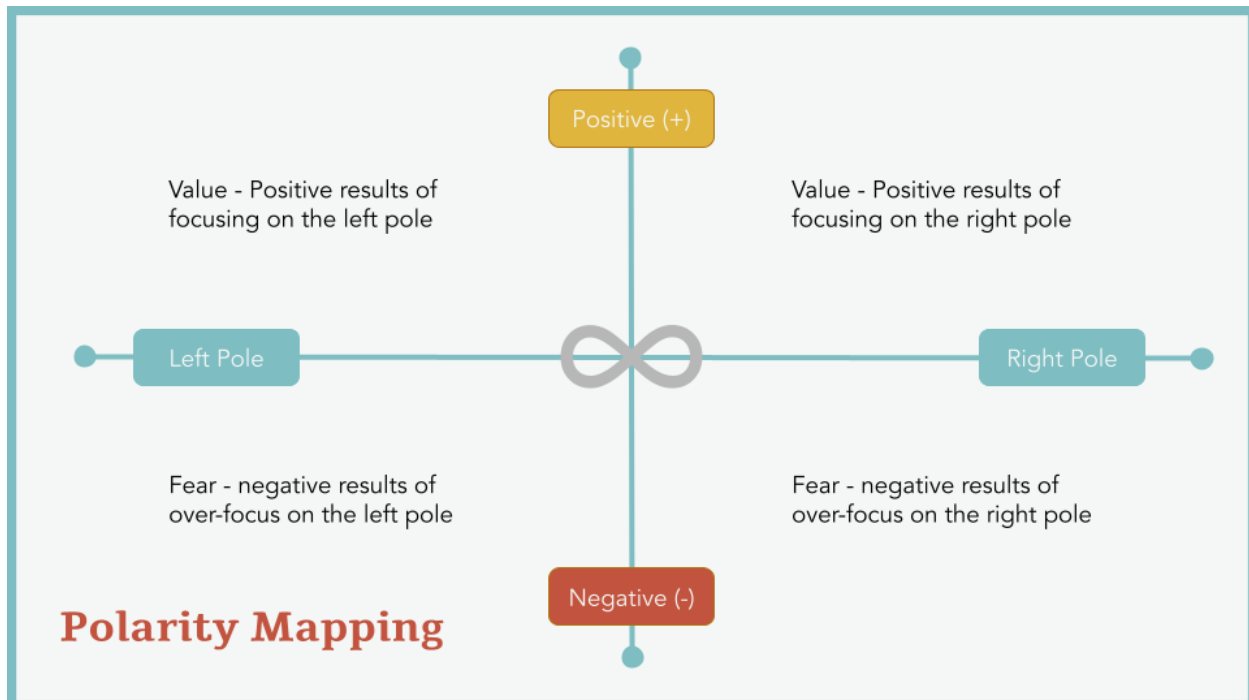


TOOL POLARITY MAPPING

OVERVIEW

All of us have felt tension between different ideas present within a group. It can feel as if we are on two sides of a canyon or just don't understand each other's perspective. The definition of tension is the act of stretching or degree of being stretched. When there are differing approaches, it is helpful to keep the "stretching" pliable to keep our thinking proactive and not reactive. Polarity Mapping allows us to name and increase understanding of the tension that is present. It helps us see the positives and negatives of each approach. It is not a tool to persuade or to change the inherent tensions. Instead, polarity mapping balances the approaches. It allows a group to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of any one perspective so we can move forward together with greater understanding.

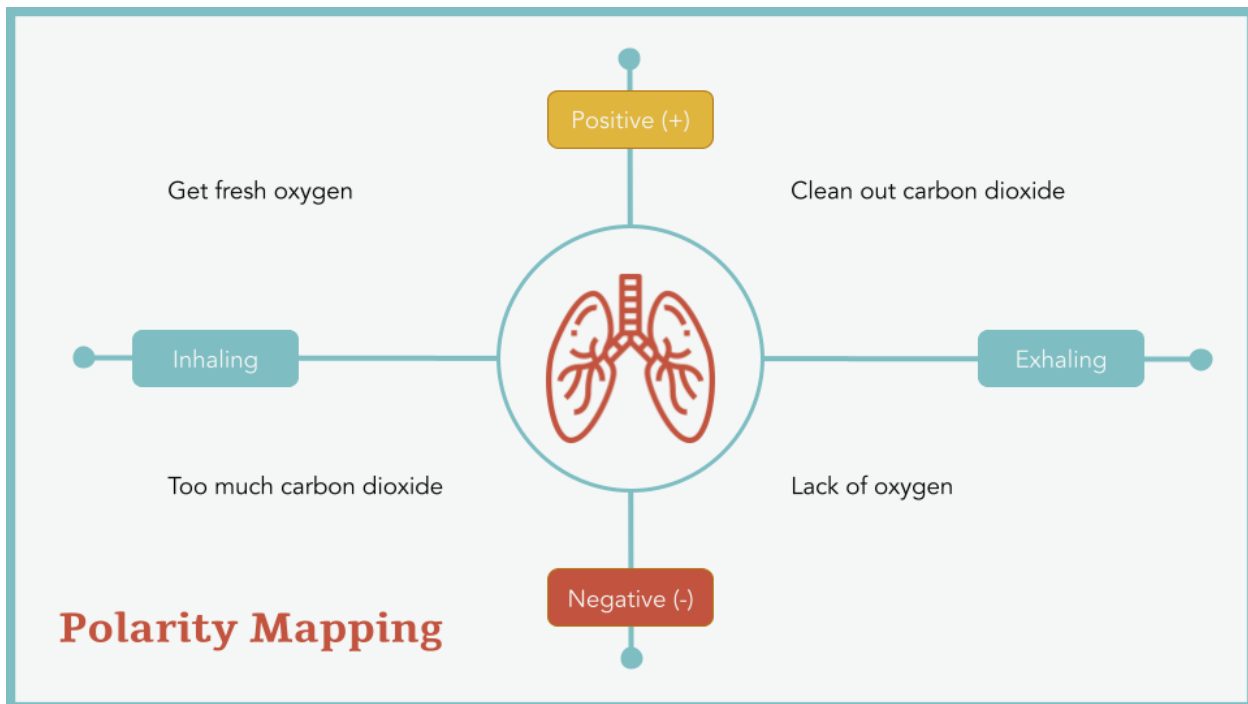


WHEN TO USE

Use polarity mapping when you're worried about having too much of a good thing or having a hard time deciding between two good things. When there is tension within a group around an issue, polarity mapping can increase understanding between different perspectives and

help the group use all the wisdom that multiple perspectives bring to an issue without judgement. We call these diverse perspectives “poles.”

Take breathing for example. One pole is inhaling, and the other is exhaling. We need both. We can’t survive without either. To begin, we put our poles on the left and right side. At the top we have the positives. For inhaling, the best part of the inhale is getting oxygen into our lungs and into our body. But if we only inhale, we can’t get rid of carbon dioxide. The opposite is true for exhaling. We need a balance of the two to breathe. In this way, polarity mapping comes out of our natural world. We can think of other poles like light and dark, winter and summer that show us the need to find balance between good things.



HOW TO USE

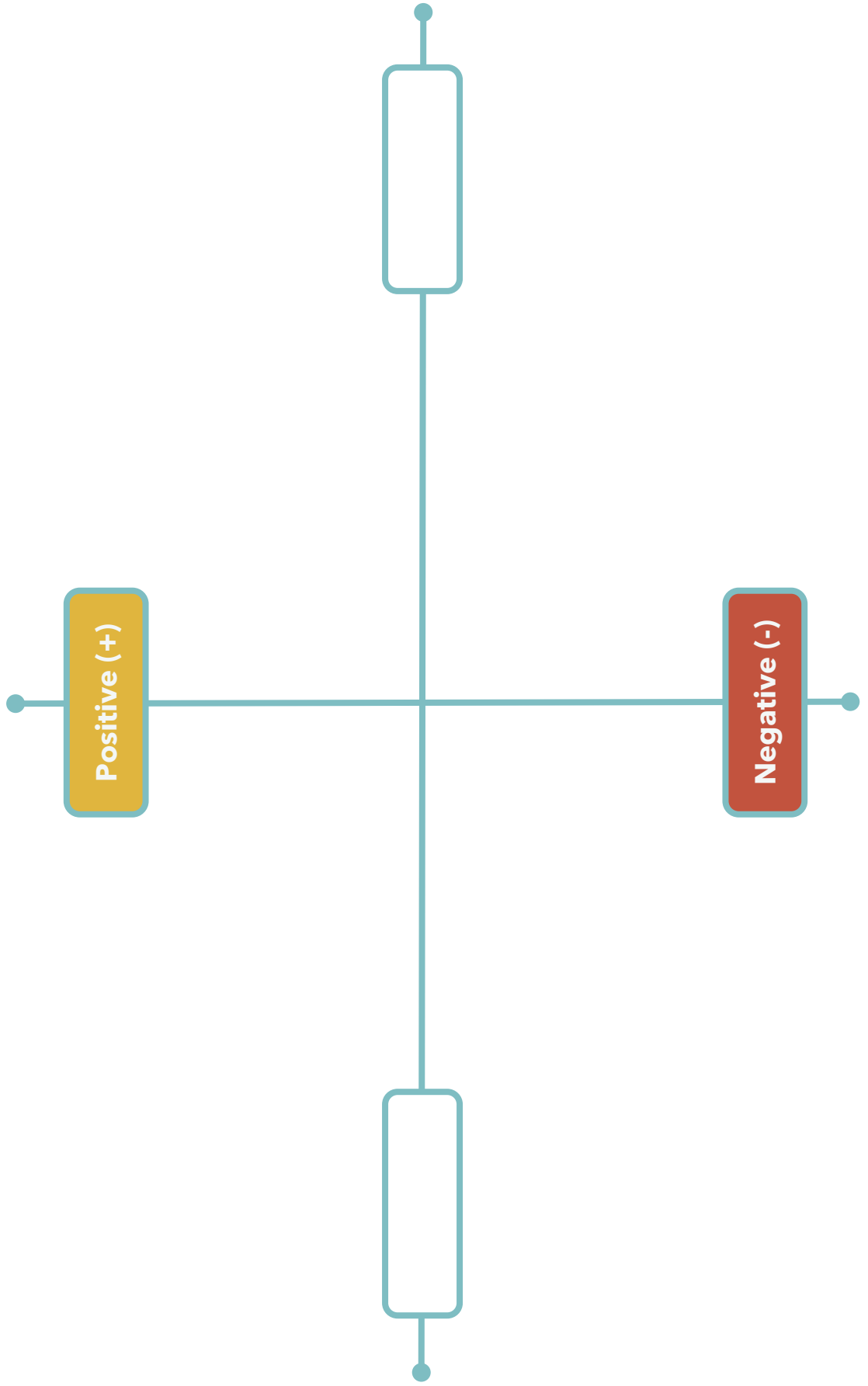
The tool worksheet below can be copied or printed out. First you must come to agreement on what are the two poles. To use the mapping, start by adding your left and right pole. The easiest way to do this is think of two right answers that are interdependent on each other. For example, individual and team, activity and rest, competition and collaboration, or work and home.

Here are some common polarities:

- Candor and Diplomacy
- Ideation and Execution
- Quality and Efficiency
- Equality and Equity
- Adaptability and Reliability
- Collective and Individual



WORKSHEET POLARITY MAPPING





- Nonconformity and Obedience
- Freedom and Accountability
- Extravagance and Frugality
- Fun and Serious
- Logic and Intuition
- Patience and Urgency
- Science and Art
- Innovation and Tradition
- Structured and Flexibility
- Diversity and Unity
- Liberal and Conservative
- Stability and Change
- Focus on Task and Focus on Relationships
- Local and Global
- Big Picture and Details
- Control and Empowerment
- Consequences and Rewards
- Collaborate and Compete
- Confidence and Humility

Be sure that your two poles are interdependent. If you find that one pole sounds positive and other sounds negative, you haven't found an interdependent pair. For example, if you had "flexible" on one side and "rigid" on the other. The connotation to "rigid" tends to be negative. It describes the downside of being overly structured, but structure isn't inherently bad. Similarly, you wouldn't put humility on one side and arrogance on the other.

Then write down the best of each pole in the top quadrants. We can ask ourselves, "What's the best that can come out of focusing on this pole?" Next, add the potential consequences of focusing too much on each pole to the bottom quadrants. On the bottom we can ask ourselves, "What are the potential consequences of focusing too much on this pole?" Keep in mind that if you're working with a true polarity, there will be something you write in every single quadrant, just like winter and summer. If you have trouble filling in each quadrant, consider what someone with a different perspective might say.

Once you've identified the best and the worst of each pole, you've got the information you need to design your win/win. There is no win/lose in polarity mapping. If one pole wins out, it means that you've got the best of that pole, but you've also got the worst of things that happen when you over-focus, which means there's no winning, just losing. Think back to breathing. Either both inhaling and exhaling both win or you lose. We need both. You can ask yourself these questions to see how to gain or maintain the positive results from both poles and watch out for early warning signs that tell you that you're falling into the downsides.

Ask yourself:

- How will we gain or maintain the positive results from both poles?
 - What? Who? When?



- Think about measurable indicators (things you can count/ or specify) that will let you know that you are getting into the downside of either pole.
 - What will send you an early warning sign?
- Refer to the polarity map in the future if tensions arise again. Ask the group to identify where they are on the map.

COMMUNITY LEARNING MODEL

Culture of Collaboration

Strengthen the capacities that support collaborative work such as facilitative leadership, communication, information sharing and shared accountability. These elements strengthen the ability to move through the stages of the Community Learning Model.

Polarity Mapping is a tool for the Culture of Collaboration phase of the Community Learning Model. To learn more about tools for dialogue and the other areas of the Community Learning Model, visit civiccanopy.org/clm.

