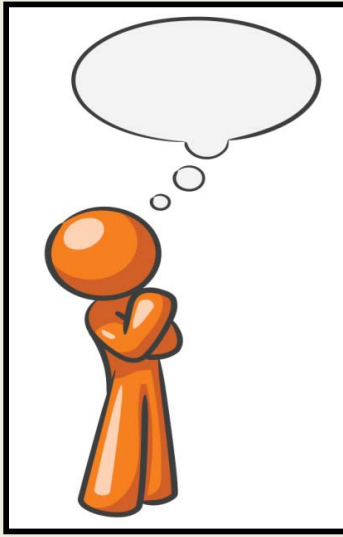


The following article on “The Power of Polarity Thinking and Mapping in Optimizing Types” by Jean Porto and Cliff Kayser was recently published in the APTi Bulletin of Psychological Type Vol. 36, NO. 3 (2013):



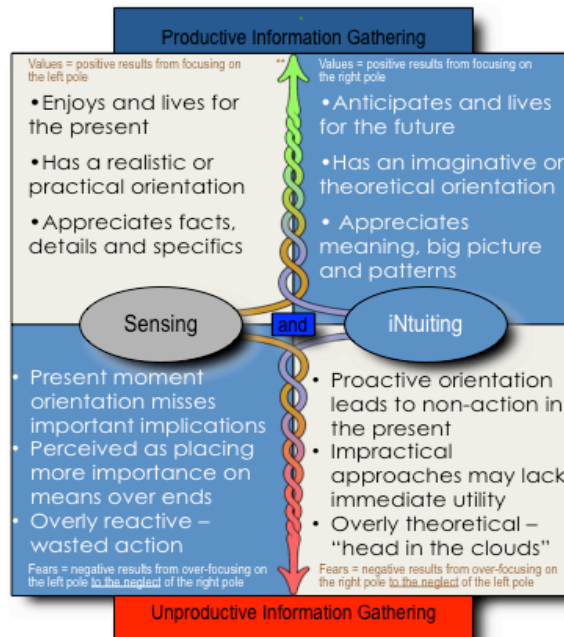
The Power of Polarity Thinking and Mapping in Optimizing Type

Article by Jean Porto and Cliff Kayser

We are two of many practitioners who administer the MBTI® assessment and debrief results in training workshops in a broad range of organizations. It is a fantastic tool with many applications, often being used to help increase understanding of self and others. In our experience, when a client first receives an MBTI report, it is read with questioning eyes, asking – ‘Is this me?’. After settling on a validated type, typically, the question becomes a statement –

‘This *is* me’. We engage our preferences for a reason—we really like and value our preferred behaviors much more than the other choices that are available so, fairly predictably, the next conclusion is: ‘I’ve got the best type!’. And that’s where the challenge for type practitioners begins. How do we teach our clients to value all the MBTI preferences equally?

While we are passionate in our practice of using the MBTI tool, we are equally passionate in our practice of Polarity Thinking and Mapping. One of the many benefits of using a Polarity Map™ is the ability to demonstrate how each type dichotomy has both strengths and limitations. This reduces the tendency to see any one type preference as “better” than another. Most of us have heard, “*every strength maximized becomes a liability.*” However, that truism is not always paired with a powerful visual to show why and how “pitfalls” or “blind spots” happen. In a Polarity Map, information about a value pair is laid out in a useful format (See Figure 1). In our example, we are using Sensing and Intuiting as the value pair or ‘poles’, with Sensing information on the left side and Intuiting information on the right side. Some upsides/strengths of the preferences are listed in the two appropriate top quadrants of the map. Downsides/challenges of the preferences are listed in the two appropriate bottom quadrants. Downsides are defined as the results of a



preference being used to the exclusion of the opposite preference – in other words, an overused preference. If we are able to ‘live’ primarily on the top half of the map, it results in a Greater Purpose, in this case, Productive information gathering. If we ‘live’ primarily on the bottom half of the map, it leads to a Deep Fear, in this case, Unproductive information gathering.

Problems can begin when one person holds their view (in polarity language – ‘pole’) as if there are no down sides to their view and, at the same time, holds the other person’s view (‘pole’) as if there are no upsides. Bottom line becomes: I’m right and you’re wrong! The next step is often a negative stereotyping of the person’s whole type – those rigid ISTJ’s! Those flighty ENFP’s! Ideally, a person uses their preference and obtains the upsides of that preference. However, when the preference is overused and some downsides begin to be noticed, it is time to make some behavior changes. Downsides of a preference are strong indicators that behaviors need to include more of the non-preference.

Jean (ENFP) often presents programs with an ISTJ co-worker, and as you can imagine, we see everything from the opposite perspective! Early in our professional relationship, we were preparing to present a program to a large group of people and we drove to see the space the organization had reserved. Almost immediately upon seeing the room, my dominant extraverted Intuiting kicked in and I started to brainstorm activities that fit with the clients’ goals. After a slight pause, my co-presenter said quietly, ‘That won’t work’. Internally, my first response was a very angry and visceral reaction – he’s trashing my ideas! Thankfully, externally I was more diplomatic – ‘Why do you think that?’, I asked. The room is too small for that many people to do the activity, he said. I intentionally tried to see the activity from a more sensing view. I had to admit – he was right! I had been so focused on the big picture possibilities I had neglected the details of the room. I began to brainstorm again, doing my best to include a Sensing perspective. Again, a pause...that will work, he said. By leveraging the Sensing and Intuitive poles, the program was a great success and we received

many compliments from the client. Using Polarity Map terminology, we were able to use both Sensing and Intuiting for the Greater Purpose of Productive information gathering. Looking back, I cringe, thinking of what might have happened if I hadn’t stopped to ask – Why do you think that? That question helped us to avoid our Deep Fear of a disastrous program as a result of Unproductive information gathering. Since that time, my co-presenter and I have presented many more programs, both together and separate. And, even the programs where we aren’t working together, we call each other, knowing we’ll get information we didn’t think of. Why do you think that?, is always a part of our conversations! Asking from a place of value and respect and *adding* the other perspective rather than using it as a replacement is key to maximizing the benefits of Polarity Mapping and type.

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The Polarity Map and Polarity Thinking is based on the work of Dr. Barry Johnson PhD and Polarity Partnerships LLC.



Jean M. Porto, is the founder and principal of Inner Inspiration LLC and is an experienced international facilitator and coach with a background in leadership and

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Cliff Kayser is a VP, Owner/Partner of Polarity Partnerships and President of Xperience® LLC, which offers OD, Executive Coaching, Leadership Training services, and Kayser Ridge Retreat & Learning Center. Prior to founding Xperience in 2007, Cliff was VP of OD and Training for The National Cooperative Bank, Senior OD Consultant for The Washington Post newspaper, and Corporate Manager of HR, Training and Web Development for The Washington Post Company. Cliff holds a BS from Lenoir Rhyne University, and Master's Degrees in both OD and HR from American University where he serves on the faculty of the MSOD program.
