

**The Polarity Management Model Of Workplace Democracy:  
A Guide To Healthy Workplaces  
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**Abstract**

This is a theoretical model for the creation of healthy, safe, and humane workplaces. The model builds on the occupational stress/workplace democracy research of Bertil Gardell (1981, 1982a, 1982b, 1991); and five exemplary models: The Demand/Control Model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990); The Workplace Democratization Model (Bernstein, 1976); The Managerial Grid Model (Blake & Mouton, 1987); The Democratic Worker Owned Firm Model (Ellerman, 1990); and the Democratic Civic Values Model (Butts, 1980).

My research suggests that workplace democracy is essential for: the creation of safe and humane workplaces; and addressing the negative impacts of occupational stress. However, the literature shows that most efforts to address occupational stress continue to focus on the individual, not democratic workplaces.

Through an examination of the theoretical assumptions and beliefs underlying workplace democracy and occupational stress, I identify: significant barriers that need to be addressed in order to expand the applicability of workplace democracy; and seven criteria that can be used to assess the face and content validity of my model:

1. Does the model reduce or eliminate the negative consequences of occupational stress (including the disparate negative impacts of occupational stress based on race, gender, and class) and contribute to the creation of safe and humane workplaces?
2. Does it maximize the accomplishments of both the individual worker and the organization?
3. Does it conform with and support those elements necessary for the attainment of both workplace and societal democracy?
4. Does it conform with and support the evolutionary developmental needs of the human species by contributing to overcoming the oppression of individuals, while advancing the development of society as a whole (i.e., does it provide all people with control over their own lives within the constraint of the impact of their actions on the lives of others)?
5. Does it encompass and optimize the benefits of both our altruistic and selfish tendencies?

6. Does it emphasize both workers' rights and responsibilities?
7. Does it contribute to the identification of adult education practices (both individual workplace learning and change strategies and societal policy advocacy strategies) that employ human agency to raise human consciousness in order to advance the concept of workplace democracy?

Addressing these criteria, I use Johnson's (1996) polarity management concept as the conceptual framework to construct my model. The model consists of ten paired elements: a) freedom-authority; b) justice-due process; c) diversity-equality; d) human rights-organizational obligations; and e) participation-regeneration. I conclude that: a) none of these elements works well without its paired element; b) all ten of these elements are essential for the attainment of workplace democracy; and c) none is sufficient independent of the others.

I explore the nature and relationships of these ten elements, including: a) the negative and positive characteristics of each of the elements; b) the polarity nature of each of the pairs; and c) the interrelationships among the pairs. I further explore the implications of the model for adult education learning and change efforts in individual workplaces, as well as for societal change efforts in a globalized context.

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