The Wheel of Life

Happiness

Assessment

15-25 min

Client

No

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).

"The Wheel of Life" is a frequently used tool to address a client's satisfaction with important life domains (Dean, 2004; Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 1998). 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 domains, opportunities to increase satisfaction in each domain are discussed.

Goal

The goal of this tool is to assess the client's perceived satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the different domains of life. Practitioners typically use this tool with clients in the discovery session 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 reflect on their current life and approximate it to their desired life, increasing the balance between the different life domains. Note that it is important first to 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 different domains to be in perfect balance. It all depends on the client's values.

- Note that the wheel does not necessarily reflect "balance." Most often, the wheel is a firm reminder of how "unbalanced" a client's life is. Therefore, this exercise may inform clients about any gap between perceived "balance" and reality.

- The Wheel of Life is not a picture of the past. It is a snapshot taken at the moment, and because of this, it is subject to change. The wheel provides the client with information about the "now," and the practitioner may use it to point out the gaps between what is true today and what the client wants for the future.

[1]

- When used regularly, this tool is an excellent way to help your clients 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 behavior change.

- A client may also ask someone who knows him/her 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 improve their satisfaction with these domains. Especially for perfectionistic clients, the awareness of low levels of satisfaction may automatically trigger a need to 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 decrease (e.g., Kappes & Oettingen, 2011). The practitioner should assist the client in setting reasonable targets to improve well-being. Instead of motivating them to work toward a 10, the practitioner should help clients 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/her relationship satisfaction with his/her spouse 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 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 behaves in line with group values.

References

- Dean, B. (2004). *MentorCoach Foundation skills training manual.* 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.* Davies-Black Publishing.

The Wheel of Life

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 with 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 with each of the domains using the wheel on p. 4 (Fig. 1). A score of 1 indicates that you are not satisfied, 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 with his/her life. For an example of a completed wheel, see Fig. 3 on p.9.

Step 4

Discuss with the client how 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
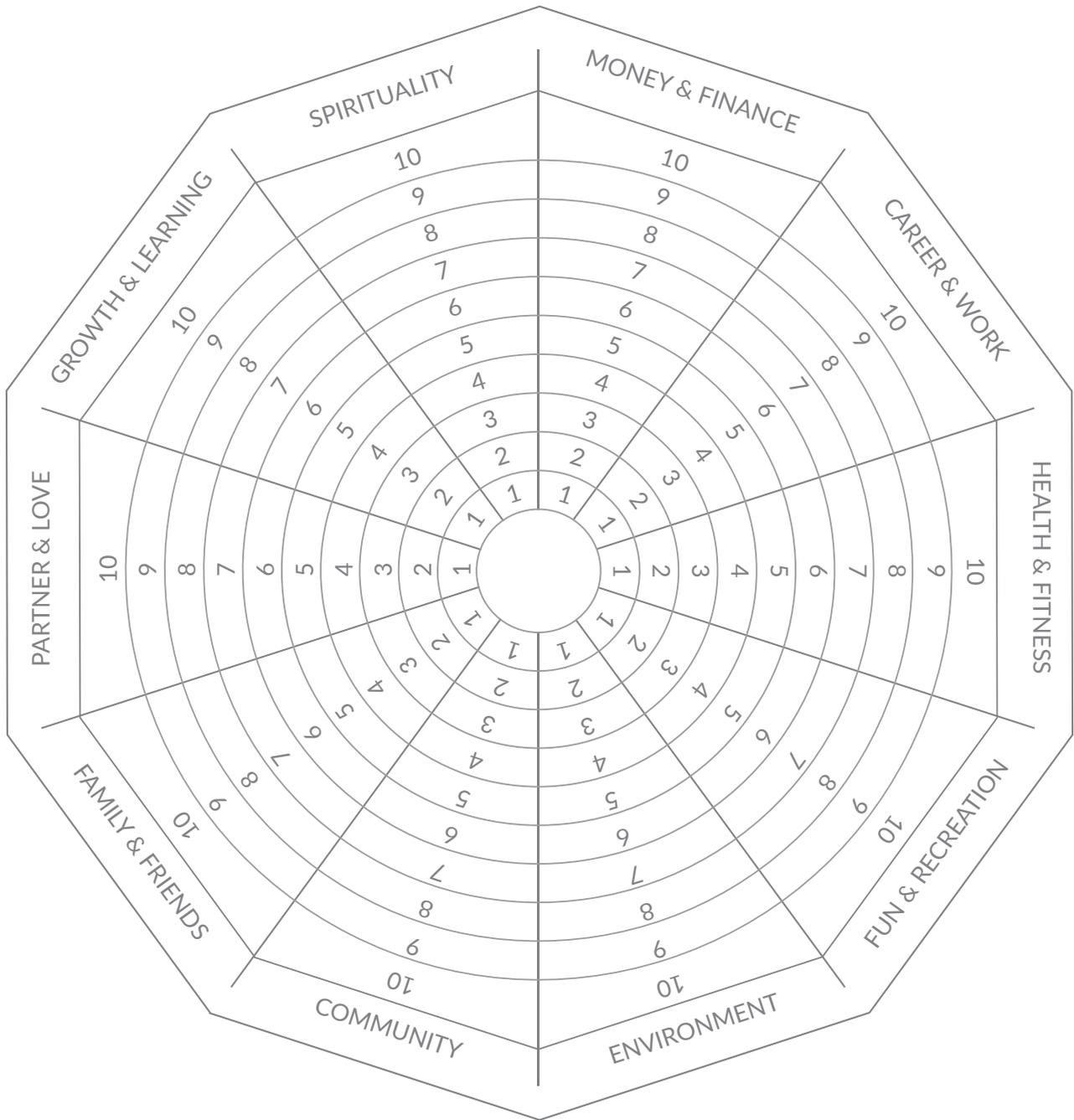
Instructions (version 2: self-defined life domains)

Inform the client that The Wheel of Life allows you both to get a snapshot of how satisfied the client is with 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. 8 (Fig. 2).

Step 3

Ask the client to rate his/her level of satisfaction with each of the domains using the wheel on p. 8 (Fig. 2). A score of 1 indicates that you are not satisfied, 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 with their life. For an example of a completed wheel, see Fig. 3 on p. 9.

Step 5

Discuss with the client how 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?

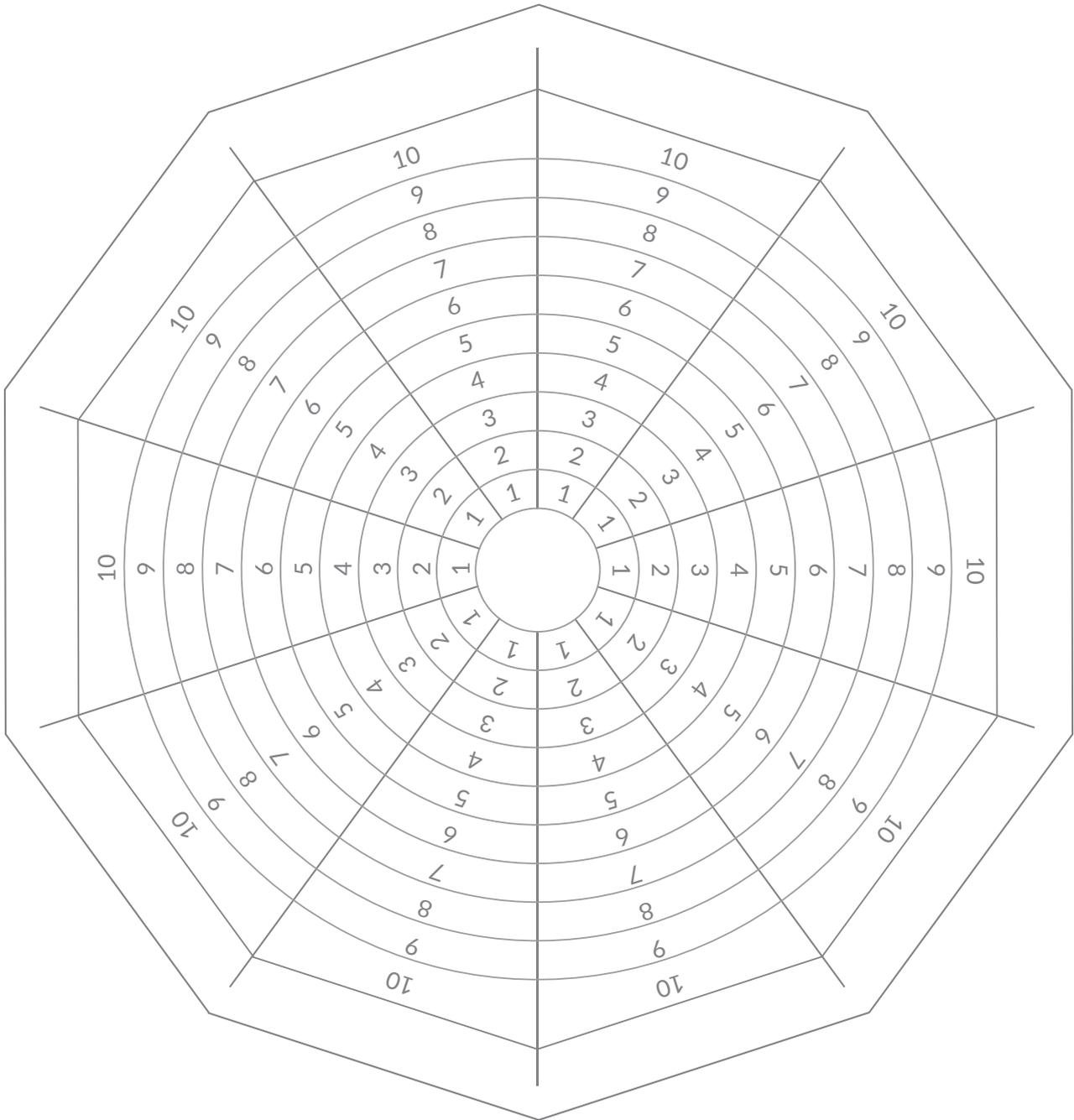**Fig. 2. The Wheel of Life with self-defined life domains**

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