

*Barry Johnson*

# And

## **Volume One: Chapter 2**

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*Making a Difference  
by Leveraging  
Polarity, Paradox or Dilemma  
Volume One: Foundations*

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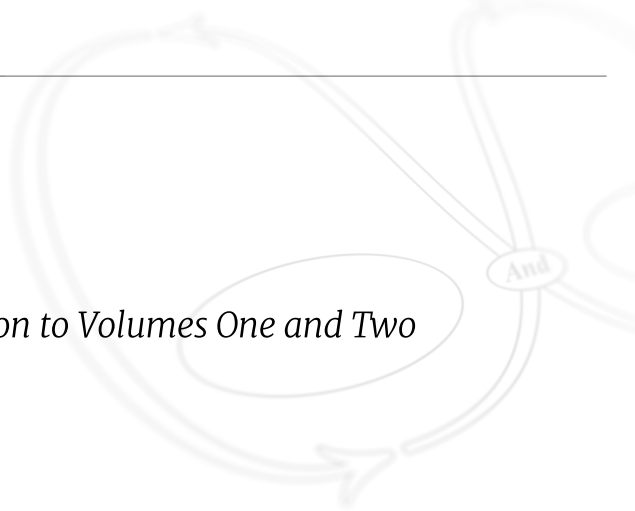
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## Introduction to Volumes One and Two

I am in Brazil being warmly welcomed by a representative of Natura outside the front entrance to their main building. They know that I have written about polarities so they smile as they translate the Portuguese words carved deep and large into the wall: “Being Well *And*<sup>1</sup> Well Being.” They explain that “Being Well” means that we must take care of Natura as a company. It must be financially sound and healthy. “Well Being” means that it is equally important to take care of those who work at Natura, the community, and the environment. (*from Chapter 6*)

### **This Book is the First of a Two-Volume Set.**

#### **Volume One – Foundations**

Volume One is a resource for people who want to make a positive difference. How? By overcoming two obstacles: resistance to change and polarization. From a problem-solving perspective, either of these challenges could be overwhelming. From a Polarity Thinking™ perspective, both can be addressed by replacing *Or* with *And* when *And* is required.

For example, the question, “Am I going to hold on to my values *Or* accept the change proposed?” is likely to create resistance to the change. That resistance could be significantly reduced by replacing *Or* with *And*. “How am I going to hold on to my values *And* gain the benefits of the change proposed?” We can save the baby *And* throw out the bathwater. (*Section Three*)

The question, “Am I going to support the group that wants to decentralize *Or* the group that wants to centralize?” is likely to create polarization. That polarization could be significantly reduced by replacing *Or* with *And*. “How do we get the benefits of decentralization *And* the benefits of centralization?” Effective decentralization requires effective centralization. (*Chapter 5*)

“Am I going to support ‘Black Lives Matter’ *Or* ‘All Lives Matter?’” This false choice is less polarizing if *Or* is replaced with *And*: “Black Lives Matter” *And* “All

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<sup>1</sup> When the word “and” is used to connect two poles of a polarity, it will be capitalized and in italics: *And*. When the word “or” is used, incorrectly, to connect two poles of a polarity, it will also be capitalized and italic: *Or*.

Lives Matter.” It is precisely because all lives matter that disproportionate attacks on and incarceration of black people matters. (*Chapter 7*)

Regardless of the size of the system that you want to change, this book guides you through a clear process:

1. **Seeing:** Is this an issue where *And* is required?
2. **Mapping:** How can I see a more complete picture and respect alternative views?
3. **Assessing:** How are we doing with this polarity?
4. **Learning:** What can we learn from our assessment results?
5. **Leveraging:** What action steps will we take to make a positive difference?

Reading this book will help you address resistance to your efforts to make a difference. Also, it will help you address chronic conflicts that become vicious cycles as both sides become more polarized.

You will learn when and how to bring *And* into your efforts to make a positive difference. When done well, supplementing *Or*-thinking with *And*-thinking will help you convert the wisdom of those resisting change into a resource to support a more effective change. *And*-thinking will help you join polarized groups and convert a vicious cycle into a benefit for all. The results will benefit both groups and the larger system of which they are a part.

## Volume Two – Applications

Volume One is from my perspective with a lot of input and help from others. What is missing are important other voices. When considering groups with power and privilege which have dominance in the United States and those groups that have been marginalized by the dominant group, I am a member of the dominant group in every category. I am white, cis male<sup>2</sup>, financially secure, college educated, raised in a hetero-normative all-white family, from a Christian tradition, without physical or mental disabilities. Having the power and privilege that comes by being in these groups does not make me a good person or a bad person. But membership in the dominant group does come with responsibility to learn from those who are marginalized. It also includes sharing power with them and interrupting the practices and policies of the dominant group that contribute to their marginalization. This marginalization is oppressive and dehumanizing for both the dominant and the marginalized groups. Some marginalized groups include Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BI-POC), women, LGBTQI+<sup>3</sup> people, the poor, those from religious traditions other than Christian, and those with physical or mental disabilities.

Volume Two includes the voices of people from marginalized groups. Each author provides an example of how they have applied Polarity Thinking to make a difference in their life and work. The authors come from a variety of disciplines. They have worked inside organizations as founders and leaders. They have also worked

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<sup>2</sup> Cis men are men assigned “male” at birth and feel that “man” and “male” accurately describe who they are.

<sup>3</sup> LGBTQI+ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, plus other identities.

as external resources to organizations as coaches, trainers, organizers for justice and equity, consultants, and teachers. At least one author in each chapter has completed a Two-Year Polarity Mastery Program.

Their stories can be used and adapted to your unique situation. The variety of examples will expand your possibilities and help you avoid common pitfalls as you apply Polarity Thinking. These diverse examples demonstrate how you can succeed in making a difference by combining your life experience with Polarity Thinking and the Polarity Map®.

### **Start with the Chapter That Interests You Most.**

Though Volume One is written in a logical sequence, I encourage you to find the chapter that seems most relevant to you and read it first. Which chapter connects to where you want to make a difference?

### **All Are Loved *And* Accountable – All Are Connected *And* Each is Unique.**

This book begins and ends with two double-messages (polarities) that come to us from most religious traditions.

1. All of us are loved unconditionally, without exception, *And* we are all accountable for our actions and inactions, without exception. In our effort to make a difference, we need to hold ourselves and others accountable. At the same time, the context for our accountability is that we are loved unconditionally (*Section Four*). When our message of accountability is combined with an often unstated message of unlovability, we generate a natural resistance from the self, family member, organization, or the country receiving the message of unlovability.
2. We are all connected in a unified whole *And* we are each unique. Neither our unity nor our uniqueness can be lost (*Section Two*). We can make a difference by affirming the reality of our connectedness *And* our uniqueness. We need not struggle to make us connected *Or* to make us unique. We are already both.

Not recognizing these two polarities (*1 & 2 above*) undermines our efforts to make the positive differences we seek to make with our families, organizations, and countries. Not recognizing these and other polarities in this book has contributed to organizational dysfunction, gross inequity and the marginalization mentioned above. Recognizing and intentionally leveraging these polarities and others can make a difference in how well our organizations are run, how financially sound they are, and how effective they are at enhancing our quality of life on the planet for all of us. My hope is that *And: Volume One* and *And: Volume Two* will support you in making your difference in the world.

Barry Johnson (he, him)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In this book, I recognize diversity of identity and use she, her / they, them / he, him. For people I know well, and those identified in the public arena, like Dr. MLK, Jr., I use the pronouns they use for themselves.

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## Chapter 2 What?

### What Are Polarities?

Polarities are interdependent pairs that need each other over time.<sup>R20</sup> They live in us and we live in them. They exist in every level of system from the inside of our brains to global issues. They are energy systems that we can leverage.<sup>R21</sup> They are unavoidable, unsolvable (in that you can't choose one pole as a sustainable solution), indestructible,<sup>R22</sup> and unstoppable.<sup>R23</sup> They are a gift of nature, a natural phenomenon like gravity and sunshine.

### How Polarities Look and Work

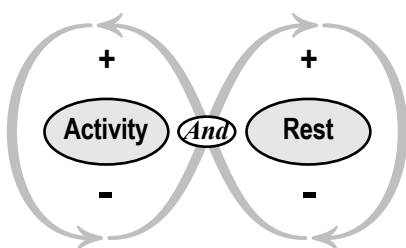
There are many models available for describing the phenomena of polarities (paradoxes, tensions, dilemmas). Our constantly developing model is our best representation at this time. It is a base from which to understand how polarities work. I will use the simple metaphor of Activity *And* Rest to explain our model, including some principles of how all polarities work and how to leverage them. Each of us lives in this polarity all the time. We get out of bed, are active during the day, and return to bed to rest. We will have periods of activity and rest within the day as well. Whatever our rhythm, we will be engaged in *both* activity *And* rest over time. Below is how our model describes this natural process.

### Activity *And*<sup>8</sup> Rest

In *Figure 1*, you can see the most basic form of our Polarity Map<sup>®</sup>. It contains two poles (Activity *And* Rest); the word “*And*” between them; and the infinity loop that represents the natural flow of energy within all polarities.

Each pole of a polarity has benefits – an “upside” that it brings to its relationship with the other pole. They are the positive results from focusing on that pole. The two upsides

*Figure 1*



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<sup>8</sup> When the word “and” is used to connect two poles of a polarity, it will be capitalized and in italics: *And*.



are represented with the (+) sign. Each pole also has its own limits or “downside,” represented with the (-) sign.<sup>R24</sup>

Figure 2, highlights how the energy crosses in the middle between the poles, keeping them separate. The poles never merge to become one.

Figure 3 highlights how the energy also wraps around the outside of the two poles, holding them together as an interdependent pair. The two poles never separate into one without the other. They exist in nature as an interdependent pair.<sup>R25</sup>

Figure 2

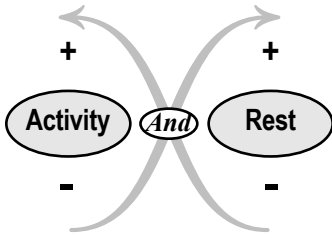
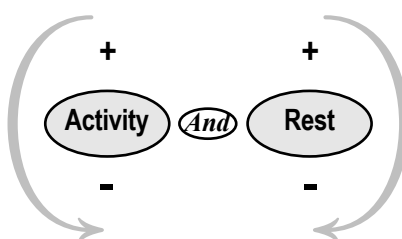


Figure 3



### How Do They Work?

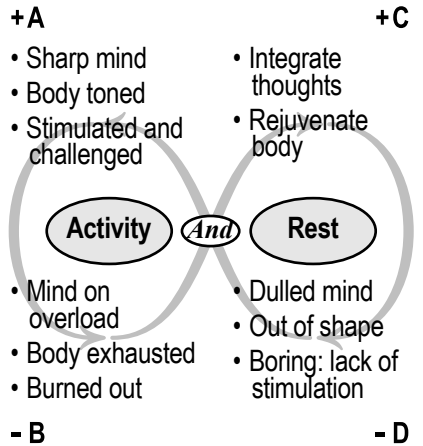
In Figure 4 there is a natural flow of energy from (+A) to (-B) to (+C) to (-D) and back to (+A).<sup>R26</sup> You can start anywhere and move through the infinity loop. If we start in (+A), we see the positive results of being physically and mentally active: a sharp mind, a toned body, and being stimulated and challenged. There are many other positive results you could add to the list. These positive results are the reasons for being Active.

Though Activity is essential and has a long list of positive results, if we over-focus on Activity to the neglect of Rest, we find ourselves in (-B), the downside of Activity.<sup>R27</sup>

As we move into this downside, our mind gets on overload, our body is exhausted and we feel burned out. The absolutely necessary benefits of Activity (+A) become a growing list of difficulties (-B).

When we find ourselves in the downside of one pole, the upside of the other pole is the natural, self-correction needed.<sup>R28</sup> In this case, we move from (-B) to (+C) to take a break, integrate our thoughts, rejuvenate our body, and relax. Notice how easy it is for us to see the downside of Activity (-B) as a “problem” and the upside of Rest (+C) as a “solution.” It is true that being exhausted is problematic. It is also true that rejuvenation is just what is needed. At the same time, Rest alone is not a sustainable “solution.”<sup>R29</sup>

Figure 4



If we pursue the upsides of Rest (+C) to the neglect of Activity, over time we will find ourselves in (-D), the downside of Rest. Without conversations with friends, reading, internet, TV, or other forms of mental stimulation, our minds would become dull. Without physical activity, we would get out of shape. And our lack of stimulation would lead to boredom. For those of you who have been over-focusing on the Activity pole recently, the upside of Rest (+C) could be so attractive that even the downside doesn't appear too bad!

However, the longer we focus on Rest to the neglect of any mental or physical activity, the more problematic it will become.<sup>R30</sup> A dramatic version of this occurred when my daughter, Shalom, was diagnosed with Polymyositis. She was 15 and the treatment, at the time, included large doses of Prednisone. This resulted in hairline fractures in her spine. She ended up in bed or a wheelchair with a back brace for a year. By the time the fractures had healed, she had so much muscle atrophy in her legs, it took her six months to be able to walk again.

Fortunately, most of us are not faced with this kind of forced, over-focus on Rest to the neglect of Activity. At the same time, we all know that Rest without Activity can be problematic. Here, again, it is easy to see the downside of Rest (-D) as a “problem” and the upside of Activity (+A) as a “solution.” The upside of Activity (+A) is the necessary self-correction required and it, also, is not a sustainable “solution.” When we get back to the upside of Activity (+A) we have completed one oscillation through the infinity loop. This natural oscillation occurs in all polarities.

A couple of other points about how polarities work:

1. The shorter the cycle time through the infinity loop, the more obvious it is that you are in a polarity.<sup>R31</sup> Since we move through Activity *And* Rest on a 24-hour cycle, it is clear that Activity *Or*<sup>9</sup> Rest is a false choice. We can't choose one to the neglect of the other. When the cycle time is longer, we are more likely to see the downside of one pole as the problem and the upside of the other pole as the solution. For example, in organizations it is easy to see Centralization as a “solution” to the silo “problem.” It might take a few years before our Centralization “solution” is itself experienced as a “problem.” It becomes a “fix that failed” and is called a “mistake.” It wasn't a mistake. It wasn't a solution in the first place. We often call this the “swing of the pendulum” as it goes from Centralization to Decentralization and back again.
2. There is no place we can go to step outside of the Activity *And* Rest polarity and decide, “Do I want to be involved in Activity *And* Rest, or not?”<sup>R32</sup> We are living in this polarity. The same is true in our organizations addressing Centralization *And* Decentralization. We live inside this organizational polarity. In both cases, the question is not, “Will I deal with this polarity?” The question is, “How can we leverage this polarity to make a positive difference?”

<sup>9</sup> When the word “or” is used, incorrectly, to connect two poles of a polarity, it will be capitalized and italic: *Or*.

**New Realities in Chapter 2**

- Reality 20 Polarities are interdependent pairs that need each other over time.
- Reality 21 They are energy systems we can leverage.
- Reality 22 They are indestructible. If there is life, polarities will be at play.
- Reality 23 They are unstoppable. The only way to stop the flow of energy in any polarity is to destroy the system in which it is flowing.
- Reality 24 Each pole of a polarity has a benefit or “upside” which it brings to its relationship with the other pole. They are the positive results from focusing on that pole. Each pole also has its own limits or “downside.”
- Reality 25 The energy flow within a polarity crosses in the middle between the poles, keeping them separate. It also wraps around the outside of the two poles, holding them together as an interdependent pair. The poles never become one *And* they never separate into one without the other. They exist in nature as an interdependent pair.
- Reality 26 There is a natural flow of energy within a polarity that goes from the downside of one pole to the upside of the other followed by anticipating or experiencing the downside of the new pole, which drives the system back to the upside of the original pole.
- Reality 27 If we over-focus on one pole to the neglect of its pole partner (the other pole), we will find ourselves in the downside of the pole on which we over-focus.
- Reality 28 When we find ourselves in the downside of one pole, the upside of the other pole is the natural, self-correction needed.
- Reality 29 When in the downside of one pole, it is easy to see that downside as a “problem” and the self-correcting upside of the other pole as the “solution.” Though the upside of the other pole is the necessary self-correction, it is not a sustainable “solution.”
- Reality 30 The longer we focus on one pole to the neglect of the other, the more problematic it will become.
- Reality 31 The shorter the cycle time through the infinity loop, the more obvious it is that you are in a polarity. The longer the cycle time, the more likely the polarity will be seen as a problem to solve.
- Reality 32 Since we live in polarities and they live in our brain, there is no place we can go to step outside of the polarity and decide if we want to engage it.

# Praise for And



“Polarity Thinking has revolutionized how we approach tough problems in our work. There are countless moments – from making a big decision as a management team, to launching an issue campaign that requires navigating fraught political waters, to building deep and lasting coalitions, to building more inclusive and collaborative teams – in which we map out a polarity to push our thinking and hone our strategy. In today’s complex world of politics and advocacy, identifying ways to better leverage key polarities has exponentially increased our impact. We are vocal evangelists and have shared the tool with countless customers and partners who have adopted it to increase the efficacy of their own progressive advocacy work!”

~ **Lanae Erickson**  
*Senior Vice President for Social Policy & Politics :: Third Way*



“The fight for equity, inclusion, social justice and humanity is not an ‘or’ argument. It is a ‘must’ argument which can only be achieved when advocates and allies augment *either/Or*-thinking with *both/And*-thinking. These two volumes are uniquely divided between Foundations skill building in Polarity Thinking, and a wide variety of Applications of *both/And*-thinking. The two volumes contain critical information to help us all break the divisiveness that can result from only using *either/Or*-thinking.”

~ **Eddie Moore, Jr., PhD**  
*Founder/Program Director, The White Privilege Conference*



“Polarity Thinking is one of the essential disciplines underlying our vital and never-ending search for win-win solutions to our many challenges and dilemmas. Barry Johnson has given us an invaluable gift in creating – and now deepening – this powerful tool. It can help us arrive at *And* solutions in a world that often seems hopelessly tangled in a bipolar dance within polarities. Along with systems thinking, Polarity Thinking is an essential skill that should be part of the education of every human being on the planet, especially anyone charged with leadership responsibilities.”

~ **Raj Sisodia**  
*FW Olin Distinguished Professor of Global Business, Babson College  
Co-founder & Co-Chairman, Conscious Capitalism Inc*

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