**Values Prototyping: Using Action to Help Clients Explore Their Values**

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**Function of values prototyping**

* To learn more about what you would choose to value through engaging in valued action.
* Prototypes are about gathering more information, not about testing out a finalized product.
* Committed action focuses on enacting chosen values. Values prototyping utilizes experiential learning to help you decide what you might choose to value.

**Steps in values prototyping**

1. Design a prototype to test.
2. Implement prototype and collect data.
3. Review, revise, repeat.

**Qualities of an effective prototype:**

* Active—this is about learning through doing, not learning through not doing
* Attend to the qualities of action—not just *what* you are doing but *how* you are doing it.

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**Exercise: Help Your Partner Design a Values Prototype Using the Perspective Taking Interview Method (Step 1 of values prototyping process)**

**Instructions:**

1. **Clarify roles:** Decide who will be the “client,” who will be the “therapist,” and who will be observing and taking notes.
2. **Choose a valued domain.** The therapist helps the client decide on which valued domain they would like to focus on for the prototype. This should be an area of their life that is important to them, for example: family, partners/couples, parenting, friends, work, education, spirituality, community life, the environment, etc. Choose an area in which the client wants to try something new, (re)connect with a sense of meaning and purpose in that area, or explore more about their values related to that domain.
3. **Identify a value to explore.** The therapist asks questions to help the client identify a quality, value, or valued goal they want to explore within that domain. Keep this brief. You don’t have to be fully clear on your values here, that’s what the prototyping is for. Just a general sense of what kinds of qualities or values you might be interested in is all you really need to get started prototyping.
4. **Design a prototype**. Client and therapist work together to design a prototype using the perspective taking interview method described below. Make sure you identify a specific person or several people that the client will interview. Write down the specific questions the client will ask during the interview that would give the client more information about the value they are wanting to explore.

**Perspective Taking Interview Prototype:** Identify a person or several people you know, have known, or could conceivably meet who are living out the value or quality you want to explore. Plan how you could interview those people with the goal of really understanding what it is like to be that person living out the value. What questions would you ask to really get a sense of what it is like to be in their shoes, living that quality? How do they support themselves in enacting that quality or value in their lives? The goal is to get a feeling for what it’s like to be in their shoes so that this can inform whether this is something you’d want to pursue in your life. Questions to ask in the interview could include (try to create your own with the specific people in mind):

* + What do you do on a typical day to live \_[value you are exploring e.g. compassionately, with gratitude, in the service of justice, etc.] ?
  + How would you describe what living with \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ means?
  + How have you put \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ living into practice?
  + How did you get started on this path of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ living? What keeps you going on that path? How can you tell if you’ve gotten off track?
  + How has living a life in the service of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ changed how you live or what you do?
  + How has this impacted your life or the lives of those around you?

1. **Debrief and provide feedback.** The client shares what it was like to be led through the prototyping process- What worked? What didn’t? The therapist shares what it was like for them to try to help a client with the process—What did you learn? What was challenging? The observer shares what they noticed about the process and provides any outside feedback.

**Tips to keep in mind as you do the exercise:**

* Don’t take this too seriously. The client is not committing to a whole life filled with what they are exploring. It doesn’t have to be perfect. It’s just an experiment. It’s just a chance to get to learn from someone they respect or admire that could give them some clues as to what values they might want to choose in their own life.
* Start small and be specific: Start with a prototype that focuses on one specific aspect or quality that might make up that broader valued-life picture.
* As the therapist, focus on asking good questions rather than offering solutions. Focus on facilitating a posture of curiosity, possibility, and maybe even wonder rather than trying to come up with the “right” answer.

**If you complete this step of designing the prototype before the end of the breakout, you can then move on to one or both the remaining 2 steps of the values prototyping process which are:**

1. **Identify what data your partner is going to collect and how.** Prototyping is about gathering information. You need to be specific about what information you are going to gather and how that is going to be done. Writing down the data is important, so clarify how the client will track their experience (e.g. Filling out a daily rating scale? Daily journaling? End of the week written reflection?). The following might be some questions you might have the client reflect on before and after completing the perspective taking interview:

**Before the interview:**

* Why did I choose this person? What is it about them that I am drawn to?
* What am I feeling as I think about interviewing this person about their values? What thoughts show up?
* What am I most curious about with regards to this person and their values?
* What do I think I already know about what this person chooses to value? What do I think it’s like for them to live out their values as they do?

**After the interview:**

* What was it like to interview this person? What feelings showed up as I was talking with them?
* What do I admire about how the person I interviewed is living their life? What did I dislike or feel more neutral about as they talked?
* Did I learn anything new about the person I interviewed and what matters most to them?
* What impact might it have on my life and those around me if I used this person I interviewed as a role model as I lived out this values in my life?
* How might my relationships be different a year from now if I lived out the value that this person I interviewed lives out? What might be possible in future relationships if this value guided my actions?
* How might I feel about myself one year from now if this value guided my choices and my actions over the course of a whole year?

1. **Plan for potential barriers. Consider the following questions:**

* Do I have the resources, both psychological and physical, that I need to take action on this prototype? If not, what steps can I take to acquire those resources?
* Do I like this idea? How do I feel as I think about moving forward with implementing this prototype?
* Is this prototype specific enough so that I know how to take action on it?
* Is this prototype actionable? Is it something I can do with my hands and my feet versus a feeling or thought that I have little control over?
* What difficult thoughts or feelings do I think are likely to show up once I start implementing this prototype? How would I choose to respond to these when they arise?

You may not be able to complete the design of the prototype during the time you have allotted. That’s OK, as the main purpose of this exercise is simply to try out the prototyping process and see whether you’d want to use it and how you might tweak it to make it work for you (which seems consistent with the prototyping idea, yes? 😊).

**Steps for after the workshop**

Now that you’ve designed a prototype, you can put it into action. Consider this question, **if this is an area of my life that matters to me, would I choose to implement this prototype in my life in the service of learning more about and moving towards what would be a values-based life for me?** If so, then here are the final two steps you can take after the workshop...

**Step 2. Implement and collect data.** This is where you put the prototype in action and collect information that will help further explore your values. This could be a one-day experiment or a process that takes several days or weeks.

**Step 3. Review, revise, repeat.** Values are fundamentally about the link between what someone is doing here-and-now and a larger context of purpose in which these actions are embedded.

* What have you learned about yourself from implementing the prototype and reflecting on it? Based on this information, could you:
  + Iterate the prototype based on what you experienced, tweaking it and trying again?
  + Use a different method (e.g. a question-based prototype or an “ideal day” prototype) to help you further explore this domain/quality/value?
  + Repeat the prototype across a different context or valued domain?
  + Conclude that you have learned what you need to from prototyping and you’re ready to commit to living out this value in a more sustained manner. If so, shift to exploring ways to turn this prototype into a habit or sustained ways of living in your life. This is the committed action phase of ACT.
  + Conclude this domain/value/quality really isn’t important to you or workable for you and drop it completely? If so, what might you need to accept in order to let go of this idea?

\*Our idea for the Values Prototyping tool came from the book: *“Designing your life: How to build a well-lived, joyful life.”* by Burnett & Evans. If you are interested in learning more about how design thinking can be applied to helping you explore the bigger picture of your life, this is an excellent read. It’s one of my person favorites and one I often recommend to clients as well.