

The Sailboat Metaphor

Quickstart Guide



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The sailboat

Key aspects of human functioning





About

At the core of wellbeing lies the relationship that people have with themselves.

Many people look at themselves from a very limited perspective. The lens through which they view themselves often highlights weaknesses and limitations, focusing on conditions for being good enough and flaws to be corrected.

The Sailboat Metaphor offers people a different, more holistic lens to look at themselves. It highlights both the factors that reduce our wellbeing as well as those that allow us to flourish and grow.

The metaphor compares human functioning to a sailboat and its journey, addressing eight key elements of human functioning:

1. Life domains
2. Emotions
3. Values
4. Weaknesses
5. Strengths
6. Events
7. Social relationships
8. Goals

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 within ourselves and in our environment.



Water

Life domains

Life domains are the different areas of our daily environment. Our environment is divided into many different domains, including our job, relationship with our partner, friends, financial situation, and so on.

The Sailboat Metaphor

No boat moves in isolation from the water. Think of the water as the playground of life. Just as people interact with their environment, the boat interacts with the water. The boat moves through the water, just as we move through life.

In The Sailboat Metaphor, the different segments of water through which the sailboat moves represent the different life domains. These segments of water move along with the boat. Changing the course of the boat by steering to a different segment of water is comparable to switching between different life domains.

Core question

→ What are the most important domains in your life?

Importance

Knowing our most important life domains provides us with a wide range of options for finding valuable resources and solutions. For instance, the friendship domain may be a great source of support and inspiration during difficult times. Likewise, spending more time on leisure activities can be a powerful way to restore life balance when we overinvest in the work domain.

It is common to become overly focused on the life domain with which we are least satisfied. However, we can become so focused on trying to gain control over a certain problem that we devote no time to other meaningful life domains, such as friends and family. Moreover, focusing on only one life domain can cause us to form our self-identity predominantly around this domain (e.g., “I am a patient” or “I am a lawyer”). Expanding awareness to other life domains can help restore the balance between life domains and widen the scope of our self-definition.



Compass

Emotions

An emotion is a complex state, involving many different physical and mental processes simultaneously. Emotions serve as a tool for navigating and orienting. Both positive and negative emotions are signals that provide feedback as we navigate our life's journey; they serve as a valuable guide.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In the sailboat metaphor, emotions are represented by the compass of the boat. In the same way that emotions provide feedback about our current state, the compass provides feedback about the current state (position) of the boat.

Core question

→ What kinds of emotions do you experience?

Importance

Without feelings and emotions, we would lack important information about our interaction with our environment.

Negative emotions signal that our attention is required. They narrow our attention so that we can focus on threats, dangers, and other environmental issues. They provide important information about ourselves and other people. Guilt, for example, helps us understand the person we do not want to be. Anger shows where our boundaries are.

Positive experiences, such as joy, relaxation, and energy, signal wellbeing and inform us that we are on the right track. Moreover, positive emotions cause us to open up. We start to notice more in our environment, become more creative, and feel like taking action.



Steering wheel

Values

Values help us find what's important in life. Examples of values are creativity, diversity, and friendship. When we live according to our true values, we feel an accompanying sense that we are 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. Values represent an ongoing direction and can never be accomplished. For instance, we can accomplish the goal of “buying a new piano” but never accomplish the value of “creativity.” The latter involves an ongoing process of investment.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In The Sailboat Metaphor, the steering wheel represents personal values. Just like the steering wheel determines the direction of the boat, personal values determine the direction of our life.

Core question

→ What are your values?

Importance

Values remind us of the person we want to be. Focusing on values helps us clearly understand what matters most to us. Insight into our values can help us to make choices and (re)gain a sense of meaning and purpose in life.

Values also provide a fruitful starting point for setting goals. When our goals reflect our values, they are more likely to increase commitment and increase our wellbeing once accomplished.



Leaks

Weaknesses

A weakness is a personal characteristic that reduces wellbeing. Weaknesses interfere with our ability to live in line with our values, reach goals, and bounce back from difficulty. Examples of weaknesses include fatigue, worrying, and always trying to please other people.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In The Sailboat Metaphor, weaknesses are represented by leaks in the boat. In the same way that a weakness is a person's vulnerability, a leak can be regarded as the boat's vulnerability. A leak in the boat can affect the boat's journey in numerous ways. A leak may prevent the boat from sailing in personally valued directions or slow the boat down so that important destinations are not reached on time, or at all. If an individual does not take care of their personal weaknesses, their wellbeing will likely decline. In a similar vein, if the captain does not take care of the boat's leaks, the boat may sink.

Core question

→ What weaknesses reduce your wellbeing?

Importance

If we do not take care of our weaknesses, our wellbeing will likely decline. At the very extreme, neglected weaknesses can result in illness or even death (e.g., anorexia nervosa, suicide, reckless driving, etc.).

The effect of weaknesses on wellbeing is determined by their intensity and duration. The more intense the weakness is, the stronger immediate impact it has on thoughts, feelings, and behavior. While some weaknesses reflect only a minor drop in wellbeing, others are characterized by a major decline in wellbeing. For example, drinking a little too much wine may result in a mild headache; drinking large amounts of wine may lead to alcohol poisoning.

While some weaknesses are more acute, lasting minutes or hours, other weaknesses persist for days, weeks, months, or even years. The longer the duration, the more negative the impact of the weakness will be. For example, the negative impact of having anxious thoughts for one hour is far less than having such anxious thoughts for months.



Sails

Strengths

Strengths are things we are naturally good at. For instance, we might be naturally creative, particularly generous with our time, or persevere when things get tough. When we use our strengths, we feel energized and engaged. Strengths are personal characteristics that allow us to flourish in life.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In The Sailboat Metaphor, strengths are represented by the sails of the boat. Without sails, the boat would drift 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 worth traveling. A person using their strengths feels energized and engaged, like a boat sailing at full speed with the wind in its sails.

Core question

→ What are your personal strengths?

Importance

Using your strengths is important for many reasons. In general, using strengths has been found to be associated with higher levels of wellbeing. When we use our strengths, we feel good. We feel energized, engaged, and experience a sense of effortless creation.

Moreover, in the context of work, people who use their strengths more often report higher levels of work engagement, productivity, and job satisfaction.



Weather

Events

Positive and negative events are an inevitable part of life. They vary in duration, intensity, and controllability.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In The Sailboat Metaphor, life events are represented by the weather. Just like the weather, events in life are external and constantly changing. Moreover, events in life can be just as challenging as the weather. Sometimes, the captain faces storms and heavy rain that make it very difficult to sail. Other times, the sun is shining and the sea is quiet, making it relatively easy for the captain to navigate and enjoy the journey. Similarly, positive life events are relatively easy to cope with and often contribute to positive feelings.

Core question

→ What events happened, are happening, or may happen?

Importance

Both positive and negative events influence wellbeing and mental health. For example, daily positive events are negatively associated with depressive symptoms and positively associated with daily self-esteem and perceived control. In contrast, experiencing more stressful life events predicts greater psychological problems.

Both positive and negative life events allow us to become more resilient. Negative life events offer us opportunities to learn how to deal with them. By overcoming difficult events, we strengthen the important belief that we are strong enough to deal with life's challenges. Moreover, the positive emotions that result from positive life events act as a buffer against the stress we experience during negative events.



Other boats

Social relationships

In general, a distinction can be made between positive and negative social relationships. Positive social relationships have been argued to be the most important source of life satisfaction and wellbeing. According to Diener and Seligman (2002, p. 83), “very happy people have rich and satisfying social relationships and spend little time alone relative to average people.” In contrast, negative social relationships can have a detrimental impact on wellbeing. These relationships are characterized by conflict, lack of support, and negative emotions.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In The Sailboat Metaphor, social relationships are represented by other captains and their boats. During a captain’s journey, the water is shared with numerous other captains and their boats. Some of these boats may pass the captain’s boat for just a short time, while others may travel alongside the boat for many miles. With some captains, the captain has a positive, constructive relationship. These captains greatly contribute to the pleasantness of their journey and offer them support during difficult weather circumstances. In contrast, the captain may have a troublesome relationship with other captains. These captains prevent the captain from sailing in a valued direction.

Core questions

- What does your social network look like?
- Who are the positive social relationships in your network?
- How do the people in your positive network contribute to your wellbeing?
- Who are the negative social relationships in your network?
- How do the people in your negative network reduce your wellbeing?

Importance

Interacting with others can enhance wellbeing in numerous ways. For example, other captains can help us to realize our aspirations, serve as a source of inspiration, and offer support in difficult times. Spending time with those in our positive social network results in positive emotions and helps us to meet our innate need for relatedness.

Social relationships can also be a major source of distress and misery. Negative social relationships are characterized by conflict and negativity. They are associated with a variety of negative emotions, a lack of (or unhealthy/unhelpful) support, and hindrance of goal achievement.



Destinations

Goals

A goal is a mental image of a future scenario that you aim to achieve or avoid. Not all goals are the same. For example, while some goals can be reached relatively quickly, others take months or even years to be completed. Some goals are focused on moving toward a desired outcome; others are focused on moving away from an undesired outcome. Some goals have a clearly defined end state; others are vague about what exactly is needed to achieve them.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In The Sailboat Metaphor, goals are represented by the destinations to which the captain wants to travel. People can accomplish goals, just like the captain can reach destinations.

Core questions

- What are your goals?
- What do you aim to achieve?
- What do you aim to avoid?
- What are your long-term and short-term goals?
- How clearly defined is the end state of your goals?
- Once achieved, do your goals require additional action or not?

Importance

Goals help us to perform and develop ourselves via three key mechanisms. First, goals help us to focus. They direct attention and effort toward goal-relevant activities and away from goal-irrelevant activities.

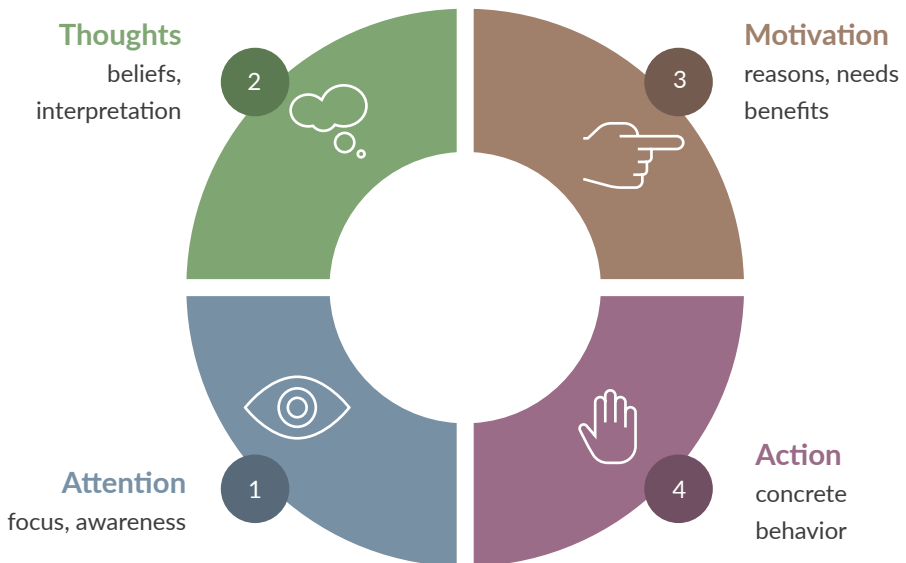
Second, goals have an energizing function. Setting a goal creates a sense of urgency, motivating us to make an effort to reduce the discrepancy between our current state and the desired goal state. In addition, goals can energize us; the self-confidence acquired by reaching them fuels motivation to continue pursuing new goals.

Third, goals increase learning. When we start to pursue a goal, we gain new insights, gather novel information, and learn to apply new strategies.



The captain

The individual





About

The eight elements of the sailboat all represent key aspects of human functioning. It is important to note that these key aspects influence the wellbeing of the individual but do not define them.

The best way to define the individual in The Sailboat Metaphor is by comparing them to the captain of the boat. Rather than being a leak in the boat, the individual is the captain, who can become aware of this leak and do something about it. Nor is the individual defined by destinations they reach; instead, they are the captain who chooses to pursue these destinations in the first place. The individual is not the direction of the boat, but the one who turns the steering wheel in that direction.

The quality of our life depends on our relationships with the eight key aspects of wellbeing, just as the quality of the captain's journey is determined by their interaction with the eight elements of the sailboat.

Therefore, it is important to not only address the eight different components of the sailboat, but also identify the captain's relationships with 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.



Attention


Attention is the concentration of awareness on something to the exclusion of something else. Attention is a matter of focus. Attention helps us to become aware of things.

In The Sailboat Metaphor, attention involves the captain focusing on a certain element of the boat. For example, the captain may pay attention to the compass of the boat. In the same way this attention results in awareness of the compass, our ability to pay attention to emotions results in awareness of these emotions.

Two central components of attention are:

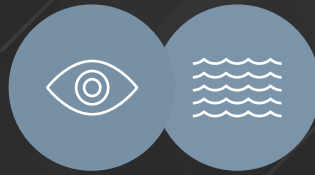
Amount of attention

The amount of attention simply means how much attention we pay to something. For example, someone who devotes a lot of attention to their strengths is like a captain who devotes a lot of attention to the sails of the boat. Someone who pays little attention to personal values is like a captain who does not pay a lot of attention to the steering wheel of the boat.



Quality of attention

The quality of attention refers to the way we pay attention to something. The key question here is: *how* are we attending to something? For example, our attention may be fragmented because we are often distracted by other things. Alternatively, our attention may be very rigid, tense, and overly focused. Or, we may find ourselves paying attention in a relaxed yet concentrated way.



Attention – Water

Life balance

Life balance means we experience a harmonious blend of the different life domains. In contrast, a lack of life balance means we devote more attention to one or more life domains at the expense of others. A common life domain that many of us tend to devote too much attention to is work.

Life balance is a matter of paying attention. To have a balanced life, we must divide our attention between the various important life domains.

The Sailboat Metaphor

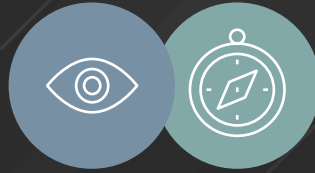
A person who can maintain life balance is like a captain who mindfully divides their attention, sailing through different parts of the water. In contrast, a person without a balanced life can be compared to a captain who constantly sails in only one specific part of the water and neglects surrounding regions during their journey.

Core questions

- How well can you divide your attention between different life domains?
- Which life domains receive too much attention?
- Which life domains receive too little attention?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Balanced attention**
You divide your attention between different life domains.
- ✓ **Awareness of investment**
You know when you are paying too much/little attention to a given life domain.
- ✓ **Variety**
Your ability to invest in different life domains allows you to experience enough variety in life.



Attention – Compass

Emotional awareness

If you have a high level of emotional awareness, you are in touch with your emotions. You know which emotions are present at any given moment.

The Sailboat Metaphor

Emotional awareness results from our ability to pay attention to our emotions. In The Sailboat Metaphor, emotional awareness is represented by the captain's attention to the compass.

A high level of emotional awareness is represented by the captain's ability to check the compass regularly during the journey. This allows the captain to make the most use of the compass's feedback during the journey.

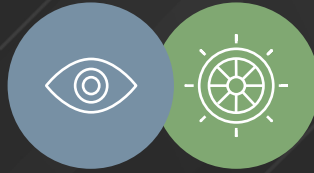
A captain who does not pay enough attention to the compass is likely to feel lost during the journey. In a similar vein, people who are unable to connect to their emotions miss the inner guide that provides invaluable information about the comings and goings of the outer world.

Core questions

- How aware are you of your emotions, including the thoughts, bodily sensations, and action tendencies that accompany them?
- Can you allow both positive and negative emotions to be present?
- How well can you translate your feelings into words?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Awareness of emotional experiences**
You can tune in to what you are experiencing emotionally. You notice how your body reacts, which thoughts come up, and what you are most inclined to do.
- ✓ **Willingness to experience**
You are willing to experience and welcome all emotions, including difficult ones.
- ✓ **Verbalizing experiences**
You can accurately describe how you are feeling and find the right words to inform others what goes on emotionally.



Attention – Steering wheel

Awareness of values

At the heart of value awareness lies the question: “How aware am I of my personal values?” When you are aware of your personal values, you know what you deem important in life. In terms of The Sailboat Metaphor, value awareness is represented by the captain’s attention to the steering wheel.

The Sailboat Metaphor

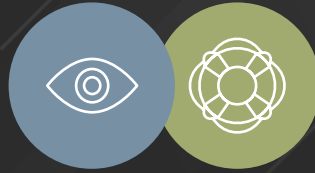
When you pay attention to your values, you also regularly check whether your actions still align with your values. You are like a captain who regularly checks the general course of the boat. Is the boat still sailing in a meaningful direction? Is it following a course that the captain perceives as valuable and worthwhile?

Core questions

- Deep down, are you aware of what is important to you?
- Do you know what you want your life to stand for?
- Are you aware of the qualities you want to cultivate as a person?
- How often do you reflect on whether your actions align with your values?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Purposefulness, enthusiasm**
You experience interest or enthusiasm for life's activities.
- ✓ **Commitment**
You can stick with goals and commitments.
- ✓ **Critical thinking**
You can form an opinion and make independent decisions.
- ✓ **Satisfying decisions**
Your choices result in satisfying outcomes for yourself and others.



Attention – Leaks

Awareness of weaknesses

Well-being emerges from balanced attention to personal weaknesses. Devoting too little attention to weaknesses prevents you from dealing with and learning from them. Moreover, it creates an unrealistic, overly positive view of yourself.

Devoting too much attention to weaknesses, however, may result in an overly negative view of yourself, resulting in feelings of helplessness and depression.

Balanced attention means that we maintain an open attitude toward both positive and negative information about ourselves.

The Sailboat Metaphor

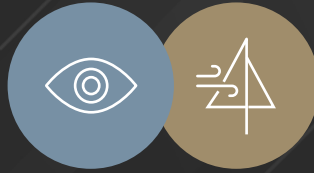
A person who attends to weaknesses in a balanced way is like a captain who is willing to consider both the leaks and the sails of their boat equally.

Core questions

- How willing are you to acknowledge your weaknesses?
- How much attention do you pay to your weaknesses as compared to your strengths?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Honest self-reflection**
You pay equal attention to both personal weaknesses and strengths.
- ✓ **Non-defensiveness**
You approach information about personal weaknesses in an open and non-defensive way.
- ✓ **Stable self-view**
A confrontation with your weaknesses does not result in a drop of self-esteem, in the same way that a confrontation with your strengths does not result in feelings of superiority.



Attention – Sails

Awareness of strengths

Awareness of your personal strengths allows you to make the most of them. Without self-examination and reflection, your strengths are likely to remain untapped.

Arguably, the most powerful way to increase awareness of your strengths is to regularly pay attention to signs of strength use. The expression of a strength is reflected in thoughts, feelings, and behavior. For example, someone who is expressing their creativity strength by writing a novel may notice thoughts like, “I could do this forever,” feelings of engagement and passion, and behavior characterized by concentration and high performance.

The Sailboat Metaphor

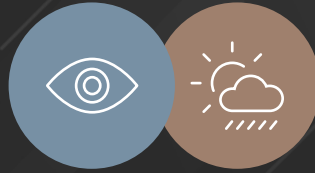
Awareness of strengths is represented in The Sailboat Metaphor by the captain's attention to the sails of the boat. How much attention does the captain pay to the sails of the boat? Is the captain aware of the size, position, and potential of their sails?

Core questions

- How often do you pay attention to your strengths?
- What kind of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are present when you are using your strengths?
- How well can you label your strengths?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Clear idea of personal strengths**
You know what your most important strengths are and can easily label and explain them.
- ✓ **Awareness of feelings, thoughts, and actions**
You are aware of how you feel, think, and act when you are using a particular strength.
- ✓ **Strength lens**
You can look at yourself and others through a strength lens. It's easy for you to become aware of when you or others are using a strength.
- ✓ **Monitoring strength use**
You regularly pay attention to your strengths. You are aware of situations that allow you to use your strengths and notice when your strengths remain untapped for too long.



Attention – Weather

Attention to positive and negative events

Although we often have little control over the occurrence of positive and negative events in our life, we do have control over how much attention we devote to these events.

People who focus excessively on negative events show lower levels of wellbeing. For example, people diagnosed with depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder pay more attention to negative events relative to positive or neutral events.

In general, it is helpful to focus on positive events. However, focusing on positive events as a way to avoid or suppress difficult feelings is a sign of unhelpful emotion regulation and linked with lower levels of wellbeing.

The Sailboat Metaphor

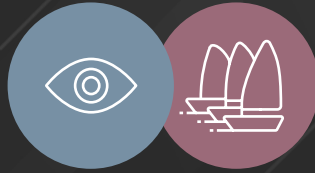
In The Sailboat Metaphor, attention to positive and negative events is represented by the amount of attention the captain devotes to good and bad weather. What grabs the most attention from the captain during their journey? Is it a cloudy sky ahead, raindrops falling, dark clouds blocking the sun, or rays of light passing through the clouds, a refreshing breeze, and a beautiful rainbow?

Core questions

- How much attention do you pay to positive events in your life?
- How much attention do you pay to negative events in your life?
- How well can you pay attention to the positive in challenging times?
- Are you using a focus on positive events as a way to avoid or suppress difficult feelings?

Positive signs

- ✓ **General ability to notice the positive**
In daily life, you can notice positive events, no matter how small or insignificant these events may seem.
- ✓ **Preventing an excessively negative focus**
When confronted with negative events, you remain mindful of the positive and prevent yourself from getting stuck in an exclusively negative focus.
- ✓ **No misuse of a positive focus**
Your focus on positive events is not a way to avoid or suppress feelings resulting from exposure to negative life events.



Attention – Other boats

Attention to social relationships

Having a social network is not enough. To reap the benefits from our social connections, we have to deliberately pay attention to them. Arguably, the importance of devoting attention to social relationships is most convincingly demonstrated by research showing the detrimental effects of social isolation. Some scholars have argued that the health risks associated with social isolation are comparable to the well-known dangers of smoking cigarettes and obesity.

The Sailboat Metaphor

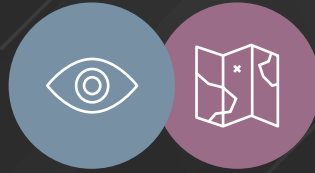
Attention to social relationships is represented by the captain's attention to other captains and their boats in The Sailboat Metaphor. Is the captain a lonely sailor traveling most parts of their journey alone, or are they devoting ample attention to other sailors? How often does the captain stop to meet and interact with other captains?

Core questions

- How much attention do you devote to social relationships?
- How lonely do you feel in general?
- Which relationships would you like to pay more attention to?
- Which relationships would you like to pay less attention to?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Attention to positive social ties**
You devote enough attention to the people in your positive social network to make sure that these valuable relationships remain alive.
- ✓ **Feelings of connectedness**
You feel connected to others and rarely experience feelings of loneliness.
- ✓ **Manageable number of social ties**
The size of your social network is large enough to prevent feelings of isolation and small enough to devote enough attention to.



Attention – Destinations

Attention to goals

Paying attention to goals is fundamental to wellbeing. Without attention to goals, you would wander through life aimlessly. Moreover, for goals to be reached, you must pay attention to whether and how much you are making progress.

Too much attention to goals, however, will negatively influence your wellbeing. When you are mostly focused on the future, you become unable to enjoy the present moment. This is associated with workaholism, neglecting friends and family, not taking time for occasional self-indulgence, and not having time for hobbies.

Balanced attention to goals and the present moment is key for wellbeing. This means you can switch your attention between the present and the future.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In The Sailboat Metaphor, attention to goals is represented by the captain's attention to the destination of their boat. How much of the captain's attention is devoted to that final marker on the horizon? Does the captain pay little attention to where they want to sail, or are they constantly looking ahead, sailing with only one thing in mind: reaching a destination?

Core questions

- How much attention do you pay to your goals?
- How often do you check the progress toward your goals?
- How well can you both enjoy the present moment and focus on goals?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Attention to goals**
Because you are aware of your goals, you have a clear vision of what you want to accomplish in life.
- ✓ **Progress monitoring**
From time to time, you reflect on the progress you are making toward your goals, ensuring that your current actions will help you to reach them.
- ✓ **Balanced attention**
Because you can switch your attention between the future and the now, you can both enjoy the present moment and realize your dreams.



Thoughts

Thoughts are mental constructs. They are mind-made stories that guide our behavior, consciously or unconsciously. Three important types of thoughts include:

Beliefs

A belief is the thought of being sure that someone or something exists or that something is true. Examples of beliefs are, “I have what it takes to reach my goals” and “Asking other people for help is a sign of weakness.” Our beliefs greatly influence how we interpret situations and respond to them. Often, beliefs are difficult to change.

Evaluations

Evaluations are judgmental thoughts. When we evaluate, we determine the status, value, or significance of something. For example, “I am very satisfied with my relationship with my spouse.”

Explanations

Explanations are thoughts about why and how things are the way they are. Explanations may concern ourselves, others, or life in general; for example, “I developed compulsive behavior because my parents were very controlling” and “If she would have done X, he probably would not have left her.”



Thoughts – Water

Life domain satisfaction

Life domain satisfaction refers to how favorably we evaluate one particular life domain, such as family or health. When we are satisfied with a life domain, we feel that the conditions in this domain are what we want and need.

It is important to note that life events do not influence our general satisfaction with life directly, but rather influence specific life domains. A fight with a colleague, for example, may not directly cause you to become generally more dissatisfied with life, but will probably influence your satisfaction with the work domain.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In The Sailboat Metaphor, life domain satisfaction is represented by the evaluative thoughts of the captain while sailing on a particular area of the sea. How much is the captain enjoying traveling through this particular area of the sea?

Core questions

- How satisfied are you with life domain X?
- To what extent is life domain X what you want and expect it to be?
- How well does life domain X fulfill the needs that you associate with it?

Positive signs

- ✓ **High satisfaction**
Overall, there is little to nothing you want to change in life domain X.
- ✓ **Expectations are met**
You feel that the conditions in life domain X are what you want and expect.
- ✓ **Need satisfaction**
You feel that the conditions in life domain X help you to fulfill certain needs, such as autonomy and relatedness.



Thoughts – Compass

Beliefs about emotions

We all have beliefs about emotions. Although we are often unaware of these beliefs, they strongly influence how we deal with emotions.

First, people hold beliefs about the acceptability of emotions. For example, we may believe that experiencing and expressing negative feelings is not okay. Second, people hold beliefs about the changeability of emotions. For example, we may believe that no matter how hard we try, we cannot really change our emotions.

The Sailboat Metaphor

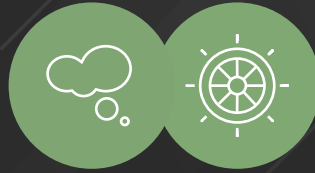
In The Sailboat Metaphor, the way we think about our emotions is represented by the captain's thoughts about the compass. What kinds of thoughts does the captain have about feedback from the compass?

Core questions

- What kinds of beliefs do you have about emotions in general?
- Do you believe that experiencing and expressing difficult emotions is okay?
- Do you believe that you can change your emotions?
- Do you hold beliefs about emotions that stop you from dealing with them?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Believing all emotions are acceptable**
You believe that experiencing and expressing difficult emotions is okay.
- ✓ **Willingness to experience all emotions**
Because you believe that having difficult emotions is okay, you allow yourself to feel them.
- ✓ **Believing emotions are changeable**
You believe that there are actions you can take to change your emotions.
- ✓ **Active way of dealing with emotions**
Because you believe you can change your emotions, you take action when required.



Thoughts – Steering wheel

Beliefs about values

Values should function as helpful guidelines. However, rigid beliefs about values can turn them from guidelines into obligations. When this happens, values lose their power to help us on our journey. They become norms that we must adhere to at all times.

An example of a rigid belief about the value of family could be: “I must always be there for my kids.” Aside from greatly reducing our freedom, rigid beliefs are likely to result in emotions such as guilt, because it is simply impossible to always live up to them.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In The Sailboat Metaphor, rigid beliefs about values are represented by the captain who thinks of the general direction of their boat as something from which they cannot divert. Consequently, the captain holds the steering wheel very tightly, making sure that the boat will not sail in any other direction than the intended one. They can't flexibly adjust the course of the boat when needed and feel a lot of pressure to stay on track.

Core questions

- How rigid are your beliefs about your values?
- How often do you think of your values in an all-or-nothing way?
- To what extent do you think about your values as a standard or norm to which you must always adhere?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Flexible adjustment of values**
You can change or let go of values when they no longer serve you.
- ✓ **Using values as a guide rather than a rule**
You understand that you cannot always live in line with your values.
- ✓ **Awareness of emotional consequences**
You are aware of how your (rigid) thoughts about your values influence your emotions and feelings about yourself.



Thoughts – Leaks

Self-evaluation

Self-acceptance means we accept ourselves despite our weaknesses. The thoughts we have about our weaknesses reflect the extent to which we accept ourselves.

People with low self-acceptance evaluate themselves using conditions for being “worthy” or “good enough.” They believe that their weaknesses prove that they have failed to reach these conditions. In contrast, people who unconditionally accept themselves do not base their self-worth on any particular condition. They believe that their weaknesses are irrelevant to their worth as human beings.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In The Sailboat Metaphor, the way people think about their weaknesses is represented by the captain’s thoughts about leaks in the boat. What kinds of thoughts does the captain have about the leaks in their boat? How does the captain evaluate these leaks? Do they feel that the leaks in the boat prove that they are not worthy of being a sailor? Or does the captain believe that having leaks is a part of every captain’s journey?

Core questions

- What kinds of thoughts do you have about your weaknesses?
- To what extent do you believe your weaknesses prove that you are not “good enough”?
- What do the thoughts about your weaknesses tell you about your personal standards for being “good enough”?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Unconditional self-acceptance**
You believe your weaknesses are unrelated to your worth as a human being. You believe that you are enough and that weaknesses do not mean you are unworthy of love.
- ✓ **Evaluation of weaknesses**
You evaluate your weaknesses rather than the self as a whole.
- ✓ **Growth mindset**
You believe that weaknesses are aspects of yourself you can improve, rather than proof of unworthiness.



Thoughts – Sails

Implicit theories about strengths

People differ in the way they think about their strengths.

People with a fixed mindset hold beliefs that hinder the development of strengths. When you have this mindset, you believe that no amount of time or effort could change your strengths. Consequently, you are unlikely to put effort in developing your strengths and will consider setbacks as proof that a certain strength is not (sufficiently) present.

People with a growth mindset have beliefs that promote the development of strengths. They believe you can develop your strengths by investing work and time. When you have this mindset, you cultivate your strengths through effort and view setbacks in an area of strength as proof that the strength can be developed more.

The Sailboat Metaphor

The way people think about their strengths is represented in The Sailboat Metaphor by the captain's thoughts about the sails of their boat. What kinds of beliefs does the captain hold regarding the sails of their boat? Does the captain believe that investing time and effort will render them better able to use the sails of their boat? Or do they believe that their sails will promote a prosperous journey regardless of time investment and effort?

Core questions

- What kinds of beliefs do you hold about your strengths?
- To what extent do you believe your strengths can be developed through the investment of time and effort?
- What kinds of thoughts emerge when you experience setbacks in an area of strength?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Investment**
Because you believe that you can develop your strengths, you invest time and effort in doing so.
- ✓ **Persistence**
You persist when you experience setbacks in an area of strength because you think of setbacks as opportunities for improvement.
- ✓ **Process oriented**
You are more likely to be interested in the process of learning and developing strengths instead of achieving a particular outcome, such as gaining approval from others.



Thoughts – Weather

Beliefs about positive and negative events

The impact events have on wellbeing is largely shaped by the way we think about those events. When you perceive an upcoming stressful life event as a threat, you are likely to experience fear. In contrast, when you see the event as an opportunity for growth, you may feel positively challenged.

Likewise, when you evaluate a past stressful event and believe that there were benefits and important lessons learned, the event will have less of a negative impact on your wellbeing than if you believe this event offered nothing but negativity.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In The Sailboat Metaphor, the beliefs people have about life events are represented by the thoughts of the captain about the weather. For example, does the captain believe that bad weather conditions are only temporary, or do they believe that they will last forever? Does the captain perceive bad weather as an opportunity to enhance their sailing skills or as a threat to their journey? Does the captain believe that good weather circumstances are scarce or that they will occur often during the journey?

Core questions

- Do you think of difficult life events as challenges or threats?
- Can you see the positive effects that emerged from past stressful events?
- How do you explain the causes of positive life events? Do you believe the cause will remain stable over time or across situations? Do you believe the positivity will last? Do you believe you were responsible for the event?
- How do you explain the causes of negative life events? Do you believe the cause will remain stable over time or across situations? Do you believe the negativity will last? Do you believe you were responsible for the event?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Thinking of stressful events as challenges**
In general, you see stressful life events as challenges. You believe you have what it takes to deal with them and can learn and grow from these experiences.
- ✓ **Benefit finding**
You can look beyond the negative and think of a past stressful event in terms of the positive effects that emerged from it.
- ✓ **Optimism**
You believe the cause of positive events will remain stable over time or across situations, whereas the cause for negative events will vary. You believe positivity will last and negativity will pass. You believe you are mainly responsible for positive events and less responsible for negative events.



Thoughts – Other boats

Perceived quality of relationships

Without addressing your thoughts about the quality of your social network, the actual details of your network may not reveal much about your wellbeing. For example, although you may have an objectively small number of social ties, you may not think about this number as small and may not feel lonely at all. In contrast, even with a large number of social connections, you may still think of your network as insufficient and experience feelings of loneliness.

Likewise, although you may have a large number of people in your network who will offer you support, you may think that no support is available to you. Or conversely, you may believe that support is available when, in fact, it is not. As counterintuitive as it may appear, having positive beliefs about support is more predictive of wellbeing than actual support.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In The Sailboat Metaphor, beliefs about your social network are represented by the captain's thoughts about other captains. What does the captain think about their connection with other captains? Do they believe their network is large enough? Do they believe there will be enough support available when the journey gets tough?

Core questions

- How would you evaluate the quality of your social network?
- Regardless of the size of your network, how connected do you believe you are?
- To what extent do you believe that social support is available?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Positive network evaluation**
You are satisfied with the number and quality of your social relationships.
- ✓ **Positive beliefs about support**
You believe that in difficult times, there will be enough people in your network to offer you support.
- ✓ **Recall of helpful support**
It is easy for you to recall helpful support you received in the past.



Thoughts – Destinations

Outcome expectations

The beliefs you have about your goals strongly influence the successful attainment of those goals. For example, when you believe you possess the skills and abilities to accomplish a goal, this confidence will cause you to be committed, set challenging goals, and increase your chances of reaching this goal.

Moreover, when obstacles on the journey toward your goal arise, believing that you are capable of finding alternative routes will instill hope and make you more likely to overcome these obstacles.

The Sailboat Metaphor

The beliefs that you have about your goals are represented by the captain's thoughts regarding their destinations in The Sailboat Metaphor. Does the captain believe that they are capable of successfully reaching their desired destinations? Does the captain believe they can set the routes to sail to their intended destination?

Core questions

- To what extent do you believe you can carry out what is necessary to realize your goals?
- How confident are you that you will find alternative ways to reach your goals when obstacles arise?
- Which thoughts are helpful on your journey toward your goals? Which are less helpful?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Self-efficacy**
You believe you have what it takes to realize your goals.
- ✓ **Hope**
You believe that when obstacles arise, you will find alternative ways to realize your goals.
- ✓ **Helpful thoughts**
Your thoughts help you continue when facing setbacks, forgive yourself for mistakes, and remind you of the importance of your goals.



Motivation

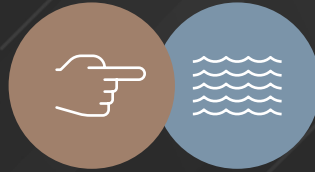
Motivation involves the ‘why’ of our choices. For example, “Why do I wish to reach this goal?” or “Why is it important for me to stay in touch with this person?” To understand the impact of motivation on our wellbeing, it is important to consider two key ingredients of motivation:

Autonomy

The more autonomous our motivation is, the more it reflects our values and interests. Higher levels of autonomous motivation can be summarized as “want to,” and lower levels, as “have to.” In general, higher levels of autonomous motivation have a more positive impact on wellbeing than lower levels.

Needs

A need is something necessary for you to live a healthy and happy life. Examples of needs include rest, safety, and autonomy. Needs are an important source of motivation. For example, our need to belong motivates us to stay in touch with others. Likewise, our need for rest motivates us to take a day off. Becoming aware of our needs helps us to better understand the ‘why’ of our choices.



Motivation – Water

Need satisfaction

All human beings have needs, such as companionship, relatedness, trust, and autonomy.

Most life domains are organized around needs. For example, the leisure life domain typically involves activities related to the need for social connectedness, aesthetics, and creativity. The health domain may involve activities related to biological and safety needs.

The Sailboat Metaphor

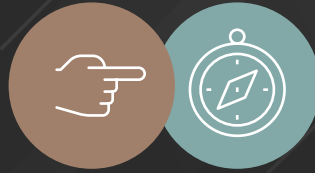
We are motivated to fulfill our needs, and the more successful we are in doing so, the more satisfied we are with our lives. In The Sailboat Metaphor, this motivational process is represented by the link between the captain's motivation and the water. In the same way people are motivated to meet their needs through their actions in different life domains, the captain is motivated to meet their needs by sailing through different areas of the water.

Core questions

- What are the most important needs you seek to satisfy in life domain X?
- Which needs are currently satisfied in life domain X?
- Which needs are not currently satisfied in life domain X?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Need satisfaction**
Your actions in life domain X help you to satisfy your most important needs in this domain.
- ✓ **Sufficient life domains**
Not all your needs can be satisfied in a single life domain. There are enough life domains in your life to meet all of your needs.
- ✓ **Taking action**
You take action when you feel certain needs are thwarted in life domain X.



Motivation – Compass

Emotional knowledge

Emotions motivate us to behave in a certain way. For example, anger may motivate us to be aggressive, whereas shame often motivates us to socially withdraw.

To understand the motivational force behind emotions, we must treat emotions as data. Emotions tell whether our needs are met. For example, feelings of exclusion may inform you that your need for connection is not being met. This, in turn, motivates you to call a friend.

Emotions also reveal information about our values. Emotions usually emerge when something valuable is at stake. For example, your fear before delivering a presentation informs you that the presentation is important to you. This, in turn, motivates you to try your best.

The Sailboat Metaphor

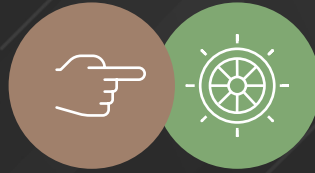
In The Sailboat Metaphor, the relationship between motivation and emotion is illustrated by the link between the motivation of the captain and the compass. What does feedback from the compass motivate the captain to do?

Core questions

- Which action does your emotion motivate you to take?
- Does this action serve you? Does it serve others?
- What do your emotions tell you about what you need most right now?
- What do your emotions tell you about what is important to you?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Awareness of action tendencies**
You know which action an emotion motivates you to take and can hold back this action when needed.
- ✓ **Awareness of underlying needs**
You know what your emotions tell you about what you need most right now.
- ✓ **Awareness of underlying values**
You know what your emotions tell you about what you consider important.



Motivation – Steering wheel

Motivation behind values

To understand the motives behind a value, we must ask, “Why is this value important to me?”

In general, a distinction can be made between intrinsic values and extrinsic values. The behavior that we carry out to express an intrinsic value is rewarding in itself. For example, the very act of painting (behavior) may be something you enjoy and allows you to express your creativity (value).

Behavior originating from extrinsic values, however, is not reinforcing. The main motivational force behind the behavior is something other than the behavior itself. For example, the value ‘kindness’ may be expressed by engaging in kind acts primarily because we expect to get something in return, such as approval from others.

The Sailboat Metaphor

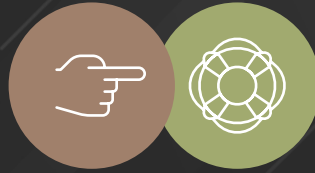
Motives behind values are represented by the relationship between the captain’s motivation and the sailboat’s steering wheel. Why does the captain want to sail in that direction?

Core questions

- Why is this value important to you?
- Is the behavior that is necessary to express this value rewarding to you?
- To what extent do you feel pressure to have this value?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Motivated by personal growth**
Your value originates from the innate tendency to grow and develop.
- ✓ **The reward is in the behavior**
The behavior to express the value is rewarding in itself.
- ✓ **Freely chosen**
Rather than feeling pressure to have this value, you experience this value as freely chosen.
- ✓ **Need satisfaction**
When you engage in behavior that expresses this value, you experience satisfaction of one or more basic psychological needs (relatedness, competence, and autonomy).



Motivation – Leaks

Motivation for improvement

What motivates us to deal with our weaknesses and improve ourselves? Attempts to address our weaknesses can be motivated by our need for either self-esteem or personal growth.

When the need to maintain self-esteem is your main motivation for addressing weaknesses, you are driven to improve because you want to feel worthy and appear worthy to others. When the need to grow is your main motivation for addressing weaknesses, you are driven to improve because you want to learn and develop yourself.

The Sailboat Metaphor

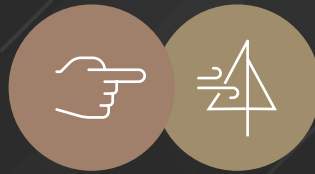
In The Sailboat Metaphor, the need for self-esteem is illustrated by a captain who is motivated to repair a leak because they are afraid of being an unworthy captain and hope to avoid other captains' disapproval for having a leak. The need for growth idea is illustrated by a captain who is motivated to repair a leak because they experience it as an opportunity to improve their skills and grow as a captain.

Core questions

- What motivates you to address your weaknesses?
- How much do the judgments of others fuel your motivation to deal with your weaknesses?
- How motivated are you to deal with your weaknesses because they offer you an opportunity for personal growth?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Focus on growth**
Your main motivation for addressing your weaknesses is the genuinely felt drive to learn and develop yourself, rather than a need to be “good enough” or appear worthy in the eyes of others.
- ✓ **Healthy striving**
Rather than being obsessively driven to overcome your weaknesses, you allow yourself ample time to learn and deal with your weaknesses.
- ✓ **Process oriented**
Rather than working toward an ‘ought to’ concrete future state, you adopt a moment-to-moment approach without a defined end state.



Motivation – Sails

Benefits of strengths

We are motivated to use and keep using our strengths because of the benefits that result from using them. Although people may report unique benefits of using a given strength, there are general benefits that motivate strength use.

The most common immediate benefit is the rewarding moment-to-moment experience of strength use. While using our strengths, we experience positive states such as excitement, enjoyment, and interest. In many cases, we feel energized and enter a flow state where we lose track of time and self-consciousness.

Repeated strength use has also been associated with a wide range of long-term benefits. For example, strength use is an important predictor of wellbeing. It leads to less stress and increased vitality and self-esteem. At work, using strengths has been found to contribute to work satisfaction as well as healthy and ambitious work behavior.

The Sailboat Metaphor

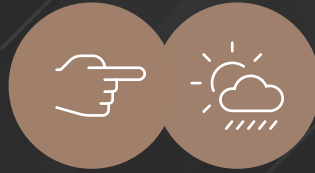
The motivation to use strengths is represented by the captain's motivation to use the sails of their boat. What drives the captain to use the sails? How do the sails help the captain on their journey? What are the immediate and long-term benefits for the captain of effectively using the sails?

Core questions

- What motivates you to use your strengths?
- What are the most common immediate benefits of using your strengths?
- What are the most common long-term benefits of using your strengths?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Rewarding experiences**
Using your strengths results in immediate pleasant experiences, such as enjoyment. These experiences alone are enough to motivate you to keep using your strengths.
- ✓ **Long-term benefits**
Over time, you notice the overall positive impact of strength use on your mood, engagement, and performance. This motivates you to keep using and developing your strengths.



Motivation – Weather

Motivation behind coping strategies

What motivates us to deal with positive and negative events the way we do?

Overcontrol is often motivated by the fear of losing control or the false belief that there is more to control than there actually is. The burden of responsibility, feelings of being overwhelmed, and simply not knowing how to cope are common motivations for undercontrol.

Several reasons explain why we are less motivated to savor positive moments. Stress motivates us to notice threats instead of positive events. Impatience motivates us to rush through activities rather than attend to them. A sense of abundance motivates us to get more rather than enjoy what is already there.

The Sailboat Metaphor

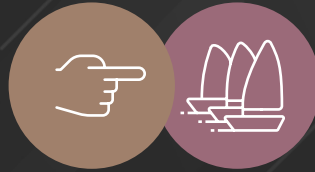
The motivation underlying different coping styles can be compared to the motivation of the captain to deal with the weather the way they do. For example, why does the captain avoid action when a storm is coming up? What drives them to keep trying to manage an uncontrollable sea? Why is the captain unable to enjoy the beautiful weather?

Core questions

- What motivates you to deal with negative life events the way you do?
- What are the benefits of your way of dealing with negative life events?
What are the downsides?
- What motivates you to deal with positive life events the way you do?
- What are the benefits of your way of dealing with positive life events?
What are the downsides?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Positive control beliefs**
You are motivated to take responsibility and actively cope with negative events because you believe your efforts can make a difference.
- ✓ **Past confrontation with limited control**
You are motivated to let go of control when needed because you have experienced your personal limits of control in the past.
- ✓ **Not taking positivity for granted**
Your ability to savor positive events is motivated by the deep realization that positive events should not be taken for granted.



Motivation – Other boats

Motivation for commitment

Three key factors determine your motivation to invest in a social relationship, be it a positive or negative one.

- The extent to which you are satisfied with the relationship
- The attractiveness and availability of alternatives to this relationship
- The magnitude and importance of the resources (e.g., assets, children) attached to the relationship

The Sailboat Metaphor

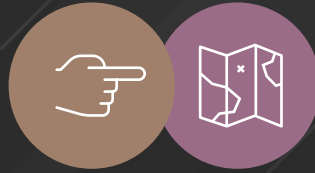
In The Sailboat Metaphor, the motivation to invest in relationships is represented by the motivation of the captain to invest time and energy in their relationship with other captains. Why is the captain motivated to seek out the company of certain captains? Why is the captain motivated to stay connected with other captains, even if some of them may actually decrease the pleasantness of their journey?

Core questions

- What motivates you to keep investing in a certain relationship?
- How satisfied are you with this relationship?
- To what extent do you believe that there are other people who can better meet your needs than the person in this relationship?
- How significant do you believe the resources attached to this relationship are?

Positive signs

- ✓ **High satisfaction level**
You favorably evaluate a given relationship because you feel the other person fulfills important needs.
- ✓ **Low quality of alternatives**
You believe there is no one or only a few people who can better meet your personal needs outside the current relationship.
- ✓ **High investment size**
You feel that the psychological (e.g., self-disclosure), social (e.g., mutual friends), and/or physical (e.g., material possessions) resources attached to a given relationship are significant.



Motivation – Destinations

Motivation behind goals

The impact of goal pursuit on wellbeing depends strongly on motivation. The more autonomous our motivation is, the more it reflects our values and interests. Our actions can be guided by strong autonomous reasons, such as, “I really like what I am doing” or “I sincerely believe it is important to reach this goal,” or by less autonomous reasons, for example, “My partner wants me to do this” or “I fear that others will make fun of me if I don’t do this.” In general, higher levels of autonomous motivation have a more positive impact on wellbeing than lower levels.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In The Sailboat Metaphor, the motivation behind goal pursuit is represented by the captain’s motivation behind their intention to reach a certain destination. Why did the captain choose to sail to this particular destination? What were their primary reasons for choosing this destination over others? For example, does the captain aim to reach this destination because they feel pressured by other captains? Or did they choose this destination because they enjoy the journey toward it?

Core questions

- What motivates you to pursue this goal?
- To what extent do you have this goal because someone else wants you to pursue it?
- To what extent do you have this goal because you would feel guilty or anxious if you did not have it?
- To what extent do you have this goal because you believe it is a good thing to strive for and you truly want to achieve it?
- To what extent do you have this goal because you enjoy the way toward the goal?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Self-chosen**
You chose this goal. You don't strive for it because somebody else wants you to or the situation seems to compel it.
- ✓ **"Want to" rather than "ought to"**
You strive for this goal because you want to, not because you feel you ought to.
- ✓ **Personal importance**
You pursue this goal because you genuinely feel that it is an important goal to have.
- ✓ **Enjoyment**
You strive for this goal because you enjoy the process of working toward the goal. The main reward is the pleasure you get from working on your goal.



Action

Action refers to concrete behavior. Action is about what we do. For our wellbeing to increase, it is not enough to become aware of things. We need to follow awareness and insights with concrete actions. To improve wellbeing, it is important to address three forms of action:

Past actions

Our past actions provide valuable insights into patterns that have been helpful or unhelpful. Unhelpful actions of the past can serve as a lesson, preventing us from making the same mistake in the future. Helpful actions of the past can serve as a guide, teaching us what has worked well for us. These insights can be translated into concrete actions in the moment.

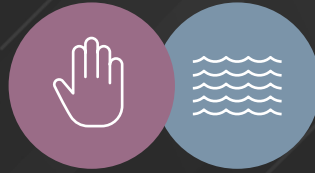
Current actions

Reflecting on our current actions is required for continuous growth. On a regular basis, we must ask ourselves whether our current actions support a meaningful life and are true to the person we want to be. This reflection helps us to become aware of any discrepancies between our ideals and our actions and act accordingly.



Future actions

Planning future actions helps us to concretize vague intentions and allows for more tangible results. For example, rather than saying, “I want to live more healthily,” planning concrete future actions, such as, “I’m going to run on Tuesday morning,” increases clarity and the chance that we will take action.



Action – Water

Activities per life domain

Within each life domain, we engage in diverse activities. For example, in the health domain, we may engage in regular exercise, healthy eating, and take breaks to regain energy. In the spirituality domain, we may engage in a religious practice, read books, and meditate.

The degree to which these activities fulfill our needs strongly depends on *how* we are engaging in them. Can we prioritize activities in a given life domain? Are we carrying out these activities with mindful awareness? Can we let go of activities when another domain requires our attention?

The Sailboat Metaphor

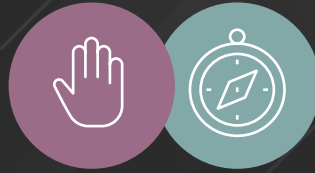
In The Sailboat Metaphor, engagement in activities across life domains is represented by the action of the captain with respect to the water. How well can the captain move between different parts of the sea? How is the captain acting when they are sailing in a particular part of the sea? Can they focus on one activity, or are they constantly switching between activities? Is the captain engaged in too few or too many activities?

Core questions

- How well can you maintain life balance by letting go of an activity in life domain X and switching to another activity in life domain Y?
- How good are you at prioritizing your activities in life domain X?
- To what extent are you carrying out activities in life domain X with mindful attention?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Switching**
You know when it is time to let go of an activity in life domain X and move on to another activity in life domain Y.
- ✓ **Prioritizing**
You prevent yourself from getting overwhelmed by the large number of activities in life domain X by prioritizing your activities in this domain.
- ✓ **Acting with awareness**
When you are carrying out an action in life domain X, your attention is solely focused on that activity in the present moment.



Action – Compass

Emotional expression

Emotional expression refers to your ability to name and express what is happening emotionally. There are various ways to express your emotions. For example, you may share your emotions with others, write them down, or create music to express how you feel.

Expressing emotions is important. Rather than avoiding or suppressing emotions, expression can be a healthy way to approach emotions. Moreover, emotional expression can help to increase self-insight, strengthen social relationships, and start constructive resolution to an interpersonal problem.

The Sailboat Metaphor

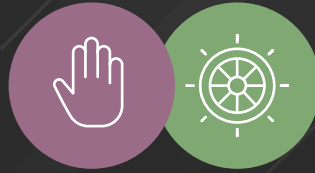
In The Sailboat Metaphor, emotional expression is represented by the captain's actions regarding their compass. How does the captain name and express feedback from the compass? The captain may, for example, share the feedback with other captains, use the feedback to update their logbook, or shout aloud because the feedback is unfavorable.

Core questions

- How do you express your emotions?
- To what extent does your way of expressing difficult emotions help to cope with them?
- How frequently do you express negative versus positive emotions?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Regular expression of emotions**
Rather than suppressing or avoiding your emotions, you regularly express how you feel.
- ✓ **Effective coping**
The way you express your emotions helps you to cope with difficult ones.
- ✓ **Balanced expression**
You express both positive and negative emotions to similar degrees.



Action – Steering wheel

Value expression

At the core of value expression lies the question, “To what extent do your actions reflect your values?” If family is a core value of yours, but you rarely spend time with them, your actions are not in line with your values.

The Sailboat Metaphor

Value expression is about concrete behavior and, in The Sailboat Metaphor, is represented by the combination of the captain’s actions with the boat’s steering wheel. In demonstrating value expression, the captain turns the steering wheel so that the boat moves in a direction they consider worth traveling.

Value expression requires action; to actually sail in a desirable direction, the captain must hold and turn the steering wheel. In the same way, we must focus on taking actions that help us express our values.

Core questions

- To what extent are you living in line with your values?
- What actions would you need to take to live in a way that reflects what you believe is important in life?
- How much does fear prevent you from living in line with your values?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Self-reflection**
You pay attention to personal experiences and decide how valuable they are.
- ✓ **Beyond fear**
You engage in value-based actions despite fear.
- ✓ **Affirmation of values**
You own your values and are not afraid to share them with others because you know you are doing your best to live in line with them.



Action – Leaks

Self-care

People treat themselves differently when confronted with personal weaknesses. In general, a distinction can be made between self-neglect and self-care.

Self-neglect reflects a hostile relationship with yourself. It is characterized by self-criticism: a punitive attitude where the main goal is to punish yourself for your weakness.

Self-care is a hallmark of a friendly relationship with yourself. It is characterized by self-compassion: responding in the same supportive and understanding way you would with a good friend when confronted with a personal weakness. It means you focus on taking care of your needs.

The Sailboat Metaphor

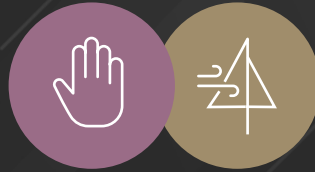
In The Sailboat Metaphor, the way you treat yourself when confronted with weaknesses is represented by the action of the captain regarding leaks in the boat. How does the captain react when they notice a leak in the boat? Do they punish themselves for having the leak? Do they blame themselves or neglect the compass in order to start fixing the leak immediately? Or, do they slow the boat down and take time to read the compass before going ahead and fixing the leak?

Core questions

- How do you treat yourself when you are confronted with a personal weakness?
- Does the way you deal with weaknesses reflect a friendly or hostile relationship with yourself?
- When dealing with a personal weakness, how much room is there for taking care of your needs?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Self-compassionate internal voice**
The way you talk to yourself when confronted with weaknesses reflects kindness and understanding. This voice reminds you that we all have weaknesses and that it is important to take care of yourself.
- ✓ **Taking care of needs**
When addressing weaknesses, you make sure to take care of your needs. For example, rather than persisting when you are in need of rest, you stop and take time to restore.
- ✓ **Actively seeking support**
Your desire to take of yourself and address your weaknesses is greater than your shame for exposing your vulnerability to others. You are able to ask others for support.



Action – Sails

Strength regulation

Although knowing your strengths is important, you need to actually use your strengths to experience their positive effect on wellbeing.

Optimal strength use requires careful consideration of the demands of the situation. Rather than blindly using your strengths, optimal strength use requires conscious regulation, where you prevent strength overuse (expressing a strength too strongly), underuse (not using a strength enough), or misuse (using a strength to harm others).

The Sailboat Metaphor

A person who uses their strengths optimally is like a captain who can hoist the sails so that the boat can catch wind and travel in a favorable direction. Strength regulation is about the individual's ability to intelligently use their strengths, like a captain who is intelligently using their sails. This captain is hoisting and lowering the sails under the right circumstances.

Core questions

- How much are you using your strengths in daily life?
- Which of your strengths do you tend to overuse? When? How?
- Which of your strengths do you tend to underuse? When? How?
- Have you ever misused your strengths? How?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Sufficient strength use**
You can use your strengths on a daily basis in a wide variety of life domains.
- ✓ **Self-monitoring**
You regularly check whether the current circumstances allow for your strengths to be used and to what extent.
- ✓ **Corrective action**
When you notice that you are under- or overusing a strength, you act to match the use of your strength to the demands of the situation.



Action – Weather

Coping with positive and negative events

The better we can cope with positive and negative life events, the more resilient we are. Coping effectively with negative events means that we can manage stress that results from these events. The key is to do what can be done and avoid overcontrol (trying to control the uncontrollable) or undercontrol (not taking enough responsibility).

Coping with positive events refers to actions that help us derive pleasure from the event, also referred to as savoring. Techniques such as noticing and appreciating the positive in the world, sharing positive events with others, and a mindful, moment-to-moment focus on the pleasant experience all help to make the most of positive events.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In The Sailboat Metaphor, coping can be translated as the captain's actions in response to the weather. How does the captain respond to good and bad weather? Do they focus on the actions they can take to safely guide the boat through bad weather, or are they denying their responsibility for handling the boat? Can they leave the steering wheel for a while, close their eyes, and intently enjoy the warm sun on their face, or do they ignore good weather conditions?

Core questions

- How do you deal with difficult life events? What strategies do you use to manage stress?
- How well can you differentiate between the things you can and cannot control in challenging situations and act accordingly?
- How do you deal with positive life events? What strategies do you use to enjoy these events to the fullest?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Adaptive coping**
Rather than trying to control things that are in fact beyond your personal control, you focus on actions within your control.
- ✓ **Responsibility**
You realize that although you may not be able to change the situation itself, you can change the way you relate to the situation, by changing how you think and feel about it.
- ✓ **Savoring**
You can derive pleasure from past, current, and future positive events. The positive emotions you experience act as a buffer against negativity and stress.



Action – Other boats

Relationship management

To maintain high-quality, positive relationships, relationship management skills must be refined and enhanced. Examples of important skills include mindful listening, forgiveness, kindness, expressing gratitude, showing vulnerability, and empathy.

The Sailboat Metaphor

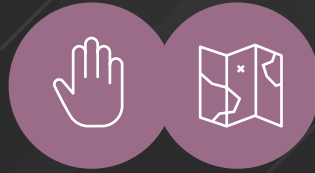
In The Sailboat Metaphor, relationship management is represented by the actions that the captain takes to maintain relationships with other captains. Can the captain build and maintain friendships with other captains? What actions does the captain take to keep valued relationships alive?

Core questions

- Which actions do you take to maintain high-quality, positive relationships?
- How well can you mindfully listen to others?
- To what extent do you express kindness and gratitude to others?
- How well are you able to be vulnerable with others?
- How well can you forgive others and ask for forgiveness?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Mindful attention**
You can listen mindfully to others, giving them your full attention.
- ✓ **Kindness and gratitude**
You are kind to others and express your gratitude regularly.
- ✓ **Vulnerability**
You are not afraid to show your true feelings, insecurities, and needs to others.
- ✓ **Forgiveness**
You are able to forgive others for their mistakes and admit and apologize for your own.



Action – Destinations

Goal-directed behavior

Even when goals have been set, we often fail to act on our good intentions. Goals are good for setting a direction, but action is needed to make progress. Several techniques can be used to translate intentions into action. Examples include visualization of the goal and the steps needed to move toward it, planning short-term, concrete actions that are necessary for goal attainment, and building habits by taking consistent steps.

The Sailboat Metaphor

In The Sailboat Metaphor, goal-directed behavior involves the actions of the captain regarding their destination. Which actions will help the captain reach their destination? For example, the captain may create a plan beforehand, carefully mapping out the different parts of the journey. Or, rather than rigorously turning the steering wheel in the intended direction, the captain may instead adjust the course of the boat slightly but consistently every day in the right direction.

Core questions

- Which actions are needed to accomplish your goal?
- What action, no matter how small, can you take this week that will help you to move closer to your goal?
- How can you build a habit that, over time, will help you to reach your goal?
- How will you make sure that you keep making progress toward your goal?

Positive signs

- ✓ **Clear plan**
You have planned short-term, concrete actions that are necessary to successfully accomplish the larger goal.
- ✓ **Dealing with obstacles**
You have thought about how to handle obstacles, such as temptation or forgetfulness.
- ✓ **Consistent action**
You keep working on your goal and make steady progress.

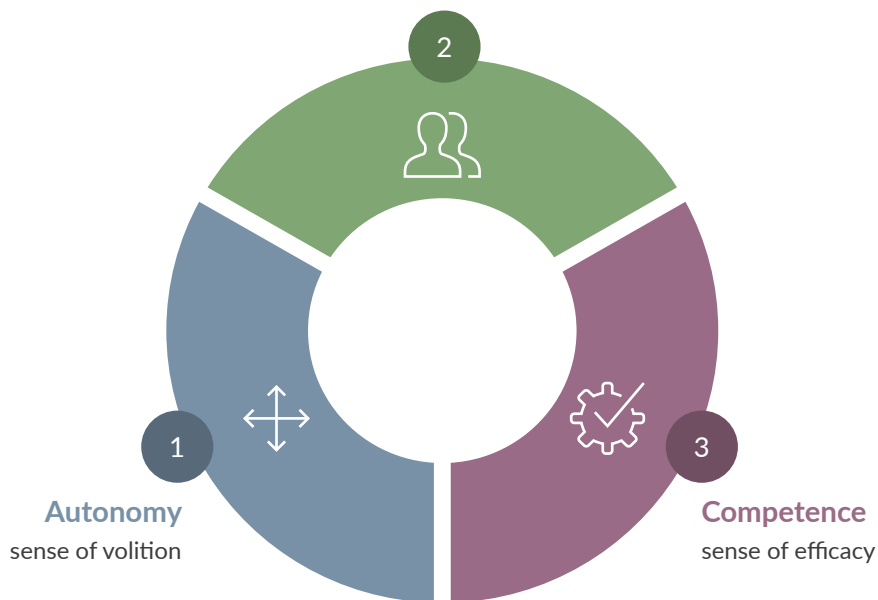


The lighthouse

The practitioner

Relatedness

sense of caring relationships





About

All successful interventions are grounded in a continuous, strong, genuine relationship between the client and practitioner. This relationship is often referred to as the therapeutic alliance or helping relationship.

Self-determination theory describes three key ingredients of healthy helping relationships, based on the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These are the psychological nutrients essential for optimal functioning and wellbeing. Just like plants need water, minerals, and sunshine to grow, humans are thought to need autonomy, competence, and relatedness to flourish.

In a practical context, the function of the practitioner can be compared to the function of a lighthouse on the captain's journey. Whereas the client is represented by the captain of their sailboat, the practitioner can best be compared to the lighthouse keeper, using their skills to ensure that the lighthouse functions as a navigational aid for the sailboat.

The analogy of a lighthouse helps to explain the different ways practitioners can meet the aforementioned three psychological needs of their clients.



Autonomy

The need for autonomy comprises our need to make and implement our own choices. This may include deciding what we do, as well as how, when, and where we do it. Three ways the client's need for autonomy can be met are:

Independence

The client's autonomy can be strengthened when clients are held responsible for their progress. In The Sailboat Metaphor, this idea is illustrated by the way the lighthouse assists the boat on its journey. In contrast to a rescue boat that is pulling the client's boat, the lighthouse is assisting the boat but not doing the work. The captain still has to do the sailing.

The client as the expert

Autonomy can also be promoted when practitioners treat the client as the expert. The practitioner assists in uncovering, as opposed to providing, answers that are already present within the client. In The Sailboat Metaphor, this is illustrated by the lighthouse keeper, who does not claim to know the right direction nor which route to take. The lighthouse merely illuminates traveling options.

Freedom of choice

Another way to meet the client's need for autonomy is by providing ample freedom of choice during treatment. For example, clients may choose how they would like to perform homework exercises. In The Sailboat Metaphor, this idea is illustrated by the lighthouse highlighting possible sailing routes. The captain has the freedom to decide which route to take and how.

Core questions

- Is the relationship between my client and me characterized by independence, or do I feel responsible for their progress?
- Can I view the client as the expert who possesses the answers to their vital questions in life?
- Am I a facilitator who enables the client to find answers or an expert who holds and provides the answers?
- Do I allow the client a sufficient level of choice with regard to the practical aspects of the intervention?
- Can I tailor the practical parts of the intervention to the specific preferences and goals of the client?



Relatedness


People need to experience a sense of belonging and attachment to other people. The need for relatedness is our need to love, care, and be loved and cared for. Three ways the client's need for relatedness can be met are:

Unconditional acceptance

Perhaps the greatest contributor to a strong relationship is unconditional acceptance: to be loved and appreciated despite failures or shortcomings. The lighthouse keeper's relationship with the passing boats reflects this unconditional stance. The keeper does not judge the captain of the sailboat. There are no conditions for receiving the light. The light shines regardless of the captain's mistakes, inadequacies, or other shortcomings.

Support in difficult times

The true strength of a relationship typically reveals itself during difficult times. When the going gets tough, those who truly care remain present to support you. In the same way that strong social connections offer support during difficult life circumstances, the lighthouse keeps shining its light in all weather conditions, including bad ones.



Selfless giving

In the same way that a practitioner always operates in service of the client's life, a lighthouse always operates in service of the captain's journey. There is no hidden agenda. The goal is uncompromised and simple: to be an aid on the captain's journey. The lighthouse shines the light, regardless of whether the captain expresses gratitude or returns the favor.

Core questions

- Can I listen carefully with nonjudgmental acceptance?
- Can I remember that I am working with a human being, just like myself?
- Can I be open and honest about my own difficult experiences?
- Can I be there for the client in difficult times?
- Am I helping the client for the sake of helping, or am I expecting some kind of reward or return on investment?
- Can I connect to the experience of my clients and meet them where they are?



Competence

The need for competence comprises our need to gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills. When we feel we have the skills needed for success, we are more likely to take actions that will help us achieve our goals. It is our inborn need to experience the feeling that we can do it, which results from successes. Two ways the client's need for competence can be met are:

Strength focus

One way to increase clients' feelings of competence is by focusing on their strengths, including clients' successful experiences of the past and the supportive people in their social environment. In The Sailboat Metaphor, the practitioner's attention to strengths is illustrated by light from the lighthouse that highlights the sails of the boat (the client's strengths), as well as the water.

Success experiences

Feelings of competence emerge when we have enough experiences of success. The practitioner can assist clients in having these experiences by highlighting possibilities and potential pitfalls. In the same way, the lighthouse allows the captain to have success experiences by assisting in navigation, such as signaling safe entries to harbors and marking dangerous coastlines and hazardous reefs.

Core questions

- Can I look at the client from a strength perspective?
- Can I see the strengths of the client's environment?
- Can I assist the client in formulating specific, concrete, and realistic goals?
- Can I assist the client in taking actions that result in valuable personal experiences?
- Do I spend enough time highlighting the client's previous successes?