

AN INTRODUCTION TO

# POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY



HANDBOOK

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## ■ FOREWORD

Over the years, when I was teaching positive psychology, my students would often remark “I really love the ideas and concepts and I really see the potential, but it is all a bit overwhelming.” I can understand their point. Positive psychology is a broad field that involves a wide range of topics, including mindfulness, strengths, self-compassion, resilience, just to mention a few.

Thus, at a certain point, I was asking myself: What if we could provide students, helping professionals, clients, and other people who aim to incorporate positive psychology into their daily life with a profound, yet easy to understand framework for explaining and practicing positive psychology?

What if we could help both experts and non-experts grasp the principles of positive psychology and offer a way to look at themselves and others in a holistic way that would incorporate emotions, values, challenges, strengths, and more?

What I learned through practicing psychology is that the key to well-being is the way people look at themselves. At the core of well-being lies the relationship that people have with themselves. I believe it is all about relating to the self. Sadly, many people still look at themselves from a very limited perspective. The lens through which they view themselves is often weak and limited. A lens that highlights conditions for being good enough and flaws to be corrected. Perhaps the most difficult part of being a helping professional is being confronted with so many beautiful human beings who fail to see their own beauty and potential.

One of the most important reasons for developing the sailboat metaphor was to offer people a different, more holistic “lens” to look at themselves. The sailboat metaphor addresses the full spectrum of human functioning. It highlights both the factors that reduce our well-being as well as those that allow us to flourish and grow. Looking at ourselves through the lens of the sailboat metaphor instantly broadens our view. It shifts our attention from what is wrong with us, to the resources in ourselves and in our environment.

More than anything, I hope that this metaphor will help you and the people around you realize that we are all captains of our boat and that we are equipped with necessary resources to make our journey worth traveling.

*Hugo Alberts*

**1**

# **INTRODUCTION**

Over the years, an increasing number of studies have addressed a wide range of topics that are at the heart of positive psychology, including well-being, resilience, goal setting, motivation, strengths, and social support. As an inevitable consequence of this growing body of research, the number of practical tools to measure and improve well-being has increased as well. In this ever-expanding array of interventions and assessments, positive psychology practitioners can easily become overwhelmed by abundant choices and find themselves struggling to integrate different topics and tools in their work with clients. Thus, where to start integrating positive psychology into coaching or clinical practice can become a common concern.

This handbook complements a training program that was designed to offer practitioners a comprehensive, yet easy to understand framework to integrate positive psychology in their work with clients. The goal of this handbook is twofold. The first goal is to offer a structured, science-based resource that will enable practitioners to understand the various processes underlying the many topics within the field of Positive Psychology. The second goal is to offer a structural approach to directly apply positive psychology in order to assess and improve the client's level of well-being.

## ■ THE SAILBOAT METAPHOR

This handbook introduces a sailboat metaphor that is used as a guide throughout the program. The different elements of the sailboat provide an easy to understand, yet comprehensive structure for addressing the essential elements of well-being and their interrelations. The structure of this metaphor not only creates order in the diverse range of techniques and theoretical constructs, but it also offers clients an intuitive perspective on human functioning that captures the complex nature of well-being without the need to understand the theoretical and scientific underpinnings of the various processes involved. The metaphor will serve as a framework throughout this handbook.

## ■ STRUCTURE

In the first part of this handbook, we introduce the field of Positive Psychology and the developments within this field. In the second part, we focus on the sailboat metaphor. We address each element of the metaphor, describe the ways in which

the metaphor can be used to explain concepts like well-being, and propose the ways in which the metaphor can be used in a practical context.

SECTION I

# **POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**



**2**

# **INTRODUCING POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**

The question “What is wrong with people?” has guided the thinking of many psychologists and dominated countless scientific studies during the 20th century. It cannot be denied that it is an important question. In our attempts to answer the question, we have gained insight into many illnesses and developed effective treatments for a wide range of problems. However, focusing on disease and mental deficit has limited our understanding and knowledge-base of human functioning, as relatively little attention is focused at factors that make life worth living.

## ■ A WEAKNESS FOCUS

Focusing on what is wrong with an individual is what we call a weakness focus. We place direct attention on the negative aspects of an individual. In the context of work and performance, a weakness focus means that we are primarily concerned with behavior that is causing suboptimal or low performance. For example, during a performance evaluation, the employer focuses only on why an employee is not reaching his sales targets or why he is not able to communicate well with customers.

In a clinical context, this means that the focus is on behavioral or cognitive patterns that cause suffering and reduce well-being. As an example, consider a psychologist who focusses only on the problems that a client experiences. From this perspective, the psychologist may discover that the client thinks negatively about the past and these thoughts have negative consequences on their present actions. The idea behind the weakness focus may seem intuitive: by fixing the weakness, we aim to increase well-being. However, as we will see, this view is far from complete and includes fundamental misconceptions about well-being.

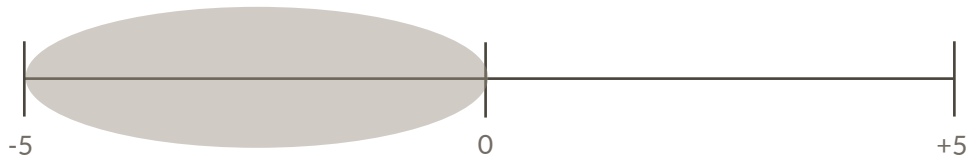
A weakness focus means a focus on what is wrong rather than what is right.

## ■ A WEAKNESS FOCUS IN PSYCHOLOGY

After World War II, psychology became a science largely devoted to curing illness. As a consequence, a disproportionate number of studies in psychology focused on psychopathology and factors that make life dysfunctional while little research focused on the factors that promote psychological well-being. For instance, an analysis of the ratio of positive to negative subjects in the psychology publications from the end of the 19th century to the year 2000 revealed a ratio greater than 2:1

in favor of the negative topics [1]. This focus on psychopathology and markers of the psychological disease has been referred to as the disease model of human functioning. The disease model is easily illustrated in Fig. 2.1.

*Fig. 2.1 A focus on repairing weakness*



In this picture, -5, represents suffering from problems, 0 represents not suffering from these problems anymore, and +5 represents a flourishing and fulfilled life. The disease model is focused on the -5 to 0 section. The goal of interventions that are grounded in this model is to help people move from -5 to 0. In a clinical context, this could mean that a therapist aims to reduce symptoms and to prevent relapse. The end goal (0-point) is achieved when the client is no longer experiencing diagnosable symptoms of psychopathology as described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

## ■ MISCONCEPTIONS RESULTING FROM THE DISEASE MODEL

Although many researchers and practitioners have adopted the disease model as the dominant model, they have often neglected or overlooked some important misconceptions. The awareness of these misconceptions has contributed to the development of positive psychology as we know it today. In this section, we discuss some essential misconceptions that are based on the focus of the disease model.

► **MISCONCEPTION #1: FIXING WHAT IS WRONG LEADS TO WELL-BEING**

Underlying the weakness focus of the disease model is the belief that fixing what is wrong will automatically lead to well-being. However, as counterintuitive as it may sound, happiness and unhappiness are not on the same continuum. Positive affect is not the opposite of negative affect [2]. Getting rid of anger, fear, and depression will not automatically lead to peace, love, and joy. In a similar way, strategies to reduce fear, anger, or depression are not identical to strategies to maximize peace, joy, or meaning. Indeed, many scholars have argued that health is not merely the absence of illness or something negative; instead, it is the presence of something positive. The World Health Organization [3] included this view in its definition of mental health as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (p. 18).

In support of this view, a growing body of research has shown that the absence of mental illness does not imply the presence of mental health and that the absence of mental health does not imply the presence of mental illness [4,5,6]. Keyes [4] found that although a higher score on subjective well-being correlates with less psychological complaints and vice versa, this relationship is far from perfect. In other words, some people who suffer from a disorder might still experience a relatively high level of subjective well-being while some people who report low levels of subjective well-being might experience little psychopathological symptoms. This finding has been replicated in other studies using different measures and populations, for instance, in American adolescents between 12 and 18 years [4], South African adults [5], and Dutch adults [6].

► **MISCONCEPTION #2: EFFECTIVE COPING IS REFLECTED BY A REDUCTION IN NEGATIVE STATES**

Typically, psychological interventions aim to reduce aversive states, like negative emotions or stress. Consistent with the disease model, such an aim is based on the assumption that a reduction in aversive states reflects both effective coping and enhanced well-being (or fewer problems). Interestingly, previous findings have repeatedly shown that effective coping does not necessarily mean a reduction in aversive states, like stress or negative emotions. An elegant illustration of this principle is found in the literature on dieting; research has revealed that it is not the absence of stress that is related to successful weight maintenance, but rather the ability to effectively deal with stress (see, for instance, [7]). Similar findings

have been obtained in the domain of work, with numerous studies highlighting the negative consequences of stress in the workplace (see, for instance, [8]). For instance, research has shown that not the experience of stress but the way employees deal with perceived stress is responsible for its acclaimed negative effect on health. For some individuals, stress can lead to positive consequences. In this case, stress is referred to as eustress, defined as a positive response to a stressor, as indicated by the presence of positive psychological states [9,10].

Research on eustress has shown that if a stressor is being evaluated as positive in terms of its potential implications for well-being, a different psychological and physiological response follows than if a stressor is assessed as negative. In this case, stress can improve rather than worsen well-being [11]. Past studies have found support for a direct link between eustress and health (cf. [12,13]), suggesting that the way people deal with and perceive difficult experiences (eustress versus distress), rather than their occurrence, is a valuable indication of successful coping.

Further support for the idea that not merely a reduction in negative states reflects effective coping comes from the literature on post-traumatic growth. Post-traumatic growth is the development of a positive outlook following a trauma [14,15]. Positive changes may include a different way of relating to others, awareness of personal strength, spiritual changes, and increased appreciation for life [15]. Post-traumatic growth can be perceived as an effective way of coping with adversity. It can emerge following various traumatic events, including war and terror [16]. Growth following adversity, however, is not the absence of post-traumatic stress reactions but the presence of positive states.

In sum, these findings suggest that focusing on building people's strengths so that they can cope with difficult experiences as opposed to purely focusing on reducing negative experiences has a clinical advantage. Rather than trying to solely eliminate negative experiences (moving from -5 to 0), it seems important to also employ coping skills that promote well-being, despite the negative experiences (moving towards +5). In support of this notion, existing research has demonstrated that irrespective of the level of stress, personal resources are associated with psychological well-being [17,18,19].

### ► MISCONCEPTION #3: CORRECTING WEAKNESS CREATES OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE

According to Clifton and Nelson [20], the behavior and mindset of many teachers, employers, parents, and leaders are guided by the implicit belief that optimal performance results from fixing weaknesses. Indeed, to promote professional

development, employees are typically exposed to training programs that focus on correcting their weaknesses. In a similar vein, evaluation interviews often focus on areas that need improvement and aspects of work with which employees typically struggle. A similar pattern can be found in many schools. Typically, the number of mistakes is highlighted when work is corrected, and when report cards are brought home, lower grades tend to attract more attention. According to Clifton and Nelson [20], fixing or correcting weakness will not result in an optimally functioning person or organization. In their view, fixing weakness will at best help the individual or organization become normal or average.

Research findings show that the opportunity to do what one does best each day (that is, using one's strengths) is a core predictor of workplace engagement [21], which in turn is an important predictor of performance (see, for instance, [22,23]). These findings indirectly support Clifton and Nelson's [20] claim that boosting the use of strengths, rather than improving weaknesses, will contribute to optimal performance.

► **MISCONCEPTION #4: WEAKNESSES DESERVE MORE ATTENTION BECAUSE STRENGTHS WILL TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES**

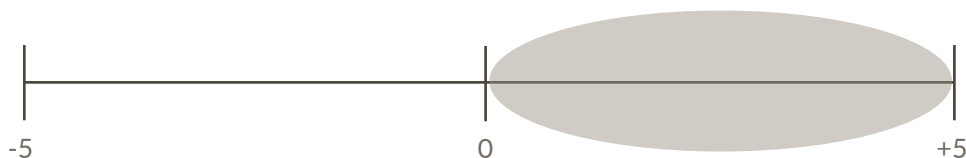
Another misconception that contributes to an excessive focus on weakness involves the belief that strengths do not need much attention because they will take care of themselves and develop naturally. Just like skills, strengths can be trained and developed deliberately [24,25]. For instance, research has shown that through practice, people can learn to be more optimistic [26]. In general, these studies show that over time, practice and effort can help build new habits that boost strength use. Boosting strengths means increasing not only the frequency of use but also the number of different situations in which the strength is applied. When strengths are not used or trained, their potential effect on well-being remains limited. When a child who is very creative is minimally or not at all exposed to activities that call upon creativity, the child is unlikely to develop skills, knowledge, and experience that will maximize his creative potential. Although many strengths are already present at a very young age, they need to be nurtured to realize their full potential.

### ► MISCONCEPTION #5: A DEFICIT FOCUS CAN HELP PREVENT PROBLEMS

If we keep focusing on repairing weakness, we will increase our understanding of weaknesses. A focus on repairing weakness will bring forward more ways to decrease the gap between -5 and 0 (see Fig. 2.1). Indeed, during the past 40 years, many interventions have been developed to cure mental illness or other problems by focusing on fixing things that have already gone wrong.

Obviously, it is important to have different interventions and treatment programs to deal with problems and setbacks. However, what we have learned over the last 50 years is that the disease model has not moved us closer to the prevention of problems. When it comes to prevention, the question is not “How can we treat people with problem X effectively?” but “How can problem X be prevented from occurring?” Working exclusively on personal weakness and disorders has rendered science poorly equipped to design effective prevention programs. We are minimally closer to preventing serious problems like burnout, depression, or substance abuse. It seems that major advances in prevention are made when the focus is on systematically building competence rather than on correcting weakness (see, for instance, [27], for a review of effective prevention programs for youths). To design effective prevention programs, we must also focus on the +5 part (see Fig. 2.2) and ask questions like, why do some people flourish despite difficult circumstances? How do some employees avoid burnout symptoms? Why do some employees show a high level of work engagement? What are the characteristics of resilient and flourishing individuals, and what can we learn from them? How can we use this knowledge to design interventions that help people become resilient so that they are capable of bouncing back when the going gets tough?

*Fig. 2.2 A focus on building strengths*



## ■ THE POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

In 1998, Martin Seligman strongly encouraged the field of psychology to widen its scope and move beyond human problems and pathology to human flourishing. According to Seligman [28], positive psychology aims to move people not from -5 to 0 but from 0 to +5 (see Fig. 2), and to do this, a different focus is needed. Rather than merely focusing on what is wrong with people and fixing their problems, the focus should also be on what is right with people and boosting their strengths.

The questions that positive psychology aims to answer are: What are the characteristics of people with high levels of happiness? What are the qualities of people who manage their troubles effectively? In other words, what strengths do these people possess? These questions do not fit the disease model. These questions force us to consider the bigger question of “What is right with people?” If we learn what differentiates happy and resilient people from unhappy and rigid people, then we could use this knowledge to increase happiness and boost the resilience of others.

An important mission of positive psychology research is, therefore, to investigate human behavior using a strengths approach. This focus on human flourishing and markers of psychological well-being has been referred to as the health model of human functioning (see Fig. 2.2).

## ■ CRITICAL NOTES

At first sight, the previously discussed misconceptions about a deficit focus may give rise to the idea that one should focus predominantly on human strengths rather than weaknesses. While it may be true that correcting weakness will not create optimal performance or well-being, it is also true that focusing only on human strengths while ignoring weaknesses will not automatically lead to optimal performance or well-being. Especially when weaknesses cause problems or hinder optimal strength use, they need to be addressed and managed. While traditional psychologists may falsely believe that taking away negatives will automatically create positives, positive psychologists and practitioners must avoid the trap of believing that creating positives will automatically take away the negatives. As discussed above, the positive and negative are on two separate continua. Attention must be paid to processes necessary for building the positive and to processes necessary for coping with the negative. For this reason, positive psychology can best be considered as an addition to rather than a replacement of the existing psychology. It can best be considered as an enrichment of the field rather than a



rejection of it. Alternatively, to use Seligman's words: "Positive psychology is not just happyology" and "is not meant to replace psychology as usual" [29].

Although a great amount of research has addressed aspects of human functioning that are linked to lower levels of well-being, it is incorrect to categorize psychological research in terms of positive and negative. These are evaluative terms and raise the false impression that research can be categorized as 'good' and 'bad' or 'right' and 'wrong.' First, psychological research aims to shed more light on human functioning in general; it is not devoted to positive or negative human conditions. Moreover, it is equally important to increase insights into aspects that hinder well-being as it is to increase insights into aspects that promote well-being. Categorizing studies on human dysfunction as 'negative psychology' should, therefore, be avoided.

When examining psychological research conducted over the past 40 years in the domains of psychopathology and clinical psychology, one could conclude that this research has mainly adopted a 'negative' side of human functioning. However, the field of psychology reaches far beyond the subdomains of psychopathology and clinical psychology. Examples of other fields include health psychology, social psychology, developmental psychology, and organizational psychology. Many studies in these other domains have focused on well-being for years, even before the introduction of Positive Psychology in 2000. These studies have addressed topics like job satisfaction, safe sex practices, and high self-esteem, focusing primarily on the positive side of human functioning.

## ■ DEFINING THE FIELD OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Positive psychology can be described as a field dedicated to the study, development, and application of positive interventions aimed at increasing well-being by modifying factors under voluntary control [30]. Both research and practice are at the core of positive psychology. In this section, we address the contributions of both components to the field.

### ► PROVING EFFECTIVENESS

Since the introduction of positive psychology, countless studies have identified actions and interventions that significantly improve well-being. These studies have been guided by questions like:

- Which personal qualities help buffer against stress and illness?
- How can we increase happiness?
- Which characteristics of people and environments are related to a high level of well-being?
- How can we develop valid measurement tools?
- What is the role of positive emotions and experiences?
- How can we best embrace the existence of and deal with negative experiences?
- How can we create healthy self-esteem?

By addressing these questions, numerous studies have revealed concrete actions that lead to improved human functioning. The results from these studies offer direct proof for the effectiveness of interventions and help us understand the difference between what we believe might contribute to enhanced well-being and what really enhances it. For instance, writing about and imagining the best possible self has repeatedly been demonstrated to increase people's mood and well-being [31,32,33]. Moreover, research on gratitude has shown that gratitude can be trained and increased. In a study by McCullough and Emmons [34], participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups. Participants completed an extensive daily journal in which they rated their moods, physical health, and overall judgments concerning how their lives were going. Each participant kept a brief weekly journal for ten weeks. They had to describe, in a single sentence, either five things for which they were grateful that had occurred in the past week (the gratitude condition) or five daily hassles (irritants) that had displeased them in the past week (the hassles condition). The neutral group was asked to simply list five events or circumstances that affected them in the last week, and they were not told to accentuate the positive or negative aspects of those circumstances (the events condition). Those in the gratitude condition reported fewer health complaints and even spent more time exercising than control participants did. The gratitude group participants experienced fewer symptoms of physical illness compared to those in either of the other two groups. Lastly, people in the gratitude condition spent significantly more time exercising (nearly 1.5 hours more per week) compared to those in the hassles condition. In one of our own studies [35], we investigated the effectiveness of a 3-week self-compassion group intervention. Participants were randomly assigned to either an intervention designed to teach skills of self-compassion or an active control group intervention teaching general time management skills. Both interventions included 3 group meetings held over three weeks. The results showed that the self-compassion intervention led to significantly greater increases in self-compassion, mindfulness, optimism, and self-efficacy as well as significantly greater decreases in rumination in comparison

to the active control intervention. In summary, these findings demonstrate that research can help differentiate between effective and less effective interventions and thus serve as a valuable guide for practitioners.

## ► UNDERLYING MECHANISMS

In addition to testing the effectiveness of interventions, studies have also provided insights into the working mechanisms underlying these actions. Simply put, these studies have not only shown that well-being can be increased by applying certain strategies but also offered insights into why these strategies contribute to well-being. For instance, one of the author's own studies [36] addressed different emotion regulation strategies and their influence on cognitive resources. Previous studies have repeatedly shown that exerting self-control decreases self-control performance on a subsequent task. Thus, when a dieter who tries to quit smoking says "no" to a tempting piece of the pie, he is more likely to fail in refusing a cigarette at a later moment. The idea is that controlling oneself, in this case controlling the urge to eat, requires cognitive resources that, after using, are not available for attempts to quit smoking. In our study, participants were asked to watch a distressing video. Three groups were created. One group was asked to apply self-control; specifically, they were instructed to suppress all the emotions felt during the video. One group was asked to apply mindful acceptance, that is, they were instructed to allow the emotions to be present and to observe them. The last group simply watched the movie without any instructions. After the movie, all participants completed a computer task that required self-control. We found that participants who suppressed their emotions performed the worst on this second self-control task. In contrast, participants who accepted their emotions outperformed both groups. These findings provide insight into a potential mechanism underlying mindful acceptance that appears to conserve regulatory resources. In a similar vein, other studies have offered valuable insights into why certain strategies and interventions might work.

## ► MEASUREMENT TOOLS

Finally, research has developed many valuable measurement tools to address complex constructs like happiness, optimism, and resilience. For example, in 2004, Peterson and Seligman developed the Values In Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS), which brings together the six most valued virtues operationalized into 24 different character strengths. By completing this assessment, respondents gain insight into the extent to which they possess these 24 character strengths [25].

Other examples of measurement tools that have been developed over the years include the Flourishing Scale [37], the Subjective Happiness Scale [38], the Adult Dispositional Hope Scale [39] and the Brief Resilience Scale [40].

These assessment tools are valuable for various reasons. First, they provide a way to gather information about the extent to which certain constructs characterize people. Using them, we can, for example, determine the level of optimism of a person or his ability to deal with difficult thoughts. Second, the scores on assessment tools can be compared to mean scores. Many assessment tools have been used in a wide range of populations, providing means for countries, age groups, or other population characteristics. In this way, the score of one single person can be compared to a mean score, which provides additional information about the relative score of this individual. Third, assessment tools can be used as repeated measures. For instance, by administering a questionnaire at multiple times during an intervention, the progress of a client can be tracked. Moreover, repeated administration can provide information on the stability of characteristics. One may complete the aforementioned VIA- IS at a certain time point and one year later and discover that the strengths identified on both occasions are very similar. Lastly, insights into the relationship between different constructs can be obtained by comparing the correlation between the scores on different assessment tools. Using this method, research has revealed that people who score high on mindfulness also use their strengths more, for instance [41].

## ► PRACTICE

The many interventions and actions that are proven to enhance well-being are a rich source for practitioners who aim to apply positive psychology. The insights from positive psychological research can be applied directly in different ways. First, existing treatment programs can integrate positive psychology interventions into the treatment protocol. For example, a cognitive behavioral therapist may use positive interventions like gratitude practice as an addition to the regular intervention program. Many positive interventions assign homework to clients. Rather than passively waiting for the next meeting, clients can actively work on their personal development. Second, during the past two decades, new interventions have been developed that strongly rely on the insights and principles of positive psychology. A few examples of these interventions are listed below.

- *Appreciative Inquiry*. This approach appeared in the 1980s. Appreciative inquiry (AI) involves ‘searching for the best’ in people, organizations, and communities through the discovery of ‘what gives life’ to a system when it is at its most effective and most economically, ecologically, and socially capable

[42]. AI shares the strengths-based approach to positive psychology [43]. Like strengths in positive psychology, appreciative inquiry focusses on what is already working inside families, organizations, or communities.

- *Positive Psychotherapy*. This empirically validated approach to psychotherapy aims to reduce psychopathology by focusing predominantly on building strengths and enhancing positive emotions and engagement [44]. Seligman and colleagues [45] showed significant, long-lasting decreases in depression after positive psychotherapy.
- *Positive Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*. The focus of positive cognitive behavioral therapy is not on pathology but on building clients' strengths by considering what works for them, much like positive psychology itself. This form of therapy draws on research and applications from positive psychology and solution-focused brief therapy.
- *Strengths-Based Counselling*. This model for conducting therapy is based on the premises of positive psychology, counseling psychology, positive youth development, social work, narrative therapy, and solution-focused therapy [46]. The model was created specifically for use with adolescents to increase their growth by helping them use strengths to overcome problems. Strengths-based counseling uses a strength-perspective and guides the psychologist who "searches for what people have rather than what they do not have, what people can do rather than what they cannot do, and how they have been successful rather than how they have failed" [46 p. 38].
- *Strength-Centered Therapy*. This psychotherapeutic approach focusses heavily on building strengths in the change process [47]. Strength-centered therapy is characterized by the social constructivist notion that the subjective views of clients regarding their own pathology and well-being are more important in therapy than the expert opinions of mental health providers.
- *Solution-focused therapy*. This therapy was developed by de Shazer, Berg, and colleagues [48,49,50,51,52,53] to explain how the strengths people possess can be applied to the change process. A key ingredient of solution-focused therapy is the use of positive language. By using language that focuses on possibilities and positive exceptions, the therapist influences the way clients perceive their problems, assists them in seeing the potential for solutions, and creates an expectancy for change [54].

## ■ A BRIEF HISTORY OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Many have argued that Martin Seligman introduced positive psychology to the American Psychological Association in his 1998 APA Presidential Address. Although Seligman should definitely be credited for his renewed introduction of a positive outlook in psychology, other researchers, even before the introduction of positive psychology, have adopted a similar approach by studying mental health rather than mental illness (see, for instance, [55]) and by focusing on maturity and growth (e.g., [56]). For instance, in 1979, Antonovsky [57] coined the term salutogenesis to describe an approach focusing on factors that support human health and well-being rather than on factors that cause disease. In fact, the very foundation of positive psychology dates back to 500 BC. Below, we present an outline of a global timeline of the history of positive psychology.

### ▶ +/- 500 B.C. ANCIENT PHILOSOPHERS

Many of the questions addressed by positive psychologists were also raised by ancient Greek philosophers, like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, as well as eastern philosophers, like Confucius and Lao-Tsu [58]. At around 500 BC, these philosophers were already concerned with questions like, what does happiness mean? How can happiness be achieved? What is a virtuous life?

### ▶ 1842 – 1910 WILLIAM JAMES

The psychologist William James was interested in the study of optimal human functioning and considered subjective experience as highly important. He argued that objectivity is based on subjectivity. His interest in optimal human functioning was reflected by the questions he raised in his speech to the American Psychological Association in 1906. He believed that to maximize human potential, we must gain insight into both the limits of human energy and the ways to stimulate and optimally use this energy [59 p. 136]. Some have argued that William James should be considered “America’s first positive psychologist” [60 p.15].

### ▶ 1950 - HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

Humanistic psychology emerged in the 1950s in Europe and the United States. Many of the views and concerns of humanistic psychology are similar to those

of positive psychology. Both humanistic psychology and positive psychology are concerned with the quality of human experience and the ability to self-actualize; to reach the highest potential [61]. Humanistic psychology has been defined as "... an orientation toward the whole of psychology rather than a distinct area or school... concerned with topics having little place in existing theories and systems: e.g., love, creativity, growth, self-actualization, peak experience, courage, and related topics" [62 p. 454]. Two of the most influential humanistic psychologists were Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow.

The term positive psychology was first used by Maslow in his book *Motivation and Personality* [63]. In the chapter called "Toward a Positive Psychology," Maslow wrote: "The science of psychology has been far more successful on the negative than on the positive side; it has revealed to us much about man's shortcomings, his illnesses, his sins, but little about his potentialities, his virtues, his achievable aspirations, or his full psychological height. It is as if psychology had voluntarily restricted itself to only half its rightful jurisdiction, and that the darker, meaner half" [63 p. 354].

Humanistic psychology was a reaction to the view of human functioning as reflected by psycho-analysis and behaviorism. According to humanistic psychology, individuals are shaped by an innate drive to make themselves and the world a better place. Moreover, whereas psycho-analysis was predominantly concerned with the negative side of human functioning, addressing topics like neurosis and psychosis, humanistic psychology was focused on the positive side of human functioning. The field of humanistic psychology has been criticized for its lack of scientific rigor. Critics state that the field has relied too much on introspective, qualitative research methods. Positive psychology shares the same view of human functioning but uses quantitative and reductionistic methods to address its claims.

## ► 1998 - MARTIN SELIGMAN

Martin Seligman [64] is often referred to as the "father of positive psychology". Seligman was the founder of the theory of 'learned helplessness.' He argued that clinical depression and other related mental illnesses are caused by the lack of control over the outcome of a situation. Later, Seligman became interested in how to minimize or reduce depression. He realized that he and other psychologists were guided by a disease model that was focused on repairing damage rather than promoting well-being. After being elected President of the American Psychological Association in 1996, he chose positive psychology as the central theme of his term. With the introduction of positive psychology, he wanted to start a new era of psychology that focusses on the factors that contribute to well-being.

## ► BARBARA HELD

Back in 2004, Held [65] wrote a critical paper on the viewpoints and ideas of positive psychology. In this paper, she argued that the current movement of positive psychology has presented itself as a separate field of psychology characterized by negativity about negativity itself. In her opinion, it would benefit psychology in general and positive psychology in particular to become more integrated into psychology as a whole rather than separated out. She emphasized the importance of an “open acknowledgment and appreciation of the negative side of human existence/nature, a side that has heretofore been denied or dismissed by promoters of the movement’s dominant Message” [65 p.40]. She labeled this more nuanced approach to the notions of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ as the ‘second wave’ of positive psychology. Others have referred to this integration of the positive and negative of human experience as positive psychology 2.0 (see for instance [66]). Recently, positive psychology scholars have begun to adopt a more nuanced approach to the notions of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ and have worked on a new mature synthesis of positive and negative within the field.

## ■ CRITICAL NOTE

The above-described timeline provides a very general overview of the people and developments that have influenced positive psychology as we know it today. Obviously, this overview represents just a very limited selection of influential people. There have been many more pioneers who greatly influenced the development of positive psychology. Examples include Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi with his work on flow, Carol Dweck with her theory and research on mindsets, and Ed Diener with his essential work on well-being.



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**3**

**SECOND WAVE  
POSITIVE  
PSYCHOLOGY**

Initially, the strong focus of positive psychology on the positive side of human functioning was introduced as a necessary step to restore the imbalance that was created by the negative view that dominated psychology. However, the strong focus on positive experiences, traits, thoughts, and emotions carries the implicit message that people should strive mainly for positive experiences and should avoid negative experiences. While “psychology as usual” was criticized by positive psychologists for its almost exclusive focus on repairing weakness, positive psychology has been criticized for adopting an almost exclusive focus on well-being and positive outcomes. The excessive embracing of the positive can be conceptualized as the “first wave positive psychology.” Although this second generation of positive psychology remains focused on increasing wellbeing, it appreciates the ambivalent and complex nature of the field by:

- recognizing that seemingly negative experiences can contribute to positive aspects of human functioning and transformation;
- recognizing that seemingly positive qualities and experiences can be detrimental to well-being under certain circumstances;
- acknowledging the importance of coping with negative thoughts, experiences, and behaviors; and
- second wave positive psychologists at the heart of this handbook who incorporate the assessment of both positive and negative factors of human functioning. In the following sections, we describe some important psychological considerations that underlie the second wave perspective.

## ■ INTERDEPENDENCE

Many clients wish for a life that is characterized predominantly by the presence of positive experiences and the absence of negative experiences. On the basis of this desire lies the view that negative experiences are ‘bad’ and positive experiences are ‘good’. This perception creates a contrast that neglects the fact that both are in fact a part of the same coin of life, just like good versus bad, beautiful versus ugly, small versus large, etc. Opposites exist only in relation to each other and cannot exist independently. Good can exist only with the bad. Light can only be there if there is darkness. A teacher can only exist if there are students. Opposites are always part of the same coin. This coin thus consists of two halves, or two opposites. The moment that one of these halves falls away, the other half ceases to exist. One could say that both can only exist in relation to each other. The existence of one half (bad/student/grief) makes the experience of the other half (good/teacher/pleasure) possible. In other words, we need the bad to appreciate the good

life. When positive psychology is viewed as a way to avoid the negative, we lose touch with reality. The study of stress, coping, and adaptation provides many rich examples of the interrelation of positive and negative phenomena. A psychology of human flourishing is not the study of how negative experience may be avoided or ignored but rather of how positive and negative experiences are interrelated.

## ■ PARADOXES

Perceiving ‘negative’ events and experiences as ‘bad’ in an absolute sense can trigger the need to avoid and control them; ‘bad’ should become ‘good’. The literature on self-regulation has revealed many examples in which the attempt to control states paradoxically leads to an increase of these states (also referred to as the ironic process of control; [1]). For instance, in a well-replicated classic study by Wegner, Schneider, Carter, and White [2], participants were told that the goal of a task was to not think of a white bear. Every time, participants did think of a white bear, they were instructed to ring a bell. Participants who attempted to reach the goal of not thinking of a white bear rang the bell significantly more often compared to participants who were not instructed to reach this goal. Similar findings were found in the context of sleeping [3] and eating behaviors [4]. These findings suggest that trying too hard to control or avoid certain experiences can backfire, causing the very thing that one is attempting to avoid to become stronger. In a similar vein, trying to control positive feelings by focusing too much on ‘achieving happiness’ can paradoxically reduce the feelings of happiness. This effect is suggested to be caused by increased awareness of the discrepancy that exists between the current state (not happy enough) and the desired state (happy) [5]. Considering this, it is important to realize that positive thinking per se is not always beneficial, especially when it is used to avoid or control negative experiences; this is a form of experiential avoidance [6], a phenomenon that has been linked to a great diversity of negative outcomes (see [7], for a review).

Third wave therapies, like mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR; [8,9]) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT; [6]), recognize the paradoxical nature of control and avoidance and focus on the development of acceptance-based coping. Acceptance-based coping means embracing both positive and negative experiences rather than fighting them. Second wave positive psychology integrates insights from these third wave therapies to enhance well-being. To use King’s [10 pp. 53–54] words, flourishing does not mean being a “well-defended fortress invulnerable to the vicissitudes of life,” but appreciating and even embracing the complex and ambivalent nature of existence.

## ■ WHEN NEGATIVE BECOMES POSITIVE

People can report major positive changes as a result of challenging life events, such as severe illness or trauma. This process is referred to as benefit finding. Helgeson and colleagues [11] defined benefit finding as “the positive effects that result from a traumatic event” (p. 797). In other words, it is the process of deriving positive growth from adversity.

In general, research has revealed positive long-term effects of benefit finding. For instance, some individuals report a new appreciation of their own strength and resilience, an enhanced sense of purpose, greater spirituality, closer ties with others, and changes in life priorities (for reviews see [12,11]). Others feel that their relationships are stronger and that they have become more compassionate or altruistic (e.g., [13,14,15]). The research on post-traumatic growth, lifespan development (e.g., [16]), and benefit finding [11] has demonstrated that experiencing and mastering challenging and traumatic situations can contribute to the development of personal growth in the long run. In sum, these findings demonstrate that difficulties or negative experiences can have positive outcomes if we approach them in a certain way and should therefore not be perceived as ‘negative’ in an absolute sense.

## ■ WHEN POSITIVE BECOMES NEGATIVE

Positive traits can also have negative effects. Research has shown that certain positive traits enacted at very high levels can decrease well-being. Consider the extreme optimist whose excessive positivity means that he has lost touch with the potential pitfalls and dangers of his choices. He sees things only as he wants them to be rather than as they are. Or, consider the person who is so optimistic about a project that she has unrealistic expectations about its feasibility and consequently fails to finalize it. Indeed, extreme levels of optimism have been linked to underappreciation of risk and maladaptive risk-taking (see, for instance, [17]). Another illustration of the downside of ‘too much’ comes from the literature on choice. The positive effects of having a personal choice are well supported by numerous studies demonstrating a link between the provision of choice and increases in intrinsic motivation, perceived control, task performance, and life satisfaction [18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27]. Interestingly, research has also found that too much personal choice can decrease well-being. An elegant demonstration of this was provided in a series of experiments by Iyengar and Lepper [28]. The researchers showed that participants who chose a chocolate from a display of 30 options were more dissatisfied and regretful of the choices they made compared to participants



who choose a chocolate from a display of only 6 options. In other words, having a greater choice is not necessarily true. In sum, these findings suggest that for many, if not all, constructs, moderation is the keyword. Or, to use the words of Publius Terentius Afer, an ancient Roman dramatist, “Ne quid nimis,” or “All things in moderation.”

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SECTION II

# **THE SAILBOAT METAPHOR**

**4**

# **INTRODUCING THE SAILBOAT METAPHOR**

*“I am not afraid of storms for I am learning how to sail my ship.”*

*- Louisa May Alcott*

This quote beautifully summarizes what could be considered the most important practical aim of positive psychology, which is to enhance autonomy and resilience. The goal of every helping professional is to eventually become redundant by helping the client realize that he is the captain of his own ship and as such, he can take effective action. This realization allows the client to align his behavior with personal values and take responsibility for his own behavior and thus reality.

A key step in this process is the development of a balanced and complete perspective of the self; a perspective that considers the many factors (positive and negative, controllable and uncontrollable) that determine daily behavior and experiences. Autonomy emerges through becoming aware of personal strengths and weaknesses, of factors that can and cannot be controlled, and of positive and negative social forces. In this chapter, we introduce the sailboat metaphor. This metaphor compares human functioning to a sailboat and its journey and offers a multi-faceted yet easy to understand the perspective of the self. A graphical representation of the metaphor is shown in Fig. 4.1 on the next page.

## ■ THE ELEMENTS OF THE SAILBOAT METAPHOR OF HUMAN FUNCTIONING

The following sections provide a detailed description of each element of the sailboat metaphor.

### ► 01. WATER

No boat moves in isolation from the water. The water can be compared to what we could call the ‘playground of life’. Just like the water encompasses the space in which the boat is held afloat and moves, it represents the direct environment in which we live and with which we interact. This environment is divided into many different domains, including our job, relationship with our partner, our friends, our financial situation, and so on. In short, it is our direct physical reality.

► 02. COMPASS

A compass is an instrument used for navigation and orientation that shows direction relative to the environment. It provides feedback on the current direction in which we are heading. In a similar vein, experiences like feelings, emotions, bodily sensations, and intuition serve as a tool for navigating and orienting. Both positive and negative experiences are signals that provide feedback as we navigate our life’s journey; thus, they serve as a valuable guide. For this reason, it is important to pay attention to them and allow them to be present. Positive experiences, such as joy, relaxation, and energy signal personal well-being and inform us that we are on the right track. These experiences can serve as a direct reinforcer and over time, build long-lasting resources (sails: element 5). Negative experiences, such as fear and pain, inform us that attention is required.

Fig. 4.1 A graphical representation of the eight elements of the Sailboat Metaphor



Rather than suppressing these negative experiences, allowing them to be present without acting upon them can reveal valuable information that may assist us on our journey. Fear, for instance, may signal that we are approaching the edge of our comfort zone. Since we are uncertain about what the other side of the ocean looks like, we experience fear. Fear may indicate that we have a chance to broaden our horizons and expand our comfort zone. Possibly, we may also realize that the thing that is causing us to fear is important to us (after all, why would we experience fear if we did not care about it?) and may give us insight into a personal value.

Note that the emotional experience itself is never a problem. In terms of the sailboat metaphor, the compass is not the problem; it simply provides information and feedback. The problem arises when a person uses his or her compass in an ineffective way. For instance, many clients attempt to control or avoid the negative experiences that their compass indicates. However, paradoxically, such avoidance can lead to an increase in negative experiences.

### ► 03. STEERING WHEEL

The steering wheel represents personal values. Just like the steering wheel determines where the boat will go, personal values determine how we want to live our life. They are the answer to the question: what do you find important in life? When we live according to our true values, there is an accompanying sense of fulfilling our deepest purpose in life. Values provide the direction and meaning that we need to lead fulfilling and rewarding lives.

Values are best compared to directions rather than destinations, like the steering wheel that determines a certain direction. Whereas goals (destinations: element 8) can be achieved, values cannot be achieved. For example, the value of being creative can never be completely fulfilled. Even if the person creates a painting (a concrete goal), it would be silly to say, “Now that I have created this painting, I’ve accomplished creativity. Now I’ll proceed to the next thing.” Therefore, values are best formulated as verbs, as something that is never fully achieved. A value might be “being creative” or “contributing to other’s well-being.”

Note that the steering wheel represents our current values, both adaptive and maladaptive. Adaptive values contribute to our well-being while maladaptive values reduce well-being. When clients have lost connection with their adaptive values, it is often because one or more of the other elements of the boat receives a disproportionate level of attention. For instance, a client who experiences fear (compass: element 2) may spend a lot of time trying to control and reduce fear. He is constantly monitoring and trying to control his inner experiences. In other words, undue attention is focused on the compass, and “safety” and “control”



become the main direction of his boat. Paradoxically, sailing in this direction may cause fear to increase. The values “safety” and “control” thus affect his well-being in a negative way. Another client may focus too much on the values of other people (other boats: element 6). This focus may be the result of a need for approval; a value that is currently guiding his behavior but which does not contribute to his well-being in a positive way.

#### ► 04. LEAK

A leak in the boat represents a weakness; thus, it reflects a personal characteristic that reduces well-being. Weaknesses can be present at the physical, cognitive, and/or behavioral level. At a physical level, the individual may experience pain, hunger, fatigue, or other body-related issues that reduce well-being. At a cognitive level, the individual may, for instance, suffer from rumination, worry, self-blame, or unrealistic standards. At a behavioral level, the individual may engage in behaviors that result in lower levels of well-being, such as aggression, pleasing others, acting impulsively, and procrastinating. Just like leaks are considered ‘internal’ problems for a boat, weaknesses can be considered internal stressors: they come from the individual’s personal goals, expectations, standards, perceptions, desires, and the like. In other words, they come from within and are self-induced. In contrast, external stressors are generated outside the individual. In many cases, these are uncontrollable circumstances, such as loss of employment or death in the family. In the sailboat metaphor, these external stressors are represented by bad weather (events: element 6).

A weakness focus centers solely on the leak. Although the leak is not the only defining characteristic of the boat (e.g., the boat has sails, a steering wheel, etc.), we focus our attention only on this specific aspect of the boat. The idea behind the weakness focus is clear and well-meaning, that is, by fixing the weakness, we aim to increase well-being. In terms of the boat metaphor, by fixing the leak, we expect the boat to be able to sail again. Indeed, if we do not fix the leak, then the boat will sink, and the client will not be able to sail anywhere. However, aiming to increase well-being by only focusing on repairing the leak of the boat is unlikely to result in success or reaching a destination or goal. This approach ignores the fact that the absence of problems or illness does not automatically imply well-being (see, for instance, [1]). Regarding the sailboat metaphor, even if you would be able to repair the leak, your client may still not be able to get anywhere. It is his sails—the next component of the metaphor—that actually give the client’s boat momentum. In summary, although it is important to address weaknesses to prevent the boat from sinking, one must also hoist the sails to catch a favorable wind (i.e., opportunity) and move forward.

## ► 05. SAILS

Personal strengths are factors that facilitate valued living and goal achievement and increase personal well-being. These factors are positive traits reflected in one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors [2]. Strengths include ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that are authentic and energizing to the individual. Using strengths enables optimal functioning, development, and performance [3]. Examples of strengths are effective coping styles, like optimism or acceptance, but also activities that provide energy and enthusiasm, like writing or painting. In the sailboat metaphor, strengths are represented by the sails of the boat. Without the sails of the boat, the boat would float aimlessly in the water, not going anywhere. Just like strengths allow the individual to flourish in life, the sails allow the boat to move in favorable directions. The sails of the boat generate momentum, helping the captain create a journey that is worth traveling. A person who is using his strengths feels energized and engaged, like a boat that is sailing at full speed with the wind in its sails.

## ► 06. WEATHER

Life events are external things that happen to people. Real-life examples include the loss of a loved one, getting stuck in traffic, winning the lottery, or falling in love, among others. Although we often have limited control over these events, the way we deal with them can have a serious effect on our well-being. In the sailboat metaphor, life events can be compared to the weather. Sometimes the wind is blowing in our sails and we encounter situations that allow us to use our strengths optimally. At other times, the wind and the rain make it difficult to keep traveling in our preferred direction.

## ► 07. OTHER BOATS

The other boats in the sea represent the people that surround us. These boats can be compared to our social network. Other boats can influence us in many ways, both positively and negatively. For instance, when we decide to turn the steering wheel and take a different course, we may experience support from peers who motivate us to pursue our new direction. At the same time, others may disapprove of the new direction and provoke feelings of self-doubt and fear within us (compass: element 2). In the latter case, it is important to stay true to our values and direction rather than letting others determine the course of the boat. Our social network

may also offer support in difficult times. In times of stormy weather, other boats can help us stay on our course and remind us of what is truly important in our journey (our core values).

## ► 08. DESTINATION

Just like a boat can sail to certain destinations, people can steer to reach goals. While a value reflects the general direction of the boat, a goal represents a specific and concrete destination of the boat. Goal setting and achievement are important processes that can help concretize values. Goals can help translate abstract values like “creativity” into practice. Moreover, achieving personally meaningful goals can help build self-confidence and self-efficacy.

## ■ THE CAPTAIN

The eight elements of the sailboat described earlier all represent key aspects of human functioning. It is important to note that these key aspects influence the well-being of the individual but do not define the individual. The best way to define the individual in the sailboat metaphor is by comparing him or her to the captain of the boat. As the captain, the individual can turn the steering wheel in a certain direction. Rather than a leak in the boat, the individual is the captain; he or she can become aware of this leak and do something about it. In a similar vein, the individual does not represent the destinations he or she reaches, but the captain who chooses to pursue these destinations in the first place.

How the captain relates to the eight elements of the boat represents the relationship that the individual has with himself and others. Imagine a captain believing his boat is worth nothing because of a leak. No matter how beautiful past journeys have been and how powerful the sails of the boat are, the myopic view of the captain regarding the leak heavily influences his relationship with his boat; thus, he may consider it worthless. This example resembles the relationship many people have with their personal weaknesses. Many people are afraid to fail or make mistakes, and when they do, they beat themselves up for their failings. Rather than allowing themselves to be human and accepting themselves for making mistakes and failing, they show very little self-compassion. It is important to note that it is not the individual’s weaknesses in the first place that affect their well-being, but the relationship with their weaknesses. Therefore, it is important to not only address the eight different components of the sailboat but to identify

the captain's perspective on these elements as well. In the sailboat metaphor, the captain's relationships with each of the eight sailboat elements are determined by four key elements: attention, thoughts, motivation, and action (see Fig. 4.2).

## ► ATTENTION

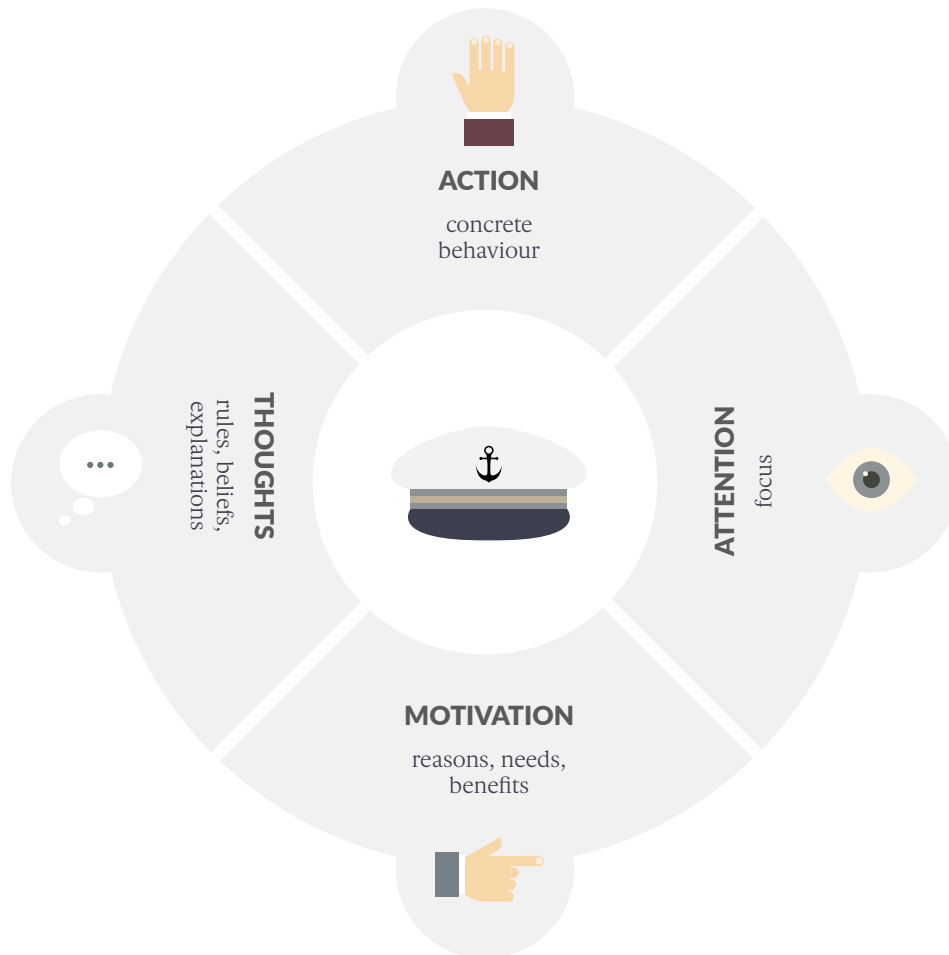
Attention can be compared to a telescope. A telescope is a powerful instrument through which we can select, bring into focus, and magnify the stimuli we experience in our world [4]. In the *Principles of Psychology*, William James [5] wrote, "My experience is what I agree to attend to" (p. 402). As James suggested, our experiences are largely determined by the way in which we pay attention to ourselves and our surroundings.

Attention is the ability of the captain to concentrate on a particular element of the boat. Two constituents of attention are important here. The first constituent is the amount of attention paid by the captain to a certain element. For example, how much attention is devoted to the destination? Is the captain constantly looking forward, perhaps paying too much attention to future destinations while forgetting to pay attention to the journey as well? How much attention does the captain pay to the direction of the boat? Is he checking sufficiently whether the boat is still on track? How much attention does the captain devote to the captains of other boats during his journey? The second constituent is the consideration of the nature of attention given. How does the captain of the boat direct attention to the different elements of his boat? Is the captain's attention rigid, judgmental, and scattered? Or is his attention open and non-judgmental, focused singularly?

## ► THOUGHTS

The thoughts of the captain represent cognitive processes that accompany interactions with different parts of the boat. For example, thoughts may include expectancies regarding the ability to cover the leak of the boat, thinking patterns that are present when using the sails of the boat, or beliefs about how to use the feedback from the compass. Although thoughts may to some degree reflect reality, they can also be distorted, and although never tested, they strongly determine the behavior and actions of the captain. It is important to note that not the thought itself is problematic, but the fact that the captain perceives certain thoughts to be true often without being aware of their direct effect on well-being.

Fig. 4.2 A graphical representation of the four key elements of the captain of the sailboat



## ► MOTIVATION

The motivation of the captain represents the motivational orientation underlying the different elements of the boat. Why are the chosen destinations of the boat important to the captain? Why are the leaks of the boat still not covered? How does the captain benefit from using the sails of his boat? Examining the motivational orientation of the captain regarding his sailboat provides insight into the boat's past, current, and future journey.

## ► ACTION

The actions of the captain represent the direct way in which the captain interacts with the different elements of his boat. For example, how does the captain deal with leaks on the boat? Is the captain able to cover the leak? Is the captain able to turn the steering wheel? Is the captain able to hoist the sails and sail in a valuable direction? When fostering a client's autonomy, which is one of the most important outcomes of any intervention, the client can be viewed as embodying the role of a captain; he is in charge of his boat and the journey. Rather than living in a mindless passive state where one is strongly influenced by forces outside the self, one is holding the steering wheel firmly, looking ahead, and planning carefully for a journey that he or she believes is worth taking.

### IMPORTANT NOTE

The captain that is shown in the illustrations of this handbook is a white male. It goes without saying that every person is a captain, regardless of gender, skin color, background, religion, etc.

## ■ THE LIGHTHOUSE

When considering the sailboat metaphor in a practical context, the function of the practitioner can be compared to the function of a lighthouse on the sailboat's journey. Where the client represents the captain of his or her sailboat, the practitioner can best be compared to the lighthouse keeper, using his or her skills to ensure that the light of the lighthouse becomes a navigational aid for the sailboat. The similarities between a lighthouse and a practitioner are summarized in Table 4.1.

*Table 4.1 The similarities between a lighthouse and a practitioner*

Lighthouse	Practitioner
assists in navigation by signaling safe entries to harbors but also by marking dangerous coastlines and hazardous reefs	assists the client in achieving his aspirations/valued living by highlighting possibilities and potential pitfalls
does not dictate the direction or destination of the boat	does not determine which values and goals the client should have
is a temporary aid on a journey, not a permanent one	is a temporary support for the client, with the ultimate goal of achieving independence of the client
is particularly valuable in case of bad weather circumstances/turbulent sea	is particularly valuable in case of difficult life circumstances
always operates in service of the journey of the boat	always operates in service of the preferred goals and values of the client
helps clarify the current position of the Boat	helps the client increase awareness of his current values, goals, strengths, weaknesses, etc.
illuminates the current environment of the boat	sheds (new) light on current circumstances

## ■ INTERACTION BETWEEN ELEMENTS

The different components of the boat metaphor do not exist in isolation but in constant interaction with each other. Some examples of how the elements of the boat work together synergistically are described below.

- Ignoring weaknesses (leak: element 4) while boosting the use of strengths (sails: element 5) will give the boat momentum but will gradually cause the boat to sink. In other words, it is important to address both weaknesses and strengths.

- A boat that sails in a personally valuable direction (steering wheel: element 3) will be more likely to stay on track during stormy weather (element 6) compared to a boat that is sailing in a direction that is not perceived to be personally meaningful.
- A boat that is not willing to choose a different direction (steering wheel: element 3) because of fear (compass: element 2) of leaving the “comfort zone” will be unlikely to sail in new waters (water: element 1). From a psychological perspective, this means that structural changes in the client’s environment are unlikely to emerge when avoidance-based coping is used to deal with negative emotions.
- The nature of the water (quiet, turbulent, etc.) is influenced not only by uncontrollable circumstances, like the weather (element 6), but also by the deliberate choice of the boat sailing in another direction (steering wheel: element 3). This new direction might cause the boat to enter a new zone that is characterized by (temporary) turbulent or quiet waters, rocky or dangerous areas, etc. Likewise, other boats (element 7) can block the sailing route, making it difficult to sail in a certain direction. These examples illustrate that many factors, internal and external, influence the daily reality a person with varying degrees of controllability. Not only uncontrollable events, like the loss of a friend, or the negativity of other people affect daily reality, but also the deliberate choices we make in life. By making the deliberate choice to live under the influence of our personal values, the changes we typically experience (both behavioral and circumstantial) will tend to align with those values. Regarding the sailboat metaphor, this means that we deliberately choose a different route and encounter different waters. This new route is characterized by easy and difficult parts.
- It is often helpful to consider the parts of the new route that will be potentially challenging and evaluate the degree of controllability. By doing so, the individual can prevent himself or herself from trying to influence uncontrollable events. For instance, a person who decides to quit drinking may anticipate ex-fellow drinkers (other boats: element 7) to be unsupportive of the new direction. Rather than attempting to gain control by trying to convince other captains to choose the same direction, the captain may wisely decide to focus on controllable elements of the boat, like the direction of the boat or the sails. The captain may decide to steer the boat in a direction that allows more frequent encounters with supportive boats or may decide to deliberately use his personal strengths to deal with the challenges.





## ENCOURAGE CLIENTS TO USE THE METAPHOR

Clients can use the metaphor to explain their current state. For some clients, the metaphor offers a “safe” way to describe personal feelings by providing them with emotional distance from a problem. It allows them to talk about their private experiences in a more indirect and less vulnerable way without losing the essence of the message. Another related advantage of using the boat metaphor is its flexibility with different interpretations. Allowing clients to explain their understanding of the different elements can help the practitioner better grasp the reality of the client. Encouraging clients to develop their own way of using the metaphor, promotes a personal connection to the metaphor.

Examples of potential use with clients:

- “I don’t feel like my boat is moving. It is floating in one place, bobbing on the waves”: the client may experience a lack of meaning and/or autonomy.
- “I feel like I am sailing in a direction that other sailors want me to sail”: the client is experiencing a high level of social pressure and lack of autonomy.
- “I feel like all I can see is the leaking boat - I keep taking on water”: the client indicates that he experiences an excessive focus on his problems.
- “I am afraid that my boat will not withstand the stormy weather that is coming”: the client is experiencing low levels of self-efficacy and has doubts about his own coping skills.

Using the sailboat metaphor can also stimulate more creative problem-solving. Because the metaphor allows the client to form a meta-perspective of himself and his functioning, he may perceive problems from a bigger and different perspective. Often, clients are so identified with a certain problem (i.e., a leak in the boat) that they fail to see the bigger picture. A significant part of their daily life is focused on controlling the problem. This “zooming-in” on the problem often happens at the expense of valued living. Alternatively, in terms of the sailboat metaphor, because the client is so focused on covering the leak of the boat, he forgets to ensure that the boat is sailing in a valuable direction. Allowing the client to see the bigger picture and connect to personal values, strengths, etc., provides new ways to deal with challenges that arise.

## ■ THE BENEFITS OF THE SAILBOAT METAPHOR

There are several important reasons for using this metaphor in a practical or educational context. First, the metaphor can be used to explain complex psychological constructs in a relatively simple way. For instance, effective coping can be compared to a boat that stays on course despite stormy weather or effectively gets back on course after stormy weather. Rumination (dwelling on negative thoughts about past failures) can be compared to spending a lot of time looking at the wake (water pattern) behind the boat. Second, the metaphor can be used to untangle many different constructs in the field of (positive) psychology and bring them together in one cohesive framework. Finally, the metaphor can be used to communicate complex interactive psychological processes (see, for instance, the previous section on “Interaction between elements”).

## ■ IMPORTANT NOTES

Before using the sailboat metaphor, it is important to consider the following notes. First, an important aim of the sailboat metaphor is to offer a structured framework that incorporates essential factors that have been found to influence well-being. Obviously, given the immense complexity of psychological functioning, it is impossible to address all factors that influence human behavior and well-being. Although the sailboat metaphor can be used to explain and map many of these factors, it cannot cover all of them.

Second, it is important to note that we chose one particular way of translating the different elements of the sailboat metaphor to psychological concepts and processes. For instance, in this metaphor, the compass represents feelings and emotions. Alternatively, one may argue that the compass represents the individual's values, as values can also be considered a guide for action.

Third, like any model, the sailboat metaphor is a representation of the reality, not the reality itself. Per definition, every model reduces the endless complexity of reality. Therefore, the sailboat metaphor should be viewed as a general guide for addressing various key elements of well-being and their interrelations rather than an attempt to fully explain the whole spectrum of human functioning.

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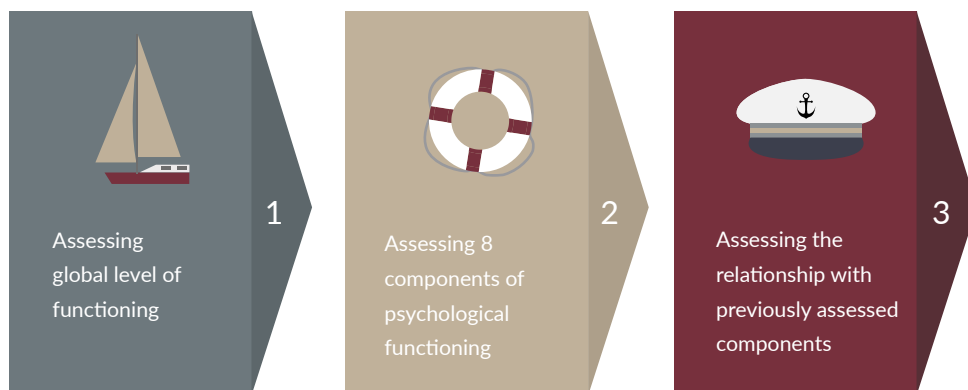
# **USING THE SAILBOAT METAPHOR IN PRACTICE**

The sailboat metaphor can be used for educational purposes, offering a framework for positive psychology concepts and their interrelations and a framework for coaching or clinical practice. In this chapter, we discuss possible ways to use the sailboat metaphor as a tool for coaching or psychological treatment.

## ■ THREE PHASES OF ASSESSMENT

To translate the different elements of the sailboat metaphor into a structural assessment or protocol, it can be helpful to differentiate between different phases. Translating the sailboat metaphor into different phases means that each element of the sailboat becomes a unique step in the assessment sequence. Below, we provide a possible way to translate the sailboat metaphor into a structural assessment procedure by making a distinction between three different phases (see also Fig 5.1).

*Fig. 5.1. Summary of the three different assessment phases*



## ■ PHASE I: GLOBAL ASSESSMENT

The first phase can best be regarded as a general diagnostic measure of the status of the sailboat and its journey. This phase is a form of ‘meta-assessment’ that examines overarching psychological constructs, such as life satisfaction and meaning. Sample questions include: “In general, how happy is the client with his life?” or “In general, to what extent is life experienced as meaningful?”

## ■ PHASE II: ASSESSING THE STATUS OF THE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS

The second phase includes eight different steps. These steps are based on the previously described eight elements of the sailboat. In this second phase, the practitioner addresses the current status of the different elements. Simply put, he focusses on the “what” question, such as, What life domain needs the most attention? What are the values of the client? What are the strengths of the client? The core questions of this second phase are summarized in Table 5.1 below.

*Table 5.1. Core questions that are addressed in the second phase*

Sailboat element	Core question
water (life domains)	What are the most important domains in the client's life?
compass (feelings and emotions)	What kind of emotions and physical sensations does the client experience in this life domain?
steering wheel (values)	What are the values of the client in this life domain?
leak (weaknesses)	What is preventing the client from reaching his goals and living in line with his values?
sails (strengths)	What are the qualities of the client that allow him to reach his goals and deal with difficulties?
weather (events)	What are the positive and negative events that happened/are happening/ may happen in the future?
other boats (social relationships)	What does the social network of the client look like?
destination (goal)	What are the most important goals of the client?

## ■ PHASE III: ASSESSING THE CLIENT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS

In the third phase of the assessment, the practitioner addresses how the client relates to the different elements. In other words, the practitioner assesses the relationship of the captain with the different elements of the sailboat. Simply put, the second phase focusses on the “why” and “how” questions. Why does the client want to address this life domain? How does the client translate his values into action? How does the client relate to his emotions? How motivated is the client to reach his goals?

While the second phase is all about what the client wishes to change, the third phase is designed for the practitioner to examine the deeper psychological mechanisms behind these changes. This third phase allows the practitioner to develop a deeper understanding of the client's motives to make the desired change, of deeply ingrained beliefs and thinking patterns guiding the change, and of behavioral patterns that are present now and have been present in the past. Addressing these psychological mechanisms allows the practitioner to gain insight into the relationship the client has with himself.

The following key components are addressed in this third phase (see Fig. 5.2):

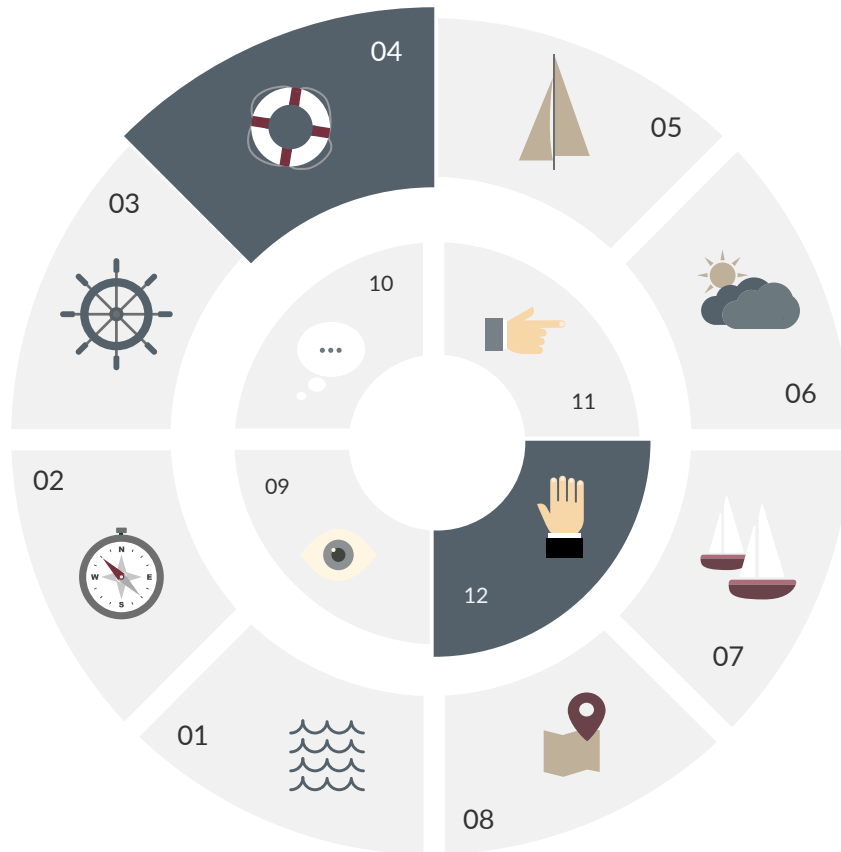
1. Attention: the amount and nature of the attention devoted to an element
2. Thoughts: the thoughts of the client about an element
3. Motivation: the motivational forces behind an element
4. Action: how an element has been manifested through the client's behavioral actions

### ► ATTENTION

Attention involves the process of focusing on a certain element. Two central components of attention include the amount of attention and the direction of attention. The amount simply means how much attention a certain element typically receives. For example, how much time does the client spend on the life domain ‘work’? How much attention is paid to goals? Does the client tend to reflect on his personal values or are they often neglected?

The direction of attention refers to the quality of attention. Is the client rigidly trying to force himself to focus on a certain element? Is the client able to narrow his attention when needed or is the client often distracted, doing multiple things at the same time? These questions all address the nature of attention, which has repeatedly been found to be a key predictor of well-being.

Fig. 5.2. Phase 3 of the assessment assesses the relationship of the captain with each of the eight elements of the sailboat. The illustration provides an example of a specific focus in the assessment procedure, namely the actions of the captain regarding the leak of the boat (how the client deals with weaknesses).



**Sailboat Elements**

- 01. Water - Life Domains
- 02. Compass - Feelings, Emotions
- 03. Steering Wheel - Values
- 04. Leak - Weaknesses
- 05. Sails - Strengths
- 06. Weather - Events
- 07. Other Boats - Social Relationships
- 08. Destinations - Goals



**Captain Elements**

- 09. Attention - Focus
- 10. Thoughts - Beliefs, Explanations
- 11. Motivation - Reasons, Needs
- 12. Action - Concrete Behavior



## ► THOUGHTS

The client's thoughts in this context include all mental constructs that guide his behavior consciously or unconsciously. Examples of thoughts include:

### **Beliefs**

A belief is a mental attitude or disposition that predetermines the client's responses to and interpretations of situations. Beliefs are habitual ways of thinking about something and (a) are not easily changed (stable), (b) are a matter of degree (held more or less weakly or strongly), (c) guide the goals and actions of the client, and (d) are habitually or tenaciously held in a manner that indicates a strong commitment to defend them [1]. Examples of beliefs are "I have what it takes to reach my goals," "no matter how hard you try, you cannot change how intelligent you are," or "asking other people for help is a sign of weakness."

Rigid beliefs have also been referred to as "rules" [2]. Rules are strong beliefs about how things should be. Due to their rigid nature, rules can have a significant effect on behavior and feelings. Examples of rules are: "I should work hard," "I should be kind to other people," "I should always be on time," "I must not show that I am afraid," etc. Although rules can help the client make choices and take action, they can also cause negative emotions, like shame and stress, when the client breaks them. It is important for the client to be able to use rules flexibly.

### **Evaluations**

Evaluations are assessments. An evaluation involves a judgment about the amount, number, or value of something. For instance, how does the client evaluate the quality of his or her relationships with others? Or, how satisfied is the client with the life domain 'work'? It is important to note that evaluations reflect the perceived rather than the actual value or status of something.

### **Explanations**

Explanations are self-constructed mental stories regarding the causality of events. Explanations may concern oneself, others, or life in general. Explanations typically include assumed cause and effect relationships ("I developed compulsive behavior because my parents were very controlling") and general attributions of other people's behavior ("If she would have done X, he would probably not have left her"). Mental explanations can be true, partly true/partly untrue, or false. An important part of many interventions is for the client to become aware of the difference between the stories he tells himself (consciously or unconsciously) and the facts.

## ► MOTIVATION

The motivation of the client addresses the ‘why’ of behavior. For example, “Why does the client want to address a certain life domain?,” “Why does the client wish to reach certain goals?,” “Why are certain values important to the client?” In other words, addressing the motivation of the client involves addressing the underlying reasons for his choices. Evaluating the motivation of the client is important because research has consistently demonstrated that people strive for different reasons, and the nature of the reason for striving strongly affects well-being. The key to healthy motivation is autonomy. Behavior can be guided by strong autonomous reasons (“I really like what I am doing” or “I sincerely believe it is important to reach this goal”) or by less autonomous reasons (“My partner wants me to do this” or “I fear that others will make fun of me if I don’t do this”). The former type of motivation is associated with positive outcomes in a wide variety of life domains, including relationships (e.g., [3]), work (e.g., [4]), religion (e.g., [5]), political behavior (e.g., [6]), and environmental practices [7].

Moreover, motivation is about needs. Needs are essential elements of growth. Examples of needs include the need for shelter, the need for connectedness with others, the need for freedom of speech, etc. Needs are an important source of human motivation. For instance, our need to belong motivates us to stay in touch with others, our need for autonomy motivates us to make our own choices, and so on. By assessing the client’s motivation for action and the needs underlying the motivation, the practitioner can increase the chance that the client’s desired changes will effectively promote well-being.

## ► ACTION

Action refers to the behavior of the client. To increase well-being, it is not enough to be aware of the elements of the sailboat and their current status. For well-being to increase, one needs to follow awareness with action and translate insights into concrete behavior. Ultimately, it is the captain of the boat who turns the steering wheel in order for his boat to sail in a more valuable direction; it is the captain who starts to collaborate with other boats to minimize the effect of his personal weaknesses.

During the assessment, the practitioner is encouraged to address the past, present, and future actions of the client. First, analyzing past actions provides insights into former patterns that have been proven to be helpful or unhelpful. Second, addressing present actions can shed light on positive and negative discrepancies regarding the client’s current and past actions. For instance,

comparing the client's past unhelpful behavior with the client's current behavior may reveal that positive change is already happening. Likewise, a comparison of past behavior with current behavior may reveal that past behavior was more effective in contributing to well-being. In either way, comparing past and present behavior can provide valuable insights into potential pathways for growth. Finally, by addressing desired future behavior, both the client and practitioner develop a clear view of the desired change in one or more of the elements. For example, what kind of behavior does the client display when he treats his "leaks" with more care and self-compassion? What kind of behavior does the client exhibit using the strength "creativity"? Translating abstract processes like "developing more self-compassion" or "developing strengths" into concrete future actions increases clarity and allows for more tangible results. It is important to note that the order in which the four elements of the second phase are being addressed can vary depending on the specific element of the sailboat that is addressed.



### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE THIRD PHASE OF ASSESSMENT

It is important to note that the third phase of assessment may shed new light on the client's desired changes. This deeper understanding of the client's behavior, thinking patterns, and underlying motives offers a valuable starting point for intervention. It is this third phase that allows the practitioner to help the client focus on the element that needs the most attention. For example, a client may wish to address the life domain 'physical appearance.' The main objective is to lose weight. Phase II can help shed light on the emotions the client experiences when confronted with his own body, the obstacles that prevent him from losing weight, and the strengths he possesses to make weight loss happen. If the practitioner does not proceed to phase III and simply helps the client lose weight, there is a reasonable chance that even when weight loss is achieved, the client's well-being is not structurally improved. Successfully losing weight may result in short-lived positive experiences. For instance, receiving compliments from others may result in pride, and being able to buy new clothes that were previously out of reach may give rise to feelings of joy and excitement.

However, when the client's desire to lose weight is driven by a lack of self-acceptance and a need to be "worthy" in the eyes of others, losing weight does not change anything about this deeply ingrained issue. Part of the real issue is that the client defines himself largely based on his appearance.

In this instance, over-identification with appearance is the primary motivation for change. Such over-identification causes compassionless self-criticism and negative emotions, like fear, shame, and regret, and triggers a constant need to compare oneself to others and receive their approval.

By not addressing the client's thoughts about "attractiveness" and "worthiness" and neglecting the fact that the client treats himself badly when he fails to lose weight, the intervention will unlikely have any long-term positive effects on well-being. In fact, focusing too closely on weight control may paradoxically cause the client to further strengthen his rigid beliefs about how important it is to look good and be attractive to others. This case example illustrates how important it is to include the third phase of the assessment, for it enables sustainable behavioral change at a more fundamental level. While the client may visit the practitioner to lose weight and expect a rigid pattern of self-control and dieting, the practitioner may decide to focus first on building a healthy relationship with the self and may even start by enhancing the client's level of self-acceptance first.

## ■ GENERAL ADVICE FOR USING THE METAPHOR

In this chapter, we discussed how to best approach the three assessment phases of the sailboat metaphor in a practical context, such as coaching or clinical work. Here, we discuss some general guidelines for using the metaphor in practice.

### ▶ ADOPTING A MODULAR APPROACH

Rather than moving through the three phases systematically by addressing one sailboat element before commencing another, we suggest a flexible approach whereby the different phases and elements are addressed idiosyncratically to align with the specific needs of the client. For instance, if the client's primary purpose for visiting a practitioner is to find out more about his strengths, the practitioner may decide to focus primarily on the sails of the sailboat and work from there. It is also often helpful to switch between the three phases of assessment. Depending on the current situation of the client, the practitioner may decide to 'zoom-out' and consider a meta-perspective on the client's life (phase 1) or 'zoom in' and

address the client's relationship with a specific element of the sailboat (phase 3). To summarize, in a practical context, it is recommended to use the sailboat metaphor in a flexible way by carefully choosing phase and element that require the client's attention most at a given moment.

### ► CHOOSING A TRANSLATION

It is important to note that combining captain elements with the sailboat elements in this manual is only one way of linking the two. For instance, here, we chose to translate the "thoughts" of the captain regarding the "leak" of his boat as the client's level of self-criticism when confronted with personal shortcomings. However, this relationship can be translated in many different ways. For example, one may also address this relationship by focusing on the client's beliefs about his shortcomings. It is beyond the scope of this book to address all possible relationship translations, and thus the exercises in this training guide can best be regarded as starting points. The practitioner is encouraged to look beyond the specific way the interaction between elements is addressed here and choose a translation that best fits the client's situation and needs.

### ► ADDRESSING FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

The sailboat metaphor can be used to review the past and current experiences of a client, but it may also serve as a valuable tool for addressing future aspirations. For instance, the metaphor can be used as a valuable starting point for intervention. A client may respond to questions like, What aspect of your boat has the highest priority at the moment? In an ideal world, what would your boat look like? What kind of destination would you like to reach with your boat?

### ► A STANDARD PART OF EVERY SESSION

It can also be valuable to introduce the sailboat metaphor as a standard part of every session. During every session, the helping professional may reserve some time to allow the client to talk about the current status of his sailboat. In this way, multi-dimensional self-reflection of the client is stimulated. In addition, updated information on the status of the client's sailboat can assist the helping professional to prioritize actions steps.

## ► THE INTERACTION BETWEEN ELEMENTS

In this handbook, the elements of the sailboat and the captain are addressed separately, without considering all the possible interactions between the different elements. For instance, the social network of the client may influence the way he deals with difficulties. Or, using the sailboat metaphor, the other boats can influence the captain's actions when confronted with bad weather circumstances. In support of this notion, research has found that when individuals suffering from rheumatoid arthritis were more satisfied with their social support, they had significantly more adaptive coping abilities compared to those unsatisfied with their social support networks, who were more prone to maladaptive coping [8]. These findings support the idea that the different elements of the sailboat and the captain do not operate in isolation but work together synergistically. The complex interaction between all the elements ultimately determines the overall status (well-being) of the boat.

## ► USING THE METAPHOR IN A GROUP CONTEXT

The sailboat metaphor can be used in a group context as well. Teams can be perceived as a fleet of boats that, in an ideal situation, sail in the same direction. In other words, the team members are on the same mission. Note, however, that this does not mean that all the boats are similar; it can be better to have different boats (that is, team members with different strengths) that can work together in a complementary way.

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**6**

# **WELL-BEING AND THE SAILBOAT METAPHOR**



## ■ KEY INGREDIENTS FOR WELL-BEING

In the previous chapter, the sailboat metaphor was introduced as an analogy for human functioning. The same metaphor can be used to understand what contributes to personal well-being. Some considerations are discussed below:

### ▶ ACTION

For well-being to increase, it is not enough just to be aware of the different elements of the sailboat metaphor. A person who becomes aware of the fact that his boat is sailing in a direction that does not promote personal well-being must act and turn the wheel in a valuable and adaptive direction to increase well-being. In other words, in addition to becoming aware of one's values, one must follow specific behavioral steps in order to benefit from this awareness. Likewise, it is not enough to look at the sails of the boat (element 5). One must also hoist the sails in order for them to catch the wind. Thus, to increase well-being, merely becoming aware of one's own strengths is not sufficient; in addition to (increased) awareness, behavioral and circumstantial changes that allow strengths to be used are required.

### ▶ BALANCE BETWEEN ELEMENTS

A balanced amount of attention to the different elements can be considered a fundamental condition for well-being. Too much focus on any component is unlikely to result in well-being. For instance, a client may focus too much on the destination of the boat (goals: element 8) and consequently fail to enjoy the view during his journey (positive emotions: element 2). Another client may focus too much on how the weather is out of his control (events: element 6) and experience learned helplessness (leak: element 4).

### ▶ CONSIDERING ALL ELEMENTS

Ignoring certain elements is likely to result in low levels of well-being. For instance, the destination of a boat (element 8) that is too strongly determined by the destination of other boats (element 7) may ignore its compass (element 2). Consequently, the boat lacks a sense of autonomy (steering wheel: element 4) and feels like outside elements are controlling it. A boat that ignores its sails (strengths: element 5) will have a hard time traveling through stormy weather (element 6) and may lack a sense of energy and enthusiasm (compass: element 2).

## ► CONTINUOUS ATTENTION

Each element of the boat metaphor requires ongoing attention. For example, even if a client manages to repair a leak and focus on strengths, the water will still create strong pressure on that leak; clients' weaknesses will be tested repeatedly. Therefore, it is not sufficient to temporarily repair or patch the leak. The client needs to consistently check the leak (reflect) and strengthen the repair (consciously work on weaknesses). Weaknesses do not simply vanish in a day; they typically require continuous attention. The same holds for the steering wheel of the boat. As stated previously, values are chosen actions that cannot be obtained like a goal but can be concretized from moment to moment. This means that valued living is an ongoing process that requires continuous attention.

Moreover, continuous attention is also the key to strength development. Through effort, challenging oneself, learning to deal with failure, and taking risks, the client can enhance his sails. By increasing the size of his sails, and learning how to effectively use these sails, the client forces more wind to hit the sails. Subsequently, the boat will become faster and stronger. In other words, continuous attention to one's strengths also increases their beneficial effects.

## ► FLEXIBILITY

Rather than perceiving the elements of the boat as static and using them to maintain one's current state, they should be considered as highly dynamic. One can always change the direction (values: element 3) and destination (goals: element 8) at any given moment. Likewise, the compass, the weather, and other boats are constantly changing. The importance of flexibility is perhaps most clearly illustrated by the sails (strengths: element 5) of the boat. The sails are dependent on external factors, like the weather (events: element 6). The wind may not blow in a direction for the sails to catch it. In this case, the captain must be flexible enough to change the direction of the boat, adjust the sails to catch the wind, or wait until the wind turns in a favorable direction again. In other words, optimal strength use requires careful consideration of the situation and context one is facing. Rather than just blindly using strength to its fullest degree, one must be able to flexibly interact with the environment.

## ■ SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

In scientific literature, the complex construct of well-being has been conceptualized in different ways. Two of the most common conceptualizations of well-being in the field of Positive Psychology are subjective well-being (SWB) and psychological well-being (PWB) [1]. Both constructs and their relationship with the sailboat are discussed in the following sections.

### ► SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING (SWB)

SWB refers to the evaluation of one's life [2]. These evaluations are both affective and cognitive. High levels of subjective well-being are experienced when people feel more pleasant and less unpleasant emotions, are more engaged in interesting activities, experience more pleasures and fewer pains, and are generally satisfied with life. SWB involves three components: life satisfaction (cognitive component), positive affect, and negative affect (affective components). In an informal context, SWB is often referred to as "happiness."

According to Diener [2], SWB involves three key concepts. First, the concept, like the term suggests, is about subjective experiences and thus resides within the individual. Second, it is not just the absence of negative factors but also the presence of positive factors. Third, rather than only a narrow assessment of one life domain, like for instance work or friends, it involves a global assessment of the individual's life.

### ► PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING (PWB)

While the terms subjective well-being (SWB) and psychological well-being (PWB) are often used interchangeably, they are derived from two separate traditions: hedonism and eudaimonism [3]. The SWB construct focusses on the hedonic aspect of well-being, which is the pursuit of happiness and pleasant life. The PWB construct, on the other hand, focusses on eudaimonic well-being, which is the fulfillment of human potential and meaningful life. PWB involves perceived thriving in the face of existing life challenges, such as pursuing meaningful goals, growing and developing as a person, and establishing quality ties with others [4,5]. In this view, well-being is the outcome of positive goal pursuits [6]. Using developmental, humanistic, and clinical psychological insights, Ryff [4] developed a model of PWB that includes six related yet distinct components:

- positive evaluation of oneself and one's past (self-acceptance)
- a sense of continued growth and development as a person (environmental mastery)
- the belief that one's life is purposeful and meaningful (purpose in life)
- quality relations with others (positive relations with others)
- the capacity to manage one's life and the surrounding world effectively (personal growth)
- a sense of self-determination (autonomy)

## ■ UNDERSTANDING SWB AND PWB IN TERMS OF THE SAILBOAT METAPHOR

The sailboat metaphor can be used to gain insight into the different factors that influence well-being. To understand both SWB and PWB, it is crucial to involve the captain of the sailboat. The captain of the sailboat represents the agent that is in charge of the boat and its course. It is the captain of the boat who interacts with the different components of his sailboat. Ultimately, he is the one who decides to steer the boat in a certain direction, hoist the sails, avoid dangerous storms, and the like. In sum, the captain is responsible for the level of well-being experienced. Table 6.1 and Table 6.2 show how both SWB and PWB can be translated into the sailboat metaphor.

*Table 6.1. Subjective well-being in reference to the sailboat metaphor*

subjective well-being dimension	optimal level of subjective well-being	optimal level of subjective well-being in terms of the sailboat metaphor
Cognitive evaluation of life	The client evaluates his life as positive; he is satisfied with life.	The captain of the sailboat is satisfied with the past and present journey of his sailboat.
Affective evaluation of life	The client experiences many pleasant emotions and relatively few unpleasant emotions.	The compass of the boat is often providing positive feedback and infrequently providing negative feedback.

Table 6.2 *Psychological well-being in terms of the sailboat metaphor*

psychological well-being dimension	optimal level of psychological well-being	optimal Level of psychological well-being in terms of the sailboat metaphor
Environmental Mastery	The client has both a sense of mastery and competence in controlling the environment; regulates external activities; makes effective use of opportunities; and develops or selects contexts that are most appropriate for personal needs and values.	The captain of the boat is able to cope with difficult weather, steer the boat in a direction that allows the sails to catch wind, and sail to areas that enable the boat to reach valuable destinations.
Personal Growth	The client has a sense of continuous improvement and growing; is ready for new ideas; understands his own ability and is conscious of self-advancement and behavior over time.	The captain feels that the journey of the boat contributes to the development of the boat; the sails may become bigger, the destinations may become clearer, and the ability to deal with difficult weather may improve.
Purpose in life	The client has a sense that both the present and the past have meaning.	The captain feels the current and past journeys of the boat were worth traveling.
Autonomy	The client shows a sense of self-determination and being independent; is able to counter social pressures.	The captain of the boat is sailing in a direction and reaching destinations that reflect personal wishes rather than those of the captains of other boats.

Self-Acceptance	The client not only has a positive attitude toward himself but accepts his good and bad qualities.	The captain has a positive attitude towards the boat; accepts the leaks and the sails of the boat.
Positive Relations with Others	The client has warm and trusting relationships with others; his interaction with others is characterized by empathy, affection, and intimacy.	The captain has warm and trusting relationships with the captains of other boats; his interaction with other captains is characterized by empathy, affection, and intimacy.

## ■ THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN SWB AND PWB

In this handbook, we focus on both SWB and PWB. Different tools to assess and increase SWB and PWB will be examined. Both types of well-being will be addressed because they are in fact strongly related. For instance, many methods and techniques that are incorporated in this handbook have been found to influence both SWB and PWB. Mindfulness, for instance, has been associated with both SWB [7,8,9] and PWB [10,11,12,13]. Moreover, specific dimensions of psychological well-being, such as self-acceptance [14,15], autonomy [16,17], positive relationships [18,19], and personal growth [20] have also been found to positively correlate with mindfulness. In other words, the many techniques and methods that are discussed in this book are likely to influence both SWB and PWB.

The second reason for addressing both types of well-being in this training is that the second wave movement of positive psychology is also concerned with the ‘darker side’ of life. As discussed previously, an important characteristic of this new perspective is that it embraces negative experiences and mental states and considers the growth that can result from them. Because PWB is concerned with thriving in the face of existing challenges of life, it is believed that addressing the core foundations of the second wave perspective is of particular value. The deepness that PWB adds to the human experience moves beyond ‘feeling good.’ The sense of autonomy and authenticity that emerges from valued actions and coping with difficulties is not some fleeting feeling but profound experience of meaning and self-efficacy. Individuals with high levels of PWB are likely to experience many

positive and pleasurable feelings as well as difficult and uncomfortable ones. Focusing on only SWB would undermine the very foundations of the second wave of positive psychology.

Finally, research findings suggest that the relationship between SWB and PWB is bi-directional. At first glance, SWB may seem to be the primary result of higher levels of PWB. For instance, a person who has positive relations with others and experiences a high level of autonomy is likely to experience positive feelings like joy, excitement, and so on. Research, however, has found that SWB can also influence PWB. Experiments have shown that induced positive mood leads to a higher purpose in life [21,22]. Moreover, receiving negative feedback from another participant caused participants to rate their lives as less meaningful compared to those who received neutral or positive feedback ([23], Study 1). In sum, components of PWB, like meaningful commitments and purpose in life, can promote opportunities for satisfaction and happiness. At the same time, positive affect can facilitate advanced cognitive functions and behavioral repertoires, thus fostering psychological growth and meaning-making [24].

It is important to note that scholars do not entirely agree on the conceptual distinction between SWB and PWB. Some argue that both concepts address distinct components of well-being [25]. Others stress the similarities between both constructs. In this view, SWB and PWB are not two separate concepts of well-being but reflect two different research traditions in that they are more similar than different from each other [26].

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