

Enriching Traditional Interpersonal Style Assessments by Thinking in Pairs

Awareness, Growth and Development from a Polarity Perspective

by Margaret Seidler, author of Power Surge: A Conduit for Enlightened Leadership

I have lived in the world of behavioral assessments for the past 19 years. Most assessments, such as the highly recognized DISC®, provides a report on the responder's predominant interpersonal style based on a set of behavioral preferences which manifest themselves as a set of strengths. Responders also learn they have a set of potential weaknesses associated with each style.

While DISC® and other interpersonal style reports bring awareness about strengths and associated weaknesses, I find using a polarity perspective complements the report and supports a person's willingness and capacity to develop an improvement plan and act on it.

Polarity Management®

Polarities are interdependent pairs of Values, often competing, that need each other over time to gain and maintain performance.

It has only been in the last few decades that business leaders have recognized the advantages of being able to understand and manage polarities. Here we recognize that our own Motivating Values, those which direct our action, are best served when seen and managed from a polarity perspective. With this perspective, a person can supplement strengths so they won't turn into weaknesses.

It's about tapping the Power of the **"and"** - this ability to see and act from two very different *motivating values* simultaneously. This bigger picture offers a more robust way of seeing and thinking, providing more options for dealing with the complex challenges people often face.

While some of us were fortunate enough to be endowed with this exceptional ability to see multiple and contradictory viewpoints, the rest of us are more apt to fall prey to our own strong, singular instincts about what we see as the *"right"* way to do things. For example, when a responder receives the report, it may be difficult to imagine how to improve on a weakness.

That's the genius of Dr. Barry Johnson's method, Polarity Management®. It provides the responder both a straightforward way to make visible and accessible what may have been a blind spot in the past while honoring the strengths that have been mastered.

Here's my own polarity example:

Consider the values pair of Candor and Tact. As a leader, I am strongly motivated by my belief in Candor. Because I value Candor, I am straight to the point with people and they always know where I stand. There are no surprises or hidden agendas. This is a good thing and since I see this as very positive, I am even more Candid.

*As a matter of fact, I am so completely Candid that I neglect the other part of the values pair, the use of Tact. I avoid Tact because I mostly see its negative --- used when people want to gloss over the truth and have hidden agendas. Unfortunately, as is true of all polarities, without Tact, I run the risk of becoming "brutally honest." This lack of Tact on my part diminishes my effectiveness by angering others or hurting their feelings. So what I need to do is be both Candid **and** Tactful – recognizing the need to have an on-going balance of getting the positives of both values and avoiding the negatives of both.*

What's key here is the ability of the responder to see a more complete picture, consciously get the best of both values over time, and recognize when to shift the emphasis from one value to the other in the pair. That on-going shift is what creates synergy and lifts a person to a higher level of awareness and performance never before imagined.

Polarity theory predicts that our strength will become our weakness over time if we neglect its complementary, yet different part of the values pair.

DISC® Assessment from a Polarity Perspective

Below are some Motivating Values from the DISC® Assessment on the left. On the right, I have suggested an Interdependent Value to address potential weaknesses by supplementing the responder's strength. Johnson's Polarity Map™ is an effective tool to make visible the strengths of both Values in the pair.

D – Dominance

1. High ego strength AND High concern for others
2. Get things done quickly AND Get things done mindfully
3. Seek change AND Hold onto the present
4. Want to win AND Want to collaborate
5. Want direct answers AND Use diplomacy
6. Will move/act fast AND Think/deliberate

I- Influence

1. People-oriented AND Task-oriented
2. Willing to share feelings AND Reserves feelings
3. Doesn't need to be neat AND Appreciates being organized
4. Wants to be liked AND Wants to be respected
5. Optimistic AND Realistic

6. Verbal AND Listener

S – Steadiness

1. Loyal/predictable AND Assertive
2. Family and group oriented AND Self interest
3. Very well organized AND Very flexible
4. Hold onto stability/safety AND Embrace change
5. Make changes carefully AND Make changes expediently

C – Compliance (*conscientiousness*)

1. Follow rules/expectations AND Adapt to needs/situation
2. Watch people carefully AND Encourage others
3. Motivated to be accurate AND Able to move swiftly
4. Value work AND Value playfulness
5. Ask careful questions AND Accept ideas

Margaret Seidler is an organization development consultant, master trainer and author. Her interest in helping other professionals become more effective leaders began in the 1990s, when she recognized the need to improve her own leadership skills. Her consulting practice focuses on creating higher organization performance by helping clients manage the complexities of organizational leadership through the use of Polarity Management®.

Margaret holds both a Master's degree in Public Administration and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of South Carolina. Her first book, ***Power Surge: A Conduit for Enlightened Leadership***, was published in November 2008 by Human Resource Development (HRD) Press of Amherst, Massachusetts.

Power Surge: A Conduit for Enlightened Leadership

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