

PERSONAL SYNTHESIS

A complete guide to personal knowledge

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PWBC, London

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INTRODUCTION

What is Personal Synthesis?

The amount of knowledge we possess is amazing. You may know about evolution and creation, who invented the light bulb or won at Waterloo, what the capital of Norway is, how to use a computer and drive a car... but how much do you know about yourself and those areas of life that make up your everyday experience? This is the subject of Personal Synthesis. It is not about the world out there, but about us. It can help you develop understanding and skills related to issues such as handling emotions, developing creativity, making decisions (and putting them into practice), overcoming anxiety, coping with problems, communicating effectively, developing constructive relationships and many more. The book provides, in one place, essential knowledge (practical and theoretical) of all the basic areas of human life. They are also organised in a two-dimensional map that shows the relations and connections between them, hence synthesis.

Why Personal Synthesis?

We are all aware that we live in a time of rapid and dramatic changes. As one historian put it, this is a period that 'breaks the old cycles and the traditional customs of man'¹. In the past, society played a much greater role in the lives of individuals. Almost every aspect of daily existence was determined by political and social systems, the church, extended family, even neighbours. Life then was more restrictive, less tolerant towards digressions and differences, and often wrong and unfair (at least towards some of its members). Yet, such a situation created a sense of security and predictability. Nowadays, the complex nature of our society, the greater cultural diversity and pluralism of values have increased choice and allowed more freedom, but it has also increased personal responsibility, insecurity, anxiety and confusion.

A recent survey² over decades shows that although we have never had it better, we seem to be less happy. According to the World Health Organization, depression is set to become the world's most pervasive serious illness by the year 2020 (more widespread than heart disease and cancer). One in four visits to GPs in Britain is already due to some psychologically related problem (the most frequent reason, after flu and cold). Nearly a quarter of a million people try to kill themselves every year in the UK³ alone. Alcohol and drug abuse, delinquency and violence are also on the increase. This is not to say that we should try to go back and embrace outdated ideologies and social systems. But, if we wish to move forward, personal knowledge may help us avoid some of the pitfalls on that journey.

This is not, however, the only reason why it can be valuable. Attributes like class, gender, nationality, cultural or religious backgrounds, affluence and status that used to be decisive regarding employment, relationships and other aspects of life, are now losing their significance (rightly so), while personal qualities are becoming more important. We have to rely on ourselves more than ever, so paying attention to our personal development is not a luxury any more, but a necessity.

Despite all that, it is still hard to know where and how to go about it. Probably the most frequent sentence that I have heard working as a counsellor is "If I'd only known". Our civilisation, focused mainly on the external world, has substantially increased its control and power over the environment (for better or for worse). Much less is done regarding self-knowledge and self-power. Let me try to clarify what I mean.

Numerous pieces of research⁴ conclude that personal and psychological development is much more important to successful life than academic achievement, for example. Yet, in mainstream education there are plenty of opportunities to learn about mathematics, literature, geography, science, history, art and other subjects, but little chance to learn about those things that really matter in life – about ourselves and the ways we can experience and relate to the world around us.

Social institutions (media, political or religious organisations etc.) often seem to have their own agenda, so it is not surprising that their attempts to ‘educate’ us about how to lead our lives are usually met with suspicion.

Speaking to friends or relatives about personal matters, although good in its own right, can be sometimes more confusing than helpful. We often find in these situations that some of them are not interested and are content to follow what the majority do without much reflection, while others come out with very different, sometimes contradictory suggestions or claims.

It is not surprising that counselling is becoming more and more popular, but the majority of counsellors nowadays are committed to being non-committal, ‘passive’ listeners, which is of limited value. A lot of people find that this is simply not enough.

This is why there are an ever increasing number of self-help books around. However, wading through innumerable titles to find good ones can be wearisome indeed. Moreover, they often contain only a few original and useful sentences. No doubt, many of these books can make us feel temporarily better, but that feeling usually quickly wears off and we are back to square one. Even materials that have a real practical value usually deal with one subject, so it is like patching up one hole, while others are opening up. And who has time to read a book or two for every important area of life?

This book is an attempt to overcome this problem and have it all in one place. To achieve that, all the materials are written in a ‘no frills’ way. No stories, anecdotes, counselling practice examples, and other gimmicks. Admittedly, it may be easier to read through a book garnished with such additives, but this is not very helpful. How many times did you enjoy reading a self-help book, but when you tried to apply its wisdom you couldn’t remember much or didn’t know what to do? The materials that really help us learn something practical – those that make a real difference – are usually clear and straightforward (computer or car manuals that are full of stories may be a nice read, but wouldn’t be taken seriously by those who really want to learn

about cars or computers). Thus, each area in this book is presented in a concise and clear way, so that you can go through, remember its content and return to it without wasting much time. In other words, only essence is given. Such a style also makes the materials more universal, which means that they can be a valuable tool irrespective of one's circumstances and personality.

The aim of the book

The main purpose of this book is to help you be more in charge of your life. Knowledge is power, and personal knowledge leads to personal empowerment. This book does not preach nor does it try to sell a particular formula (such as 'all you need to do is exercise more, or slow down, or cry (laugh, love) more, or recognise that your partner is from a different planet...'). No book can tell you what is good and what is bad for you. There is not a simple magic formula that works for everybody in every situation. What a book like this can do, though, is to assist you in making informed choices for yourself and putting them into practice. So, the aim is not to solve your potential or existing problems, but to empower you to face and deal with life challenges on your own. I do not claim that it can automatically make you eternally happy, successful, rich, or a great lover. You will still be facing ups and downs, frustrations and challenges. However, you will be able to take the place at the helm of your boat and direct it. Personal knowledge can be considered a solid platform that can give you confidence to enter stormy waters.

Moreover, embarking on this journey can make life more interesting – exploring that very complex web of human life has many surprises. It is like having a town map, which makes it easier to get where you want to go and see what you would otherwise miss. This does not mean that a map is always necessary. Sometimes it is more fun just to wander around. But knowing that you won't get lost can give you the confidence to do so.

How to use the book

The book can be used in several ways. The recommended way is to go systematically through each area in the suggested order. The reason for this is that all of the areas are interrelated (they affect each other), and also some of them rely on others. This does not imply just reading through the book from cover to cover. It is important to remain with one area as long as it is necessary, before moving to another. Such a systematic approach would enable a fully rounded development.

However, if you don't have time or patience to go through it systematically, or if you have a burning issue that needs to be attended to immediately, you can also start from an area that you are particularly interested in or that is closely related to your problem, and then perhaps expand your reading to surrounding and cross-referenced areas.

You may wonder for how long to remain with one area. Of course, perfecting your knowledge and skills related to any of them can take an entire lifetime; the materials here should be taken only as a foundation, a starting point. I suggest focusing on an area until you develop some confidence and mastery so that you can continue on your own. It is like learning to swim or drive: at one point you need to decide when you can do it without an external support. On average, it should not take more than a week, in many cases less, depending on how much time you can dedicate to your personal development. What is important to remember is that these materials are only a means to an end. And the end is to be fully in charge of your life.

A MAP OF HUMAN LIFE

Human life is very complicated and diverse. So, how can a model that may be of practical use to everyone be created? Obviously, this complexity needs to be somehow simplified without losing its essential elements. One way of doing so is to locate common denominators of our experience, underlying building blocks that life events are made of (such as feelings, reasoning, confidence, experience, motivation, basic types of relationships etc.). This has several advantages.

First of all, there is a limited number of such basic areas (whereas there is an unlimited number of intricate and unique life situations), so it is manageable. Also, we cannot deal successfully with complex issues if their underlying components are not addressed. Take, for example, smoking. Developing this habit depends on many factors such as relation to pleasure, susceptibility to influence, stability, self-discipline, gratification and so on. If they are not addressed, it is unlikely that you can be in control of smoking. And finally, these basic areas enable endless combinations that can be applied in any situation, so everybody can use them in a way that fits his or her personality and circumstances.

The following criteria are used to locate these basic areas:

- The areas in the model are irreducible. This means that they cannot be a part of, or be identified with other areas or their combinations. For example, anger or joy can be reduced to emotions so they are not included as separate areas (although they are, of course, addressed *within* other areas). On the other hand, pleasure cannot be, so it has its own place in the model. This criterion is important because it prevents overlaps or repetitions.
- All these areas are universal and play a role in our lives regardless of cultural background, beliefs, inclinations or personal qualities, so they are relevant to everybody. This also means that they are ‘timeless’, therefore pertinent to any future that may come.

- The areas are also transferable, meaning that the relevant knowledge and skills are not specific, but can be applied in a wide range of situations.
- All of them together should cover the totality of human experience. In other words, no gaps are left. This is vital because they are connected and support each other.

The above criteria, however, are not sufficient on their own to demarcate the areas of human life with typically fuzzy boundaries. The ‘bottom-up’ approach needs to be combined with the ‘top-down’ approach. This means that each area must also have its place within an overall structure, map of the territory. The following explanation of how such a map can be created may seem in some places a bit complicated, but it is worth persisting with it, because understanding the map will enable you to be more creative in using it and discover connections that are meaningful for you.

The map design starts with the fundamental dimensions of human life. They consist of two modes and two domains. The two basic modes that define us as human beings are *existence* and *agency*: in other words you *are* (you exist) and you *do* (your are able to choose and act). These two modes are applied in the two general domains: *internal* and *external*. Internal domain includes areas that focus around some aspects of yourself, such as thinking, feelings, desires, past experiences and so on, while external domain includes areas directed towards the world and others (expectations, achievements, communicating, relationships etc.)⁵. Although, of course, these domains influence and mould each other, it is of great practical importance to make a distinction between them. For example, if you are afraid, you can respond to the *situation* that has caused the fear (you can run away, fight, freeze, etc.), or you can respond to the *internal state*, fear itself (you can suppress, accept, fight, project, or ignore it). The first type of responses would belong to the external domain, the second to the internal. In fact, many psychological problems arise because the boundary between internal and external is blurred.

These dimensions provide the coordinates for the map:

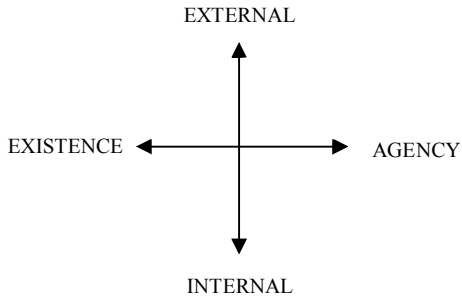


Figure 1

The diagrams below show the space that these dimensions cover:

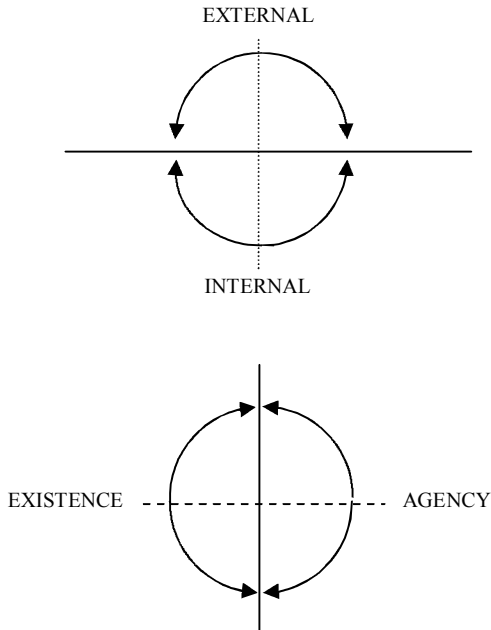


Figure 2

We can see that the modes and domains overlap. Put together, they can be presented in the following way:

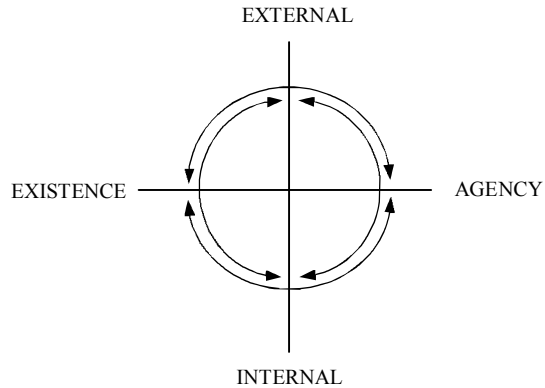


Figure 3

Categories

The areas that are mentioned earlier cluster around these coordinates and form four categories: *Personal* category, *Being* category, *Doing* category, and *Social* category⁶. They are represented in this diagram:

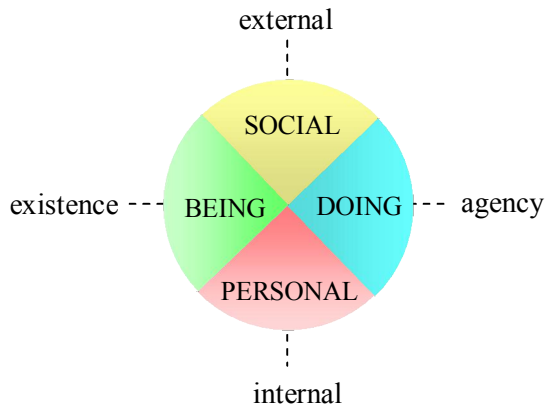


Figure 4

The Personal category, at the bottom of the diagram, is the foundational or root category. This is because the other categories rely to some extent on it. The personal category includes areas that relate to ourselves (such as self-awareness, emotions, reasoning etc.).

The Being and Doing categories are the side categories, and they complement each other. The Being category involves the ways we *are* in the world and the ways we perceive the world. The Doing category is concerned with choice and deliberate actions. The terms *being* and *doing* are close to the more commonly used terms *passive* (or receptive) and *active*. They are preferred, however, because ‘active’ and ‘passive’ are value-laden and can be misleading. *Being* here means that the person is affected, while *doing* means that the person affects. So, the Being category can include an activity if it is a re-action (an incentive comes from the outside), and the Doing category can include inactivity if it is the result of one’s choice (an incentive comes, as it were, from the inside).

The Social category, at the top of the diagram, is mainly concerned with the interaction with others. It depends to some extent on the previous categories and also overarches them.

Let’s see how these categories relate to the modes and domains. Figure 5 (on the following page) shows that the Internal domain includes the Personal category and one side of the Being and Doing categories; the External domain includes the Social category and the other side of the Being and Doing categories; the Existence mode includes the Being category and one side of the Personal and Social categories; and the Agency mode includes the Doing category and the other side of the Personal and Social categories. So, the modes and domains overlap. The Personal category, for example, belongs to the internal domain, but its one side also belongs to the Existence mode, while the other belongs to the Agency mode.

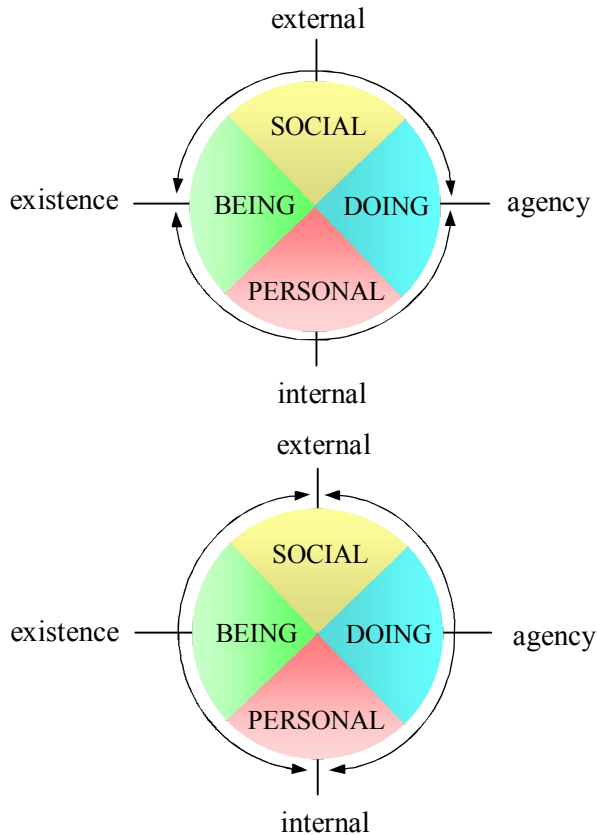


Figure 5

Groups

Each category consists of four groups, which makes sixteen groups (see figure 6). The groups relate to each other in the same way as the categories. The root group of each category is always near the centre of the model. In the Doing category, for example, it is the Choice group. Every category also has two side groups (relative to the root group) that belong to either different modes or different domains. The side groups in our example are the Directive group and Problem group⁷. The

former belongs to the Internal domain, while the latter belongs to the External domain. The groups positioned at the corners are called the top groups⁸. In the Doing category, it is the Activity group. They have an overarching role, but rely on certain elements from other groups in the same category.

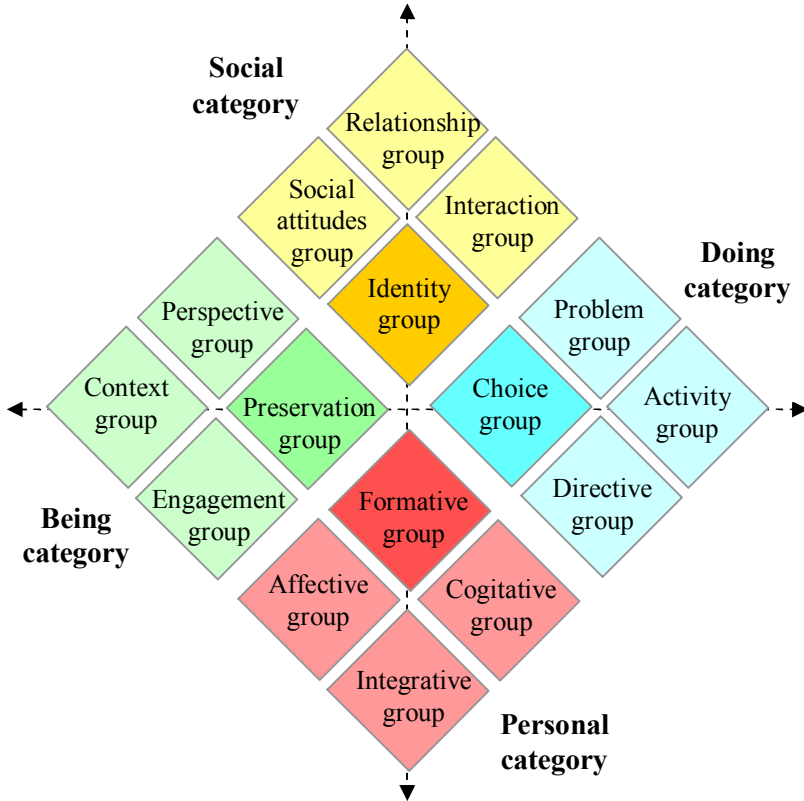
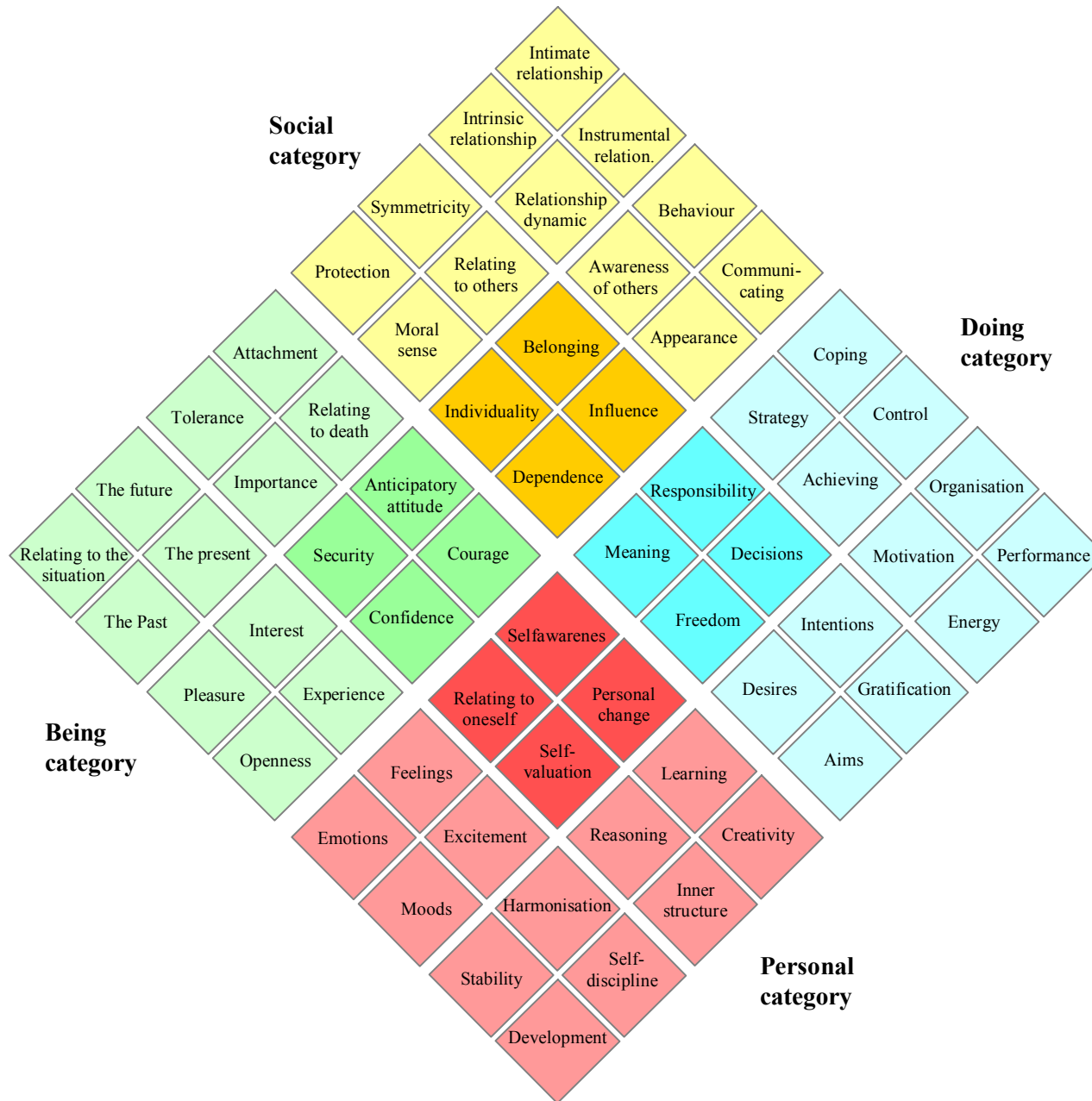


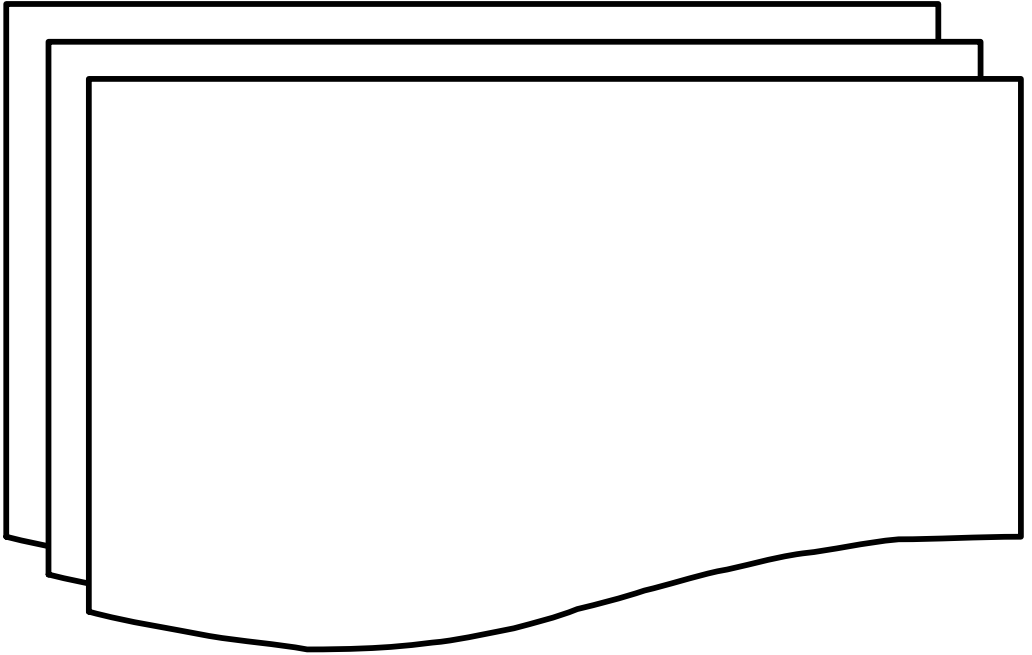
Figure 6

Areas

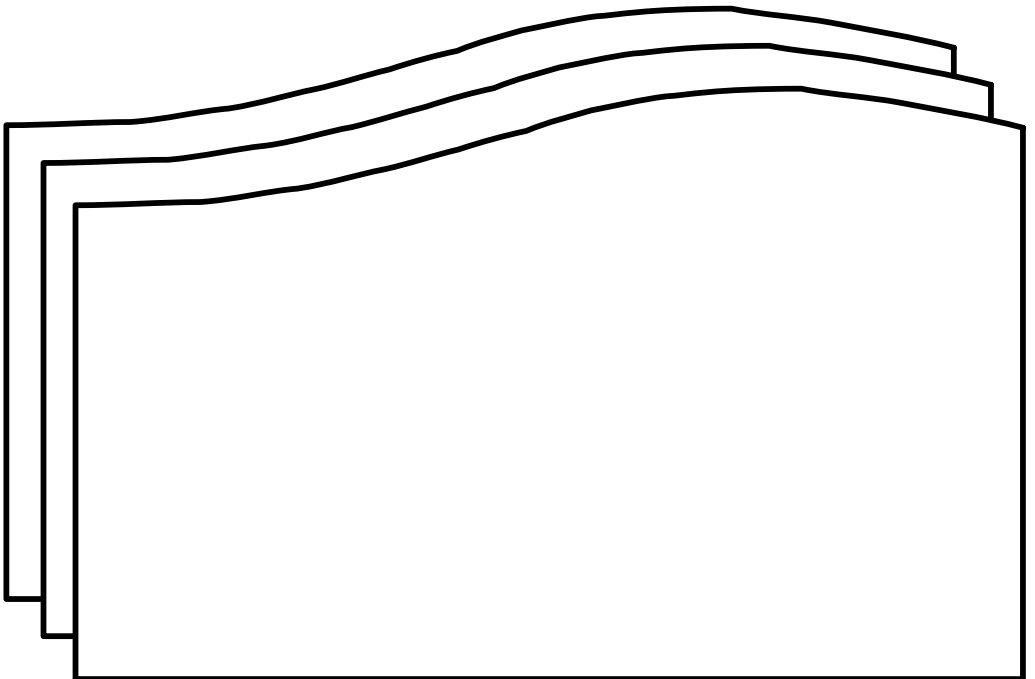
Each of these groups consists of four areas, which makes 64 areas in total. They are all presented in the final model:

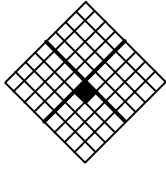
THE MAP





SOME PAGES ARE HERE OMITTED





01. SELF-AWARENESS

Turn inward for your voyage! For all your arts
you will not find the Stone in foreign parts.

Angelus Silesius

The reason why we often don't fully understand ourselves is several obstacles to self-awareness. What they are, and some methods to overcome them are suggested below.

THEORETICAL LEVEL

Self-ignorance. By ignoring our inner processes we may temporarily avoid unpleasant feelings or postpone facing some difficult issues, but the ignored will not disappear; in fact, in the long run its influence may increase. Self-awareness may require an effort, but it can be beneficial in many ways. The better you know yourself, the more you will be in charge. Knowing yourself can also help you form realistic expectations, which, among other benefits, minimises disappointments. Finally, an inner world can be as rich and complex as the external one, so a life without self-awareness is impoverished.

This is not to say, however, that you should focus only on yourself and neglect the world around. Perception of the external reality reflects the inner one, and the other way around. So, looking outside may help you learn about yourself, and looking inside can contribute to better understanding of the outside world. For example, the way you perceive and describe a scene, event or person is always to some extent unique, so it can reveal something about yourself. Conversely, self-knowledge can help you understand others better, recognise if your perception is distorted and judge a situation more accurately.

Self-deceit often includes self-ignorance, but adds to it a false or unrealistic self-image. It is usually employed to avoid awareness of those aspects of oneself that are not acceptable or desirable in order to preserve or enhance self-esteem. Self-deceit can make you feel temporarily better, but in time,

discrepancies between the real person and a created image accumulate, which eventually leads either to rejecting reality, or to being forced to renounce the idealised self and face the real one. Both outcomes can have unpleasant consequences. To avoid self-deceit it is necessary to be sincere with oneself even if it is uncomfortable. Consider, for example, a person who believes that he wants to study medicine to help others, but is in fact driven by social insecurity and desire for prestige. Although admitting this may be hard, it would enable him to deal adequately with the underlying drives and make a right career move.

Obscurity refers to those mental processes and motives that we are not fully aware of (they may be suppressed, but also they simply may not yet be clearly formulated in our consciousness). They can be manifested in dreams, daydreams and fantasies, so dream analysis can be an example of how to throw more light on such processes.

There is much disagreement about the purpose and meaning of dreams. The extreme views maintain that dreams are random and meaningless sensations, or that they are messages from a hidden part of the mind, with universal symbols and language. A midway position considers dreams expressions of our states of mind. While in reality experiences affect our state of mind, in dreams the state of mind creates an experience. So, dreams can be taken as manifestations of our emotions, desires, thoughts and other drives. They can be meaningful, but their meaning is specific to the dreamer rather than universal. However, dreams do not follow logic but a chain of associations, which is why they may be confusing and difficult to interpret. Several techniques to analyse dreams are suggested below. Remember, though, that dreams are not about a message but learning about yourself.

REFLECTIVE LEVEL

It may be worth considering how well you know yourself (e.g. why you have certain preferences or react in a certain way) and to what extent you value self-awareness.

PRACTICAL LEVEL

There are several methods that can help you overcome the above obstacles.

Self-disclosure. Talking about yourself to an accepting listener (e.g. a trustworthy friend or a counsellor) is one of the oldest and best methods of getting to know yourself.

Keeping a diary can help us recognise certain patterns that would otherwise not be noticed. For this purpose, the diary should be a candid description of events and your reactions, thoughts and feelings. It is better to leave interpretations and analyses for later, because they can take you away from the experience or distort its accurate recollection.

Self-representation. Visualise or draw a picture of an image that symbolises your personality. It may be a house, for example. Is it big or small, detached or attached, dark or light? What is in the cellar or the loft? What does this image tell you about yourself?⁹

Dream analysis. One method to analyse dreams is to write down everything you can remember from the dream and then extract several elements (e.g. an object, person or event from the dream). On the basis of whatever first comes to mind, make a short story about each of them (this will eliminate the form of the dream that may be an obstacle to understanding). The themes that are common, that repeat, should reveal a dream trigger.

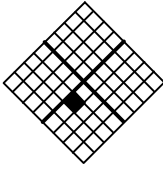
Gestalt psychologists¹⁰ suggest taking one or more elements from the dream and engage in a dialogue with them by alternating the roles of a dream element and yourself.

Another option is to focus directly on the feelings and sensations rather than dream images, and consider how they relate to your present situation, aspirations or concerns.

RECOMMENDED MATERIALS

Chapters one, four, five and six in Rainwater, J. *You're in Charge: A guide to Becoming Your Own Therapist* focus on this area. In fiction, Hesse's *Demian* is an engaging example of self-exploration. A darker and more cynical self-account can be found in *Memoirs from the Underground* by Dostoyevsky.

02. RELATING TO ONESELF



Paradoxically, change seems to happen when you have abandoned the chase after what you want to be (or think you should be) and have accepted – and fully experienced – what you are.

Janette Rainwater

This area considers the two basic attitudes towards oneself: acceptance and rejection. Shame and guilt are closely related to these attitudes, so they are addressed too.

THEORETICAL LEVEL

Acceptance and rejection. We can't get away from ourselves, so accepting yourself is better than rejecting. Rejection doesn't make the rejected disappear, its influence only shifts to the unconscious level and in that way often grows. It also creates an inner conflict, which decreases the amount of energy that can be used constructively. Not only is the initial act of repressing effortful, but continuous energy is needed to keep the rejected suppressed. On the other hand, acceptance enables the person to stop inner fights and build security and confidence. It is the basis of personal integrity. Moreover, those who accept themselves are more likely to be accepted by others too.

Acceptance doesn't mean pampering yourself, but not hating, ignoring, being ashamed or being afraid of yourself. Being imperfect is not a reason for embarrassment. This applies to what you do too. Accepting your limitations will release you from the pressure of unrealistic expectations and minimise disappointment. It is also worth remembering that your weaknesses and mistakes may be hidden intentions, manifestations of (perhaps inadequate) responses to the environment or your needs. Only if you allow them to emerge to the surface, can you learn about them and find the reason for their occurrence. All this doesn't imply complacency – it can be the first step towards a constructive change. It is easier to make an improvement if you first accept your shortcomings. If ignored or denied, they are more likely to grow.

Rejection rarely leads to a constructive change, but it may result in an attempted shortcut, appearance of a change – creating a false personality (see ‘Self-deceit’ in the area *Self-awareness* p.28-29). Acceptance, on the other hand, requires abolishing self-idealisation. It may temporarily make you feel worse, but it is beneficial in long run. This is not to say that your imperfections should become a focus of your concerns, which may be paralysing. They need to be observed in totality, as a part of a whole picture, from which perspective you can consider what can be improved.

Guilt and shame are not the result of self-rejection, but they may lead to it. They are reactions to a perceived digression from personal and social norms respectively. They indicate that we now know better, that we are ready to change, which can help us stop repeating the same mistakes. Therefore, these feelings are adequate only regarding the actions and their consequences that we are responsible for. Feeling ashamed or shaming others for something that is beyond your or their power (e.g. height, age, race) is misplaced. However, ignoring guilt and shame if they are a response to your actions means also rejecting a part of yourself. If not accepted, they may compel you to repeat an act in order to diminish its importance, which can become a vicious circle. This doesn’t mean being stuck with these feelings, which can be debilitating, make you insecure and arouse suspicion among others. Self-punishment rarely helps and is in fact not necessary. The first step of reconciliation with yourself is taking full responsibility and accepting the consequences of your actions. Guilt and shame can be then used as a motivational force instead. As one author puts it, ‘if [guilt and shame] can instigate us to consideration of the future, [they] can be replaced by a purpose, a resolution’¹¹. This means correcting what can be corrected, but also understanding your motives and developing strategies for similar situations, so that the mistake is not repeated. In the case of shame, this doesn’t necessarily imply changing your behaviour. The resolution could be to withstand the pressure of others if the related social norms are deemed inadequate.

REFLECTIVE LEVEL

It may be worthwhile to consider the consequences of rejecting and accepting yourself. For example, you can pick an aspect of yourself that you fully accept and see how it reflects on your life, and then choose an aspect that you reject and again see what effects it has (or had in the past). Observing others may give you an insight into what effect self-acceptance and self-rejection have on relationships.

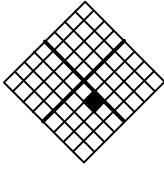
PRACTICAL LEVEL

Developing self-acceptance. This exercise can help you find out how you relate to various aspects of yourself and develop a more accepting attitude (if you wish to do so).

Scan (mentally) various aspects of yourself: body (weight, height, shape, size), mind (thoughts, feelings, fantasies, desires), attitudes and behaviour. This should also include those features that you may be afraid of (e.g. ‘a dark side’ of the unconscious) and positive sides too (they also may be difficult to accept if you are, for example, shy). Elements that are not fully accepted are those that provoke negative feelings or tension, or are skipped over. Come back to them, observe what you feel and whether it is justifiable. Imagine how it would feel to accept them. One way of doing this is to think that you are your own best friend – treat, talk and behave towards yourself in this way, and see what difference it makes. After that you can return to those features that you didn’t like and clarify which of them cannot be changed (or are not worth changing) and which ones can be (how to do this will be the main subject of the following area *Personal Change*).

RECOMMENDED MATERIALS

Rogers, C. *On Becoming a Person* and Taubman, S. *Ending the Struggle Against Yourself* deal with the subject in some depth. Both books are written in the tradition of humanistic psychology. The latter one is, however, more practically orientated.



03. PERSONAL CHANGE

The Master said, it is only the wisest and the very stupidest who cannot change.

Confucius

A change can happen due to influences of the environment and other factors, but this area focuses on self-induced changes. People often don't believe that they can change and continue to follow the same patterns even when these become self-defeating. Yet, deliberate change is possible – how it can be achieved is the focus of this area.

THEORETICAL LEVEL

The basis of successful personal change is trust that you *can* change and that it is never too late. This is not to say that everything can be changed, but many affective, behavioural or thought patterns are adopted and habituated, and they can be. To build confidence, start from small changes that are more likely to be successful. Bear in mind that the earlier a habit is instilled, the more difficult it is to change it.

Before attempting to make a change it is a good idea to examine the old pattern first. Changing manifestations without finding and dealing with their causes may create an inner conflict, and lead to dissatisfaction or suppression. What is built on bad foundations can easily collapse.

Anxiety or the feeling of deprivation that a change may provoke can be minimised if you dis-identify with that which needs to be changed and take a position from which advantages of the change can be recognised (e.g. if you wish to be more outgoing, look at your shyness from a distance rather than being attached to it). To avoid insecurity that may lead to regression, it is also important to be clear what your goal is. Defining it in positive terms increases motivation (e.g. rather than aiming to lose weight, you can aim to be fit and healthy).

Attempt to make a change only when you are sure that the new way is preferable. Change is possible only if the invested energy is greater than the resistance. So, to avoid

disappointment, wait until the pattern to be changed is weak and your determination is strong. A rational decision is rarely sufficient, resolution needs to come from the heart. The stronger and deeper the feelings associated with the change are, the more profound the change.

A pattern to be changed is sometimes a part of a larger system (e.g. staying out late may be a part of one's social life). In this case you may need to deal with the whole system until the new way becomes stronger, otherwise the past habit will be recreated by its other components. Take into account that a change may cause some disruptions and a sense of uncertainty in others. So, they may refuse to accept the change even if it is for the better.

Persistency is essential in this process because old patterns tend to return out of habit. Despite many possible challenges it is worthwhile persevering: in addition to the specific benefits, every successful change also increases the sense of personal power and control.

REFLECTIVE LEVEL

Before moving to the practical level it may be useful to examine whether you really believe that deliberate change is possible. Consider if you have already made some changes in the past and how you have done it. In what way those experiences can contribute to succeeding this time?

PRACTICAL LEVEL

Making change is a method that consists of several steps. Following them can help you achieve desired change.

Clarify: pick a habit or pattern that you want to alter first. To establish if the change is really desirable and worth the effort, list the advantages and disadvantages of the old way and of the new one. Then consider if you can compensate for the advantages of the old pattern, and the disadvantages of the new one. To come to terms with a loss of the old lifestyle, think about what your life would look like if you continue in the same direction. Then imagine vividly that you have already changed. How would that look like?

Observe: don't initially interfere with your habit (but don't allow it to get worse either). Observe it, locate its triggers, look for possible causes and how they can be redirected. You can use a diary or a log for this purpose. It sometimes may help, but is, by all means, not necessary, to overdo the old habit (e.g. eating several chocolates in one go). If you decide to do so, take it out of context and focus only on the act - the purpose is to weaken the desire, not to enjoy it for the last time.

Apply: you can make a change gradually, step by step, or in one go. See which way suits you more. Announce your intentions publicly, and minimise, as much as you can, external and internal distractions and influences. This may include, for instance, dissociating with or removing the triggers that support the old habit (e.g. objects, stressful or tempting situations, other people and even your own negative thoughts).

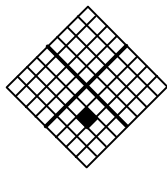
Persevere: rewarding yourself can strengthen determination. In some instances it may help to mentally identify with an image that has desirable characteristics (this could be another person, an object, or even an animal or phenomenon).

When you make it: enjoy the benefits and appreciate the success fully. It will make the process easier next time.

And if you don't: if you experience a relapse, accept it as a temporary setback – you are defeated only if you give up! Establish why it has happened and develop a strategy for similar situations in the future. For example, if you had a cigarette because you were annoyed, think about what you can do instead of smoking to deal with annoyance (for example, a relaxation exercise, see p.74).

RECOMMENDED MATERIALS

Changing for Good by J. O. Prochaska *at al.* and *I want to change but I don't know how* by T. Rusk and R. Read are self-help resources that can be a valuable support in carrying out desired changes. The former is based on and backed by scientific research.



04. SELF-VALUATION

Tho' modesty be a virtue,
bashfulness is a vice.

Proverb

Self-valuation refers to valuative attitudes and judgements of oneself that can encompass a range of categories: self-respect, self-esteem, modesty, conceit, vanity etc. There are two types of self-value: innate and acquired. The former is linked to self-respect, the latter to self-esteem. The emphasis on one or the other plays an important role in developing modesty or conceit, so they are also addressed.

THEORETICAL LEVEL

Self-respect derives from recognising our innate value and it doesn't depend on individual characteristics or merits. You don't even need to think favourably of yourself to maintain self-respect. The innate value is based on two fundamental features of every person: that one is (*existence*), and that one can choose and act (*agency*). The sense of self-respect, therefore, can be lost only if you deny your existence and agency. Existence is denied if you ignore or reject yourself (these attitudes are addressed in the preceding areas *Self-awareness* and *Relating to oneself*, respectively). Agency can be denied if you are not 'your own master' (this relates to the area *Personal change*). So, although self-respect does not need to be deserved, it is supported by living in accord with your ideals and values, because this is how we confirm ourselves.

Disrespect can be an excuse for giving in to weaknesses, but it has a negative effect on self-identity, confidence, independence and a general sense of well-being. If you don't respect yourself, you are also less likely to be respected and taken seriously by others.

Self-esteem is linked to our acquired value. This means that unlike self-respect, it has much to do with personal achievement and success. However, it cannot simply be identified with

achievements. Self-esteem is relative to personal standards, it is the ratio of our realisations to our expectations. The implication of this is that higher self-esteem can be brought about not only by achieving more, but also by lowering your expectations.

Self-esteem has a strong affective component. That is, it influences how we feel about ourselves. Research indicates that people with high self-esteem are happier and more effective; they are also likely to be more assertive, independent, and creative¹². However, too high self-esteem may lead to self-satisfaction that can decrease motivation for further development and to an exaggerated sense of self-importance.

Modesty derives from awareness of our place in the world, realisation that we are a part of a greater whole. It is beneficial in many ways: it supports self-control, preserves energy and enables the person to experience the world more fully.

Modesty is different, however, from self-depreciation or submissiveness. Low self-esteem or insecurity don't produce genuine modesty. Giving inflated importance to others (which means in fact to oneself through others) or taking yourself below anybody or anything else can be a form of egotism that indicates false modesty. A modest person simply does not base her value on comparisons with others. This is a more stable attitude because it is less affected by a change of circumstances. Self-assessment based on comparing is relative and often unrealistic. If you have no need to prove your equality, you can maintain dignity even in a humiliating situation. This is possible only if you don't doubt your innate value. Modesty, therefore, requires an emphasis on self-respect rather than self-esteem. People without self-respect can hardly be really modest. This is not to say that modesty indicates low self-esteem, but that the esteemed value is not prioritised (for this reason a modest person appears to have different standards from others). Such an attitude doesn't undermine achievements, but values them for their own sake, rather than as a means to maintain the sense of personal worth. In other words, modesty means taking yourself seriously rather than your image, which is why secondary gains such as praise or fame lose on importance.

Conceit and **vanity** are the result of a self-centred perspective. Esteemed value, what distinguishes one from others, is emphasised over innate value, what one shares with others. So, self-esteem is more important than self-respect. Such attitudes are in fact often compensation for a lack of self-respect ('I am worthy because of x' implies worthlessness without it). Unlike self-respect, conceit and vanity depend on external factors and need a constant affirmation. Self-image is more valued than the self. Because they are linked to self-esteem, they can make you feel good temporarily, but being driven by conceit and vanity requires a lot of energy and leads to losing touch with yourself and others.

REFLECTIVE LEVEL

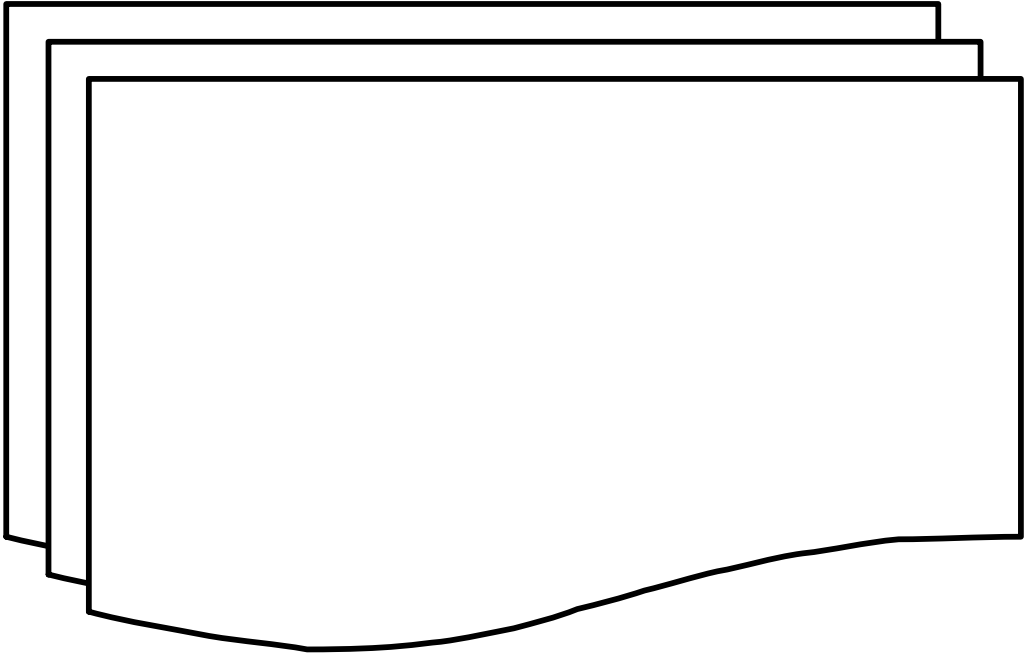
To clarify your views about this area, you can compare the value of self-respect and self-esteem, what affects them, and whether they in some instances oppose each other. You can also ask yourself how you can reinforce the sense of self-respect – not in general, but today.

PRACTICAL LEVEL

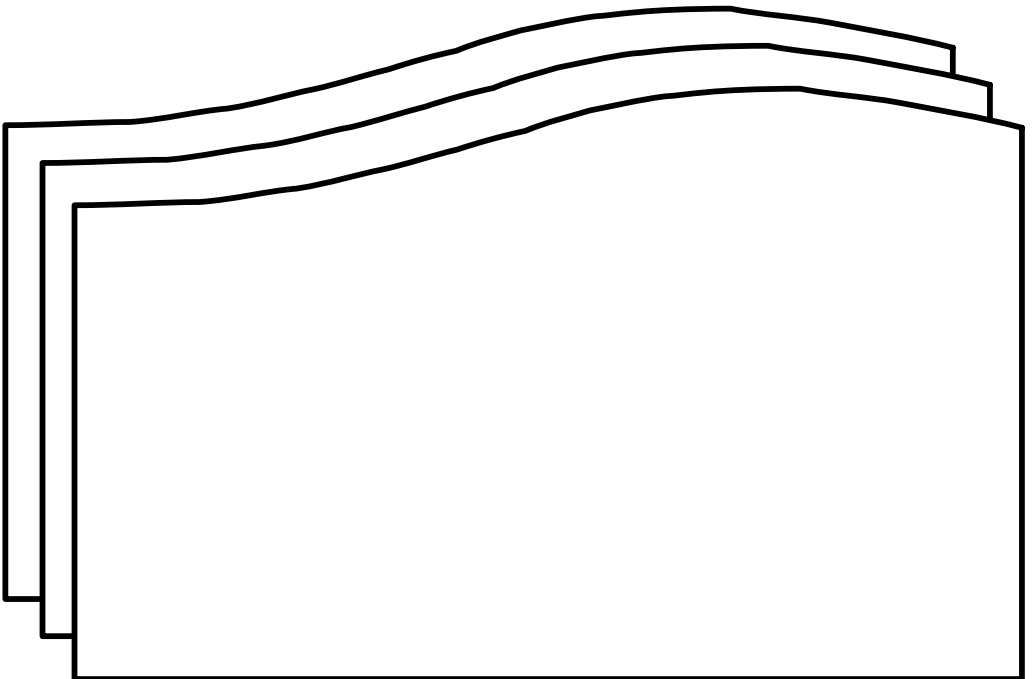
Self-characterisation. Write a character sketch of yourself, but in the third person, as it might be written by a friend who knows you well. Besides the content, the tone and style that you use can also indicate the sources of your self-value. For example, if the tone and style change substantially when you write about positive sides and when you write about negative sides, it is likely that your emphasis is on self-esteem. If the tone and style don't change much, your self-respect is probably intact. This is because it indicates a stable sense of self-value below immediate set-backs (of course, this should not be confused with a deliberate change of style for aesthetic purposes).

RECOMMENDED MATERIALS

Dillon, R. *Dignity, Character and Self-Respect* is a comprehensive collection of essays on this subject. Branden, N. *How to Raise your Self-esteem* provide some practical advice. In fiction, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen can be inspiring.



SOME PAGES ARE HERE OMITTED



EXERCISE TOOLBOX

There are over hundred practical exercises in the materials. To make it easier to use them, they are all grouped here in four big categories: *understanding* (as the basis); *dealing with* (to get from minus to zero); *regulating* (to maintain a zero point) and *improving* (moving from zero to plus). Each of them have subgroups relating to yourself, experience, actions and others.

UNDERSTANDING (27)

Yourself: Self-representation; Self-characterisation; Focusing on feeling; Revealing hidden feelings; Laddering; Dream analysis; Self-disclosure; Keeping a diary; Writing autobiography; (9)

Your experience: Evening review; Systematic elimination; Uncovering fear; Looking in to see out; Back to the future; Predictions check; (6)

Your actions: Imaginary dialogue; Where do I want to be?; Uncovering end-desires; Intention clarification; Charting desires; The map of aims; Backwards schedule; (7)

Your relationships: Bracketing; Overcoming partiality; Developing empathy; Falling in and climbing out; (4)

DEALING WITH (28)

Yourself: Unblocking emotions; Re-visiting the past; Dream control; Altering moods; Developing self-acceptance; Resolving inner conflicts; Mind Mapping; Dealing with your 'saboteur'; Parent-child-adult; (9)

Your experience: Exposure; Worry reduction; Anxiety control; Desensitisation; Combating boredom; Being positive; Accepting the situation; (7)

Your actions: Brainstorming; Picture problem; Emulating a person; Emulating a solution; Incubation; Preventing sabotage; Visualising confidence; (7)

Your relationships: Defusing intimidation; Dealing with protective reactions; On the way to acceptance; Assertiveness rehearsal; Conflict resolution; (5)

REGULATING, MAINTAINING (28)

Yourself: Peaceful images; Meditation; Dis-identification; Centring; Breathing exercises; Progressive relaxation; Autogenic Training; Energy flow; Stretching; (9)

Your experience: After fear; Matters of death; Coming to terms with death; Letting go; The pyramid of priorities; Importance regulation; (6)

Your actions: Keeping on track; Control feeling; Control image; Dealing with impatience; Inventory of activities; Life house; Tactical use of energy; Time-out; (8)

Your relationships: Alone but not lonely; Challenging asymmetries; Being watched; Influence work out; What do I really want?; (5)

IMPROVING (28)

Yourself: De-conditioning; Making change; Reprogramming; Time delay; Good discipline; Invocation by image; Evoking moods; Uplifting learning; Thinking straight; Developing creativity; (10)

Your experience: Phenomenological reduction; Awareness control; Openness control; Enhancing experience; Mindful eating; Mindfulness; On the top of a mountain; (7)

Your actions: Decision-making; Aim breaking; Background planning; Enhancing Motivation; Invoking motivation; Achievement maximisation; The final performance; (7)

Your relationships: Playing with appearance; Listen to yourself; Freeing behaviour; You and the group; Improving friendships; (5)

To find where these exercises are, please, look in the index.

FILMS

Movies can also be inspiring. Here are some suggestions related to each area:

01. SELF-AWARENESS: Spellbound (1945); Magnolia (1999)
02. RELATING TO ONESELF: Fight Club (1999)
03. PERSONAL CHANGE: Fried Green Tomatoes (1992)
04. SELF-VALUATION: It's a Wonderful Life (1946); Pride and Prejudice (2003)
05. FEELINGS: Ordinary People (1980)
06. EMOTIONS: The Sound of Music (1965)
07. EXCITEMENT: Grease (1978)
08. MOODS: Girl, Interrupted (1999)
09. LEARNING: Educating Rita (1983); Little Man Tate (1991)
10. REASONING: Twelve Angry Men (1957)
11. CREATIVE THINKING: F/X murder by illusion (1986)
12. INNER STRUCTURE: The Truman Show (1998); The Matrix (1999); Dark City (1998)
13. HARMONISATION: Barbarian invasion (2004)
14. STABILITY: The Driver (1978)
15. SELF-DISCIPLINE: All that jazz (1979)
16. DEVELOPMENT: The Wizard of Oz (1939)
17. COURAGE: Born on the fourth of July (1990)
18. CONFIDENCE: Billy Elliot (2000)
19. ANTICIPATORY ATTITUDE: As Good AS It Gets (1997)
20. SECURITY: Fearless (1994)
21. EXPERIENCE: Zorba the Greek (1964)
22. OPENNESS: Don Juan de Marco (1995)
23. INTEREST: Dead Poet Society (1990)
24. PLEASURE: Chocolat (2001)
25. RELATING TO DEATH: The Seventh Seal (1956)
26. IMPORTANCE: Citizen Kane (1941)
27. ATTACHMENT: Paris-Texas (1984)
28. TOLERANCE: Falling down (1993)
29. THE PRESENT: Groundhog Day (1997)
30. THE PAST: Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004)
31. THE FUTURE: What dreams may come (1998)
32. RELATING TO THE SITUATION: Life is beautiful (1998)

33. MEANING: Mr. Holland's Opus (1996)
34. FREEDOM: Lawrence of Arabia (1962)
35. RESPONSIBILITY: The Conformist (1970)
36. DECISIONS: Casablanca (1942)
37. DESIRES: Piano (1983)
38. AIMS: Field of Dreams (1989)
39. INTENTIONS: Forrest Gump (1994)
40. GRATIFICATION: Bright Lights, Big City (1988); 28 Days (2000)
41. STRATEGY: Thomas Crown Affair (1999)
42. ACHIEVING: An Angel at My Table (1990)
43. COPING: The Colour Purple (1985) Three Colours: Blue (1993)
44. CONTROL: The Godfather (1972)
45. MOTIVATION: Fly Away Home (1996)
46. ENERGY: Chariots of fire (1981)
47. ORGANISATION: Up, Close and Personal (1996)
48. PERFORMANCE: Gattaca (1997)
49. DEPENDENCE: Easy Rider (1969)
50. INDIVIDUALITY: Rebel without a Cause (1955)
51. INFLUENCE: Pay it Forward (2001)
52. BELONGING: About a boy (2002)
53. MORAL SENSE: Third man (1949)
54. PROTECTION: Edward Scissorhands (1990)
55. RELATING OT OTHERS: To Kill a Mockingbird (1962); Kiss of the Spider Woman (1985)
56. SYMMETRICITY: Blade Runner (1982)
57. APPEARANCE: Tootsie (1982); Some Like it Hot (1959)
58. AWARENESS OF OTHERS: The Green Mile (1999)
59. COMMUNICATING: Spanglish (2004) Rashomon (1950)
60. BEHAVIOUR: American Beauty (1999) Clueless (1995);
61. RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS: Annie Hall (1977); Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994)
62. INTRINSIC RELATIONSHIP: Jules and Jim (1961); Midnight Cowboy (1969)
63. INSTRUMENTAL RELATIONSHIP: Broadcast News (1987)
64. INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP: The Four Seasons (1982)

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NOTES

¹ Braudel, F. (1980) *On History* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p.215

² Ferri, E. *et al.* (2003) *Changing Britain, Changing Lives*, London, IoE.

³ Deurzen-Smith, E. van (1994) *Can Counselling Help?* Durham: School of Education, University of Durham, p.19

⁴ See Sprinthall, N. (1980) 'Psychology for secondary schools: the saber-tooth curriculum revisited' *American Psychologist* Issue 35, p.341-342

⁵ The internal-external axis departs from the classic distinction between inner and outer in so far as the internal is not identified with the subjective, or the external with the objective. They only represent domains or directions of individual awareness and intent.

⁶ The categories take positions that roughly correspond to the major areas of the brain (looking from left to right): our receptive abilities are mainly grouped in the anterior part of the cortex; the posterior part of the cortex is predominantly responsible for our agency; language, one of the central social aspects, is mainly situated in the left hemisphere, while the right hemisphere is believed to have a central role in the mental activities that are traditionally considered more subjective or personal (e.g. creativity, emotions). However, any further similarities or attempts to find parallels between the brain structure and this model would be strained.

⁷ This is because our desires, aims and intentions (that comprise the Directive group) are first begotten in ourselves before we 'reach out'. On the other hand, problems come from the outside - we don't create them (even when we want them).

⁸ This term, of course, does not have an evaluative meaning, it only reflects the position of the groups.

⁹ Other symbols and an evaluation of this method can be found in Assagioli, R. (1965) *Psychosynthesis* London: Crucible, 1990, 287-302

¹⁰ See, for example, Parlett, M. and Page, F. (1990) 'Gestalt therapy' in Dryden, W. (ed.) *Individual Therapy* Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1992, p.191 or Rainwater, J. (1979) *You are in charge* California: DeVorss & Company, 1989, p.118.

¹¹ Isenberg, A. (1980) 'Natural Pride and Natural Shame' in Rorty, A. (ed.) *Explaining Emotions* Berkeley; London: University of California Press, p.364.

¹² Coopersmith, S. (1967) *The Antecedents of Self-esteem* San Francisco: W. H. Freeman
p.19 and p.62.