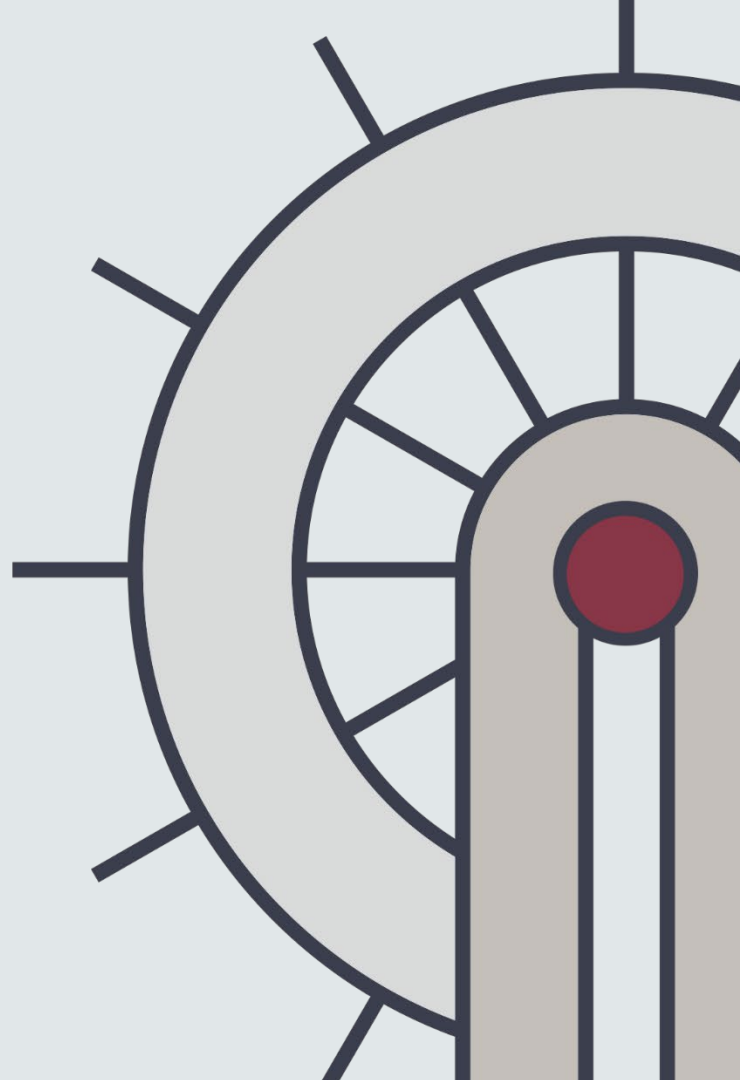


4

The Problem of Meaning

A MASTERCLASS ON MEANING AND VALUED LIVING



The importance of meaning

- humans seem to have an inborn need to find meaning (will to meaning)
- meaning in life protects against death anxiety
- meaning in life makes suffering bearable

The importance of meaning

A lack of meaning is associated with:

- substance abuse disorders
- eating disorders
- anxiety
- obsessive compulsive disorders
- phobias
- adjustment disorders

The importance of meaning

perceiving life to be meaningful is linked to lower levels of distressful or unhealthy variables such as:

- thoughts of suicide
- loneliness
- smoking cigarettes
- using alcohol
- depressive symptoms
- stress

The problem

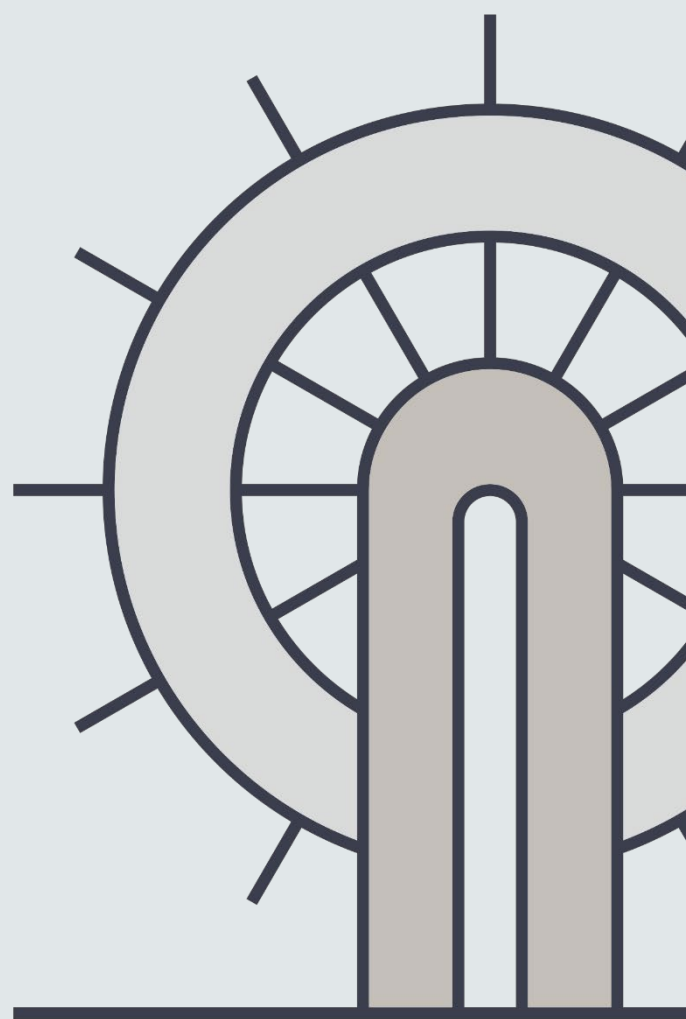
- vast subject
- lack of consensus
- no theoretical framework
- semantical problem
- no groundbreaking work in a long time



5

Meaning Defined

A MASTERCLASS ON MEANING AND VALUED LIVING



Your definition of meaning



?

“What does ‘meaning’ mean to you?”

What is “meaning”?

- English word (common noun)
- a word is a tool
- used for different purposes

What is “meaning”?

“My relationship with my father means a lot to me.”

(expression of value)

What is “meaning”?

“The sign on the road for motorists doesn’t mean anything to me because I’m riding my bicycle.”

(personal relevance filter)

What is “meaning”?

“What does the French word “frère” mean? Frère means brother.”

(synonym for explanation or definition)

What is “meaning”?

- different things, different contexts
(semantics, intention, affect, etc.)
- other languages have multiple words for
the English word “meaning”

Battista & Almond (1973, p. 409)

”

“The concept of positive life regard, an individual’s belief that he is fulfilling his positively valued life-framework or life-goal...”

Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, & King (2009, p. 474)

”

“a sense that life has an authentic purpose, and experiencing “feelings of legitimacy, importance, and value to... aspects of life,” such as relationships, behavior, goals, and work”...

Steger et al. (2006, p. 81)

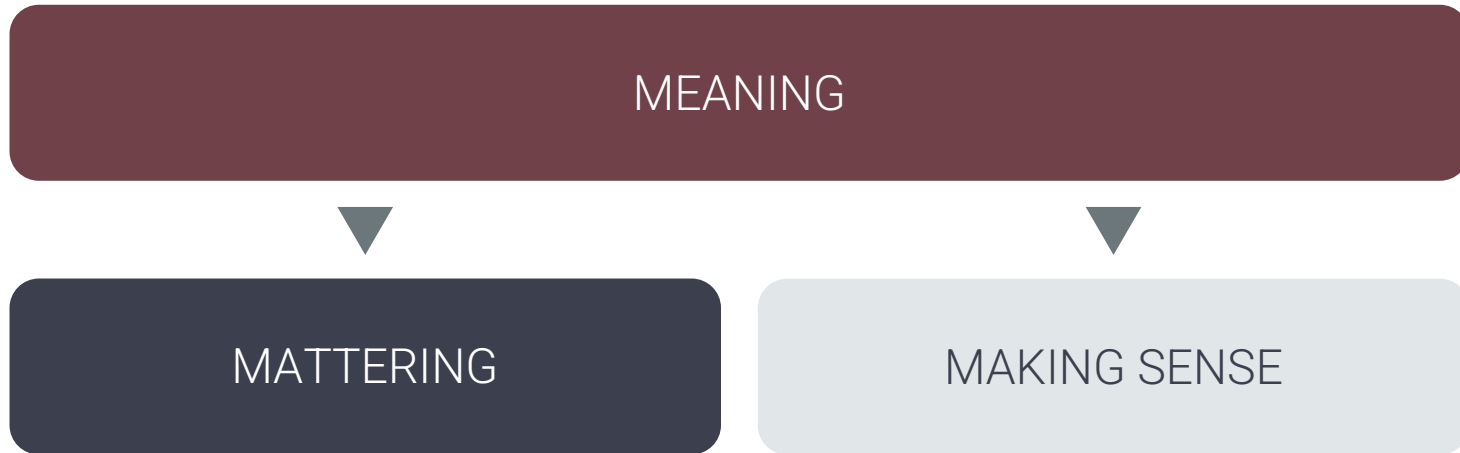
”

“the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one’s being and existence”

Scientific definitions

- many different scientific definitions
- shared keywords: coherence, significance, value, relevance and purpose
- interconnected terms
- point to a mental state

2 core processes



Mattering

- = of personal relevance
- attribution of significance to an experience
- purpose, value, relevance, significance = something matters
- e.g. having purpose = having a direction in life that matters

Making sense

- = see their structure and interrelatedness between experiences
- recognise understandable patterns in experiences
- rendering the world comprehensible, coherent and predictable
- hard to attribute meaning to what we cannot understand

Making sense

- meaning crisis = mattering without making sense
- not a pre-requisite for mattering, but for meaning
- not enough for meaning

Note for practitioners

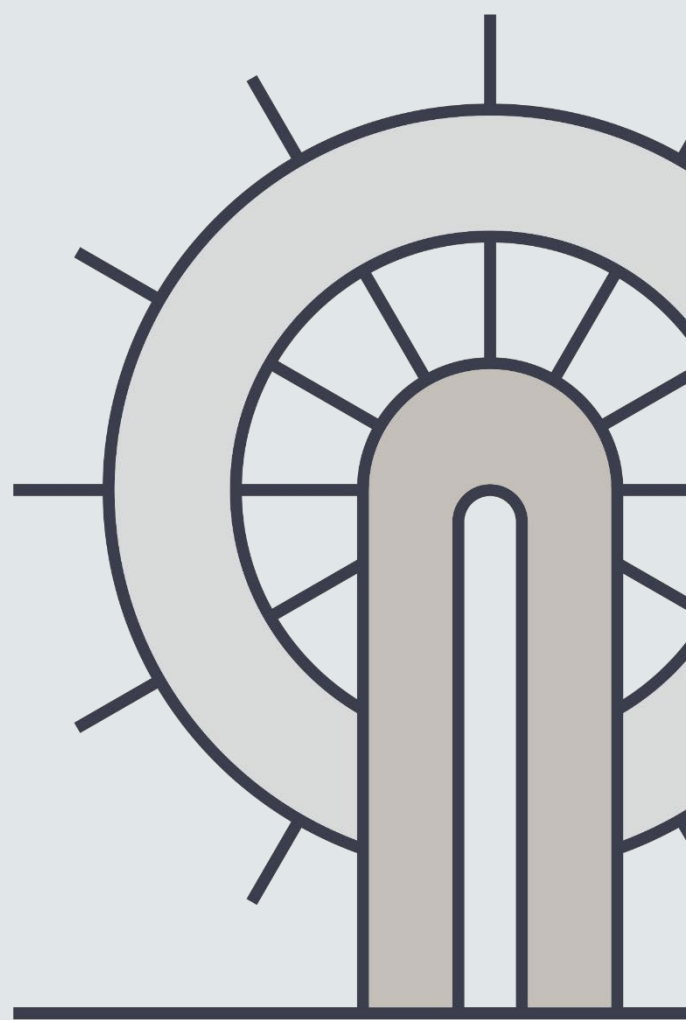


- meaningful: often a better word
- less confusion
- directly relates to the subjective experience of 'mattering'
- a continuum of 0 - 10

6

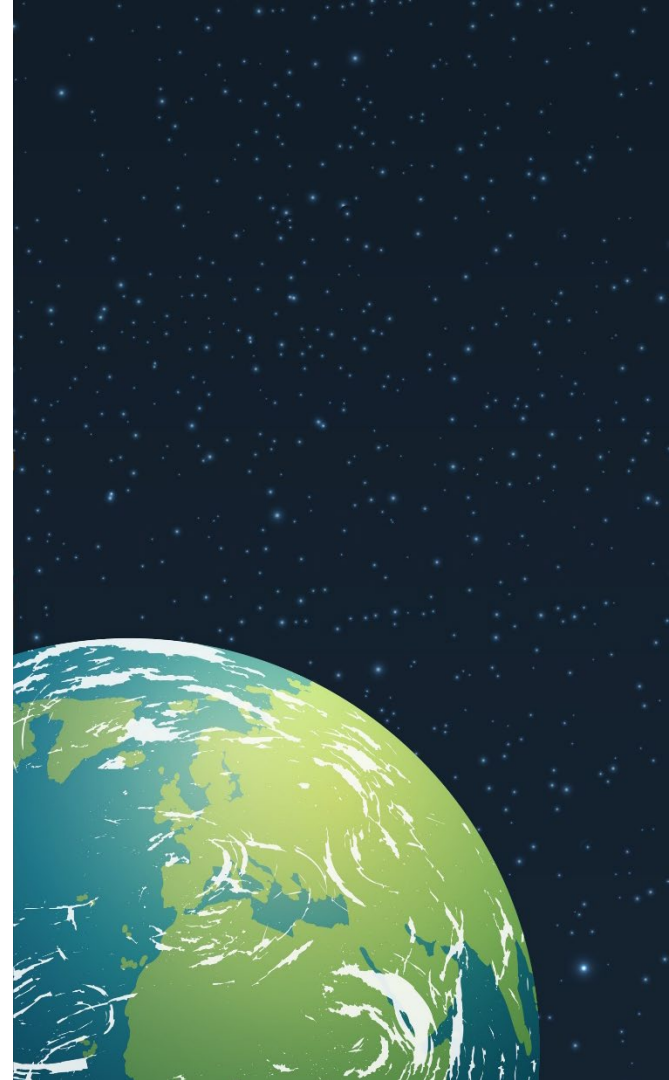
Different Kinds Of Meaning

A MASTERCLASS ON MEANING AND VALUED LIVING



Cosmic meaning

- how something outside of us is supposed to make sense for us
- meaning of everything
- magical, religious, spiritual ordering of the universe
- top-down explanatory scheme



Example question

?

“What does the creator want us to do?”

Example question

?

“Why are we here?”

Example question

?

“Does our existence matter - and if so - how?”

Chapter 6 - Different Kinds of Meaning

Sailboat metaphor



Big meaning

- how individuals make sense of their life as a whole
- purpose
- aka global meaning, terrestrial meaning, the ultimate meaning hypothesis



Example question

?

“What is the meaning of my life?”

Example question

?

“What is my calling in life?”

Chapter 6 - Different Kinds of Meaning

Sailboat metaphor



Situational meaning

- how individuals make sense of specific experiences in life
- interpretation
- cognitive process



Example question

?

How do I find meaning after trauma?

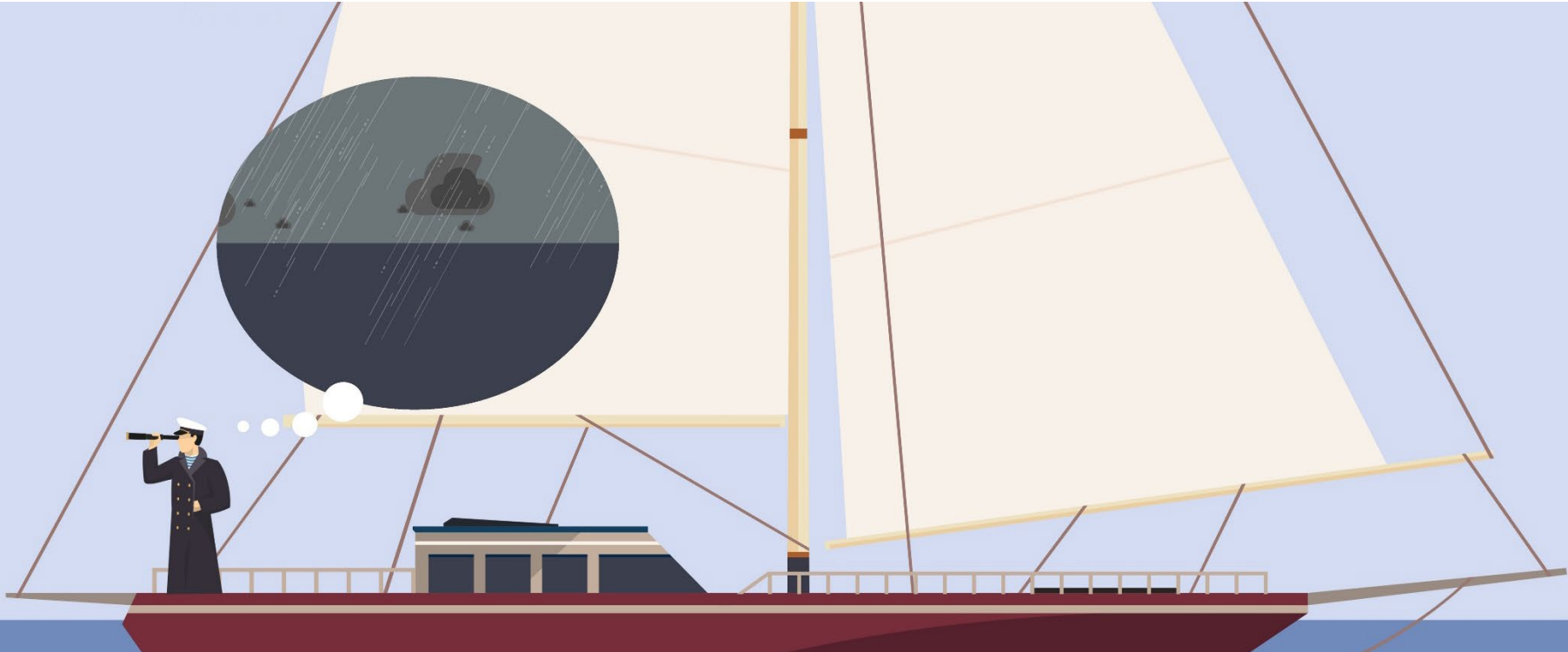
Example question

?

What can I learn from this stressful event?

Chapter 6 - Different Kinds of Meaning

Sailboat metaphor



Experience of meaning

- how an individual 'experiences' meaning
- aka small meaning
- no labeling
- direct experience (affect and emotion)
- flow



Example question

?

“Is this moment meaningful to me?”

Chapter 6 - Different Kinds of Meaning

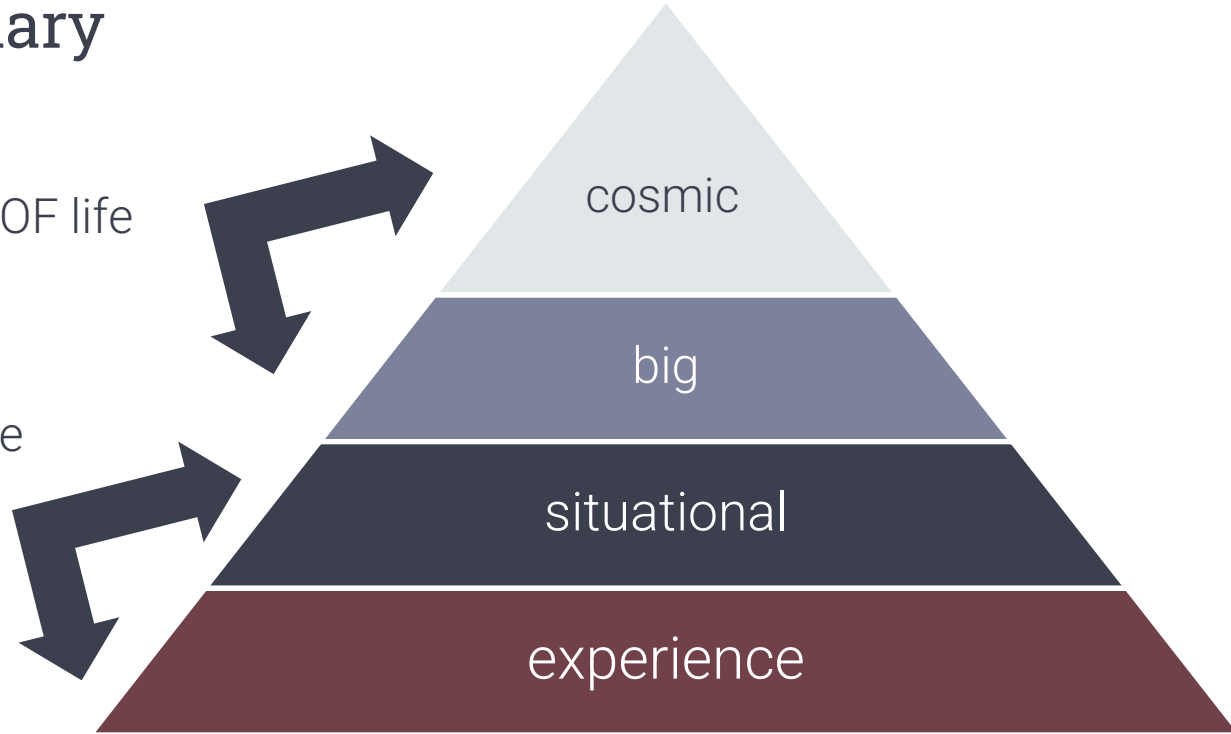
Sailboat metaphor



Summary

Meaning OF life

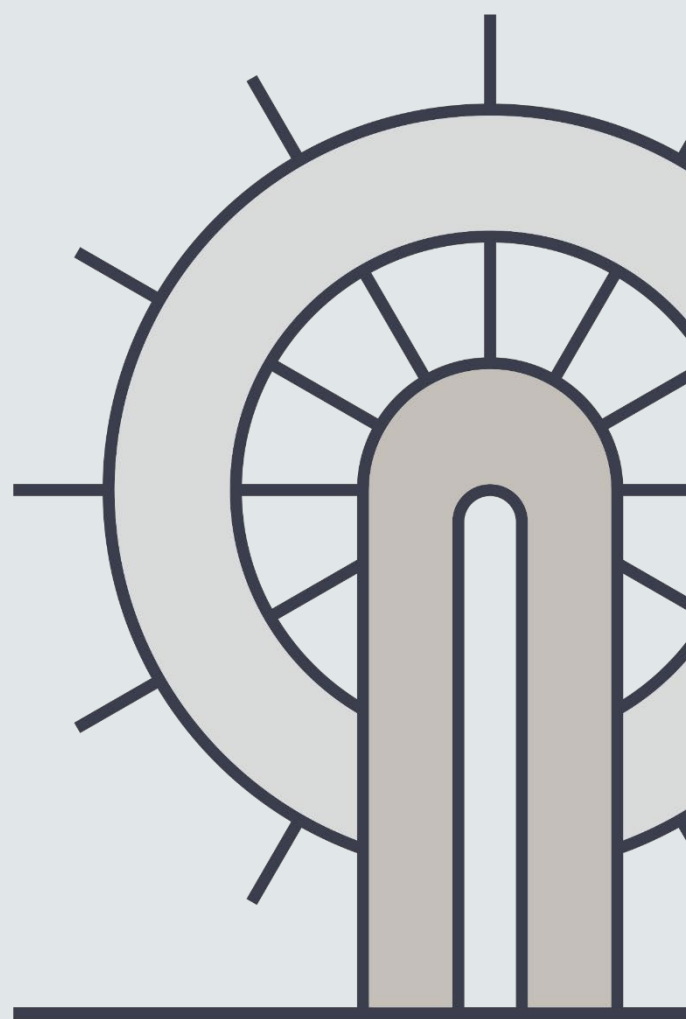
Meaning IN life



7

The Paradox Of Meaning

A MASTERCLASS ON MEANING AND VALUED LIVING



Victor Frankl (1946, p.131)

”

“Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life.”

Wrong question

- Frankl caused a paradigm shift by turning the tables
- individual is responsible for big meaning
- however, searching for the meaning of life isn't a desirable state
- search for and presence of meaning are inversely related (Steger et al., 2008)

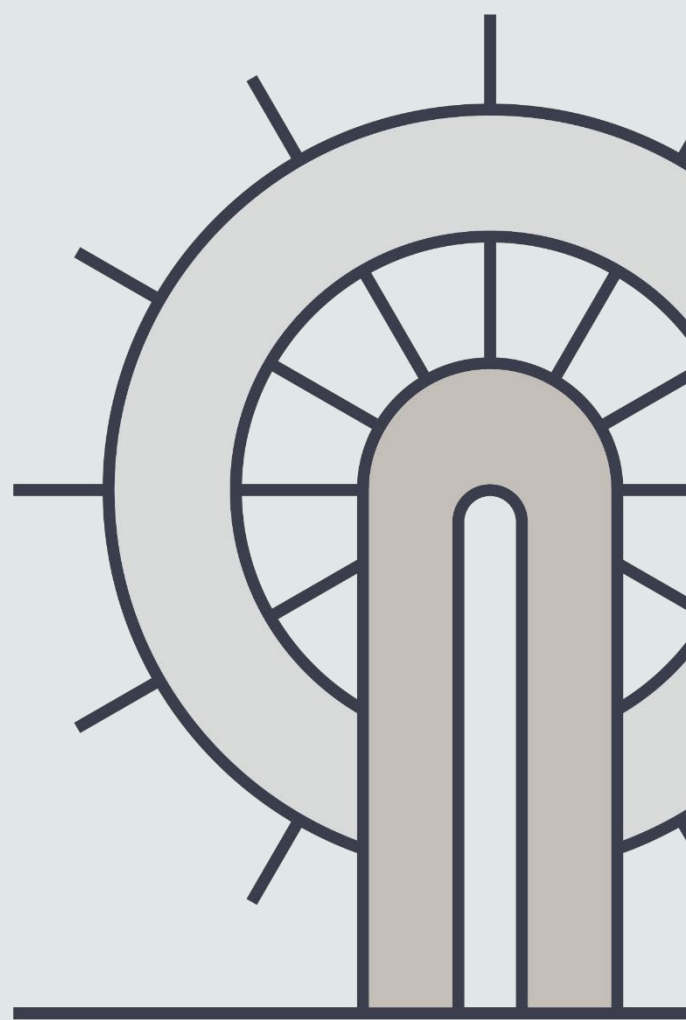
Paradox Of Meaning

“The distinction between searching and presence is an important one; it indicates that you can be **constantly searching for meaning**, but it may **not translate to greater presence of meaning** in your life, even when you find it. Conversely, you may **not search for meaning** at all, but still have a good sense of the **presence of meaning** in your life.”

8

How Meaning In Life Arises

A MASTERCLASS ON MEANING AND VALUED LIVING



Meaning needs you

“Meaning is not something static or immortal – it is as mortal as the person who holds it.”

Meaning needs you



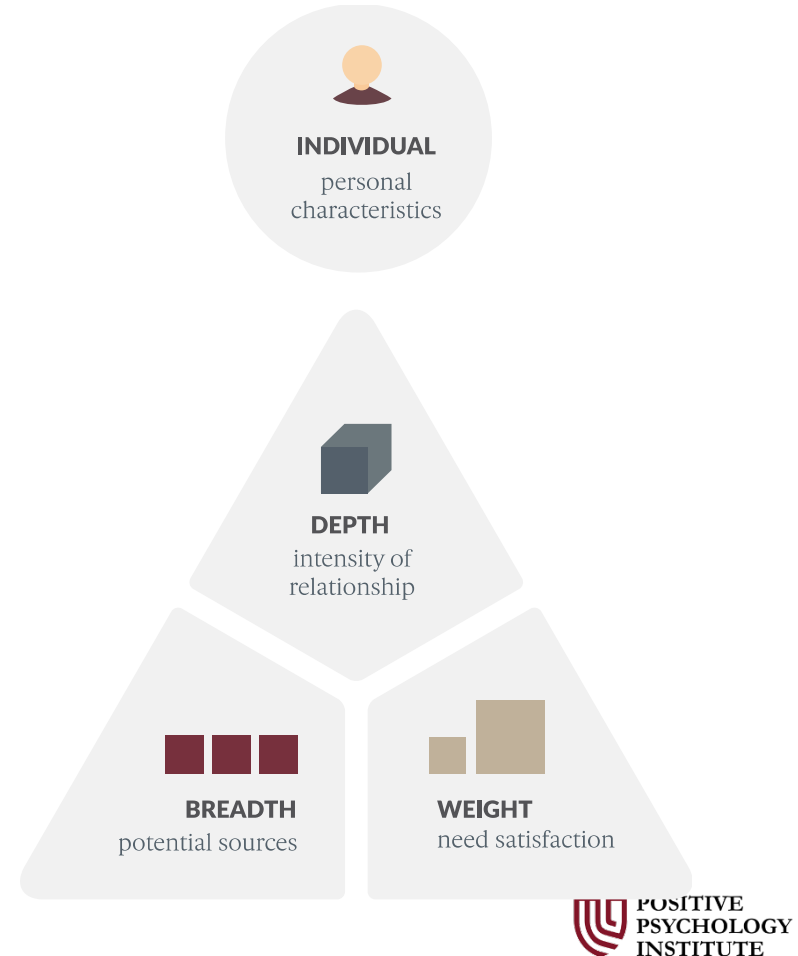
Reker & Wong (1988, p. 221)

”

The realization of personal meaning is always accompanied by feelings of satisfaction and fulfilment.

Trinity of Meaning Model

- a model for understanding how meaning in life arises
- engagement in activities that result in positive thoughts and emotions
- counteraction of apathy, passivity, dullness, and loss of interest in surroundings



Individual

what you find meaningful because of
who you are

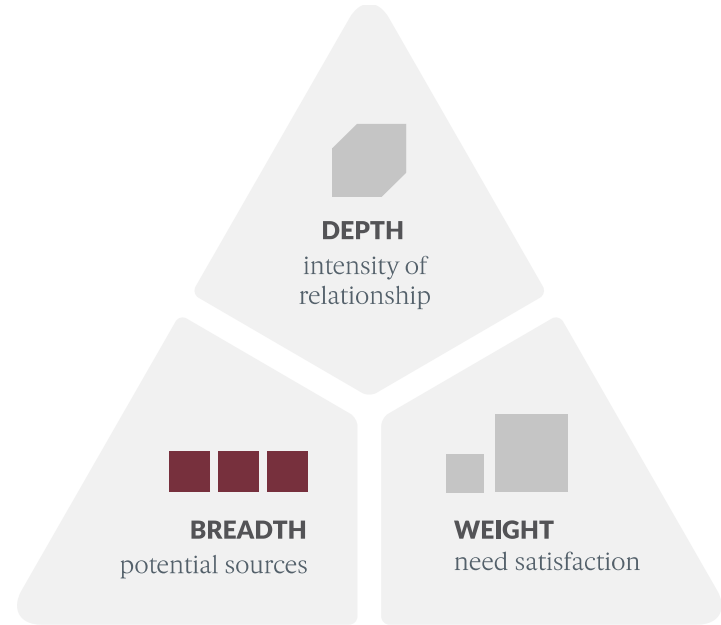
- values
- strengths
- personality
- culture
- facticity
- etc.



Breadth of meaning

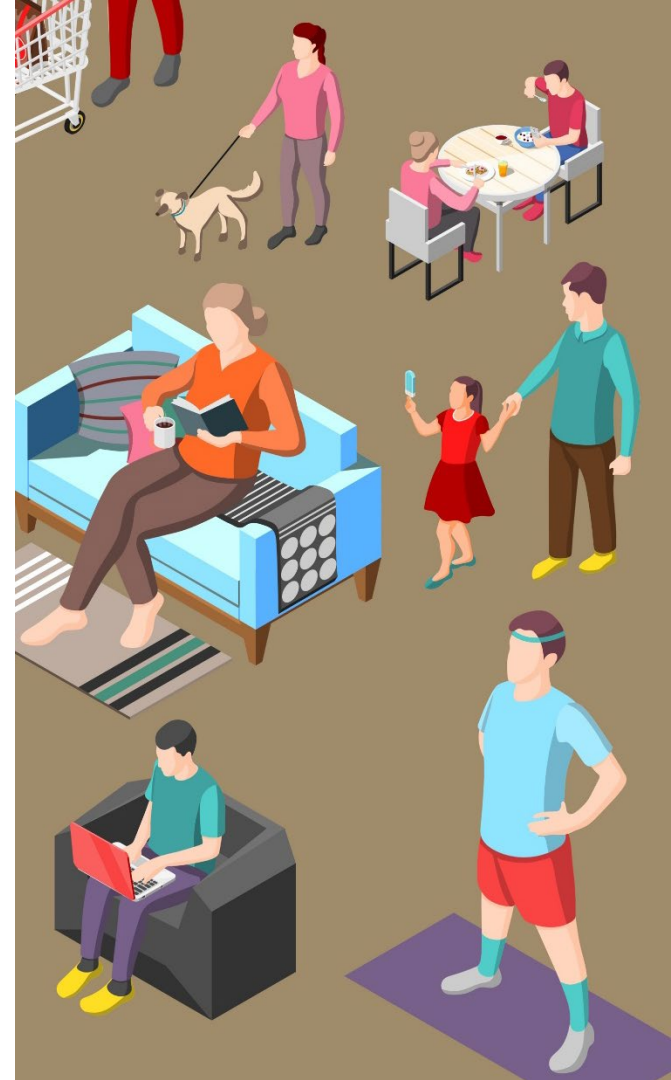
potential sources of meaning

- all-inclusive buffet of sources of meaning
- life domains
- activities



Primary sources of meaning

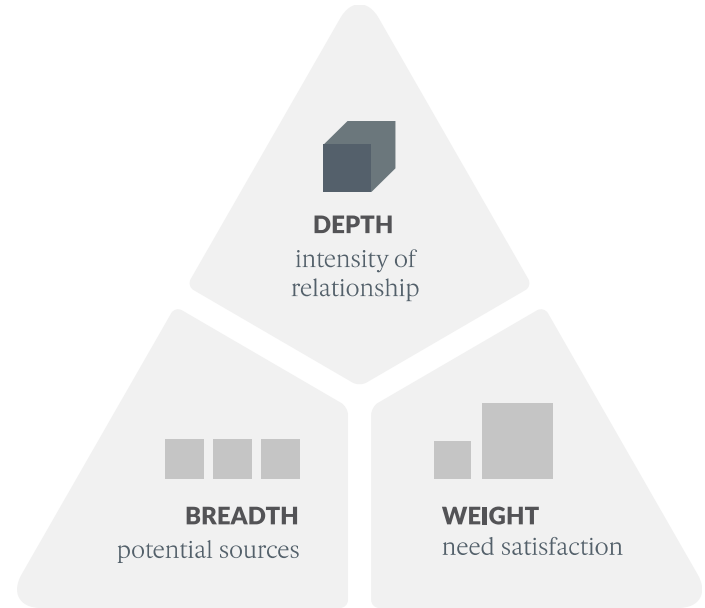
- romantic relationship
- family & friends
- work
- hobbies/interests
- religion



Depth of meaning

intensity of the relationship between
you and a potential source of meaning

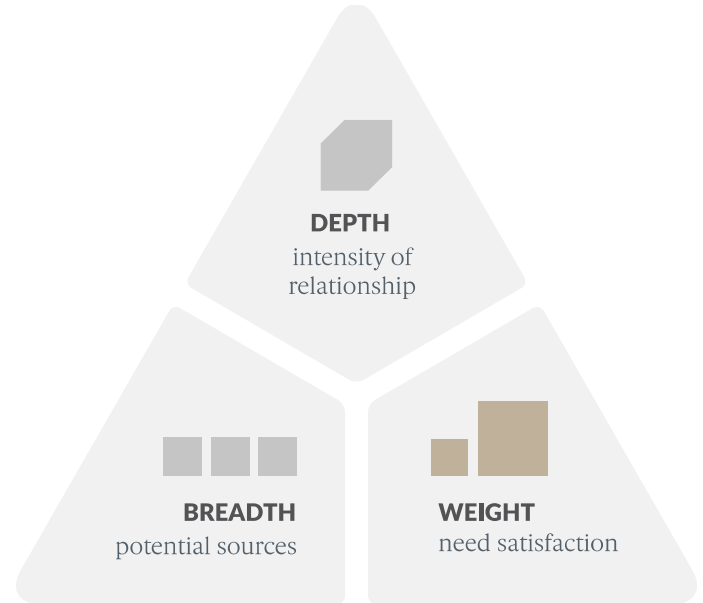
- connection
- engagement
- dedication
- commitment



Weight of meaning

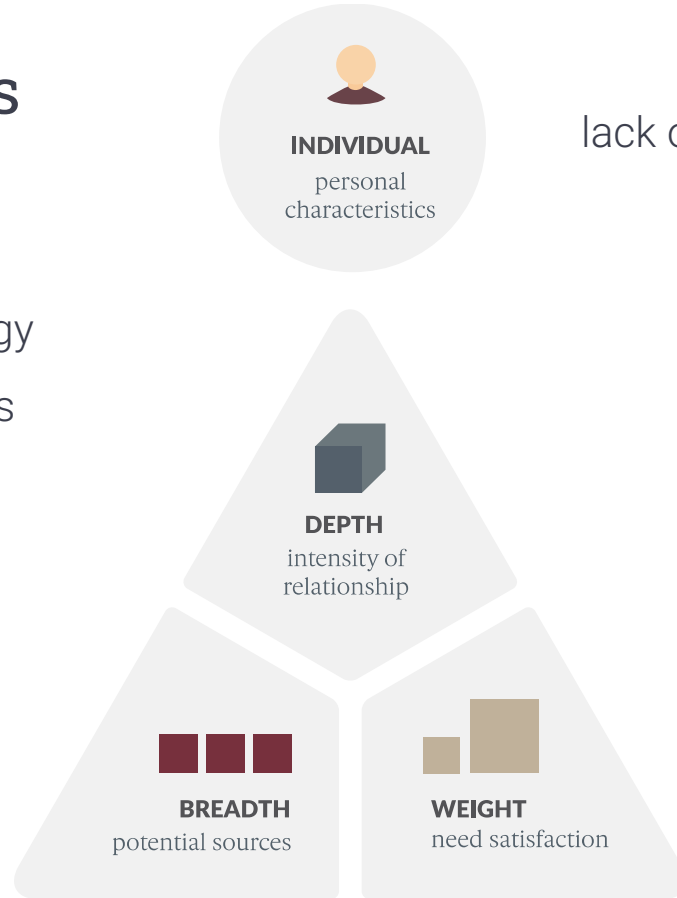
degree to which a chosen source of meaning fulfils significant needs of the self and/or others

- need satisfaction
- self-transcendence
- social connectedness
- sense of contribution



Meaning crisis

- controlling technology
 - constant distractions
 - fear of commitment
-
- option paralysis
 - over-investment
 - under-investment



- lack of emotional awareness
- excessive self-interest

Meaning in the dark side of life

some important core questions regarding meaning cannot be fully addressed through a positive-only approach:

- one can have a meaningful life that is not full of positive experiences
- people can experience meaningfulness in relation to a crisis or difficult situation

Stressful life events

- traumatic events disturb basic assumptions about life
- confrontation with limits of control
- often result in feelings of vulnerability, meaninglessness, and chaos of the world



Example question

?

“Why did this happen to me?”

Example question

?

“How could God ever let this happen?”

Example question



?

“What did I do to deserve this?”

Meaning-based coping

- traumatic events 'matter' per definition
- meaning by 'making sense'
- cognitive processes by which one attempts to understand the event and rebuild the assumptive world
- integrating a negative event into one's belief system

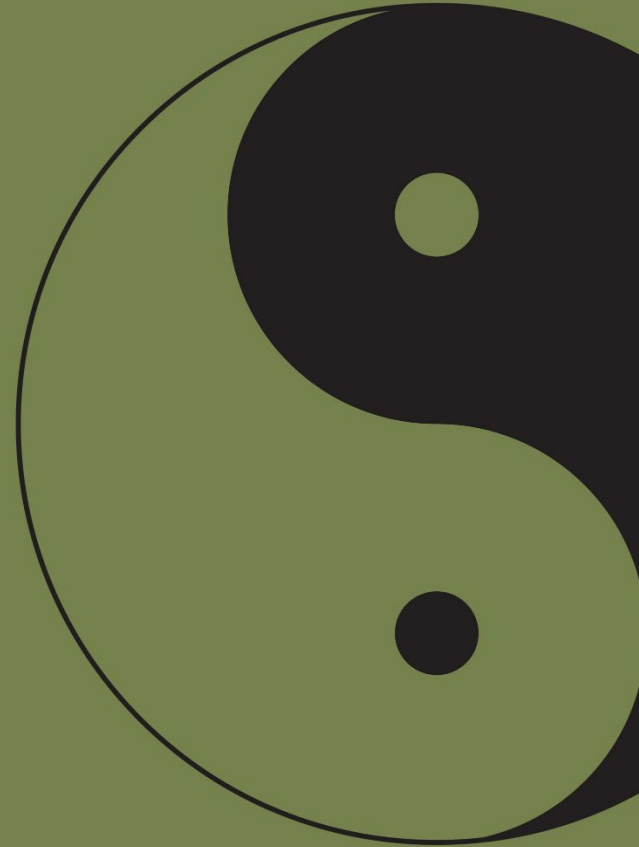


Types of meaning-based coping

- benefit finding
- following blisters
- goal setting
- reordering priorities
- attention for daily positive events
- spiritual meaning making

Benefit finding

- the positive effects that result from a negative event
- re-appraising stressful events
- deriving positive growth from adversity

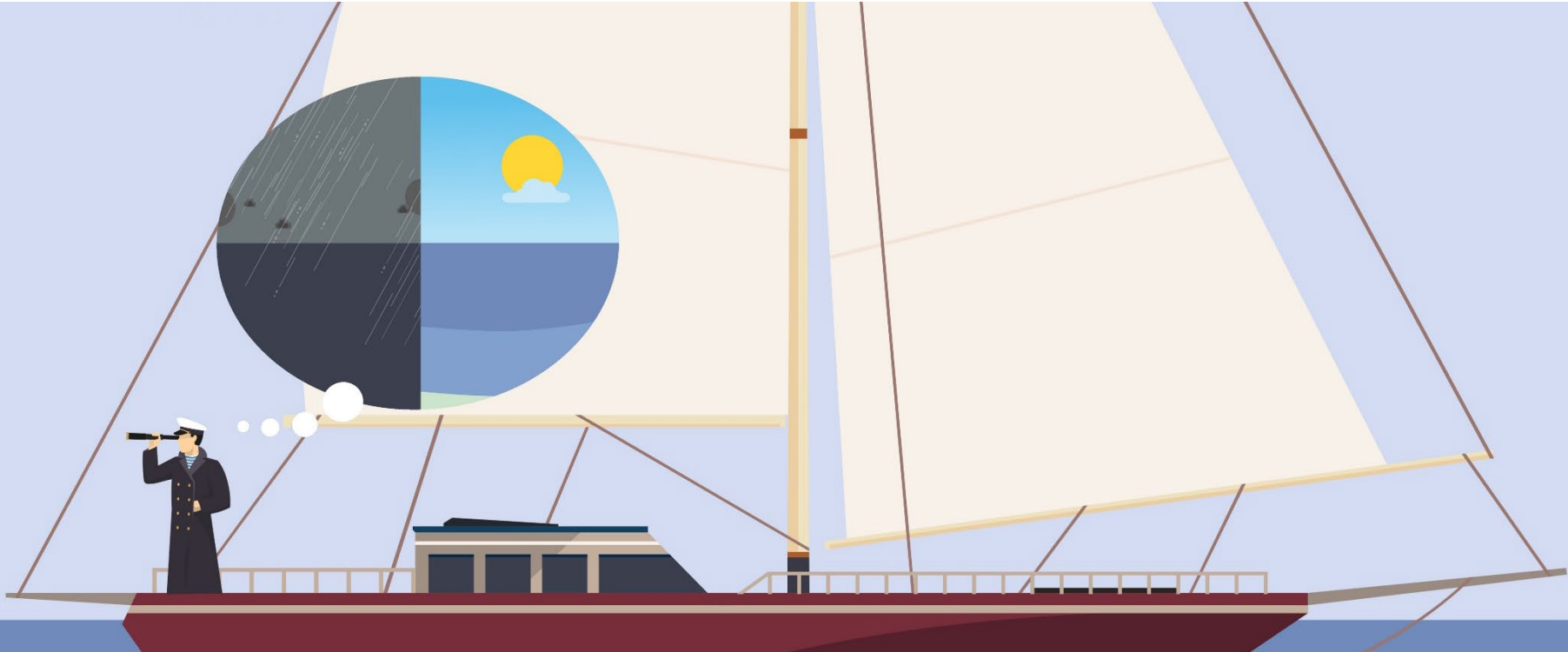


Examples of benefit finding

- I learned valuable lessons about the importance of taking care of my body
- I learned a lot about myself
- I never thought I would make it, but here I am
- more than ever, I appreciate the people I love
- I now know how precious life is

Chapter 8 - How Meaning Arises

Sailboat metaphor



Following blisters

- transforming 'wounds' caused by tragic life events into life meaning
- pain as a motivation to heal others
- transcends his own suffering

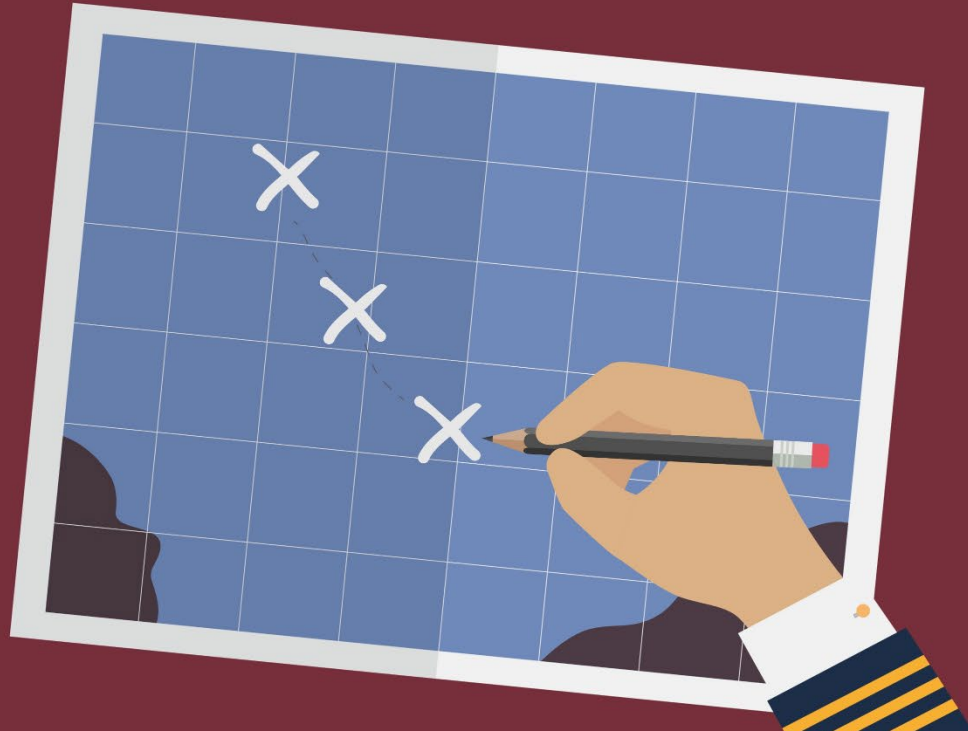
Goal setting

- reduce feelings of chaos by creating a sense of mastery and control
- reduce the distress of unattainable goals by re-focusing
- 'bigger picture' motivation



Chapter 8 - How Meaning Arises

Sailboat metaphor



Reordering priorities

- prioritise what matters most
- initiation of formulation of goals
- allocation of resources
- planning action steps necessary for moving forward



Chapter 8 - How Meaning Arises

Sailboat metaphor



Attention for positive events

- notice small positive moments
- generate positive emotions
- important buffer against the detrimental effects of negative emotions



Chapter 8 - How Meaning Arises

Sailboat metaphor



Spiritual meaning making

- making sense of life events via spirituality or religion
- perceiving the random and cruel nature of stressful life events as divinely ordained
- hope and facilitates coping with loss
- can also result in doubt and confusion



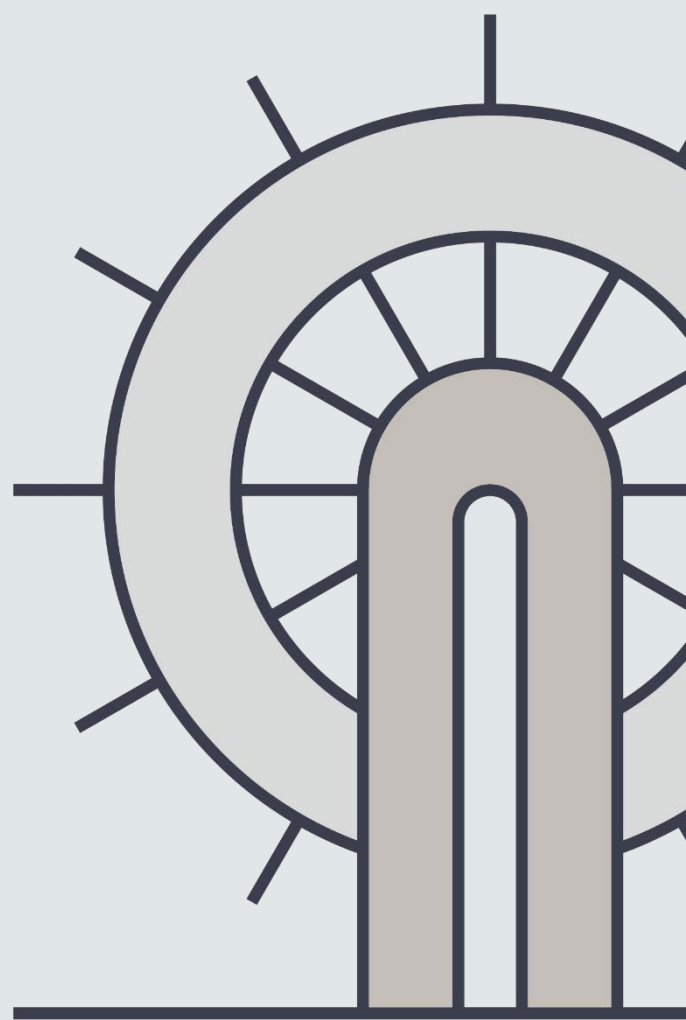
Barriers

- overwhelming 'dark side'
- not enough time passed
- over-identification with negative narrative
- focus on 'cosmic meaning' questions

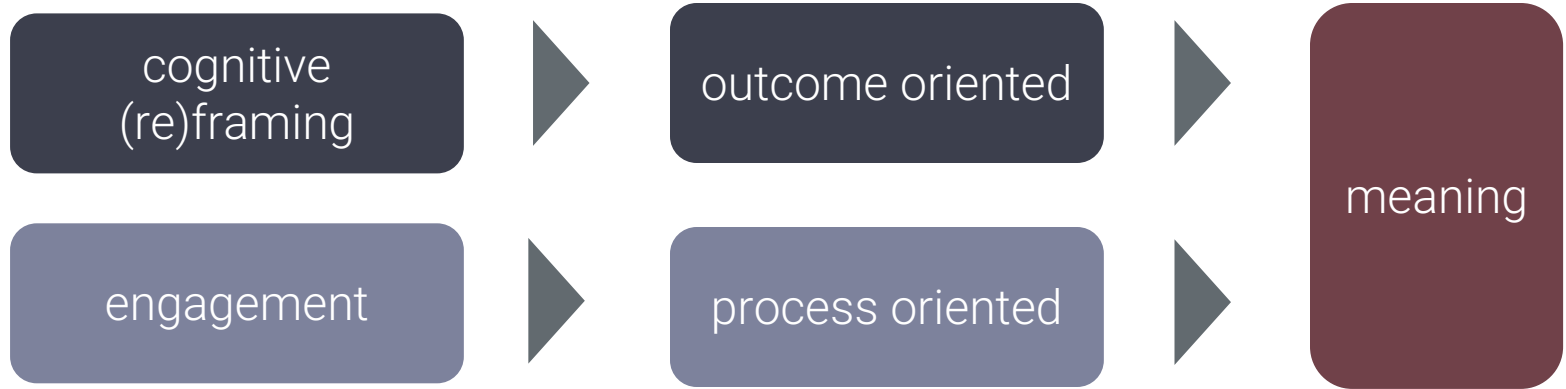
9

How to Find Meaning

A MASTERCLASS ON MEANING AND VALUES



Two Pathways To Meaning



Cognitive framing

- how you (you) relate (depth) to something (breadth)
- no “exotic, existential substance” out there
- meaning through labelling

Engagement

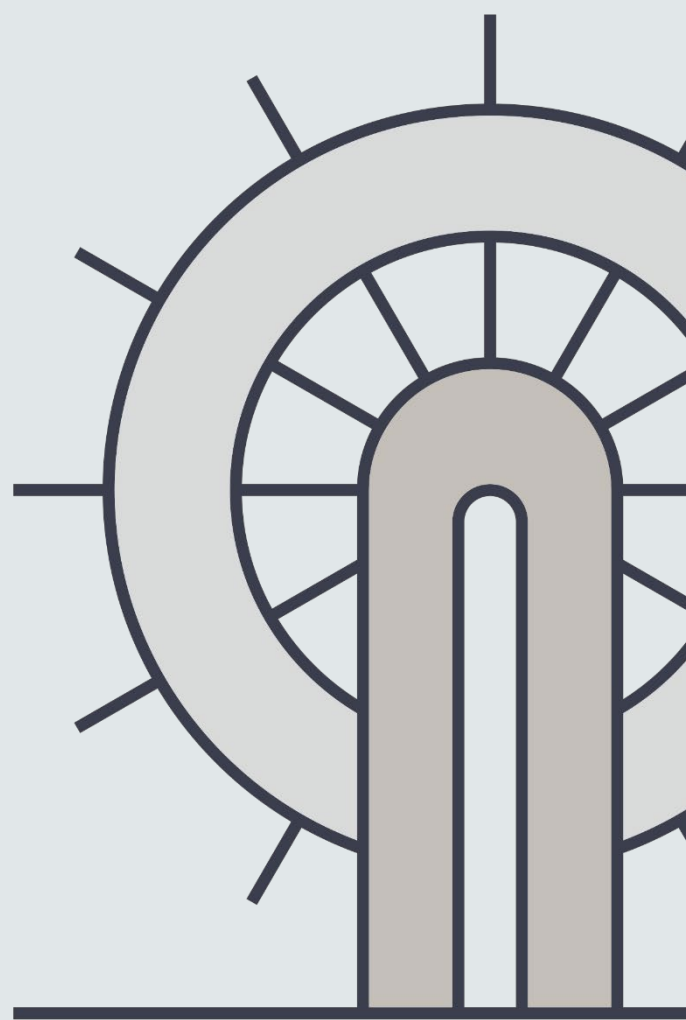
- choose a source from the breadth - anything really
- that is in line with your strengths and values
- commitment
- spending 80 hours in a soup kitchen
- meaning increases through depth
- depth increases through engagement



10

Helping Others Find Meaning

A MASTERCLASS ON MEANING AND VALUES



General guidelines

- take the existential concern seriously
- identify the meaning related questions that clients are focusing on
- treat the search for meaning OF life as a symptom
- help clients to focus on the right questions (autonomy)

Meaning in the bright side of life

help clients:

- to strengthen an ‘inside-out’, self-reflective focus
- identify potential sources of meaning
- eliminate distractions and develop deep relationships with sources of meaning
- to take action

Meaning in the dark side of life

help clients:

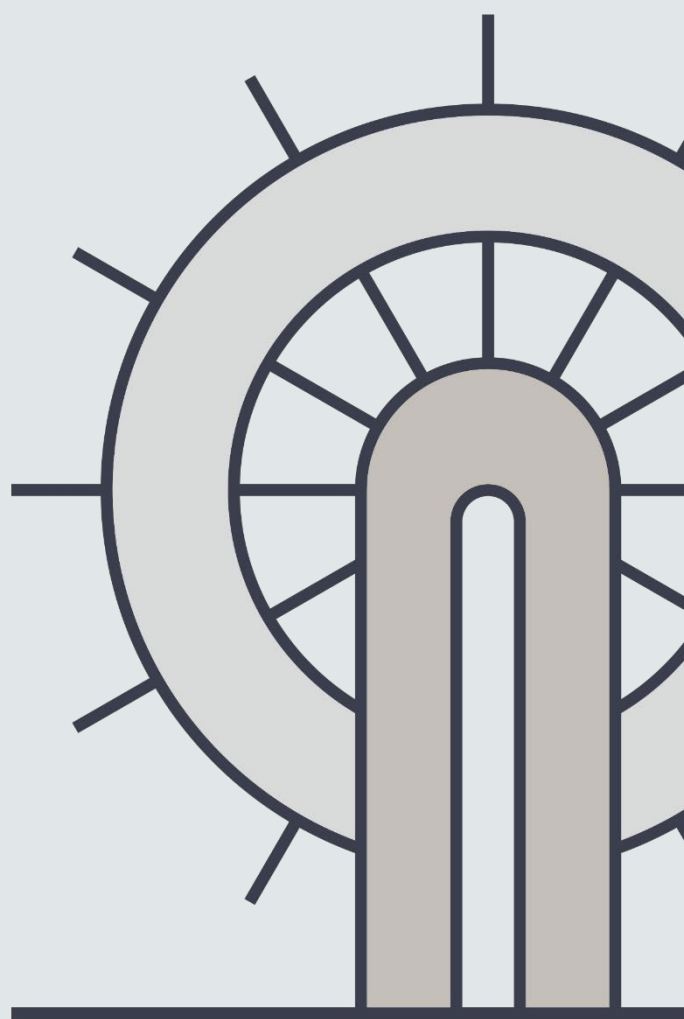
- to connect to their painful experiences
- to see the difference between what they can and cannot control (agency)
- relate to a negative life event in a constructive way
- to focus on new goals and priorities (moving on)

11



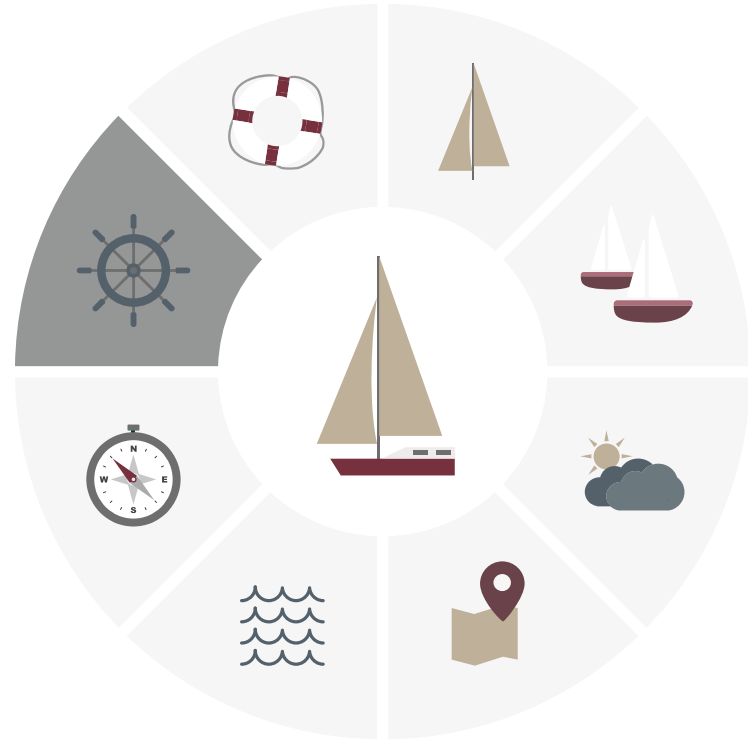
Values

A MASTERCLASS ON MEANING AND VALUES



Values

- third element of sailboat metaphor
- steering wheel



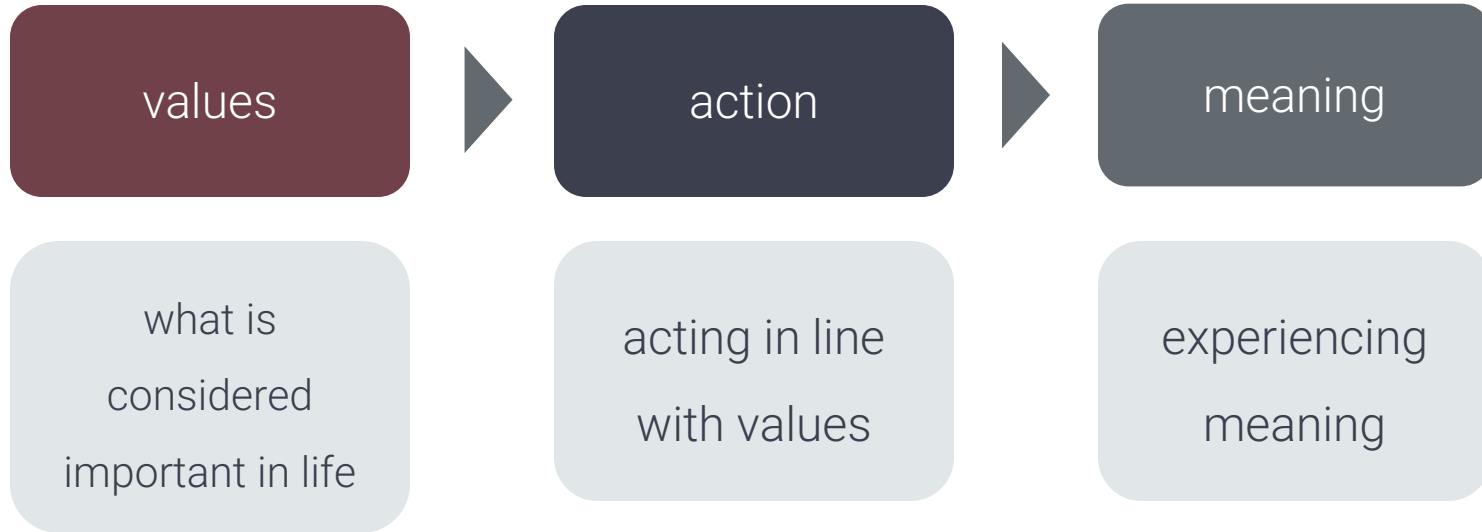
Values

- stable, general beliefs about what is desirable
(Feather, 1992)
- values cannot be ‘achieved’
- what an individual wants to do with his/her life

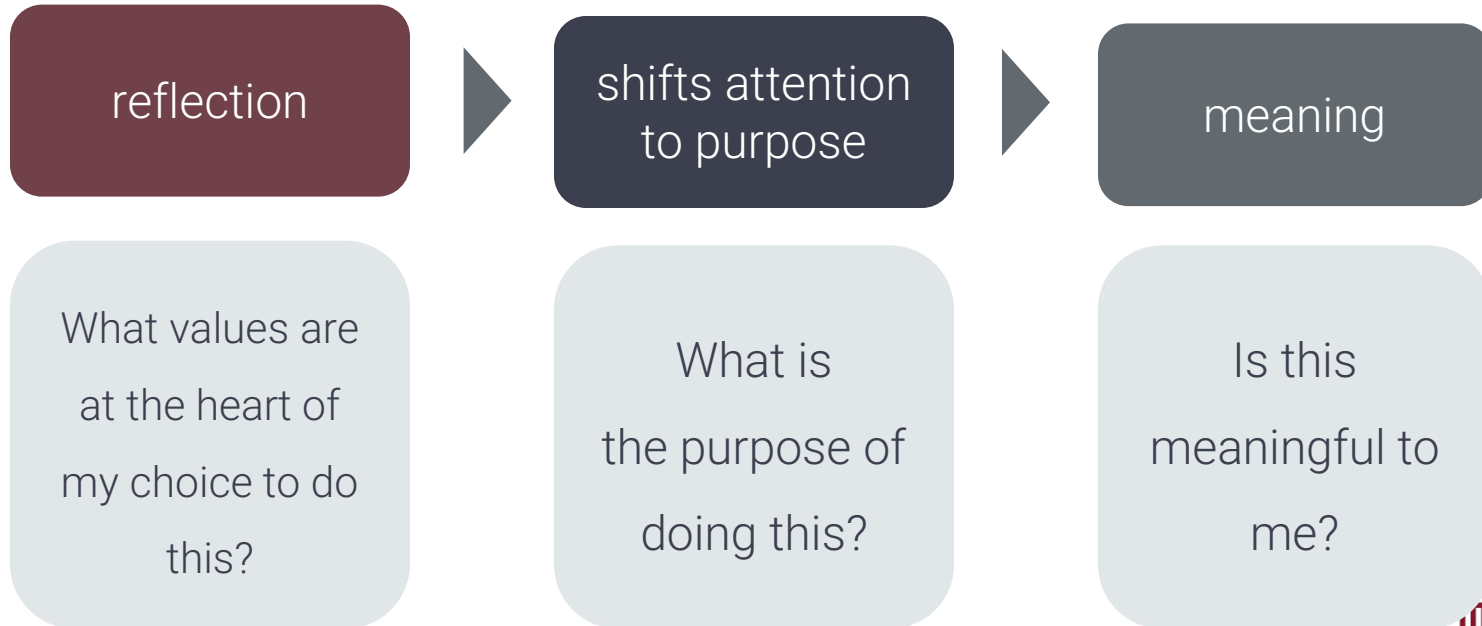
Examples of values

- accountability
- equality
- altruism
- passion
- creativity

Values & meaning



Values & meaning



Influence of values

- values impact perception, attitudes and behaviours
- e.g. prediction of:
 - buying environmentally friendly products
 - political voting
 - choosing a university course

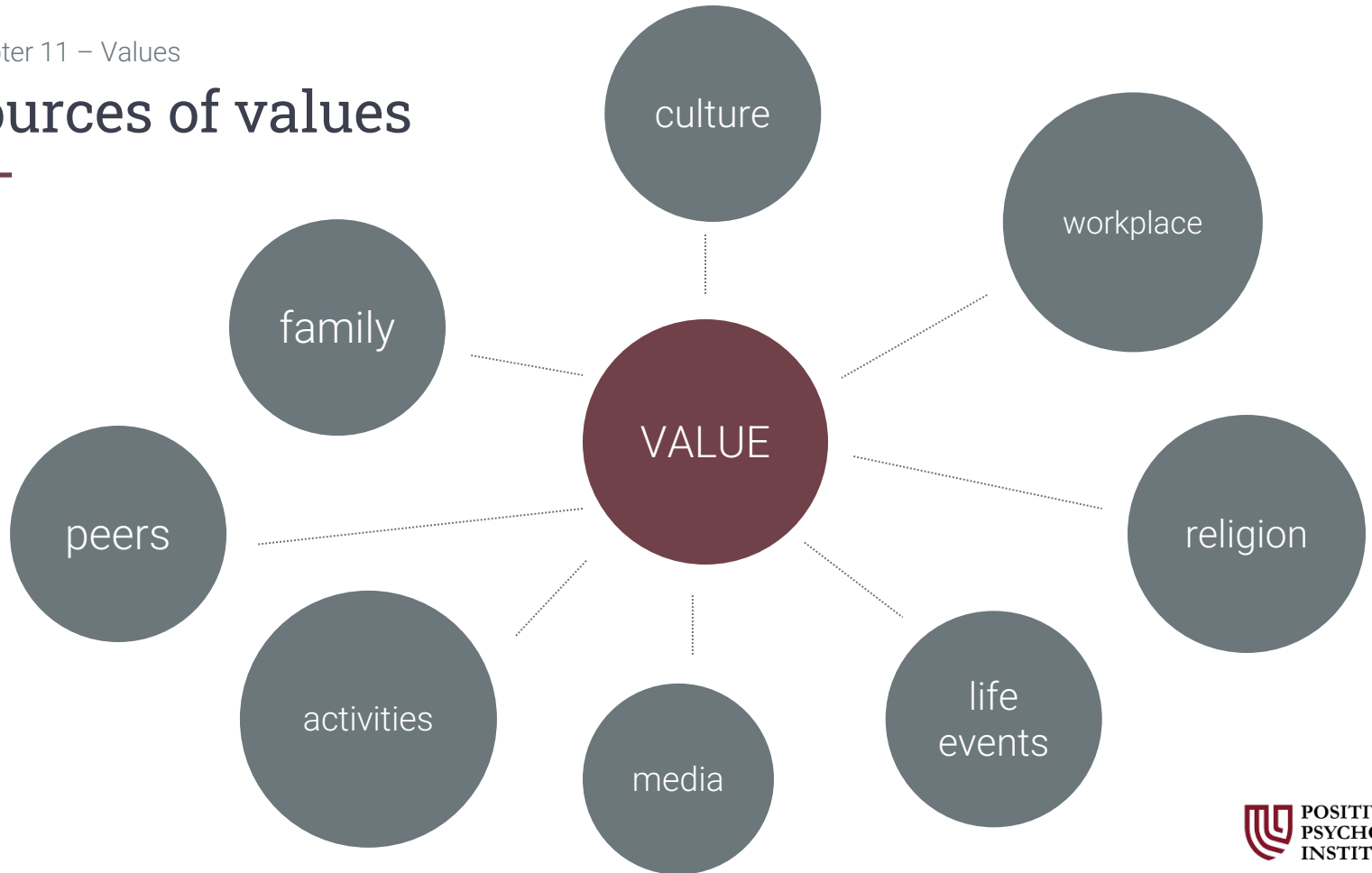
Practical notes



The benefits of working with values:

- (re)gaining a sense of meaning and purpose in life
- helpful starting point for goal setting
- connecting behaviour to specific values: more willing to experience difficult thoughts and feelings

Sources of values

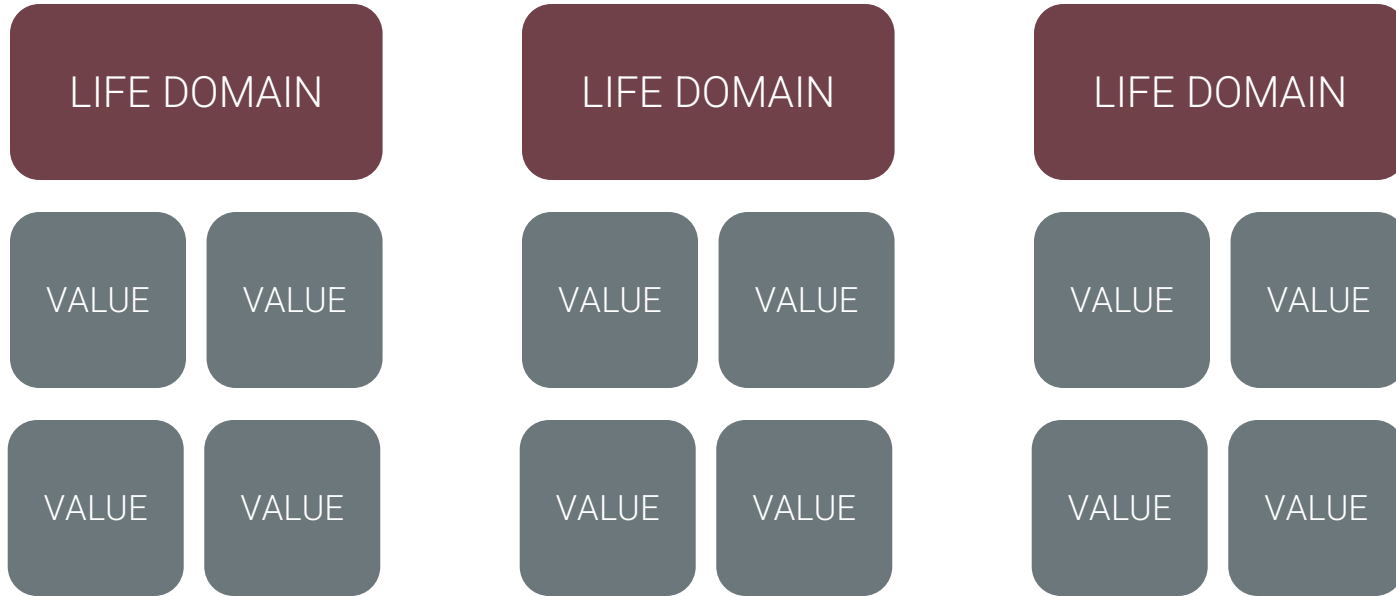


Practical note

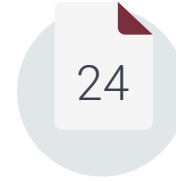


Rather than **liberating** the client from **externally imposed values**, the goal of examining the client's values is to foster **self-reflection** and help the client to determine the extent to which the current values contribute to well-being and and a sense of meaning in life.

Values per life domain



Value identification

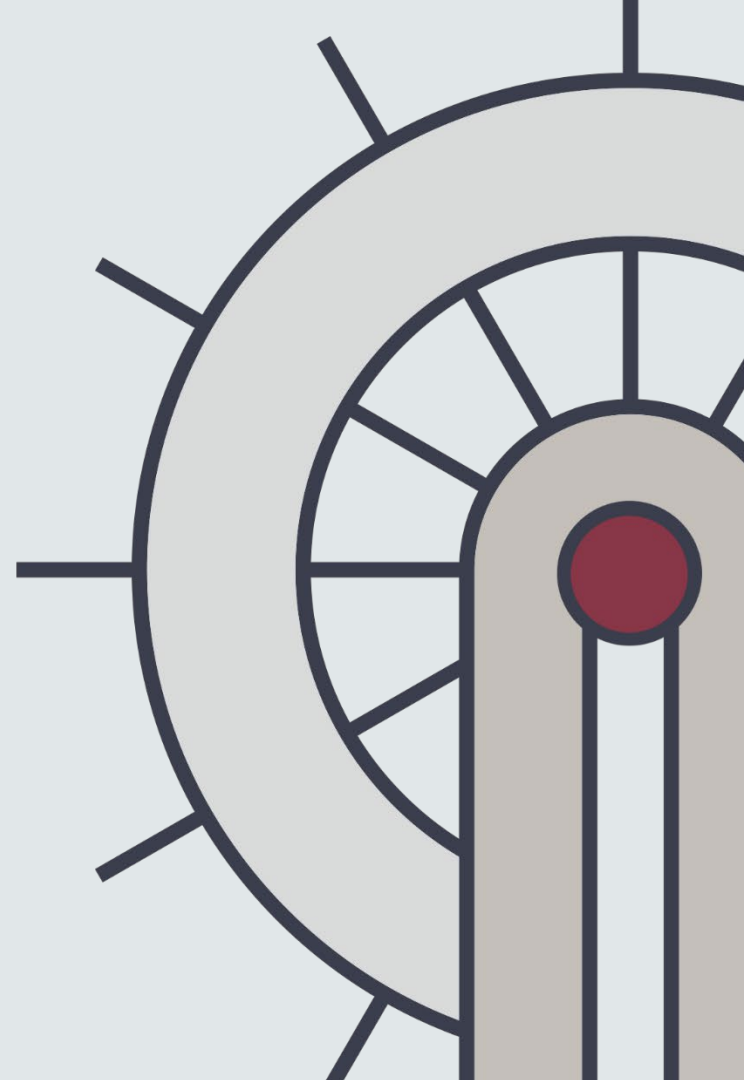


- Choose one life domain.
- In this life domain, what kind of person would you like to be?
Describe as accurately as possible how you would like to think, behave and feel in this life domain?
- The interviewer's task is to identify the potential values underlying the other's answers.

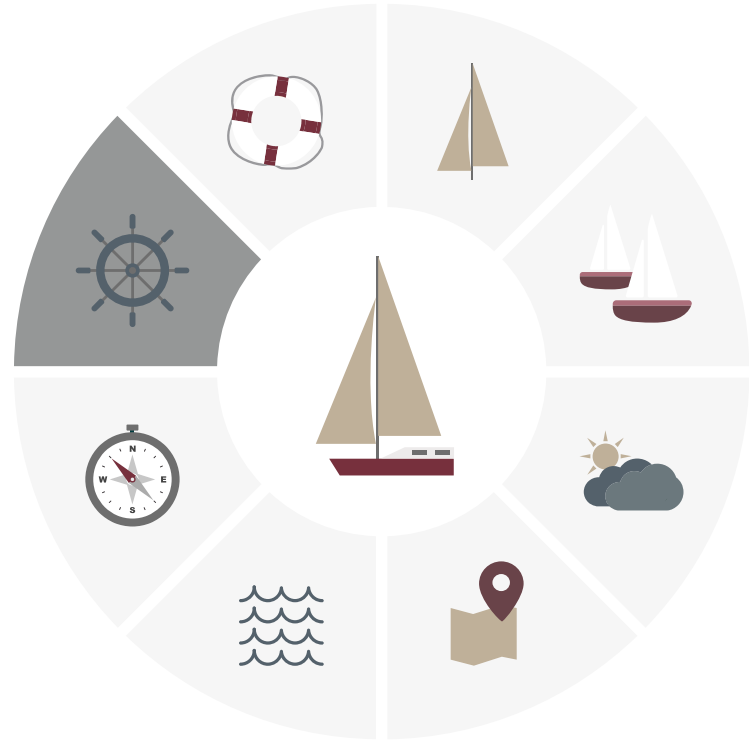
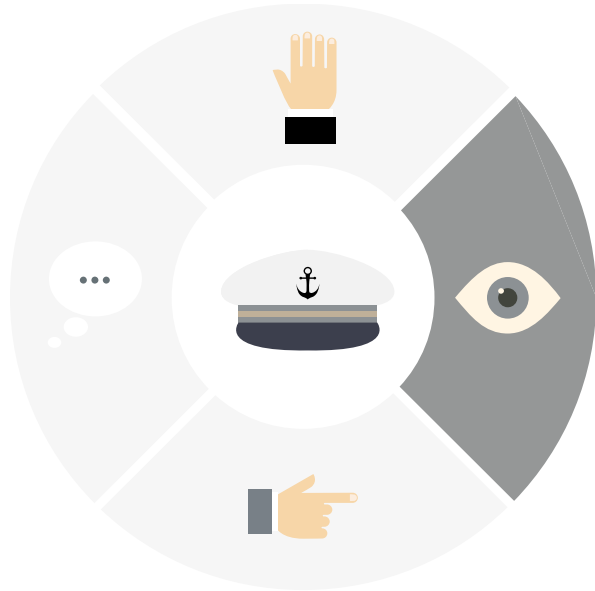
12

Awareness of Values

A MASTERCLASS ON MEANING AND VALUES



The captain: Attention



Core question

”

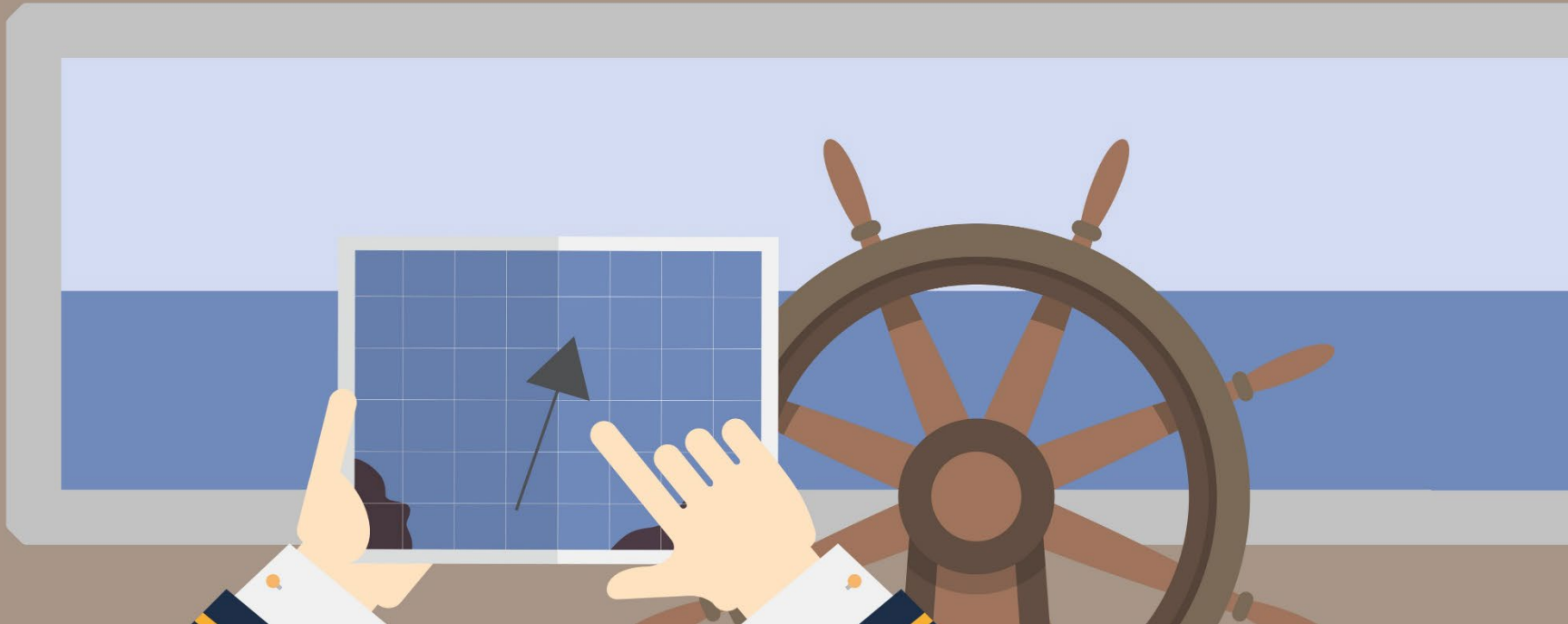
“To what extent is the individual aware of personal values?”

Characteristics of value awareness

Low value awareness	High value awareness
apathy	purposefulness, enthusiasm
lack of commitment	commitment
over-conforming	critical thinking
unsatisfying decisions	satisfying decisions

Chapter 12 – Awareness of Values (steering wheel – attention)

Sailboat metaphor



The importance of value awareness

- a) decision making
- b) motivation
- c) preventing emotion-driven behaviour
- d) preventing excessive goal focus

A) Decision making

EASY?

OR

RIGHT?

MEANINGFUL?

OR

PLEASURABLE?

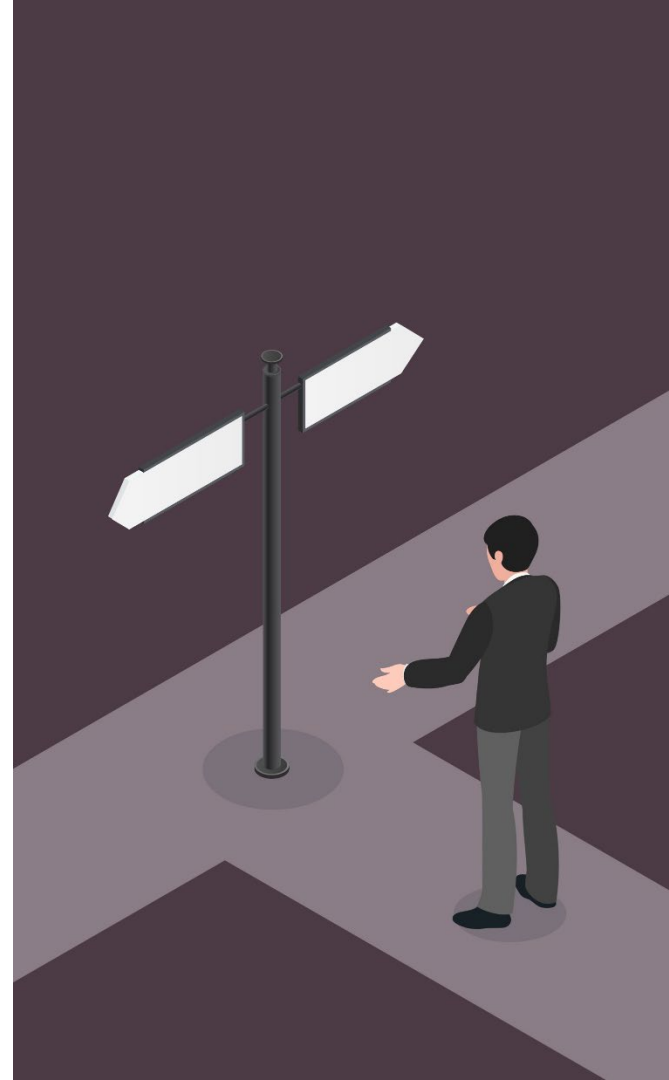
OURSELVES?

OR

OTHERS?

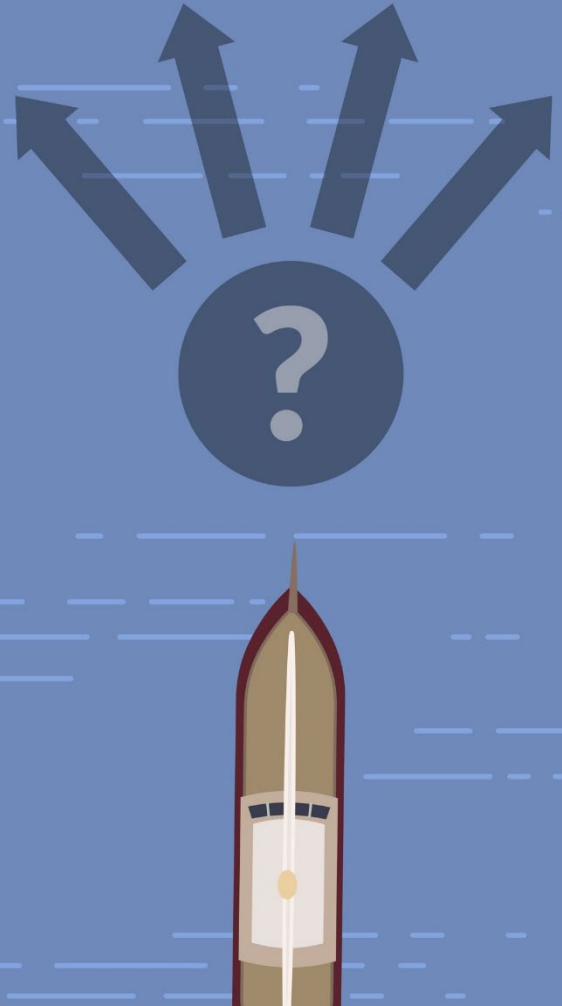
A) Decision making

- values change during life
(life events, age)
- value awareness =
behaviour reflecting current
values



Sailboat metaphor

- constantly changing directions
- relying on advice of other captains
- boat is ‘floating around’



B) Motivation

- many meaningful projects involve hard work and persistence
- awareness of values = connection with degree of personal importance
- more effort and persistence



C) Preventing emotion-driven behaviour

- “Why am I doing this?”
- “Is my choice the result of an emotion or based on what I consider important?”
- “Will following my emotions help me or prevent me from acting in line with my values?”



D) Preventing excessive goal focus

- impact bias
- values are process oriented
- directions rather than goals



Practical note



Many clients have lost connection with their values because most of their time is spent trying gain **control** over their problem. Value awareness can help to **'zoom out'** again.

Wild question technique

- it is always possible to generate reasons for why living in line with one's deepest desires is difficult or impossible
- the rational mind often stops motivation immediately
- (temporarily) bypass the inner critical/rational voice
- think outside normal limitations/restrictions

Wild question technique

- What would you do if you were free from fear and knew that you could not fail?
- What would you do if you won a fortune on the lottery tomorrow?
- What have you always wanted to do but held yourself back from?
- If you were granted three wishes that you knew would come true, how would you use them?

Chapter 12 – Awareness of Values (steering wheel – attention)

Wild question technique demonstration



Wild question technique



- What would you do if you were free from fear and knew that you could not fail?
- What would you do if you won a fortune on the lottery tomorrow?
- What have you always wanted to do but held yourself back from?
- If you were granted three wishes that you knew would come true, how would you use them?

Value clarification

- values vision board
- meaningful photography
- team branding

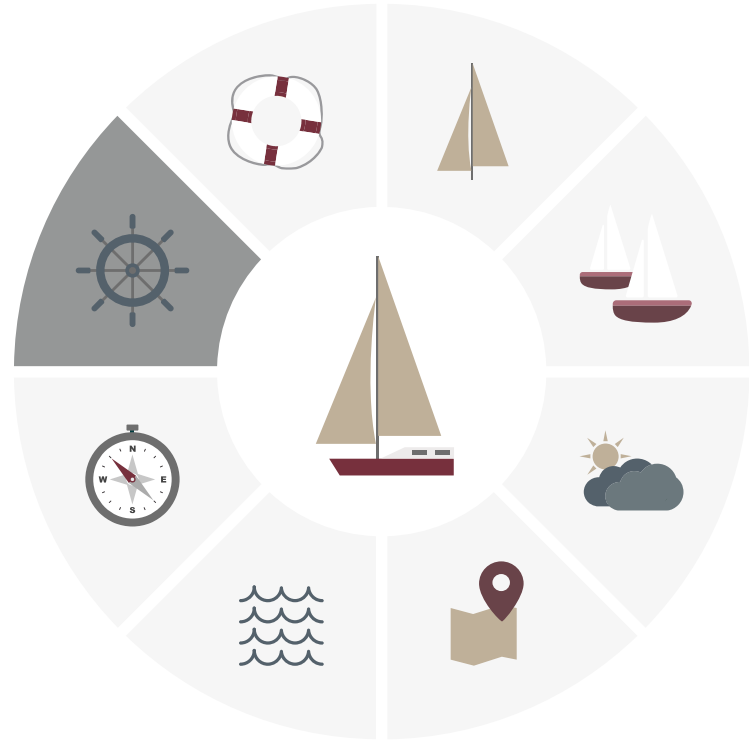
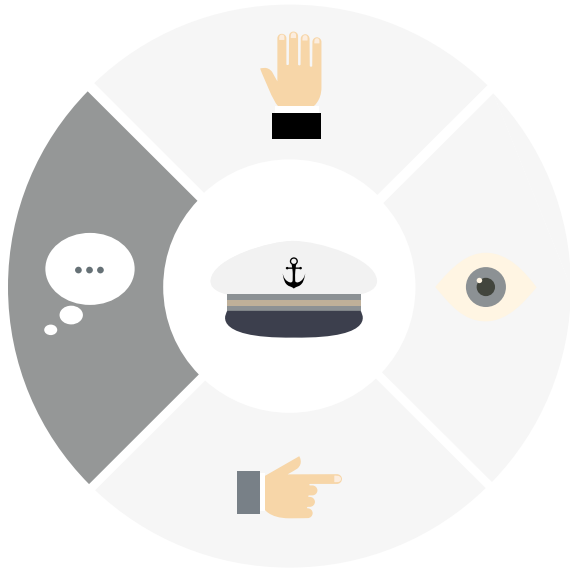
13

Beliefs about Values

A MASTERCLASS ON MEANING AND VALUED LIVING



The captain: Thoughts



Core question

”

“How rigid are the individual's beliefs regarding his or her values?”

Dichotomous thinking

- thinking in terms of binary oppositions
- linked to cluster B and C personality disorders
- important factor contributing to the maintenance of eating disorders

Dichotomous thinking

”

“There are good values and bad values.”

Rule making

- rigid beliefs turn values into rules
- greatly reduce freedom
- dictate ‘how life should be lived’
- breaking rules → strong emotions



Chapter 13 – Beliefs about Values (steering wheel – thoughts)

Rule making

”

“I must always be there for my kids”

Rule making

”

“I must be kind to other people”

Rule making

”

“I have to help other people at all times”

Chapter 13 – Beliefs about Values (steering wheel – thoughts)

Sailboat metaphor



Increasing flexibility



When stated values become obligatory,
what can we do to increase choice and decrease
the rigid pursuit of these values?

Increasing flexibility

- increase awareness of rules
- increase awareness of impact of rules on well-being
- do not get rid of them, observe them
- break rules (you can think A and do B)

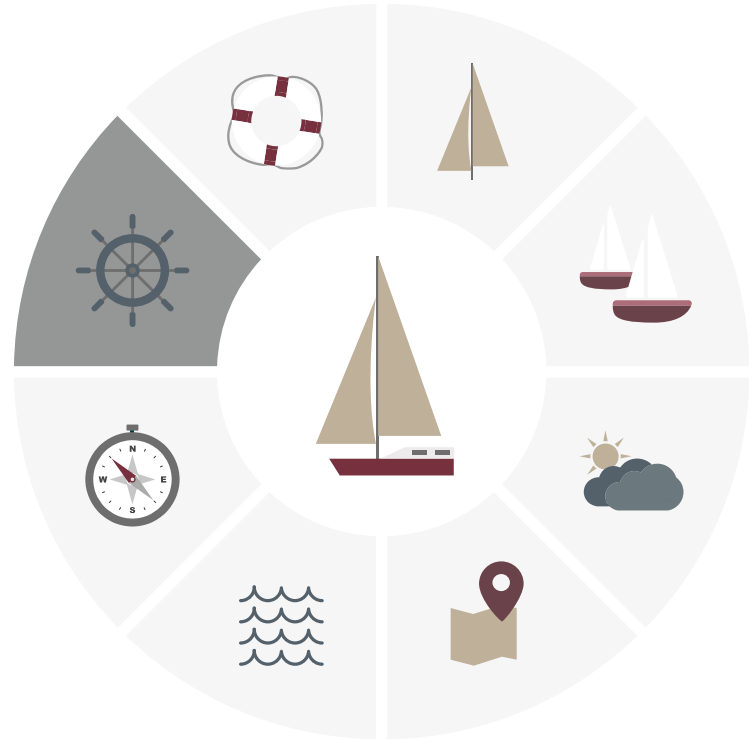
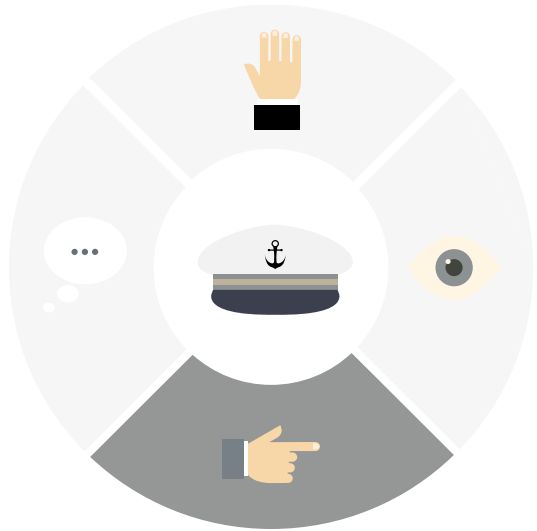
14

Motives behind Values

A MASTERCLASS ON MEANING AND VALUED LIVING



The Captain: Motivation



Core question

”

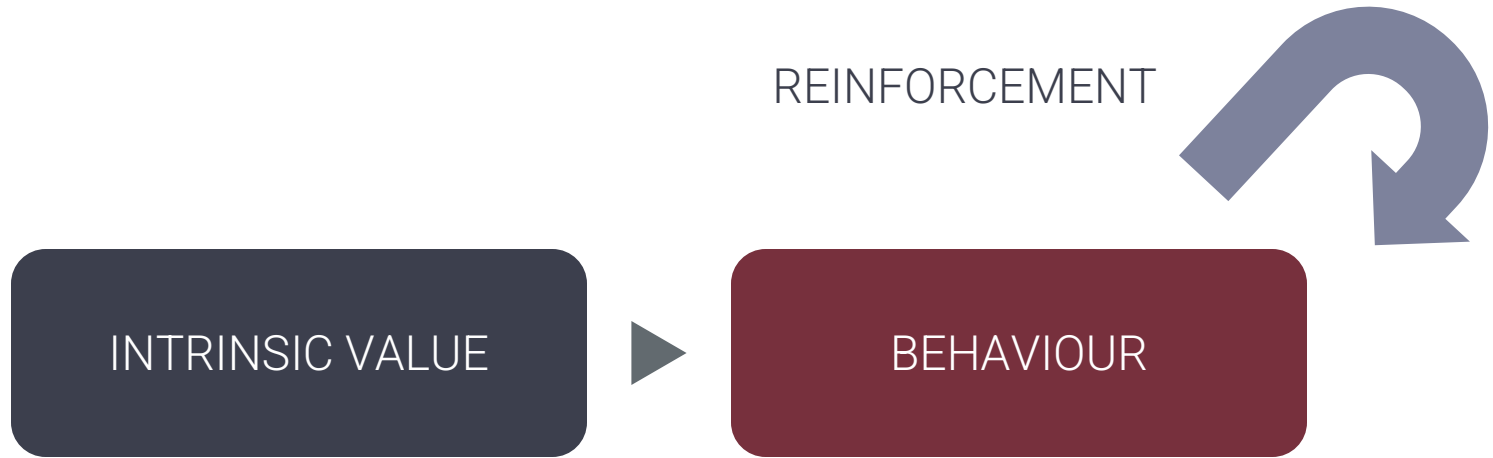
“Why does the individual consider these values to be important?”

Intrinsic values

- expression of inherent human desire to **grow and develop**
- e.g. self-acceptance, affiliation, creativity
- the behaviour to express an intrinsic value is reinforcing in itself



Intrinsic values



Extrinsic values

- the behaviour that expresses an extrinsic value is a means to achieve a **separable outcome**
- e.g. financial success, social popularity and physical attractiveness



Extrinsic values



Chapter 14 – Motives behind Values (steering wheel – motivation)

Sailboat Metaphor





Practical note

At first sight some values may **seem intrinsic**. The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic values must be made at the **behavioural level**, by analysing the **reasons** for engaging in certain value-driven behaviour.

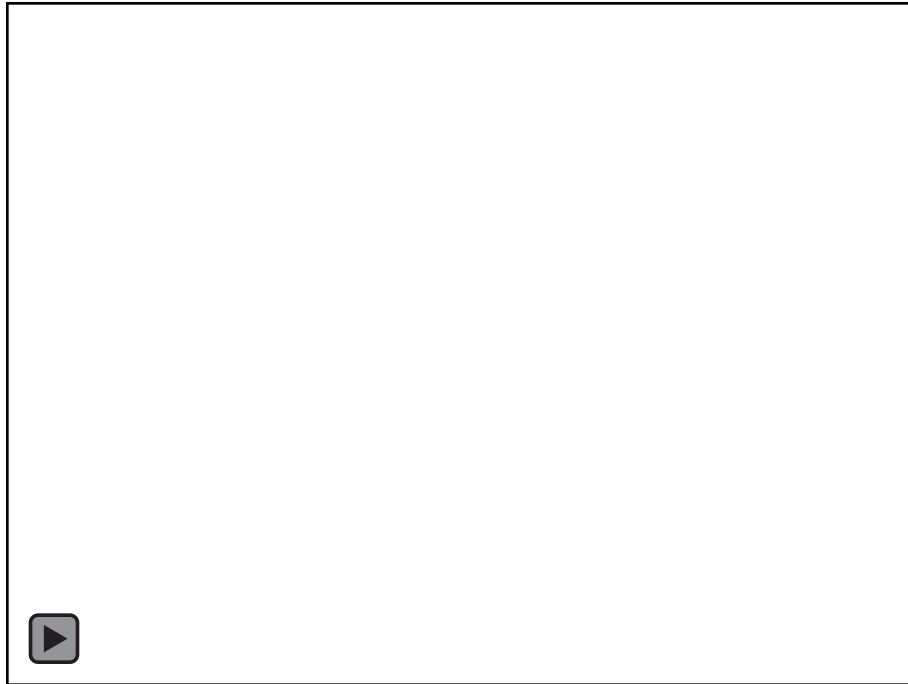


Practical note

- address the underlying **promise** that extrinsic value seems to make
- imagine scenario's in which the extrinsic value at hand is **no longer relevant**
- look for **alternative ways** to meet the promise of the extrinsic value

Chapter 14 – Motives behind Values (steering wheel – motivation)

Steve Jobs: death

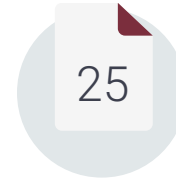


Death reflection

- powerful tool to uncover intrinsic values
- “live your life the way you want to be remembered”
- many people with a near death experience → wealth and possessions are empty and meaningless



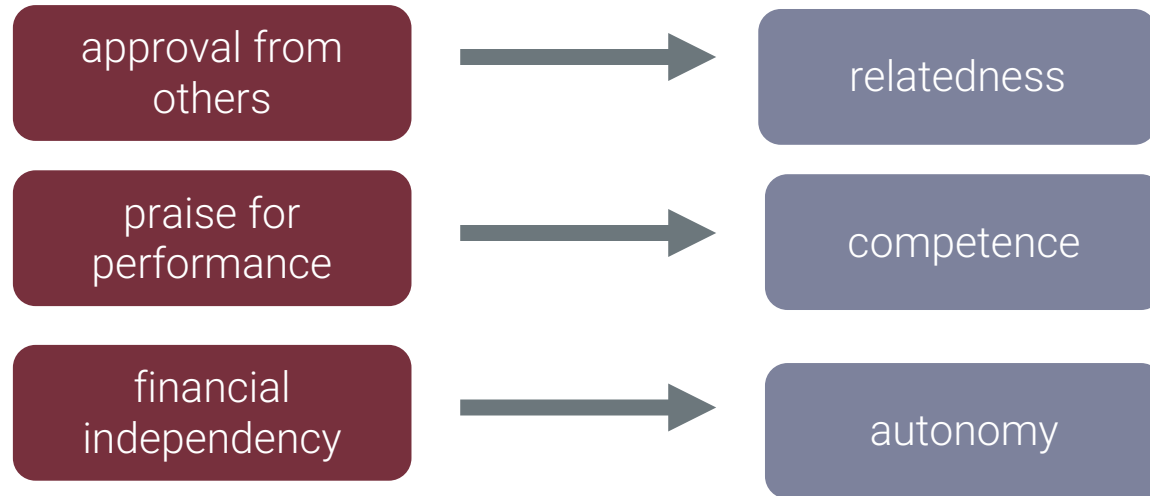
Death reflection



Imagine that your life is almost over. On your last birthday, there is a big party where your best friend will give a speech about you. What do you hope your friend would tell the audience about you?

Extrinsic value pursuit

substitutes for basic needs



Extrinsic value pursuit

probable causes:

- media
- modelling
- affective forecasting



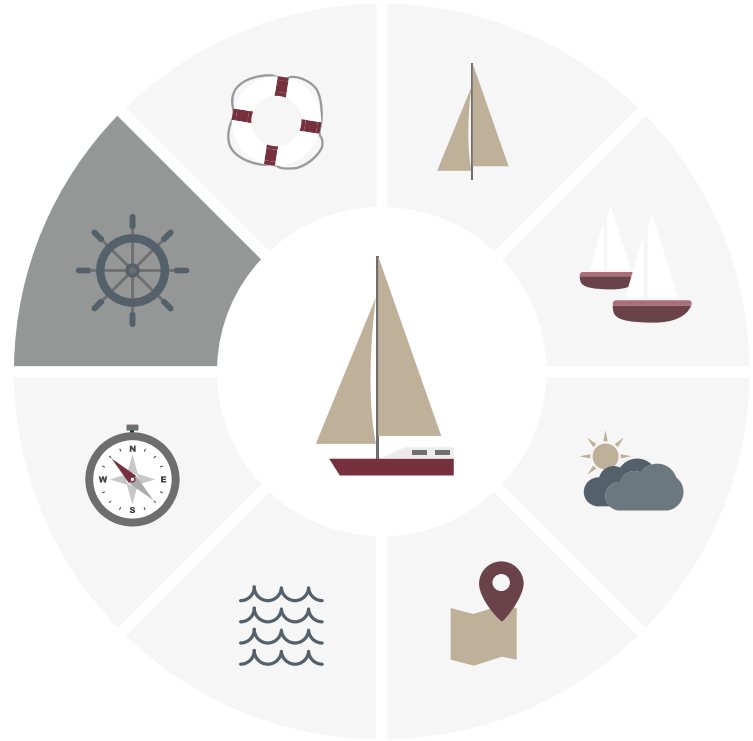
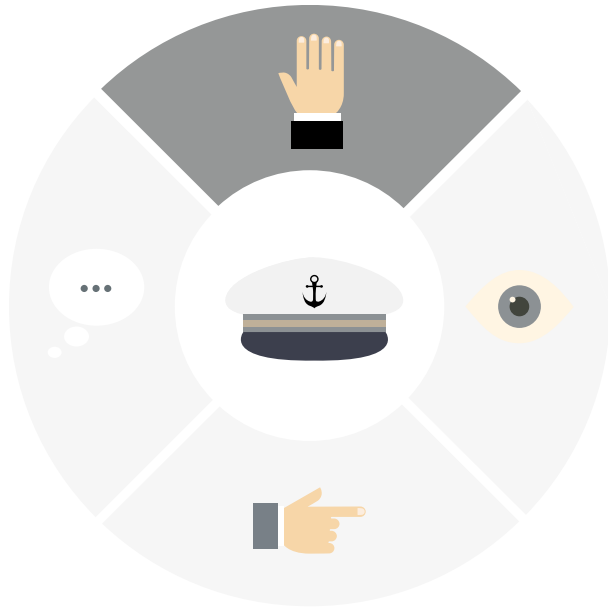
15

Value Expression

A MASTERCLASS ON MEANING AND VALUED LIVING



The captain: Action



Core question

”

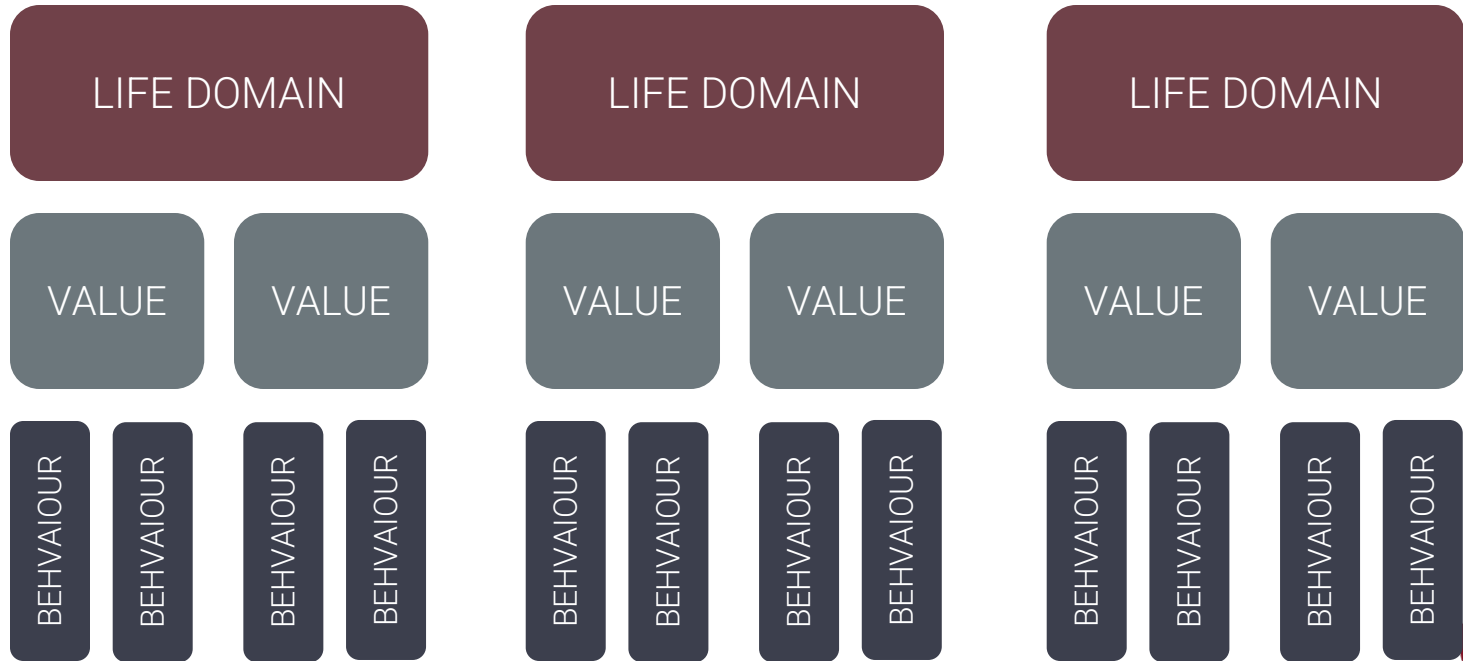
“To what extent are the individual’s values expressed at a behavioural level?”

Chapter 15 – Value Expression (steering wheel – action)

Sailboat metaphor



Life domains



Life domains

WORK (LIFE DOMAIN)

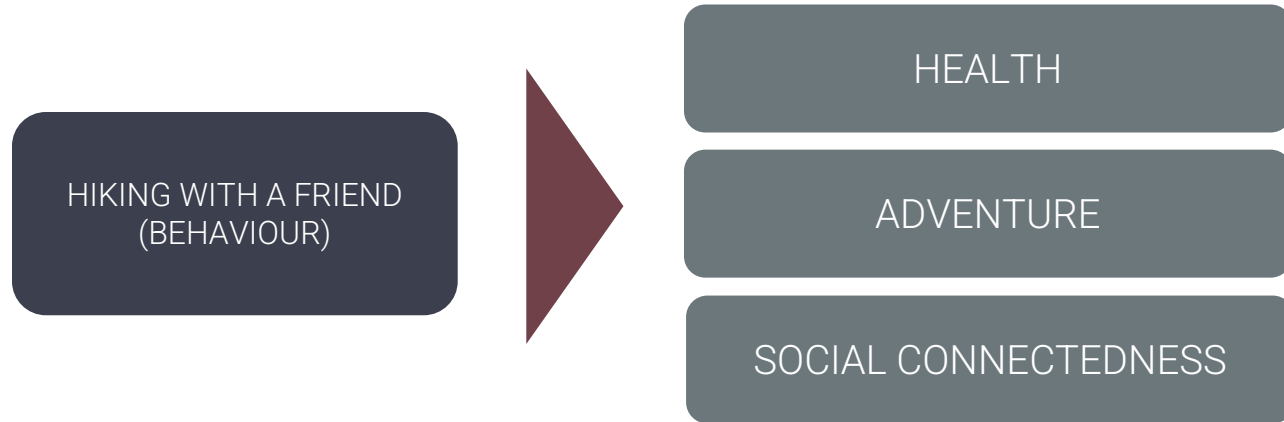
LEARNING/SELF-DEVELOPMENT (VALUE)

JOINING WORKGROUPS
(BEHAVIOUR)

TAKING ONLINE CLASSES
(BEHAVIOUR)

READING
(BEHAVIOUR)

Value-rich behaviours



Barriers of value-congruent action

- A. lack of self-reflection
- B. fear
- C. conflicting value expression

A) lack of self-reflection

observe oneself engaging in behaviour



notice experience



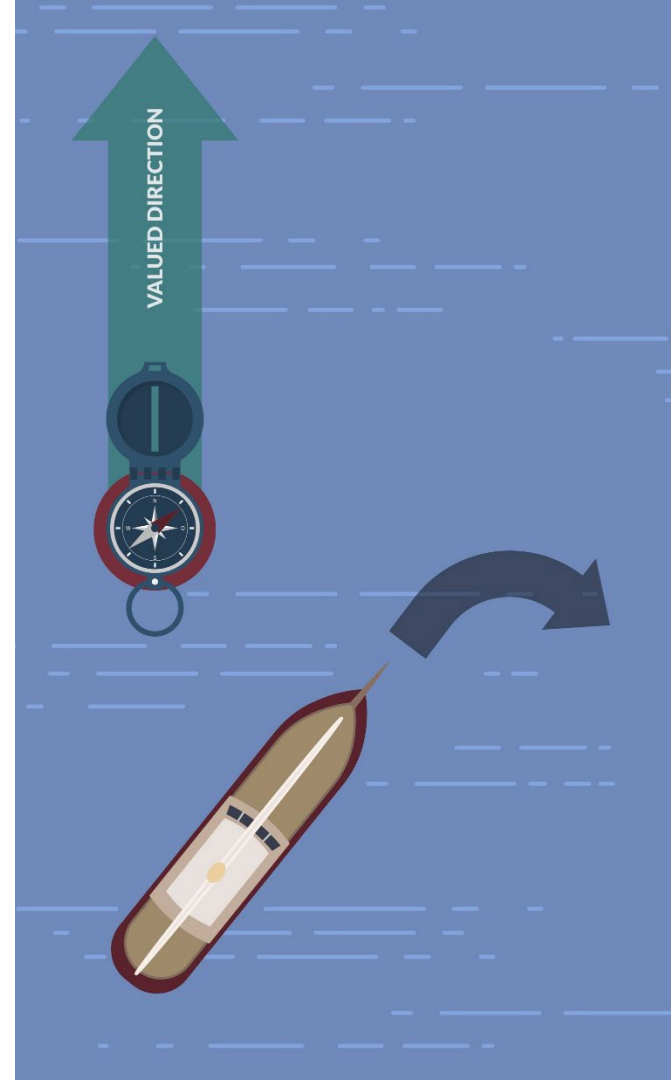
link experience/behaviour with value



Chapter 15 – Value Expression (steering wheel – action)

B) Fear

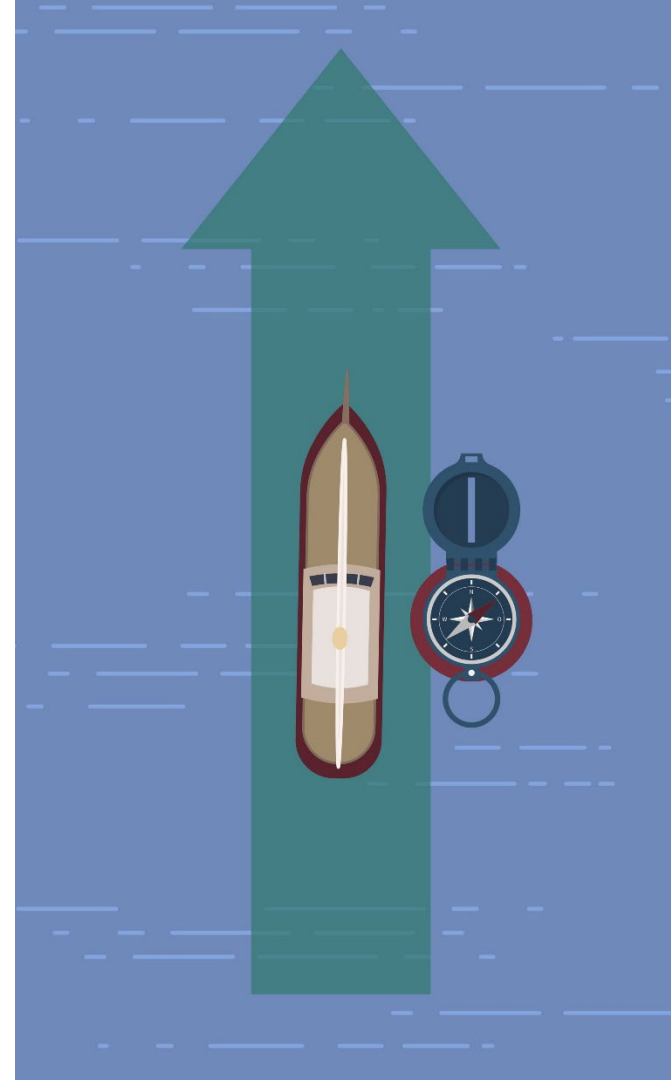
“ I would love to
BUT I am afraid that...”



Chapter 15 – Value Expression (steering wheel – action)

B) Fear

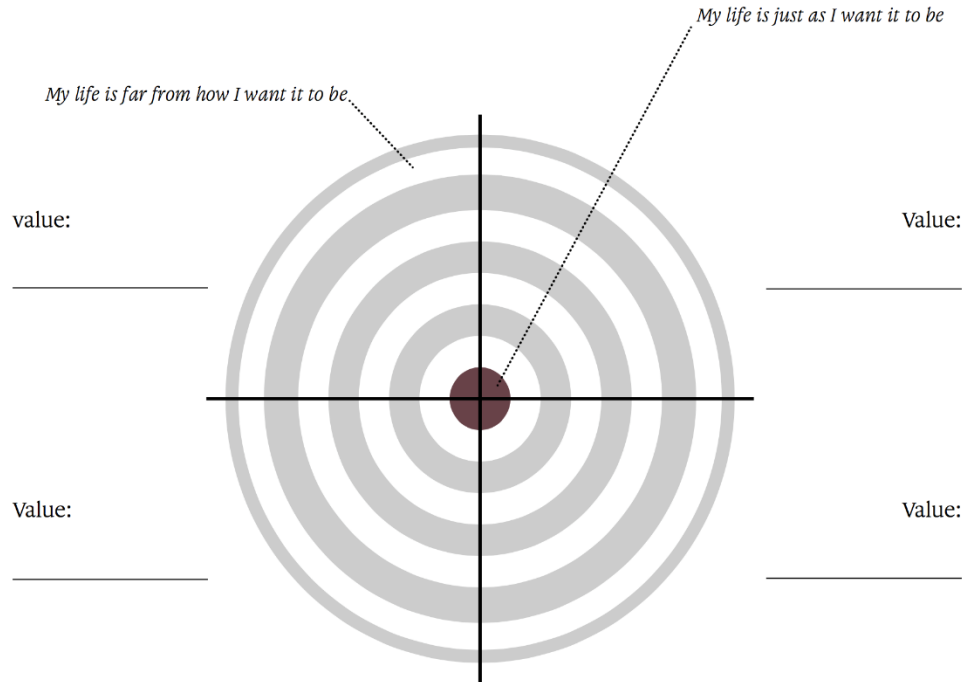
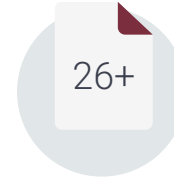
“ I would love to
AND I am afraid that...”



C) Conflicting value expression

- actions that express one value hinder expression of another value
- inner conflict
- pursuing one value automatically implies violation of another value

Value-congruent actions

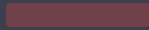


Practical notes



- it can be **painful** for clients to be confronted with their neglect of values
- meet clients where they are; **allow emotions** to be present
- show **compassion**; falling out of contact with values is very common

Thanks



for your attention

Thanks



for your attention