BALANCING LIFE DOMAINS

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LIFE DOMAINS

L ife domains represent the main areas of functioning in an individual's life. The most frequently addressed life domains in research are: health, family, income, social relationships, leisure time, work, sex life, housing, safety, self-worth, and education (e.g., [1,2,3,4,5,6]). Other well-researched life domains include physical self (e.g., [7]), marriage (e.g., [8,9]), friends and acquaintances (e.g., [10]), and spiritual life (e.g., [11,12]). This chapter aims to clarify the concept of life domains.

⛵ LIFE DOMAINS

In the sailboat metaphor, the water represents the immediate environment that an individual interacts with. Just like people interact with their environment, the boat "interacts" with the water. The boat moves through the water, analogous to how we "move" through life. Life domains are different areas of our daily environment. They may involve our social environment (e.g., our friends and family), our physical environment (e.g., housing), or our psychological "internal environment" (e.g., self-worth and mental health). In the sailboat metaphor, the different segments of water upon which the sailboat sits reflect the different life domains. These segments of water move along with the boat. Changing the course of the boat by steering to a different segment of water is comparable to switching between different life domains.

> ## 👫 ASK CLIENTS TO USE THEIR OWN LABELS FOR DIFFERENT LIFE DOMAINS
>
> It is important to note that different labels have been used to define the same life domains in the literature. According to Cummins [13], at least 173 different life domain labels have been used in the literature, and the possible number of domains is even larger. This means that it may be better to ask the client to label relevant life domains in his or her own words rather than select from a predetermined list because (a) the latter will not necessarily cover all the domains relevant to the client's life and (b) the client may interpret a given domain name differently than its intended meaning.

■ EFFECTS WITHIN AND BETWEEN LIFE DOMAINS

Life domains have been studied independently from each other as well as in association with each other. In most cases, the first line of research focuses on one life domain and the effect of circumstantial change within this life domain. For instance, research on the effect of divorce investigates short- and long-term effects of changes in the life domain "marriage" and addresses positive as well as negative consequences (see [14], for an overview). The second line of research addressing the interdependence of the various life domains has shown that events in different domains are related. A change in one life domain may influence or coincide with a change in another life domain. For instance, research suggests that "work" and "family" life domains are intertwined. Studies have shown that divorce heightens the risk of unemployment [15,16] and vice versa [17]. Other studies have shown that family life can have a beneficial effect on work-life (a phenomenon sometimes referred to as work–family enrichment or enhancement). This research suggests that work and family can each provide people with resources, such as enhanced esteem and income, that can help them function in other life domains, such as hobbies and friends [18,19]. For instance, a person may feel that his family life has taught him new ways of interacting with co-workers or has improved his ability to multitask at work [20,21,22]. Likewise, a person may believe that conflict resolution skills learned at work will help him resolve conflicts with friends more effectively.

When considering the interaction between life domains, it is important to recognize that the idea of separate life domains reflects an artificial structure of

one's different life activities. Many of our activities serve multiple life domains simultaneously. For example, going to the gym with a friend can be classified as belonging to the domains of "leisure time," "health," and "friends." Like most theoretical concepts in psychology, the concept of life domains cannot fully capture the complexity of reality.

👥 UNDERSTANDING THE PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF ADDRESSING LIFE DOMAINS

Gaining a clear view of the client's most valued life domains has several practical benefits:

- The "mental health" life domain is obviously an important domain in the context of coaching and clinical practice. Each year, millions of people seek treatment for problems like mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and numerous other clinical and non-clinical problems. However, while mental health may seem to be the predominant life domain for many clients, it is important to recognize that their lives expand beyond merely mental health. A more complete image of the client's life can be gained by addressing also other life domains.

- Having an overview of a client's most relevant life domains provides the practitioner with a wide range of options for finding valuable resources and solutions during the client's process of change. For instance, the life domain "friends" may entail a great source of support and inspiration for clients during difficult times. Likewise, spending more time on leisure activities can be a powerful way to restore life balance for clients who over-invested in the life domain "work."

- It is common for clients to become overly focused on the life domain with which they are least satisfied. While it is true that this life domain needs attention, devoting all of one's energy to it at the expense of other important life domains may be counterproductive. For instance, clients may become so focused on trying to gain control over a certain problem that they devote no time to other meaningful life domains, such as friends and family. Moreover, focusing only on one life domain can cause clients to form their self-identify predominantly around this domain (e.g., "I am a patient," or "I am a lawyer"). Increasing the client's awareness and relevance of other life domains can help restore the balance between life domains and widen the scope of the client's self-definition.

■ PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF LIFE DOMAINS

Life domains are not necessarily perceived as equally important. Researchers (e.g., [23,24]) have long argued that the relative importance of a given life domain may influence the overall picture of life satisfaction. This principle has been labeled domain importance [23] or domain salience [25].

In a classic study by Campbell et al. [23], 91% of US Americans rated "health" as very important or important, followed by intimacy (89%), material well-being (73%), and productivity (70%). This finding has been replicated many times since. In another study conducted across 28 European countries [26], participants were asked to rank a list of life domains in terms of the extent to which they contributed to participants' quality of life. The study revealed that most participants across different countries selected "being in good health" as one of the three most important contributors, followed by "sufficient income to meet my needs" and "having family members who are there when I need them."

Interestingly, research shows that assessing the relative importance of each life domain does not provide better insight in a person's overall life satisfaction. In these studies, participants were asked to rate each life domain in terms of how important it was to them and how satisfied they were with it. The results revealed that including participant's satisfaction scores for each life domain did not predict their satisfaction with life better than when this information was omitted (e.g., [27,28,29,30]). There are several reasons for this finding. First, it may be difficult for people to accurately assess the importance of each life domain, as each life domain helps to serve different needs, all of which may be considered important. For instance, it may be difficult to compare the life domain "work" with the life domain "family" in terms of importance. "Family" may satisfy one's need for connectedness while "work" may provide a sense of autonomy. Both social connectedness and autonomy are important, as, without one or the other, life satisfaction is likely to be reduced. Second, life domains are strongly interconnected in terms of the value they provide. For example, the money that is earned in the life domain "work" makes it possible to engage in fun activities in the life domain "family." Spending time in the life domain "friends" may serve to buffer against stress in the life domain "work." Thus, because one life domain may be contributing to the perceived value of multiple other domains, accurately assessing the value of a single domain seems rather difficult, if not impossible.

👥 KNOW WHEN TO USE AND NOT TO USE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF LIFE DOMAINS

When trying measure clients' life satisfaction by asking them to rate their perceived satisfaction with life domains, it is not very useful to also measure the perceived importance of each life domain. Research findings suggest that this information does not provide any value in addition to their satisfaction scores alone. However, it may still be valuable to ask clients to select only those life domains that are considered relevant and important before evaluating the satisfaction with these domains. Some life domains may not be relevant (e.g., marriage) or important (e.g., community) to the individual, which would make evaluation pointless.

⛵ PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF LIFE DOMAINS

In the sailboat metaphor, different life domains can be compared to different segments of the water. Just like a person can devote time to the life domain "work," a captain may sail for a while in a direction that covers a specific part of the water (as depicted by the circles in the illustration above). Life domains that are perceived as more important are similar to those parts of the water that the captain perceives as more important than other parts.
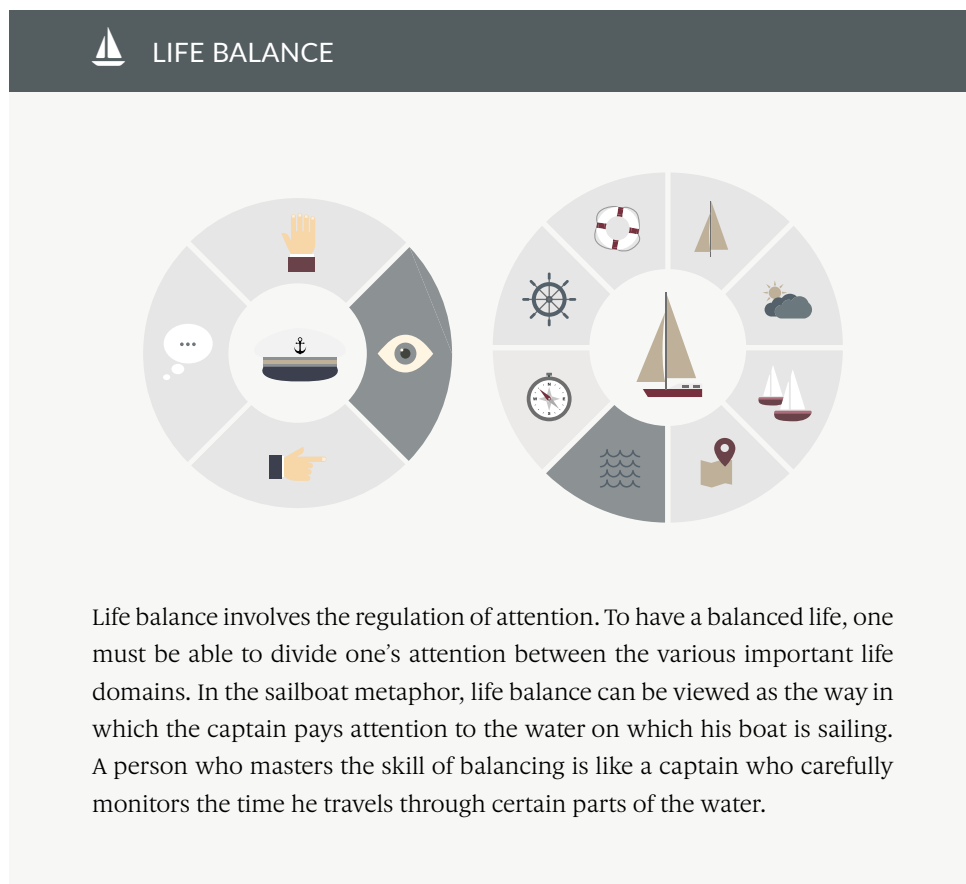
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2

LIFE BALANCE

Martin Seligman [1] argued that happiness has three dimensions that can be cultivated: the regular experience of pleasure (the pleasant life), the frequent engagement in satisfying activities (the engaged life), and the experience of a sense of connectedness with a greater whole (the meaningful life). Building on Seligman's three dimensions of happiness, Sirgy and Wu [2] added the fourth dimension: the balanced life. According to these authors, balance in life contributes to happiness. This chapter aims to clarify the concept of life balance.

⛵ LIFE BALANCE

Life balance involves the regulation of attention. To have a balanced life, one must be able to divide one's attention between the various important life domains. In the sailboat metaphor, life balance can be viewed as the way in which the captain pays attention to the water on which his boat is sailing. A person who masters the skill of balancing is like a captain who carefully monitors the time he travels through certain parts of the water.

■ LIFE BALANCE AND WELL-BEING

According to Sirgy and Wu [2], balance in life contributes to happiness because of the satisfaction limit that people can derive from a single life domain. A single life domain cannot fulfill one's needs; people need to be involved in multiple domains

to meet the full range of their needs. An individual who spends too much time in the life domain "work" for instance may fail to meet his needs in the "health" domain (e.g., somatic complaints or sleeping issues), "family" domain (e.g., conflicts with his partner), and "leisure" domain (e.g., no time to spend on pleasurable hobbies).

The ability to balance life domains has been found to be positively related to life satisfaction [3,4], marital satisfaction [5], and mental health [6]. In contrast, research has shown that failing to achieve a balance across life domains is associated with various serious negative consequences, including higher stress, health problems, family conflict, and overall reductions in well-being and the quality of life [7].

⛵ A BALANCED VERSUS UNBALANCED AMOUNT OF ATTENTION FOR LIFE DOMAINS

A person who can maintain life balance is like a captain who carefully divides his attention between different parts of the water. As shown in the left side of the illustration, this captain pays attention to and sails through different parts of the water. In contrast, a person without a balanced life can be compared to the captain displayed in the right part of the illustration. This captain constantly sails in only one specific part of the water and neglects surrounding regions during his journey.

Life balance is thought to be important for well-being for several reasons. First, as discussed above, the amount of satisfaction that can be derived from a single life domain is limited. One needs to be involved in multiple domains in life to satisfy the broad spectrum of human needs, such as autonomy, safety, relatedness, and competence. Second, the perceived importance of life domains seems to change over the course of one's life [8,9]. These changes are often related to important life

events, such as the birth of a first child and retirement. Such life events are often considered "turning points" after which the individual shifts his priority of what matters in life. For instance, parents have been found to shift their priorities after the birth of a first child away from friends and towards the family. Later in life, when their children leave home, they start perceiving the family as less important again [10]. This research indicated the importance of investing in multiple life domains, given single life domains can become increasingly less satisfying over time. A person who has focused exclusively on family life and invested little to no time in friendships may come into trouble when, later in life, the children leave home and friends become more important.

The third reason for investing in multiple life domains comes from the literature on hedonic adaptation (also referred to as the hedonic treadmill). According to the hedonic adaptation hypothesis, the effect of a favorable or unfavorable change has only a limited effect on well-being [11]. For example, a promotion at work may initially result in increased feelings of happiness. However, over time, one becomes used to the situation and derives gradually less happiness from this favorable change. Thus, in this view, variations in happiness and unhappiness are no more than short-lived reactions to changes in people's circumstances. In support of this notion, research has shown that humans return quickly to a relatively stable level of happiness despite major positive or negative events or life changes [12,13]. While people may initially experience strong reactions to events that change their material level of well-being, they eventually return to a baseline level of life satisfaction determined by their natural temperament [14]. This implies that the effect of favorable changes in a given life domain is limited. This may be especially true for life domains such as "work" or "income," which involve relatively static changes, such as material goods or achievements. The initial positive effect of an increase in income on well-being often declines early because the individual habituates to the new level of consumption choices that are now possible [15]. A person who devotes most of his time to work may experience a boost in happiness after receiving a financial bonus or following a successful performance, but the scope of positive experiences and their lasting effect on well-being is limited. According to Sheldon, Boehm, and Lyubomirsky [16], variety can counteract hedonic adaptation. By definition, adaptation happens only in response to constant or repeated stimuli rather than dynamically varying ones ([11]; see also [17,18]). Research on variety in both thoughts and behaviors has shown that variety is innately stimulating and rewarding [19,20,21]. By varying the content, similarity, timing, and diversity of events, the positive emotions that result from them are more diverse and are expected to increase the durability of happiness. Thus, investment in multiple life domains, as opposed to just one, is a way to counteract hedonic adaptation by increasing the variety of both experiences and emotions.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS

Past research findings support the idea that people are more satisfied with life when the source of satisfaction is derived from *multiple* life domains. A common example is an imbalance between "work" and "personal life" life domains (which often occurs because of paying too much attention to the "work." Research has shown that work-family role conflict is associated with life dissatisfaction (e.g., [22,23]), low marital and family satisfaction, and symptoms of low mental and physical well-being (e.g., [24,25]). Additional support for investing in multiple life domains comes from Marks and MacDermid's [26] study, which examined the engagement of employed mothers in different roles (e.g., employee, mother, spouse, etc.). The study found that mothers who were more "role balanced" and enjoyed "every part of their life equally" reported less role overload, higher self-esteem, and lower depression levels compared to mothers who were less balanced. In sum, these findings suggest that people's ability to divide attention carefully between different life domains is an important skill for preventing the negative consequences associated with over-investment of time and energy in a single life domain.
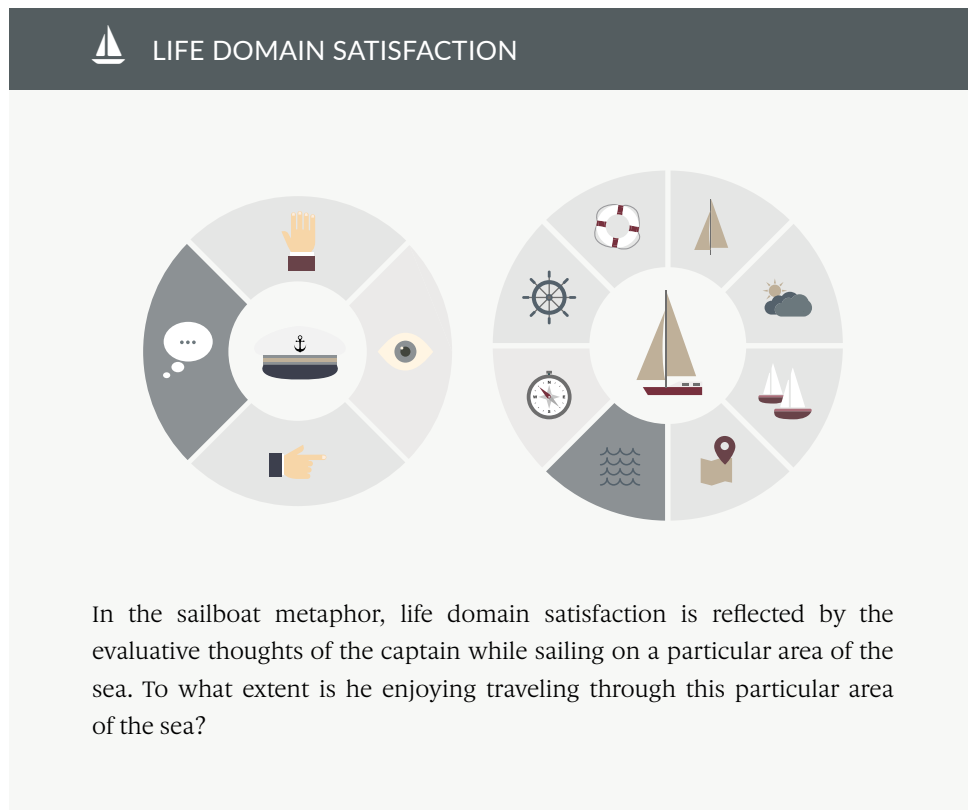
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3

LIFE DOMAIN SATISFACTION

Whereas life satisfaction refers to how favorably one evaluates his or her life as a whole, life domain satisfaction refers to the appreciation of fulfillment within one specific life domain, such as "family" or "health." According to multiple discrepancies theory [1], life domain satisfaction reflects the extent to which objective conditions in a particular area of life match people's respective needs or aspirations. Consider a person who believes that companionship, affection, and emotional support are his most important needs in the life domain "marriage". This person's satisfaction with the life domain "marriage" will be determined by the extent to which these needs are currently being fulfilled in his marital relationship. The aim of this chapter is to explore the relationship between life domain satisfaction and well-being.

⚓ LIFE DOMAIN SATISFACTION

In the sailboat metaphor, life domain satisfaction is reflected by the evaluative thoughts of the captain while sailing on a particular area of the sea. To what extent is he enjoying traveling through this particular area of the sea?

■ THE MOST IMPORTANT LIFE DOMAINS

Health, family, and finances are generally considered to be the most important life domains for overall life satisfaction (see also [2,3,4,5]). Hence, when people are asked to rate their personal well-being, it is likely that they are reflecting on these

three areas of life. However, while health, family, and finances are commonly considered to be important in the context of life satisfaction, evidence also suggests that people from different cultures [6,7,8] and in different stages of life [9,10] weigh life domains differently in the context of rating their global life satisfaction. Thus, people's cultural background and current phase of life may cause them to rate some life domains as more important for life-satisfaction compared to others.

◼ LIFE DOMAIN SATISFACTION AND WELL-BEING

According to the so-called life domain approach to well-being [11,12], changes in life circumstances do not influence well-being directly but influence specific areas of life which are generally important for well-being. A fight with a colleague, for instance, may not directly affect one's subjective well-being but may still affect one's satisfaction with the life domain "work." Thus, measuring only global life satisfaction has limited practical utility [13]. For this reason, global life satisfaction is commonly measured by summing the satisfaction of various life domains (e.g., [14,15]). However, while it is theoretically possible "to have a happy marriage but still be dissatisfied with life-as-a-whole, or to be satisfied with life-as-a-whole in spite of an unhappy marriage" [16 p. 237], most research findings suggest that the sum of an individual's satisfaction scores over various life domains approximates his or her global life happiness (see, for instance, [17,18]).

👥 ASSESS LIFE DOMAIN SATISFACTION AT MULTIPLE TIMES

From a practical point of view, a client's perception of well-being across the most important life domains provides insight into the areas of his or her life that have the greatest potential for change and growth. Further, assessing the degree to which a client is satisfied with the different domains in his or her life is an effective strategy both at the beginning of and repeatedly throughout the coaching or clinical trajectory.

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4

NEED SATISFACTION

Several theories, such as multiple discrepancy theory [1], the hierarchy of needs theory [2], and the self-concordance model [3], have proposed that a person's satisfaction with life can be regarded as *need satisfaction*. These theories state that people are motivated to fulfill various developmental needs (biological, safety, social, esteem, self-actualization, knowledge, and beauty-related needs), and the more successful they are in fulfilling these needs, the more satisfied they are with their lives.
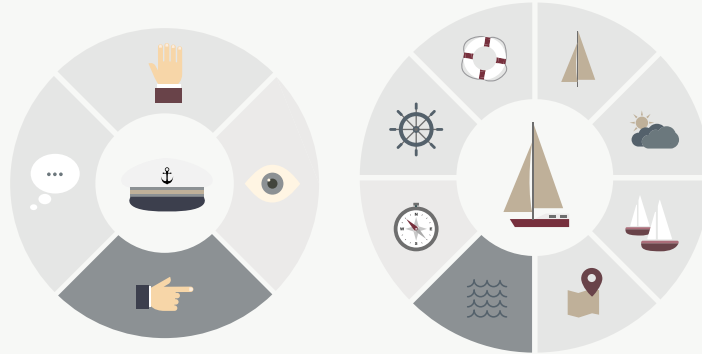
Life domains can also be perceived from a need perspective. In fact, most life domains are organized and structured around needs (see Table 4.1). For instance, leisure life typically involves activities related to the need for social connectedness, aesthetics, and creativity. The life domain "health" may involve activities related to biological and safety needs. Thus, a domain contributes to the individual's global well-being through need satisfaction. In this chapter, we address need satisfaction in the context of life domains.

Table 4.1. Common needs that are fulfilled by activities in different life domains

Life domain	Common needs fulfilled by this life domain
Family	affection, appreciation, belonging, closeness, support
Partner	sexual needs, intimacy, warmth, safety
Social relationships	companionship, relatedness, trust, empathy, support
Leisure-time	play, joy, self-expression
Work	competence, autonomy, growth, discovery, understanding

NEED SATISFACTION

In general, people are motivated to satisfy their personal needs. Through their activities in different life domains, they are able to meet their different needs. In other words, need satisfaction in the context of life domains is a motivational process. In the sailboat metaphor, this motivational process is represented by the link between the captain's motivation and the water. In the same way people are motivated to meet their needs through their actions in different life domains, the captain is motivated to meet his needs by sailing through different areas of the water.

NEED SATISFACTION LIMITS

Many studies have examined need satisfaction within specific life domains, such as school [4], sports [5,6], work [7,8], leisure [9], and significant others [10,11]. Although need satisfaction within a given life domain has been linked to well-being, some scholars have emphasized the importance of examining need satisfaction across all life domains. For instance, according to Sirgy and Wu [12], positive affect that results from satisfaction in one life domain can contribute to subjective well-being only to a limited extent. Subjective well-being is not simply the result of positive minus negative affect. If this were true it would be possible to invest all of one's time and energy into one single life domain while ignoring all the other domains and still experience a high level of well-being. In practice, life domains address diverse needs. The need for knowledge may be addressed by the life domain "work" but not, or to a very limited degree, by the life domain "family."

Thus, when focusing only on one life domain, it is very likely that only a handful of selected needs are being satisfied. For ongoing well-being, the full range of human developmental needs must be met. In sum, because a single domain can provide only limited satisfaction, people have to invest their resources in multiple life domains to satisfy the full spectrum of survival and growth needs. This principle has been referred to as *need satisfaction limits.*

Support for the notion of need satisfaction limits comes from research showing that materialism is negatively related to life satisfaction (see [13], for a meta-analysis of the research findings). Materialism can be regarded as an imbalance between life domains with an excessive focus on the life domain "money." The number of needs that are satisfied by success in this life domain is limited. An excessive amount of time and energy devoted to this life domain means, per definition, that other life domains, such as friends, family, and spiritual life, receive less attention. Consequently, the needs that would normally be fulfilled by these other domains are thwarted, negatively influencing overall well-being.

Moreover, a series of studies by Sheldon and Niemiec [14] examined the effect of balanced versus unbalanced basic need satisfaction on well-being. Balanced need satisfaction means that the activities of an individual allow for different needs to be fulfilled to a similar extent. Unbalanced need satisfaction means that certain individual's actions satisfy certain needs to a greater extent compared to other needs. For instance, a workaholic may satisfy his need for competence and autonomy (even more so than other people) but thwart his need for relatedness because his excessive focus on work prevents him from spending time with others. Across several studies, it was found that people who experienced balanced need satisfaction report higher well-being compared to those who scored the same on need satisfaction that was unbalanced. In sum, research findings suggest that when assessing need satisfaction, it is important to consider the bigger picture, incorporating different life domains rather than focusing only on need satisfaction within a given life domain.
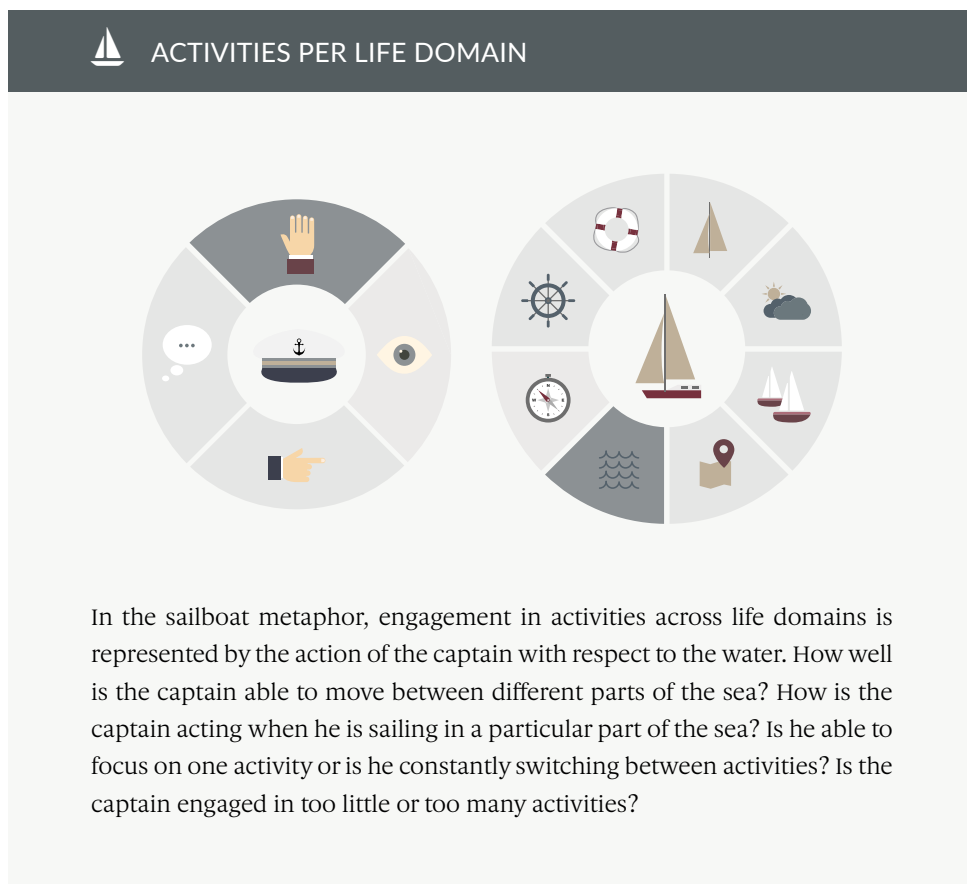
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5

ACTIVITIES PER LIFE DOMAIN

People engage in diverse activities within specific life domains to fulfill their needs. For instance, in the life domain "health," people may engage in regular exercise, healthy eating, and take breaks to regain energy. In the life domain "spirituality," people may visit the church, read books, and meditate. In this chapter, we address the interconnectedness of activities within a single life domain and the type of behavior that is most likely to maximize satisfaction across multiple life domains.

⛵ ACTIVITIES PER LIFE DOMAIN

In the sailboat metaphor, engagement in activities across life domains is represented by the action of the captain with respect to the water. How well is the captain able to move between different parts of the sea? How is the captain acting when he is sailing in a particular part of the sea? Is he able to focus on one activity or is he constantly switching between activities? Is the captain engaged in too little or too many activities?

■ THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF ACTIVITIES

The activities in which people engage within a life domain should not be considered in isolation when determining their effect on well-being. The effect of an activity on need satisfaction may reach far beyond a single life domain. Activities in one life domain may have a beneficial effect on another life domain. For instance, activities in the life domain "work" generate the financial resources that make activities (e.g.,

visiting a spa) in the life domain "leisure" possible. Likewise, activities in the life domain "leisure" (e.g., creating a painting) may help reduce work-related stress, which may, in turn, improve efficacy at work and subsequently, financial rewards. However, activities in one domain may also negatively affect other domains. For example, a person who spends too much time on a project at "work" may experience difficulty detaching from this domain, and during dinner with his spouse, for example, he may be distracted and preoccupied with work rather than be present in the moment.

ASK CLIENTS TO CONSIDER THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACTIVITIES IN DIFFERENT LIFE DOMAINS

Asking clients to reflect on the amount of time they devote to different life domains can sometimes result in feelings of frustration and regret. A client may feel that the time he devotes to work "eats up" the available time for his children. Although it is important to find a healthy balance between work and private life, it is equally important for clients to understand the positive interaction between the different life domains. While it is true that one cannot simultaneously be with one's children and work, the money that is generated through work contributes to the "family" domain, including the availability of food, clothes, education, and money for leisure activities. Therefore, asking clients to reflect on the effect of activities in different life domains can help them manage feelings of frustration or regret that emerge from a black and white thinking style regarding life domain activities.

THE QUALITY OF BEHAVIOR IN DIFFERENT LIFE DOMAINS

What kind of behavior is required to increase life balance and satisfaction in different areas of life? In this section, we introduce three different behavioral skills that promote well-being across life domains.
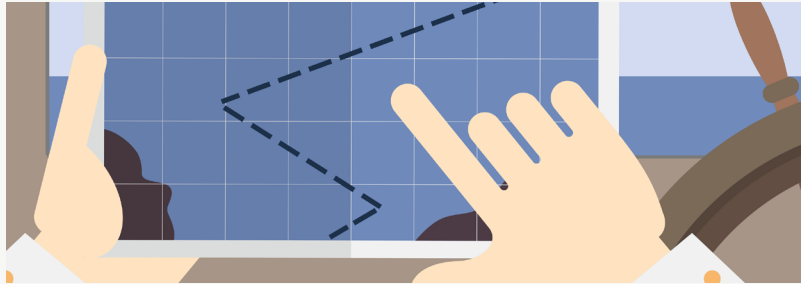
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▶ BALANCING BETWEEN LIFE DOMAINS

Previously, life balance was introduced as an important predictor of well-being. However, some authors have argued that the concept of life balance is misleading and illusory. Keller, for instance, stated, "The idea of balance is exactly that—an idea. In philosophy, 'the golden mean' is the moderate middle between polar extremes, a concept used to describe a place between two positions that is more desirable than one state or the other. This is a grand idea, but not a very practical one. Idealistic, but not realistic. Balance doesn't exist." [1 p. 73]. When one is engaging in one life domain, one is not investing in another life domain and thus inevitably creating an imbalance. Moreover, the purpose and meaning typically follow from prolonged engagement in valued activities. If the individual is unable or unwilling to invest enough time in a given life domain, the amount of fulfillment that results from engaging in this life domain remains limited. Consider, for instance, an individual's investment in his "hobbies" life domain; if making music is the primary activity within this life domain, making music for only one hour per week is unlikely to generate the same degree of fulfillment as making music for 10 hours per week. In other words, temporary disbalance is required to extract meaning from a given life domain. In Keller's view, rather than striving for life balance, one should master the skill of "balancing." The act of balancing means that the individual carefully monitors the time and energy he invests in and distributes between different life domains. Notably, balancing does not necessarily mean that one must switch between life domains. Balance can be achieved by engaging in activities that serve multiple life domains simultaneously. For example, by going to the theater with a friend, one engages in "leisure" and "friends" domains at the same time. Likewise, by inviting a colleague to meet while taking a walk, one is simultaneously serving the life domains "work" and "health." In sum, balancing requires a meta-perspective on time investment and involves knowing when one is becoming overly involved in one particular life domain.

⛵ BALANCING BETWEEN LIFE DOMAINS

In terms of the sailboat metaphor, balancing relates to monitoring the duration of the journey and using the steering wheel to ensure the boat moves dynamically between different parts of the water. An individual who is able to balance his/her attention to the different domains in his or her life is similar to a captain who makes sure that the boat is not covering only one area of the sea. Rather than a one-sided journey during which the captain is unable to enjoy the beauty of the ocean, the captain deliberately changes the course of the boat at times to cover different areas of the water.
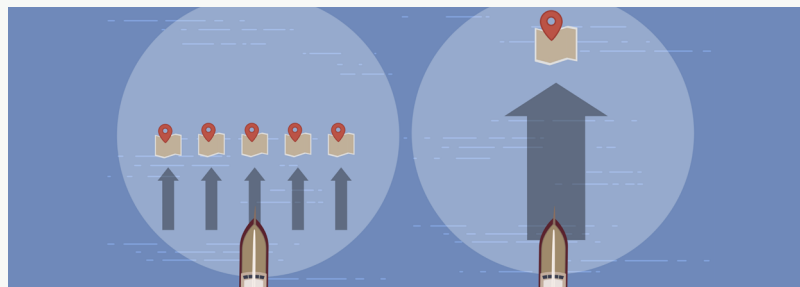
▶ PRIORITIZING

Whereas balancing is an essential skills for managing optimal engagement *between* life domains, prioritizing is a skill for realizing optimal engagement *within* a given life domain. In each life domain, people strive for different goals. For instance, in the life domain "work," a person may aim to finish a report, respond to all emails, lead an upcoming meeting, and finish a presentation. This person may also strive to master several different hobbies (life domain: leisure), stay in touch with friends (life domain: friends), and improve his general knowledge (life domain: education). While some life domains tend to have fewer goals, other life domains may have many goals. Research on goal setting has demonstrated that when people set so many goals that they exceed their ability to process and attain them, these goals will likely lead to stress and anxiety as well as to low or no goal commitment (for an overview of research findings, see [2]). Increasing the number of goals automatically increases the complexity of life and the cognitive resources needed to keep track of the progress of each goal. Additionally, the more goals one has, the more one needs to compromise in terms of time and energy. Working

on one goal means that no progress is made toward another goal. Consequently, pursuing numerous goals at once can make one feel as though he is falling short, because progress is slower than expected and/or desired, and feel stressed because the complexity of several life domains increases. The skill of prioritization serves to prevent the negative effect of multiple goal pursuit on well-being. Prioritization requires the individual to identify the most important goal within a given life domain. Rather than having three different hobbies, he may decide to focus on the one that is most satisfying. Instead of being involved in six different projects at work, he may choose to focus on the two that are most important. Prioritizing involves making choices that align with personal values. This requires the ability to filter activities that are personally important and decline those that are incongruent with personal values.

⛵ PRIORITIZATION OF LIFE DOMAINS

In the sailboat metaphor, prioritization of life domains reflects the captain's capacity to limit the number of destinations while sailing on the sea. In the above image, the captain on the left is aiming to reach multiple destinations, and this requires dividing his time and energy between the goals. As the number of destinations increases, more time will be needed to reach each one. A captain with too many destinations in sight may experience a constant state of falling short; as he travels toward destination A, he is automatically not making any progress toward destination B. Moreover, pursuing more destinations increases the complexity of the journey. The more destinations in sight, the more the captain needs to track his progress regarding each destination and the more he needs to constantly adjust the course of the boat.

Comparatively, the journey of a captain who aims for fewer destinations (see right side of the image above) becomes less complex and more straightforward. Because this captain can devote all his time and energy to moving closer to one or a few destinations, he is able to make a lot of progress. His ability to be highly selective when choosing his destinations allows him to travel far without the burden of frustration due to a constant perceived lack of progress.

▶ ACTING WITH AWARENESS

Acting with awareness is another skill for achieving optimal engagement *within* a given life domain. Past studies have shown that acting with awareness—being attentive and fully engaged in one's current activity—has a substantial positive effect on well-being. For instance, a cross-sectional study by Bränström, Duncan, and Moskowitz [3] showed that acting with awareness is significantly related to positive states of mind and perceived health. Comparatively, mind wandering, which is switching attention from a single task to unrelated thoughts [4], has been shown to negatively affect task performance. For instance, mind wandering has been related to diminished capacity for sustained attention [5,6], reduced awareness of task stimuli and the external environment [7], lower fluid intelligence, and lower SAT performance [8]. Similar findings have been found for multitasking. For instance, increased media multitasking has been found to be associated with higher levels of depression and social anxiety symptoms [9], lower academic performance in college students [10], and decreased ability to effectively filter irrelevant information [11]. In terms of processes, multitasking often involves cognitive shifts. If one is writing a report and answering emails at the same time, every incoming email becomes a stimulus that interrupts the writing task, which requires attentional reorientation. These interruptions increase stress and effort [12].

Research findings also suggest that it is important to stay focused on activities in one life domain rather than constantly switch between life domains. A powerful illustration of this comes from the literature on psychological detachment. Psychological detachment has been described as an "individual's sense of being away from the work situation" [13 p. 579]. Psychological detachment involves the capacity to let go of work when one is not spending time in the life domain "work." For instance, when spending time with friends, one does not check job-related

emails. Or, when playing with the kids, one does not think about job-related issues. Research has found that psychological detachment from work is positively correlated with sleep quality, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction [14,15,16].

⛵ ACTING WITH AWARENESS

Being unable to focus on just one activity in a given life domain is like a captain who constantly switches between different elements of his boat while sailing in a sea area. For example, rather than focusing only on reading the compass, he may attempt to also hold the steering wheel, consider future destinations, and try to prevent damage to the boat. Because the captain is constantly switching between the elements of the boat, he finds himself feeling overwhelmed and agitated, as his attention is needed in many places at the same time. In contrast, being attentive and fully engaged in one activity is like a captain who intentionally chooses to interact with only one element of his sailboat at a time. Rather than rapidly switching between elements, running from one side of the boat to the other, he carefully directs attention to the element that needs it most right now.

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