

BOOK EXTRACT | 2026

Lebensfähig 2040

Risks, Spirals and Life Domains

Two complete chapters from 'Lebensfähig 2040 - How We Can Live Well When Paid Work No Longer Sustains Us'

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ABOUT THIS EXTRACT

Two chapters - one shared map

This editable extract contains the complete chapters 'When Work Disappears - A Map of Risks' and 'The Six-Domain Model of Life Capabilities'. It describes seven areas of risk, five possible downward spirals and six life domains that provide support.

Methodological context: The contents are an interdisciplinary synthesis and a guide to orientation. They are not a representative empirical study, a diagnosis or a substitute for professional psychological, medical or social advice.

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CHAPTER 3

When Work Disappears - A Map of Risks

When work disappears, many people think first about money. That is understandable. The bills keep coming. Rent must be paid, food bought and electricity paid for. Financial uncertainty can make life more constrained, more exhausting and more vulnerable. This book will not romanticise poverty. Having little money is not simply minimalism. It can create shame, strain relationships, threaten health and narrow the scope for action. And yet money is only the most visible part.

The previous chapter explored the support that work often provides without our noticing. This chapter goes a step further. It no longer asks: What functions does work fulfil? Instead it asks: What can happen when several of these functions disappear at once? That is where the real risk lies. Not everyone who loses their job enters a crisis. Many people find new paths. Some even use a career interruption to reorganise their lives. Some find new work, new responsibilities, new freedom or new strength. But there are typical dangers. They rarely arise in isolation. They arise when losses combine.

An unstructured day is not yet a catastrophe. Fewer social contacts are not yet a collapse. Damaged self-worth is not yet a permanent rupture. Financial worry alone does not explain everything. It becomes dangerous when several things start slipping at the same time and reinforce one another. Uncertainty then becomes withdrawal. Withdrawal becomes loneliness. Loneliness becomes shame. Shame becomes passivity. Passivity becomes still more uncertainty.

This chapter is therefore a map of risks and an attempt to recognise typical patterns early. Risk is not destiny. But what we recognise is easier to influence.

The central risk: a chain reaction

Losing work is rarely a single event. It is more like a rupture that touches several areas of life. It may begin with dismissal, an expiring contract, unsuccessful applications, illness, technological change or an industry that needs fewer people. The external event can be clearly named. But the consequences spread. First everyday life changes. Then conversations. Then mood. Then self-image. Then relationships. Then perhaps the body. Then the outlook on the future. Not always. But often enough to deserve close attention.

The insidious thing is that many of these changes seem small. You get up a little later. You decline an invitation. You avoid a question. You postpone a task. You drink a little more in the evening. You scroll for longer. You make contact less often. You move less. You tell yourself: Tomorrow I will start again. Viewed individually, none of this seems dramatic. Taken together, it can create a direction of travel. Risks often begin quietly.

Risk 1: the gradual loss of structure

Structure rarely disappears all at once. At first, an open day may even feel good. No alarm clock. No pressure. No obligation. After a demanding period at work, that can be restorative. You sleep in, let things take their course and enjoy the freedom. But at some point freedom can tip into something else. The day no longer has a clear beginning. Mealtimes shift. Sleep becomes more irregular. Tasks lose their urgency. The difference between weekdays and weekends becomes blurred. There is time, but less direction.

The risk does not lie in sleeping late once or wasting a day. It lies in the day no longer acquiring any shape. Structure is not merely order. It protects energy. It reduces decisions. It helps us start acting. It makes it visible whether a day has begun, whether something has gone well and when rest is deserved. Without external structure, we need internal or self-chosen structure. Otherwise a paradox emerges: we have more time but less access to it. An initial warning sign is therefore: I have time, but I cannot get myself to act.

Risk 2: self-worth begins to wobble

Shame is one of the most dangerous feelings during periods without work because it isolates people. It does not merely say: Something difficult has happened to me. It says: Something is wrong with me. That is a difference. Someone who becomes unemployed may be able to name many external reasons: the economy, the industry, age, health, automation, location, chance, caring responsibilities or lack of demand. Internally, however, a different story can quickly emerge: I am not good enough. I have failed. I am worth less. I am a burden to others.

Shame prevents openness. It prevents help. It prevents contact. It makes learning harder. You want to become visible again only when you have something to show. Only after the new job. Only after the solution. Only when everything is in order again. Yet this makes the way back more difficult. In uncertain periods, people particularly need responsive connection. They need others who see them through more than performance. They need conversations in which not everything has to be explained and justified. They need places where they are not reduced to employment status. A warning sign is: I avoid people because I would have to explain myself.

Risk 3: withdrawal becomes a habit

Withdrawal often starts reasonably. You want to save money. You do not want to burden anyone. You want to avoid awkward questions. You want to sort yourself out first. You do not want to spread a bad mood. So you decline. Once. Twice. Three times. Eventually a decision becomes a habit. You reach out less often, and others ask after you less.

Withdrawal has a logic of its own. The less contact you have, the harder contact becomes. The longer you wait, the greater the internal barrier. The lonelier you become, the more readily you interpret the world as rejecting you. Then a small disappointment is enough to confirm the earlier decision: It is not worth it. Nobody really cares. I would rather keep to myself. The risk is not being alone. Solitude can be beneficial. The risk is involuntary isolation. A warning sign is: I do not withdraw because it is good for me, but because contact has become too exhausting.

Risk 4: numbing instead of shaping life

When life becomes uncertain, people seek relief. That is normal. Nobody can withstand constant tension. Problems arise when relief becomes numbing. Numbing can take many forms: alcohol, food, scrolling, series, gaming, gambling, shopping, pornography, news, outrage-driven media, constant sleep or endless planning without action. Not every one of these activities is problematic in itself. The decisive factor is its function. Does it serve recovery? Or does it serve the avoidance of feeling?

A film can be relaxing. A glass of wine can be a pleasure. A game can be enjoyable. An afternoon on the internet can be harmless. But if the same things regularly prevent me from shaping my life, something shifts. I no longer ask: What do I need? Instead: How can I escape myself as quickly as possible?

Numbing is understandable. But it rarely solves the problem it protects us from. Usually it makes the next day harder. The body is more tired. The task is more unpleasant. The future is even less clear. A warning sign is: I no longer do things because they are good for me, but because otherwise I find myself difficult to bear.

Risk 5: relationships come under pressure

When work disappears, it is not only your own life that changes. The people around you must also readjust. In partnerships, families and close relationships, questions often arise without being spoken:

1. Who now carries what?
2. Who earns?
3. Who provides care?
4. Who is allowed to be exhausted?
5. Who takes on tasks?
6. Who is still entitled to recognition?

Many conflicts arise not because people do not love each other, but because roles become uncertain. When income disappears, contribution is renegotiated. When someone spends more time at home, expectations change. When the future is unclear, irritability increases. When shame is present, conversations become more sensitive. A practical question can quickly become a question of worth. 'Did you get anything done today?' no longer sounds like a simple question. It sounds like: Are you useful? Are you trying hard enough? Can I rely on you?

That is precisely why words are needed before silence hardens. During such periods, relationships need not only love but clarification: What is weighing on us? What does each person need? Which contributions count? What can we carry together? What must not remain unsaid? A warning sign is: We no longer talk about the situation; we only talk past each other irritably.

Risk 6: powerlessness and bitterness can grow

People who feel persistently powerless look for explanations. That is human. Without explanation, uncertainty is barely tolerable. Some explanations help. They reveal connections. They distinguish personal responsibility from external conditions. They open up room for action. Others harden. Disappointment then becomes bitterness. Anger becomes contempt. Hurt becomes an image of an enemy. Powerlessness becomes the wish at least to hold somebody responsible.

This can turn inwards: It is my fault. I am worthless. I have wasted my life. It can turn outwards: It is other people's fault. Politicians. Foreigners. The young. The old. The successful. The unemployed. The elites. The machines. Society as a whole. Of course real injustices exist. Of course there is political responsibility. Of course economic decisions can hit people hard. Anger can be justified. But anger without an opportunity to act becomes dangerous. It keeps us alert, but does not necessarily move us forward. It can provide energy, but also destroy. It can connect people, but also radicalise them.

Life capability does not mean suppressing anger. It means giving anger direction: What can I understand? What can I influence? Where do I need others? Where can I contribute? Where must I set boundaries? Where is protest necessary? Where does self-destruction begin? A warning sign is: My explanations do not make me clearer, only harder.

Risk 7: the future shrinks

One of the deepest risks is not immediately visible: the future becomes smaller. At first there are still plans. Applications. Ideas. Conversations. Possibilities. You think in months, perhaps years. When uncertainty lasts longer, the inner horizon can narrow. You think only as far as the next bill. The next rejection. The next appointment. The next day.

Confidence in the future is not a luxury. It is a psychological resource. People who can imagine a future find it easier to act. Those who see only threats lose flexibility. This does not mean being naively optimistic. Confidence in the future does not mean: Everything will turn out fine. It means something closer to: There are still ways to lead a satisfying life, even if I cannot yet see them. My story is not over. This phase is not my entire story. When the future shrinks, small, attainable horizons are needed. Not a grand plan for life. Sometimes next week is enough. The next morning. The next contact. The next meaningful task. A warning sign is: I can no longer imagine a good next stage.

The five downward spirals

The risks described become particularly dangerous when they combine into spirals. A spiral is more than a problem. It is a pattern in which one step makes the next more likely.

1. The loss-of-structure spiral

No fixed times. The days blur. Motivation decreases. Self-worth suffers. Structure becomes even harder. Countermovement: daily anchors. A fixed time to get up. A morning walk. Regular meals. A small task completed every day. Not perfectly. But reliably.

2. The withdrawal spiral

Shame grows. Contacts diminish. Loneliness increases. Energy falls. Withdrawal becomes even more likely. Countermovement: small contacts. A message. A call. A short walk with someone. A regular place. An arrangement to meet, even if it is unremarkable. Deep closeness is not the first thing to rescue us. Repetition alone often helps.

3. The loss-of-self-worth spiral

The job title is gone. Status becomes uncertain. Comparison with others increases. The sense of uselessness grows. Initiative becomes harder. Countermovement: contribution and capability. Repair something. Help someone. Learn something. Complete a task. Make a small, visible difference. Self-worth grows not only through encouragement. It also grows through experiencing effectiveness.

4. The numbing spiral

Emptiness arises. Distraction brings short-term relief. Alcohol, scrolling, food, gaming, consumption or constant background noise take up more space. The condition deteriorates over time. Emptiness grows. Countermovement: recognise real needs. Am I tired? Lonely? Overwhelmed? Ashamed? Afraid? Underchallenged? Physically restless? Numbing asks: How can I feel less? Life capability asks: What do I really need?

5. The meaning spiral

A task is missing. Meaninglessness grows. Passivity increases. Psychological strain rises. Acting becomes even harder. Countermovement: small tasks that count. Help someone. Care for something. Put something in order. Pass something on. Begin and finish something. Meaning does not always begin on a grand scale. Sometimes it begins with a useful action.

Early warning signs instead of self-blame

This map of risks should not lead us to monitor ourselves more harshly or condemn ourselves for every weakness. It is about noticing early. Everyone has patterns. Some withdraw. Some become irritable. Some freeze. Some keep functioning until they cannot go on. Some numb themselves. Some fight the wrong opponents. Some lose touch with their body first, others with hope. The crucial question is not: Why am I like this? A better question is: How can I notice early that I am losing my footing? Early warning signs can be very concrete:

- I get up significantly later than planned for several days.
- I stop opening messages.
- I avoid people who are actually good for me.
- I explain myself constantly, or no longer at all.
- I hardly move any more.
- I drink, eat, scroll or consume differently from usual.
- I become more cynical.
- I sleep badly.
- I lose interest in things that used to matter to me.
- I can no longer imagine a good week ahead.

Such signs are not evidence of failure. They are signals. And signals are valuable because they make action possible.

The most important insight

Risk does not arise solely from unemployment itself. It arises from the combination of external loss and internal withdrawal, financial worry and shame, lack of structure and lack of contact, powerlessness and lack of effectiveness. That is why it is not enough to react only once everything has become difficult.

Life capability means building supportive countermovements early: small structures, reliable contacts, honest conversations, physical routines, useful tasks, new contributions and a future that becomes imaginable again, at least in small steps. The aim is not to be afraid of unemployment. The aim is to know your vulnerable points before they break.

A thought to take away

Not every loss leads to a crisis. But when several supports collapse at the same time, deliberate countermovements are needed.

Exercise: my personal risk map

Read the five downward spirals again. Choose the one that feels most familiar to you personally. Answer in writing:

- How would I notice that this spiral was beginning for me?
- What do I typically do when I feel ashamed, empty, overwhelmed or useless?
- Which people would probably notice first that I was doing worse?
- What could provide a small impulse in the opposite direction?
- Which ability could be particularly protective for me?

The aim is not to frighten yourself. It is to notice earlier when you need support.

Mini-experiment for this week

Choose one possible downward spiral and deliberately put a counter-anchor in place.

- Against loss of structure: get up at the same time on three days.
- Against withdrawal: contact two people.
- Against loss of self-worth: complete a useful task.
- Against numbing: shape an evening without alcohol, scrolling or a substitute routine.
- Against loss of meaning: help someone in a concrete way.

Then write one sentence: When I notice that I am slipping, the first thing that helps me is: ...

CHAPTER 4

The Six-Domain Model of Life Capabilities

Introduction: between naivety and fear

When people talk about an uncertain future, they easily move towards two opposite positions. The first is reassurance. It will not be that bad. Somehow new jobs always emerge. People have always adapted. Technology has always brought prosperity in the end. Anyone who stays flexible will find their place. The second position is panic. Everything will collapse. Machines will take our work. States will be overwhelmed. A great mass of people will be made useless. Everyone must save themselves while they still can.

The better approach probably lies somewhere between the two. Reassurance blinds us to real risks. Panic constricts us and prevents action. Reassurance prevents preparation. Panic prevents intelligent preparation. This book therefore adopts the perspective of sober hope. Sober, because the risks are real. Paid work is likely to become less secure, less well paid and less of a given for many people. Social security systems may not be able to absorb everything.

Hopeful, because people can develop abilities. Because relationships can support us. Because practical skills can make us more independent. Because communities can emerge. Because a good life need not depend entirely on the labour market. Hope here does not mean: Everything will be fine. Hope means: There is a next step. That is precisely what this chapter is about.

Core idea: This is not a book about fear of the future. It is a book about abilities that can support people in uncertain futures. For this purpose, we work with six domains:

1. Structure
2. Relationships
3. Meaning
4. The body
5. Practical skills
6. Community

These six domains are not a perfect theory. They are a map. A simple guide to the question: What can my life stand on when paid work becomes less secure as a central support, or disappears? When work disappears or becomes fragile, income is often not the only thing missing. So are rhythm, encounters, recognition, tasks, identity, development, movement and the feeling of being needed. A good life therefore needs several supports. When one wobbles, others can help carry the weight. That is the basic idea of life capability.

Life capability means: I can shape my everyday life, nurture relationships, find meaning, keep my body stable, develop practical abilities and connect with others. Not perfectly. But sufficiently to avoid being entirely dissatisfied.

What this book does not promise

This book does not promise that everything will be easy. It does not promise that a walk cures depression. It does not promise that volunteering, a daily structure or a close-knit family replaces the loss of paid work. It does not promise that community is always warm, fair and available. Nor does it promise that individual abilities can replace political solutions. A society in which many people cannot find sufficient paid work needs political answers: fair distribution, education, social security, access to healthcare, affordable housing, democratic shaping of technology and protection from exploitation or crime.

But political answers take time. And anyone observing politics today is unlikely to believe in quick answers fit for the future. In this context, Pero Mičić, a futures researcher and professor at Steinbeis University in Berlin, said: 'Precisely because politics lacks foresight, we will enter a crisis scenario, possibly a horror scenario.' Professor Gad Saad, a Canadian social researcher, has studied our social and political structures and identified an inability to undertake necessary, far-reaching reforms at the right time. That is precisely why we must expect to rely partly on ourselves. Even in a 'horror scenario', merely complaining about politics and society and waiting is of little help. The better alternative is: We shape what we can shape. Step by step.

Why six domains?

A good life does not emerge from a single factor. It is a web. Some threads are material: money, housing, food, health. Some are social: relationships, belonging, mutual help. Some are psychological: self-efficacy, meaning, hope, dignity. Some are physical: sleep, movement, strength, daylight, nutrition. If one thread breaks, the web may hold. If several break simultaneously, it becomes dangerous. That is precisely why strengthening only one ability is not enough.

The six domains help to give life a broader foundation. They answer six simple questions:

1. Structure: How does my day acquire a shape?
2. Relationships: Who sees me, and whom do I see?
3. Meaning: What makes it worth getting up?
4. The body: What keeps me physically stable?
5. Practical skills: What can I do myself rather than only buying or paying for things?
6. Community: With whom can I share, learn, help and receive support?

1. Structure: I give my day a shape

Structure means: My day does not dissolve completely. While paid work is present, structure often comes from outside. The alarm rings. You have to be somewhere. Appointments, breaks, journeys, tasks and the end of the working day give the day a shape. This shape can be demanding. But it also stabilises. When paid work disappears, a new task emerges: you must build the day yourself.

That sounds like freedom. And sometimes it is. It can be healing not to have to function constantly. It can feel good to wake without pressure, eat breakfast more slowly, take a walk and reconnect with your own rhythm.

But lasting freedom without structure can become empty. Mornings drift. Meals lose their place. Sleep becomes irregular. Small tasks are repeatedly postponed until tomorrow. A free day becomes a shapeless day. Recovery becomes listlessness.

Structure is therefore not a petty exercise in discipline. It is a handrail. It helps us stay in motion even when nobody is pulling from outside. It protects against emptiness. It makes small advances visible. It gives body and mind orientation. Structure does not mean planning every day with military precision. It is not about running yourself like a company. It is about simple anchors, such as a fixed time to get up or an evening ritual.

Structure also strengthens autonomy. Autonomy does not mean managing everything alone. It means experiencing your own life as something you can help shape. I can decide when my day begins. I can decide what to cook today. I can decide whom to contact. I can decide which small step to take. These decisions may seem unspectacular. But they are training against powerlessness. Those who shape their day experience this: I do not control everything. But I have a next step.

2. Relationships: I am not alone

Relationships mean: I am connected with people. Few things sustain a life as much as reliable relationships. What matters is not the number of contacts but their quality. Are there people with whom I can show myself as I am? Is there someone I could call? Are there people with whom I can laugh, eat, work, be silent or feel sad? Is there a place where I belong? Stable social relationships of good quality are even the strongest predictor of life satisfaction. This kind of relationship is usually found in families or with long-standing friends and companions. But there are plenty of examples of families and friendships breaking down too.

When work disappears, existing relationships can be challenged. It becomes apparent whether relationships outside work are strong enough, or whether we can sustain them with greater closeness. We may share a home with more people in a smaller space. Families may live together for longer again, and we may see three-generation households more often. This brings challenges for which we are not well prepared. We are accustomed to having 'our' own retreat. Nurturing relationships, dialogue and conflict skills, willingness to compromise, emotional regulation and other relationship competencies become more important and become life capabilities.

Friendships do not develop through liking alone. They develop through repetition, reliability and time together. Many people overestimate closeness and underestimate rhythm. Friendship does not always need profound conversations. Sometimes it needs Tuesday evening, sport and a regular place at the table. Anyone preparing for a future with less secure work should therefore do more than learn skills or save money. They should nurture relationships before they urgently need them.

3. Meaning: what I do counts

Meaning means: My actions matter. Meaning is a big word. It suggests a life's task, a calling, saving the world. Many people therefore look for meaning in places that are too grand and overlook it in small things. Yet meaning often emerges where something becomes a little better, easier, warmer, more orderly, more beautiful or more alive through what I do.

A child understands something because I explained it. A neighbour has less to do because I did the shopping. A room becomes more welcoming because I tidied it. An object continues to be

used because I repaired it. A plant grows because I cared for it. A person feels less alone because I listened.

Meaning does not have to be paid. Nor does it always have to be visible. But it needs a connection with values. What matters to me? For whom or what do I want to take responsibility? What kind of person do I want to be in difficult times? What should become a little better through me?

Without such questions, life without paid work can tip into mere occupation. Occupation fills time. Meaning gives time direction. This does not mean that every day has to be meaningful. Many days are ordinary. Some are arduous. Some consist of shopping, cleaning, laundry, phone calls, forms and small duties. But these too can contain meaning when it is clear what something is being done for.

Meaning is closely connected with contribution. People do not want only to be provided for. They want to contribute. Even someone who needs help does not want to remain only a recipient indefinitely. Dignity also comes from being able to give something. The contribution need not be large. It must be real. This experience becomes particularly important when paid work disappears: I am still someone who can contribute. My worth does not depend only on whether someone pays for my time.

4. The body: I live in my body

The body means: I treat my body as a foundation, not a side issue. In uncertain times, many people first turn to thinking. They analyse, plan, compare, read, research and worry. The mind works without a break. Yet stability does not arise from thinking alone.

The body is a fundamental anchor. Sleep, movement, nutrition, daylight, breathing, strength, endurance, touch and physical activity influence how we experience the world. A poorly ventilated room, poor sleep, little movement and irregular eating can make the future appear darker than it is. This does not mean all problems can be solved by walks. But without a physical foundation, many problems become harder.

When paid work disappears, some everyday physical movement often disappears too. You leave the house less often. Journeys fall away. The body has fewer reasons to be active. At the same time, the risk increases of sitting for long periods, scrolling, numbing yourself or spending the day in your head. That is why the body is not a marginal topic in this book. A good life with little money and little external security needs simple physical routines, such as moving the body, getting daylight or sleeping regularly.

The body is not the opposite of the mind. It is the foundation on which psychological stability can grow. When you move, you feel yourself. When you cook, you smell, taste and provide for yourself. When you repair, you use your hands, eyes, strength and patience. When you walk, your perspective changes. When you sleep, you think differently. Taking the body seriously gives life a simple but powerful anchor.

5. Practical skills: I can do something

Practical skills mean: I can do, maintain, repair, make or improve things myself. Over recent decades, many people have become highly dependent on buying, replacing and paying. When something breaks, it is replaced. When something is missing, it is ordered. When something does not work, someone is paid. That is convenient while there is enough money. But it also makes us helpless when money becomes scarcer. Practical skills can change that feeling.

Someone who steadies a wobbly chair feels competence immediately. Someone who cooks a good meal from simple ingredients experiences self-efficacy. Someone who makes a bicycle roadworthy again regains mobility. Someone who mends a piece of clothing extends its life and their own sense of independence. Competence does not have to be spectacular. It grows through repetition. Through failure. Through asking. Through trying things out. Through the courage to be a beginner. That is particularly important: being allowed to be a beginner.

Many people avoid practical activities because they are afraid of feeling clumsy. They say: I cannot do that. I am all thumbs. I am not practical. I will certainly get it wrong. Yet life capability often begins precisely where you are not yet good. You do not have to build a cupboard immediately. You can start with a button. With a loose screw. With a simple dish. With a bicycle inner tube. With a pot of herbs. With a blunt knife that needs sharpening. With a drawer that sticks. Practical skill is more than thrift. It is an antidote to powerlessness.

It says: I am not only a consumer. I am not only dependent on prices, delivery services, specialist businesses and opening hours. I can learn. I can practise. I can put something right. And often more emerges from this than the thing itself. People who repair together get talking. People who cook can invite others. People who share tools build relationships. People who have learned something can pass it on. Practical skills thus connect several domains at once: the body, competence, meaning, community and dignity.

6. Community: together we are less alone

Community means: I do not have to carry my life alone. People need one another. In families this is often taken for granted - but note: only often. We need social contact, but also knowledge, tools, comfort, a division of labour, closeness, correction, protection and shared places.

Community becomes particularly important in a future with less secure paid work. Not as a romantic idea, because community can also be exhausting. Think of life in a club or family, where conflicts and interpersonal challenges can also occur regularly. People have different needs, boundaries, habits, fears and ideas. Anyone who idealises community will quickly be disappointed. But without community, many things become harder.

Community is the social side of life capability. It protects against turning uncertainty into an individual struggle. It reminds us that not everyone needs to be able to do everything. One person cooks well. Another can repair. One understands forms. Another listens well. One has tools. Another has time. One needs help. Another needs the feeling of being needed. This is how reciprocity emerges. And reciprocity is different from one-way help. It preserves dignity. It says: Today you need me. Tomorrow I need you. And sometimes we simply sit together at the table.

How the six domains interact

The six domains do not sit side by side like separate drawers. They influence one another. Structure helps the body because sleep, food and movement become more regular. The body helps the mind because movement, daylight and sleep can reduce rumination. Relationships protect against withdrawal because people see and speak to one another. Meaning protects against emptiness because tasks acquire direction. Practical skills strengthen competence because you experience directly: I can do something. Community connects individual abilities because private capability can become shared support. One example: someone decides to cook for two neighbours once a week. Structure emerges because there is a fixed day. Relationships emerge because people come together. Meaning emerges because the meal benefits someone. The body is involved because there is cooking, chopping and eating. Practical skill grows because cooking requires practice. Community emerges because a meal can become recurring contact.

A small action touches several domains. That is precisely the strength of this model. It does not demand changing your whole life at once. It invites you to choose small actions that strengthen several areas of life simultaneously.

The attitude: start small, really do it

Many people overestimate grand intentions and underestimate small repetitions. They resolve to change their whole life. More exercise, better nutrition, new friends, less consumption, more meaning, more order, more calm. After a few days it becomes too much. Then comes disappointment. And disappointment quickly becomes the thought: I cannot do it anyway. Life capability develops differently. Not through a grand restart, but through small, repeatable steps.

Hope rarely grows through abstract positive thinking. It grows through the experience of action. I do something and notice that something moves. That is the difference between merely enduring and life capability. Enduring says: I somehow have to get through. Life capability says: I can shape something, even when not everything is certain.

How you can read this book

This book is structured to explore the six domains in greater depth, step by step. Part I helps explain what work has supported until now and why it makes sense to give your life a broader foundation. Part II addresses inner stability: daily structure, self-worth, meaning, fear, shame, emptiness and the body. Part III becomes practical: money, living together, cooking, repairs, tools, clothing, bicycles, the household, the garden and simple self-provisioning. Part IV focuses on community: sharing, exchanging, borrowing, helping, setting boundaries and finding or establishing places.

You do not have to work through this book perfectly. Nor do you have to do every exercise. Some will fit immediately. Others perhaps later, and some hopefully never. Some chapters will speak to you more strongly than others. What matters is not changing everything at once. What matters is beginning.

A thought to take away

A good life becomes more sustainable when structure, relationships, meaning, the body, practical skills and community support one another.

Exercise: my life-capability wheel

Draw a circle and divide it into six domains:

1. Structure
2. Relationships
3. Meaning
4. The body
5. Practical skills
6. Community

Rate each domain on a scale from 1 to 10. 1 means: This domain is currently very weak or uncertain. 10 means: This domain supports me well. Then ask yourself:

- Which domain is currently strongest?
- Which domain is weakest?
- Which domain depends too heavily on paid work in my life?
- Which domain would have the greatest positive effect if I strengthened it over the next four weeks?
- Which domain am I neglecting even though I know it matters?

Then choose just one domain. Answer in writing:

- Why is this particular domain important now?
- What would be a small improvement over the next seven days?
- Who or what could help me with it?
- How would I notice that this domain was becoming stronger?

This is not about judging or criticising yourself. It is about seeing your starting point honestly. What becomes visible can be shaped.

Mini-experiment for this week

Choose one of the six domains and take one small action in it every day for seven days.

Structure: get up at the same time every morning. Relationships: write a short message to someone every day or seek out a brief conversation. Meaning: take a small useful action every day that benefits someone else or your surroundings.

The body: go outside for 20 minutes every day. Practical skills: practise a practical ability for 15 minutes every day or attend to an object that can be repaired, maintained or improved.

Community: research or visit a place where people share, repair, learn, cook, garden or help. At the end of the week, write three sentences:

- What felt easier than expected?
- What was harder than expected?
- What would be a useful small next step?

ABOUT THE FULL BOOK

Lebensfähig 2040

The full book explores the six life domains in greater depth and connects psychological stability, practical life skills and community with the question of how a good life can remain something we can shape, even under uncertain conditions.

Guiding idea: Not every loss leads to a crisis. But when several supports collapse at the same time, deliberate countermovements are needed.

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