

Exploring Explanatory Styles

- 📍 Mindset
- 🕒 15-20 min
- 👤 You

Tool Description

Instructions

Part 1: Visualise a negative life event from two different perspectives

In this exercise, we are going to visualise a situation from two different perspectives; first, from a pessimistic perspective; then, from an optimistic perspective.

Gently close your eyes to begin, and allow yourself to be present.

Now, I'm going to ask you to imagine that you have just been laid off at work. This has come at quite a surprise; you thought things were going OK.

Now, imagine that the reason you were laid off was fundamentally your fault... Which of your skills and personal characteristics likely led you to being fired...? What aspects of yourself and your personality played a role in the situation?

Now, imagine that the situation was permanent... Rather than changing or getting better over time, the situation will stay the same. Being fired today means that you are someone who won't be able to find another job... You may well stay unemployed forever.

Now, think about when this type of thing has happened in other areas of your life... When have other good things not lasted? Past romantic relationships, friendships, holidays, hobbies...?

OK now, let this scenario go, and come back to where you are right now, sitting here, in this room. Keep your eyes closed, and take three deep, slow breaths.

We'll now take a look at the same situation in a different way. Bring back to mind the image of being unexpectedly laid off at work.

This time, imagine that you were laid off was because of circumstances outside your control... such as the company going under, or your superiors feeling threatened by your accomplishments.

Now, imagine that the situation was only temporary... You have faith that you won't be unemployed forever... you will find another job, and soon.

Now, remind yourself that this setback is only occurring in one aspect of your life... you have plenty of other things going on, such as family, hobbies, your pet, and these things in your life are relatively unaffected by this situation at work.

Good, now let the image of being fired go, and come back to the present moment... keep your eyes closed, and take a deep slow breath.

Evaluation

- What was it like to view the situation from a pessimistic perspective?
 - What was it like to view the situation in a more optimistic way?
 - Was there a difference in how you felt in each of these mindsets?
 - Did one mode feel more familiar to you than the other? If so, which?
- This gives you indication of your explanatory style, which is the way you explain life events and experiences to yourself.

Part 2: Visualise a positive life event from two different perspectives

In part 2 of the exercise, we are going to visualise a situation from two different perspectives; first, from a pessimistic perspective; then, from an optimistic perspective.

Gently close your eyes to begin, and allow yourself to be present.

Now, I'm going to ask you to imagine that you have just received a promotion at work. Picture yourself at work, having just heard the good news from your boss.

Now, imagine that the reason you were promoted was not so much to do with you as it was to do with luck and/or other factors... perhaps you were promoted only because the person above you quit, or because you were (luckily) part of a team that excelled this year...

Now, imagine that this situation was temporary... You might think to yourself, surely this won't last, I'm not good enough to keep this position for very long....

Now, imagine that your good fortune only applies to your working life... if only you were so lucky in other areas of your life like with relationships or your health.

OK now as best you can, let everything go and come back to where you are right now, sitting here, in this room. Keep your eyes closed, and take three deep, slow breaths.

We'll now take a look at the same situation in a different way. Bring back to mind the image of being unexpectedly promoted at work.

This time, imagine that you were promoted purely because of yourself... because you have been an excellent employee...

Now, imagine that the situation will last... This new position will suit you well... and you are ready to take on the challenge of stepping up to the plate...

Now, consider what else is going well for you in your life... where else have you excelled, or experienced good fortune lately?

Very good. Now let the image of being promoted go, and come back to the present moment... keep your eyes closed, and take a deep slow breath.

Evaluation

- What was it like to view this positive event from a pessimistic perspective?
- What was it like to view this positive event from an optimistic perspective?
- Was there a difference in how you felt between the two experiences?
- Did one mode feel more familiar to you than the other? If so, which?

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