

THE MEANING MINDSET: MEASUREMENT AND IMPLICATIONS

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In an ideal world, most reasonable people will want to live a life of pleasure, positive engagement, and meaning (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). However, throughout life we often have to make tough choices between what is right and what is profitable or between what is meaningful and what is pleasurable. The tough choices people make are more likely to reveal more of their core values and basic life orientation.

A related issue has to do with the ultimate concern or primary objective of one's life. It seems fair to assume that most people desire happiness and aspire to live a good life. What does the good life mean to them? What really matters to them? Their life purpose and goals also reflect their basic value orientation.

We believe that there are at least two fundamentally different life orientations. One orientation is primarily concerned with how to live a meaningful life—a virtuous life of serving a higher purpose and making a significant difference in the world. This is akin to Aristotle's ideal of eudaimonia.

The other orientation is primarily concerned with how to live a personally successful and happy life. People with this orientation are less identified with humanity and less concerned about global issues of poverty and injustice.

The following figure, modelled after Frankl (1985), reflects the differences between these two basic life orientations.

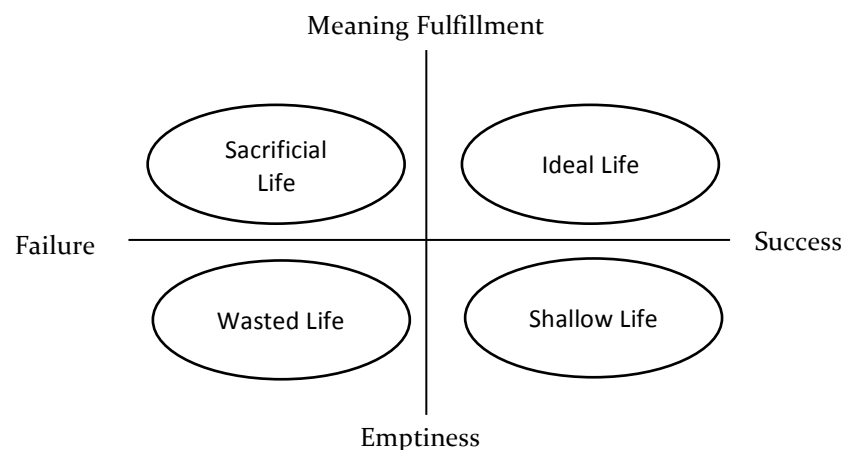


Figure 1. Meaning-mindset vs. success mindset.

These two different mindsets can exert pervasive influences on our lives and society, from career choices, relationships, and character strengths to civic virtues and community development. It is difficult to develop a harmonious, compassionate, and virtuous society without a significant number of people subscribing to the meaning-mindset. For a fuller explanation of the vital role of the mindset, please refer to Wong (2011, 2012).

I have developed a tentative Life Orientation Scale (LOS) to measure the meaning-mindset as per the following Table. In terms of content validity, LOS reflects a positive-mindset with strong emphasis on moral excellence and altruism. This test is consistent with the lifestyle of individuals (e.g., Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa) who chose to sacrifice personal success and happiness and give of themselves to a higher cause.

We can also predict that people who score high in LOS will be more likely to devote themselves to humanitarian relief work, social reform advocacy, or religious vocations. Such individuals are more likely to show more altruism, more eudaimonia, and more spirituality.

Personally, I believe that a meaning-mindset is exactly what we need to create a culture that values social responsibility, civic virtues, and service to humanity. Ultimately, a meaning-mindset will result in a kinder and more harmonious society and more sustainable development. I invite all psychologists to prove me wrong.

REFERENCES

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Table 1. Life Orientation Scale

The Life Orientation Scale (LOS)

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Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by circling a number on the 5-point scale that best corresponds to your personal belief and attitude.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				

Items 3, 4, 6, 8, and 10 are worded in the negative direction. The higher the total score is, the greater the meaning mindset.