

T H E

# WHEEL OF LIFE



# Foreword

A central topic within the field of Positive Psychology is well-being. Over the years, scientists have developed many different tools to assess personal well-being, ranging from relatively simple questions about positive emotions to complex assessments of satisfaction with different life domains.

Although most of these assessments share the same objective, their practical use varies greatly. While some of them can be effectively used with clients, others are too complex and extensive to be effectively used in a practical setting.

One tool that we believe both successfully addresses the complex nature of well-being and comes in a practitioner-friendly format is the so-called “Wheel of Life”. This tool is described in detail on the following pages. We hope you will find it useful!

## **Join the Positive Psychology Toolkit Community**

Our aim at Positive Psychology Program is to bridge the gap between science and practice, offering Positive Psychology Practitioners the best of both worlds. The wheel of life is just one of many tools that we have created in collaboration with professionals around the globe. For more tools, please go to: [positivepsychologytoolkit.com/join/](https://positivepsychologytoolkit.com/join/)



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## Happiness

Assessment

15-25 min.

Client

No

# The Wheel of Life

*Subjective well-being involves different components: life satisfaction (global judgments of one's life), satisfaction with important life domains (e.g., recreation), positive affect (experiencing pleasant emotions and moods), and low levels of negative affect (experiencing few unpleasant emotions and moods) (Diener, 2000).*

*An often used tool to address a client's satisfaction with important life domains is "The Wheel of Life" (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 1998; Dean, 2004). This tool requires that the client first identifies specific life domains (career development, relationships, leisure time, etc.) and then rates these domains on a scale of one to ten (from not at all satisfied, to completely satisfied). After rating one's personal domains, opportunities for increasing satisfaction in each domain are discussed.*

## Goal

The goal of this tool is to assess the client's perceived satisfaction/dissatisfaction in the different domains of life. Practitioners typically use this tool with clients in the discovery session in an effort to gauge a client's sense of life fulfillment.

## Advice

- This exercise can be used to clarify priorities for goal-setting, allowing the client to plan so their current life becomes closer to their desired life: increasing balance between the different life domains. Note that it is important to first understand what "balance" looks like for the client before trying to make this determination based on the results of this exercise. Not everyone is going to want the different domains to be in perfect balance. It all depends on the client's values.
- Note that "balance" is not necessarily reflected by the wheel. In fact, most often, the wheel is a firm reminder of how "unbalanced" a client's life is. Therefore, this exercise may serve to inform clients of any gap between perceived "balance" and reality.
- The Wheel of Life is not a picture of the past. It is a snapshot taken in the moment and because of this, it is subject to change. The wheel provides the client with data in the "now," and the practitioner may use that information to point out the gaps between what is true today and what the client wants for the future.
- When used on a regular basis, this tool is excellent to help your clients to see how far they have come. Repeated measures allow clients to monitor their progress in perceived life balance. Periodic balance checks can highlight useful patterns and facilitate client behavioural change.
- A client may also ask someone who knows them well to complete the scores for them. At times, it may be helpful for a client to understand an outsider's perspective. Preferably, this is someone who the client trusts and whose opinion the client values.

- When clients are unsatisfied with specific life domains, they may want to drastically improve their satisfaction with these domains. Especially for perfectionistic clients, the awareness of low levels of satisfaction may automatically trigger a need to drastically increase them. However, setting unrealistic goals is likely to cause frustration and lower well-being. For instance, several studies have shown that when people have idealized positive fantasies, their motivation and energy to achieve these goals dramatically decreases (e.g. Kappes & Oettingen, 2011). The practitioner should assist the client in setting reasonable targets for improving well-being. Instead of motivating them to work toward a 10, the practitioner should help clients to shift the focus from being the best to simply being better, offering them permission to strive without the burden of emotional self-flagellation. A solution-focused strategy may work well here. For example, if a client rates his relationship satisfaction with his wife a 5, the practitioner could ask: “What could you do this week to move your 5 up to a 6?”.
- This tool can also be used in a group-setting. Group members may be asked to complete the exercise before attending the first session and to repeat the exercise during the course of the program. Repeating the exercise will allow group members to acknowledge both the changes that they are making and the growth that they are experiencing. Alternatively, the “life domains” may be replaced with “group values” (e.g. collaboration, honesty, etc.). In this version of the tool, the wheel can serve as a tool to monitor the extent to which the group is behaving in line with group values.



### Suggested Readings

Dean, B. (2004). *MentorCoach Foundation skills training manual*. Baltimore: MentorCoach.

Diener, E. (2000). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness, and a proposal for national index. *American Psychologist*, 55, 34-43.

Kappes, H.B., Stephens, E.J. & Oettingen, G. (2011). Implicit theories moderate the relation of positive future fantasies to academic outcomes. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 45, 269-278.

Oishi, S., Diener, E., & Lucas, R. E. (2007). Optimal level of well-being: Can people be too happy? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 2, 346-360.

Whitworth, L., Kimsey-House, H., & Sandahl, P. (1998). *Co-active coaching*. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.

## Tool Description

### Instructions (version 1: pre-defined life domains)

#### *Step 1*

Inform the client that The Wheel of Life allows you both to get a snapshot of how satisfied the client is in his/her life. In this version of the exercise there are ten pre-defined domains on the wheel:

- Money & Finance
- Career & Work
- Health & Fitness
- Fun & Recreation
- Environment
- Community
- Family & Friends
- Partner & Love
- Growth & Learning
- Spirituality

#### *Step 2*

Ask the client to rate his/her level of satisfaction in each of the domains using the wheel on p.5 (Fig. 1). A score of 1 indicates that you are not satisfied at all and a score of 10 means you are highly satisfied.

#### *Step 3*

After the client has rated each of the domains, ask him/her to connect the lines to form an inner wheel. This gives the client an overview of the level of satisfaction in their life. For an example of a completed wheel, see Fig. 3 on p.10.

#### *Step 4*

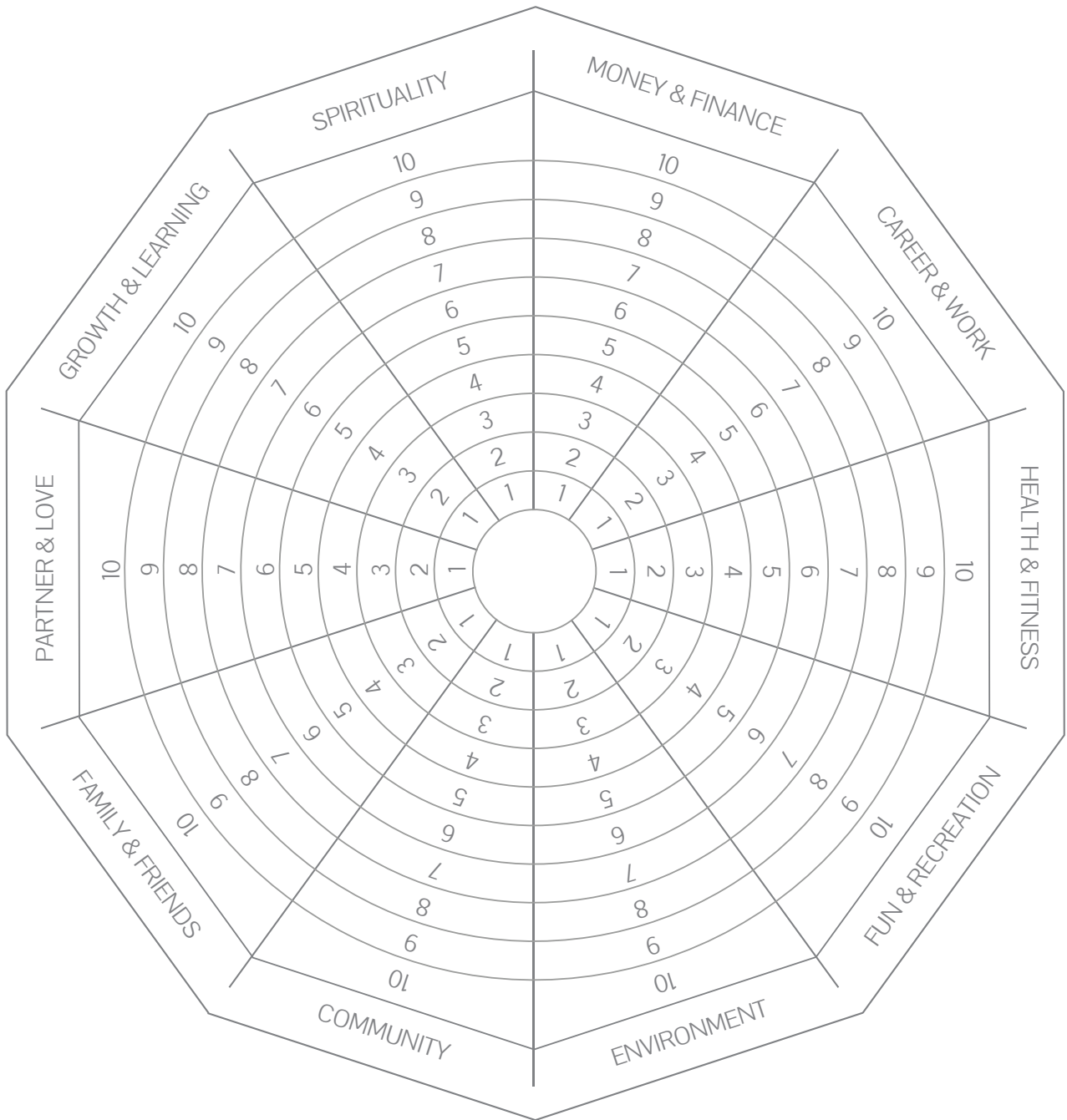
Discuss with the client in what ways he/she would want to change the shape of the inner wheel. Which domains draw your attention?

#### *Step 5*

Once a domain is selected, proceed with the following questions:

- Why does this domain need attention?
- What would it take to raise your satisfaction by one score in this domain?
- What can you do to raise your satisfaction in this domain?

Fig. 1: The Wheel of Life with pre-defined life domains



**Instructions (version 2: self-defined life domains)**

*Step 1*

Inform the client that The Wheel of Life allows you both to get a snapshot of how satisfied the client is in his/her life. The client is invited to choose up to 10 categories to reflect different domains of his/her life. The practitioner may offer examples of life areas to help the client get started. Define the chosen life domains including a brief description per domain below.

Life Domain 1:

Life Domain 2:

Life Domain 3:

Life Domain 4:

Life Domain 5:

Life Domain 6:

Life Domain 7:

Life Domain 8:

Life Domain 9:

Life Domain 10:



*Step 2*

Ask the client to enter the names of the life domains in the outer rim of the empty wheel displayed on p.9 (Fig. 2).

*Step 3*

Ask the client to rate his/her level of satisfaction in each of the domains using the wheel on p.9 (Fig. 2). A score of 1 indicates that you are not satisfied at all and a score of 10 means you are highly satisfied.

*Step 4*

After the client has rated each of the domains, ask him/her to connect the lines to form an inner wheel. This gives the client an overview of the level of satisfaction in their life. For an example of a completed wheel, see Fig. 3 on p.10.

*Step 5*

Discuss with the client in what ways he/she would want to change the shape of the inner wheel. Which domains draw your attention?

*Step 6*

Once an area is selected, proceed with the following questions:

- Why does this domain need attention?
- What would it take to raise your satisfaction by one score in this domain?
- What can you do to raise your satisfaction in this domain?

Fig. 2: The Wheel of Life with self-defined life domains

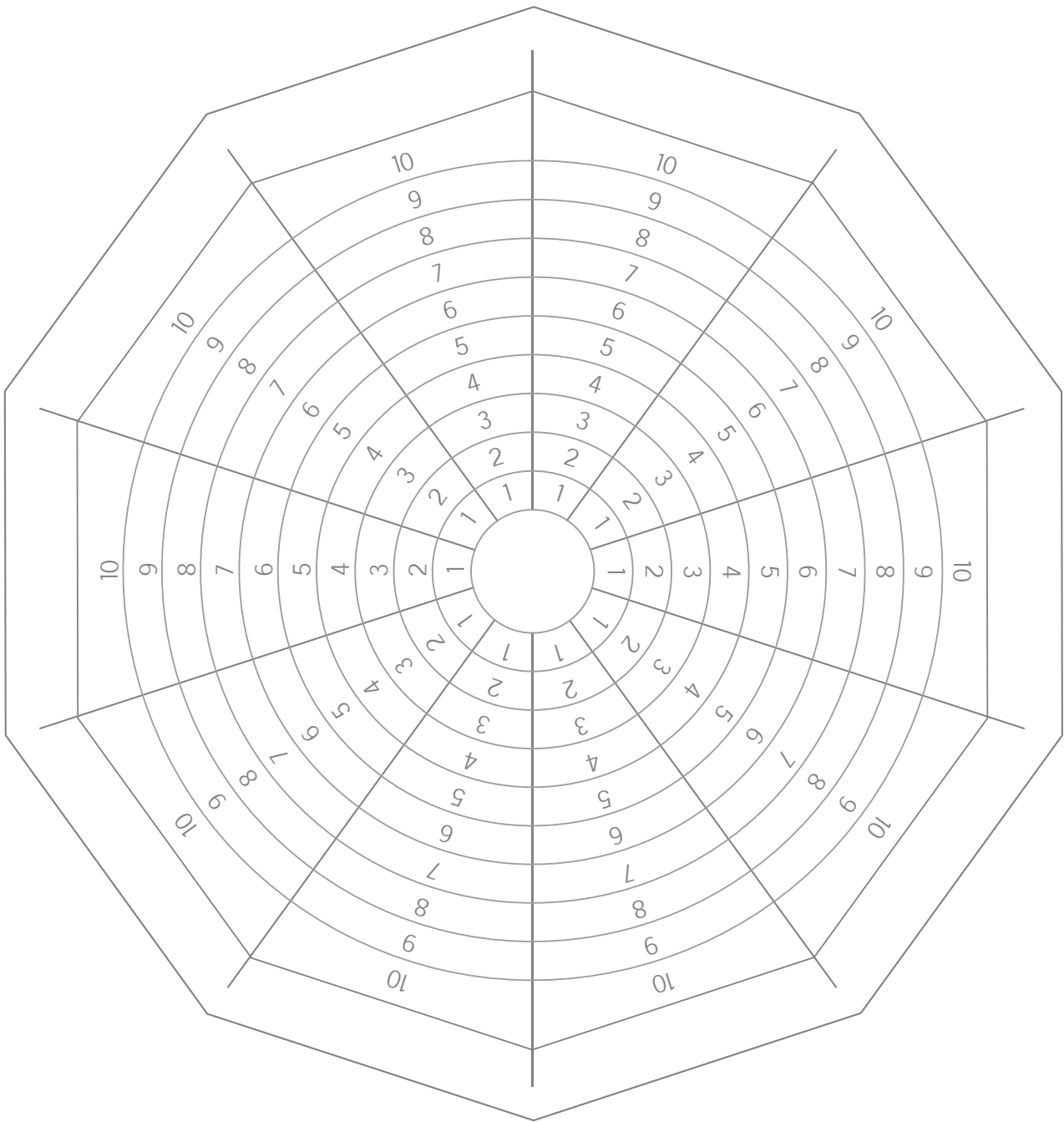


Fig. 3: Example of a completed version of The Wheel of Life

