



WAYNE STATE
UNIVERSITY



Leadership: Working with a Polarized Public



*National Association of County Collectors,
Treasurers & Finance Officers*



EXECUTIVE & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Agenda

- Learning Objectives
- Participant Introductions/Icebreaker
- Lesson One: Polarization Overview
- Lesson Two: Strategies to Address Polarization
- Closing



Learning Objectives

- At the end of the session, you will be able to:
 - Define polarization.
 - Explain why and how polarization may occur in three domains: group decision making, attitudes, and intergroup perception.
 - Explain the effects of polarization in the workplace.
 - Implement strategies to address polarization at an organizational level, within teams, and on a one-on-one basis.



Participant Introductions & Opening Activity

- Directions: In your small group, introduce yourselves to each other by sharing the following information:
 - Name, Job Title/Responsibilities, Location/County
 - Share a story about a friend or family member with whom you disagree with about something. What happened? How did you get through the disagreement (if you were able to)?



Lesson One: Polarization Overview

- Polarization Definition
- Polarization Domains
 - Group Decision Making
 - Attitudes
 - Intergroup Perception
- Polarization Effects



Lesson One: Polarization Overview

Definition & Examples

- Polarization Definition
 - Movement in individuals' views toward opposite extremes.
- Polarization Examples



Lesson One: Polarization Overview

Personal Examples

- Large Group Discussion
 - In your organization, what situations or issues have led to polarization? Be specific.



Lesson One: Polarization Overview

- Polarization Domains
 - Group Decision Making
 - Attitudes
 - Intergroup Perception



Lesson One: Polarization Overview

Polarization Domain: Group Decision Making

- Group Polarization
 - Groups tend to move individuals to adopt positions that are more extreme than their initial stances.
 - Why?
 - Persuasive arguments by group members help reinforce or strengthen an individual's initial position.
 - Social comparison processes where members try to demonstrate they endorse the apparent group norm.



Lesson One: Polarization Overview

Polarization Domain: Attitudes

- Confirmation Bias
 - Search for Evidence
 - Attitudes can become more polarized as a result of a biased search for evidence in support of the initial attitude.
 - Interpretation of Information
 - Tendency to interpret information in a way that supports or confirms a desired conclusion or attitude. Supporting facts may seem overwhelmingly strong and negating facts may seem automatically weak.



Lesson One: Polarization Overview

Polarization Domain: Intergroup Perception

- False Polarization
 - Overestimation of the extremity of the average view held by each side, believing that two groups are farther apart in their views than they actually are.
 - Each side may miss the opportunity to resolve group conflict if they overestimate the degree of difference between each side.



Lesson One: Polarization Overview

Small Group Exercise

- Directions: With your small group, review the list of situations or issues that the large group brainstormed during the large group discussion. Then, select two of the situations/issues and complete the following task for each one:
 - Choose the domain that you think best reflects how the situation/issue resulted in polarization and describe why.



Lesson One: Polarization Overview

Polarization Effects

- Polarization may lead to:
 - Hostility between coworkers.
 - Deception between coworkers.
 - Employees hiding beliefs because they feel may be viewed negatively.
 - Increased stress resulting in physical and mental health issues.
- Effects can lead to:
 - Reduction in job satisfaction.
 - Reduction in job effectiveness.
 - Employee turnover.



Lesson One: Polarization Overview

Individual & Small Group Exercise

- Directions:
 - Part One: Individually, use your device (phone, tablet or laptop) and take the perception gap quiz found here (use link or QR code): <https://bit.ly/PerceptionGapQuiz>
 - Reflect on your quiz results and other polarization experiences by answering the questions on your handout.
 - Part Two: With your small group, share your thoughts about the quiz and polarization effects. Please note that you do not have to share your specific views, you only need to share your overall reaction and feelings.
 - Be prepared to share overall conclusions or thoughts with the large group.





Lesson Two: Strategies to Address Polarization

- Organizational Strategies
- One-on-one and Team Strategies



Lesson Two: Strategies to Address Polarization

Organizational Strategies

- Build a Cooperative Environment
 - Eliminate Competitive Policies
- Encourage Meaningful Contact
 - Emphasize the Importance of Trust
- Create a Safe and Healthy Environment for Engagement/Sharing of Views
 - Communicate Norms for Safe Discussions
 - Engage All Views
 - Do Not “Ban” Difficult Conversations



Lesson Two: Strategies to Address Polarization

Individual & Large Group Exercise

- Directions:
 - Individually brainstorm ways that you can implement the strategies listed below in your workplace.
 - Build a Cooperative Environment
 - Encourage Meaningful Contact
 - Create a Safe and Healthy Environment for Engagement/Sharing of Views
 - At the direction of the instructor, organize your ideas by the corresponding strategy listed above. Then, work at your table to group like ideas into clusters.



Lesson Two: Strategies to Address Polarization

One-on-one and Team Strategies

- Recognize Different Views
- Use Informal Opportunities to Discuss Issues
- Keep Discussions Short
- Ensure Each Individual is Heard
- Use Inclusive Language
- Point Out Commonalities between Individuals
- Ask for Facts First & Request Sources Politely
- Become a Bridge Builder



Lesson Two: Strategies to Address Polarization

Small Group Exercise

- Directions:
 - You will receive a handout for this exercise. On page 1, individually read the scenario. Then, with your small group, complete the task on page 2.



Closing

- How will you think about situations or issues that cause polarization in a new way?
- How will you think about your coworkers or organization differently?
- What will you do back in your workplace to address polarization when it arises?



Closing

Learning Objectives Review

- At the end of the session, you will be able to:
 - Define polarization.
 - Explain why and how polarization may occur in three domains: group decision making, attitudes, and intergroup perception.
 - Explain the effects of polarization in the workplace.
 - Implement strategies to address polarization at an organizational level, within teams, and on a one-on-one basis.



Thank You

Executive & Professional Development

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Resources

- Chow, D. & Lees, J. (2021). 3 Strategies to Address Political Polarization in the Workplace. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2021/07/3-strategies-to-address-political-polarization-in-the-workplace>.
- City of Albuquerque. Preventing Polarization in Your Association. Retrieved from <https://www.cabq.gov/office-of-neighborhood-coordination/news/preventing-polarization-in-your-association>.
- Greater Good Science Center (n.d.). Bridging Differences Playbook. Retrieved from <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>.
- Jilani, Z. & Smith, J.A. (2019). What is the True Cost of Polarization in America? Retrieved from <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/what-is-the-true-cost-of-polarization-in-america>.
- Levendusky, M.S. & Malhotra, N.A. (2013). The Effect of “False” Polarization: Are Perceptions of Political Polarization Self-Fulfilling Prophecies? Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/files/2014/01/fp_writeup_oct6_for_jop.pdf.
- More in Common (2019). The Perception Gap. Retrieved from <https://perceptiongap.us/>.
- Polarization Processes. Retrieved from <http://psychology.iresearchnet.com/social-psychology/attitudes/polarization-processes/>.
- Reeves, M., Quinlan, L., & Lefevre, M. (2021). How Business Leaders Can Reduce Polarization. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2021/10/how-business-leaders-can-reduce-polarization>.
- Thibodeaux, W. (2019). What to Do When Polarizing People Are Disrupting Your Team. Retrieved from <https://www.inc.com/wanda-thibodeaux/how-to-avoid-polarizing-people-causing-problems-in-your-business.html>.

NACCTFO: National Association of County Collectors, Treasures & Finance Officers
Working with a Polarized Public
General Handout


Materials Preparation: One stapled copy per participant (double-sided is OK).

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NACCTFO: National Association of County Collectors, Treasures & Finance Officers Working with a Polarized Public

Learning Objectives

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 - Explain the effects of polarization in the workplace.
 - Implement strategies to address polarization at an organizational level, within teams, and on a one-on-one basis.

Lesson One: Polarization Overview

- **Definition & Examples**
 - Polarization Definition
 - Movement in individuals' views toward opposite extremes.
 - Polarization Examples
- **Polarization Domains**
 - Polarization Domain: Group Decision Making
 - Group Polarization
 - Groups tend to move individuals to adopt positions that are more extreme than their initial stances.
 - Why?
 - Persuasive arguments by group members help reinforce or strengthen an individual's initial position.
 - Social comparison processes where members try to demonstrate they endorse the apparent group norm.
 - Polarization Domain: Attitudes
 - Confirmation Bias
 - Search for Evidence
 - Attitudes can become more polarized as a result of a biased search for evidence in support of the initial attitude.
 - Interpretation of Information
 - Tendency to interpret information in a way that supports or confirms a desired conclusion or attitude. Supporting facts may seem overwhelmingly strong and negating facts may seem automatically weak.
 - Polarization Domain: Intergroup Perception
 - False Polarization

- Overestimation of the extremity of the average view held by each side, believing that two groups are farther apart in their views than they actually are.
 - Each side may miss the opportunity to resolve group conflict if they overestimate the degree of difference between each side.
- **Polarization Effects**
 - Polarization may lead to:
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 - Effects can lead to:
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Lesson Two: Strategies to Address Polarization

- **Organizational Strategies**
 - Build a Cooperative Environment
 - Eliminate Competitive Policies
 - Encourage Meaningful Contact
 - Emphasize the Importance of Trust
 - Create a Safe and Healthy Environment for Engagement/Sharing of Views
 - Communicate Norms for Safe Discussions
 - Engage All Views
 - Do Not “Ban” Difficult Conversations
- **One-on-one and Team Strategies**
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 - Use Informal Opportunities to Discuss Issues
 - Keep Discussions Short
 - Ensure Each Individual is Heard
 - Use Inclusive Language
 - Point Out Commonalities between Individuals
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Resources

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- City of Albuquerque. Preventing Polarization in Your Association. Retrieved from <https://www.cabq.gov/office-of-neighborhood-coordination/news/preventing-polarization-in-your-association>.
- Greater Good Science Center (n.d.). Bridging Differences Playbook. Retrieved from <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>.
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- Levendusky, M.S. & Malhotra, N.A. (2013). The Effect of “False” Polarization: Are Perceptions of Political Polarization Self-Fulfilling Prophecies? Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/files/2014/01/fp_writeup_oct6_for_jop.pdf.
- More in Common (2019). The Perception Gap. Retrieved from <https://perceptiongap.us/>.
- Polarization Processes. Retrieved from <http://psychology.iresearchnet.com/social-psychology/attitudes/polarization-processes/>.
- Reeves, M., Quinlan, L., & Lefevre, M. (2021). How Business Leaders Can Reduce Polarization. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2021/10/how-business-leaders-can-reduce-polarization>.
- Thibodeaux, W. (2019). What to Do When Polarizing People Are Disrupting Your Team. Retrieved from <https://www.inc.com/wanda-thibodeaux/how-to-avoid-polarizing-people-causing-problems-in-your-business.html>.

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Working with a Polarized Public
Lesson One: Polarization Overview
Individual & Small Group Exercise

Materials Preparation: One copy per participant.

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Lesson Two: Strategies to Address Polarization
Small Group Exercise

Materials Preparation: One stapled copy per participant (not double-sided).

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Lesson Two: Strategies to Address Polarization
Small Group Exercise

Directions: Individually, read the scenario below. Then, with your small group, complete the task on page 2.

Scenario

Smith County is beginning a campaign to educate its citizens on climate change and the new “climate actions” it is going to take over the next several years to help. A small team of individuals that come from various departments within the county to help with this campaign is meeting for the first time. When they arrive, the leader of the group asks for each person’s view on climate change. Here are everyone’s responses:

- Person A: I am really fed up with all of the emphasis put on how humans are affecting the climate. There really is quite a lot of data that shows otherwise. I will help with this project, but I feel there needs to be sharing of both sides of the data, not just one side.
- Person B: I don’t know the right answer to everything, but I do know that a huge population depends on the coal industry and all this talk about renewable energy is ridiculous and doesn’t take them into account. And, all of these changes are not going to affect me or my family in my lifetime or really anytime in the near future.
- Person C: I believe that climate change is happening because of how we are living and it is up to us to try and make changes to reverse or slow down global warming. We could be more responsible global citizens. There are a lot of different ways we could impact climate change and I’m all for learning more about them and educating others.
- Person D: I have done some research on this topic and I believe that climate change will cause an increase in water and food shortages, civil unrest, state failure, civil war and terrorism throughout the world, with no region or nation being immune to these effects, including our county. It’s our duty to make responding to climate change a priority.

Task

- What strategies should the leader use to respond to the individuals and the team to ensure the team works well together and the polarization on this topic can be addressed? Provide examples of questions or statements the leader could ask or say to each person.

Montgomery County Climate Action Plan: Building a Healthy, Equitable, Resilient Community (June 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/green/climate/climate-action-planning.html>.

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