

LEARNING JOURNEY

LAI 1: ENVISION YOUR NEW GOOD LIFE (ESTIMATED TIME 90+ MINUTES + VIDEO)

Context

The “My New Good Life” *Learning Journey* series has been developed for anyone who would like to explore how to live their own version of a good life and make it more resilient to external local or global drivers of change.

This could include anyone who:

- feels that their life is somehow lacking (perhaps despite having everything they had hoped would bring happiness).
- is satisfied with their life but is concerned that “Shadows” on the horizon (climate change, political and financial instability, war etc.) could negatively affect their future.

“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.”

Helen Keller

This *Learning Journey* comprises four *Learning Adventures* and is designed to support you:

- envision what your own “New Good Life” (NGL) could look like (LAI1).
- explore the resources available to you on the journey toward your NGL (LAI2).
- assess the potential threat to your NGL from global and local “shadows” (LAI3).
- develop strategies to achieve your NGL in a way that is resilient to change (LAI4).

We recommend completing the *Learning Adventure* in several sittings, perhaps skipping optional exercises to begin with. It can also be very helpful to have a thinking buddy to work with. A fictional case study that is intended to illustrate the process outlined in this *Learning Adventure* is included in Appendix 1. You may find it helpful to refer to it as you go along.

Objectives

This *Learning Adventure* (LAI1), the first in the series, is designed to support you in developing an inspiring vision for your NGL. The aim is to help you capture what is truly important for you to live a “good life”. This may require you to question your current beliefs and assumptions and think creatively about what you truly want from life and how you would like to be remembered. The process you will go through and the techniques you will use will encourage the use of both your analytical mind as well as your intuition.

A “Good Life”

Before you start the journey of discovering your NGL, you might find it helpful to reflect on what makes or would make your life “good”. To what extent is living a good life the same as living a happy life? Other than happiness, what else might be important for your NGL?

Capture your thoughts in the box below.



Creating your Vision

Tool 1 - Automatic Writing

André Bréton (born in 1896) was a French poet and a founding member of the Surrealist movement. He was the father of automatic writing, which was a method of creative writing, aimed to channel the subconscious, as purely and effortlessly as possible.

Inspired by Bréton's method:

- Find a time and place where you will not be disturbed.
- Enter an as calm and receptive state of mind as possible.
- Start by reflecting on the following questions:
 - *What is a good day for you? How does it look and feel?*
 - *What would you like to have in your life?*
 - *What kind of person would you like to be?*
 - *What legacy would you like to leave?*
- Write (not type) the first sentence that comes to mind remain and continue like this.
- Write quickly and avoid any temptation to read what you have written.
- Trust in the inexhaustible nature of your subconscious.
- If silence threatens, write anything repeatedly, if necessary.
- At least for part of the time, trying writing with your non-dominant hand. So, if you are right-handed, try writing with your left hand.
- Keep going for at least 5 minutes.

Capture any important insights or possible actions here:

Once you have completed your list, reflect on it, and summarise those things that would be important for your NGL. Again, what was interesting or surprising?

Capture any important insights or possible actions here:

Tool 2 – Domains of Life

Having started with a tool that draws on intuition, you are now going to experiment with a more analytical approach, by reflecting on different aspects of your life.

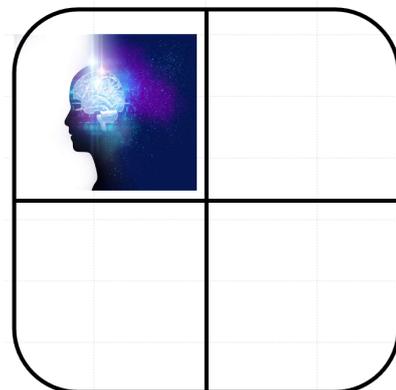
Human dimension

1. “Mental Fitness”

The following is inspired by [Ken Wilber’s 4-quadrants](#) model.

Starting with what’s going on in your own mind. The upper-left part of the 4-quadrant model is the individual-interior perspective. This includes a person’s thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, memories etc. We start here because this is what most of us really want. We may be focused on buying a new car, but this is probably because we imagine the good feelings it will bring.

For example, in your NGL, your thoughts may normally be optimistic, and your feelings generally positive. Perhaps you are quickly aware of negative thoughts or feelings, and able to switch quickly from a negative to a positive state.



In your NGL, how important is mental fitness¹? What kinds of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and memories will you be having?

Capture any important insights or possible actions here:

Once you have completed your list, reflect on it. What was interesting or surprising?

Capture any important insights or possible actions here:

¹ Dr. Shirzad Chamine defines Mental Fitness as the capacity to respond to life's challenges with a positive mindset.

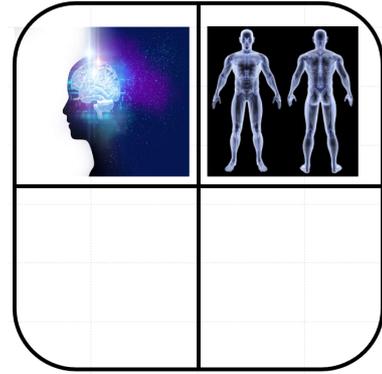
2. Physical Capacities

Mental health and physical health are closely interconnected. It is possible to continue to have positive thoughts and emotions when you are not physically well. But, as Dr. Chris Palmer explains in his book *Brain Energy*, if you are mentally healthy you are more likely to be physically healthy. And, if you are physically healthy you are more likely to be mentally healthy.

The upper-right part of the 4-quadrant model addresses the individual-exterior perspective. It includes all the things you can measure about a person, such as their physical health and financial resources.

For example, in you NGL, you might want blood tests to show that you are within normal healthy ranges, have a healthy Body Mass Index ([BMI](#)), sleep well and have plenty of energy throughout the day. You may also want a minimum level of assets and savings.

What do you aspire to in your NGL? What goals would you set yourself to achieve?



Capture any important insights or possible actions here:

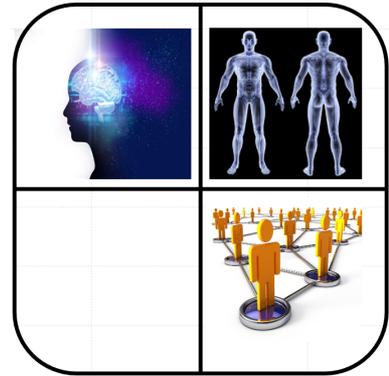
Once you have completed your list, reflect on it. What was interesting or surprising?

Capture any important insights or possible actions here:

3. Supportive Systems and Structures

The lower-right part of the 4-quadrant model addresses the collective exterior perspective.

It's no doubt possible to live alone in a cave and be content. But again, for most people, social connections are a key component of a good life. Two books on this topic that you may find helpful are *The Chimp Paradox* by Professor Steve Peters and *Wired to connect* by Dr. Amy Banks. Both books emphasize the importance of being part of a "troop" or "tribe". This is a relatively small number of people with whom you have a close connection. This includes the networks of people whom you relate to in your private and professional life.



In your NGL, who would be in your immediate "tribe"? What other relationships would be important to you?

Whilst social networks are very important, there are many other systems and structures that will be vital for your NGL. These could include systems for:

- the supply of food and water
- the supply of energy (e.g. electricity)
- maintaining law and order
- the generation and storage of wealth
- information access and exchange
- waste management (reduction, reuse, repair, rotting and recycling)

What systems will you be relying on for your NGL?

Capture your thoughts here:

Once you have completed your list, reflect on it. What was interesting or surprising?

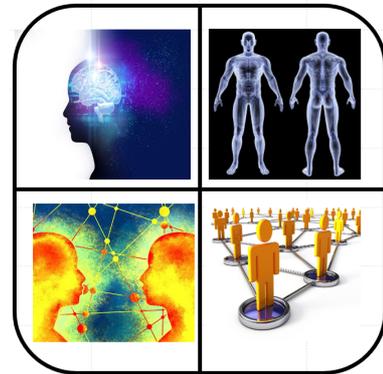
Capture any important insights or possible actions here:

4. Culture

Lastly, in the human sphere, we will explore culture.

The lower-left part of the 4-quadrant model is the collective-interior perspective. This includes the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, memories, etc. of the groups (e.g. family and friends) or organisations that you are part of.

For example, perhaps it is important for you to be part of groups where you can exchange ideas on the topics that are of interest to you. In your professional context, you may want to be your authentic self and feel safe to express opinions and challenge the views of other group members. Would it be important to share similar beliefs or values, or would you prefer to be part of a more diverse culture?



What are the key factors that are likely to contribute to your NGL?

Capture any important insights or possible actions here:

Once you have completed your list, reflect on it. What was interesting or surprising?

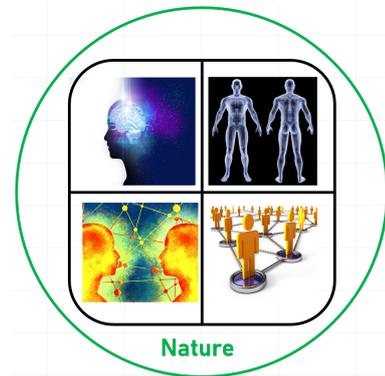
Capture any important insights or possible actions here:

Dimension of Nature

Now, we will move beyond human aspects to the natural world of which we are a part.

When you consider your NGL, what is important to take account of in the domain of the natural world?

For example, it may be important for you to be able to see nature around you and to be able to get out into nature daily. Perhaps you enjoy living in a part of the world that has four seasons or maybe you need to see blue skies and mountains.



Capture any important insights or possible actions here:

Once you have completed your list, reflect on it. What was interesting or surprising?

Capture any important insights or possible actions here:

Dimension of “Spirit”

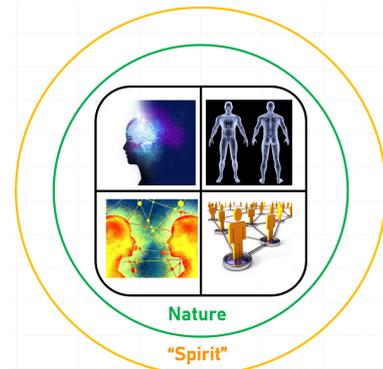
Finally, we turn to the world of spirit. Perhaps we should have started here.

For most people, having some kind of sense of meaning and purpose in life is very important. As George Bernhard Shaw is famously quoted as saying *“This is the true joy in life, being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one.”*

Religious or spiritual beliefs can contribute to this sense of meaning and purpose. Voltaire is alleged to have said that *“If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him”*. There’s no doubt that religions contain a lot of wisdom and, there is compelling evidence that being part of a religious group can contribute to mental and physical wellbeing.

In recent years, there has been increasing interest and exploration into how religion and science might converge or complement each other. Some scientists are exploring how consciousness may “boot up” reality rather than matter (our brains) creating consciousness (this is explored in LAi6).

What mighty purpose are you serving? How might some kind of spiritual life contribute to your NGL? Would it be important to be part of a traditional religious community or adopt more personalized spiritual practices?



Capture any important insights or possible actions here:

Living a “Happy Life”

Having taken time to reflect on your NGL, to what extent have your views on the importance of happiness changed since the first exercise? How have you been seeking happiness? Looking back at your own life, when were you most happy? What contributed to this state?

(Optional) In this short (4- minute) [video](#), Steve Cutts depicts a rodent's unrelenting quest for happiness and fulfilment. Does the rodent’s experience bear any resemblance to your own?



Capture any important insights or possible actions here:

A “Happy Life” – The Science **(Optional)**

You might be interested in the results of the longest study on happiness.

In 2016 psychiatrist Robert Waldinger gave what would turn out to be one of the most-watched [TED talks](#) – “What make a good life?” This [short video](#) presents the important lessons from the Harvard study on how to build a long and fulfilling life. What were the lessons? There are many factors, but in this study, it was relationships that made most difference. (< 13 mins)



Capture any important insights or possible actions here:

Summary

In this *Learning Adventure*, you have started to develop a sense of what your NGL could look like. Before moving on, reflect on the following questions:

- How do you feel after completing this *Learning Adventure*?
- What are your top 3-4 take-aways?
- What actions do you plan to take?

Capture your ideas here:

After you have spent some time letting your NGL vision sink in, you may want to explore your existing internal and external resources (e.g. determination or important friendships) that are available to you now on the journey toward your NGL. This is explored in the next *Learning Adventure* in the series (LAI2).

References

Websites:

Wilber 4-Quadrant Model:

<https://www.thelivingphilosophy.com/the-four-quadrants-ken-wilber/>

Books:

1. Banks, Amy: *Wired to Connect*: ISBN 978-1-101-98321-8
2. Palmer, Christopher: *Brain Energy*: ISBN 978-1-63774-158-0
3. Peters, Steven: *The Chimp Paradox*: ISBN 978-0-09-193558-0

Appendix 1 – Karin’s Case Study (Part 1)

The following is part 1 of a fictional case study that is intended to illustrate the process outlined in this *Learning Adventure* and the ones that follow. Karin’s case study is continued in *Learning Adventures 2, 3 and 4*.

Karin is 49 and a Belgian national. She is married to Chris (a British citizen) and has two children, a daughter Lisa (17) and a son Steven (16). The family also has a Border Collie called Maggie.

Karin is a bright, well-educated woman who works for a large pharmaceutical company as a programme manager. She is outgoing and enjoys her job and the contact she has with her colleagues. Looking back over the past ten years of her life, Karin can now sense a growing awareness of some of the global shadows. However, she put her concerns to the back of her mind and focused on taking care of her family and building her career. However, with the growing political extremism, the shock of Covid, the war in Ukraine and the increasingly obvious effects of climate change, she has become anxious about her and her family’s future. She has tried to discuss her fears with Chris but, so far, he has brushed her fears aside, believing that technical solutions will eventually save the day.

Learning Adventure 1 – Envision Your New Good Life

Karin and Chris had done well in their respective jobs, which had allowed them to acquire a large, comfortable house in the countryside on the outskirts of Brussels. Impressive cars were parked in their drive, and they had regular holidays in exotic parts of the world. Karin knew that she was very fortunate but couldn’t shake off a growing sense that life had become a treadmill, lacking meaning and joy. At work, there was the constant call to “do more with less”. She was working long hours and was not able to spend as much time with her family as she would have liked. Lisa and Steven were growing up fast and could soon be leaving home. She’d read once that 75% of the time parents have with their children is spent by age 12. How much of their time did she have left?

In the Automatic Writing exercise (Tool 1), Karin imagined starting her day with an early-morning walk in the local countryside with Maggie, and a more relaxed breakfast with her family. Karin enjoyed her job, but in her NGL she could work more regularly from her home office and be able to complete her work within her contractual 40 hour-week. When she thought about what she would like to have in her life, she realised that the most important thing for her were her relationships. She would like to have more time for both family and friends and allow her to have one or two hobbies. Karin used to enjoy playing the guitar and singing in a local band but had to give this up because of a lack of time. She would like to feel more at peace and experience more joy in her life. Thinking about her legacy, she wanted to be remembered as someone who had made a positive difference in the lives of others, particularly her family and friends.

As Karin explored the Human dimension of her life (Tool 2), mental and physical fitness stood out as particularly important. She wanted to be able to better manage her feelings of anxiety and overwhelm that regularly intruded into her day. At work, she had followed an introductory workshop on mindfulness. She had immediately noticed a positive impact but had never managed to make mindfulness a regular practice. Also, her weight had been steadily increasing and, when she did manage to go for a walk, she was far more quickly out of breath.

The systems and structures in the lower-right quadrant were meeting all her immediate needs. But she had become more distant from some friends who had once been important. She would really like to be able to rekindle some of these relationships. In the lower-left quadrant of culture, she recognised that at work she did not always feel psychologically safe.

Karin's boss could be very critical, and she did not fully trust some of her colleagues. The company underwent regular reorganisations leaving people having to re-apply for their jobs and the redundancy packages offered were far worse than they had been in the past.

The dimension of nature was also important for Karin. She enjoyed walking and felt blessed to be living within a ten-minute walk of the Zoniënwood, a large, wooded area just 10km from the centre of Brussels. She would love to be able to spend more time walking and cycling in the countryside and had recently bought an electric bike so that she could easily keep up with other members of the family.

The dimension of spirit didn't really resonate for Karin. Her parents had insisted that she go with them to church on Sunday. But as a teenager, she had started to question some of the core beliefs and, since then, religion had never been a particularly important part of her life.

When Karin consolidated her NGL vision using Canva, she produced the following:



Karin watched Steve Cutts' video about the rodent seeking happiness and could see uncomfortable parallels with her own world. Looking back at her life she could see that she had been seduced by the belief that her life would really be happy if only And, as the Harvard study showed, Karin could see that a key contributor to her happiness was her close relationships.