

Academic Paper

# Navigating the Necessary Negative: Introducing the empirically developed Clarity Compass & Clarity Cards to guide the exploration of our thoughts and emotions

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## Abstract

Humans are facing a global mental health crisis. The need to navigate the unseen yet influential forces of our thoughts and emotions has never been greater. This study employs Q-methodology to explore and reveal our subjective inner landscape. Through rigorous systematic collection and condensing of a range of diverse views and opinions on the thoughts and emotions associated with the goal pursuit journey, a set of 40 Clarity Cards were generated. Via participant sorting and factor analysis, four distinct patterns of thoughts and emotions were revealed, and the Clarity Compass framework developed. Findings highlight the normalcy of self-doubt, overwhelm, anxiety and stress in goal pursuit, and the need to navigate these necessary 'negatives' to create *springboard states*. The Clarity Compass and Clarity Cards are offered as a tool to guide this inner world exploration.

## Keywords

Q methodology, coaching tools, thoughts, emotions, goals

## Article history

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## Introduction

There has been an alarming rise in negative emotions on a global scale with stress, sadness, anger, and worry reaching record highs in Gallup's tracking (2021), a trend that persisted into 2023 (Gallup, 2023). The urgent need for practical interventions to support mental wellness and alleviate the ongoing mental health crisis has never been greater. However, there is a dearth of empirical research and conceptual work revealing the interplay between our thoughts and emotions. By leveraging Q-methodology, a valuable tool for exploring subjective experiences (Churruca et al., 2021) thoughts and emotions are empirically revealed in a new way. The findings equip individuals

and groups with a comprehensive framework designed to facilitate deeper exploration of thoughts and emotions with a simple and systematic navigation process – the Clarity Compass and Clarity Cards. Finally the normalcy of ‘negative’ emotions is discussed with the option to translate these into *springboard states* and a formula for goal success is proposed.

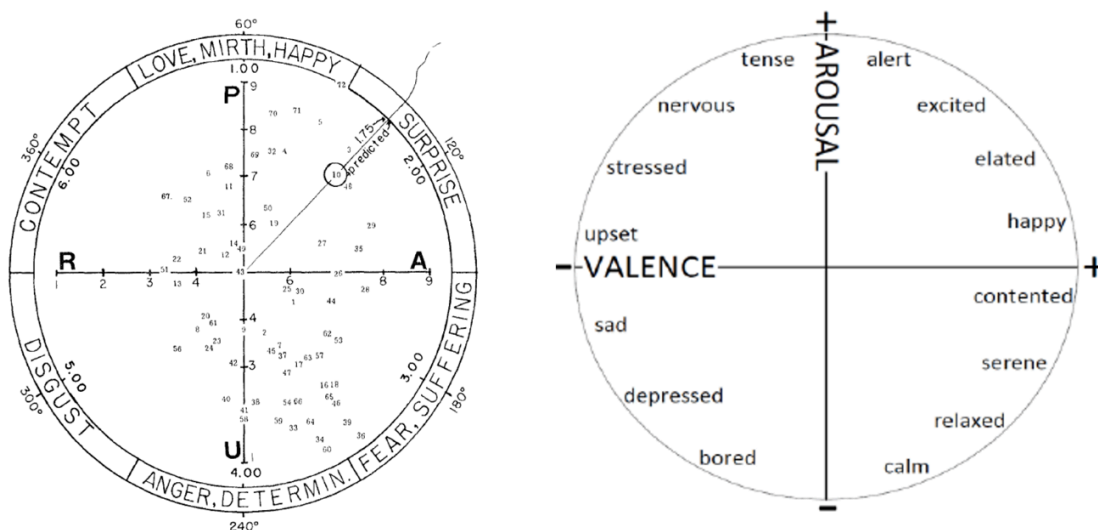
## Literature Review

### Theories of Emotion

Throughout human history, the realm of human cognition has often taken centre stage, overshadowing the complex world of emotions. Traditionally, emotions were viewed as disruptive or irrational, receiving minimal attention in scholarly discourse (Bachkirova & Cox, 2007; Wager & Barrett, 2017). Yet, as Ortony, Clore and Collins (1988) eloquently put it, emotions serve as the silent, unseen orchestrators of our lives, infusing every action and interaction with nuanced subtexts. They can propel us forward or hold us back, shape our motivations, and focus our attention (Diener et al., 2020; Ford & Gross, 2019). However, despite their profound influence, research on emotions has often been side-lined due to perceived difficulties in measurement and definition (Dukes et al., 2021). According to Russell (2003) it is emotions that remain the most mysterious, with emotion management being proposed by Patel & Patel (2019) as one of the most important, but least examined concerns in medicine.

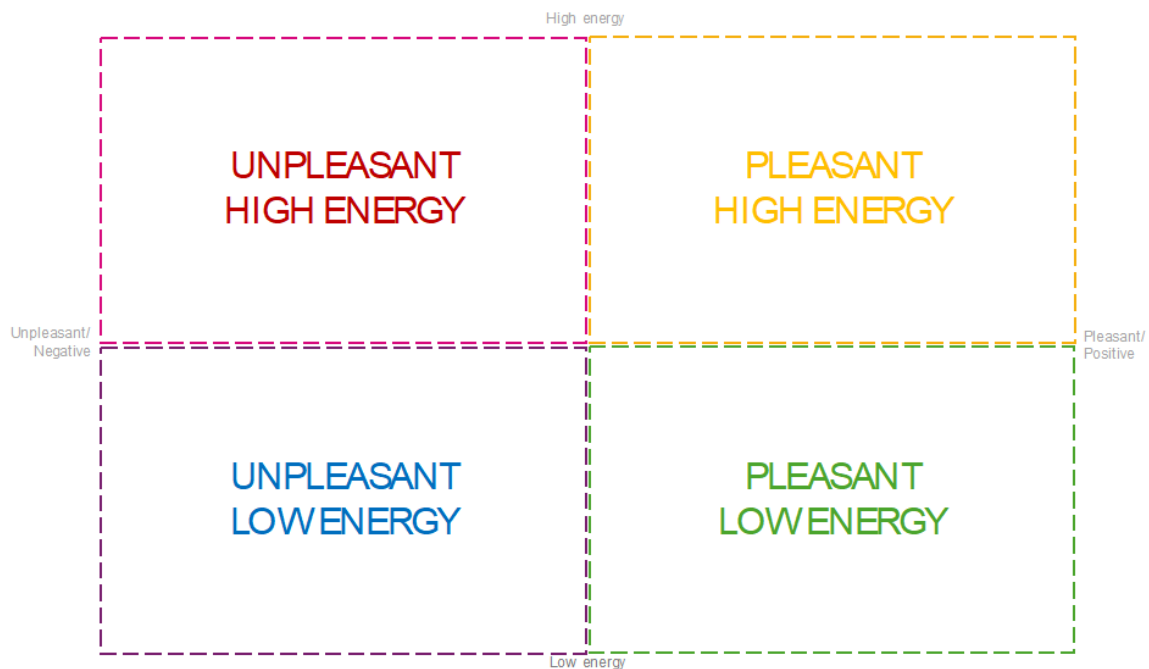
Definitions of emotions vary greatly, and the only consensus is that there is no agreed upon definition (Brown, 2021; Damasio, 1999). Three main theories of emotions were examined to decide on the most appropriate for this endeavour: i) *Constructed Theory of Emotion*: suggesting emotions are not hardwired within us but are rather shaped by our social and cultural experiences (Pober, 2018). ii) *Cognitive Theory of Emotion*: emphasising the impact of our perceptions, values, and beliefs on our emotional responses. iii) *Evolutionary Theory of Emotions* proposing that emotions are primary and independent of cognition, meaning they are instinctual responses designed to help us survive and navigate our environment (Bechara et al., 2000; Joseph, 2015). In this study, the Constructed Theory of Emotion was particularly relevant, informing the labelling of emotions in the context of goal pursuit.

**Figure 1: Schlosberg's Two dimension of emotions (1952) & Russell's Circumplex Model of Affect (1980)**



Woodworth's (1938) Circumplex Model of Affect lay the groundwork for understanding affective experiences, allowing individuals to self-report emotions. Figure 1 shows Schlosberg's (1952) refinements to Woodworth's model informed by factor analysis to identify interconnected affective dimensions of pleasure (vertical axis) and attention (horizontal axis), represented in this spatial model. Furthermore, Russell's (1980) Affect Grid built on this structured approach to assessing affect by using the dimensions of arousal (vertical axis) and pleasantness (horizontal axis) (Stanisławski et al., 2021). Expanding on these frameworks, this study created a Combined Thought and Emotion Grid (Figure 2), to map the thoughts and emotions generated in Step 1 of the research.

**Figure 2: Combined Thought and Emotion Grid (Author's own - based on Russell, 1980)**



In the landscape of psychological inquiry, much attention has been devoted to 'negative' emotions, with a particular focus on psychological distress such as stress and depression with positive psychology attempting to redress the balance from the late 1990's (Hogendoorn et al., 2010; Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014; Seligman, 1998; Wong, 2011). This skewed emphasis underscores the need for a more balanced and cohesive understanding of thoughts and emotions (Wright, 2014).

## Thoughts and self-talk

Thoughts and self-talk, both facets of cognition, wield significant influence over our pursuit of goals. Self-talk, or the internal dialogue we engage in, plays a pivotal role in our ability to achieve goals and positive outcomes in life. Our inner voices, though instrumental in evaluating past experiences and planning for the future, can sometimes hinder our ability to function effectively, especially during challenging moments (Kross, 2021; Orvell et al., 2019). While introspection is essential for self-awareness and goal achievement, excessive self-criticism can lead to detrimental outcomes (Walter et al., 2019). This study explored the nuances of self-talk, focusing primarily on its valence from positive or negative (Hardy, 2006). However, it is important to acknowledge the diverse variants of self-talk, including those related to self-efficacy and the use of personal pronouns (Dickens et al., 2018). For example Hardy, Roberts and Hardy (2009) claim thoughts related to self-efficacy, and beliefs about one's own capabilities are often associated with 'I am' self-talk

statements. Automatic thoughts are spontaneous and often unconscious thoughts that can shape our motivation, self-efficacy, and persistence (Kazdin, 1990; Netemeyer et al., 2002). The Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire (ATQ), developed by Beck (1995) as part of the cognitive theory of depression (Beck et al., 1961; Hollon & Kendall, 1980) contributed a variety of statements to this study such as 'What's the point?' and 'I'm not good enough'.

Despite advancements in various domains such as health, sport, education, business, clinical science, and coaching, a comprehensive theoretical model that combines both thoughts and emotions remains elusive. While existing models like Edgerton and Palmer's (2005) SPACE model of Cognitive Behavioural Coaching and Burgess and Haaga's (1994) inclusion of positive and negative automatic thoughts offer insights into the relationship between these concepts, they do not map thoughts and emotions collectively or with equal merit. Similarly, Brackett's (2019) Mood Meter and the Circumplex of Emotions provide frameworks for understanding emotions but exclude thoughts. This study explores the thoughts and emotions associated with goal achievement using Q-Methodology to contribute to knowledge within this gap.

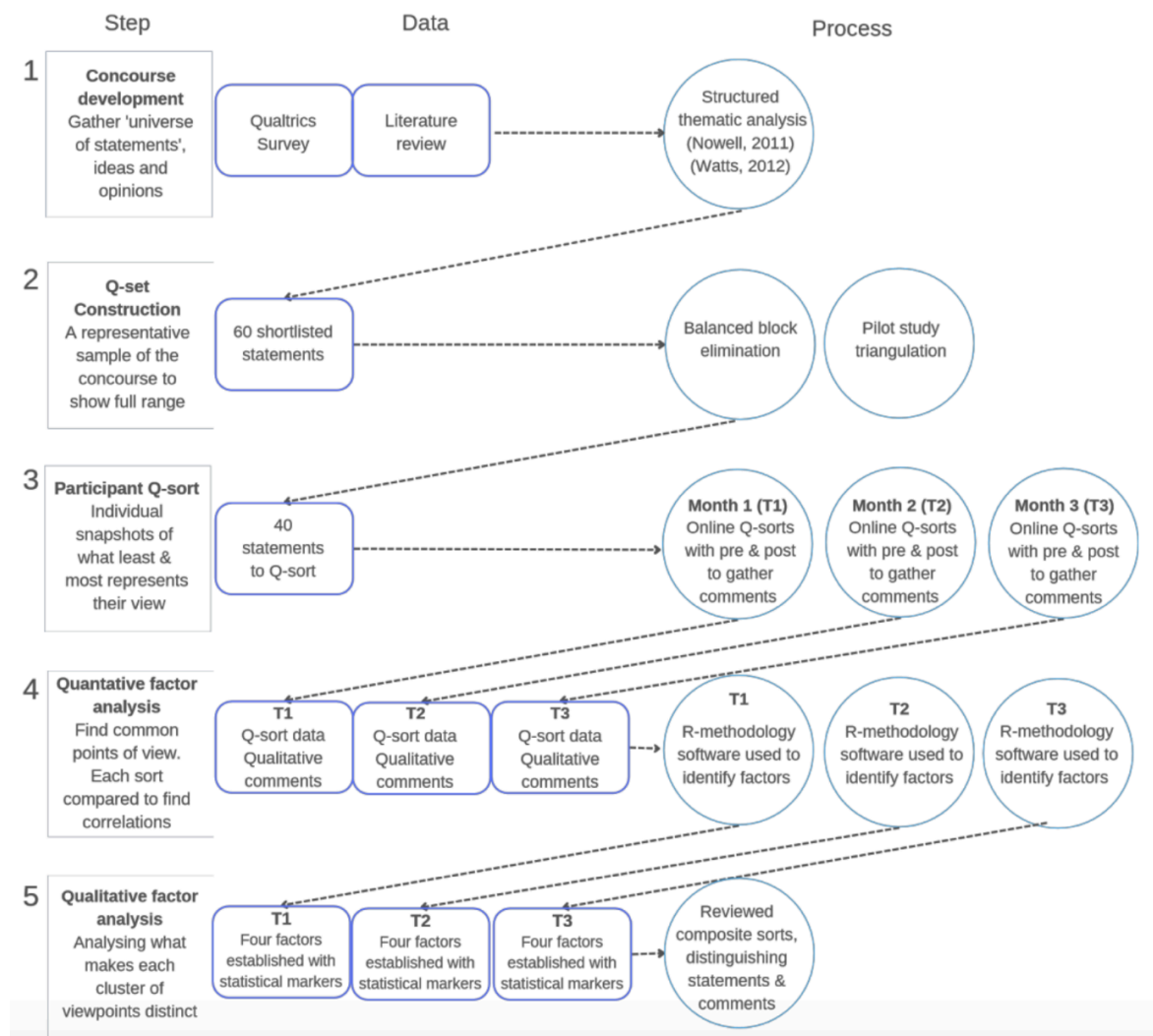
## Research Method

### Rationale for Q Methodology

Progress in studying emotion and thought can be difficult and fraught with criticism due to the complex nature and unpredictability of the subjects, context, and phenomena (Tamir et al., 2013). Thus, the recognition of Q-Methodology as a valuable mode of investigation into the complex issues of human subjectivity is one this study aimed to leverage (Churrua et al., 2021). Q methodology is a research methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques to study subjectivity and explore individual viewpoints (Ramlo, 2016). It provides a structured and systematic approach to studying opinions and exploring individual viewpoints on a particular topic, allowing researchers to capture the complexity and diversity of perspectives within a population and identify common patterns or factors underlying these viewpoints (Stephenson, 1935; Watts & Stenner, 2005).

The specific Q-Methodology steps undertaken for this study are shown in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Research Process showing the steps of Q Methodology (Author's own)



## 1) Concourse Development

The research began by collecting the concourse to compile a 'universe' of statements representing the inner thoughts and emotions associated with the goal pursuit journey. Drawing from two primary sources, a Qualtrics survey and a literature review, the concourse was enriched with a diverse array of perspectives (Stephenson, 1952). A structured and balanced block approach was adopted to ensure a comprehensive representation of subjective experiences by mapping the statements into the well-established model of pleasantness/valence and arousal/energy shown in Figure 2 (Exel & Graaf, 2005).

## 2) Q-Set Construction

The initial pool of 322 statements underwent rigorous refinement to create a Q-Set representing a wide range of voices and opinions. Steps included eliminating redundancy, prioritising salience, and ensuring a balanced mix of positively and negatively worded statements (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2011; Umbach & Lyons, 1997). To enhance the validity and comprehensiveness, multiple cycles of peer validation were employed (Webler et al., 2009). Through these iterative cycles of review, validation, and feedback, the Q-Set evolved into a robust collection of 60 statements, ready for further refinement (Webler, Danielson and Tuler, 2009b; Brown, 1996a). To streamline and

optimise the statements for Step 3 participant Q-sorting a pilot study was conducted to assess the feasibility and clarity of the statements for the Q-Sort process. Insights from the pilot study informed further refinement of the Q-Set, resulting in a final set of 40 statements, 10 in each quadrant of the Thoughts and Emotion Grid shown in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4: The final 40 Q-Set Statements created using a structured, balanced block approach.**

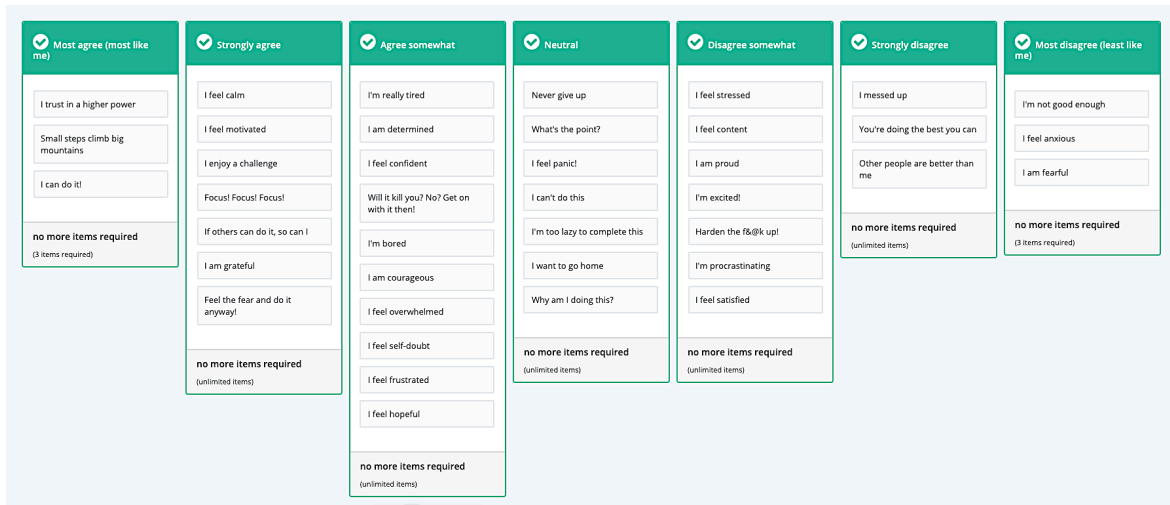


It is important to note that all statements in this study are constructs subject to individual interpretations and experiences. The situational appropriateness and potential advantages of displaying certain emotional states vary for each individual and are beyond the scope of this study's discussion (Barrett, 2017).

### 3) Participant Q Sort (data collection)

19 'Step 3' participants sorted all 40 statements into a forced distribution curve, from 'most like me' to 'least like me', at the beginning, middle and end of a three-month goal pursuit journey. QSortTouch online software was used gathering a total of 57 Q-Sorts to provide the data required for quantitative factor analysis in Step 4. An example Q-Sort is shown in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: An example Q-Sort showing distribution from most like me to least like me.



#### 4) Quantitative Factor Analysis

Step 4 factor analysis identified four factors or viewpoints with statistical validity as shown in Table 1. For each of the three time points thorough data analysis was performed to establish the optimum number of factors. The number of factors that emerges could not have been known in advance as it is wholly dependent on the individual inputs of the Q-sorters and the empirical process (Zabala, 2014). There are regularly used quantitative criteria proposed by Q-methodology to establish how many factors to analyse for example Eigenvalues, the number of participants loading on to each factor and the levels of correlation. To ensure validity the automated software outputs for 3, 4 and 5 factor solutions at each time point were carefully reviewed and a four factor (or viewpoint) model was identified as the most statistically viable option.

Table 1: Statistical validity for choice of four factors.

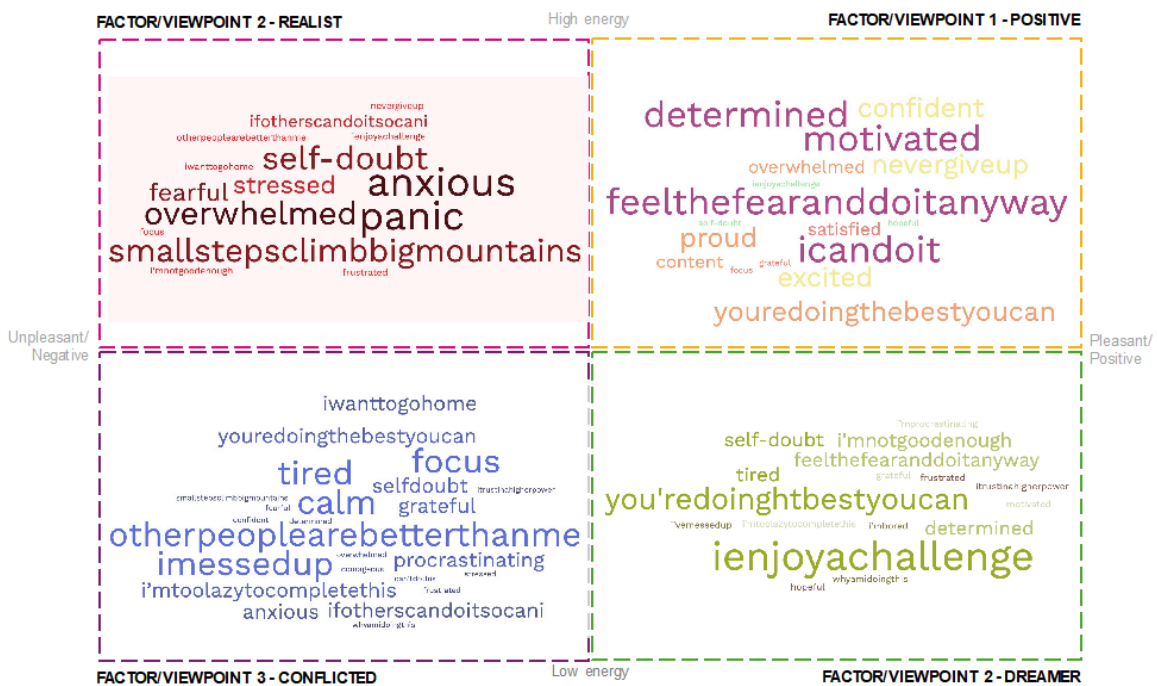
#### 5) Qualitative factor analysis and interpretation

Factor interpretation is the final step of data analysis to construct a qualitative description of the viewpoints expressed. A crib sheet was used to systematically analyse each of the four viewpoints consistently and in detail. This tool, designed by Simon Watts (2005), ensures that the importance and location of each statement in all factors is subjected to the same rigorous procedure, not just the characterising or distinguishing statements (Plummer, 2012). Word clouds also offer a methodologically advantageous way of presenting the additional data this longitudinal study has produced, in addition to the traditional tables and numerical formats that can overwhelm all but avid Q-Methodologists.

## Findings

The Four View Framework reveals the Positive, Realist, Dreamer and Conflicted Views that underpin the Clarity Compass. Each of the four factors has distinct characteristics based on the 'most like me' thought and emotion and distinguishing statements that occurred most frequently from each viewpoint as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Four viewpoints from factors analysis with a word cloud showing most frequently chosen 'most like me' statements in each view.



Whilst the statement 'clouds' shown may not align perfectly with the energy & pleasantness quadrants there are synergies that are clearly visible in this format. The findings also include establishing the thoughts and emotions associated with goal achievement, which in order of frequency are: 'I feel self-doubt', 'I can do it', 'I enjoy a challenge', 'I am grateful', 'I am courageous', 'If others can do it, so can I', 'I feel overwhelmed', 'I feel stressed' and 'I am determined'.

For the goal achievers there were no negative thoughts, a higher number of trait-like 'I am' pleasant statements than for those who did not achieve their goal e.g. 'I am grateful', 'I am courageous', 'I am determined' with the unpleasant statements being 'I feel' statements e.g. 'I feel self-doubt' and 'I feel anxious' indicating these may be temporary and manageable in the moment. As Hardy et al (2009b) claim, the choice of I am statements may relate to high self-efficacy and belief about one's own abilities, suggesting a more permanent positive identity construct of *being* grateful and courageous, in contrast to the more temporary feeling states of self-doubt and anxiety.

All of the 'negative', high energy 'Realists' experiencing self-doubt, overwhelm and anxiousness at the beginning of the journey went on to achieve their goals and shifted to a position with greater pleasantness, whilst only a third of the 'Positive' participants and a quarter of the positive thinking 'Dreamers' achieved theirs. 15 of the 19 participants changed views during their goal pursuit journey.

The Four View Framework including Positive, Realist, Dreamer and Conflicted Views implies the emotions and thoughts experienced may not reflect the belief that positive thinking is the best or only route to goal attainment.

The findings also include the 40 Q-Set statements shown in Figure 4 subsequently developed into full colour, illustrated Clarity Cards (see Appendix 1 for full set).



## Discussion

### Normalising and Navigating Negative Emotions

The findings highlight the normalcy of experiencing negative emotions during the pursuit of goals. Many participants found solace in the realisation that their thoughts and emotions were shared by others, and they were not alone. This awareness opens the door for reframing, acceptance, and even embracing discomfort as an integral part of the journey toward meaningful achievements (Woolley & Fishbach, 2022). This study reinforces Ford et al's (2018) findings that negative thoughts and emotions are widespread. Notably, 62% of the statements deemed most agreeable or strongly agreeable were emotions, while only 38% were thoughts, underscoring the significant role of emotions in striving for goals. This suggests that emotions, especially negative ones, play a more substantial role than previously proposed (Grant & O'Connor, 2018; Mejia & Hooker, 2017). When examined from a broader, gestalt perspective, as is consistent with standard Q-Methodology practices, the results align with Ford and Gross (2019) and Diener et al. (2020), emphasising that both positive and negative emotions can propel us into action and motivate us toward achieving our goals. The study also reveals that individuals who achieved their goals expressed higher energy levels compared to those who did not, deepening the importance of considering the impact of energy, both positive and negative on goal attainment (Baker, 2019; D. R. Hawkins, 2002; R. M. Hawkins et al., 2020).

The findings, which show a balance across the dimensions of energy and pleasantness, resonate with the dialectic nature of well-being i.e. positive cannot exist without negative, the light cannot exist without the dark. The findings suggest that we all have a 'dark side', most people experience negative states, and that negative states are unavoidable with a role to play in goal achievement (Kashdan and Biswas-Diener, 2014; Ivtzan et al., 2015). However, it's essential to recognise that while this study intended to unify thoughts and emotions, it still perpetuated the separation of positive and negative, a psychological phenomenon known as 'splitting,' which can be detrimental. Instead of trying to eliminate negative states, Gilbert and Choden (2014) propose that engaging with them, integrating them, and transforming them, can be a path to healing. Many individuals attempt to suppress negative states, ironically leading to a greater frequency of those states. In contrast, this study suggests that evaluating and purposefully utilising negative states as tools to energise and motivate may lead to higher goal outcomes (Weidman and Kross, 2020). In addition, accepting negative emotions without judgment may result in psychological health benefits (Ford et al., 2018). Acknowledging unpleasant thoughts and emotions can facilitate recovery after distressing events, yet their role in goal pursuit may have been overlooked. Negative emotions are necessary for growth and should be embraced as signs of progress (David et al., 2016; Grant, 2016; Netzer et al., 2015).

### Is there an upside to stress, anxiety, and self-doubt?

This study highlights specific 'unpleasant' emotions like stress, anxiety, self-doubt and overwhelm, which consistently emerge throughout the goal pursuit journey for both achievers and non-achievers, warranting further discussion (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006; Rassin et al., 2000; Richards & Gross, 1999).

While pinpointing any single thought or emotion is challenging, this study suggests that the unpleasantness of emotions like anxiety, stress, and self-doubt could serve as necessary energetic catalysts or '*springboard states*' and the away-from motivation necessary for progress toward a goal.

Some individuals claim to perform better under stress, and those who can utilise anxiety and stress as motivators, coupled with positive thoughts such as 'I can do it' and 'I enjoy a challenge', are

more likely to achieve their goals (Strack et al., 2017). As Crum *et al.*, (2017) and previous research suggests, altering evaluations of stress and similar states can enhance performance. However, the belief that there is a 'growing plague' of stress (Crum et al., 2013) and the dominant cultural evaluations that stress is bad (Crum et al., 2020) still predicate. This is despite the alternative views of scholars such as McGonigal and Epstein (2015), who suggest that there is an upside to stress, and as the results indicate - that stress has a positive role to play in goal attainment. Whilst Crum, Salovey and Achor (2013) suggest that a 'stress-is enhancing' mindset is a distinct and meaningful variable in determining the stress response, typically there is a desire within organisations to reduce and manage stress and anxiety, rather than considering how beliefs about stress (and I would suggest anxiety, overwhelm and self-doubt), may positively or negatively impact performance, as (Smith et al., 2020) propose. However, when working with anxious individuals, it is crucial to provide a duty of care to consider accompanying thoughts and emotions and their duration and root causes to ensure appropriate support is offered. The notion that coaching can reduce anxiety and stress has been reported as a benefit, but further investigation, awareness and training may be required (Grant, 2020; Soosalu et al., 2018).

## Positive Thinking and 'Springboard' States

The broaden and build theory suggests that positive emotions broaden our experiences and build psychological resources, leading to increased awareness and fostering novel thoughts and actions (Fredrickson, 1998, 2013, 2004; Grant & O'Connor, 2018). Positive emotions are also proposed to enhance cognitive, affective, and physical resilience (Cox et al., 2018; Fredrickson, 2011). The findings suggest that positive thinking contributes to goal achievement, but perhaps not as significantly as initially assumed. Participants who achieved their goals often used positive, confidence-boosting statements like 'I am determined/courageous' alongside thoughts aimed at self-regulation (Bülbül, 2020). However, this positive thinking was not exclusive of negative emotions revealing an intriguing dynamic between thoughts and emotions, as observed in models like Cognitive Behavioural and Emotion-Focused approaches (Timulak et al., 2018). Motivational and positive statements aimed at boosting confidence and regulating effort, such as '*I can do it*' and '*I enjoy a challenge*,' were prevalent among both goal achievers and non-achievers. However, it is noteworthy that '*I can do it*' was absent among those who did not achieve their goals. Additionally, the self-talk of those who did not achieve their goals, characterised by phrases like '*You're doing the best you can*,' differed from the more immersed '*If others can do it, so can I*' self-talk of goal achievers (Kross et al., 2014; Orvell et al., 2021). This underscores how subtle shifts in language, like using 'I am', 'You are' or 'I feel,' can impact outcomes. According to Dolcos and Albarracín (2014) this ability to self-distance can work well when analysing negative experiences through self-reflection. Son *et al*'s (2011) study into first and third-person self-talk suggests that using the personal pronoun 'you' offers a linguistic device to shift the focus of a self-talk, enabling better behaviour evaluation and this can be a useful device when using the Clarity Cards. While positive self-regulating thoughts like '*I can do it*' and '*I enjoy a challenge*' do contribute to goal attainment, feelings of self-doubt and anxiety seem to play an equally or even more significant role. These combinations of positive thinking and unpleasant emotions could create what this study terms 'springboard states' for goal achievement which could be expressed as a formula such as:

**Positive identity 'I am' statements + unpleasant activating feelings = goal success**

e.g. I am courageous + I feel self-doubt = 'springboard state' for goal success.

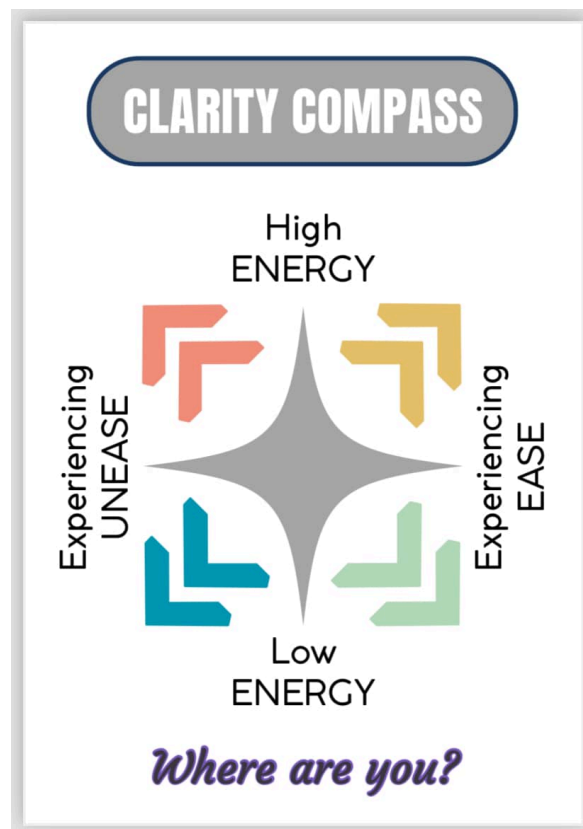
## From labelling of positive and negative to experiencing ease and unease

The study implies that what are commonly perceived as 'negative' emotions may indeed be integral to the goal achievement process for some participants, while others may prioritise immediate positive experiences and hedonic states. Participant comments from those who achieved their goals indicate that positive emotions, especially determination, play a significant role in the journey

of goal pursuit. However, it is worth noting that negative emotions like anxiety and anger can also serve a constructive purpose, such as fuelling cognitive work and defining boundaries (Schwartz, 2021; Wang et al., 2018). While positive emotions broaden experience and build psychological resources (Brown et al., 2013) negative emotions can provide focus and attention. This challenges the traditional view that minimising unpleasant emotions and maximising pleasant ones leads to happiness. Instead, a more balanced valuation of both positive and negative emotions is emerging (Weidman & Kross, 2020).

Negative emotions can act as motivators, transforming individuals from a state of lethargy to alertness (Barretta, 2020). Research in third-wave positive psychology suggests that negatively valenced qualities can lead to positive outcomes (Lomas et al., 2020). For instance, boredom can stimulate creative imagination and introspective insight, which resonates with participants in this study who achieved their goals despite experiencing unpleasant thoughts and emotions like boredom, self-doubt and overwhelm. Aligned with Lomas and Ivtzan's (2016) perspective, it might be beneficial to reconsider how we classify phenomena as either positive or negative and instead leverage the combined value of both ends of the emotional spectrum. In the development of the Clarity Compass, as an aid to help navigate the 40 Clarity Cards, I have renamed the horizontal axis in the Cognitive Emotion framework from pleasantness or positive/negative to a spectrum of ease to unease. This potentially allows for greater exploration of our experience with opportunities for future investigation into disease and the psychological causes of illness. Suppressing emotions because they are unpleasant can have adverse effects across various domains of life, potentially leading to cognitive strain and increased sympathetic nervous system activation (Chapman et al., 2013; Richards & Gross, 1999).

**Figure 7: The Clarity Compass: 4 factor model based on Circumplex of emotion with further insight and understanding generated from factor analysis**



Whilst it is important to acknowledge that positivity is not a cure-all, the thoughts and emotions linked to achieving goals often defy expectations. They do not always align with the emotions commonly identified with goal achievement, such as 'pride' and 'excitement'. Interestingly, in the

initial Qualtrics survey, 65% of Step 1 participants who recalled previous goals expressed positive sentiments. This coincides with research on a phenomenon known as positivity bias, where autobiographical memory tends to emphasise positive events (Adler & Pansky, 2020; Marsh et al., 2019). However, this bias does not fully capture the real experiences of goal pursuit, as this study revealed. Further investigation into 'directed forgetting' has shown that negative words are often overlooked compared to positive ones (Marsh et al., 2019). This could be because the excitement at the start of the goal pursuit journey and the sense of pride upon completion are more memorable. Alternatively, it might be due to a tendency in the literature to focus more on goal setting and performance success rather than the actual journey itself. Exploring these factors could provide valuable insights into the dynamics of goal pursuit and memory retention. While this study did not centre on the study of goals, it has cast light on the significant impact of goals on individuals and the implications for organisations (Müller & Kotte, 2020). As mentioned in the Introduction and suggested by the Findings, the relentless pursuit of certain goals may lead to stress, overwhelm, and negative effects on mental health (Höpfner & Keith, 2021).

## Clarity Card Practical Applications

According to Müller and Kotte (2020), practitioners frequently use goal-setting approaches in their practice, considering them very important or even essential. Goals can be thwarted by irrational thoughts and emotional disturbance. By challenging these and fostering alternative, rational thoughts and emotional shifts, progress can be achieved. The ability to navigate through discomfort, especially when confronting unpleasant thoughts and emotions, is emerging as a crucial aspect of coaching (Orvell et al., 2021). The Clarity Cards can serve as a valuable tool in this endeavour aligning with approaches such as Cognitive Behavioural Coaching (Neenan & Dryden, 2020). Strategies for emotional regulation, such as those proposed by Yuratan & Yucesoylu (2010), emphasising reappraisal over suppression, can be facilitated through the use of the Clarity Cards. By engaging in conversations that reframe the value of various responses, practitioners can guide individuals through the complex interplay of emotions and thoughts, fostering conditions conducive to both success and wellbeing. Transforming stress from a hindrance to a catalyst, as suggested by Crum and Lyddy (2014) underscores the potential for positive change and psychological growth inherent in the goal pursuit process.

As proposed by Skews & Palmer (2016) Acceptance and Commitment-Based Coaching could provide a valuable approach to effectively manage the inevitable uncomfortable and painful thoughts and emotions in life. Building on this idea, ontological coaching offers a fresh perspective on human existence and the potential for a new approach to understanding the human experience (Campone et al., 2022). Moreover, integrating mindfulness practices and body scans into sessions can help clients develop a more productive and nuanced awareness of their thoughts and emotions (Loades et al., 2014; Tamir et al., 2013; Tod et al., 2011). The aim of the Clarity Cards is to facilitate these evaluations and reflections during client conversations. However, Cox et al., (2018) caution that practitioners should not venture beyond their current boundaries and expertise, emphasising the importance of recognising their limits to ensure they can establish genuine connections and avoid causing harm.

The Clarity Compass and Clarity Cards offer many opportunities for a wide variety of uses and interventions with individuals, 1:1's, teams and groups e.g.:

1. **Quick check-in:** choose your current location on the Clarity Compass (Fig. 7). Which quadrant are you in and why?
2. **Least to most:** choose three Clarity Cards that most and least resonate with your current state regarding a specific goal. What do you notice? (Fig. 8)

3. **Build a bridge:** select as many Clarity Cards as you need to build a bridge between your current state and a desired state (Fig. 8).

**Figure 8: Example of Least to Most and Build a bridge card selections.**



4. **Think AND Feel:** Pick three Clarity Cards that best represent where you are right now/in relation to a goal etc. Are they thoughts and/or feelings? What insights does this offer? (Fig. 9)

5. **Pick a path:** Layout cards to review options, obstacles, and opportunities along the goal pursuit journey, aiding in mental preparation and rehearsal (Fig. 9).

6. **Springboard States:** which combinations of positive thinking and uneasy emotions create a 'springboard' state that most resonates in your current situation? (Fig. 9)

**Figure 9: Think AND Feel, Pick a Path and Springboard State**



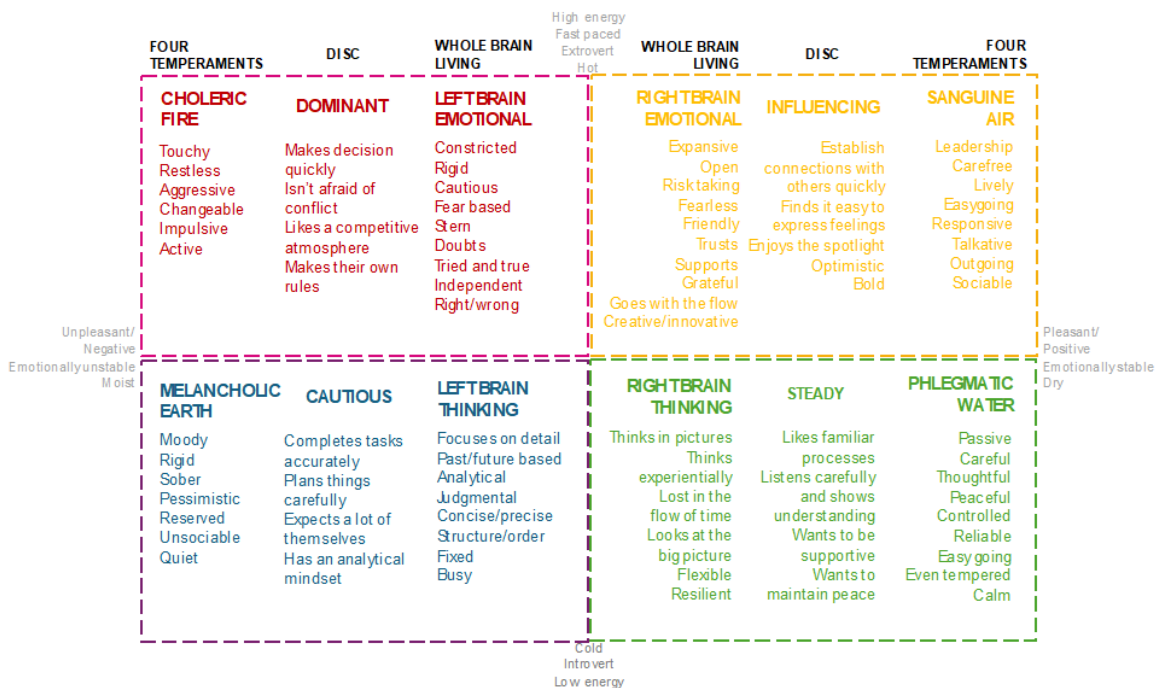
In addition, whilst this study did not set out to compare or confirm personality theories, the four factors the findings revealed raise inquiries regarding potential links. There are sufficient overlaps between the four-view framework and various four type personality theories that can be understood in terms of simple two by two matrices to warrant further discussion. For example:

1. Four Temperaments – suggests that there are four fundamental personality types: sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic across the dimensions of moist to dry (stable to unstable), and hot to cold (extravert to introvert) dimensions of the four temperaments (Doody & Immerwahr, 1983), These dimensions reflect different personality traits and

- tendencies, such as emotional responsiveness, sociability, and adaptability and could be extended to include thoughts and emotions.
2. DISC - categorises individuals into four main behavioural styles: dominance (action-orientated), influence (social and outgoing), steadiness (stable and consistent), and conscientiousness (detail-oriented). These styles are positioned along two dimensions: action to stability and challenge to collaboration. DISC is often used in organisational settings to improve communication, teamwork, and leadership effectiveness.(Schwefel, 2011),
  3. Whole Brain Living - Contrary to popular belief, neuroscience reveals that emotional and rational functions are distributed evenly across both hemispheres. Dr. Taylor presents four distinct modules of cells, likened to four characters within us: Left Thinking, Left Emotion, Right Emotion, and Right Thinking. Each character embodies specific skills, emotions, and thoughts, highlighting the intricate interplay between different regions of the brain in shaping our experiences and behaviours (Taylor, 2021).

Figure 10 maps these personality theories into one framework and is offered as a discussion tool and opportunity for insight. By referring to other four factor frameworks deep discussion and possible connections with these theories and knowledge can be postulated, offering an opportunity to consolidate insights from multiple tools, perhaps stimulating alternative perspectives and maximising the self as a tool (Passmore, 2010).

**Figure 10: Four type personality theories mapped into a single framework for consideration with Four View Framework**



## Conclusion

In conclusion, the negative effects of suppressing emotions are widely acknowledged, and the findings support this perspective. Both positive and negative emotions can be viewed as tools for achieving specific goals when deployed purposefully. However, there tends to be a bias towards the use of positive thoughts and emotions, and my findings advocate for a more balanced approach. Each individual's combination of thoughts and emotions is unique, and reframing unpleasant emotions as activating emotions may be crucial for achieving meaningful goals and

safeguarding mental health. The findings suggest that a certain level of discomfort arising from unpleasant thoughts and emotions could serve as 'springboard states', propelling individuals towards goal achievement by fuelling motivation, regulatory focus, and determination (Wang et al., 2018). However, it is essential to acknowledge that positive thoughts such as '*I can do it*' also play a crucial role, mitigating the potentially detrimental effects of negative emotions. Emotions such as self-doubt might even enhance performance and improve outcomes, highlighting the complexity of the human psyche (Delgado-García et al., 2012).

The presence of negative emotional states in goal pursuit underscores the need for acknowledgment and support from coaching communities, therapy providers, and organisational leaders and one with which Clarity Cards can support the conversation both in theory and in practice. Coaching can provide a safe space to address overwhelm, stress, anxiety, and self-doubt, highlighting the importance of incorporating these topics into coach training and supervision (de Estevan-Ubeda, 2018). Yet, it is important to tread carefully when navigating the boundary between coaching and therapy, avoiding pathologising normal human experiences (Cremona, 2010). As the field of coaching continues to evolve, there is a need for ongoing exploration to bridge gaps in understanding human psychology comprehensively. The development and application of tools like the Clarity Cards offer promising avenues for both academic research and coaching practice. By providing a structured framework to explore and normalise the thoughts and emotions associated with goal pursuit, the Clarity Cards facilitate deeper reflection and understanding (English et al., 2017).

Moving forward, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study and explore alternative methodologies and approaches. Future research could delve into the impact of different types of statements and explore the experiences of diverse populations, shedding further light on the intricacies of human thought and emotion. Ultimately, navigating the journey towards goals is a dynamic and multifaceted process. By embracing and understanding the diverse array of thoughts and emotions involved, we can all gain valuable insights and better navigate our path towards what is meaningful in life.

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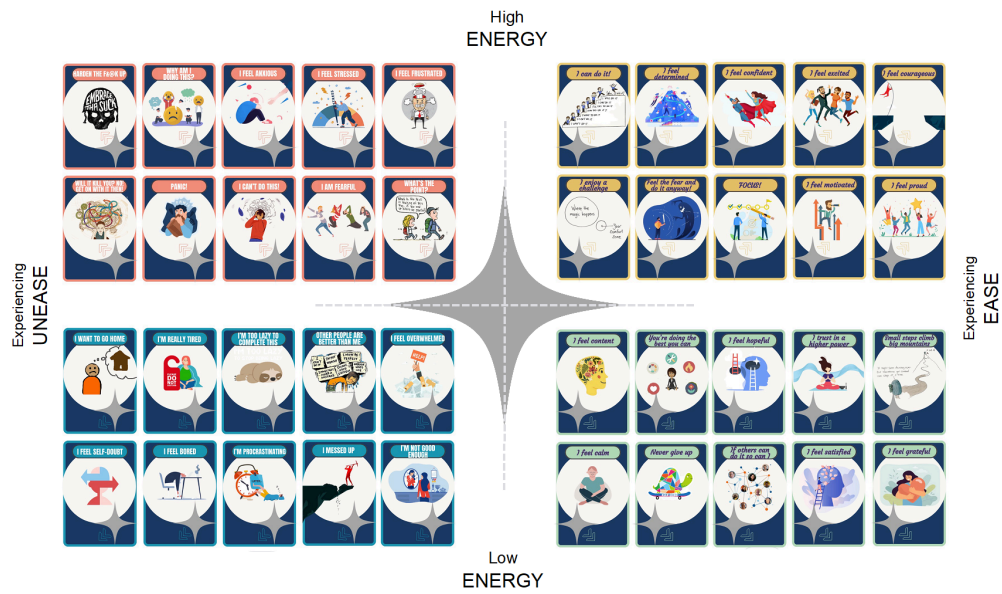
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## About the author

**Dr Lindsay Foreman** has a long history working with CEO's, boards and senior leaders in both the public and private sectors during times of exceptional change and transformation. Based on the findings of her research her passion is to support change and transformation using the Clarity Cards as a tool to navigate the inevitable ups and downs.

# Appendix 1: Full set of Clarity Cards



10 cards in each quadrant representing a universe of thoughts and emotions