

## LEARNING JOURNEY

Creating My New Good Life



### LAI4. Develop Strategies

ESTIMATED TIME: 90+ MINUTES

# CONTEXT

The **Creating My New Good Life Learning Journey** has been developed for anyone who would like to explore how to live their own version of a good life and make it more resilient to external local or global threats.

**This could include anyone who:**

- Feels that their life is somehow lacking (perhaps despite having everything they had hoped would bring them happiness).
- Is satisfied with their life but is concerned that “Shadows” on the horizon (climate change, political and financial instability, war etc.) could negatively affect their future.

**This Learning Journey comprises four Learning Adventures and is designed to support you:**



Envision what your own “New Good Life” (NGL) could look like.



Explore the resources available on the journey toward your NGL.



Assess the potential threat to your NGL from global and local “shadows”.

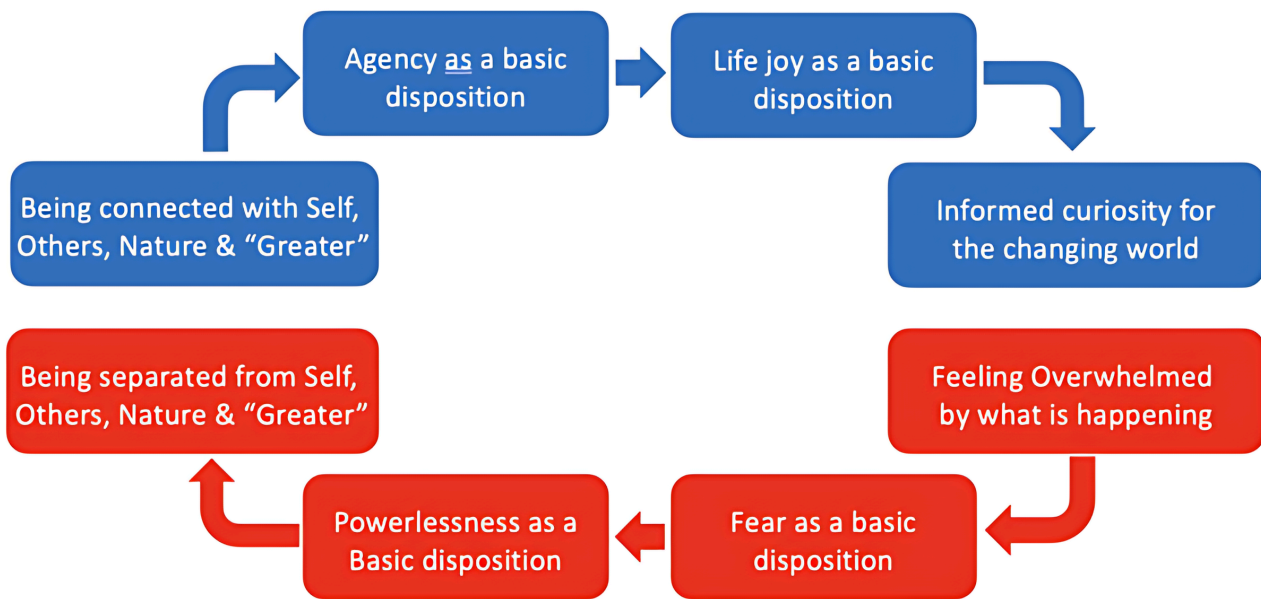


Develop strategies to achieve your NGL in a way that is resilient to change.

**We recommend completing the Learning Adventure in several sittings, perhaps skipping optional exercises to begin with. It can also be very helpful to have a thinking buddy to work with. A fictional case study that is intended to illustrate the process outlined in this Learning Adventure is included in Appendix 1. You may find it helpful to refer to it as you go along.**

# Objectives

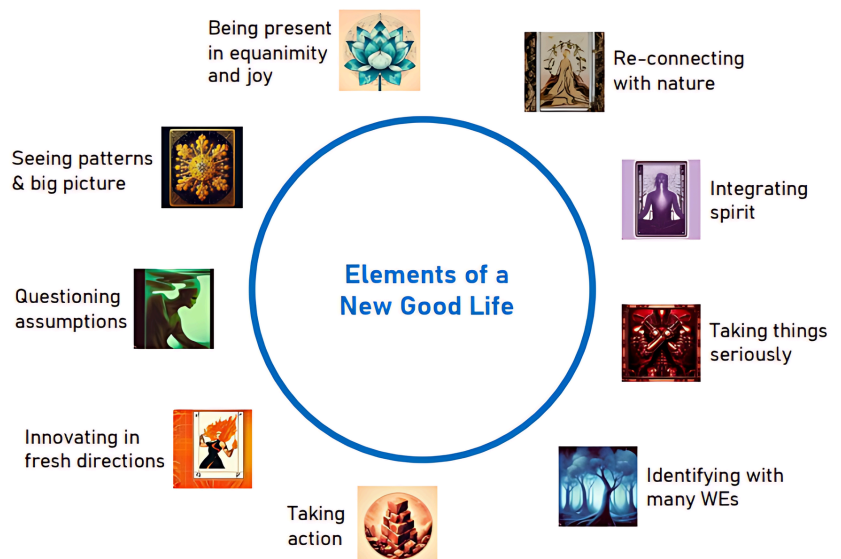
If we have our eyes open to what is going on in the world, there is the potential to slide into fear and powerlessness, depression and a feeling of separation from ourselves, others, nature and something greater. We believe that one way to reverse this dynamic is by practising greater connection, focusing on and widening our circle of influence, which will increase our sense of agency, enable us to experience greater joy in life and approach the changing world with informed curiosity.



This Learning adventure LAi4, provides tools or “Elements” to support this process and develop a NGL that is resilient to the changes we are likely to encounter.

These tools or “Elements” comprise:

- Reconnecting with nature.
- Integrating spirit.
- Taking things seriously.
- Identifying with the many “We’s”.
- Taking action.
- Innovating in fresh directions
- Questioning assumptions
- Seeing patterns and the big picture.
- Being present in equanimity and joy



## Objectives (cont.)

Specifically, in this Learning Adventure, we will be exploring:

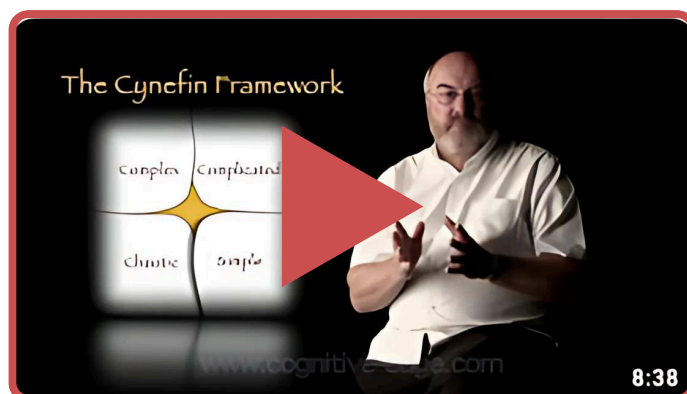
- what each Element has to offer.
- where and when the Elements are beneficial.
- how they may be combined into a helpful sequence.
- how to calibrate each Element – enough, but not too much.

*Make a note of any insights or questions you have at this stage of the Learning Adventure:*

Before we start, it is worth mentioning that, as David Snowden explains using his Cynefin Framework, depending on the complexity of the situation you face, you will need to think differently.

In a complex situation, it is not possible to know in advance what the “right” way forward is. Rather it is necessary to try things (Probe) using “safe-to-fail” experiments, see what happens (Sense) and continually adapt what you do (Respond) as more information becomes available.

**Optional:** Watch the video of David Snowden explaining the model.



# Exploring the Elements

The following is a brief introduction to each of the Elements.

## Re-connecting with nature

“When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time, I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.”

[Wendell Berry \(1934 - \)](#)

In recent centuries, we have come to see ourselves as somehow separate from nature. We need to relearn how to see our cyclical connection to nature. We need to think in ages and cycles.

In practical terms, this could mean spending more time in nature and appreciating it. Experiencing the sun and the rain, the hot and the cold. It could also mean paying more attention to what we consume. To what extent would it be possible to consume less, and to repair, re-use, rot or recycle things?



**How are you already connecting with nature? How do they support you? To what extent could this be an important Element to develop to achieve your NGL? How might you use it?**

*Capture any important insights, shifts you need to make or possible actions to take here:*

## Integrating spirit

“The more you lose yourself in something bigger than yourself, the more energy you will have.”

**Norman Vincent Peale (1898-1983)**

We can conceptualize spirit as a “God”, a larger “consciousness”, an “energy” or “just” something that emerges in or between us. Moving beyond purely rational thinking, **Integrating spirit** can involve an increasing sense of connection with something “greater” and acquiring wisdom from our own or the collective unconscious.

In practice, this could involve e.g.:

- bodywork that is refreshing and centring
- personal habits of prayer / meditation that centre and connect with our True / Higher Self
- rituals in the family, such as gratitude before eating



**How do you experience “spirit”? What practices are you already using? How do they support you? How could you integrate it more? To what extent could this be an important Element to expand or bring into your development of your NGL?**

*Capture any important insights, shifts you need to make or possible actions to take here:*

## Taking things seriously

“Truth is so obscure in these times, and falsehood so established that, unless we love the truth, we cannot know it.”

**Blaise Pascal (1623-62)**

This Element lays the foundation for many of the others. Our human nature tends to avoid realities that are overwhelming. This can be a healthy talent or a dangerous trait.

Some future developments can be tackled when they appear. For others it will too be late to invent a reaction - they need proactive consideration. Start by looking at the facts, Taking things seriously, pondering the consequences for all aspects of life, beyond denial or superficial thinking. This may require having the courage to make tough life decisions, such as changing habits related to health, relationships and consumption.



**In what ways are you already taking things seriously? What tough decisions might you need to take? The fact that you are reading this Learning Adventure implies that you are already curious and open to learning. To what extent could this be an important Element to expand in the development of your NGL? How might you use it?**

*Capture any important insights or possible actions here:*

## Identifying with many We's

"No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

[John Donne \(1572-1631\)](#)

Like a tree, we are never alone. We need to be part of different ecosystems to live and thrive. We are part of social systems and rely on other systems to deliver the food, energy, information and safety that we need. Like trees we have many parts, while being part of other wholes. We do things together - at least with others in mind. Identification often entails defining "others": our nation vs. other nations, our block (e.g. "West") vs. the others, humans vs. the rest of nature. Experiencing larger "WEs" can enable us to transcend egoism so that we can value the needs of others.

For example, in practice, this could mean:

- facilitating dialogue in your family, friends and colleagues.
- looking beyond differences of attitudes and values and fostering solidarity.
- using opportunities to celebrate and spend time together



**With which social and other systems do you identify? To what extent could this be an important Element to bring into your development of your NGL? How might you use it?**

*Capture any important insights, shifts you need to make or possible actions to take here:*



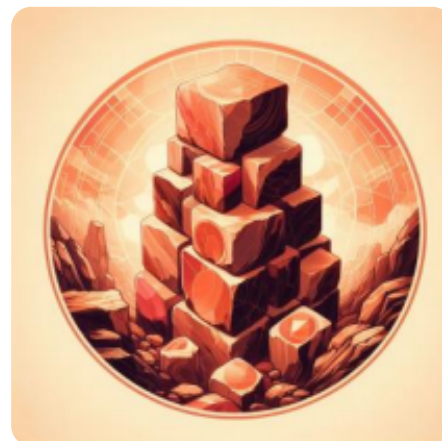
## Taking action

“Take time to deliberate, but when the time for action has arrived, stop thinking and go on.”

[Napoleon Bonaparte \(1769 – 1821\)](#)

Taking action can mean continuing to do things - and it can take a lot of energy to just to persist. It can also mean changing things. This could be changing habits, processes, structures etc. This can involve “technical challenges”, which can be difficult and require specific expertise. Worse still are “adaptive challenges”, where we need to adapt our mindset to enable change to happen.

For example, taking action might include developing skills, reducing dependence on networks of e.g. electricity and water and building financial reserves to reduce fragility.



**What is the balance of reflection and action in your life? Where do you need to take action now? How and when could this be an important Element to bring into your development of your NGL?**

*Capture any important insights, shifts you need to make or possible actions to take here:*

## Innovating in fresh directions

"Innovation is the ability to see change as an opportunity, not a threat."

[Steve Jobs \(1955 – 2011\)](#)

To envision your NGL, develop strategies and identify options, you will need a certain amount of creativity and innovation. The goal is greater resilience or even anti-fragility (where there is gain or strengthening from disruption). When we can let go of old beliefs new things become possible. Innovation entails technological innovations: mechanical, electrical, digital and beyond, but it also entails societal innovations: how to decide and work together, how to share what we have, how to resolve tensions, etc.

For example, what innovations could you bring into your:

- way of making a living?
- patterns of consumption?
- way of relating to yourself and others?



**What beliefs do you have about creativity and innovation? Where and when have you been innovative in your life? What do you need to give up to make way for something new to emerge? To what extent could this be an important Element to bring into your development of your NGL? How might you use it?**

*Capture any important insights, shifts you need to make or possible actions to take here:*

## Questioning assumptions

"If we worked on the assumption that what is accepted as true really is true, then there would be little hope for advance.

**Orville Wright (1871 – 1948)**

As we go about developing our vision of a NGL and a strategy to achieve and maintain it, it is worth taking time to question our assumptions about what is truly important for us.

For example, this could include:

- the type of work that would best suit my needs?
- where to live: how much space do I really need?
- how to get around: do I need to own a car?
- what to wear: do they all need to be new?
- what to eat: can I reduce meat or processed food?
- what brings joy to your life?



**As you think about your NGL what assumptions might you be making that are holding you back? To what extent could this be an important Element to bring into your development of your NGL? How might you use it?**

*Capture any important insights, shifts you need to make or possible actions to take here:*

## Seeing Patterns and the Big Picture

“It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts.”

**Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859 – 1930).**

Before starting to explore a strategy and plan, it is important to take time to bring your analytical capabilities to bear to explore your context, how things are related, the systems you are part of and the processes that are unfolding. It can be helpful to start experimenting with different scenarios.

For example, if temperatures continue to rise, how could that affect the movement of people. What impact might that have on the demand for and hence the price of housing in your region? What impact might that have on social and political stability?



**As you think about your NGL where might it be helpful to gather more data and get different perspectives? To what extent could this be an important Element to bring into your development of your NGL? How might you use it?**

*Capture any important insights, shifts you need to make or possible actions to take here:*

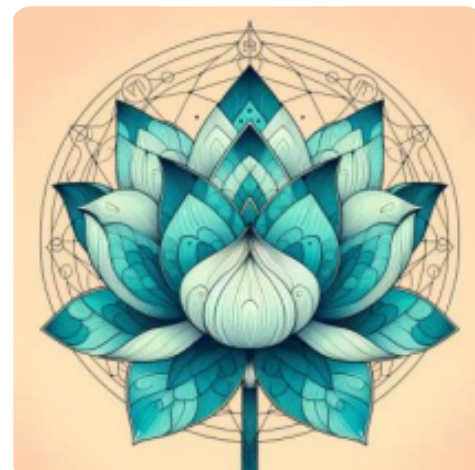
## Being Present in Equanimity and Joy

“All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone.”

[Blaise Pascal \(1623-62\)](#)

Many of the above Elements invite us to think and do. To balance this, it is necessary to take time to pause, to be present and at peace in the “Now”. Make space for what is there within you and outside you. Let it come and let it go. Experience the sensations, thoughts and emotions that arise and flow by if we do not cling to them.

For example, it may be helpful to start or develop a meditative practice, avoid clinging to a role, social position or a standard of living and look for relationships with people and / or communities that have achieved some form of inner peace.



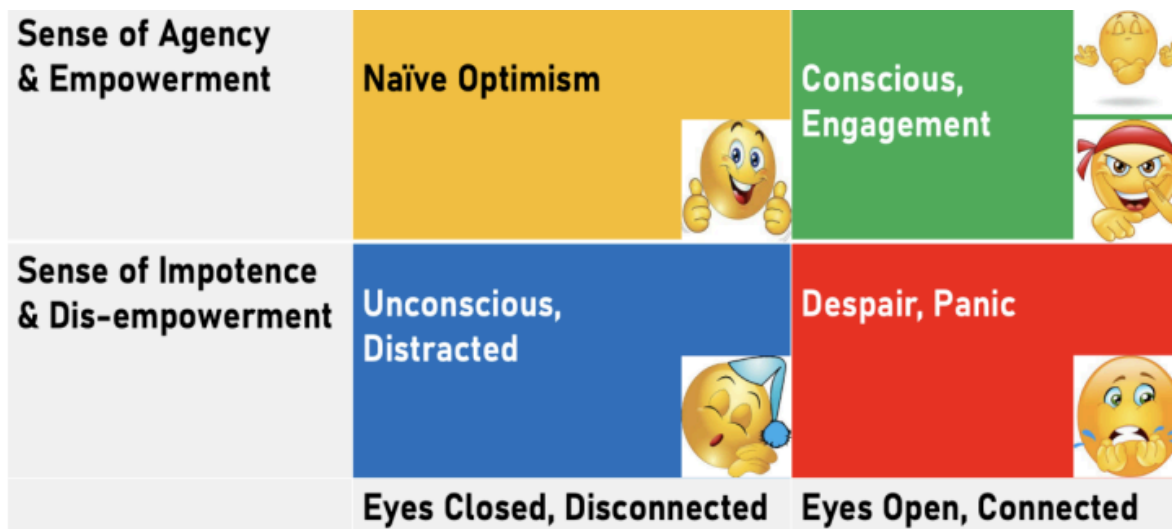
**What practices, such as mindfulness, are you already using? How do they support you? To what extent could this be an important Element to expand or bring into your development of your NGL? How might you use it?**

*Capture any important insights or possible actions here:*

# Choosing Elements

## Based on your current stance

In Learning Adventure LAi3 – we explored four broad stances that all of us probably adopt at one stage or another when facing significant challenges:



Depending on where you find yourself in the four quadrants, certain Elements can be more helpful.

For example, if you find yourself in the:

**Lower-right quadrant - (Despair/Panic) - helpful Elements to start with could be:**

- “Reconnecting with nature” e.g. spending more time in and appreciating nature.
- “Integrating spirit” e.g. practising breathwork or meditation to become more centred.

**Lower-left quadrant - (Unconscious/Distracted!) - helpful Elements to start with could be:**

- “Taking things seriously” e.g. looking at the facts and reflecting on consequences.
- “Seeing patterns and big picture” e.g. exploring how local challenges are connected with more global issues.

**Upper-left quadrant - (Naïve Optimism) - helpful Elements to start with could be:**

- “Questioning assumptions” e.g. checking whether fundamental beliefs and assumptions are valid in the light of the “facts”.
- “Taking action” e.g. consider some immediate actions on “low hanging fruit” to build momentum.

**Upper-right quadrant - (Conscious Engagement) - helpful Elements to start with could be:**

- “Being present in equanimity and joy” e.g. balancing action by taking time to pause, to be present and at peace in the “Now”.
- “Innovating in fresh directions” e.g. exploring how new innovations could help you move towards your NGL

## Combining Elements

Individual Elements may be used on their own or combined into a sequence.

One approach to combining the Elements is to consider them in relation to a problem-solving process. You can think of a problem as a gap between what you would like (explored in Learning Adventure LAi1) and your current situation. If you use the Elements in a typical problem-solving process, the sequence could look like the following:

**Problem identification** – analysing the situation:

- “Taking things seriously” – to gather the salient facts.
- “Reconnecting with nature” – e.g. to pay attention to your consumption.
- “Identifying the many WEs” – to better understand your relationships.
- “Seeing patterns and big picture” – to better understand the context.
- “Questioning assumptions” – to test whether your assumptions are correct.

**Solution Finding:**

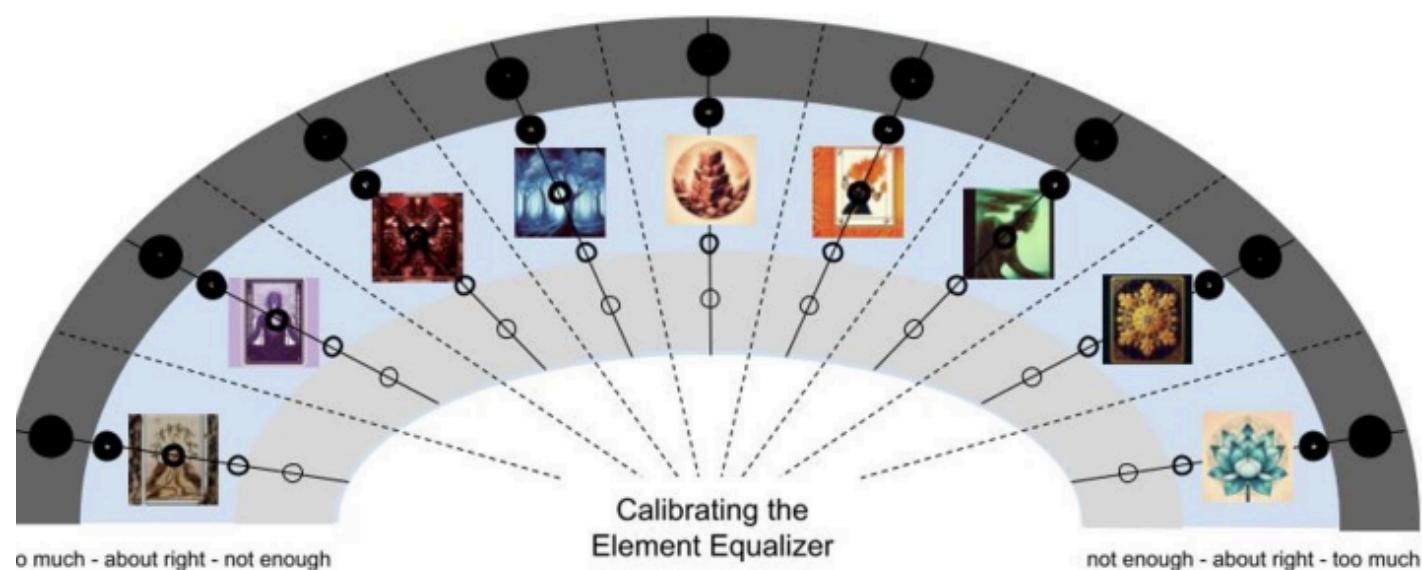
- “Integrating spirit” – to create a mental state that is conducive to creativity.
- “Innovating in fresh directions” – to explore new solutions or strategies.

**Implementation:**

- “Taking action” – to implement your ideas/strategy.
- “Being present in equanimity and joy” – to remain in a resourceful state as you put your plan into action.

## Calibrating Elements

Remember amplifiers with graphic equalisers to calibrate the sound? The graphic equaliser can serve as a useful metaphor for the NGL Elements.



We can think of 5 positions for each Element: Not enough, Minimum, Balanced, Maximum and Too Much. Imbalance can arise, for example, when we develop the capacity for new Elements, we may neglect other Elements.

Here are some possible warning signs that you might be focusing too much on a particular Element:

1. "Reconnecting with nature": rejecting all that human culture has created.
2. "Integrating spirit": in the extreme, spirituality can lead to non-rational thinking.
3. "Taking things seriously": focusing only on the shadows with no time for fun / enjoyment.
4. "Identifying the many WEs": over-focusing on others' needs and not enough on our own.
5. "Taking action": too much doing and not enough time for reflecting or just being.
6. "Innovating in fresh directions": believing that innovation alone will "save" you / us.
7. "Questioning assumptions": too much questioning can lead to uncertainty and paralysis.
8. "Seeing patterns and big picture": being overwhelmed with abstractions / unable to act.
9. "Being present in equanimity and joy": thinking "everything is wonderful, suffering has a purpose and there is no need to interfere".

**Give yourself a score for each of the Elements:**

Element	Not Enough	Minimum	Balanced	Maximum	Too Much
Reconnecting with nature					
Integrating spirit					
Taking things seriously					
Identifying the many WEs					
Taking action					
Innovating in fresh directions					
Questioning assumptions					
Seeing patterns & big picture					
Being present in equanimity & joy					

**On which Elements might you be focusing too little or too much? What action might you take?**

*Capture any important insights or possible actions here:*



It's also worth mentioning that achieving your NGL will not just be about identifying and solving problems. It will also include more effectively balancing polarities. Polarities are interdependent and complementary aspects or values. Important polarities in creating your NGL could include:

- Using Analysis – Using Intuition
- Working – Resting
- Doing – Reflecting
- Being Authoritative – Being Collaborative
- Being Assertive (own needs) – Being Helpful (others' needs)

For more information on how to identify and better manage polarities, please see the separate links to the video on polarities and polarity management below.

## Reflection

In this Learning Adventure, you have started to explore how the different Elements can be used to help you develop your NGL that is more resilient in the face of the global Shadows. Before moving on, reflect on the following questions:

- How do you feel now after completing this Learning Adventure?
- What are your top 3-4 take-aways? What actions do you plan to take?
- Has this Learning Adventure had any impact on your driving questions?

*Capture any important insights or possible actions here:*

# Support

If you would like to speak with someone about thoughts or emotions stirred by this Learning Adventure, or to join our community, please reach out to us at [support@mynewgoodlife.com](mailto:support@mynewgoodlife.com)

# References

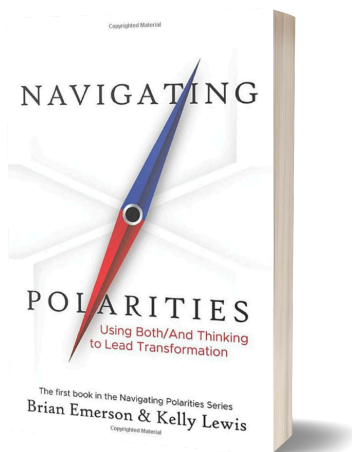
## Websites:

[New Good Life](#)

[What is a Polarity?](#)

## Books:

Emerson, Brian & Lewis, Kelly: Navigating Polarities: ISBN 978-1-7333828-0-9



## Appendix 1 – Karin’s Case Study (Part 4)

The following is part 4 of a fictional case study that is intended to illustrate the process outlined in this Learning Adventure. It follows on from parts 1 - 3 included in Learning Adventures LAi1 - LAi3.

When Karin started to reflect on which of the Elements to start with it occurred to her that she had already started to question many of her assumptions. So, she decided to start with the Element – **Questioning Assumptions** using the Automatic Writing tool that she had learnt in Learning adventure LAi1. Key assumptions were:

- I will always be able to rely on a consistent and affordable supply of electricity, gas, water and internet connection.
- I will be able to work as a program manager for the remainder of my career.
- The supermarket will always have plentiful supplies of food.
- The wonderful Belgian health system will continue to provide me with prompt and effective care.
- The official retirement age will remain at 67.
- The Belgian government will be able to meet its pension commitments.

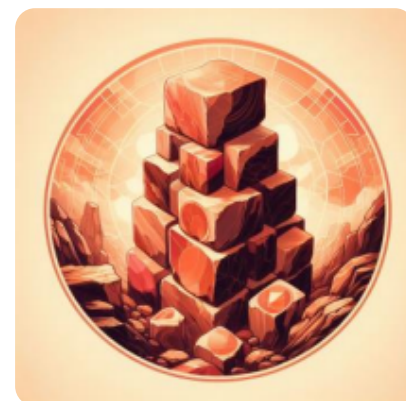


After completing the exercise Karin could feel her heart racing as she started to question the assumptions on which her NGL depended. She could sense the temptation to try to numb herself with busyness. Scanning the list of Elements, she recognised that her immediate need was **Reconnecting with Nature**.

Karin decided to take Maggie for a walk. She grabbed Maggie’s harness and was soon on the short walk through the fields to the beech forest beyond. As she walked, her head started to clear, and she felt greater peace. She had already started to capture some possible actions in Learning Adventure 3. She desperately wanted time both to think and to enjoy time with herself and her family. She decided to discuss her wish to reduce her work hours with her boss. And made a commitment to herself to work on her physical and mental fitness and to look for ways to simplify her life.



As soon as she returned from her walk, Karin created a *12-week year* action plan. She had used this approach before and knew that it would help her to focus. Chris could see how tired Karin had become, so getting his buy-in to her action plan was easy. Her boss eventually agreed to allow her to move to an 80% contract and pending the start of her new work schedule she took some of the leave she had accumulated. This allowed her to start to build her fitness, while reconnecting with nature. She signed up for a mental fitness programme and started to incorporate periods of mindfulness into her day.



By the end of the 12 weeks, she was feeling more energised and positive about her ability to build an NGL, despite the global Shadows.

For her next 12-week period, Karin decided to focus on the Elements “Taking things seriously” and “Identifying the many We’s”

The work she had undertaken in the first 12 weeks had built her confidence to the point where she felt able to explore the global Shadows in more depth. She signed up with the MyNewGoodLife community, which allowed her to share her hopes and fears with like-minded people and gave her access to more resources. The facts were not always easy for her to handle, but her regular connection with nature and mindfulness practice enabled her to cope. She held off talking to Chris in any detail about the global Shadows until surer of her facts. She feared he would be sceptical, but now felt more confident to be able to explain her concerns clearly.



Karin identified the following groups with which she felt most affinity:

- Immediate family: Chris, Lisa and Steven
- Extended family: her sister Els and brothers Yannick and Joris together with her nieces, nephews and cousins
- A network of friends both old and new
- Her local community, neighbours, local business owners
- Work colleagues
- Belgians
- Europeans



Although she had not planned it, Karin found herself talking to Chris about what she had been learning and how she felt. This conversation soon extended to the whole family and they ended up reflecting together on what their collective vision for a NGL could be.

After a long conversation, they came up with several ideas to spend more time together as a family, reduce costs (to compensate for Karin’s lower income) and lessen their environmental impact e.g.:

- limiting screen time for non-school / work reasons.
- regular walks, cycling and growing their own vegetables.
- rewilding part of their garden to provide more opportunities for local wildlife whilst reducing time needed to mow the lawn.
- using bikes for short journeys rather than the car.
- taking holidays in Europe to avoid expensive and CO2 heavy long-haul flights.



At the end of the 6-month period, Karin was feeling fitter and far more relaxed. She noticed that with her greater connection with nature and her mindfulness practice, she was already getting a taste of the Element “Being Present in Equanimity and Joy”. The family was more together, and they had made some first steps to reducing their environmental impact. Karin felt optimistic that they were on track to achieve their NGL and far better prepared to face whatever challenges the future may hold.