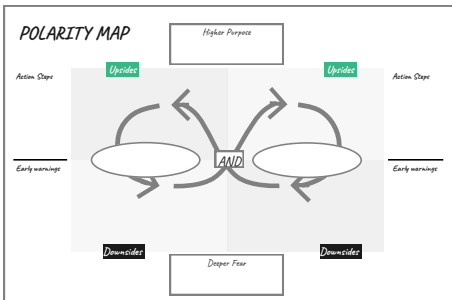


Navigating decision dilemmas

The Polarity Map

Polarity mapping is a technique that helps you explore deeply two sides of the same issue. By using the polarity map, you will be able to come with ideas that aim at maximising the upsides and minimising the downsides of each pole. Below you find an overview of the different steps of the Polarity Mapping procedure.



| Step | Description |
|------|---|
| 1 | Assemble a group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assemble an appropriate set of relevant stakeholders to work on the issue Give the group some introductory information about the concepts of paradoxes and conflicting goals |
| 2 | Identify the poles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the two main interdependent values (or sides, or poles) at stake Use at least neutral, but rather positive, desirable titles to name the two sides |
| 3 | List upsides and downsides <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upsides: Think about the upsides associated with each side and list them in the corresponding upper quadrant. Determine these by answering the question "What are the benefits of focusing on this side?" Downsides: Downsides are not simply the "cons" of each side, but reflect the negative results of over-focusing on one pole. They reflect the extreme case, where one pole is ignored in favour of the other. Determine by answering the question "What are the negative results of over-focusing on this side to the exclusion of the other?" |
| 4 | Appreciate the infinity loop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider and discuss the movement between the two poles of the Polarity Map. <p>Explanation</p> <p>The polarity map is deliberately constructed on a grid to demonstrate the predictable movement between the two sides of an issue. This infinity loop represents the natural flow between two poles. One might think that the "best" place to be on the Polarity Map is within the upside of the preferred pole. However, since movement within the map is inevitable, trying to stay permanently within either upside is impossible. Over-emphasizing one side will inevitably over time push the business to the downside of that value. By consciously seeking actions and approaches that reinforce both poles, one can minimize the time spent in both downsides. Thus the desired "steady state" would be described as productive movement in an infinity loop between the two poles, focused primarily on the upsides of both poles, while spending minimum time and energy on their downsides. Maintaining a focus on both poles (as part of a Both/AND approach) moderates the degree of oscillation between poles.</p> |
| 5 | Identify Action Steps and Early Warnings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action steps refer to both upsides. Think about specific steps that support both sides of the poles and list them beside the upsides of each pole. High-leverage Action Steps are specific acts that support both sides of the dilemma Early warnings refer to both downsides. They describe "red flags" that can alert the group to the fact that you are over-focusing on a particular pole. |
| 6 | Create Higher Purpose and Deeper Fear statements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher Purpose describes the ultimate reason to manage the polarity, answering the question: "What is the overall goal we are trying to achieve by understanding and managing this polarity?" Deeper Fear describes the negative outcome that all are striving to prevent, answering the question "What is the overall result that we want to prevent by understanding and managing this polarity?" |
| 7 | Promote virtuous cycles, prevent vicious cycles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A virtuous cycle is present when all efforts are centered predominantly on the upsides of both poles. The business actively pursues both sides of the paradox, consistently and deliberately, over a long period. If you find yourself over-emphasizing one pole to the exclusion of the other, quickly make sure to take self-correcting steps. If you find yourself stuck in the downsides of both poles, you are in a vicious cycle. Start taking steps to pay explicit attention to both poles and maximize their upsides. |
| 8 | Engage in group reflection and learning <p>A Polarity Map reveals both personal and group preferences. Used as a strategic tool, e.g., via regular check-ins, it can help to navigate conflicting goals over a long time and help recalibrating actions if needed.</p> |