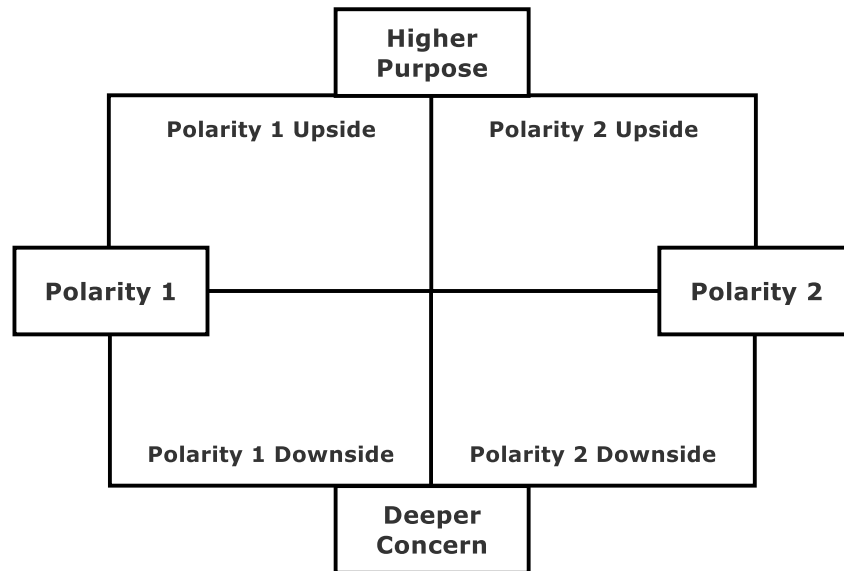


Tools for Knowledge Workers

Polarity Matrix



Should we centralize or decentralize? Do we focus on market penetration or diversification? Should managers concentrate on supporting their subordinates or supervising them? These and other commonly encountered situations in the workplace have no single, right answer. Instead, they constitute what Barry Johnson calls “polarities” and they must be managed, not solved. Indeed, treating them as problems to be solved can make matters worse. The matrix above depicts the basic elements involved in polarity management. The polarities themselves lie along the horizontal axis. The higher purpose or goal is at the top and deeper concerns tied to not realizing it are at the bottom. The upsides or pros and the downsides or cons of both polarities are in the center grid. Utilizing this framework or tool helps managers and executives figure out how to properly balance the polarities and avoid either-or thinking. For those wanting to know more, Barry Johnson’s excellent summary introduction to polarity management can be found by clicking [here](#).

