



OPTIMAL: an Explanatory Model for Development of a Skill in Balancing Work and Home Environments

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1. Short Introduction

To address the challenge of a healthy life-span as imposed by the conditions of the modern, industrialized and technologized society may be an overwhelming attempt per se, especially if a person is missing the literacy in the domain of work-life balance. Protecting own health is a pursuit that should practically start during the early stages of adulthood, if not even before. A healthy life-style of a parental dyad, if internalized by the child, may be perpetuated and applied during late stages of living, as well as transmitted to the following generations. Yet, the environmental conditions are due to change, and thus, the procedures for a healthy life-span should be subdued to adjustments. However, as stated by the cognitive sciences, “declarative knowledge” is not all the same to “procedural knowledge” (Lewicki, P., Hill, T. & Czyzewska, M., 1992). To know from observation and experience, “first-hand information”, and/or from practice contains a plus of information, compared to knowing from reliable, yet, in reference to the person, “second hand” sources. Even a book may, in fact contain so-called “second hand” knowledge.

In this work, the aim is to uncover a few of the practical steps necessary in order to form, starting during the years of early education, a base for a skill in work-home balance. We infer that this would be useful for the prevention of physical body damages and for the awareness of vulnerabilities, as well as of the risks for the overloads of stressors. Yet, the uniqueness of each individual may trigger specific modalities of coping with internal and environmental stressors. Even more, the evaluation of a type of stressor (Bandura, A., 1997), either physical, or chemical, or emotional, maybe even spiritual could differ from a person to another, depending on the unique genetics that everybody is endowed with.

2. 「OPTIMAL」 model explained

In the below Table 1, we may notice the seven layers of the proposed model. These are: Oblio mind-set, preparing and prioritizing, transforming, intentional set, mindfulness, authentic self-expression and liaison. We detail about each in the below paragraphs. The order in which the set of actions specific to each layer is played should not necessarily be understood in a stage-like sense. The layers are at hand as an ebb and flow, to serve us to become, to evolve as beings, to develop our mind so as to contribute to the community through our daily actions. Although this model is at an empirical level of knowledge, we consider it to have an intrinsic value.

Table 1 「OPTIMAL」 model briefly explained

O	blio mind-set: skeptical attitude, not taking for granted, accepting unicity
P	repare/Prioritize: Japanese expression [kokoro gamae], kokoro meaning <heart>, gamae meaning <readiness>
T	ransform: transgress emotional/mental blockage(s) so that to uncover the necessary resources for adaptation
I	ntentional set: focus of attention, exposure to various knowledge from different fields of study
M	indfulness as a daily practice, surrendering to gratitude
A	uthenticity: compassion, allowing the awariness of grief
L	iaison: attunement, kindness

With no further saying, accepting unicity, as well as recognizing and accepting intercultural differences implies an attitude of skepticism. Not taking everything for granted so that to gain awareness about “*what’s going on?*” is a proof of functional adaptability. The cartoon that we refer to and derive the first letter to explain our acronym is Oblio, the main character of the musical animation directed by Fred Wolf (1971). Reaching to an **Oblio mind set** implies crossing through a series of experiences that enables someone to construct a series of coping strategies. Also, an open heart and mind may facilitate a degree of transparency of the Self (e.g. needs for adaptation, thoughts) in relationship to the world and other-significant. A daily living filled with repressed guilt or rejection can attract even more harm than enacting a curious, skeptical behavior toward life. Thus, on the course of our existence, in considering the aspiration of becoming a “*Best Version of Yourself*” (Kunkel, K., 2022) by naming our state of mind at the level of “here and now”, we allow to deepen our self-understanding. As stated since ancient times, knowing oneself is a prerequisite of mastering the Universe.

A person may need to have previously available and accessible, at a level of procedural knowledge, a plethora of so-called “labels”. Further on, we create a space within our mind in order to **prepare** for the course of an action. This is an attempt that may surpass the cognitive level; it may also trigger emotional and motivational stances. For this reason, we refer to the Japanese formulation of “*kokoro gamae*” that contains the “heart” at the center of the idea of preparation. In considering the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, A.H., 1943), we derive the assumption of the body that informs us, through “first-hand” level of experience, about “*what’s the most adequate course of action to pursue?*”. Time spent within nature has a huge transformative value. It may also enhance patience and may serve as incentive to a person for extending within various environments.

Choices for healthiness should be **prioritized** among other actions during a day. Even if social obligations impose otherwise, acknowledging the need that we have permits us to be aware of our deep reasons for procrastination and, maybe, to allow another moment in time for expressing it. The developmentally formed, inherent mechanism of suppression (Bandura, A., 1997) of emotions, in general, and of frustrations, in particular, may lead to impairments in our functioning. Our culture and society may impose norms that become internalized demands about “*how may I put myself on a desirable path of becoming a better version of*

myself, as a person inside a community?”. Therefore, the suppression of our natural tendencies may be a part of the normal educational road. Yet, to develop our accountability, we need to adjust some of our instincts and to nourish intuition.

Fulfillment of our mission on this Planet has as foundation the belief in self-efficacy. This is empowering. It requires time available to deepen the knowledge in our inner world, as well. Consequently, to overcome internal conflicts, to prevent malfunctions, to live peacefully within our minds and souls, we may have to **transform** blockages, so that to uncover the resources for adaptation. Learning to contemplate sensations, thoughts, nature is sustainable for the integration of dissociated parts of our mostly selfish Ego. Transgression of a negative set of mind into a positive one, perceiving a harsh condition as an opportunity for evolution and development may require time and energy.

Furthermore, there is the **intention** to pursue a positive change. In focusing our mind to the purpose of evolution and healthiness, we allow our recovery to occur. That is the reason for which we may prefer to be directed toward various and diverse fields of study rather than toward harmful or resource-depletion encounters. “*Am I in my body right now or my mind wanders elsewhere?*” is a question to ask ourselves in order to gain consciousness on the “here and now” state of our mind. It is very likely that a wandering mind to have as main cause a traumatic event that the person was yet unable to transform into self-growth. The grandeur of the overload may have had surpassed the available adaptability-resources, at a certain moment in time, most likely in the past. Yet, once overpassed, satisfying intercultural relationships are prone to develop.

Whatsoever, transforming the overloads of a stressor into an opportunity for growth is unlikely to occur without surrendering to gratefulness. **Mindfulness** implies for a person to be present within a moment, even if the triggers of an initial stressor may also appear. Feeding the brain with gratefulness has a reinforcing value for the availability of the coping resources. Therefore, a person becomes prevented from drowning again into the sea of “out of control” anxiety or impairing depression. To counteract, we need courage to accept the best of life, which could be enhanced through a question addressed to self, as “*for today, what are the best moments that I feel grateful for?*”. Journaling (Capacchione, L., 2001) the answers is a modality to practice gratitude for everyday life. Mindful movement, mindful talk add quality to life, enabling a person to serve to a superior purpose of life.

“*Am I in contact with my sense of compassion? Am I able to extend it beyond myself, to other beings, more or less proximal, to entire Earth, even? How may I express it, as an output?*” are self-questions that may serve for psychological growth. An honest answer to such questions is a prerequisite of **authenticity** that we imply also to be unlikely to occur if there are low overloads of available compassion. This, taken together with gratitude may be also one of the highest expressions of intentional, mindfully enacted set of daily behaviors, as part of a healthy life-style. An authentic self-expression may also have a value for reversing severe conditions, such as it may be the post-traumatic stress.

Finally, in order for a person to build a “personal agency” (Bandura, A., 1997), a sense of attunement is a condition. To be attuned to implies also to perceive a harmony between own functioning of the body and mind. Internal conflicts may impede the sense of grounding. **Liaison** stands for social resource, encounters to other selves that may serve our growth. It

is most likely to internalize a sense of kindness inside environments that we also perceive as secured than otherwise.

A synthetic view of the seven layers described above, useful for developing a skill for balancing work and home environments is encompassed in Figure 1.

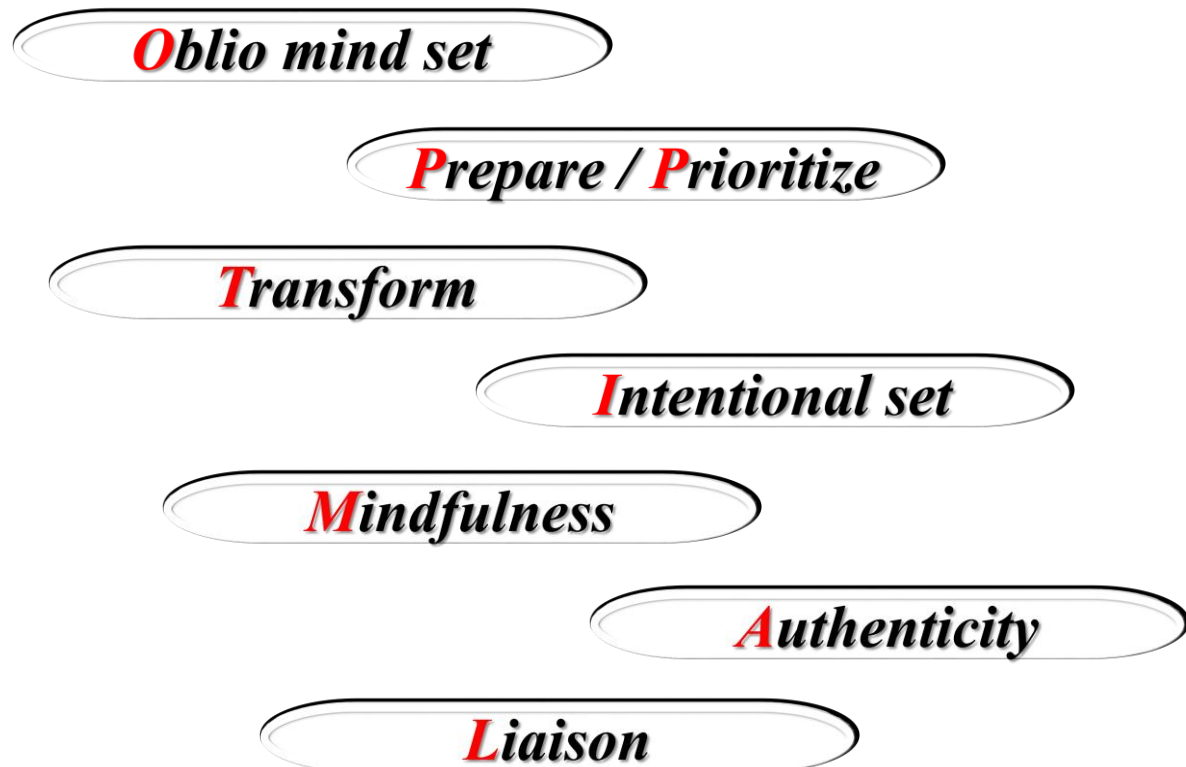


Figure 1. 「OPTIMAL」 : a seven-layers model for developing a skill in balancing work and home environments

3. Discussion and conclusions

As already stated, switching the mind from abusive, egoistic thoughts of a daily living to self-reflection, as the questions encompassed above would allow, is a habit that promotes a functioning of the brain that is also recommended for a health-span. An optimal state of mind would imply that people to develop an open-spirit in the sense of excellence (Emamzadeh, A., 2022) rather than in the direction of perfectionism. It would also imply that people to be

prepared to prioritize challenges, to have a routine of life-style that would permit them to do so. In their ways toward authentic self-expression and liaison, so that to add contributions to society and to act in a plan-full, pro-active manner, the conscious awareness is a number one condition for the transgression of the mental and emotional stressors, into adaptability resources. As daily practices, the focus of an intention for a day and mindfulness could serve as anchors for positive change, sustaining the social encounters. Organizations have an inner life of their own, different from that of the set of rules or of each individual, separately taken into account (Fineman, S., 2000).

To distinguish between procedural and declarative knowledge, in reference to the skill of work-home balance, some of the formulations that could, perhaps, eventually apply as items to a sample of research may sound as following: “I know that a skill in work-home balance is good for people”, “I intuitively know how balancing work and home environments feels like”, to measure the level of declarative knowledge of the mentioned skill, and “I am aware of the modalities that I need to put into practice, on a regularly basis, to balance work and home environments”, “I am conscious of the benefits of the skill in work-home balance, for my present life”, for the procedural level of the characteristic, each of them coded on a five-points or seven-points intervals, on a Lickert-type of scale.

As stated in a past study (Muscalu Bratescu, I.C., Matsumoto, M., Kanai, A., Takai, J., 2014), the skill in work-home balance may have a preventive function in the relationship between an event perceived to have a negative load of the stressor, occurred during daily-life and mental health. Also, for the entrepreneurs preoccupied for the people to be endowed with it, this skill may have an important role for the maintenance of an optimal level of general life-satisfaction. Psychotherapy or even counseling could not replace a natural, healthy routine of the life-style that is helpful even for dragging unseen boundaries, whereas necessary. In this respect, we mention that affirming self-value weights a great deal. Empirical studies are to confirm such assumptions.

To conclude, practical application may stand for dealing with various and diverse daily life-encounters, inside and outside the formal context of the organizations. We believe that the above stated layers may serve as guideline in restoring the motivation of the vulnerable categories challenged by situations like school refusal or university withdrawal, as well. To protect, to improve, to restore resources are among the main aspects of nowadays life that may require a gentle care from the entire humankind.

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