

Building mental resilience for young adults

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Exploring strategies to support
the wellbeing of young adults in
the overwhelmed society of 2032

Master Thesis
Strategic Product Design
Delft University of Technology
Industrial Design Engineering

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“The thing about a spiral is, if you follow it inward, it never actually ends. It just keeps tightening, infinitely.”

– John Green,
Turtles All The Way Down (2017)

Building Mental Resilience for Young Adults: Exploring strategies to support the well-being of young adults in the overwhelmed society of 2032

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PREFACE

I am honoured that you have taken the time to read my thesis. I look forward to taking you by the hand and exploring the subject of my thesis, the mental well-being of young adults in the society of 2032. This has by no means been an easy, fun or light-hearted project, nor will it be an easy read. It touches on some of the fundamental misconceptions in our society about mental well-being and has involved emotional conversations, long discussions and quiet reflection. In retrospect, these steps were necessary to arrive at this final report. The process has taught me valuable components not only for my thesis, but also for my personal life, and has changed my view of society and how its current structure affects our collective well-being. I originally started this project because several people close to me had fallen into a downward spiral of mental well-being difficulties. My aim with this work is not to force people out of these spirals, but to make them aware of them and to build resilience to take early action and deal effectively with the stress that is inherent and unavoidable in the society of 2032. I have channelled my personal frustration at not being able to help those around me into this work. I hope my work will inspire you to not only advocate for systemic change, but to find the direction of that change and take action to improve our societal well-being. To set expectations, I am not trying to preach about how we should do things, nor am I saying that I am right and other approaches are wrong. I am exploring fruitful ways forward and I hope that not only the end result, the interventions, but the whole process can inspire you to think differently about how we can change towards a more desirable society that respects our most basic human needs. We need to look beyond the myths that we accept as normal in our modern society and reconnect with the true nature of who we are as a species. Donella Meadows beautifully illustrates some of the misleading ideas of our society in her book *The Limits to Growth*:

— Donella Meadows,
American environmental
scientist,
The Limits to Growth (1972)

“People don’t need enormous cars; they need admiration and respect. They don’t need a constant stream of new clothes; they need to feel that others consider them to be attractive, and they need excitement and variety and beauty. People don’t need electronic entertainment; they need something interesting to occupy their minds and emotions. And so forth. Trying to fill real but nonmaterial needs—for identity, community, self-esteem, challenge, love, joy—with material things is to set up an unquenchable appetite for false solutions to never-satisfied longings. A society that allows itself to admit and articulate its nonmaterial human needs, and to find nonmaterial ways to satisfy them, would provide much higher levels of human fulfillment.”

This thesis would never have been possible without the time and effort of the people involved. First of all, I would like to thank everyone who voluntarily opened up to me, friends, family, complete strangers and distant acquaintances. Thank you for sharing your deepest inner thoughts, feelings and experiences with me. Thank you for your vulnerability, openness and interest in exploring the subject. These conversations added an extra layer of depth to this project. Secondly, I would like to thank my two supervisors, Matthijs van Dijk and Dirk Snelders. I really enjoyed our long conversations, which always gave me new perspectives to consider and opened me up to viewpoints outside of my own. Your guidance has made this project possible. Thirdly, I would like to thank Leontien Los, Maarten Coolen, Sanneke de Haan and Michelle Mansink.

All your expertise and in-depth knowledge made the subjective, complex and broad field of mental well-being more understandable. Sander Hermesen, Harm van Beek and Marcel Schouwenaar, I would like to thank you for helping me to explore possible ways of making an impact on this complex challenge. Fourthly, I would like to thank my girlfriend, friends, family and fellow designers who have listened and helped me throughout this project. A listening ear and subtle input has always given me new insights. 'Thank you' will never be enough.

Now it is time to close this chapter and move on to the next. I would be more than happy to chat about my thesis if you ever feel the urge.

– Leon

Discover what hides in plain sight all around us and shatter the myths that we consider normal.



Figure 1: Our consumeristic culture where we unknowingly swap our human needs for materialistic ones, digital painting, 1080px by 1080px.

ABSTRACT

Mental health among young adults is in sharp decline, with over 68% of European young adults reporting having experienced signs of burnout in the past year (Strava, 2021). This increasing prevalence of mental health problems among young adults, including burnout, anxiety, depression and feelings of hopelessness, has been exacerbated by factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and societal pressures. Despite increased awareness, reduced stigma and efforts to improve mental health, the number of diagnoses appears to keep increasing. The demand for professional mental health care is greater than the capacity of institutions to provide it, making it difficult to access professional care in a timely manner, resulting in an increasing reliance on biochemical solutions for symptom relief rather than psychotherapy. This sudden increase in mental health diagnoses among young adults cannot be attributed to changes in genetics, as genes don't change in a population over such a short period. If we assume that neither reduced stigma nor a change in genetics is solely responsible for the increase in mental health diagnoses, then we seem to have created an environment that encourages mental health problems in young adults.

In particular, the transition from a learning environment to a working environment seems to be a moment of vulnerability for young adults, and this research therefore focuses on a transitional group, mostly aged 20-28, who can identify with this life transition. The aim of this thesis is to address the social phenomenon of declining mental health among the transitional group and to look for novel ways forward.

In order to find ways forward, a probable vision for the future of 2032 is defined through the collection of 168 context factors; concise statements that serve as building blocks for the future context. These are collected through semi-structured interviews with the transitional group, interviews with experts such as philosophers, psychologists and psychiatrists, books, journals and documentaries. This probable future context is made understandable through a framework that describes six states of mind in which the transitional group can get trapped, as can be seen in table 1.

Table 1: the probable future context of 2032, described in a 2x3 framework that displays six states of mind.

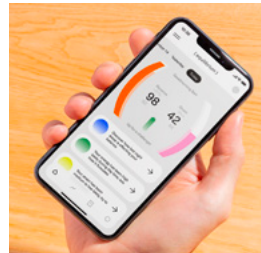
The future feels inevitable	<p>Trapped in Endless Productivity</p> <p>The (in)ability to find congruence, a meaningful role in society and feel at home</p> <p><i>Conforming the Self</i></p>	<p>Trapped in Extraordinary Achievement</p> <p>The (in)ability to develop identity that is more than work and gain self-worth</p> <p><i>Distinguishing the Self</i></p>	<p>Trapped in becoming the Best Version of Myself</p> <p>The (in)ability to accept our imperfection and find connection</p> <p><i>Authenticating the Self</i></p>	
	The future feels controllable	<p>Trapped in Chasing Society's Ideal</p> <p>The (in)ability to feel content, embrace imperfection and express gratitude</p>	<p>Trapped in Individual Uniqueness</p> <p>The (in)ability to embrace randomness and give up on control</p>	<p>Trapped in a Pleasurable Life</p> <p>The (in)ability to embrace and accept negative emotions and practice empathy</p>

By articulating the normative values of the designer, several goals and ambitions emerge for each state of mind that help move closer to a desired future. For all these goals, ideas were generated and a strategic set of six promising interventions was developed. An overview of the six concepts is given in table 2. Due to time constraints, only the 'One on One' concept was selected for further development into a prototype.

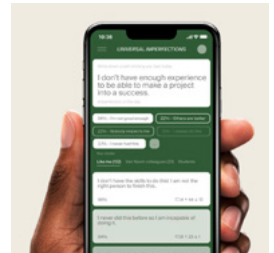
Table 2: the six concept interventions that together pull towards the desired future context.



MANDATORY EXPLORATION
Failure and exploration as an essential part of all educational programmes



EQUILIBRIUM
Discover and nurture your mental balance on the long-term



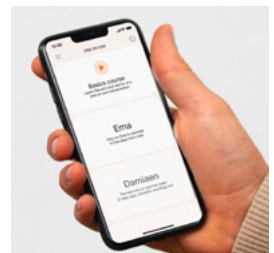
UNIVERSAL STRUGGLE
A social network designed to make you feel less alone in your imperfections



IDENTITY MENTORS
A mentor helping you to understand and recraft the story about you



NOT TIED TO MY FUTURE
Time dedicated to forget about your future and find satisfaction in helping others



ONE ON ONE
Going beyond the surface, guiding deeper conversations about negativity



Figure 2: The concept for One on One application.

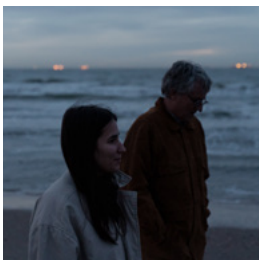


Figure 3: A still from the concept video.

One on One is a social media platform that guides users to take time out for each other and have one-on-one conversations about the things that matter most with the people that matter most. Through these meaningful conversations about difficult topics, you learn to safely express negative feelings and be heard, accepted and understood by the people you care about. The person you are talking to will feel useful as he or she learns how to be helpful to you by listening. This creates a safe and non-judgmental space where we can express ourselves without fear of criticism or rejection. While the transitional group reports the lowest levels of social loneliness of any group, they score remarkably high on emotional loneliness (CBS, 2021). One of the main causes of depression, anxiety and stress according to Maté (2022). This reveals a lack of deep relationships in which negative emotions can be expressed, rather than a shortage of social connections. Regular one-on-one sessions aim to build a deep relationship in which there is room for vulnerability and the expression of negative emotions, therefore reducing emotional loneliness and impacting well-being.

To measure the impact of the One on One concept on the well-being of the transitional group, a one-group pretest-posttest study is conducted with 26 participants, measuring the level of emotional loneliness before and after the intervention. A prototype website has been developed where participants find a step-by-step guide how to invite, plan and learn the essentials of having a One on One through three five-minute podcasts. The results showed a potential impact of the One on One prototype on the emotional loneliness and future research is recommended to further investigate this.

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PART ONE

Part one aims to provide a comprehensive introduction to the project and lays the foundations for the research to come. In this section we will first introduce the topic of this thesis, the mental health of young adults and the increasing prevalence of burnout, anxiety, depression and feelings of hopelessness. We will then outline the design approach taken in this project, highlighting the tools and methods used. Finally, we will consider how we as humans relate to our environment and how this relationship affects our well-being. By examining these fundamental aspects of the problem, we will gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of young adults' mental well-being and the multifaceted approach needed to address it.

The Groundwork

Figure 4: How the modern human relates to its environment, author unknown 7



CHAPTER ONE

Project Introduction

This chapter introduces the initial task of this thesis. First, it describes the societal phenomenon, the context and its relevance. Second, this chapter will explain the increasing urgency of finding a novel approach to this phenomenon. Thirdly, the project is scoped and focused on a specific life transition that is briefly addressed here. Finally, the aim of the project is summarised in a statement that forms the backbone of the project and guides the design process.

In a society where we are more obsessed than ever with improving our health, our mental health is in steep decline (Maté, 2022). It is hard to have missed the severity of our global mental health epidemic in the media in recent years. In 2021 alone, 59% of all adult Europeans were burnt out or on the brink of burnout (Stada, 2022). Mental health diagnoses are escalating, especially among young adults around the world (Mate, 2022). In 2021, over two-thirds of European citizens between the ages of 18 and 25 experienced or felt on the verge of burnout (Stada, 2022), a significant deviation of 10 percent from the average. British universities are struggling with the well-being of their students, experiencing a spike in student anxiety, mental breakdown and depression (Shackle, 2019). In the Netherlands, 27% of 18-25 year olds felt psychologically unhealthy in 2021, 12% higher than the average of 15% for all Dutch adults (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2021). As can be seen in figure 5.

“IN THE MOST HEALTH-OBSESSED SOCIETY EVER, ALL IS NOT WELL.”

Gabor Maté, Hungarian-Canadian physician, The Myth of Normal (2022)

The period of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns seem to have further exposed and exacerbated the situation for this age group, leading to an increase in experienced stress, loneliness, unhappiness, lower quality of life and worries about the future (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2021). As can be seen in figure 6. Concern about climate change has also accelerated the mental health crisis, being associated among young adults with the perception that they “have no future, that humanity is doomed” (Hickman et al., 2021). The climate crisis evokes feelings of betrayal and abandonment by governments and older generations, and therefore triggers feelings of hopelessness. This is a chronic stressor that has significant, long-lasting and progressive negative effects on the mental health of children and young adults (Hickman et al., 2021). All in all, young adults are 13% less satisfied with their lives and 7% less happy than the average for all generations in the Netherlands (CBS, 2021).

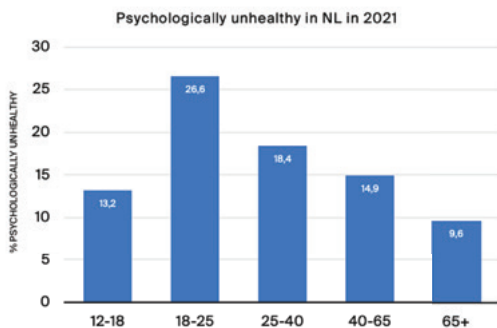


Figure 5: Percentage of psychologically unhealthy Dutch citizens spread over different generations CBS, 2021)



Figure 6: Percentage of psychologically unhealthy Dutch citizens from 2015 - 2021 (CBS, 2021)

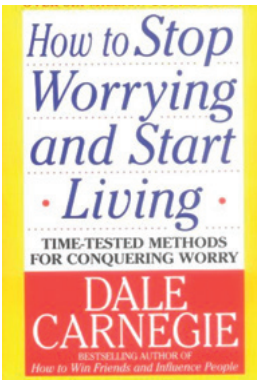


Figure 7: Best-selling book *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* by Dale Carnegie.



Figure 8: The cover of *New York Times Bestseller Unfuck Yourself* by Gary John Bishop.



Figure 9: An illustration of Santa that can be double tapped to 'de-stress', liked by 271,119 people.

As the taboo around mental health seems to be slowly disappearing in some Western countries, young adults are becoming more aware of the importance of their mental health. They are increasingly seeking help from mental health professionals and licensed therapists. They are spending more time and money on improving themselves, both physically and mentally, with the personal development market set to reach USD 11.5 billion by 2021 ("Personal Development Market Size Report, 2022-2030", n.d.). Figure 7, 8 & 9 show examples of self-help materials. However, this increased awareness and effort does not seem to be paying off as the numbers continue to rise. The growing demand for professional mental health care is outstripping the ability of institutions to provide it, putting increasing pressure on institutions and governments. Queues to see a mental healthcare professional are growing globally every year and are currently around 14 weeks on average in the Netherlands (Nederlandse Zorgautoriteit, 2021). This puts timely professional care out of reach for many young adults seeking help. For those who are lucky enough to receive professional care, "we are increasingly turning to biochemical solutions for symptom relief rather than psychotherapy", according to Scull (2022). In the last two years, there has been a 20% increase in the number of antidepressant prescriptions for young women in the Netherlands to help with anxiety and depressive symptoms (Nivel, 2022). For men, this increase was stated to be 'only 11 per cent'.

In addition to these specific developments of our time, this particular age group of young adults is still developing and is therefore most vulnerable to the development of mental health problems (World Health Organisation, 2021). This period of life is characterised by major social, economic and psychological changes in a short period, making young adults particularly vulnerable. When we zoom in on young adults, we can see that individuals are moving from a learning environment to a working environment, becoming socially and economically independent, needing to give direction to their lives and develop a degree of autonomy while maintaining social connections. The focus of this research is therefore on this life transition and the challenges and barriers that inevitably accompany this transition in the near future of 2032. The peak of distress is perhaps most evident when individuals move from a learning environment to a working environment, therefore this study focuses on slightly older individuals aged 20-28 that identify with this transition. The aim of this thesis is to find new ways of addressing this societal issue for young adults, where current approaches alone do not appear to be sufficient.

This sudden increase in mental health diagnosis among the transitional group can not be attributed to changes in genetics, whereas genes don't change in a population over a short period of time like 10 years (Maté, 2022). While there is arguably an increase in the amount of diagnoses due to increased acceptance and awareness around mental health, we for this research assume that there is more underlying this increase. When we take for granted that neither reduced taboo nor a change in genetics is solely responsible for the increase in mental health diagnoses, we apparently created an environment that incentivises mental health challenges for young adults.



Change in Genetics
Genes do not change in a population over 10 years



Change in Awareness
More people seeking help because of reduced taboo



Change in Environment
Shift in environment, values, upbringing & culture

Figure 10: Possible explanations for the increase in mental health diagnosis among young adults →

However, we are unaware of the underlying cultural aspects that we perceive as normal in our environments that are influencing the subjective mental well-being of this transitional group. While we as humans have a genius to get used to and adapt to circumstances, especially when changes are incremental, we unnoticeably created an environment that, according to Maté (2022): “is toxic and undermines our most fundamental and nonnegotiable human needs”. These hidden changes are beautifully illustrated in a passage from the 2005 commencement speech by David Foster Wallace called *This is Water*: “There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes “What the hell is water?”” (David Foster Wallace, 2005). The point Wallace makes is that “the most obvious, ubiquitous, important realities are often the ones hardest to see and talk about”. This project sets out to uncover what hidden and underlying societal factors are contributing to the mental health difficulties the group will experience in the near future of 2032. To understand this, we have to research what “Our Water Is”, what societal factors we assume to be normal, which are actually opposing our human nature and therefore causing mental health challenges to arise and thrive. We maybe even have to go beyond understanding our water, and find out what has poisoned our water and thus limited our human capacity to flourish. When we have an understanding of what societal factors are poisoning or altering our water, a desired future context can be developed that is including new interventions that help the transitional group deal more effectively with these mental health challenges and align with who we fundamentally are as human beings.

This thesis builds on the extensive research and vision created by Redesigning Psychiatry (RP), a network of designers, philosophers, researchers, healthcare professionals and experts that together create and advocate a desirable design of the mental health sector of 2030. By closely working together with Redesigning Psychiatry, a comprehensive constellation of stakeholders in the mental health care sector and their engrained knowledge is tapped into. While RP primarily focuses on the context of the Netherlands, this project stretches beyond the borders of my home country, the Netherlands. The focus lies on countries that show signs of a toxic culture that encourages mental health challenges to arise, and where therefore mental health issues among the transitional group are especially prevailing. The focus therefore, lies for practical reasons, primarily on West-European countries and interviews took place over a variety of these countries.

“There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes “What the hell is water?””

This is Water by David Foster Wallace (2005) ↵

Figure 11: *What is our water?*
Fisheye by Robert Gligorov (2006) ↓



CHAPTER TWO

The Approach

This chapter describes the design approach taken in this thesis and argues why this particular method offers a valuable perspective on the challenge described in the previous chapter. The general process of this thesis project is then outlined visually, accompanied by a description of the actions, tools and methods.

As discussed in the introduction, in order to effectively address the mental health challenges of the specific transitional group, we need to understand the deeper underlying contextual and societal factors that influence their future well-being. As there is no narrowly defined problem or solution space in this project, it focuses primarily on identifying potential opportunities for intervention in a future context. There is no right or wrong answer, but there is room to show that we can do things differently to how they are done now. Because of the aim of this project, the Vision in Product design (ViP) method developed by Hekkert and van Dijk (2016) was chosen. ViP is a future- and context-oriented design method that is well suited for open-ended design challenges. ViP is about taking responsibility as a designer and designing from a personal vision. The method is based on three interrelated levels: the product level, the interaction level and the context level. A product always functions in relation to another entity (interaction), which can be, for example, a human-to-product, human-to-human or product-to-nature interaction. This interaction is always embedded in a larger context that actively influences the meaning of the interaction. By keeping these levels in mind, contextual factors are gathered that describe the probable future context, a desirable interaction is designed that moves the probable future towards a desired future, and finally the product that facilitates this interaction is designed.

In order to understand which contextual factors do and do not influence our well-being, we must first explore what, at a basic biological and psychological level, influences our well-being. As human beings, we are always in constant interaction with our environment, so we need to understand the biological and psychological processes that facilitate this interaction between the individual and our environment in order to determine which contextual factors have a significant impact on our well-being.

This fundamental understanding guides the process of collecting context factors and acts as a filter of what is important and what is not. Context factors are clear and concise statements such as: *“Technology is making it increasingly possible to monitor and improve our health.”* or *“People have a biological need to control their environment to improve their chances of survival”*. These statements act as building blocks for the probable future context. Contextual factors are gathered from a variety of sources, including: qualitative interviews, expert interviews, scientific literature, books, news articles, documentaries and podcasts. Ten participants from the transitional group, of different nationalities, were interviewed in order to have a deeper and more contextual understanding of what is driving their subjective well-being. Psychologists, psychiatrists and philosophers were interviewed to gather additional contextual factors and to confirm statements made by the transitional group. Consulting all sources resulted in a list of 171 contextual factors that together describe the probable context of 2032.

Part one:
The Groundwork

Part two:
The Probable Future

Part three:
The Desired Future

Part four:
The Interventions

Figure 12: A visual overview of the design process

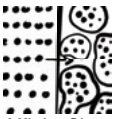
Activities



Desk research, literature, books, documentaries



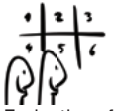
Qualitative interviews and sensitising booklet,
Expert interviews,
Literature, books, podcasts, documentaries etc.



Affinity Clustering



3-Way Comparisons



Evaluation of framework with experts and transitional group



Normative values and normative framework



Ideation per goal

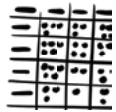


Developing one concept
Initial concept evaluation with experts and transitional group
Prototype
Concept test and evaluation

Results



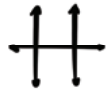
Filter what contextual factors are influencing well-being and which are not



168 context factors



13 Driving Forces



Framework



Framework with six states of mind that describe the probable future



Goals and ambitions for 2032, the design brief



Strategic set of six interventions



Final concept
Conclusion and recommendation

Using affinity clustering, the 171 contextual factors are grouped into 13 driving forces, each of which explains a particular undercurrent within the society of 2032, supported by several contextual factors. An example of a Driving Force is a cluster called “Paralysed by Choice”, which contains 13 individual contextual factors that together tell the story of how a society characterised by endless possibilities and opportunities makes every decision important. These 13 Driving Forces do not all tell the same story or point to a similar probable futures for 2032. By exploring contrasting views within the Driving Forces through 3-way comparisons, two axes emerged that together form a framework on which all the Driving Forces can be mapped. This framework characterises six unique states of mind in the probable future context. Each of these states represents a different mindset in which the transition group in 2032 is likely to be trapped. Being trapped in a particular mindset creates problem-sustaining patterns in which individuals keep encountering the same problems over and over again. The framework and the six mindsets together describe the probable context of 2032.

Now that there is a likely context, the designer needs to take a stance. Since the issue is a sensitive and subjective one, it is crucial to express what the designer considers desirable and undesirable. Therefore, a normative framework is developed in which the designer’s norms and values are articulated so they can be argued. This leads to a set of values that act as a lens through which to view the probable context of 2032. By looking at the probable future through this lens, we are able to formulate a set of goals and ambitions that highlight an opportunity to move towards a desired future context.

These goals and ambitions for 2032 act as a design brief and guide the ideation phase. Ideation took place per goal and at three different levels of relationship: to self, to others and to society. This resulted in a strategic set of six interventions spread across the six different states of mind. Due to time constraints, one of the six proposed interventions was further developed.

A first prototype of the ‘One on One’ concept is then tested with the transitional group and the impact on mental well-being of the intervention is measured through a one-group pretest-posttest design study.

CHAPTER THREE

How we as humans relate to the world

This chapter explores the biological, physiological and psychological processes by which we as humans relate to our context. This understanding is essential for the following parts of the project. It acts as a filter for what contextual factors may or may not be relevant to the well-being of the transitional group in the future context of 2032. This chapter acts as a preliminary exploration of the scope of the project to define and set the boundaries of the research and to explore where the edges of the scope of this project lie.

Figure 13: An image generated by Open AI's DALL-E 2, by using the prompt: A chimpanzee in a cubicle office. The painting highlights the tension between our biological nature and our modern day society. ↘

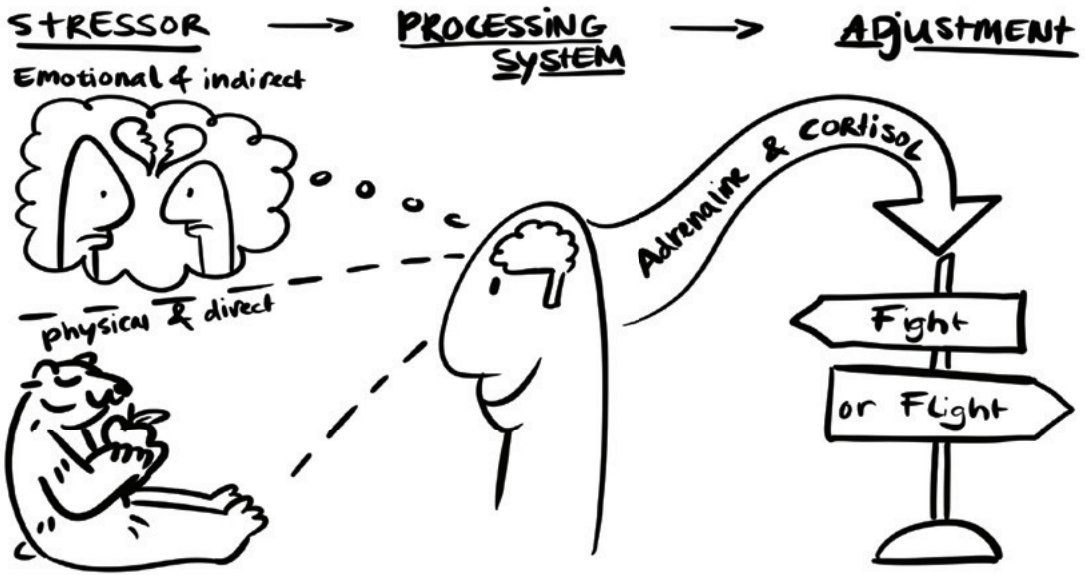


14 billion years ago, when our universe began, humans slowly evolved from non-matter. Our social skills allowed us to grow into a world-dominating organism. We love and we hate; we live and we die; we create and we interact; we flourish and we stagnate; and we have complex interactions and emotions. We are loving creatures who seek companionship, meaning and pleasure. However, our current era has seen a significant increase in the number of people, especially young adults, facing depression, anxiety, loneliness, burnout and other mental health challenges. To understand where these mental health challenges come from, we need to stop seeing behaviour and mental well-being as pathological, but as a natural and understandable response to environmental circumstances. Just as in plant care, when we observe that a plant is not thriving, we ask ourselves what is causing it not to thrive? The place in the house? Too much or too little water? Too much direct sunlight? We do not assume that the internal mechanisms of the plant are simply broken. We are looking for explanations. While the labels given to mental health challenges such as burnout, depression and anxiety disorders provide a description of symptoms and behaviour, they do not provide an explanation. If we are to reverse this rise in mental health problems, it is vital that we look at the context in which we operate as individuals. What in our environment is supportive of our human nature and what is potentially in conflict with our basic human needs? To understand which contextual factors influence our mental well-being, we must first understand how we as individuals interact with our environment. By laying the theoretical groundwork for how we relate to external stressors, we begin to understand how mental distress works. This chapter therefore provides a basic explanation to spark our search for directly contextual factors that influence our well-being.

As human beings, we have always been in constant interaction with our environment. According to evolutionary theory, our emotions exist because they play an 'adaptive role in our environment'. Emotions motivate people to respond quickly to stimuli in their environment. For example, the emotion we call fear helps us to be alert to potential danger, anger helps us to set boundaries, and sadness helps us to seek refuge with others in difficult times. In this way, emotions are similar to the immune system. They both essentially try to keep out what is bad for us and keep in or maintain what is good for us and nourishes our well-being. Put simply, our emotions help to improve our chances of success and survival by helping us to respond appropriately to perceived changes in our environment.

When an organism perceives a threat to its existence or well-being, the physiological stress response is activated (Selye, 1978). Hans Selye (1978) uses the word stress to refer purely to the internal changes that occur in response to a perceived threat to well-being, or when we perceive that something valuable to our well-being is being taken away or withheld. In its most basic form, a threat is a possible disturbance of our homeostasis, the limited range of conditions within which we as humans can operate. When this physiological balance is disturbed, survival and functioning are threatened. Adrenaline and cortisol are released, diverting blood from the internal organs to the muscles and causing the heart to pump faster. The brain focuses solely on the threat, forgetting about hunger and reproduction. Stored energy is mobilised and the body is ready to either fight or flight. This perceived threat may be a direct physical threat, such as facing a bear in the woods, our stress mechanism prepares us than to either fight or flight.

However, Selye (1978) states that 'our stress response in modern society is primarily triggered by emotional interactions'. The stress response can be triggered by emotional trauma or the threat of such trauma, even when this is solely fictional and even when this threat is outside our conscious awareness (e.g. general sense of insecurity due to climate change) or when the individual may believe himself to be stressed in a "good" way (Maté, 2011). For individuals that experience heightened stress response over a long time, the absence of stress creates unease, nervous tension and a sense of meaninglessness (Maté, 2011). Selye (1978) states that human beings can even become addicted to high levels of their own stress hormones, adrenaline, and cortisol. Being used to high levels of stress makes stress feel desirable, while the absence of stress suddenly feels like something to be avoided at all cost (Selye, 1978). Hans Selye who coined the term stress, explains in his book *The Stress Of Life*, that the stress mechanism has three main components: the stressor, the processing system and the stress response as is illustrated in figure 14. A stressor is referred to as an event which can be physical or emotional, fictional or real, conscious or unconscious, direct or indirect, that the individual interprets as threatening to their well-being. This stressor is then interpreted by our brains (the human processing system) that attributes meaning to the stressor. The brain then responds and makes the various physiological and behavioural adjustments as a reaction to that perceived threat (Selye, 1978).



When we tell others that we are 'stressed', we are usually referring to nervous tension caused by excessive demands from our environment, such as relationships, work, finances, family, etc. In the medical world, the word stress is also mostly used to refer to the short-term reaction of our body to an immediate threat or tension (Maté, 2011). This acute form of stress is the most obvious side of the coin. It is important for this project that we make a clear distinction between acute and chronic stress as can be seen in figure 15. While acute stress is the short-term and immediate activation of our stress response system in reaction to a threat, chronic stress is defined by the activation of stress mechanisms over a long period of time. While acute stress is essential for our functioning (e.g. waking up), chronic stress can be harmful. Chronic stress occurs when you are exposed to stressors that you cannot escape, either because you are simply unaware of the stressor or because you are unable to control or respond appropriately to that stressor (Maté, 2011). The research literature has identified three factors that universally lead to chronic stress: uncertainty, lack of information and loss of control (Ursin, 1978), three things that are omnipresent in our society. The word stress in a psychological context refers to the meaning often attributed to the word in engineering: "the applied force divided by the undeformed area over which the force is applied". In this sense, excessive stress occurs when the demands placed on an organism exceed its reasonable capacity to meet them (Selye, 1978). Just as a rubber band would break or a spring would deform if too much force were applied, a person can experience exhaustion when the reserves for

Figure 14: A visual explanation of the stress response mechanism as defined by Hans Selye (1978) ↑

Figure 15: The difference between acute and chronic stress ↓

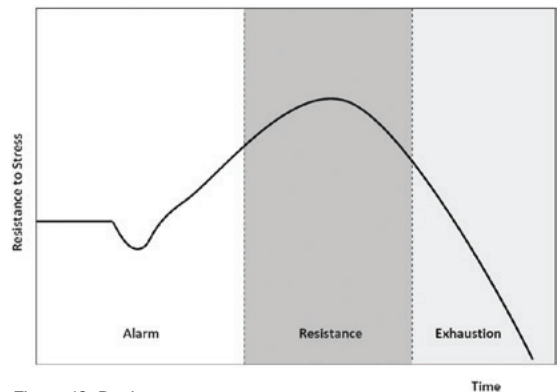
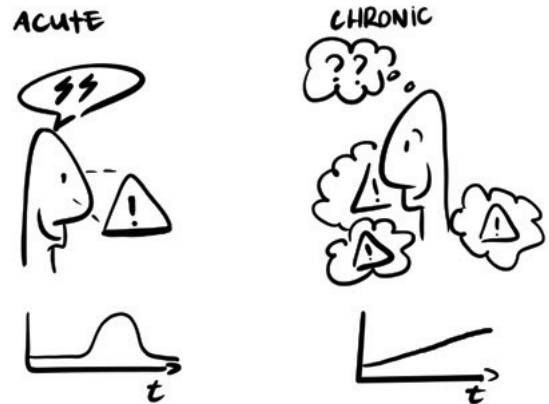


Figure 16: Resistance to stress over-time called the general adaptation syndrome, Selye (1978) ↑

coping with the stressor are exhausted. This is visualised in the general adaptation syndrome to stress by Hans Selye (1978), that can be seen in figure 16.

Our internal mechanisms for dealing with external stressors still exist today for the same purpose as they did thousands of years ago: simply to enable our survival and ensure our well-being. However, the environment in which we humans operate has changed drastically in recent decades, largely through our own efforts and best intentions. The environment we have created is changing faster, is more complex, more unstable and more turbulent. There may be less direct physical threat, but according to Maté (2011), 'we have undoubtedly created socio-economic structures that generate chronic stressors that undermine our most basic needs and therefore threaten our well-being in a triad of ways'. Now that we understand how we, as human beings, relate to our environment, and therefore what chronically triggers our stress response, we can begin to identify the contextual factors that most influence the mental well-being of the transitional group in the future context of 2032..



Figure 17: The environment in which we as human beings operate has drastically changed over the past decades, author unknown ↗

PART TWO

Part two aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors that shape the society of 2032. The process of gathering these contextual factors is discussed. Thirteen main drivers emerged from the clustering process, representing the major undercurrents within the scope. A framework is established into which all these driving forces can be placed, and the six most prevalent states of mind are explained in detail. The aim of this section is to provide a clear and thorough understanding of the context in which the society of 2032 is likely to operate.

Figure 18: An advertisement of Orange Only (employment agency) on a car next to TU Delft displaying 'YOU ARE YOUR ONLY LIMIT'. Which characterises a certain mentality. ↗

The Probable Future



Van Mossel Fiat

YOU ARE YOUR ONLY LIMIT

CHAPTER FOUR

Gathering Context Factors

Now that there is an understanding of the underlying mechanism that influences our well-being, contextual factors can be collected appropriately. Using the previous chapter as a filter, we can select and scope which contextual factors are influential and which are less influential. This chapter will first explain what contextual factors are. It will then explain the process and sources used to collect the different contextual factors that form the basis of the project.

WHAT ARE CONTEXT FACTORS?

To understand the future context of well-being for the transitional group, we look for 'context factors'. These clear and concise statements serve as the building blocks of the future context. These factors are supported by sources, which makes the project fundamentally research-based. They are pieces of information that describe both how the domain of well-being for young adults is changing over time and what is not changing but remains stable over time. There are four 'types' of contextual factors, as distinguished by Hekkert & Van Dijk (2016):

- Developments** Phenomena that will change over time within the chosen scope.
- Trends** Changes in the behaviour, values or preferences of people or groups.
- States** Phenomena that are relatively stable over time within the scope, but not forever.
- Principles** Factors that do not change over time.

The context factors are drawn from a wide variety of fields, which we will refer to as 'categories': biological, cultural, demographic, economic, psychological, sociological and technological. This ensures a broad and holistic perspective that considers the non-obvious as well as the obvious, the directly linked as well as the indirectly.

↳ An example of a
Economic Trend:

"All hours of flexible jobs can theoretically be transformed into more work" (Petersen, 2021)

↳ An example of a
Psychological Principle:

"Uncertainty, the lack of information and the loss of control lead universally to chronic stress." (Ursin, 1978)

↳ An example of a
Cultural State:

"Not improving is more and more experienced as going backwards in our culture." (RP, 2016)

↳ An example of a
Technological Development:

"Work and private become more entangled through technology." (Petersen, 2021)

Categories → Types ↓	Biological (7)	Cultural (55)	Demographic (5)	Economic (18)	Psychological (56)	Sociological (19)	Technological (8)
Development	-	31	2	7	7	9	5
Trend	-	11	1	5	10	5	3
State	-	12	2	6	7	3	-
Principle	7	1	-	-	32	2	-



Figure 19: A detail from a filled-in page of the online sensitising booklet using the Miro platform ↑

INTERVIEWS WITH THE TRANSITIONAL GROUP

The first step in gathering context factors is to choose the right resources that will bring the most valuable information to the table. While the focus of this research is on the subjective well-being of the transitional group, it is important to have a deep understanding of what is driving their well-being. Through semi-structured interviews with 10 participants within the transition group, a number of themes were identified as influential. As discussed in Chapter 1, the focus of the research is on individuals experiencing the transition from learning to working environments. Individuals belonging to this transition group were identified to participate in the interviews. To find out what is driving the well-being of individuals at a deeper level, we need to access latent knowledge. Knowledge that is most likely difficult to verbalise. Prior to the interview, participants are asked to complete a sensitisation booklet in order to prime them to verbalise these latent thoughts. This booklet is based on the principles of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and aims to verbalise the thoughts and feelings behind certain triggering events. An example of a completed sheet of a sensitising booklet is shown in figure 19 the booklet can be found in appendix A. The interviews all started with questions about the present, then the past, and ended with questions about the desired future. Recruitment was done through the social media platform Instagram, where people were asked to participate in an interview about well-being and stress. An overview of the participants and the duration of the interviews can be found in table 3.

Gender, Age, Profession	Nationality, Country of Res.	Duration
Female, 25 years old, end of HBO studies	Dutch, Netherlands	64 min.
Female 25 years old, working for 6 months	Dutch, Netherlands	54 min.
Male, 24 years old, working for 2 years	Dutch, Netherlands	42 min.
Female 26 years old, working for 1 year	Spanish, Netherlands	56 min.
Female 26 years old, working for 1,5 years	Dutch, Norway	1:03 min.
Female 23 years old, end of MSc studies	Finnish, Finland	58 min.
Female, 25 years old, working for 4 months	Dutch, Netherlands	49 min.
Male, 23 years old, studies and works part time	Dutch, Finland	48 min.
Female, 25 years old, end of MSc.	Spanish/German, Sweden	1:12 min.
Female, 25 years old, end of MSc.	Slovenia, Finland	44 min.

Table 3: An overview of the participants that were interviewed ↗

INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS

In addition to interviewing the transitional group, experts in the field were interviewed to gain a better understanding of the scope. Two philosophers with a specific focus on modernity and mental well-being were interviewed. A psychiatrist was interviewed to gain a better understanding of the psychological impact and development during the specific transition period. A student psychologist was interviewed to gain a better understanding of the issues that are raised in the current context. An overview of the experts, their professions and areas of expertise can be found in table 4.

Name	Profession	Specialisation	Duration
Maarten Coolen	Philosopher	Burn-out and the modern human	2:44 min.
Sanneke de Haan	Philosopher	Philosophy on psychiatry	44 min.
Leontien Los	Psychiatrist	Focus on young adults	35 min.
Michelle Mansink	Psychologist	Student well-being	49 min.

Table 2: An overview of the spread of context factors over categories and types ←

Table 4: An overview of the experts that were interviewed →

LITERATURE

In addition to interviews, a number of resources were used during the process. The two pamphlets produced by Redesigning Psychiatry were used extensively to capture their vision on psychiatry. Other key works and materials are listed in table 5. No specific reading list or order was established in advance, but sources were accessed through interviews and cross-referencing.

Title	Author	Type
Booklet 1 & 2	Redesigning Psychiatry	Books
The Burnout Society	Byung-Chul Han	Book
When the body says no	Gabor Maté	Book
The Myth of Normal	Gabor Maté	Book
Can't Even: How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation	Anne Petersen	Book
The century of the self	Adam Curtis	Documentary
Desperate remedies	Andrew Scull	Book
The Wisdom Of Trauma	Benazzo, Gabor Maté	Documentary
The Mind Explained	Netflix	Documentary Series
The BlindBoy Podcast	Blindboy	Podcast
Listen	Kathryn Mannix	Book
This is Water	David Foster Wallace	Book
The Stress of Life	Hans Selye	Book

Table 5: Primary resources that were consulted during the context gathering phase ↴

The collection of context factors was stopped after approximately 150 context factors had been collected due to the time constraints of the project. Therefore, the project is biased by the specific information the designer was able to absorb and process in the given time period. An overview of all the different context factors can be found in appendix B or via onone.nl/context. The context factors have then been clustered by means of the affinity clustering method, an example can be seen in figure 20. Each cluster tells a specific story based on a combination of contextual factors. A total of thirteen clusters were identified, which will be referred to as 'driving forces' and are discussed in the following chapter.



QR Code to the full list of Context Factors, onone.nl/context

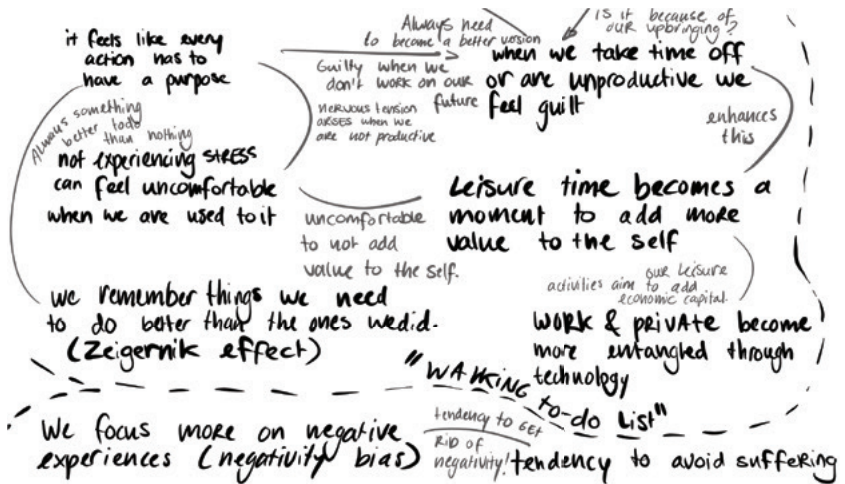


Figure 20: Several context factors that were clustered through affinity diagramming ↴

CHAPTER FIVE

The Driving Forces outlining the world of 2032

In this chapter we will discuss the driving forces that shape the context of well-being of the transitional group in the society of 2032. The aim of the driving forces is not to predict the future as a fixed endpoint, but rather to provide an overarching view of the undercurrents that shape the context of 2032. Using the 13 driving forces as major undercurrents, we map the society of 2032 in terms of mental well-being for the transitional group. These drivers consist of 168 individual contextual factors, which are all backed up by literature and studies. For practical reasons, only brief summaries of the 13 Driving Forces are presented here; for a full explanation of each of the driving forces and its associated context factors, I recommend consulting appendix C.

Table 6: The thirteen driving forces shaping the probable future of 2032 ↓

Paralysed by choice

In a society characterised by endless possibilities and opportunities, the pressure to make the “right” choices and the fear of missing out on better options can lead to decision paralysis and dissatisfaction with the choices made.

A story called ‘me’

We all tell unique stories about ourselves, but we experience crisis when our personal narratives become outdated or unable to hold onto.

The best version of myself

The self-help market is expanding as society places more pressure on individuals to improve their mental health and shape themselves towards perfection.

Illusion of control

Humans tend to avoid uncertainty by trying to control their environment, but as society changes and uncertainty increases, it becomes clear that we have less control than we believe while we try to control the uncontrollable through more work.

Feeling on our own in suffering

In a society that is characterised by positivity and individualism, experiencing negative emotions works isolating because nobody can possibly understand our unique suffering.

Fulfilling our exceptional potential

We all have potential, we only have to fulfil it to find happiness through hard work. Success becomes a destination which evokes an unending expectation where the moment of enjoyment never arises.

Failing means failure

While we tie our identity more to the work we do, making a mistake becomes failing as individual and feedback becomes a form of personal attack.

The good place

In a culture that idealises positivity and minimises the place of negative experiences, we struggle to manage and accept negative emotions, leading to psychological tension and an endless spiral of emotions.

Social comparison Social media, while intended to connect us, has become a platform for comparison and has led to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt as we see curated versions of others' lives and question the choices and direction of our own.

Plannable life In modern society, there is an increasing pressure to have a predetermined plan for one's life, but the uncertain and changing future makes it difficult to stick to these plans, leaves little room for unexpected opportunities and makes changes to the plan sources of stress.

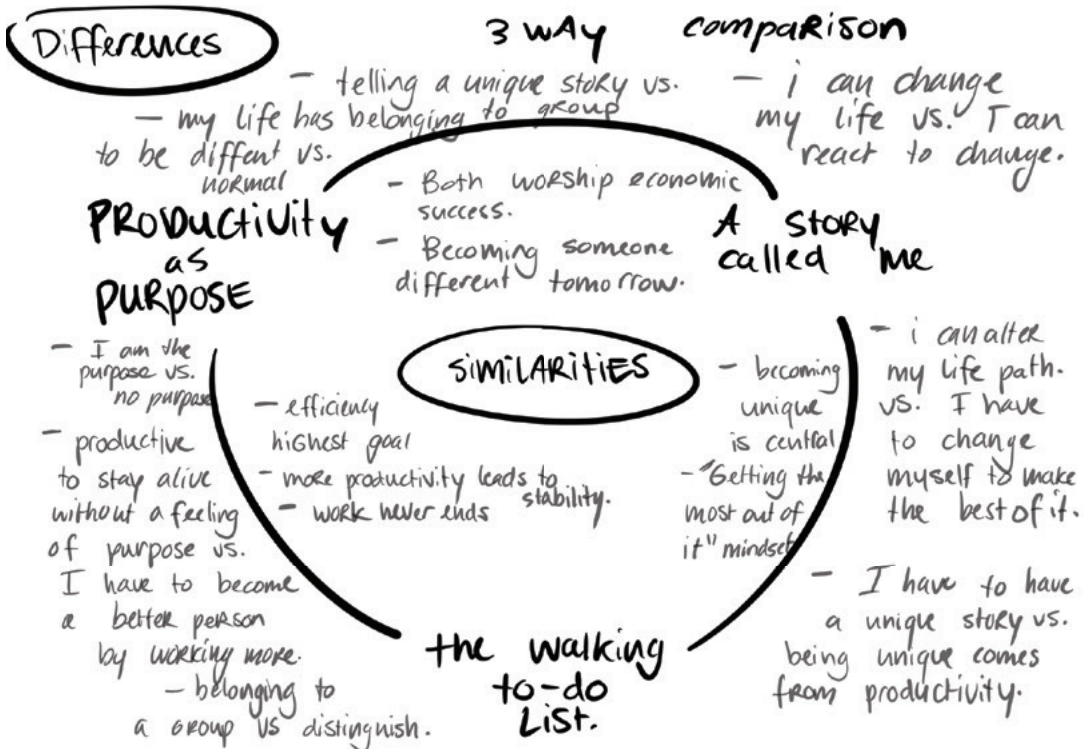
Promised security of tomorrow In our society, the idea that hard work leads to security and stability is increasingly being called into question as the dooming future becomes more uncertain and the traditional markers of adulthood, such as homeownership, become less attainable.

The walking to-do list As technology advances, we are under increasing pressure to be productive and efficient at all times, leading to a lack of time and a constant feeling that there is always something better to do, resulting in an endless race of tasks and an abandonment of boredom in our culture.

Productivity as purpose In a society where knowledge work is becoming the norm, the pressure to constantly optimise and measure productivity and efficiency is on the rise, leaving many feeling like their jobs are meaningless and lacking a sense of purpose.

Figure 21: An example of the 3-way comparison method, comparing similarities and differences ↘

QR code to the full list of driving forces, onone.nl/driving



CHAPTER SIX

Framework and six prevailing States of Mind

In this chapter, we will look at the thirteen driving forces from a distance and try to make sense of the gathering of undercurrents. While taking a step back, we can begin to see that some tell a conflicting story, while others outline a similar world view. By searching for similarities and differences using the 3-way comparison method as can be seen in figure 21, several dimensions arise on which we can map the driving forces. In this chapter we bring the undercurrents together into one coherent framework. Within this framework, six dominant states of mind emerge. Each of the quadrants characterises being trapped in a particular state of mind, trapped in a particular repetitive thought pattern that requires a certain amount of effort to escape. This framework characterises a probable future in which six different states of mind can coexist. As a person you can never be characterised as a state of mind, so they are not like personas or archetypes, but you are in a recognisable repetitive thought pattern. All states of mind, at different levels, represent a certain tension between being and becoming someone. We are taking a modern view of society here, where we assume that everyone is to some extent concerned with becoming someone and with the makeability of life during this particular life transition. We have to recognise that some people may not have this modern view of life and therefore fall out of the scope of this framework. People who are experiencing serious mental health problems may also fall outside the framework as their priorities lie elsewhere. How we respond to and anticipate these prevailing states of mind will be determined by the normative framework discussed in the following chapter.

DIMENSION 1: THE MAKEABILITY OF LIFE

The driving forces indicate two different attitudes towards the makeability of life. On the one hand, we see a view where external circumstances feel inevitable, where our only option is to adapt the self to these external circumstances. On the other hand, we can distil a view where we have the agency to change our external circumstances through our own actions. Therefore, the external circumstances feel doable and controllable rather than inevitable. This gives us the first axis of the framework:

The future feels inevitable
I have to adapt to external circumstances

The future feels controllable
I can control external circumstances



↳ *The Best Version of Myself*, where the belief prevails that we cannot change our environment but only our psyche in order to thrive in life.

↳ *Plannable Life*, where the belief prevails that we are the sole writers of the course of our life and that our decisions directly influence that course.

DIMENSION 2: POSITIONING THE SELF

The driving forces also display three different attitudes towards positioning the self. First, the driving forces indicate a willingness to conform the self to a group and therefore externally search for some form of stability and security. Second, a willingness to distinguish the self from others and therefore externally search for freedom and flexibility. Third, there is a certain attitude where people want to authenticate the self and therefore internally search for meaning and purpose. This provides us with a categorical axis for the framework:

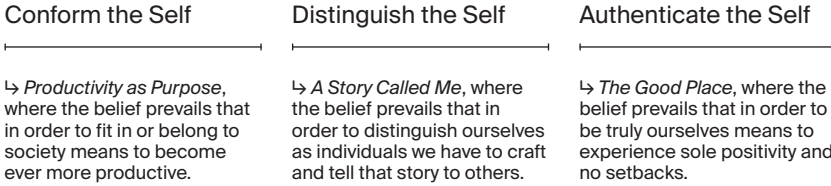


Figure 22: The framework and the six States of Mind that arise →

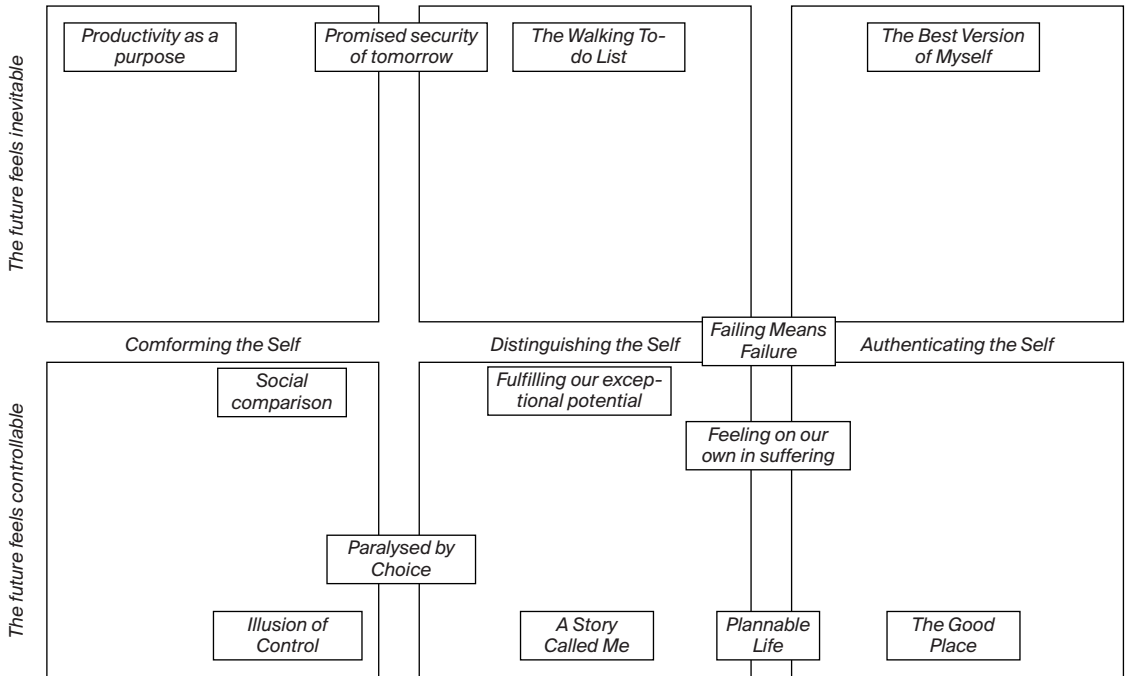


Figure 23: The driving forces spread along the framework ↗

THE FRAMEWORK AND ITS SIX QUADRANTS

If we place the driving forces along these two axes as can be seen in figure 23, a framework and six quadrants emerge. These states of mind represent a particular pattern of thinking in which the transition group is likely to be trapped. The implications and significance of these six states of mind in the likely future context of 2032 are discussed below.

The future feels inevitable

Trapped in Endless Productivity

The (in)ability to find congruence, a meaningful role in society and feel at home



Conforming the Self

Trapped in Extraordinary Achievement

The (in)ability to develop identity that is more than work and gain self-worth



Distinguishing the Self

Trapped in becoming the Best Version of Myself

The (in)ability to accept our imperfection and find connection



Authenticating the Self

The future feels controllable

Trapped in Chasing Society's Ideal

The (in)ability to feel content, embrace imperfection and express gratitude



Trapped in Individual Uniqueness

The (in)ability to embrace randomness and give up on control



Trapped in a Pleasurable Life

The (in)ability to embrace and accept negative emotions and practice empathy



TRAPPED IN ENDLESS PRODUCTIVITY

The (in)ability to find congruence, a meaningful role in society and to feel at home

While people are brought up with the idea that hard work will secure a good life, in 2032 the security of adulthood never seems to arrive. Society will change faster, and finding stability will feel like an endless race to work harder and learn more. Work will become more abstract and productivity will become a goal in itself. There will be increasing pressure to adapt yourself and your individual goals, to fit in, to keep up and to feel at home. People are always expected to be productive and to achieve more, but there is a prevailing feeling that we are a few steps behind. There is little time for rest or leisure, and people are under constant pressure to perform without feeling the intrinsic motivation to do so because of a lack of purpose in the work we do. Even sleep becomes something important that has to be done perfectly in order to get the most out of the day. Trapped in the hectic pace of the day, we lose ourselves in performing in order to find a place, value and acceptance in society. In this state of mind, people are trapped in status anxiety, in fear of losing what they have worked for.

Social comparison

Promised security of tomorrow

Productivity as a purpose

Figure 24: I lose myself blindly in more work, without knowing what I am doing, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘



TRAPPED IN CHASING SOCIETY'S IDEAL

The (in)ability to feel content, embrace imperfection and express gratitude

In 2032, the world is a place where people are constantly comparing themselves to others. They see only the blow-ups and highlight reels of everyone else's lives and have the feeling that they can never measure up. People feel increasing pressure to be part of the perfect society where there is no room for failure or negativity. There is an endless tension to perform, to make the right choices and to make no mistakes on the way to the polished life. Every time an uncertain event or situation occurs, it makes it seem as if this ideal is further away from being achieved. Every time you think you are there, the grass looks greener on the other side and we feel guilt and shame about ourselves and our achievements because it is never enough. While the norm and ideal is to be mentally and physically healthy, social and intelligent, flexible and stable, the feeling of inability to achieve all this leads to insecurity, anxiety and low self-esteem. People in 2032 are always chasing society's ideals, but they never seem to find lasting happiness.

Paralysed by choice

Illusion of control

Social comparison

Figure 25: I see and am seen on my way to the polished life, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘



TRAPPED IN EXTRAORDINARY ACHIEVEMENT

The (in)ability to develop identity that is more than work and gain self-worth

In 2032, our value and acceptance will be based more and more on our ability to work and perform. We strive to become a more extraordinary person through extraordinary performance. We can always become better performers than we are today by putting in more time, energy and money. In this way, every hour can theoretically be turned into more work that adds value to the self. Even relaxation, seeing friends and sleeping become obligatory. We are pessimistic about the future but feel that we can at least add value by working more. They track their every move and mood using wearables and other technology to get the most out of their day and their bodies. We differentiate ourselves through extreme performance and achievement. In the process of differentiating ourselves, we become increasingly judgmental of ourselves for not working hard enough and feel guilty when we aren't exceptionally productive. Failure to make the most of life as it is becomes a form of personal failure.

*The walking to-do list
Promised security of tomorrow
Fulfilling our exceptional potential
Failing means failure*

Figure 26: I fight through more work for a place in the limelight of being a unique person, digital painting 1080px by 1080px.
↘



TRAPPED IN INDIVIDUAL UNIQUENESS

The (in)ability to embrace randomness and give up on control

In 2032, people feel that their individual lives can be shaped more than ever before. There is an extreme need to be a unique individual. There is pressure to have your unique life plan ready at an early age. The result is a life in which every action and decision must contribute to fulfilling our extraordinary potential. Because our life plans don't allow for setbacks, we feel alone and like a failure when we make mistakes or things don't go as planned. So we deny uncertainty and negativity in search of exceptional uniqueness. The endless possibilities that are at our fingertips through social media have us in a constant state of doubt about what we are doing. This makes it hard to be content with what we have, while we desperately need to hold on to our plan and the story we tell about ourselves. We get caught up in expectations of how our lives are going to turn out, and this translates any unexpected deviation into a failure.

*Paralysed by choice
A story called me
Illusion of control
Feeling on our own in suffering
Fulfilling our exceptional potential
Failing means failure
Social comparison
Plannable life*

Figure 27: I live in a society where we are all focused on looking at ourselves, but is this truly us? Digital painting 1080px by 1080px.
↘



TRAPPED IN BECOMING THE BEST VERSION OF MYSELF

The (in)ability to accept our imperfection and find connection

By the year 2032, we will have become more comfortable with the idea that we are never truly a finished product. We are always a work in progress, but that means we can always work on becoming better versions of ourselves. As the taboo on mental health diminishes, there is a greater focus on improving and changing the psyche of the self. While the future feels bleak and inevitable, we can still change the inner workings of ourselves to improve our quality of life. While we have an extreme focus on improving the self, we tend to lose touch with the people around us. We can no longer be our true selves and be accepted for who we are, we have to become a better version. Technology helps us to achieve our goals, but we get frustrated. Improving the self is subjective and a long process in a society where we are used to objectivity, quick fixes and instant results. We strive to become the best we can be, but we forget that we are inherently flawed.

*The best version of myself
Failing means failure*

Figure 28: I ask myself: what about me needs to be improved next? Digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘



TRAPPED IN A PLEASURABLE LIFE

The (in)ability to embrace and accept negative emotions and practice empathy

In 2032 our future and our lives will feel more and more controllable on a personal level. We will try to avoid and ignore negative feelings at all costs, as we have been brought up to believe that negative emotions and feelings should be suppressed and have no place in our modern society. Because we can shape and control our lives, we tend to choose a version of our lives where we don't experience negativity. This leads to forms of pleasure-seeking where we suppress and deny negative feelings and avoid all unpleasantness. As we feel the urge to pretend to be happy all the time, we feel more negative emotions building up inside us. This creates an endless spiral where we feel bad but we don't allow ourselves to feel it. We suffer in isolation because no one can possibly understand our individual selves as well as we do. Selfish needs and desires are pursued to make us feel better, happier and safer, while we neglect the people around us. Although we know deep down that there is no light without darkness, we never feel like there is enough light.

*Feeling on our own in suffering
The good place
Failing means failure
Plannable life*

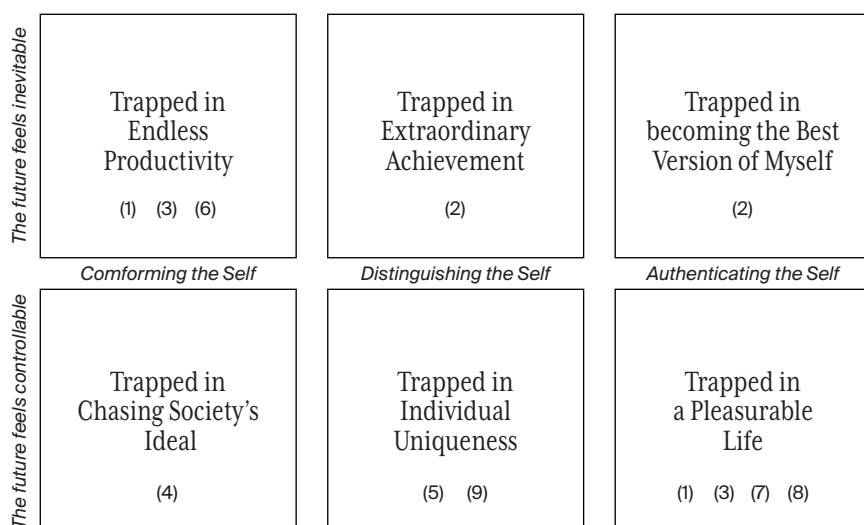
Figure 29: What others see versus what I feel, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘



EVALUATING THE FRAMEWORK

The framework was evaluated with several participants from the transitional group and experts who had been interviewed earlier in the process of collecting contextual factors. A total of 9 participants were asked to identify the most pregnant state of mind for them at that particular moment. As can be seen in figure 30, there is a relatively even distribution between the six states. This means that all the different states are identifiable for different people from the transitional group. Interestingly, several participants expressed that both the Endless Productivity and the Pleasurable Life states apply to them at the same time. They explained that they feel that the only way to survive is to be endlessly productive, while at the same time they need to portray their positive and happy outlook on life. This is understandable and can be considered as Pleasurable Life. It is in this state of mind that the tension between experiencing negativity and the societal need to express sole positivity is most present.

Figure 30: The votes spread over the framework showing the most prevailing state of mind of 9 participants in that moment. ↙



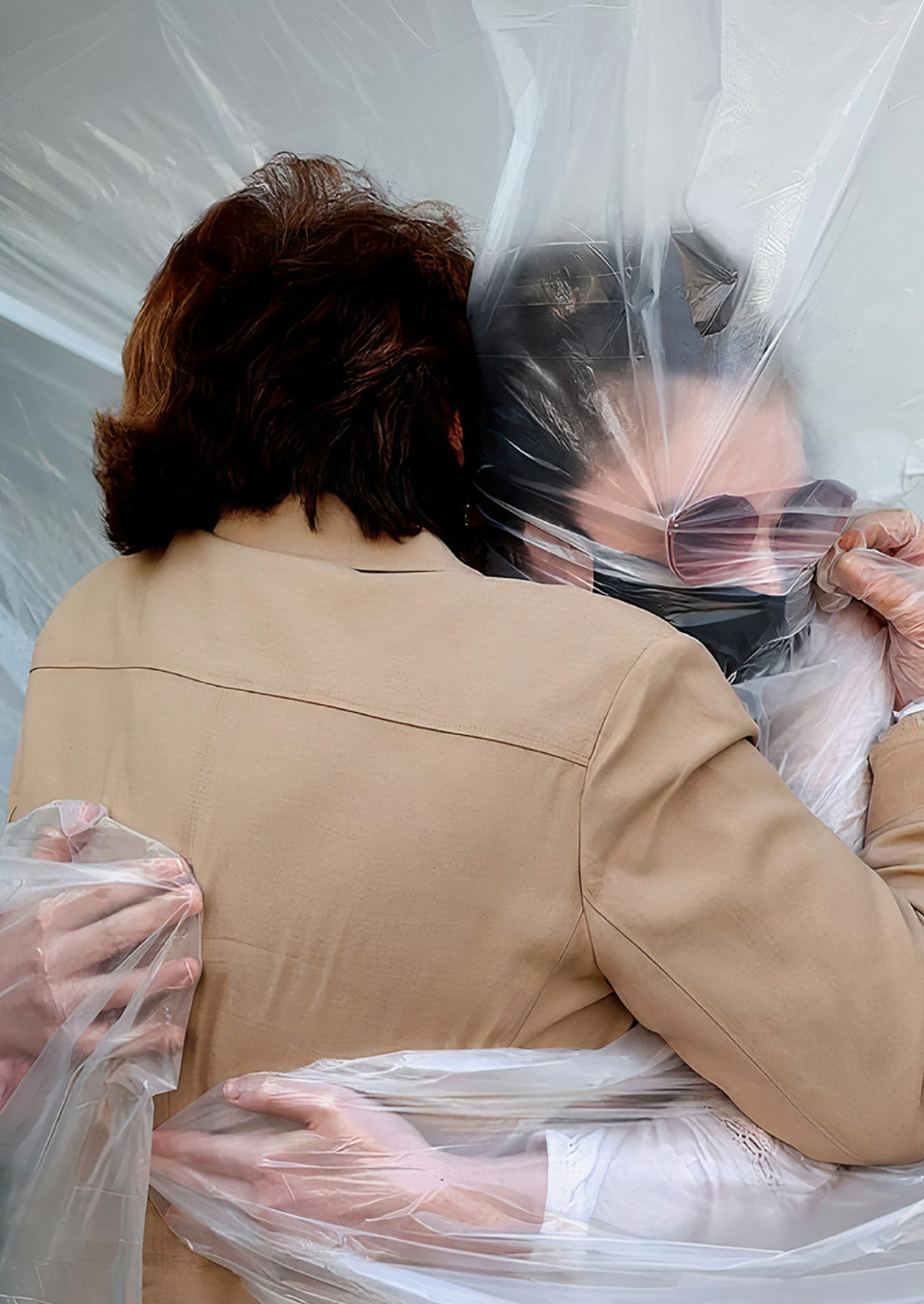
The framework was then evaluated in two qualitative interviews with Maarten Coolen (philosopher) and Leontien Los (psychiatrist). Coolen highlighted the fact that only a modern view of society was used to create the framework. “This is atypical”, he notes, “in a theoretical framework you also have to be able to position people who are not bothered with becoming someone, such as extremely religious people”. The whole framework is aimed at people who believe in the makability of life and the influence of individual actions. In this case, the first dimension should also include people who do not believe in the malleability of life. Due to practical time constraints and lack of access to this group, this value on the axis is not included, but is recommended to be explored in further research. Los rightly pointed out that there is another group that also falls outside the boundaries of the framework. She stated that approximately 15% of the population at this age experience such high levels of psychological distress that it is difficult to focus on becoming and building a future perspective. As the aim of this project is to prevent such mental health problems from occurring, we deliberately exclude this group from the framework.

PART THREE

Part three aims to shed light on the desired future. First, the normative values of the designer are articulated in a normative framework. Here the designer explains what is desirable and what is not according to his own values. With this view of what is desirable and what is not, we look at the six states of mind described in the previous chapter. This leads to a design brief that includes several goals and ambitions for each state of mind. In total, 15 goals are explored to move towards the desired future by 2032. These goals act as a design brief and are used to generate new concepts to free individuals from being trapped in a particular state of mind.

Figure 31: We have to break down the barriers of individualism and embrace our interconnected human nature, Image by Emily Nabnian. ↗

The Desired Future



CHAPTER SEVEN

Intermezzo: a Normative Framework

Where the description of the future context for 2032 was value-free, the normative framework actually helps to take a stance as a designer and formulate goals to improve the subjective mental well-being of the transitional group in the year 2032. The designer's personal values about what a desired future context requires are discussed in this normative framework. By looking at the probable context of 2032 through the lens, a set of goals and ambitions will emerge that aim to improve the well-being of the transitional group. The values discussed in this framework can be divided into three different types of relationships we have as individuals: relationships with ourselves, with others and with society.

All six future states of mind are characterised by a growing tension between being someone and becoming someone. According to Maté (2022), this is already present in our society today, where he states that “the greatest chronic stress arises from trying to be something other than who we really are”. A gap is being formed between our present capabilities and our future aspirations, or in other words, between our current self and our ought or ideal self. This gap between the actual self (being) and the ideal self (becoming) is widening in the context of 2032, according to the contextual factors. Our ideal is more and more based on what we ought to be, which is visible, for example, through social media, where we see an enlarged and smoothed life that could be ours. The versions of ourselves that we want or should become are becoming more unrealistic by global comparison and further away from our current capabilities. The norm, especially around this life transition, is that we have to become someone better tomorrow than we are today, day after day. Your actual self in this light becomes enslaved to its master, the ideal self (Han, 2015). In this way, we spend more time, energy and money on becoming someone and have expectations of what we are becoming without ever feeling satisfied with who we are. David Foster Wallace describes this in his book *This Is Water*. He states that we all worship, that there is no such thing as not worshipping, and that we just choose what to worship. Perhaps we worship individual progress? Which means that we are never going to be enough and that we are always going to be preoccupied with getting better. While we are constantly chasing our ideal selves and making rigid plans about how our lives should unfold, we neglect uncertainty and negativity. In a more rapidly changing and less stable society, it becomes increasingly frustrating to have rigid and unrealistic expectations and to try to fulfil them, because our abilities don't seem to match our media-created desires. This leads to self-discrepancy and therefore chronic stress, dissatisfaction, anxiety and self-dislike (Higgins, 1987).

This is Water by David Foster Wallace (2005), What do we collectively worship? Progress? ↙

“In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you.”

To reduce inner chronic stress, tension, and conflict in the turbulent context of 2032, we have to bring the actual and ideal self closer together. To aim for inner coexistence between being and becoming, we can on one side, focus on the genuine acceptance of the actual self. On the other hand, we can focus on putting the ideal self into perspective. Next to the relation with ourselves, we could respect the dignity of autonomy in others, to facilitate freedom of all individuals to make their own choices. We could aim for interconnectedness with others that goes beyond pleasing and making the self accepted but about genuine expression and listening. In our relation with society we could acknowledge the fact that negativity belongs to the world, we could devalue endless growth, we could foster a curious and intuitive stance towards the world and we could adopt a basic positive image of humankind. These three levels of values can be seen in figure 32.



Figure 32: The different levels of relations we as humans have. ↙

THE RELATION WITH OURSELF

Especially in the transition period between a learning and a working environment, we are constantly developing the actual self towards an ideal self. Think about choosing your next career step, choosing which friends to visit, what book to read, etc. To close the gap between being and becoming, between the actual and the ideal self, we should work on both ends.

Genuinely accept the actual self

Put the ideal self into perspective

Being

↳ *The actual self defined by our current capabilities, context and stories we tell about ourselves.*

Coexistence

↳ *A place where we have less rigid expectations of the future and are more compassionate about who we are.*

Becoming

↳ *The ideal self defined by our desires (either intrinsic or extrinsic), the stories we believe in and our hopes.*

Genuine & unconditional acceptance of the actual self

To achieve coexistence between being and becoming, we can relate to our own being differently. By accepting intrinsically that we are worthy of being, we acknowledge that we do not need to become anyone or achieve anything to gain acceptance. Both positive and negative emotions are part of our being, and rather than suppressing them, we should learn to express them effectively and accept our imperfections. We should understand that we are all human and to live, means to experience negativity and negative emotions. We should learn to be less harsh on ourselves and develop a curious level of self-compassion. Instead of always participating in activities that are tied to our future, we should value actions that don't contribute to economic capital, but to human capital. We should accept that things do not always happen to us for a reason and therefore stop blaming our own incompetence instead of randomness and uncertainty. While trusting that we are okay, we understand that there is no need for perfection, but a need for acceptance and failure because they shape and form who we are.

Putting the ideal self into perspective

In order to strive for coexistence between being and becoming, we need to relate to our ideal or future selves differently. Because our goals for who we want to become are rigid and far removed from our current context and our current capabilities, we need to look for more realistic stories about ourselves that embrace uncertainty, setbacks, and lack a clear end goal. We should give up the illusion of control and the total malleability of life and focus on the fact that the future is inherently uncertain and that we can only influence our lives to a certain extent. Stories about ourselves should therefore be less fixed, less focused on expectations, more shaped by our intuition and more adaptable to change. We need to trust something (our gut, intuition, God) that the things we do now will somehow connect in the future, rather than connecting all the dots in advance in the here and now and expecting life to unfold according to our plan. Exploring, following our intuition and not having a clear path should be valued. While we can have goals and ideals and plan towards them, we should be less preoccupied with conforming to rigid expectations of how life will unfold.

Although we experience being and becoming as complete opposites of the spectrum in our current society, they are a paradox and have the potential to co-exist. We can be and become someone at the same time, where we are satisfied and dissatisfied, where we are in control and not in control. "It is as much about the ability to sway with the waves as it is about being able to give direction within the current." To facilitate this coexistence, we should look not only at our relationship with ourselves, but also at our relationship with others and our attitude to society.

"Most of our tensions and frustrations stem from compulsive needs to act the role of someone we are not."

— Hans Selye,
The Stress of Life (1978)

THE RELATION WITH OTHERS

As we move from a learning to a working environment, our environment will change drastically and we'll form new relationships with different people and abandon other relationships, therefore we need to redefine our relationships with others.

Respect the dignity of the autonomy of others

Whatever undermines individual autonomy will be experienced as a source of chronic stress. Therefore, in our relationships with others, we should respect and acknowledge their autonomy and our own. We should celebrate diversity and let go of black and white norms. Acceptance and respect do not come from more achievement or success in becoming someone, but simply from being a human being. Respecting someone's dignity of autonomy means recognising that the other person is in full control of their own life and the choices they make. By respecting the autonomy of others, we make room for decisions that are not linked to an ideal image or to becoming a better person, but are based on intuition.

Valuing interconnectedness with others

Focusing on autonomy should not come at the expense of connecting and relating to others. It is important to focus on developing and restoring relationships at a deeper level, since it is possible to lose sight of others while focusing on the self. This connection should value emotional expressiveness and autonomy. Relationships that are not based on pleasing or expectations are valued. By focusing on our connection with others, we lose the sole focus on becoming our ideal self.

THE RELATION WITH SOCIETY

In the transition from a learning to a working environment, we escape the safety bubble and lose the sense of controllability of the learning environment and therefore need to redefine our relationship with society.

Negativity belongs to the world

To facilitate the coexistence of being and becoming, we should change our relationship with society. In our relationship with society we could acknowledge that negativity is part of the world, that there is no light without darkness. Negative experiences and emotions are inevitable and essential to our well-being and survival. While we are increasingly taught to suppress or ignore these feelings, we need to relearn how to face, accept and learn from our negative emotions and experiences. By accepting negativity in society, we reduce the tension on the actual self and reduce the pressure on the ideal self by normalising setbacks.

Devalue endless growth

We could devalue endless growth and understand society as a place that does not always value more speed, more efficiency and more economic capital, but one that values human capital and balance. While we are taught that endless growth is possible in this capitalist system, we need to acknowledge that holistic, endless growth for everyone has never been and will never be possible. By devaluing endless growth, we reduce the pressure to always become a better version tomorrow.

Trust curiosity and intuition

We could take a different stance towards the world, one in which curiosity and intuition find a home again, rather than only the makable, the rational and the predictable. While we experience the world as explainable, we neglect uncertainty and mystery. We need to relearn that the future is mysterious and that not everything has a rational explanation. Some things just are. By doing so, we create stories about who we want to become that don't assume false certainty, but that open up to what we don't know yet. We can develop a more nuanced picture of the future, one that is less black and white and more based on intuition and exploration.

Adopt a positive image of humankind

Finally, we could adopt a fundamentally positive view of humanity. We should get rid of the idea that human beings are lazy, unproductive, competitive and aggressive if we follow our intuition and our gut feeling. When we think that human beings are inherently bad, we assume that we have to become someone else, rather than being who we really are. By adopting a positive view of humanity, we assume that the way we are is good enough, thus closing the gap between being and becoming for ourselves and others.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Design Brief, Goals and Ambitions for 2032

Now that we have a set of normative values, we can take this lens of what is desirable and undesirable according to the designer and apply it to the likely context of 2032 and the six states of mind. By delving deeper into each of the six states of mind, we can identify several goals and ambitions that are worth striving for in order to create a desirable society where the gap between being and becoming is reduced. Each of the goals is specific to the state of mind and has the ambition of freeing the people within it from a particular problem sustaining interaction pattern that is keeping them trapped in that state of mind. In total, 15 unique goals were identified, each with objectives for society, educators, employers and individuals. All the goals are accompanied by initial ideas and sketches of how to achieve them, as can be seen in figure 33.

Figure 33: The 15 design goals placed in the framework →

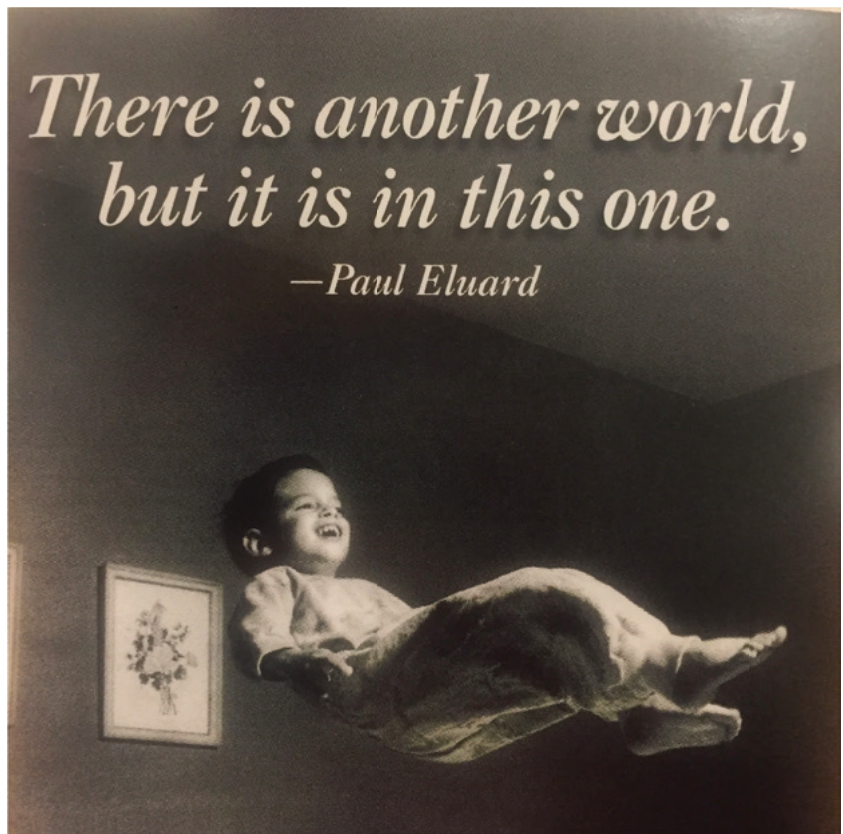


Figure 34: Quote from French surrealist poet Paul Eluard in his selected works. ↗

The future feels inevitable

Trapped in Endless Productivity

(1) Redefining Stability

A society that values stability, and that seeks and provides stability beyond our expectations of tomorrow.

(2) Setting and protecting Boundaries

A society in which we relearn how to set boundaries and create our own structures.

(3) Finding a meaningful Role

A society in which intuition is valued as a tool to help people find a meaningful role in society.

Trapped in Extraordinary Achievement

(6) Nurturing balance

A society in which a balance is maintained between economic and human capital, between work and private life, between 'useful' and 'useless' activities.

(7) Saying No

A society where we can say no, based on intuition and gut feeling, without the guilt

(8) Developing Self-Compassion

A society that is fundamentally less competitive, where people are more compassionate and forgiving towards the self.

Trapped in becoming the Best Version of Myself

(11) Accepting Imperfection

A society where imperfection is praised, where we acknowledge and respect our shortcomings.

(12) Finding Connection

A society where deep relationships are valued and encouraged, and where we let go of the sole focus on the self.

Conforming the Self

Distinguishing the Self

Authenticating the Self

The future feels controllable

Trapped in Chasing Society's Ideal

(4) Developing Healthy Ideals

A society that adopts a broader standard that leaves room for people to develop healthy ideals.

(5) Focussing on What Is

A society that focuses in a balanced way on what has been done and what still needs to be done.

Trapped in Individual Uniqueness

(9) Realising Control

A society that abandons the illusion of total control and accountability at individual level.

(10) Relearn Failing

A society in which learning through failure and experimentation is seen as an opportunity.

(11) Adaptable Stories

A society that accepts and values less rigid stories about who we are and who we want to become.

Trapped in a Pleasurable Life

(14) Letting go of Compulsive Positivity

A society that values the positive, but is also realistic about the fact that negativity is an essential part of life.

(15) Expressing and Embracing Negativity

A society in which negative feelings are shared, embraced and experienced.

(1) REDEFINING STABILITY

A society that values our biologic need for stability, and that seeks and provides stability beyond our expectations of tomorrow.

While we biologically long for stability and security, in 2032 this stability never seems to arrive. The future is more uncertain and turbulent, but we still pin our hopes on a sense of stability that is yet to come. In this state of mind, we work harder and harder to achieve that sense of stability, but we feel disappointed when the sense of stability does not arrive.

To prevent ourselves from spiralling into endless work to find stability, we should focus on different ways of finding and nurturing our innate need for stability and give up our expectation that stability in life will come through more work. As a society, we should recognise this human need for stability. We should work together to find new ways of finding and providing stability in different areas of life. In addition to acquiring this new kind of stability, we should relearn how to accept and be comfortable with instability and uncertainty. By cultivating stability in other areas of life and becoming comfortable with uncertainty, we let go of the idea that we must work endlessly to satisfy our intrinsic need for stability.

Particularly in the transition phase, we move from a stable and predictable learning environment to a state of increased instability and uncertainty at work. While we are losing this stability in one aspect of our professional lives, we could be nurturing feelings of stability in other areas of our lives, for example through our relationships with others.

Educational institutions can focus on easing the transition by providing more freedom and open-ended challenges in their programmes. In this way, the transitional group can become accustomed to the ambiguous nature of modern-day work, where there is instability, chaos, and no right or wrong answers. Employers can focus on providing the transitional group with a sense of stability and security in some aspects of their work environment, for example through connections with colleagues.

Figure 35: Aren't we all trying to find stability in a chaotic society? Digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘

As in a rugby match, you rely not only on your own ability and skills to succeed in the match, but also on the ability and support of the team and your place in it. So you gain stability and confidence not from your own ability but also from your relationship with others.

Where can and should we learn to deal with uncertainty? Where can we work to build certainty? How can we provide stability in a changing society? How can society provide stability? In what areas can it? In what areas can it not?



Us Time

A digital agent that helps you make time to do nothing and focus on each other. The agent schedules quality time to build deep relationships. These relationships become places where you can be, rather than become, and provide a haven of stability in a life that is all about performance.



Habitat

Physical spaces throughout the city that focus on providing stability. These spaces are open to everyone and provide a simple living space. You don't have to do anything and you can just feel at home with the people you want.



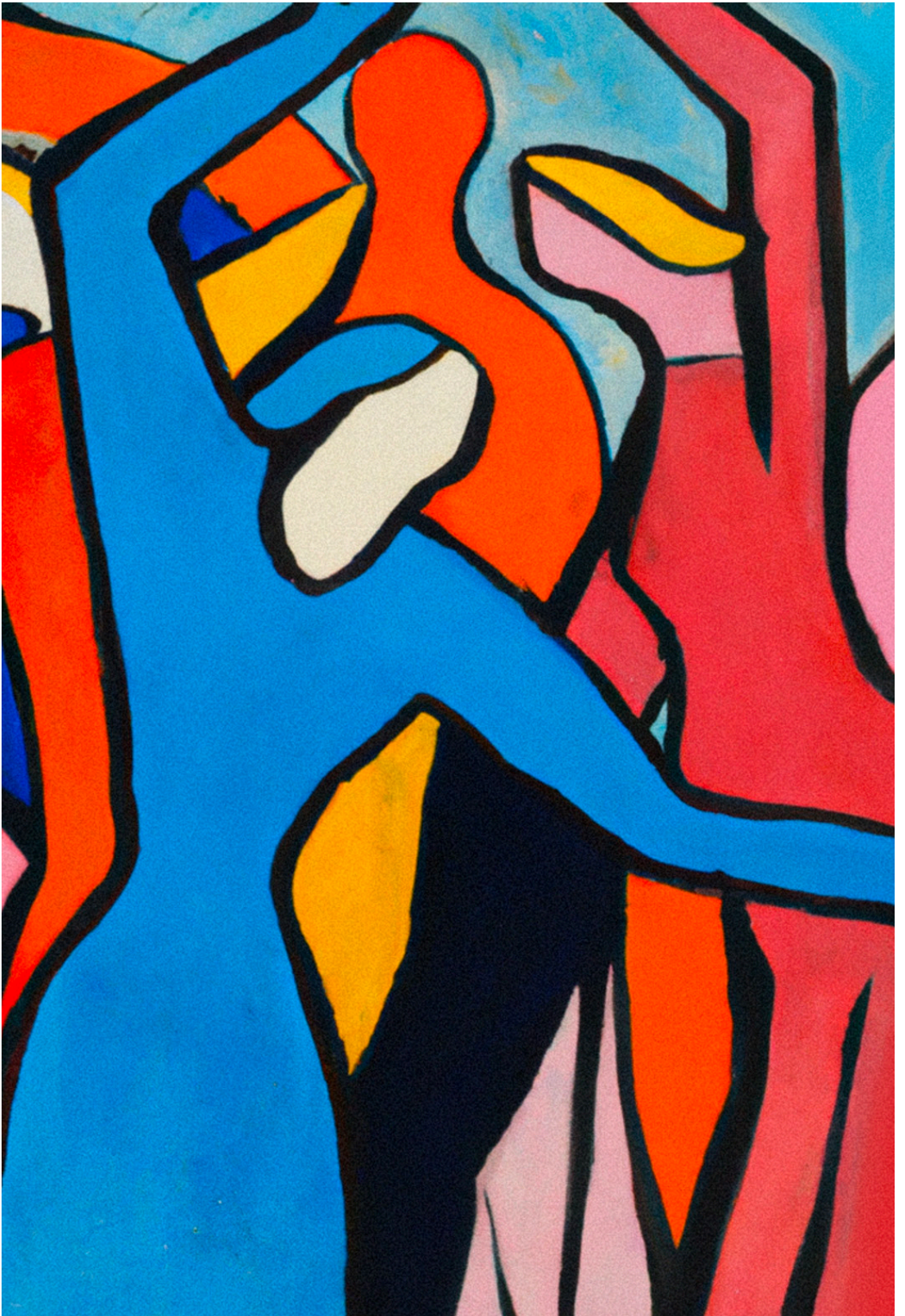
The Insecure Day

One day a week in education and work is about embracing uncertainty and doing something new. The rest of the week we embrace stability. We know what we are going to do and that we have the resources and knowledge to do it. This one day of enforced uncertainty teaches us to reflect on the opportunities in uncertainty and instability.



Stability Quest

A national programme that identifies opportunities to promote stability in times of change in a cost-effective way. This could be housing stability, economic stability or promoting social cohesion.



(2) SETTING AND PROTECTING BOUNDARIES

A society in which we relearn how to set boundaries and create our own structures.

In 2032, society is more fluid and provides fewer boundaries and structures in everyday life. While we have a psychological need for security and structure, we feel anxious and nervous when these structures are not provided because we are never taught how to deal with freedom and lack of boundaries in such an ambiguous way. In this state of mind we are so focused on proving ourselves that we forget to set and protect our boundaries and get lost in endless work.

In a society with fewer boundaries between private and work, personal and professional identity, it is important that we learn to set boundaries for ourselves that provide a sense of structure and stability. We should learn to guard these boundaries in a respectful way, recognising that we don't need to prove ourselves by stepping over our boundaries. As a society we should respect personal boundaries and set an example of good and healthy boundaries.

It is during this time of transition that it is crucial to prove that you can do what you have been taught, that you are worthy of your degree. We often overstep our boundaries to prove our worth and lose ourselves in endless more work. Not necessarily for ourselves, but to prove our worth to others.

Educational institutions can focus on teaching the transitional group how to set and communicate boundaries in a demanding environment and how to set structures in an environment that is chaotic and unpredictable. Employers can focus on creating a healthy culture where boundaries are respected and celebrated.

Figure 36: *Where should I set my boundaries when I have always done as I have been told?* digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘

As with physical training, your body will tell you the optimal balance between exercise and recovery. Our bodies set limits for us, give us strong signals when we overtrain, and know when we are exceeding our physical limits.

How can we create a society where we value boundaries again? Where do we need flexibility and freedom? And where do we need boundaries and structure? How can we learn to respect the boundaries and autonomy of others? How can we learn that we don't have to prove ourselves?



The Return of the Sunday

A government-sponsored campaign to help people see the value of having a day of mental rest and spending time developing their personal relationships. This weekly day focuses on being rather than becoming.



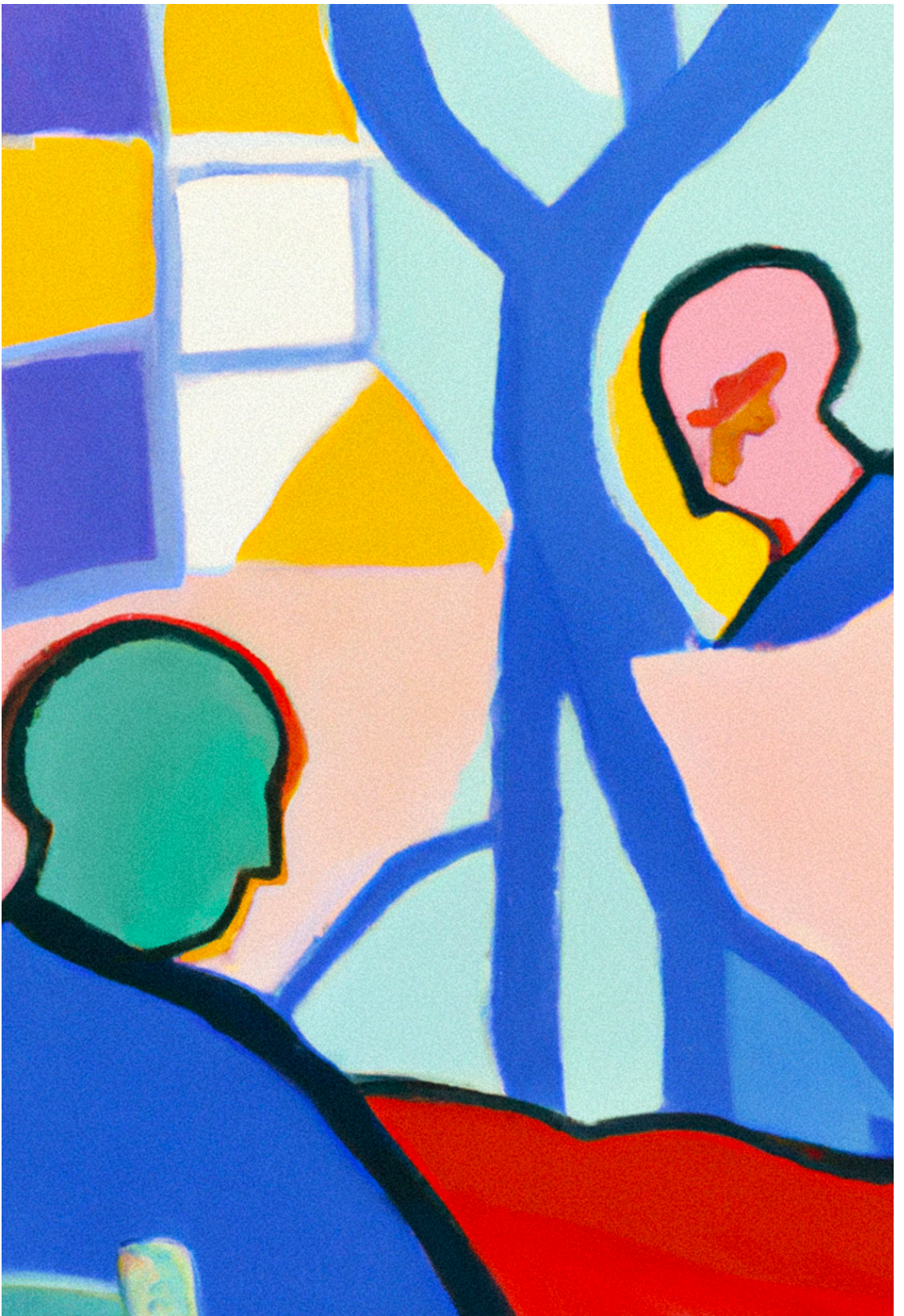
Practised Chaos

A series of educational courses that do not offer any structure, but only a vague goal at the end. Get help from a mentor to set structure, boundaries and your own goals. Learn to verbalise and set boundaries and structure in an unstructured environment with some tools you can take with you in your career.



Structure Agent

A mobile application that connects to a wearable to measure your energy and pulls information from your calendar. It helps you schedule, plan and set boundaries based on your energy levels. It provides an easy excuse to say no to doing more. It shows you when you exceed the suggested limits and helps you reflect on why that happened and helps you regain that energy balance in the long term.



(3) FINDING A MEANINGFUL ROLE

Figure 37: Using my brains and my gut feeling to determine my role in society, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘

A society in which intuition is valued as a tool to help people find a meaningful role in society.

In 2032, we have been busy achieving and finding the right answers to questions that others have asked us. We suddenly feel lost when we have to figure out what questions we want to answer as individuals. It is as if you have always been in the back seat of the car and suddenly find the steering wheel in your hands and have to determine where to go. We simply have no idea what we want to answer. In this state of mind, trapped by the promise of productivity, we lose touch with our emotions and our intuition about what we like and don't like, what we value and what we find meaningful.

To find the direction we want to take, we need to regain trust in our intuition and gut feeling. We can experiment by listening to our feelings to understand what direction we want to give our lives. As well as finding a new direction, we can reconnect with our gut to find out what our body is saying no to, what direction we are not comfortable with. As a society we should value intuitive choices and facilitate exploration so that we can find a meaningful role and direction in society that gives us a sense of fulfilment and purpose.

In the transition phase it almost feels as if you have doubled down on a role. There is no going back because you have already invested so much time and effort. By reconnecting with our intuition early in the process, we can find out what direction we inherently value and whether or not a certain direction will actually give us a sense of fulfilment.

Educational institutions can focus on exploration and intuition rather than a performance-based system focused on coming up with the right answer to the specific question posed. Employers can focus on facilitating discussions about fulfilment and meaning in work. Our innate need for meaning must be recognised and nurtured by both of them, and by our society as a whole.

As with making art, an intuitive and creative impulse motivates us to create and tells us what to create. This impulse is always there, but it is difficult to rationalise.

How can we re-value intuitive choices in society? How can we facilitate more meaningful work? How can we discover and explore what we want to contribute to society? How can we shift our ideals of what is meaningful work and what is not? How can we reward meaningful work?



What is it, that I like?

An application linked to a wearable that measures which activities keep you in the flow and which activities drain your energy. The application then helps you reflect on what seems to energise you.



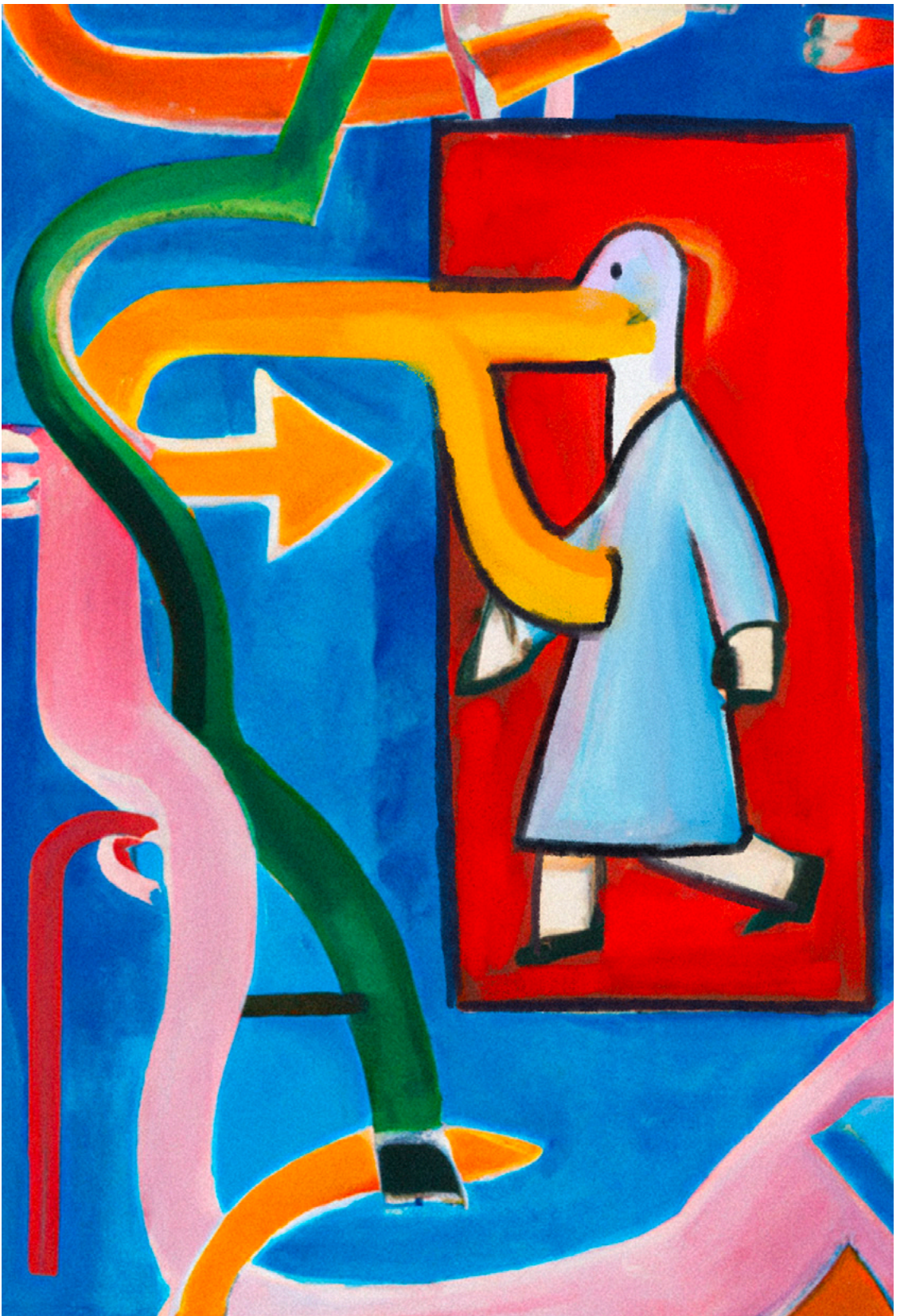
Mandatory Explorations

A national programme that aims to make exploration compulsory in all education to help students discover what they value and like. This is beneficial because it allows students to get back in touch with their intuition and their gut feeling, to discover what they like and to reconnect with their inner voice. There will be enough time, space and a mentor who can help you with what you want to do and who can help you reconnect with your gut feeling through prompts and questions.



Purpose Review

Employers are replacing performance reviews with purpose reviews. Do you feel that what you are doing is meaningful? How can your work become more purposeful, fulfilling and meaningful? Employers see and measure the value of providing purposeful work for their employees.



(4) DEVELOPING HEALTHY IDEALS

A society that adopts a broader standard that leaves room for people to develop healthy ideals.

In 2032, society is more competitive and there is a drive to conform to a certain socially created ideal. We base our ideals more and more on what others think, rather than what we want and value in our deepest being. By wanting to conform to society's ideal, the person you are and the person you should be becomes separated, causing frustration, anxiety and dissatisfaction. There is no room for mistakes or slowing down on the way to this unrealistic ideal that is not your own.

We should focus on developing ideals that we individually value. Ideals that are fluid, not based on a rigid path where each day should be better than the last and a rigid image of the future. Ideals that are not based on expectations, achievement or proving oneself. We need to rethink the ideals that we believe in - is this really what we want for ourselves? Am I pursuing this ideal because I want it or because I should want it? As a society, we should focus on developing multiple healthy ideals that broaden the standard and are realistic and identifiable with our most basic human needs. This makes the ideal self that individuals hold more attainable and dynamic, and therefore closer to current capabilities.

In a learning environment we are pushed to derive an ideal image of 'being the best', where we find the right answer as quick as possible and memorise as much as possible. When we move to a working environment we are competing against a larger multi-generational group and we cannot hold on to the unhealthy ideal of 'being the best'.

Educational institutions can focus on rewarding more values than just the right answers to questions, such as creativity, critical thinking, cooperation, generosity and curiosity. Employers can focus on developing healthy ideals that are not about who works the most hours or hits the most KPIs.

Figure 38: A society in which a plurality of more nuanced ideals coexist, am I any different or the same? Digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘

Like a road trip, you have no idea where you are going, but you feel it will be an interesting adventure. Letting yourself be guided by spontaneity and chance, but with a sense of direction and purpose.

How can we as a society develop healthier ideals? How can we respect people who deviate from the norm set by society? How can we expand the norm in society? How can we develop ideals that we inherently value and that are consistent with our evolutionary origins?



Aligning expectations

A not-for-profit organisation that links industry and education to set the right expectations about how different working life is from education. Therefore busting unhealthy ideals and expectations premature.



Not tied to my future

A programme in work and education that allows you to set a weekly goal to participate in activities that do not add value to the future self. Later, reflect on how these moments make you feel. Employers and educational institutions measure and understand the benefits.



Verbalising Ideals

Verbalising ideals is a way of understanding our values and beliefs by identifying our ideals and the assumptions behind them. This can be done through conversations in education with others, asking questions such as "What is my ideal? Why is it my ideal?" Getting different perspectives on our ideals helps us to understand ourselves and the world better.



(5) FOCUSING ON WHAT IS

A society that focuses in a balanced way on what has been done and what still needs to be done.

In 2032, we are more focused on what isn't there yet, the skills we still lack, the choices we haven't made, rather than what is right in front of us. We are more focused on becoming someone rather than being someone. Always preoccupied with becoming someone and justifying our existence, we feel unworthy and low in self-worth. I still have to do X, become Y or improve Z to be accepted.

We should let go of the belief that we are only valued if we perform and get better. We should re-learn how to be grateful for what is and embrace what is in front of us. We should learn to derive self-worth from the person we are, not the person we are becoming, our achievements or economic progress. In society we should focus on being grateful and emphasising what we have rather than what we don't yet have, in ourselves and in others.

In a learning environment, the focus is on bite-sized courses where new knowledge is acquired in a short period of time. In a work environment, the focus is on long-term career advancement, but there are always others who are better at different aspects of our professional lives. This makes us feel increasingly insecure about who we are today. While we know that we should not measure our own progress against the progress of others, the system we live in makes it extremely difficult.

Educational institutions can focus on deep group reflection on what has been done and learned. Rather than focusing on what was missing, inadequate or what can be learned for the next time. Workplaces can focus on striking a balance between reflecting on what has been achieved and planning on what still needs to happen.

Figure 39: Focusing on my future and what is right in front of me at the same time, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘

Imagine driving across the country side in the dark with only your headlights to guide you. You can do it, but you can't see more than 50 metres ahead. So can we not have a fixated vision on what will happen in the far future but we can focus on those 50 metres ahead and the steering wheel in our hands.

How can society have both a focus on what is not yet there and a focus on what is there at the same time? Rather than focusing on what needs to be done, how can we focus more on what is? How can we practice gratitude and accept what we are?



Unrush
Provides space in cities for people to be themselves and to volunteer to help others, without the pressure of perfection, achievement or the pursuit of an ideal. It is a place to connect with others and gain value from being yourself. It becomes a safe haven, protecting you from the world which is always looking to tomorrow. You can teach others something you already know, help fix a bike, or just have a chat.



Everything Unimportant
An application that helps you find out which activities are really important to you. List the things that were most important to you, that gave you a sense of purpose, and understand what kind of activities are most important to you and which are mundane and unimportant. The app will help you to look beyond the hustle and bustle of the day and focus on how to incorporate the things that you enjoy into the here and now.



(6) NURTURING BALANCE

A society in which a balance is maintained between economic and human capital, between work and private life, between ‘useful’ and ‘useless’ activities.

In 2032, most activities are focused on becoming someone, and value is gained by achieving more. Every activity must have some kind of purpose and contribute to the development of a more valuable self. From studying and working, to the amount of sleep we have and the friends we choose to hang out with. We drain our bodies of energy trying to make the most of the 24 hours we have in a day. We believe that when we are not productive, all we experience is emptiness, a frightening void of uselessness in which we feel guilty for not being productive.

We should learn how to restore the balance between activities that add economic value to the self and activities that do not. We should focus on creating space and time for life enjoyment and non-economic activities and value them. We should focus on developing a strong identity that is not just linked to our work or our economic capital. In society, we should focus on showing that life is more than just work and consumption, and we need to highlight the benefits of a balanced life.

As we move from learning to working, we become more and more obsessed with adding economic value to ourselves. This creates an imbalance where we may only spend time becoming a better version of ourselves than we were yesterday. All the activities we do have to contribute to a better CV, and we neglect the fact that our life is more than just our professional side, where everything seems to be a competition.

Education and employers can focus on valuing human capital rather than economic capital, leaving room for both to be balanced. Where we don't only learn how to work, but learn how to live and flourish in this society. Education can prepare us to maintain this balance. Education becomes not only a place to develop your professional self, but also to improve your human and social capital. Employers value you as a person and accept that work is only a small part of who you are.

Figure 40: My economical me in discussion with my humane me and our judging voice in the middle, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘

Like our innate process of knowing that we need to eat, we feel an urge to restore balance to our food system. This is so strong that we become moody if we do not restore this imbalance. How can we listen to our bodies again to know when we are out of balance?

How can we create a society that values human capital? How can we develop an identity alongside work? How can we restore the balance between work and leisure? How can we value doing nothing in a society that is geared towards getting better and better?



Equilibrium

Equilibrium helps you find your internal mental balance and guides you to restore it over time. It uses biometric data from smart wearables and questionnaires to calculate and display mental reserve and stress scores. This visualisation helps you find a good balance between mentally restorative activities and mentally demanding tasks.



Human Capital School

The focus of our education system is shifting from preparing you to work to preparing you to live. Courses that focus on developing economic and human capital are mixed. You don't just learn what to think, you learn how to think and what you want to think about. Above all, the new school teaches you what to value in life and makes you aware of your balance.



(7) SAYING NO

A society where we can say no, based on intuition and gut feeling, without feeling guilty.

In 2032, opportunities seem to be everywhere, and saying no to an opportunity feels like a missed chance to live a different life. There is an increased pressure to say yes to everything because it feels like it will open doors in a society where career paths are less linear. While we believe that we only gain acceptance through achievement and performance, we feel guilty about not making the most of it by saying no. Saying no feels like a missed opportunity that can never be taken again.

In order to break this pattern of thinking, we need to accept that we are enough by nature, and that we can only gain our worth by performing to a certain degree. By saying no, we create a space for ourselves where we are not busy fulfilling the expectations of others, but where we can focus on being instead of becoming. We need to understand that other opportunities will arise and that ignoring an opportunity will not jeopardise future stability. We should relearn how to say no and accept the inherent guilt that comes with saying no. In society, we should normalise saying no and base answers on intuition rather than just rational arguments.

Especially during the transition from learning to working, our calendars fill up to prove our economic worth. We lose ourselves in endlessly saying yes to everything until our bodies say no for us. We need to learn to say no, to feel confident about the choices we make, and to deal with the inevitable guilt that comes with saying no.

Education and employers can focus on developing a culture where the transitional group is comfortable enough to say 'no' on the basis of their gut feeling. Education can focus on providing a safe space for students to learn how to say no and how to deal with guilt and uncertainty. Employers can focus on valuing employees who say no without always demanding a rational explanation.

Figure 41: My heart and brains making the decision together to say no, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘

Like in a restaurant where you look at the menu and decide what you want to eat, this is never a rational choice, but let your gut tell you what you want and take the time to make that choice. This decision process can never be explained rationally. It is the same with saying no.

How can we learn to say no again? How can we develop the ability to sense when to say no and when to say yes? How can we normalise saying no in society? How can we normalise decisions based on irrational arguments and gut feelings?



Innate

An educational programme that helps you to reconnect with your intuition and your gut feelings in order to make decisions. The programme is compulsory for all university students and is based on over-asking, so students have to learn how to find out what they are saying yes or no to. These decisions are guided by a professional and are based on both rational arguments and gut feelings. you learn to accept the guilt that comes with saying no and to be confident in making decisions.



Choice Check-In

An app that helps you listen to your gut feeling when you have to make a decision through a series of questions. When you follow the programme, you start by saying I will think about it when faced with a choice. It's a respectful way to respond, because it shows that you are really taking time to think. It gives you time to discover what you really want. The app helps you to reflect on what your body is trying to tell you and to listen to your gut.



(8) DEVELOPING SELF-COMPASSION

A society that is fundamentally less competitive, where people are more compassionate and forgiving towards the self.

In 2032, society is more competitive in all aspects of life and people are harder on themselves. Because everything is possible and work can always be done, we feel that we are always underperforming compared to others. That we could always have done better if we had put in more time or made the 'right' decisions. We are not satisfied with the work we have done and we criticise ourselves for not making the most of the 24 hours in a day. We judge ourselves when we make mistakes or the wrong decisions and punish ourselves when we underperform compared to others.

We should accept that we are inherently enough and shift the focus from what needs to be done to what has been done. Acceptance of the self means that we should develop a curious and compassionate relationship with the self, looking at ourselves with the same non-judgmental acceptance that we would give to others, such as our friends. We should understand that we are not broken, but that we can curiously look for explanations for our behaviour. By letting go of harsh self-judgment, we accept ourselves for who we are and affirm that we do not need to gain our acceptance through performing. In society we should value human diversity, we should devalue competition and we should not be more critical of ourselves than we would be of others.

In transition, each outcome of our actions feels more and more important, as if the stakes are higher. As if it is now for real. While there is no room for error in our minds, we get angry with ourselves when things do not go perfectly according to our plan. We punish ourselves for what we could have done better and push ourselves to never make that mistake again. When others make the same mistake, we accept it and say that it is part of life.

Education can focus on normalising talking about self-limiting thoughts and treating yourself as you would treat others. They can help to adopt a more curious stance towards behaviour instead of taking it for granted. Employers can focus on understanding common self-limiting thoughts and finding ways not to fix these thoughts but to show their understanding.

Figure 42: Looking at myself in the mirror, but this time with curiosity instead of hatred, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘

Like your reaction when a friend makes a real mistake. If there is no bad intention, then there is a great chance that you will forgive that friend.

How can we treat ourselves as we treat others? How can we create a society that is less competitive and nurtures our social interdependent nature? A society where we are nudged to be less harsh on ourselves? How can we develop a curious and compassionate relationship with ourselves?



SOS Self-Compassion

An online platform that helps people find the reasons behind self-judgmental thoughts. Type in your thought and GPT-3 will classify it into one of the main categories and relabel it. Reattribute the thought by reading information about possible reasons behind the thought. Discover other people's thoughts anonymously and receive peer feedback and support based on your thought.



Buddy Network

Become buddies within education and help each other discover the underlying reasons of the self-judging thoughts with online guidance material.



(9) REALISING CONTROL

A society that abandons the illusion of total control and accountability at individual level and embraces randomness.

In 2032, our society will be more unpredictable and turbulent. However, we have become increasingly used to the idea that the world is fixable and explainable, as long as we work or search hard enough. This leaves us with the illusion that things could have turned out differently if only we had worked harder. We are the centre of our own universe and we tend to overestimate our own influence on the course of history.

We need to acknowledge that we are not always in control. We influence our lives to a certain extent, but we do not have absolute control over what happens in our lives or how it unfolds. This doesn't mean that we have to give up control completely, we still have autonomy over the choices we make. We have to accept that sometimes things just happen and we cannot attribute them to our individual actions. They were simply beyond our control and the question of control has no single answer, there is no one to blame or thank. In society we need to recognise the randomness of life and give up the illusion that we can control, explain and predict everything that happens and attribute it to our own actions. We must recognise when we are in control and when we are not.

In a learning environment, we learn that we, as individuals, have complete control over outcomes; not studying hard enough means not passing, and being bad at this subject means spending more time on it. We carry this belief into our working lives, but neglect the fact that some things are simply out of our individual control.

Educational institutions can focus on introducing randomness and complexity to help students understand that sometimes they have no control over the outcome and that the process is more important than the outcome. Employers can focus on implementing group reflection moments where employers realise their level of control and do not blame anyone, but simply note they are unlucky.

Figure 43: Letting go of the idea that I am the sole writer of my own story, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘

Like a team sport, we can influence the outcome of the game to a certain extent, but there are 25 other players on both sides, the referee, the weather, the crowd. Neither a loss nor a win can be attributed to the efforts of one person.

What is in our control and what is not? How can we learn to accept randomness? Under what circumstances can we give up on control and in which can we not? How can we experience control differently? Who to blame if not ourselves, others or god?



Flip-A-Coin

Completely relinquish control by making small decisions based on the flip of a coin. One side is yes, the other side is no. See and experience that when you are not in control, things tend to turn out pretty well in the end.



Who is there to blame if not God, others or ourselves?

A course in educational institutes where there is a lot of uncontrollability, you learn to reflect on the amount of influence you had as an individual and not to blame anyone but pure misfortune.



(10) RELEARN FAILING

A society in which learning through failure and experimentation is seen as an opportunity.

In 2032, failure is seen as a lost opportunity that can never be regained. Failure prohibits us from reaching our ideals. With this thought, we undermine the power of failure as our fundamental learning mechanism. While we believe that if you never fail, you will become unique and successful and never experience distress, we strive for a level of perfectionism that is unnatural and cannot be sustained.

We should understand that failure is not a lost opportunity, but a great opportunity to learn. We should relearn how to fail effectively and rediscover how to learn from failure. We should shatter the illusion that not failing will bring us the perfect life. We need acknowledge that our brains are inherently anti-fragile and get better from setbacks. Being good at learning from failure should be recognised as a strength in society and not only on an individual level.

In a learning environment, we are more used to giving the right answer to the question asked, and we are trained to think that giving the wrong answer is something bad. You have to get it right on the first try. This creates the illusion that you will always get things right the first time you try them. During the transition period we put more energy into preventing failure even though there is no clear definition of failure or success, right or wrong, in the real world after education.

Educational institutions can focus on preparing students for failure and recognising the potential of learning from failure as the main way of learning rather than memorising. They can recognise different models for learning where success is not based on finding the right answer to the question but learn to deal with ambiguous questions. Employers can focus on the potential benefits of failure and create a culture where failure is praised rather than feared or shamed.

Figure 44: Had I not fallen off my bike, I would still be walking, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘

Like learning to ride a bike, or walking, or talking. We could never learn it without falling, nobody can tell us in theory how to ride a bike, nor can we memorise it, only through experience, guidance and failure do we learn this skill that we will never forget.

How can we experience failure?
How can we create a society where failure is seen as good rather than bad? How can we return to a more natural way of learning from failure?



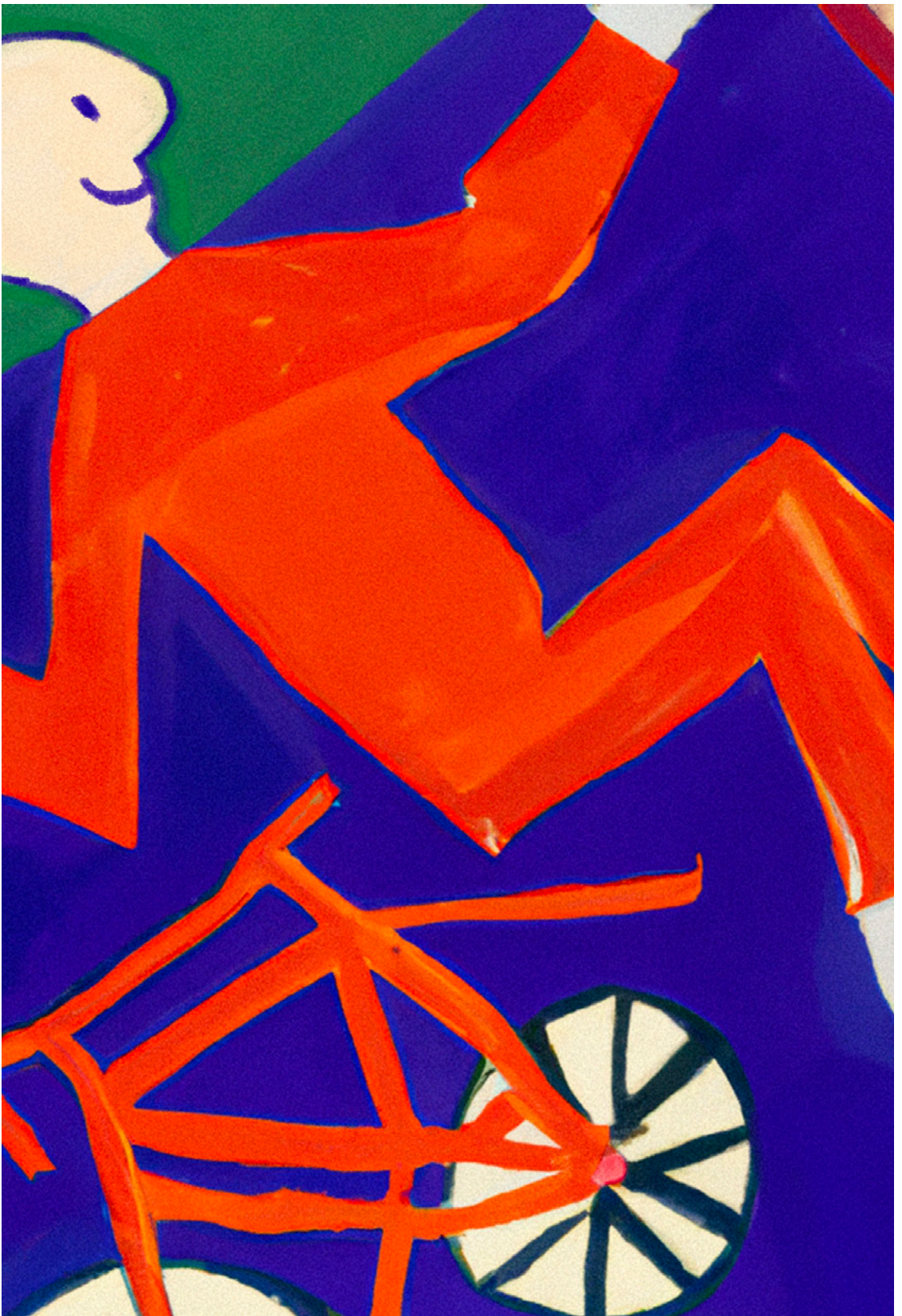
Set up to fail

Failure is mandatory in schools, without failure you cannot complete the school system. This forces us to learn how to cope with failure, and we will learn that failure is not the end of us, nor something to be afraid of.



Weekly Fail

Set a goal with colleagues to fail at least once a week, reflect on it and share it with others. This is a great way to try something new every week, get out of your comfort zone and learn from failure.



(11) ADAPTABLE STORIES

A society that accepts and values less rigid stories about who we are and who we want to become.

In 2032, there is increased pressure to tell an understandable and unique story about ourselves. With increased uncertainty about how the future will unfold and a changing environment as we move from learning to working environments, the stories we tell need to be adapted more often. The more we change our identity, the less understandable and confusing the story becomes for others. A tension arises when we have to change our story because of a changing environment, but we are unable to change it, so we try to hold on to it as long as we can, until we can no longer. When we are unable to tell an understanding story about ourselves to others, we feel lost and cannot even understand ourselves anymore. Our story falls away and we doubt who we really are.

We should embrace uncertainty in the stories we tell about ourselves and revise them according to circumstances, rather than clinging to a fixed image of who we are and want to become. We should let go of the pressure to become a unique individual, and come to terms with the fact that we never become unique by striving to become someone, but are unique by living according to our own deepest values and beliefs. We should focus on telling less rigid stories about ourselves that focus less on our achievements and accomplishments and more on who we are and what we value. In society we should accept that we do not have to have a rigid story about what we want or we want to become early on in life.

During transition, the story you tell about yourself begins to take shape. While society is more unstable, others expect to hear an understandable and promising story about who you are and what you want from life. This creates a tension where you are expected to have a story, but you don't yet know what you want from life. In an education system that is mainly based on finding the right answer to the question posed, more and more students adopt the story of being the fastest in finding the right answer. When we move into the world of work, there is no right or wrong answer, and you certainly cannot keep the story of never failing, always getting good grades or finding the right answer.

Education can focus on helping students develop stories that are less rigid. Employers can focus on accepting a variety of stories that are open-ended and leave room for change.

Figure 45: My story might be a curling path that comes back to the start, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘

Like children in primary school, one day they want to be a farmer (like me), the next day the complete opposite. Solely based on interest and they are not afraid to show a difference or change in their stories.

What stories are understandable but yet open-ended? How can we create a society in which not having a story is accepted? How can we help people craft and adapt their own stories in a logical way?



Identity Mentors

Develop an identity outside of performance and achievement. Because who am I without work? As our modern society demands that you have an identity and a story about yourself, learn to develop your identity based on who you are and your values. Work with a mentor in an educational setting to understand the story you tell about yourself. Discover where that story comes from and how it can be reshaped to fit the uncertain and unpredictable nature of our society.



RetroFutures

See and understand how your expectations of how your life would unfold were completely wrong. Write a diary in the mobile application of what you think will happen in a month's time, read it back and see what predictions, assumptions and expectations came out, reflect on whether it helped you to have those expectations.



(12) ACCEPTING IMPERFECTION

A society where imperfection is praised, where we acknowledge and respect our shortcomings.

By the year 2032, we will be so obsessed with becoming a better individual that we will have the feeling that we can become flawless. Through social media, we have experienced a zoomed-in, mirror-like, problemless life. With more tools and resources to effectively improve and monitor ourselves, the perfect personality seems to be just around the corner. While we think we can be moulded into perfection if only we put in enough time and make the right choices, we try to fix, hide or deny our inherent flaws and assume that a flawless life is the holy grail.

We need to acknowledge and respect our shortcomings rather than trying to fix all our faults and become the perfect individual. We should build an image of ourselves that has room for both negative and positive aspects and that they make us who we are. We can show curiosity towards our imperfection, for example, if you are not calm, you can try to fix it superficially by taking sleeping pills, meditating or reading self-help books. But you can also accept that you are not calm and focus on discovering the underlying reasons for being uncalm. This does not mean that we cannot improve ourselves, but we should acknowledge that our personalities are not 100% mailable and that we will never be perfect nor that perfection is wanted.

In transition, we tend to present ourselves as having no shortcomings. Everything is expected to go well because life is supposed to be good. However, we feel threatened when we experience our shortcomings and try to find a quick solution to ignore, avoid or hide them.

Education and employers can focus on normalising, acknowledging and accepting shortcomings. Education, in particular, should emphasise that it is not necessary to be good at all subjects and that it is okay not to be a star in all subjects.

Figure 46: My imperfection is what makes me unique, otherwise I would be the same, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘

Like making art, it is not about the perfect translation of reality into a painting. Imperfection is what makes the work of art unique and interesting. What gives it an interesting angle.

How can we face and accept our imperfections? How can society value imperfection? How can we understand that perfection is undesirable? Where is the right balance between working on ourselves and accepting our imperfections?



Universal Imperfection

A website where you can find out how many people have the same imperfections, where these imperfections come from, what universal imperfections we all have as humans in this modern society, and how we can reframe our imperfections to make them part of our identity.



Peer-to-Perfection

Is an online platform that allows you to help strangers and be less harsh on them by accepting their imperfections. As well as getting satisfaction and fulfilment from helping others deal with their imperfections, this teaches you to be more accepting of yourself.



(13) FINDING CONNECTION

A society where deep relationships are valued and encouraged, and where we let go of the sole focus on the self.

In 2032 we will work more often to improve ourselves mentally and physically. Because we have become so preoccupied with ourselves, becoming a better version of ourselves and therefore our struggles, our imperfections and our problems, there is a risk that we will lose sight of others. While we are biologically wired for deep social connection, there is a chance that we have lost our motivation and ability to connect.

We should develop relationships on a deep and open level, where we gain a mutual understanding of both positive and negative emotions, and where we can be vulnerable. Relationships that celebrate imperfection and see flaws as part of being human rather than rejecting them. We should take the time to develop new and strengthen existing relationships and focus less on ourselves. Relationships where we do not try to fulfil the expectations of others, but find the space to express ourselves and our own desires. As a society, we should value the quality of our relationships over the quantity of our relationships.

In a learning environment, we are always with people who are like us, from our generation, with the same interests, life struggles and challenges. In a working environment, we are in contact with people who are less like us, who have different interests and backgrounds, and with whom we are less comfortable. We feel alone with our personal struggles at work, because there is no one at work who understands the complexities of our personal histories. And we feel alone at home when we're struggling with work, because nobody in our personal lives understands what we're doing, because work has become so complex.

Education and employers can focus on developing deeper connections on a professional level, where we can be vulnerable and honest about our abilities, inabilities and aspirations.

Figure 47: Let us not forget: We are all human and made for connection, real connection, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘

Like a rugby match, you cannot do anything if you play alone. Your success is determined by your connection with others. Getting an intuitive connection with how the other person works, their strengths and weaknesses, takes mutual respect and hours of practice together, sometimes years.

How can we experience the value of relationships? How can we create a society where the quality of relationships is valued over superficial connections and the number of relationships? How can we balance working on ourselves with being there for others?



Deeper Relationships

Deepen Relationships: Learn how to connect with other people, a training programme that teaches you how to ask the right questions and create the right moment to have a good conversation and connect on a deeper level.



Karma

Simply earn and collect points in an application by doing things for others in a gamified way. Think about how helping others makes you feel. Learn that the world is not just about you, not to gain self-esteem, but simply because it makes you feel good. Reflect and meditate on the effect and how it feels to do something outside of yourself.



(14) LETTING GO OF COMPULSIVE POSITIVITY

A society that values the positive, but is also realistic about the fact that negativity is an essential part of life.

In 2032, we are more used to the idea of being in control of our lives. We have full autonomy over our lives and the choices we make. While we have a biological tendency to reject negativity, we prefer and strive for a life free of negative experiences and feelings. We believe that everything in life must be positive, especially with the rise of social media, where we see the illusion that life could be perfect. The thought arises that if you don't feel 100% positive, you haven't tried hard enough.

We need to relearn how to accept setbacks and let go of our compulsive desire for only positivity. Suffering is an inherent part of life, but we get frustrated when we experience setbacks. We need to rediscover that negative feelings, suffering, setbacks and failure are an inherent part of life. We have to feel our negative emotions again, rather than deny, ignore and suppress them, because there is a valid reason for those feelings. As a society we need to value negative experiences and let go of our fixation on finding ways to get rid of these negative feelings and emotions through pleasure.

During the transition, our environments become less predictable. In a learning environment, we have more control to cast out negativity, but in a work environment it takes more energy to keep setbacks or negative experiences out of the door. Trying endlessly to stay positive at all times exhausts and induces chronic stress.

Education can focus on teaching students how to deal with negativity. Employers can focus on recognising our biological need for positivity, providing a balance between the two and emphasising the inevitable need for negativity.

Figure 48: Atlas carrying his two smiles, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘

Like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said, "Nothing is harder to bear than a too long succession of sunny days." An excess of positivity is tedious and an extended period of any single thing can become tiresome.

How can we find beauty in suffering? How can we create a society where it is clear that there is no light without darkness? How can we learn again to feel our negative experiences instead of suppressing them?



Bad Vibes Only

A social media platform that aims to normalise negative feelings as a part of life, why are they natural and why do we experience them?

Through daily prompts in the form of questions and polls, you share negative feelings and thoughts. Where do they come from on a deeper level? Do not ignore these feelings, but explore their origins. How can we recognise these feelings on a personal level? And what are these feelings trying to tell us?



Out of Comfort

An educational programme that regularly takes you out of your comfort zone. Students will do things that evoke different kinds of negative emotions, frustration, shame, anger, injustice, etc. Reflection on how this uncertainty and fear made you feel is central.



(15) EXPRESSING AND EMBRACING NEGATIVITY

A society in which negative feelings are shared, embraced and experienced.

In 2032, we live in a society where negative feelings are even less likely to be expressed than they are now. We are taught from an early age to suppress these negative feelings. As a result, we have forgotten how to express our feelings effectively and not suppress them. How to feel them, recognise them and understand what they are telling us.

People should regain the lost ability to perceive emotional reality and let go of the belief that we are not strong enough to express our negative emotions. We should develop the courage to allow negative thinking to inform our understanding without allowing it to define our approach to the future. We should create a certain lightness around this negativity, where we learn how to really express negativity and make ourselves vulnerable to others, while not sinking into negativity or letting it take over. It's not about controlling or getting rid of fear, anger or anxiety, it's about learning to understand, accept and express them effectively. In this way we can get to know ourselves better and have deeper relationships with others. As a society we need to value emotions such as anger, sadness and shame and understand what they are trying to tell us.

During the transition there is a growing tension between our inner negative feelings and the gratitude we should be expressing. 'You got into college, you graduated, you got a job, everything is going so well for you!' This leaves no room for our real negative feelings because we are supposed to be expressing gratitude. By suppressing them, we maintain and intensify chronic stress.

Educational institutions can set better expectations about negative feelings that may arise during the transition from a learning to a working environment, in order to prepare students not only for the specific profession, but also for work in general. They can provide space for the expression of negative feelings and emotions during the training programme. Employers can focus on creating a culture in which vulnerability and the sharing of negative feelings are accepted.

Figure 49: Let me embrace what has been inside me all along, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↘

Like dating, it involves opening up and expressing your deepest self. Making a deep connection with another person is both deeply satisfying and simultaneously terrifying. It can provide a deep sense of relief and a stable place.

How can we effectively express our negative feelings? How can we revalue our negative feelings and understand why we are experiencing them? How can we create a culture where sole positivity is not seen as the ideal?



Open Up

Open Up is an application that helps you deepen your relationships by teaching you how to effectively express negative emotions to the people you love. The app provides a guide to help you prepare for and get the most out of a conversation with someone you care about. One side learns how to express negative feelings and where they come from on a deeper level. The other side learns what (not) to ask, how to facilitate and psychological theories on the subject.



Bother Me

A specialist in educational and work environments who is there to be bothered. The person is trained to listen and make you feel heard and to advocate on your behalf to improve the culture and atmosphere. Expressing negative feelings, emotions and frustration is at the heart of the bother me room. If you can find a flaw in the system, you will be rewarded for bringing it to light.



PART FOUR

Part four presents a strategic set of six interventions designed to break the problem-sustaining patterns in each of the states of mind. After careful consideration, one intervention is chosen to focus on and develop further. The vision behind the chosen concept is discovered and a rationale is explained in the form of a vision. This initial concept is then evaluated with the transitional group and various experts to identify areas for improvement. Through a process of iteration, a final design is developed that improves upon the original concept. The final design is presented and the design choices explained. A plan for evaluating the effectiveness of the concept on the well-being of the transition group is then proposed and a prototype is developed and presented. A test is then carried out and the results and implications of the test will be discussed.

Figure 50: A still from the concept video made to explain the concept of One on One, digital still. ↗

The Interventions



CHAPTER NINE

A strategic set of interventions

In this chapter I propose a constellation of interventions that aim to shape and steer towards the desired society of 2032, where the gap between being and becoming is reduced and young adults have the agency to deal effectively with mental health challenges. These conceptual interventions have evolved from the ideas presented in the previous chapter. In order to find the most promising directions, the ideas were adapted, combined, merged and split. This set of interventions works as a device to provide an escape for all six different states of mind. Therefore, all interventions can coexist in a future scenario and aim to reinforce each other. Some of the concepts are completely new to the world, others build on certain movements that are already evident in our society. Some are far-fetched, while others are closer to immediate implementation. Taken as a whole, this set of interventions provides a continuum between developing a healthier relationship with oneself, with others and with society. The spread of the concept across the different levels and states of mind is visualised in the figure 51. The interventions touch on a variety of aspects of our society, such as how we relate to others, how we structure work, and what we value in education and upbringing.

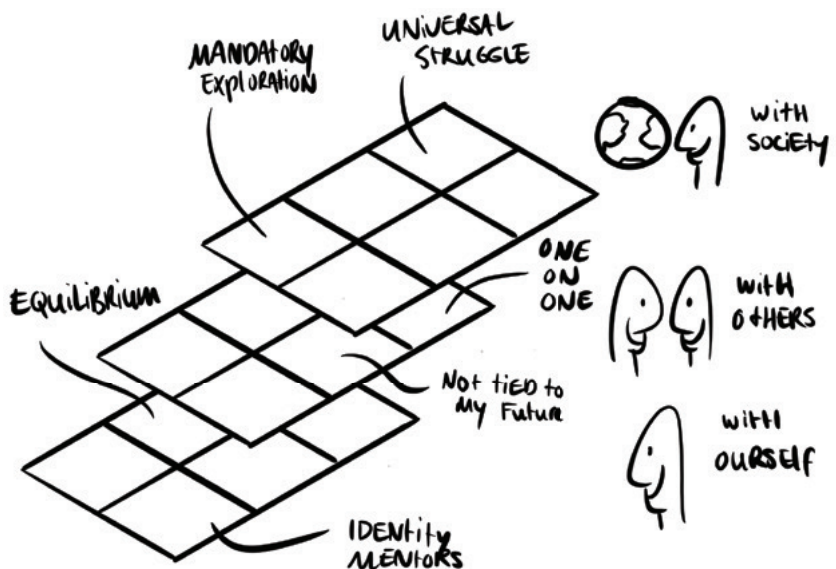


Figure 51: Distribution of the different interventions along the framework and the three levels of interaction. ↗



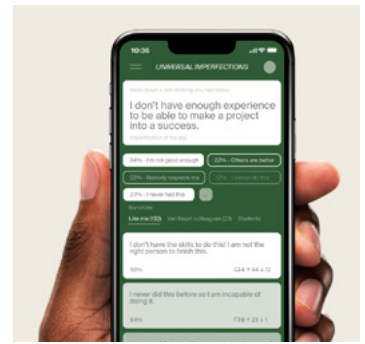
MANDATORY EXPLORATION

Failure and exploration as an essential part of all educational programmes



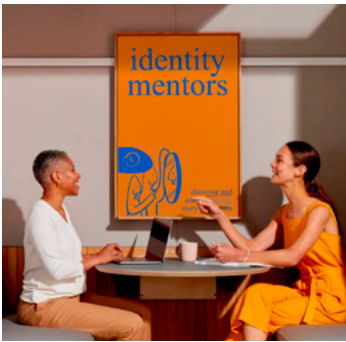
EQUILIBRIUM

Discover and nurture your mental balance on the long-term



UNIVERSAL STRUGGLE

A social network designed to make you feel less alone in your imperfections



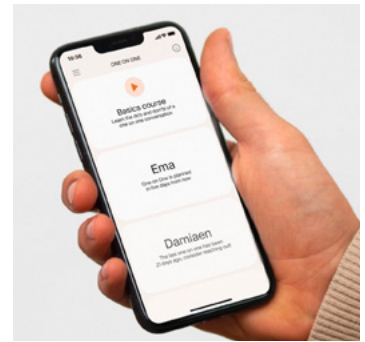
IDENTITY MENTORS

A mentor helping you to understand and recraft the story about you



NOT TIED TO MY FUTURE

Time dedicated to forget about your future and find satisfaction in helping others



ONE ON ONE

Going beyond the surface, guiding deeper conversations about negativity

MANDATORY EXPLORATION

↳ Relation with Society & Endless Productivity

Mandatory Exploration is a new regular part of the curriculum in which students practice exploring and failing to develop life skills, interest and resilience. Within this curriculum, students are forced to pursue their interests and are guided by a mentor in finding their interests. There is plenty of space and time to explore and delve deeper into a subject of interest, rather than giving the right answer to the questions asked. Students are guided by mentors to find what they like by listening to their intuition and gut feeling and exploring different topics. Mentors are true all-rounders, knowledgeable about many subjects and experts in doing, trying and failing. They know how to stimulate the right mindset and help you find the right information, connections and resources. In this programme, failure is mandatory. Without failing, you will not pass the education programme. Students are given personal guidance on what it means to fail, how to separate failure from our personal identity and how to learn from failure. Because students can do anything, they need to learn what to commit to and what not to commit to, similar to our working lives, they need to learn to say no and receive guidance on how to live with the guilt that comes with saying no. Reflection on a deeper level through discussion with the mentor is central to this programme, where students learn to listen to intuitive feelings and discover why failure feels so unnatural in our modern society. Students can only pass the course on the basis of failing, exploring and reflecting, not on output or results.

This programme helps students discover what interests them and what topics are meaningful to them. In this way we shift the focus from finding the right answer to finding the question we want to answer. Through a process of listening to the body and intuition, we develop our ability to find a meaningful role within society. The programme helps students to learn how to fail and how to learn from failure. Thus this programme offers a way out of endless productivity, where we learn the process of finding out what we actually like to do, what gives us energy and how to listen to our intuition to guide our decision making process.

Failure and exploration as an essential part of all educational programmes



Mentors help you to find things that you might like.



They help you with the first steps to try out new things.



They help you with the first steps to try out new things.



They help you with the first steps to try out new things.



They help you with the first steps to try out new things.



Figure 52: Dall-E generated images showing a traditional classroom and the mandatory exploration concept. ↓ & ↘

Figure 53: A handout that guides students in exploring new topics and failing. κ



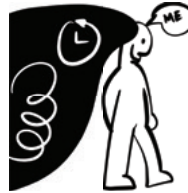
IDENTITY MENTORS

↳ Relation with Yourself & Chasing Society's Ideal

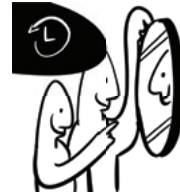
Speaking to an Identity Mentor is a mandatory part of all educational programmes. Identity Mentors are people who help you to discover the stories you tell about yourself and to discover with you the underlying reasons why you have created that story. Together you will map your story, past, present and future, and make visual connections. You will see connections from the past that shape the present and future you. Mentors provide personal guidance on how to change and/or develop a strong identity that leaves room for uncertainty, setbacks and imperfection. Together you will explore who you are outside of your career and how to create a personal narrative based on non-professional aspects. You will work together to create a new story about what it means to be you, uncovering persistent patterns and potential problems.

These exploratory conversations put your ideal self into perspective and help you to accept your actual self. By exploring the past, present and future, you uncover false beliefs about the amount of control you had in the past and how this can be translated into the future. By mapping your lifeline you understand that setbacks are a necessary part of who you are today. This course eases the tension of telling an understandable and unique story about yourself and emphasises that a unique story only comes through uncertainty and setbacks, not through prosperity alone. By verbalising and understanding where your story comes from on a deeper level, you can notice moments when you are striving for unrealistic ideals and reevaluate those thoughts based on their origin.

A mentor helping you to understand and recraft the story about you



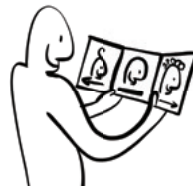
We tell a story about ourselves based on the past.



An identity mentor helps us to see and understand our story clearly based on the past, present and future.



To identify opportunities and pitfalls in our identity.



To map an identity that allows room for uncertainty and randomness.



To escape and see that the story you have told about yourself does not define you.

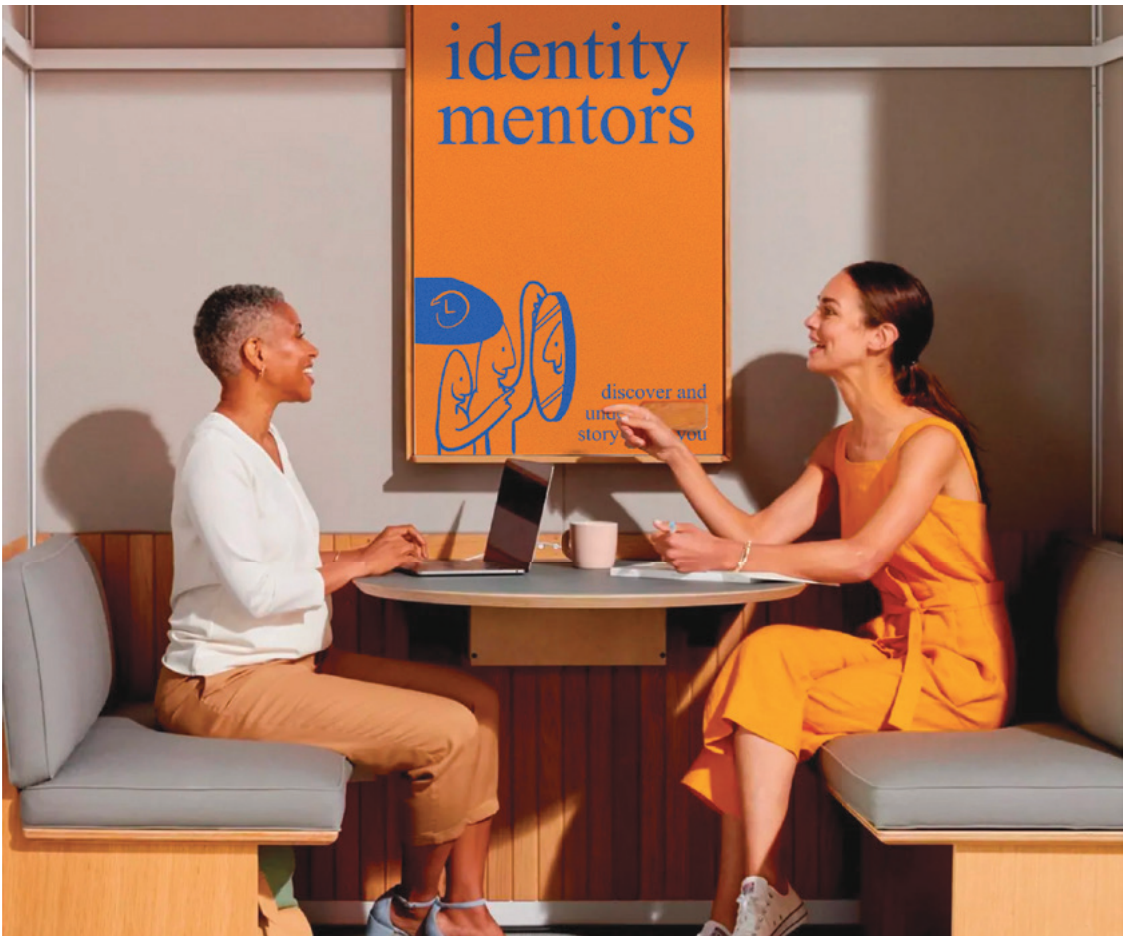


Figure 54: A mentor and a student defining what the story is the student tells. ↗

Figure 55: Dall-E generated image showing a mentor and student drawing a life line including the past, present and future. ↙



EQUILIBRIUM

↳ Relation with Self & Extraordinary Achievement

Equilibrium allows you to discover your internal mental balance and imbalance and guides you on how to restore it over time. When you connect your smart wearable to the app, it immediately starts measuring your mental reserve based on sleep, resting heart rate and long-term balance, and your mental stress based on heart rate, heart rate variability (HRV) and breathing patterns during the day. In addition to the biomarker data, the app collects your opinion on how you feel through short questionnaires. The Equilibrium app then calculates two scores based on both subjective and objective data about your mental balance. This balance between reserve and strain, both short-term (daily) and long-term (monthly), is then displayed in the app and can be used as a visual guide for reflection. Alongside this visual, the application provides interesting prompts based on trends. It acts as a mirror for reflection: what in my life can cause mental imbalance in the long term, or what has caused it today? What basic need am I ignoring? What am I not saying no to? And what can and will I change in my life to restore this balance?

Equilibrium helps you develop a healthy relationship with yourself by externalising your mental balance, providing a simple tool for personal reflection and contemplation in a chaotic world with so much noise that you cannot really listen to your own body and mind. Equilibrium enables you to understand the difference between acute and chronic stress. It is not bad to have a high level of stress on a daily basis (e.g. during exams) as long as you have a good reserve. It is only when the long-term balance is out of tune that acute stress turns into chronic stress. Through reflection, you learn to understand and listen to yourself, and to make choices based on this, in order to promote a natural balance in your life. Understanding, reflecting and acting upon mental imbalance offers a way out of being trapped in a tension to achieve more and more. Ultimately, Equilibrium becomes redundant when you have reconnected with your feelings and developed the skills to listen to your body to maintain a healthy balance yourself.

Discover and nurture your mental balance on the long-term



Connect any wearable to the platform.



The app starts measuring your reserve and strain. You both guess the reserve and strain before opening the application.



Reflect on the scores, the short and long term balance and the question prompts.



Make informed decisions based on your mental balance. Learn to listen to your body.



Find ways to optimise the long term balance.

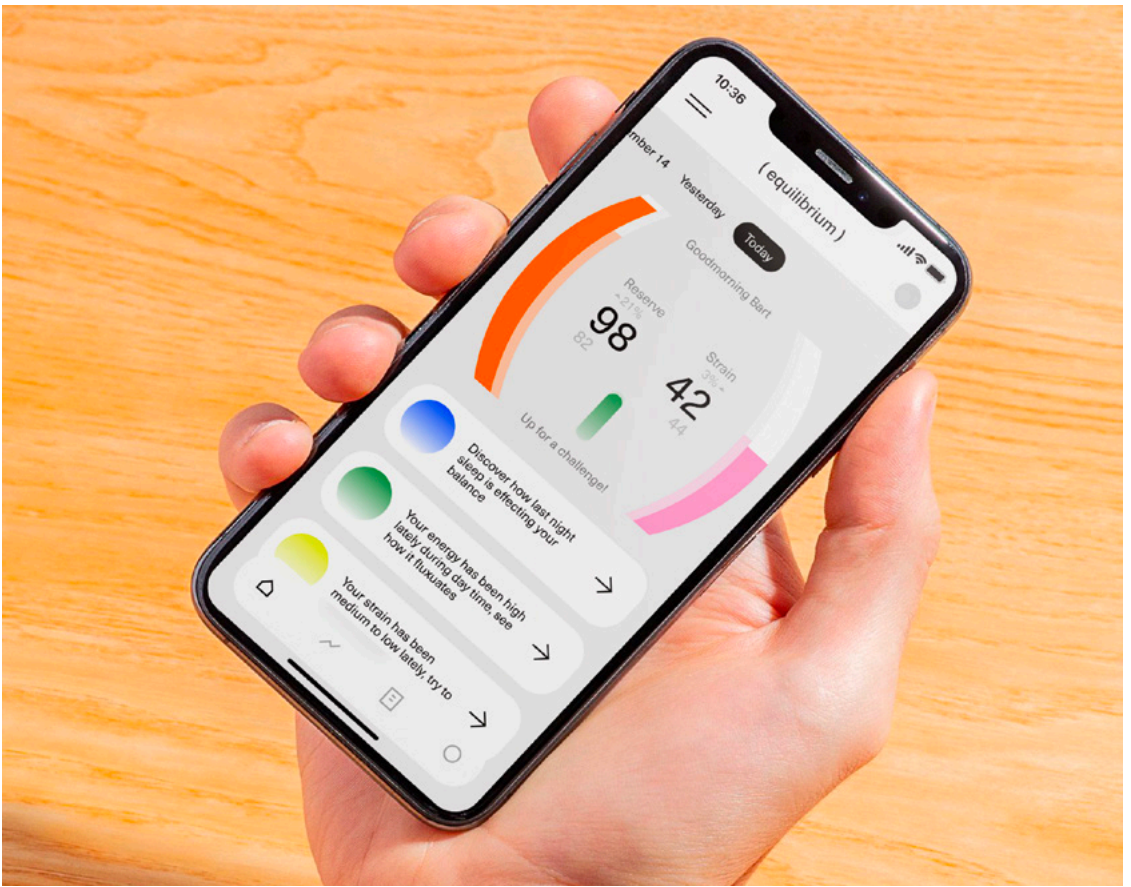


Figure 56: The interface of the Equilibrium app, showing the mental balance and reflective questions. ↗

Figure 57: The concept of the wearable interface, displaying mental balance and mood. ↙



NOT TIED TO MY FUTURE

↳ Relation with Others & Individual Uniqueness

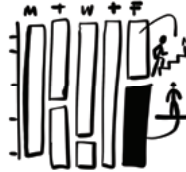
Not Tied To My Future is an employer-led programme that encourages employees to spend four (paid) hours a week on activities that are not tied to their personal future, developing a better CV or self-improvement. In a society dominated by always working on oneself, this programme offers a way out. Physical Unrush spaces will be offered across the city to ensure that we do not spend time trying to improve ourselves. Within these spaces there is room to help others as a volunteer, based on who you are and using your skills and abilities. You can help someone fix a bike, help them with life questions or just chat with others. The programme provides a safe haven where you are valued for who you are and for using your skills and knowledge to help others from all generations and backgrounds. Where there is no need to add value to yourself. Helping others allows us to feel validation, satisfaction and gratification in a society where we are more disconnected from purpose and others outside our social bubbles than ever before. There is less pressure for the perfect result, more room for failure and more opportunity to learn. Rather than dwelling on your inadequacies and imperfections, you step outside of working on yourself and gain value from putting smiles on other people's faces. Your life doesn't depend on your performance in Unrush, which makes it the perfect place to connect with other people and gain value from being yourself. The impact of the programme is monitored and researched through reflection and the benefits are clearly communicated to employers. Employers benefit from Not Tied To My Future in terms of increased creativity, social skills, productivity, reduced chronic stress levels and improved general well-being.

By stepping outside the focus on yourself, you release the tension of becoming someone and achieving an ideal that is omnipresent in society. A place where you find meaning and are valued for the person you are provides an escape from the endless pursuit of the societal ideal where you must always become a better version of yourself than you are today. It restores our innate ability to connect with others and we derive a sense of meaning, purpose and satisfaction from helping others.

Time dedicated to forget about your future and find satisfaction in helping others



We are always busy with adding economic value to the self.



Take deliberate time out to not work on the self.



Where we do not focus on ourselves but on helping others.



Through for example volunteer work in Unrush spaces throughout the city.



To burst our bubble that is always about ourselves.



Figure 58: A concept for a billboard outside of the unrush spaces. κ



Figure 59: A Dall-E generated image showing three individuals helping each other. κ

UNIVERSAL STRUGGLE

↳ Relation with Society & Best Version of Myself

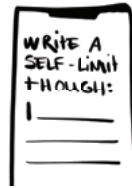
Universal Struggle is an online platform where you can explore how many people are struggling similarly to you. When you sign up, you join a random circle with a maximum of twenty strangers who are going through a similar life transition. You have the option to join other circles with friends, peers or colleagues either in incognito mode or identifiable. Daily prompts in the form of open-ended questions, polls or stories help you discover your own inner thoughts and those of others. For example, when prompted to write down a self-limiting thought you had that day, the GTP-3 NLP algorithm tries to categorise your string. It then displays the categories that are closest to your prompt and the percentage of people who have similar thoughts. By clicking on the category, you can discover the working principle behind the thought, information about where these thoughts might come from, and other people's responses. The application helps you to reflect on the origin of the thought and teaches you how to revalue, accept and re-attribute the thought. As you read other responses from people you know and people you do not know, you will feel less alone, less broken and less like an exception to the rule. You have the ability to connect, seek and give peer-to-peer support both online and offline.

Verbalising imperfections and struggles, and seeing that others experience similar feelings and thoughts, makes you feel less unique, alone and exceptional in your struggles. You learn to accept that everyone is flawed in different ways and that you are not unique in your thoughts. You learn ways to better understand, deal with and accept imperfection and flaws rather than fix them. The platform allows you to genuinely connect with others, which makes everyone seem more human, reducing the sole focus on your own problems and broadening your focus. Rather than drowning in your struggles and imperfections, you learn that they are part of life and develop strategies to appreciate and accept these thoughts. This reduces the pressure to constantly improve yourself towards perfection and you discover that being human means being imperfect.

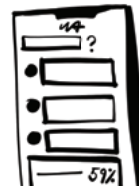
A social network designed to make you feel less alone in your imperfections



Join a circle of either anonymous people or people you know.



React to daily prompts about inner thoughts and feelings.



See what others are thinking and discover similar reactions to yours.



Learn about your thought and how to revalue it by learning about its origin.



See things in a different picture and learn to refocus and revalue these thoughts.

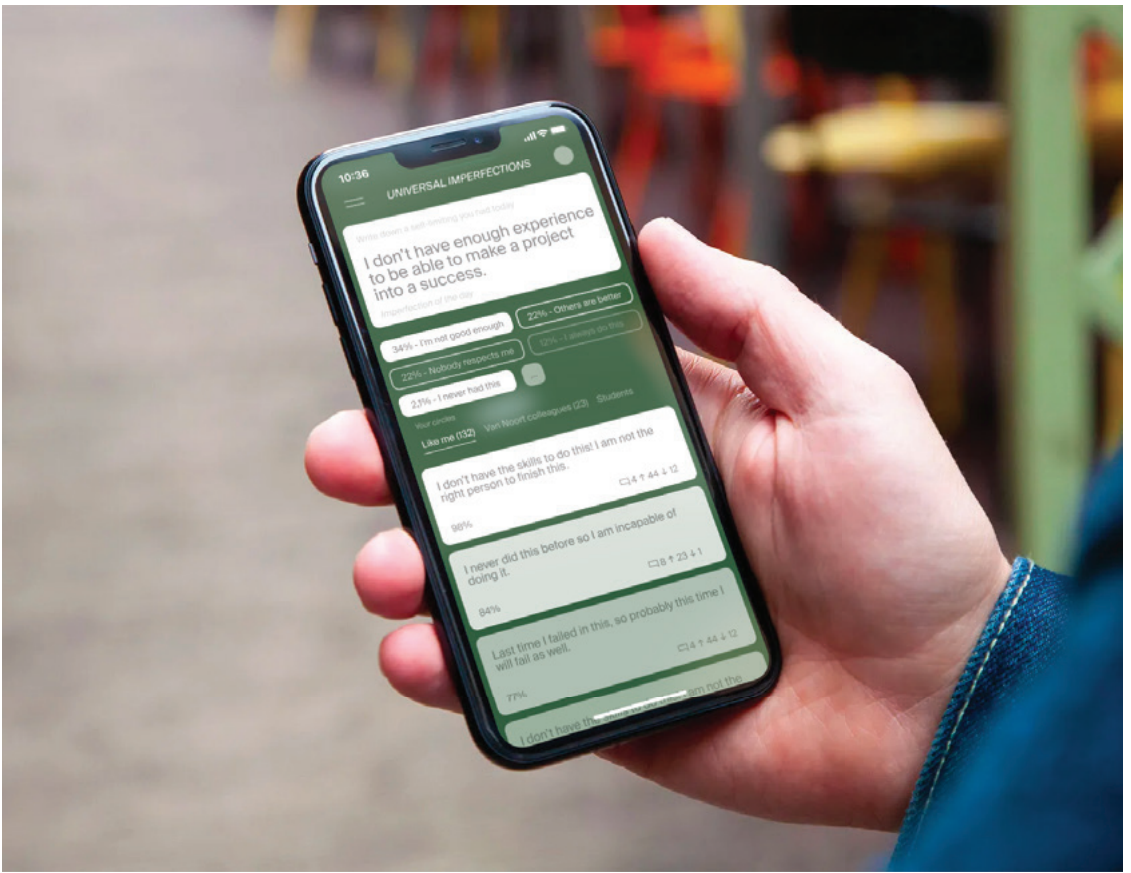
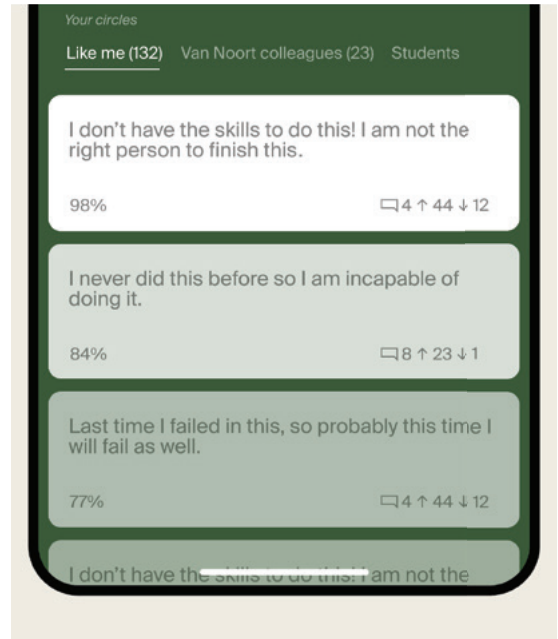
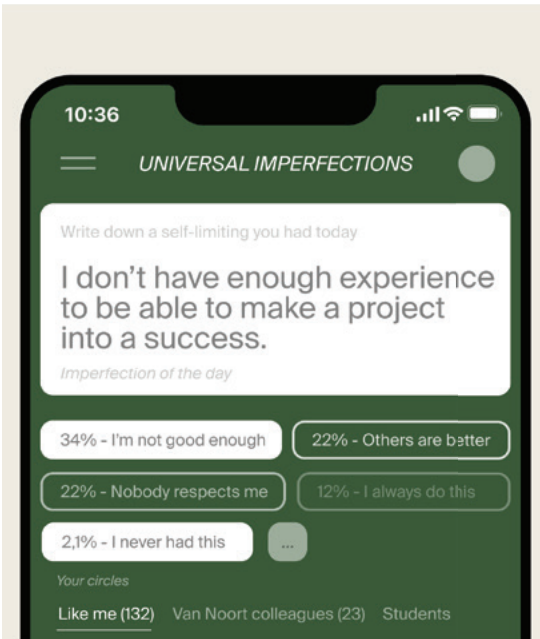


Figure 60: Two details of the proposed interface. ↓ & ↘

Figure 61: A mockup of the proposed interface of the Universal Imperfections application. ↶



ONE ON ONE

↳ Relation with Others & Pleasurable Life

One on One is an application that helps you deepen your relationships with those close to you by guiding you through one-on-one conversations that focus on expressing negative emotions and feelings. One on One acts as a planner, preparation guide and conversation aid to get the most out of the conversation. Either the person with the negative feelings or the conversation partner can reach out to each other through the application and send an invitation for a conversation. First, it allows you to set a date, time and activity (coffee, dinner or a walk together) for the conversation and make time for each other. It then helps you uncover your feelings on a deeper level by guiding you through the process of finding a topic to talk about. The app gives you a small training programme to help you develop the language to explain your thoughts and theories to understand the origins of your feelings for ten minutes a day. The other person also starts a short programme to understand how to start the conversation, how to take the topic to a deeper level, which questions lead to deeper expressive conversations, what not to ask or do and why a one-on-one conversation is valuable for both of you. During the conversation, the application offers optional prompts that can help deepen the conversation if it stalls or remains shallow. After the conversation, a reflective exercise helps us to see the benefits of a one-on-one, and a ritual is created in which both of you can reach out to each other through a familiar activity (having dinner together, listening to music, going for a walk).

By expressing genuine negative feelings and emotions to the people you love, stress levels are instantly reduced. Expressing these feelings rather than suppressing them makes you feel relieved and acts as a release valve. Because the other person accepts you and is not looking for solutions or advice to fix you, your feelings feel valid and respected. You feel accepted and heard by the people you long to be validated by. This creates a stable and safe relationship where you can focus on just being, rather than pretending to be someone you are not, which has been shown to increase chronic stress. Your relationships become safe havens in a turbulent and rapidly changing society. In this way, for those who are trapped in the need to express sole positivity at all times, One on One offers an antidote.

Going beyond the surface, guiding deeper conversations about negativity



In a society where we are taught to suppress negative feelings, we feel on our own in our struggles.



Connect with the people close to you and schedule to take time out for each other.



First learn the basics of having such conversations and then talk about the things that matter the most to us.



Express your negative thoughts and feel understood by the person you care about.



Afterwards reflect on the experience and setup a ritual with the other person.

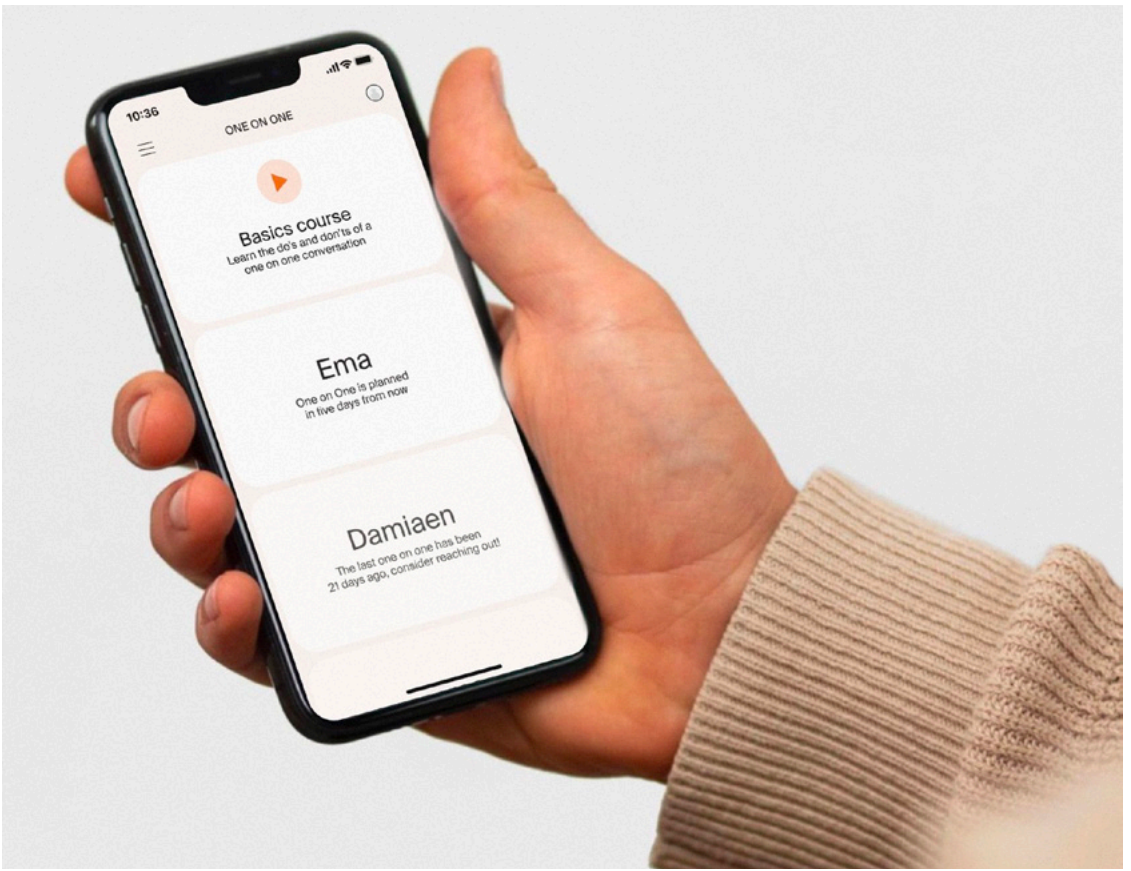
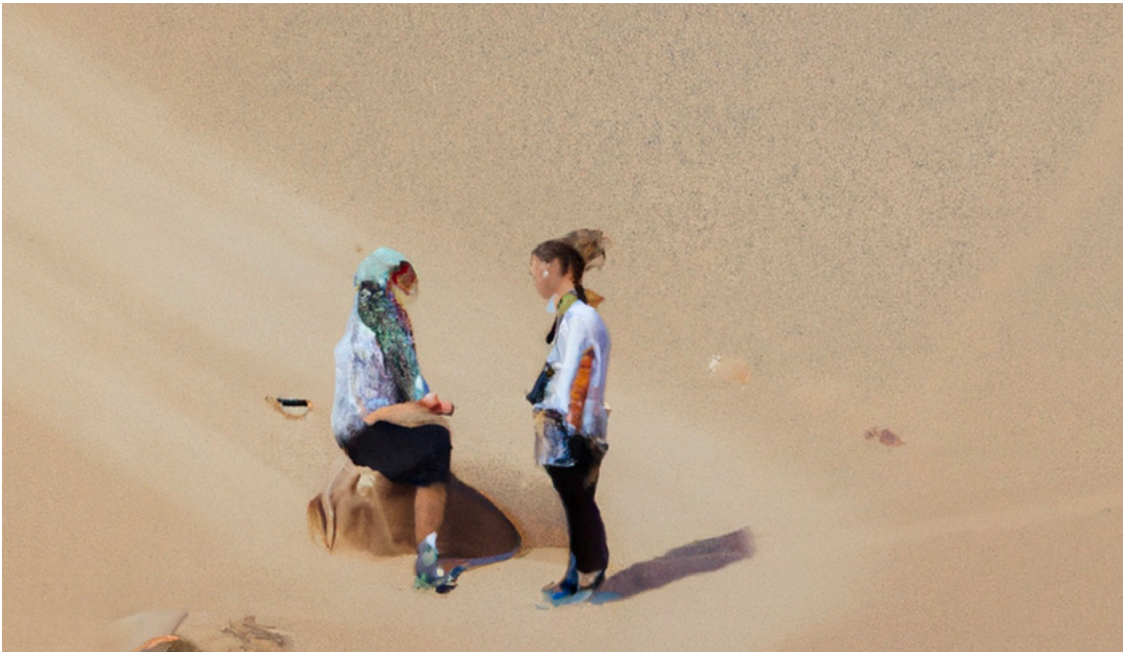


Figure 62: The home screen of the One on One application, showing the learning session and two contacts. ↗

Figure 63: A Dall-E generated image of "two people having an important conversation in the middle of nowhere" ↙



CHOOSING A CONCEPT FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Due to the time constraints of this thesis project, only one of the concepts can be selected for further development. As this project aims to test the impact of the proposed solution, the 'One on One' concept is chosen as it is likely to be testable within the given timeframe. In addition to this practical reason, One on One is particularly interesting because it offers an opposing vision from the current self-help or well-being market. The current focus is mainly on repairing the relationship with oneself and improving self-discipline. On becoming more focussed, more structured, more relaxed, in other words to worship individual progress. This current approach isolates the individual, whereas One on One seeks to reconcile the individual with his or her embedded social context. Where the focus is not on fixing or getting rid of negative feelings and emotions, but rather on accepting and experiencing them. It will therefore be interesting to see how participants respond when this new perspective is tested. Future research could aim to set up experiments to test the effects of the other concepts on well-being as well, but from here on the focus will be on developing and testing the One on One concept.



Figure 64: What is our definition of being connected?, A photograph of the T-Mobile office in The Hague.S ↗



CHAPTER TEN

Vision for One on One

This chapter explores the vision behind the One on One concept. It provides a theoretical rationale for why the concept is beneficial for improving the well-being of the transitional group. It then formulates a vision statement to guide the further development and manifestation of the concept in the following chapters.

Well-being, emotional loneliness and relationships

Humans thrive on meaningful social connections, and our well-being is inextricably linked to the relationships we have. From an evolutionary perspective, social connectedness is essential for thriving and even for our survival. Everything in human beings is therefore biologically hardwired to connect, and when we lack this human connection, we experience chronic stress (Maté, 2022). According to Maté (2022), we are becoming more stressed as individuals because there is “less real and deep connection in our society”. The amount of human-to-human interaction and the environments in which this communication can naturally take place are limited by the digitalisation of our society. We spend more time isolated in our homes, pushing buttons on a digital machine without any real connection. This digitisation of our society means that much of our communication is mediated and filtered. The apparatuses of communication are no longer true and real, but they are distorted. The way we relate to others is distorted in a positive way through social media, for example. This results in overly positive and superficial communication where there is little or no room for genuine negative emotions such as sadness, anger or frustration. This can lead to a repetitive thought pattern, a spiral, in which we feel a societal urge to always display positivity, while deep down we are experiencing negative emotions, which we therefore experience as unwanted. The more negative emotions we experience, the less we feel accepted and normal, the more negative emotions are triggered and a reinforcing feedback loop is set in motion. Our inner head is the only space that remains unmediated and it is no surprise that we spend more and more time up there. While new technologies make it easier than ever to connect with each other, we feel increasingly lonely. In fact, research suggests that one in three people in developed countries are affected by feelings of loneliness (Cacioppo, 2018).

Within the psychological concept of loneliness, a useful distinction can be made between social and emotional loneliness (Weiss, 1973). Social loneliness refers to the feeling of being disconnected from the people around you, such as not having enough people to talk to or hang out with. Emotional loneliness, on the other hand, is the feeling of not being allowed to be yourself, or not being able to share your innermost thoughts and feelings with

anyone, even if you have people around you. While young adults are the least socially isolated of all generations in the Netherlands, they report being the most emotionally lonely, as can be seen in figure 65 (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2022). This suggests a lack of emotional depth within existing relationships, rather than a lack in the quantity of relationships.

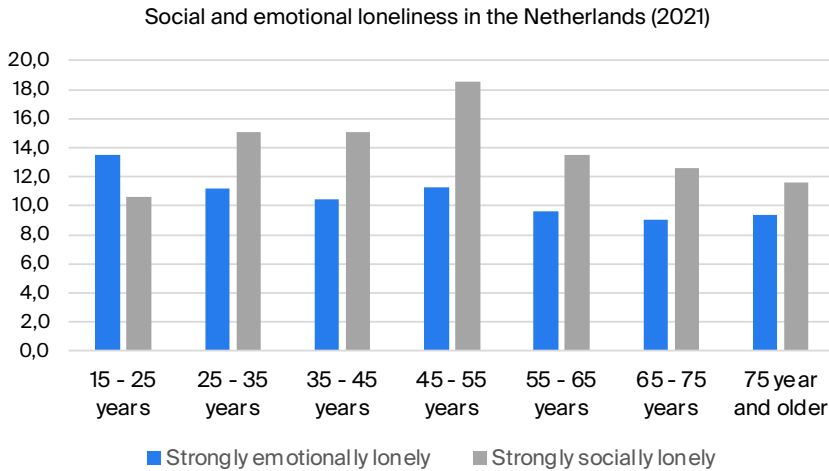


Figure 65: Levels of severe emotional and social loneliness across generations in the Netherlands in 2021 ↵

Extensive evidence shows that having quality relationships where vulnerability is allowed can help us live longer, happier lives with fewer mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and burnout (Mineo, 2018). In other studies, emotional loneliness is strongly associated with all-cause and premature mortality, elevating risks of cardio-vascular disease and chances of dementia (Rico-Uribe et al., 2018). The impact of emotional loneliness in combination with stress is illustrated in a study by Price et al. (2001). Women who experience either stress or emotional loneliness are about as likely to develop breast cancer as women who experience neither. However, women who were both emotionally isolated and stressed had a ninefold increased risk of developing breast cancer. This shows an increased activity of our chronic stress response and an increase in the associated stress hormones along the HPA axis. This suggests the importance of deep social connections in times of high stress for our well-being. While it is impossible to take away certain almost unavoidable stressors that come with the specific life transition and living in our current society, an intervention can help the group to deepen the relationships that already exist in order to deal with these unavoidable stressors more effectively. In this way, the concept of emotional loneliness acts as the missing theoretical link between the one-to-one concept and the improvement of mental well-being.

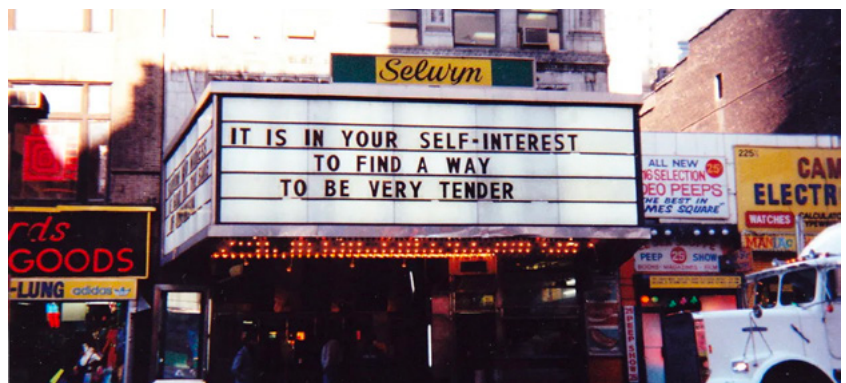


Figure 66: “It is in your self-interest to find a way to be very tender” by Jenny Holzer ↵

Going beyond the surface to deepen our relationships

I want to encourage and guide the transition group to deepen their existing relationships with the people they care about, with the connections that are already there. This will create contexts where people don't have to pretend to be someone they are not. Contexts in which vulnerability can arise, in which negativity can be expressed and in which unconditional acceptance of all feelings and thoughts is central. Where undistorted human to human communication can take place. The intervention requires trust, vulnerability, closeness and acceptance as key qualities. In order to create a bond between two people where unconditional acceptance can take place, we need to overcome three main obstacles: we need to block time, relearn to understand our feelings and relearn how to respond.

First, we need to take time out for each other in the right context to have deep conversations. In a world dominated by dopamine-inducing activities and endless possibilities, it is difficult to take time out for each other without being distracted. We need to set aside time and find the right context where we can focus fully on the other person and the conversation. An analogy can be made with the sport of golf and why so many business deals are done on the course. It is a context where people have plenty of time with a small group of people, are not easily disturbed or distracted and have an excuse to take time out for each other.

"IN THE RUSH OF DAILY LIFE, WE CONSUME INFORMATION WITHOUT TAKING A LOT OF IT IN. WE HAVE TO, OR WE WOULD BE OVERWHELMED: RADIO, TV, SOCIAL MEDIA, FAMILY, FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES, CLIENTS; PHONE CALLS, TEXT MESSAGES, EMAILS, CONVERSATIONS - WE ARE BOMBARDED BY 'COMMUNICATIONS', YET IT'S RARE THAT WE FEEL WE ARE TRULY COMMUNICATING."

— Kahtryn Mannix
Listen (2022)

According to Maté (2011), in our modern society, people have lost the ability to actually feel their emotions and therefore to understand, let alone verbalise, what stressors are causing these emotions. In order to have valuable one-on-one conversations, we need to relearn how to connect with our emotions and develop the language and tools to express and verbalise them effectively. So that we can be understood by others, so that we can understand ourselves better and so that we don't stay on the surface but go deeper. Trying to articulate our inner thoughts in conversation can help us understand our feelings, emotions and stories better.

"WHEN WE FLEE OUR VULNERABILITY, WE LOSE OUR FULL CAPACITY FOR FEELING EMOTION. WE MAY EVEN BECOME EMOTIONAL AMNESIACS, NOT REMEMBERING EVER HAVING FELT TRULY ELATED OR TRULY SAD. A NAGGING VOID OPENS, AND WE EXPERIENCE IT AS ALIENATION, AS PROFOUND AS ENNUI, AS THE SENSE OF DEFICIENT EMPTINESS."

— Gabor Maté,
In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts (2007)

On the other hand, the conversation partner lost the ability to formulate a valuable and unconditionally accepting response, not seeking solutions or comforting words to minimise distress (Mannix, 2022). Our society is so focused on quick and instant fixes and exclusive positivism that interlocutors have cultivated a response that seeks immediate solutions when someone expresses negative feelings. In addition to this, as human beings we have an evolutionary tendency to be helpful to those in our immediate environment in order to improve not only the surviv-

al of the group, but also our position within the group and thus our survival. But it is this very drive to be helpful that gets in the way of having deep conversations. In our modern society, physical threats are no longer our primary concern. Our stress today is primarily emotional in nature (Selye, 1978). Emotional stress, unlike physical threat, first needs to be truly understood and therefore expressed by the person experiencing it. For example, if we face a bear in the woods, we can both look at the bear and understand the threat it poses to our collective well-being. However, when a person faces emotional distress and communicates it to us, we cannot directly understand the situation and provide solutions. Emotional distress is intangible, invisible, complex and interpreted differently by different people. This example is illustrated in figure 67. Counterintuitive as it may sound, listening may be the most helpful thing we can do in cases of emotional distress. However, our urge to be helpful gets in the way of this, and most conversations tend to revolve around typical solution responses, as shown in figure 68. These reactions, although coming from the right intentions to help the other person, tell the person that negative feelings need to be fixed and that the person is only acceptable under certain positive circumstances when no negativity is experienced (Mannix, 2022). The conversation partner is unconsciously denying the basic need for these negative feelings and implying that the feelings could have been avoided or fixed if the person had just done something else. Although it is never meant this way, responses like these say that the other person's feelings are invalid and that it is a conscious choice to experience them.

In this way, people choose to suppress their negative feelings rather than to express them. We know from the previous chapters that suppressing negative emotions leads to a decline in mental and physical well-being and a rise in chronic stress and an increase in cortisol and adrenaline. This search for solutions is not only stressful for the person experiencing the distress, but also for the listener who feels frustrated, powerless to help and useless. In order to be able to have a valuable one-to-one conversation, the other person needs to re-learn how to be of real help. They need to relearn how to respond to the expression of negative feelings in a way that creates a space for negative feelings to be expressed, that encourages vulnerability and that is unconditionally accepting.

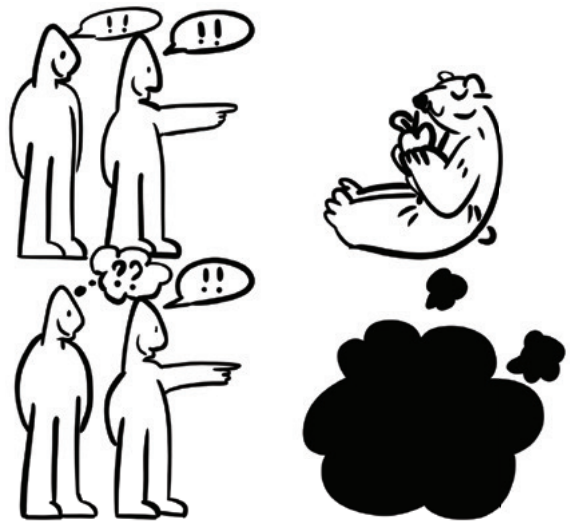


Figure 67: Being helpful in cases of physical distress or emotional distress ↵

“Repression of negative feelings disarms one’s ability to protect oneself from stress.”

– Gabor Maté,
The Myth of Normal (2022)

Figure 68: Common responses to distress aimed at minimizing harm ↵

- Just try to cheer up! 😊
- It can't all be that bad, right?
- I'm sure everything will be fine!
- Did you already try meditating?
eating healthy? Reading that book?
- Don't worry so much!
- I also had this! But even worse!
- If you just did this differently,
you wouldn't have been in this.
- At least you still have other
friends, a partner, a job.
- Others have it way worse!
- But your life is really nice
Right? No need to complain!
- You should really try X,
Y and Z!
it will make you feel better!

Relationships as anchors of stability in an unstable world

When a valuable one-on-one conversation has taken place, we have not only created an outlet for suppressed negative emotions, which is shown to reduce chronic stress (Maté, 2022). It has deepened and strengthened a relationship where people can focus on being themselves rather than pretending to be someone they are not, which has also been shown to reduce chronic stress. The effect therefore is twofold. These relationships are not based on seeking praise or acceptance. It is about receiving unconditional acceptance from the people from whom you crave it the most - the people you love, the people you care about and the people you are closest to. A ritual is created in which each of you can ask the other for a one-on-one. In this way a stakeholder constellation shift will take place. We will move from a constellation where we express our negative feelings to people outside our personal context, such as health professionals, meeting groups or peer-to-peer support, and positive feelings to people in our personal context. Towards a mixed constellation where we can experience both positive and negative emotions with the people we love and cherish. In this way we escape from the 'pleasurable life' state of mind, where we are only concerned with creating pleasure and getting rid of negativity. This shift in constellation is beautifully and simply illustrated in a passage from Jonah Hill's documentary *Stutz*:

“In traditional therapy, you're paying this person, and you save all of your problems for them. And they just listen. And your friends, who are idiots, give you advice. Unsolicited. And you want your friends to just listen. And your therapist to give you advice.”

— Jonah Hill,
Comedic actor
Stutz (2022)

In an ideal scenario, one-on-one conversations happen naturally. Taking time out for each other is something that is highly valued in the society of 2032. Expressing negative emotions is seen as important for our well-being and these feelings are not seen as something to be fixed. Our parents and teachers educate us about the importance of relationships and teach future generations how to have these important conversations with each other. As these matters are beyond the scope of this project, the focus will be on creating an intervention that brings us closer to this vision of the future and at the same time draws attention to the severity of the societal problem we are facing.



Figure 69: A sign on the mirror of an office bathroom stating: “Employees must stop crying before returning to work” ↑



Figure 70: A sign on an ATM telling to not allow help ↑

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Initial evaluation of One on One

Now that we have a clear vision of what the One on One intervention should achieve, we can explore different ways of facilitating this vision. In this chapter the initial concept is evaluated with experts and the transitional group through qualitative interviews. Several conclusions are then drawn and adjustments are made to the initial concept presented in chapter twelve. The modified concept aims to have a better potential to fulfil the vision described in the previous chapter. The initial concept was evaluated through several interviews with experts, designers and people in the transitional group. In total, three people from the transitional group and five experts were interviewed. A number of key findings have been distilled from the eight interviews and are discussed in this section. The design implications are noted for each point and the changes made to the original concept are discussed.

The initiation phase is crucial

The initiation phase is like asking someone out on a date, there is a certain tension and a threshold that has to be crossed in order to reach out. The act of initiation will create a psychological tension in which the fear of rejection is central, even though you probably know each other well. Asking for a one-on-one should not be a desperate cry for help, but an acknowledgement that we all experience these feelings and need each other's support.

People need to connect on the platform first and work from there towards their first One on One. By making a digital connection, you agree that you are both willing to work on deepening the relationship and that you can either request or offer a conversation. The initial initiation is therefore facilitated through a social media platform where you both recognise the importance and need.

Focussing on the process not on the content

The process of having a conversation is more important than the specific topic (such as dealing with stress at work or grief). We don't have to be experts on the subject to allow space for negativity to arise. It is more about the process, how to respond, what to ask and what not to say. Giving advice is not what we are looking for, so if you are not knowledgeable about the subject, you will not do that.

Both sides should study the same material in advance. So they know what to expect from each other. Both know how such a conversation could or should go, what reactions are appropriate and how difficult it is sometimes to understand emotions on a deeper level or to formulate a supportive response.

Setting a time can act as catalyst

Forcing a conversation to take place at a certain time can help people to think about the topic in advance and prepare mentally. Even if it feels forced, it will ensure that the conversation happens, that we just do it. We can spend ages preparing, but you will never be fully prepared for such a conversation.

Planning and choosing a date is therefore a key step before a one-on-one takes place. This ensures that both parties are prepared for the meeting and that it actually takes place. It also instils a 'just do it' mentality.

One on One is not a direct solution

The concept is not a direct solution for people with serious mental health problems and should not be mistaken for a solution. It should be clear that the aim of One on One is different, not to play therapist or to imitate a session with a professional, but to facilitate deeper relationships in which we can focus on being and therefore improve our mental well-being.

The fact that One on One is not a solution is discussed in the learning modules. People learn that they can skilfully recommend seeing a professional after first allowing space and time for vulnerability and negativity to be expressed. If the first reaction is "maybe you should see a professional? You are blocking the emotional expression and therefore closing off some depth between the two of you.

Picking and suggesting the right context

The context in which these conversations take place is critical to the outcome. Just like playing golf, where the right context is created for doing business. There needs to be plenty of time where it is difficult to be disturbed or distracted by technology. The context can also be an excuse to make it easier to initiate and communicate.

A fundamental step in the process is to choose a context. Several contexts are suggested and guidance is given to choose an activity that is already a ritual between you and the other person.

Developing rituals

To build a truly deep relationship, One on Ones need to become more than just a one-off. Can we inspire people to create a ritual where making time for One on Ones is a natural part of their lives?

The app helps people reflect on the value of the session and looks for ways to use the chosen context as an excuse or sign to ask for a One on One. Shall we go for a walk again? The application is designed to be deleted, as it helps to set up rituals in which vulnerability and negative expression can occur, which can continue without the application.

Space for experimentation

Making mistakes should be part of One on One. You might fall back on old answers, but that should not stop us from just doing it. The conversation does not have to be perfect. There should be a mutual feeling that we are doing something we are not experts at.

This space for experimentation is central to the Basic Skills course, which should lower expectations, emphasise the experimental approach and let go of the need for perfection.

Before a final concept for the mobile application and user guide can be designed, an overarching tone of voice and interaction qualities need to be defined. This set of qualities is used to create a coherent concept in terms of both visual communication and concept. The interaction qualities are based on the evaluation interviews, the most pregnant state of mind and the driving forces.

The interaction should be like a dance, where you don't insist on dancing but invite the other to dance, where you both go with the rhythm of the music, where you are in the moment, where one may lead and the other may follow, where you step, turn, pause, change direction and keep in time with the music as you move together on the dance floor. The interaction should be experimental, allowing for mistakes and not raising unrealistic expectations of perfection. It should have a respectful lightness, balancing negativity with a hopeful perspective without expectations. It should be friendly and familiar, building deeper relationships and creating a sense of intimacy, privacy and trust between participants.

All the feedback, recommendations and suggestions gathered during the evaluation interviews of the initial concept were used to create an iterated version of the One on One concept. A number of options were explored and through a series of iterations, as can be seen in figure 71, a final version of the One on One application is derived at.

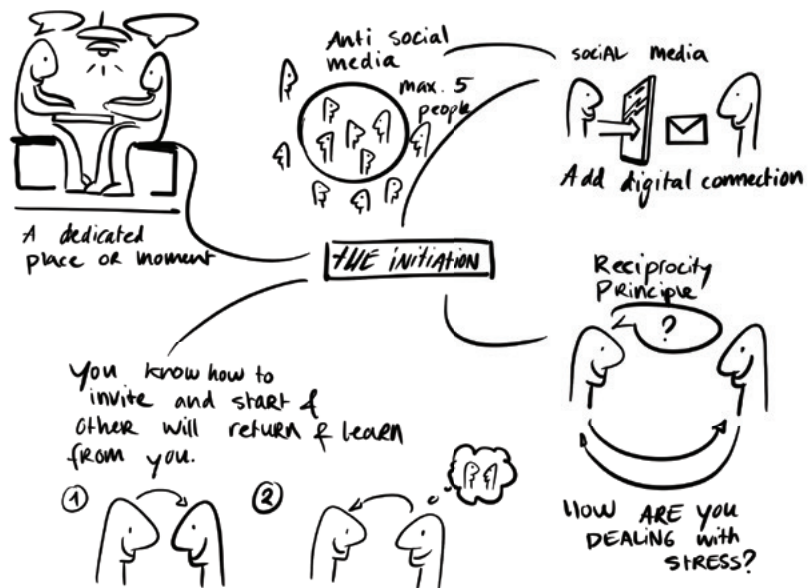


Figure 71: Thinking of new ways to facilitate and smoothen the initiation phase of a One on One ↗

CHAPTER TWELVE

One on One

A final concept

We are all familiar with the concept of social media, online platforms that connect us with an unlimited number of people from all over the world. But what if there was a social media platform that encouraged us to go beyond the surface, not to increase our number of social connections, but to truly deepen our existing relationships? This chapter describes the final design of the One on One intervention. The basic user scenario is presented, the benefits are discussed and frequently asked questions are answered.



One on One is a new social media application that guides users to take time out for each other and engage in conversations about the things that matter the most with the people that matter the most. Through these meaningful conversations about difficult topics, you learn to safely express your feelings, be heard, accepted and understood by the people you care about. The conversation partner feels useful as he or she learns how to be helpful for you. This creates a safe and non-judgemental space where we can express ourselves without fear of criticism or rejection. By having regular One on Ones, a deep relationship is formed where room for vulnerability and expression of negative emotions can arise.

It is time to get back to basics and to start connecting on a deeper level again. It only feels daunting until we start.

“Go Beyond the Surface, Deepen Your Connections”

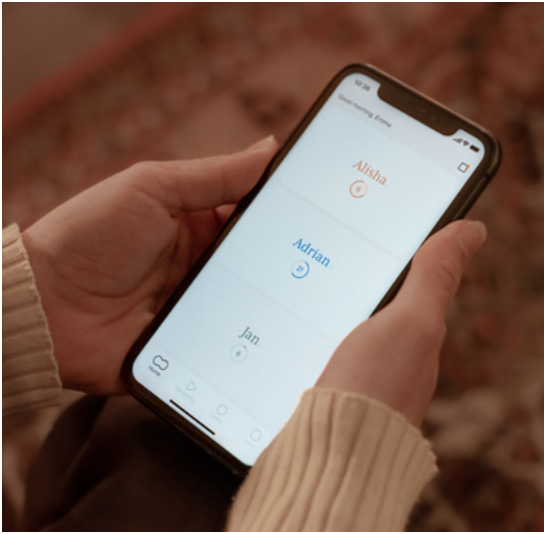
For a better understanding of the concept, I've created a short video that demonstrates the principle of the intervention and the design of the accompanying application. You can watch it by clicking on this link or scanning the QR code: onone.nl/video. I believe this video will give you a clearer and more convincing explanation of the concept and the interaction. The detailed prototype of the application can be accessed by following this link or scanning the QR code: onone.nl/proto.



Concept Video



Prototype of App



USER SCENARIO



In a society where we are taught to suppress or fix our negative feelings it is not unusual to always have something on your mind.



You hear about One on One, either through someone else's invitation or through digital channels. Onboarding teaches you about the power of deep relationships.



The app guides you to add three to five connections that you will actively deepen through one-on-one sessions.



The application will help you think about the relationships you want to deepen by giving you suggestions on who to add.



You are encouraged to either offer or request a One on One. You may have something on your mind and want to talk about it, or you may have noticed someone else's distress.



You will be guided to choose an activity that allows enough time alone, limits distractions and provides an excuse to meet. Perhaps something you already do together regularly.



You suggest a date and time that suits you best, where you have enough time and mental space to have a One on One.



You can either send the invitation through a chat channel or get tips on how to start the conversation in real life.



The other person receives the invitation and chooses their preferred date and time.



In order to understand how to have a tender conversation, you both start the basic learning programme.



Just before the one-on-one takes place, you will both receive a notification. This will include the do's and don'ts as well as some conversation starters.



The One on One takes place and your phones are automatically switched to silent.



Negativity is expressed and space is created for vulnerability. You are not looking for a solution, just a listening ear.



After the One on One, the app guides you through a reflection session to think about the value of deeper relationships.



The app provides an easy way to create a ritual and reminds you to deepen your relationships through regular One on Ones.

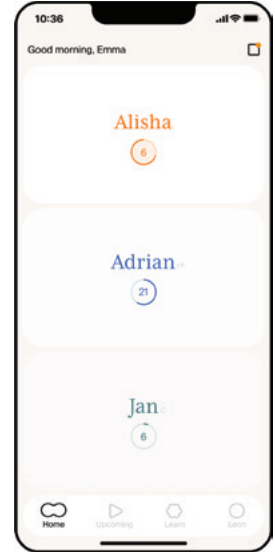
THE APPLICATION

In this chapter we will explore the design proposal for the One on One application. Although I am not an interaction designer by profession, I have developed certain principles during this project that have guided the design process of a mobile application concept. It is important to note that this is a proposal and not a final design. To better understand the application, I created a prototype, which can be accessed via the following link: onone.nl/proto

The design of the application is all about connecting with others and reaching out for a one-on-one. The connection cards are large, subtly nudging you not to add too many connections. The learning material is deliberately never the first thing you see because the aim of the app is not to endlessly learn theoretical concepts of how to have these conversations, but to plan something, learn the basics and have the conversation. The layout is simple so that it is not overwhelming and does not make things more complicated than they are. The application uses bright colours and playful illustrations to convey optimism and a sense of experimentation. The shapes used in the app are rounded to convey softness and tenderness.



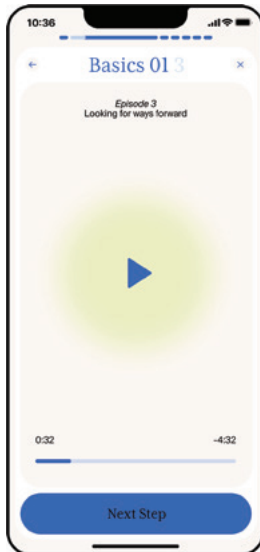
The onboarding screen introduces the concept and expresses the scientifically proven value of having regular One on Ones for mental well-being.



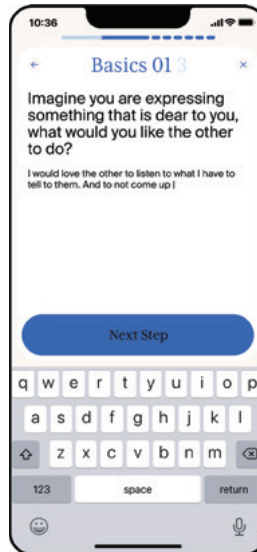
The app's home screen shows connections in a simple way. The circle shows either a countdown in days to the next session or a count since the last session.



When you click on a connection card, details will pop up. You can either make contact or start preparing for your next One on One.



The learning sessions consist of audio pieces, readings or animated videos.



And are interspersed with reflective questions in the form of small journals.



More advanced courses on specific topics can be found in the Learning Library.

THE BENEFITS



Social Connection

Rather than isolating the individual with their negative experiences, One on One reconnects people with others so they can experience and deal with their negativity more effectively.



Unconditional Acceptance

Unlike many other solutions, One on One promotes unconditional acceptance of all emotions and thoughts, creating a safe and non-judgmental space for individuals to express themselves without fear of criticism or judgement.



Deeper Relationships

One on One focuses on reconnecting individuals with their social context, creating deep relationships where we can focus on being ourselves. This can lead to increased trust, mutual understanding, support and above all a sense of stability through connection in an increasingly turbulent and unpredictable world.



Increased Understanding

Finding a listener who will give our story their full attention is an opportunity to meet ourselves, our thoughts and our feelings, and to understand ourselves and the world around us in a truer, more helpful way.



Emotional Expression

Meaningful conversations can provide an outlet for individuals to express their feelings, to be heard, accepted and understood by the people they value. One-on-one allows feelings to be expressed rather than suppressed.



Spreading the Message

Because One on One is based on a slowly growing social network of people, it raises social awareness of the issue. The importance of listening and having meaningful conversations is spread.



Putting it into Practice

While most mental health solutions focus on developing theoretical knowledge, One on One is based on rapid learning and practice cycles, where individuals put small learnings directly into practice and experience the value of it.



Designed to be Erased

The principles learned and practised through One on One conversations can become standard practice in daily life, which makes the application designed to be deleted at some point.



Feeling Useful

As listener, you learn how you can be of actual help to the speaker, resulting in feelings of satisfaction, gratification rather than frustration for the both of you.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Isn't this just another thing on my to-do list? I am already super busy.

You use the time you already spend with your close contacts to deepen your relationship. You deepen conversations by focusing on the other person and preparing with the learning material.

I am not a sensitive person, why do I have to become one and talk about my feelings?

We are all human, and human beings experience negative emotions for good reasons. Our society has taught us to suppress these emotions. We don't have to become sensitive people to really express our emotions. Simply expressing these emotions and talking about the things that are on our minds does not mean that we need to become sensitive.

I already tried to express my feelings before, so why would it work this time?

One on One is designed to facilitate meaningful conversations that can help create a safe space for emotional expression. The learning sessions ensure that you both have clear expectations about the process of a One on One, where the aim of the conversation is expression and acceptance rather than finding solutions.

What if the other person won't help me?

While there is a possibility that the other person may not be able to respond to your request for a one-on-one, there are many reasons for this. They may not feel able to talk at the moment, or may find it difficult to discuss these issues. You can admire your own courage for reaching out, because reaching out is an important social skill to develop, even if you are rejected.

So if I do a One on One, I don't have to go to a therapist?

One on One is not a substitute for professional psychotherapy. The aim of One on One is to create space and time where negativity can be held, where there is room for expression. The listener is not there to help you, just to listen and understand. If you are experiencing severe mental health problems, it is recommended that you seek help from a professional. This is also discussed in the Basics 01 course.

What if the conversation goes different than expected?

Sometimes a one-on-one can go differently than expected. The Basics 01 course helps you to set realistic expectations and gives guidance on how to end a conversation respectfully if things don't go as planned.





CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Evaluating the concept

This chapter focuses on the evaluation of the One on One intervention. As the project aims to test and evaluate the impact of the intervention on the mental well-being of the transitional group, a pilot test will be developed and conducted. The aim is to gain an understanding of the impact of the intervention on their mental well-being by measuring the impact of the intervention on the emotional loneliness of the group. To this end, a prototype has been developed to test the effect of the core working mechanisms of the intervention. This prototype consists of inviting someone close to you for a one-on-one conversation and a short course, spread over three 5-minute podcasts, to learn the basics of how to have tender conversations. A validated scale will be used to measure the emotional loneliness of the group before and after the intervention, and the results will be used to assess the impact of the intervention on mental well-being. We will first explain the method and discuss the research design. Secondly, we will discuss the design of the prototype and the decision-making process behind it.

METHOD

In order to determine the effect of the One on One concept on the mental well-being of the transitional group, we use the concept of emotional loneliness as a theoretical bridge, as discussed in Chapter 10. If we are able to define a significant effect of the intervention on emotional loneliness, we can theoretically argue the influence on the overall mental well-being of the transition group. To measure the impact of the prototype intervention, we need to measure the rate of emotional loneliness before and after the intervention in order to detect a significant change. This is commonly referred to as a one group pretest-posttest design. A visual overview of this design is shown in figure 72.

There are several validated scales that are often used to measure emotional loneliness; for this research, the widely used De Jong-Gierveld test (de Jong-Gierveld & Kamphuis, 1985) was chosen, which consists of eleven questions to measure both social and emotional loneliness. In order to make the questionnaires less burdensome, the long subscale for emotional loneliness and the short subscale for social loneliness are used, resulting in a total of nine questions. The social subscale is measured as a control variable and, if kept constant, strengthens the hypothesis of this research. The De Jong-Gierveld scale is often scored on a five-point Likert scale, where neutral and negative scores are counted as contributing to the emotional loneliness score. The order of the questions used in the final version of the surveys is shown in figure 75.

This validated scale will then be administered both as a pre-intervention measure and as a post-intervention measure after the one-on-one session has taken place. The hypothesis that will be tested is as follows: Deliberately taking time out and having a guided conversation about negative emotions with someone close to you will lead to a reduction in feelings of emotional



Figure 72: The argumentation scheme with emotional loneliness as theoretical bridge. κ

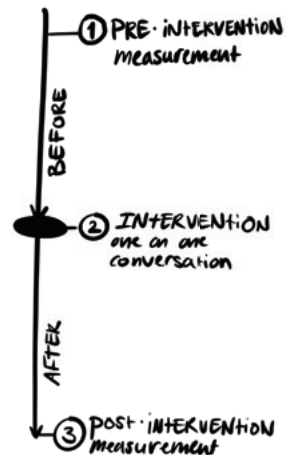


Figure 73: Overview of the one-group pretest-posttest study design. ↑

loneliness. The null hypothesis will therefore be: Taking deliberate time out for and having a guided conversation about negative emotions will not lead to a reduction in feelings of emotional loneliness. The change in emotional loneliness scores from pre- to post-intervention will be analysed using a paired t-test to compare the mean change in emotional loneliness scores between the two time points. The results of the Likert scales are converted into quantitative scores for emotional and social loneliness according to De Jong-Gierveld and Kamphuis (1985). In addition to the quantitative measurement using the scale described above, open-ended questions will be asked after the one-on-one session. The open questions help participants to reflect on the experience. They reflect on how they felt before, during and after the one-on-one. In addition to how they feel, they will be asked about their opinion of the three learning sessions and how they see this experience fitting into their future. These responses will be analysed and clustered using the Grounded Research Method (GRM).

The sample will consist of young adults (aged 18 or older) who identify themselves as being in transition from learning to working environments. Participants will be recruited through the designer's personal connections and social media channels such as Instagram and Reddit, and will mostly be between the ages of 20 and 28.

Figure 74: The open-ended question in the post-intervention survey. →

Open questions asked in the second survey

- Looking back, how did you feel before the conversation?
- Looking back, how did you feel during the conversation?
- What did this conversation do to you?
- How did you experience the 3 learning sessions?
- How do you think this experience will fit in your future?
- Is there something else you would like to mention?

Emotional loneliness subscale (full)

- I miss having a really close friend
- I experience a general sense of loneliness
- I miss the pleasure of the company of others
- I often feel rejected
- I miss having people around
- I find my circle of friends and acquaintances too limited

Social loneliness subscale (shortened)

- There are plenty of people I can rely on when I have problems
- There are many people I can trust completely
- There are enough people I feel close to

Figure 75: The final scale for emotional and social loneliness based on de Jong-Gierveld & Kamphuis (1985). ↑

THE PROTOTYPE

Due to practical time constraints, participants will only engage in one *One on One* session with one other person. This will allow participants to test the basic mechanics of the concept by deliberately taking time out for each other, learning the basics and having a conversation. The experience will be significantly different from the final concept presented in the previous chapter and some features will be missing from the prototype: reaching out and adding connections, reflective exercises and recurring *One on Ones* with a variety of connections. In this chapter we will look at the design of the *One on One* prototype and the decision-making process behind it.

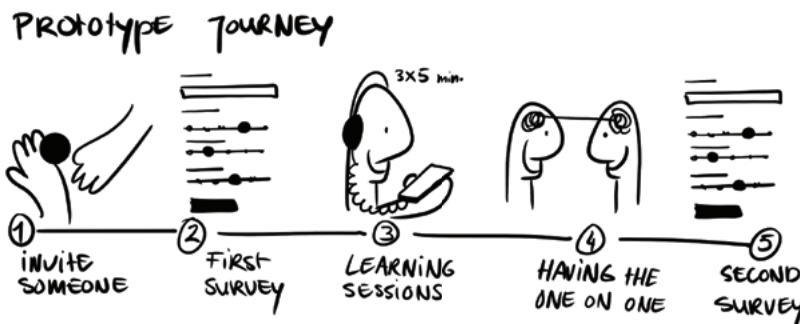


Figure 76: An overview of the prototype journey and the accompanying steps. ↩

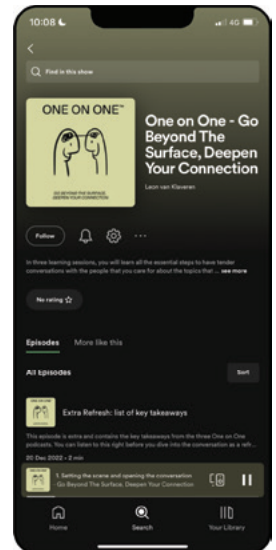
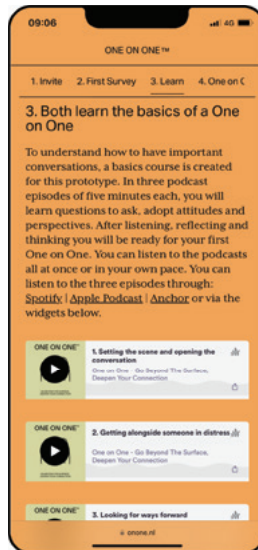
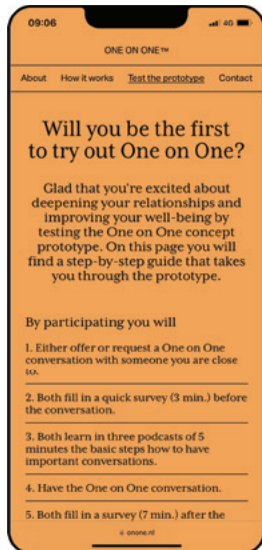
The form of the prototype



QR code to the website build for the prototype onone.nl

One of the key considerations in developing the prototype was accessibility. To make it as easy as possible for everyone to take part in the test. Although the concept may be aimed at young adults, the target audience may want to talk to people of different generations, such as their parents. To test this prototype, it was decided to use a website and a podcast as the primary mediums for delivering the content and guiding the participants. These platforms were chosen for their convenience and ease of use, making the concept accessible to a wide range of people. The website is simple, familiar and optimised for phone and desktop use. For the learning sessions, the podcast medium was chosen as it requires minimal effort on the part of the participants. The website can be visited at onone.nl and the podcast can be listened to on the website or on popular podcast platforms such as Spotify or Apple Podcast.

The home page of the website presents the concept and a dedicated 'Test the Prototype' page shows the benefits of participating and a step-by-step guide. The guide consists of five steps: invite, first survey, learn, one-on-one and second survey. The invite step acknowledges nervous feelings and gives specific advice on how to invite someone into a conversation with specific examples of phrases to use. The first and second surveys open the Qualtrics survey in a new tab. The learning step embeds an audio player and links directly to Spotify and Apple Podcasts to listen to the three different episodes. In the One on One step, nervousness is identified again and a list of final tips is given before the conversation begins.



The content of the learning sessions

As well as determining the form and delivery of the content, it is important to think about what essentials people need to learn before they have their first one-to-one conversation. The content of the podcasts for the One on One prototype is based on the interviews with the transitional group and evaluations with experts, as well as the book 'Listen' by Kathryn Mannix. In order to keep the effort of participating in the prototype test to a minimum, it was decided to limit the learning sessions to a maximum of 15 minutes. The transcripts of the podcast episodes can be found in appendix FIXME. The podcasts are divided into three episodes that resemble the beginning, middle and end of a conversation, each with a specific focus:

1. Setting the scene and opening the conversation: This episode covers the importance of having the right attitude and intention, reflecting on past experiences as a listener, and finding ways to open up the conversation.
2. Getting alongside someone in distress: The second episode focuses on understanding the other person's distress and standing with them, avoiding looking for solutions and learning what to do instead.
3. Looking for ways forward: The final episode covers the use of questions to help the teller find ways forward, moving through the distress and looking for ways forward, and recognising when professional help may be needed.

Both listeners and tellers will deliberately listen to the same podcast episodes. Learning that as a teller it is sometimes difficult to find the right words and that you use the silences to think, process and formulate thoughts and feelings. Learning that as a listener you have a natural tendency to start looking for solutions and that this is understandable. Ultimately, the guide aims to help users understand that other people's 'mistakes' come from good intentions, but that a different attitude can lead to deeper conversations. As the podcast medium is rather passive and mostly based on the transmission of information, the episodes are made semi-interactive by using reflective questions to encourage active thinking and deeper engagement with the content. Each episode has at least two of these questions built in. The learning guide is designed as a style guide, giving examples of what to say, what questions to ask, rather than as a specific guide to be followed word for word. The transcripts of the podcasts can be found in appendix E.

Figure 77: A still from the concept video and the desktop version of the website. ← & ←

An excerpt from the first podcast episode called 'Setting the scene and opening the conversation' ↘

“While we have a biological tendency to be helpful, to try to fix the person’s problem and offer solutions and reassurance, we rarely really listen to understand their distress and acknowledge that their feelings are understandable. We are afraid of making someone feel distressed, and we are afraid of causing them harm by talking about it. But talking about suffering is not what causes it in the first place. Just as talking about sex does not make someone pregnant. These conversations offer an excellent opportunity to accompany and support the other in the suffering that lies within and is waiting to be addressed.”

Figure 78: Four screenshots of the website and the podcast on Spotify ← x4

The first version of the website, learning sessions and questionnaires were pilot tested with six participants. Several small changes were then made to the website and questionnaires to facilitate the flow of the prototype.

RESULTS

In the one-group pretest-posttest design study, 26 participants were recruited and assigned to receive the intervention. The intervention consisted of deliberately taking time out and having a guided conversation about negative emotions with someone close to the participants, as described in the section above. Both the quantitative and qualitative test results can be found in appendix F. The primary quantitative outcome measure was emotional loneliness, which was assessed using a validated scale both before and after the intervention. These quantitative results were interpreted using a paired t-test. Alongside the quantitative results, several open-ended questions were asked to elicit qualitative data about the experience and a more nuanced view of the impact on the emotional well-being of the transitional group. These qualitative results were interpreted using thematic analysis and the main clusters are presented in this section.

The quantitative part

A paired samples t-test was conducted to examine the difference in emotional loneliness scores before and after the One on One intervention in a sample of 26 participants. There were 25 degrees of freedom for this analysis. The results showed a significant difference between the mean emotional loneliness scores before the intervention ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.782$) and after the intervention ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 1.787$), with a t-value of 3.67 and a p-value of 0.00116. This suggests that there was a significant reduction in emotional loneliness scores following the intervention. However, it should be noted that the design of this study (one group pretest-posttest) limits the ability to draw causal conclusions about the effects of the intervention alone. The control variable, social loneliness, showed no significant difference with a preintervention mean of 0.81 ($SD = 1.096$) and a postintervention mean of 0.62 ($SD = 0.983$), a t-value of 1.547 and a p-value of 0.134. The detailed results of the prototype test and the results of the paired t-test can be found in Appendix F.

The results of the paired samples t-test suggest that there was a significant difference between the pre- and post-intervention levels of emotional loneliness in the sample of 26 participants. This reduction in emotional loneliness scores may be partly due to the One on One intervention. The use of a control variable, social loneliness, in this study provides an important comparison for interpreting the results. The lack of significant change in social loneliness scores over the same period provides additional support for the hypothesis that the reduction in emotional loneliness was specifically due to the intervention. However, as the study used a one-group pretest-posttest design, it is not possible to establish a causal relationship between the intervention and the change in emotional loneliness scores. Further research using a more robust design is needed to confirm the potential benefits of the intervention in reducing emotional loneliness. These findings provide preliminary evidence that deliberately addressing negative emotions with a trusted person using the One on One concept can potentially lead to a reduction in feelings of emotional loneliness. However, it is important to consider that other factors may have contributed to the change in emotional loneliness scores between the two surveys. On average, there was a gap of 3 days between the surveys.

The qualitative part

In addition to the quantitative results, the post-intervention survey asked open-ended questions to increase understanding of the experience of the prototype, to validate the working principle behind the approach and to explore opportunities for improvement. The grounded theory method resulted in 121 codes and 25 clusters. The 9 most prevalent themes identified from the responses are listed here. A complete overview can be found in Appendix F.

NERVOUSNESS BEFORE CONVERSATION

↳ mentioned 13 times

A certain sense of nervousness seems to arise among participants before the conversation starts. Which indicates a tension to be overcome.

“Nervous, I had something in mind I wanted to talk about but I never really spoke it out loud so it was difficult to start the conversation.”

LEARNED TO LISTEN AND NOT OFFER SOLUTIONS

↳ mentioned 13 times

The listeners mentioned they learned the value of listening and not offering solutions for the other.

“The biggest thing I learned is that it actually feels better to not come up with solutions and just hear someone out. I will definitely use the learnings in conversations I have with others.”

WILLINGNESS TO IMPLEMENT IN THE FUTURE

↳ mentioned 9 times

Participants mentioned a willingness to use the principles learned in other conversations without the use of an application.

“I hope to implement this in my everyday conversations, even without strictly using the app. Listen to people, make them feel heard.”

DIFFICULTY NOT OFFERING SOLUTIONS

↳ mentioned 5 times

The listener expressed the difficulty of not offering solutions to other people's problems.

“It felt good that a person trusted me enough to open up to me, but in some moments it was quite difficult for me to not offer solutions or my view on the situation and only ask questions.”

INCREASED CONNECTION

↳ mentioned 4 times

Participants mentioned feeling less lonely and more connected to the conversation partner.

“I didn't feel alone, whereas sometimes I can experience that in a conversation with someone.”

THE LEARNING SESSIONS WERE INSIGHTFUL

↳ mentioned 11 times

The learning sessions were mostly considered clear, insightful and easy to follow.

“The learning sessions were clear. Actually they were so simple, but these simple guidelines made me feel that the other would actually listen to me.”

INCREASED UNDERSTANDING OF MY STORY

↳ mentioned 10 times

Tellers mentioned increased understanding of their own story by telling it to someone else.

“It made me understand the topic from a distance. I never really had an overview and the thoughts were just really linked to each other, floating in my head. But by talking I really understood the situation from a different perspective.”

FEELING EMOTIONAL DURING THE CONVERSATION

↳ mentioned 7 times

Mainly tellers expressed heightened emotions during the conversation after which they felt relief.

“I experienced different emotions throughout the conversation: moments of sadness, confrontation, insights and at the end happiness - a whole (but rewarding) rollercoaster of emotions.”

FEELING UNDERSTOOD BY THE OTHER

↳ mentioned 5 times

Tellers mentioned they felt understood by the listener because there was plenty of time and room.

“I felt understood cause I was given enough time. I often feel with difficult topics that my anxiety slows down my thought process, so being given enough time helped to have the feeling of really being understood.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Discussion and Conclusion

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore strategies to support the well-being of young adults in the overwhelmed society of 2032. The results of the study indicate a potential for the One on One approach to influence the well-being of the transition group. In doing so, it provides evidence for a valuable strategy to support the well-being of young adults. The study also explored other new and valuable ways of improving mental well-being that are vastly different from current approaches. Their effectiveness still needs to be researched, but they can already inspire new practical ways forward that focus on tackling the root causes rather than treating the symptoms. The research also highlights goals and ambitions to steer us towards a more holistically healthy society of 2032 that is aligned with our non-negotiable human needs. In this discussion section we will interpret the findings, reflect on the limitations of the study and make recommendations for further research.

Interpretation and reflection

Based on the prototype study, we can conclude that there is a potential impact of the intervention on levels of emotional loneliness in young adults, which is recommended for further investigation. The one-group pretest-posttest design has limitations, including the lack of a control group, which makes it difficult to establish causality. Although a more rigorous test (such as an RCT) should be used to establish causality, the time between the two surveys was minimal, so it can be argued that there is less chance of other events having an influence in the intervening period. Based on the open-ended responses, testing the prototype was overall a positive but intense experience for participants. Most respondents said that they would apply the principles learned in the sessions to their lives and that they had a new perspective on having deep conversations and not offering solutions. This was exactly the aim, to create more awareness in society and to make One on One conversations a ritual even without the application. Respondents also noted that they found it frustrating not to come up with solutions, which is the kind of thinking that the One on One concept was designed to stimulate,

to make people aware of their behaviour and bring it out of their subconsciousness, out of their default setting. The responses from the test can be used to inform new iterations that smoothen the user experience and help to overcome the initial limitations of use. Overall, we can conclude that the One on One intervention offers a potential way forward, but that further research is needed to determine its impact and identify ways to improve it.

Another interesting, perhaps less obvious, observation was the difference between the number of people who expressed an interest in taking part in the study and the number who actually did. Approximately 40% of the people who were interested took part in the test. This is an indication that there is a certain amount of tension or barrier to overcome before participation takes place. It must be noted that participants only had 2.5 weeks to invite, learn and participate. The reasons for not participating despite strong interest (e.g. lack of time or feeling uncomfortable) could be further explored in future research to inform new iterations of the concept.

In addition to the evaluation of the One on One concept, the other five conceptual interventions offer new ways forward that are different from the current mainstream approaches to improving the mental well-being of young adults. The focus is not on fixing the self, getting rid of negative feelings or improving self-discipline, but on accepting and understanding negative feelings and reconnecting individuals to their social context. The impact of these five interventions on young adults' well-being is recommended to be explored in future research.

The framework and the six states of mind showed an interesting approach to describing the probable future and behaviour of the transitional group. These six states can be further elaborated and looked at from a different designer's perspective to find different ways forward. The 15 goals and ambitions that serve as the design brief provide an interesting starting point for ideation. Due to time constraints, the ideation phase per ambition was unfortunately relatively short. This shows the potential for more in-depth exploration and ideation for all fifteen goals and ambitions.

Limitations of this study

Time and capacity limitations: The study was limited by the time and capacity of the designer, which led to biased results based on the information that was accessed, read and processed in the given time frame.

Network bias: Participants in the semi-structured interviews were drawn from the researcher's own (extended) network, which could lead to a positivity bias where participants would give desired responses.

Prototype limitations: The prototype that was tested lacked several features, in particular the crucial initiation phase was not focused on during the test, which is a potential barrier to the use of the concept.

Limited demographic diversity: The age and gender of participants was not diverse enough, with women and participants aged 24-26 years more likely to participate.

Small sample size: The small number of participants interviewed and involved in the prototype test may limit the generalisability of the findings.

Study design limitations: The one-group pre-test-posttest design has limitations, including the lack of a control group, difficulty in determining causality and the stability of the effect, and difficulty in estimating the magnitude of the effect. The De Jong-Gierveld measures the emotional loneliness at that exact moment, and many other events could influence the score. The results can only show that there is a correlation between pre- and post-intervention scores, but cannot claim that the intervention alone is responsible for this difference in scores.

Selection bias: Participants may self-select into the prototype test study, resulting in a non-representative sample of people interested in the topic.

Practice or test effects: Participants may perform better on the post-test due to previous exposure to the pre-test, leading to an overestimation of the effectiveness of the intervention.

The economic viability of the concept: The economic viability of the One on One intervention was not investigated due to practical time constraints. This thesis focused on demonstrating the desirability and impact of the approach, rather than the economic viability and willingness to pay.

Recommendations for further research

Based on the limitations identified and the findings of this thesis, several opportunities for future research are recommended.

First, a more rigorous trial is needed to determine the impact of the One to One concept on emotional loneliness. A randomised control trial (RCT) is recommended to determine the impact of using the prototype. The prototype can be further developed for this test to include the facilitation of the initiation phase and the social media aspect. The researchers of the De Jong-Gierveld Loneliness Scale can be contacted to discuss making the questions suitable for a prototype trial. An RCT can provide evidence for the concept and potentially attract funding. In addition, a longitudinal study can determine whether people who have regular One on Ones actually deepen their relationships, feel more comfortable being themselves, and reduce chronic stress in the long term.

Secondly, the One to One concept can be further explored and optimised to increase impact and usability. Taking it to the next level, viability and willingness to pay can be explored to build a compelling business case. Due to time constraints, the financial viability of the concept was not explored in this project and is recommended for future research.

Thirdly, the other five concepts from the strategic intervention set can be further explored and developed. Once these have been developed, their impact can also be measured using different tools. For the Equilibrium concept, for example, this could be a measure of emotional intelligence. This will provide more information about the viability of the different strategies.

Fourthly, all 15 objectives identified in the design brief can be explored in more depth. By exploring these goals and ambitions from different angles, new ideas and concepts can emerge to move towards a desired future. More time, energy and different attitudes are needed to come up with potential and impactful ideas to achieve these goals.

Fifthly, the collection of contextual factors can be supplemented with more information that allows for different perspectives and opinions. Because the field of well-being is so subjective, we need to collect more information to make the basis of this study more robust.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to explore strategies to support well-being in the overwhelmed society of 2032 and to look for tangible ways to improve the mental resilience of young adults. Based on qualitative interviews with young adults and experts, and a literature review, thirteen major undercurrents in society were identified. These thirteen drivers, which together shape the society of 2032, were then understood through a framework that identified six states of mind in which young adults are likely to be trapped. All six represent a state in which one encounters the same problem over and over again, a problem-sustaining pattern of interaction. This framework helps to understand the probable future of 2032. By stating the normative values of the designer and using these values as a lens to look at the six states of mind, 15 goals emerged. These 15 goals aim to build mental resilience and therefore prevent young adults from spiralling and becoming trapped in these six states of mind. They act as a design brief to start the idea generation process for the design of interventions that promote mental resilience and increase well-being. This normative framework and the fifteen goals together formed the desired future. Several ideas were then generated and a strategic set of six interventions was selected, spread across the six states of mind. The proposed interventions focus on the core of the problem, addressing the underlying causes rather than the symptoms. One of these concepts, One on One, was then developed into a final concept. In order to measure whether the intervention had an impact on the mental well-being of young adults, this concept was prototyped and tested with X participants. To do this, emotional loneliness was measured as it is a key determinant of well-being. Based on a pretest-posttest design study, we can conclude that there is a significant difference between pre- and post-intervention levels of emotional loneliness. This in turn may be an indication that the intervention has an impact on young adults' emotional loneliness and therefore on their well-being. Therefore, it can be argued that this research has at least shed light on a possible avenue worth pursuing. Due to time constraints, the remaining five intervention directions could not be explored in as much depth and therefore their impact on the well-being of the transitional group remains to be explored in future research.

The findings of this thesis contribute to the field of well-being in a number of ways. Firstly, it points to a number of main undercurrents in our society which, taken together, describe potential patterns of thinking in which the transitional group may become trapped in 2032. The framework highlights these mindsets and provides a language to talk about them in order to discuss further action to prevent these mindsets from becoming problematic. It also highlights the importance of contrasting our current society and human nature to look beyond the myths we accept as normal.

Secondly, the fifteen goals and ambitions can be used as a design brief for different parties such as design students, entrepreneurs, governments and institutes. The goals and ambitions can be a starting point for exploration and can be focussed on one at a time.

Thirdly, the concepts show new ways forward that focus on reconnecting people with their non-negotiable needs. These concepts can inspire action and further exploration of these conceptual directions.

Finally, this thesis demonstrates that change is possible. That we can move from saying we need to do things differently to steering in a particular direction. From blindly acting to moving towards a distant light. While we are incredibly resilient and adaptable as human beings, we have become accustomed to living in a society that harms us. Since our society is only the story we collectively believe in, we can collectively change that story to create a healthier one that is more in tune with who we truly are.

Figure 79: A society that respects our interconnected human nature, digital painting 1080px by 1080px. ↗



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Personal Reflection

Before starting my graduation project, I had some expectations about how the project would evolve and I set myself some ambitions. In this personal reflection, I reflect on my experiences of this graduation journey and the ambitions I set at the beginning.

THE GRADUATION JOURNEY

As I reflect on my journey to graduation, I realise that I set out to do something ambitious. Mental well-being is a very complex and subjective issue, with no clear goal or problem to solve. A topic that has been studied since ancient times. Some might call it a 'wicked problem', a problem that is ill-defined and almost impossible to solve. And to be fair, mental well-being is not something to solve at all, we can only point the way to future societies that respect our biological human needs more than we do now. When I started the project I had no idea where it would end. At many stages the future felt doomed and inevitable and our society felt broken and unfixable. I was anxious about whether I would come up with any concepts that would make a difference to the transitional group. For many weeks I felt like a sponge floating in the middle of the ocean, absorbing all this information without any direction. In this way, the project taught me the ubiquitous cliché that we should trust something, the process, our guts, and follow our interests. And trusting that it will be all right, led me down interesting paths, in directions I could not have imagined before, into opposing visions and ideas. My aim was not simply to find a solution, but to show that we can approach these problems differently, think beyond our current ways of living and imagine a better society. Because this project was subjective, complex and future-oriented, it was a challenge to show that my 'ways forward' were effective and led in promising directions. There were still so many assumptions I had to make and my own personal values had to be revealed as part of the project. I wanted to have a real impact and prove that my ideas and approaches were viable. To do this, I knew I had to go beyond speculating about my ideas and put them to the test. I am glad that I was able to take

at least one concept out of the hypothetical realm and demonstrate its real-world potential in the time allotted.

In the end, I am proud to have taken on this great challenge and put my ideas to the test. I couldn't have done it without the many people involved at all stages of the project, from research to evaluation and ideation. It has been a difficult and complex journey, but the satisfaction of shedding light on a potential way forward and proving that we can do things differently is truly priceless. I have learnt a lot about myself, about the world and about our modern society. And I look forward to continuing to do so in the future.

PERSONAL AMBITIONS

Improve my ability to deal with interdependencies, stakeholder constellations and context.

I think that my ability to deal with complex interdependencies and especially contrasting ideas has developed during this project. By thoroughly exploring the context, looking for commonalities and contrasting statements, I shaped the likely future of 2032 and embraced complexity. The stakeholder constellations came a little later in the project, initially there were none really, I was more focused on the context than the specific stakeholders involved in the medical system for example. While exploring the One on One concept, I used stakeholder constellations to show a clear shift towards a desired state.

Gain experience with speculative design, 'what ifs' and the dream.

Although not directly visible in the report, I experimented with what-if scenarios during the ideation phase. The goals and ambitions and the six concepts that make up the vision all contribute to a similar vision of society, perhaps most clearly articulated in the normative framework. The concepts are speculative explorations of how we might do things differently, but they are grounded in research. I am very happy to have been able to experiment with these approaches.

Gain experience in measuring the impact of design interventions.

Although the quantitative test had many limitations due to time constraints, I got a taste of what it means to validate rather than evaluate a concept. To really argue the impact of a particular design on a wicked problem. This is certainly a step that I often missed during my education and one that I will explore further in the future.

Use systems thinking and iceberg models to define the root cause.

During this project I was constantly looking for the root cause. And yes, sometimes it felt like I was investigating topics that were completely unrelated. In the end, I did not use tools such as systems mapping, mainly because so many things were interconnected that they could affect each other in a triad, perhaps infinite number of ways. When clustered with different factors, the factors tell a different story. It made me think about what systems thinking really is and what it is not.



Figure 80: A sign displaying "we are open, the door is just very heavy. Author unknown. 7

Materialism promises satisfaction but, instead, yields hollow dissatisfaction, it creates more craving. This massive and self-perpetuating addictive spiral is one of the mechanisms by which consumer society preserves itself by exploiting the very insecurities it generates. Disconnection in all its guises – alienation, loneliness, loss of meaning, and dislocation – is becoming our culture's most plentiful product. No wonder we are more addicted, chronically ill, and mentally disordered than ever before.

There may be things about our “normal,” including our sense of who we are and the nature of our society, that we are reluctant to let go of. But when a false belief falls away, after the ache of loss and sense of being unmoored subsides, I have noticed that something in me relaxes, no longer tasked with squaring circles and holding together impossible contradictions. Ignorance may bring a blissed-out tranquility, but that is not true bliss; on the collective level, it can result in great and wide suffering. We do ourselves and the world a profound service when we endeavor to dissolve our illusions and open ourselves to the truths they conceal.

“Not everything that is faced can be changed,” James Baldwin wrote, “but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

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APPENDICES

The appendices can be found online at onone.nl/appendix or by scanning the QR code.



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“Spirals grow infinitely small the farther you follow them inward, but they also grow infinitely large the farther you follow them out.”

– *John Green*,
Turtles All The Way Down (2017)

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THE RISE IN MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IS NOT ONLY A GROWING CONCERN FOR INDIVIDUALS AND THOSE CLOSE TO THEM, BUT IT IS ALSO CAUSING GOVERNMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS A GREAT DEAL OF CONCERN. THIS THESIS TAKES A DEEP DIVE INTO THE COMPLEX SOCIETAL ISSUES AT THE ROOT OF THIS WORRYING TREND. THROUGH A COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION, A NUMBER OF FRUITFUL WAYS FORWARD ARE EXPLORED, OFFERING PRACTICAL STRATEGIES, OPPORTUNITIES AND INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT YOUNG ADULTS COPE WITH THE INEVITABLE STRESSORS PRESENT IN THE SOCIETY OF 2032.

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image / figure 1: _____

image / figure 2: _____

PLANNING AND APPROACH **

Include a Gantt Chart (replace the example below - more examples can be found in Manual 2) that shows the different phases of your project, deliverables you have in mind, meetings, and how you plan to spend your time. Please note that all activities should fit within the given net time of 30 EC = 20 full time weeks or 100 working days, and your planning should include a kick-off meeting, mid-term meeting, green light meeting and graduation ceremony. Illustrate your Gantt Chart by, for instance, explaining your approach, and please indicate periods of part-time activities and/or periods of not spending time on your graduation project, if any, for instance because of holidays or parallel activities.

start date _____ - _____ - _____ end date

MOTIVATION AND PERSONAL AMBITIONS

Explain why you set up this project, what competences you want to prove and learn. For example: acquired competences from your MSc programme, the elective semester, extra-curricular activities (etc.) and point out the competences you have yet developed. Optionally, describe which personal learning ambitions you explicitly want to address in this project, on top of the learning objectives of the Graduation Project, such as: in depth knowledge a on specific subject, broadening your competences or experimenting with a specific tool and/or methodology, Stick to no more than five ambitions.

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FINAL COMMENTS

In case your project brief needs final comments, please add any information you think is relevant.

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