

Values Prototyping: Using Action to Help Clients Explore Their Values

Adapted from LeJeune, J. & Luoma, J., (2019) *Values in Therapy: A Clinician's Guide to Helping Clients Explore Values, Increase Psychological Flexibility, and Live a More Meaningful Life*.

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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 and Collect Data.
3. Review, revise, repeat.

Qualities of a good prototype

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

Exercise - Step 1: Help Your Partner Design a Prototype

Instructions: Decide who will be the “client” and who will be the “therapist” then do the following 3 steps:

1. **Identify a valued domain where the “client” has something new they want to try out or explore about themselves.** Valued domains could include (but aren’t limited to): family, couples, parenting, friends, work, education, recreation, spirituality, community life, self-care, the environment, aesthetics, etc.
2. **Identify a quality, value, or valued goal that they want to explore** that relates to that domain.
3. **Pick one of the methods below to design a prototype** that will allow them a specific, practical, and active way to explore a possible interesting future, even if only for a few minutes, an hour, or a day.

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’s just an experiment.
- 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.

Methods for Designing a Prototype

Method 1: Use questions to help you build a prototype:

- What might help me foster ____ (e.g., playful engagement) in my life?
- What specific aspects or forms of ____ (e.g., curiosity) do I think might be most meaningful or important to me? How would I enact each of those various forms of ____ (e.g. curiosity) in order to get more information about what living out that aspect of the value is like?
- What impact does it have on my interactions with others when I am more ____ (e.g., lovingly supportive)?
- What is the next smallest step I could take to embody the qualities of ____ (e.g., joyfulness) this week?
- What behaviors would I exhibit if I were embodying ____ (e.g., compassionate living)? What behaviors are not ____ (e.g., compassionate) and thus I would refrain from them?
- Is there something I have done in the past that was in the service of ____ (e.g., caring well for our planet)? What could I do now that is similar so I can see what it's like living out that value as the person I am today?
- What characters do I know from books or films that embody ____ (e.g. justice)? What could I do that would emulate these characters in some way?

Method 2: Use a Perspective Taking Interview: 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 _____?
- 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?

Method 3: Identify an “ideal day” that serves as the basis for a prototype: This could either be an idealized version of an actual day when you felt you embodied this value or a fictional ideal day based on what you imagine you would be doing if you were fully embodying the value. Identify what would be part of that day that would embody that value you are exploring. What would you be like, what would you be thinking and feeling, who would be there, what would you be doing? Get into the details of how it would be from moment-to-moment, hour-to-hour so that you can try out a day like this.

If you complete the first three steps quickly, then you can move on to one or both the remaining 2 elements of the designing a prototype process:

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?). Consider collecting data on:

The immediate and longer-term consequences of engaging in this action

- Did my actions make a positive difference in an area of life that matters to me? If so, what kind of a difference did they make?
- What got in the way, if anything, of me fully implementing my values prototype as I would have wanted?
- What would it be like if I continued this pattern of behavior over the course of a month, a year, a lifetime?
- If I were looking back on a life in which I had consistently lived out this value to the fullest, how would I feel about having lived that life? What thoughts or feelings might I have if I were to look back at the end of having lived that life?
- If I decided to not continue valuing in this way, looking back a year from now, what thoughts or feelings might I have about not having lived out this value? What might I think or feel at the end of my life as I look back on a life of not having lived out this value?
- Did I experience anything unexpected while implementing or reflecting on this prototype? What might that say about me or my values?

The interpersonal and intrapersonal impact of enacting the prototype

- How did my actions impact others? How did others react to my valued actions? Is it possible I'm making assumptions about how my actions impacted them and do I need to ask them directly to find out?
- Did engaging in this valued action contribute to a better quality of life for myself or for others around me? If so, in what ways? Do I need to ask others to find out?
- How do I feel about myself having engaged in this valued action? Did I like the person I was when I was engaging in this action?
- What thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations occurred while I was engaging in this valued action? What thoughts, feelings, or sensations showed up after I did the prototype experiment? What do these reactions tell me about what might be important to me?
- How might my relationships be different a year from now if I continued enacting this prototype? What might be possible in future relationships if I continued this way of living?
- How might I feel about myself one year from now if I continued to consistently live out this way of valuing over a whole year?

2. 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 toward engaging in this action?

- How confident am I that I can actually implement 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? What can I do in response to these?
- 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 later, if you'd like to actually test out the prototype in your life

Step 2. Implement and collect data. This is where you put the prototype in action and collect information on the immediate and longer-term consequences and the inter/intrapersonal impact of enacting the prototype. 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, should you:

- Iterate the prototype based on what you experienced, tweaking it and trying again?
- Use a different method to design another prototype for 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.
- 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?