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A WHITE PAPER OF THE INITIATIVE ON PURPOSE AND FLOURISHING

The Practical Flourishing Assessment

Measured Shifts in Agency, Resilience, and Self-Perception

A pre-post evaluation of whether a structured reflection and goal-setting framework produces measurable, directional gains in how individuals perceive control, respond to failure, and pursue meaningful goals—drawn from matched entry and exit data across eighty-four participants.

PREPARED BY

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Opening Summary: Key Findings and Framework

This paper evaluates the impact of the Practical Flourishing Assessment (TPFA), a structured reflection and goal-setting framework designed to help individuals actively engage with their own development. Using matched entry and exit survey data from 84 participants, the analysis examines whether participation in TPFA leads to measurable changes in how individuals perceive control, respond to failure, and evaluate their ability to achieve meaningful goals.

At a high level, the findings indicate that TPFA produces consistent, directional improvements across three core psychological constructs: locus of control, resilience, and self-efficacy. These constructs were selected because they collectively reflect the concept of learned optimism—the tendency to interpret outcomes as influenced by one’s own actions, persist through challenges, and expect effort to produce results. Learned optimism is not directly taught within TPFA, but the structure of the program appears to cultivate it through repeated cycles of reflection, action, and evaluation.

The most significant quantitative shifts include a 13 percentage point increase in strong disagreement with the belief that others have more control over outcomes, a 14 percentage point increase in strong agreement with retrying tasks after failure, and a 16.67 percentage point increase in strong confidence in achieving life goals. Across multiple questions, neutral responses decline substantially, suggesting that participants move away from ambiguity and toward more defined and actionable beliefs.

These shifts are reinforced by qualitative feedback, which highlights increased clarity, intentionality, and follow-through. Participants consistently describe the experience as structured, grounding, and impactful, while also identifying areas for improvement, including pacing, survey design, and the need for ongoing support between sessions. Together, the data suggests that TPFA does not radically transform all dimensions of cognition, but it does produce meaningful and consistent changes in how participants understand and act within their own lives.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The Practical Flourishing Assessment (TPFA) is designed to move individuals from passive reflection toward active engagement with their own development. The process combines a structured self-assessment across multiple life domains with goal-setting and periodic reflection, encouraging participants to regularly evaluate where they are, where they want to be, and what actions will move them forward. Rather than focusing on a single dimension of well-being, TPFA takes a holistic approach, prompting individuals to engage with different aspects of their lives in a consistent and intentional way.

This white paper evaluates whether that intended shift—from awareness to action—occurs in practice. Drawing on baseline (entry survey), post-intervention (exit survey), and matched comparison data, the analysis examines how participants' beliefs evolve across three key dimensions: agency, resilience, and self-efficacy. These dimensions are not only central to personal development, but also closely aligned with the theory of learned optimism, which provides a useful lens for interpreting the results.

Baseline: Capability with Conditional Control

At baseline, participants demonstrate relatively high levels of self-efficacy. A strong majority already believe they are capable of solving problems and achieving success through effort. In Q5, 86.9% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they can find solutions to difficult problems, and in Q2, 77.4% agree that their ability to solve problems is the cause of their success. This suggests that the cohort begins with a solid foundation of perceived competence.

However, this confidence is not fully stable. While only 11.9% of participants agree that effort does not influence outcomes, a meaningful portion remains uncertain. In Q1, 10.7% of respondents select a neutral response when asked about control over outcomes, and in Q16, 14.3% are neutral on whether effort leads to desired results. This indicates that although most participants reject a fully external locus of control, there is still ambiguity in how consistently they believe effort translates into outcomes. In other words, participants believe they are capable, but are less certain that their actions reliably produce results.

This tension is further reflected in responses to failure. In Q9, 17.9% of participants report some tendency to avoid similar tasks after failing, though this is largely moderate rather than extreme. At the same time, 78.6% agree that they would try again after failure, but 16.7% remain neutral. This suggests that resilience is more aspirational than fully internalized. Participants endorse persistence in principle, but not always with strong conviction in practice.

Post-Intervention Perception: Validation, Structure, and Friction

By the end of the TPFA process, participants overwhelmingly report that the framework is valuable and applicable to their lives. Many describe the experience as deeply impactful, not only in terms of how they feel, but in how they organize and approach their lives. One participant writes, *“TPFA is life-changing for me... my life is organized, priorities identified, there is a continuous flow of positive energy,”* while another reflects, *“This study has truly reshaped my concept of what it means to flourish.”* These responses suggest a shift that goes beyond temporary motivation and toward a more sustained reorientation.

Participants frequently emphasize the role of structure in driving this change. As one respondent notes, *“It forced me to set time aside... which really helped me to make headway,”* while another highlights that *“the most valuable aspect... was having a regular tune-in to a comprehensive view of self.”* These insights suggest that TPFA’s impact lies less in introducing new ideas and more in creating a disciplined process for engaging with them.

There is also strong affirmation of the facilitated experience and the role of community. Participants highlight the value of shared reflection and guided sessions, with one noting, *“Grateful for Rosie and David... this was a perfect amount of time and effort in community and privacy for me to flourish,”* and another emphasizing that *“there is power in a group coming together for a common goal of flourishing.”* These responses indicate that the social and facilitative components of TPFA play an important role in reinforcing engagement and accountability.

At the same time, feedback reveals consistent friction points. Time constraints are a recurring concern, with one participant explaining, *“The feeling I’ve had on the calls is that it’s rushed... reflection requires an extra beat,”* and another suggesting that more time would improve the experience. There is also demand for greater continuity outside sessions, including reminders, check-ins, and ongoing support. Additionally, some participants raise concerns about the survey itself, noting that certain questions feel open to interpretation or do not fully capture their experiences. These critiques suggest that while the conceptual framework is strong, improvements in delivery and measurement could significantly enhance its effectiveness.

Locus of Control: A Clear Shift Toward Agency

The most consistent quantitative change observed is an increase in internal locus of control, a core component of learned optimism. Participants become less likely to believe that outcomes are beyond their influence and more likely to see themselves as active contributors to results.

In Q1, agreement with the statement that effort does not influence outcomes declines from 11.9% to 7.1%, while disagreement increases, with strong disagreement rising from 40.48% to 44.05%. More substantial changes appear in Q11, where strong disagreement with the belief that others have more control than oneself increases from 39.29% to 52.38%, representing a gain of over 13 percentage points. Similarly, in Q16, strong disagreement with the idea that effort does not lead to desired outcomes rises from 35.71% to 48.81%, while agreement declines sharply. These shifts indicate a meaningful reframing of how participants interpret the relationship between effort and results, moving toward a more internalized sense of control.

Resilience: Reduced Avoidance and Increased Re-engagement

TPFA also produces clear improvements in resilience, particularly in how participants respond to failure. In Q9, agreement with avoidance behaviors declines from 17.86% to 9.52%, indicating that participants become less likely to withdraw after setbacks. At the same time, willingness to re-engage increases significantly. In Q12, strong agreement with retrying tasks after failure rises from 20.24% to 34.52%, while neutral responses decline from 16.67% to 5.95%. This combination of reduced avoidance and increased proactive behavior suggests a meaningful shift in how participants engage with challenges.

Qualitative feedback reinforces this pattern. One participant notes that the process *“helped me see the areas where I’m consistently failing... and that awareness is helping me be more objective about my blocks,”* while another reflects that being forced to set aside time led to meaningful progress on difficult issues. These responses suggest that TPFA not only encourages persistence, but also changes how failure is interpreted and acted upon.

Self-Efficacy: From Uncertainty to Conviction

While baseline self-efficacy is already high, TPFA strengthens it further in forward-looking domains. The most notable gains occur in confidence related to achieving life goals. In Q15, strong agreement with the statement “*I am able to reach my goals in life*” increases from 23.81% to 40.48%, representing a substantial shift toward greater conviction. Participants also move away from uncertainty in broader problem-solving confidence. In Q8, somewhat agreement increases from 29.76% to 47.62%, while neutral responses drop from 21.43% to 10.71%. These changes indicate that participants are not simply maintaining confidence, but becoming more certain and decisive in their self-assessments.

In contrast, questions with already high baseline agreement, such as Q5, show only modest improvement, suggesting a ceiling effect rather than a lack of impact. This pattern reinforces the idea that TPFA is most effective in areas where beliefs are still forming or unstable.

Attribution Patterns: Gradual but Uneven Change

Changes in attribution style are more subtle but directionally consistent with the development of learned optimism. In several scenarios, participants become more likely to attribute outcomes to their own actions rather than external factors. For example, in Q24, internal attribution increases from 71.43% to 78.57%, and in Q30, the proportion of participants attributing a positive social experience to their own behavior rises from 39.29% to 51.19%. These shifts suggest an increasing tendency to view oneself as an active participant in outcomes.

However, not all scenarios show change. Responses to Q19 remain unchanged, and Q28 shows minimal variation, indicating that some attribution patterns are more resistant to change, particularly when they are already well-established. This unevenness suggests that while TPFA influences attribution, its effects are more pronounced in contexts that are more immediate and personally interpretable.

Mechanism of Change: Structured Self-Observation

The combined data suggests that TPFA operates by introducing structured self-observation. Participants are prompted to regularly reflect on multiple domains of life, set goals, and evaluate progress. This repeated process creates a feedback loop in which awareness leads to action, and action reinforces a sense of agency.

Participants consistently describe this mechanism in practical terms. One notes that *“having a regular tune-in to a comprehensive view of self was the most valuable aspect,”* while another emphasizes that the structure *“forced me to deal with things head on.”* These insights point to a shift from passive awareness to active engagement, where reflection becomes a driver of behavior rather than an end in itself.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The TPFA produces measurable shifts in how participants understand and engage with their own lives. The most significant changes occur in internal locus of control, resilience after failure, and confidence in achieving goals. These shifts are not extreme, but they are consistent and meaningful, with several measures showing improvements of over 10 percentage points.

Importantly, these changes align closely with the development of learned optimism. Participants become more likely to interpret outcomes as influenced by their own actions, persist through setbacks, and expect effort to produce results. This represents not just a shift in belief, but a shift in behavior. Participants move from knowing what flourishing entails to actively practicing it.

As one participant summarizes, *“This has been an enlightening experience that reminded me that I am capable and ultimately I am the driving force for my success.”* This transition from passive belief to active authorship captures the central outcome of the TPFA and highlights its potential as a tool for sustained flourishing.

The Practical Flourishing Assessment was created and developed by Rosie von Lil and David Fulton.

APPENDIX A

Survey Item Response Distributions

Response distributions for every survey item, reported as matched entry (baseline) and exit (90-day follow-up) counts and percentages across the 84-participant matched sample. Items 1–16 use a five-point Likert format; items 17–31 use a forced-choice attributional format.

Q1 No matter how much energy I put into a task, I feel I have no control over the outcome.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
Strongly agree	1	2	1.19%	2.38%
Somewhat agree	9	4	10.71%	4.76%
Neither agree nor disagree	9	7	10.71%	8.33%
Somewhat disagree	31	34	36.90%	40.48%
Strongly disagree	34	37	40.48%	44.05%

Q5 I can find solutions to difficult problems.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
Strongly agree	46	49	54.76%	58.33%
Somewhat agree	27	26	32.14%	30.95%
Neither agree nor disagree	5	3	5.95%	3.57%
Somewhat disagree	4	2	4.76%	2.38%
Strongly disagree	2	4	2.38%	4.76%

Q8 I have the ability to solve most of life's problems.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
Strongly agree	22	24	26.19%	28.57%
Somewhat agree	25	40	29.76%	47.62%
Neither agree nor disagree	18	9	21.43%	10.71%
Somewhat disagree	16	7	19.05%	8.33%
Strongly disagree	3	4	3.57%	4.76%

Q2 I feel that my ability to solve problems is the cause of my success.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
Strongly agree	29	25	34.52%	29.76%
Somewhat agree	36	35	42.86%	41.67%
Neither agree nor disagree	9	7	10.71%	8.33%
Somewhat disagree	6	14	7.14%	16.67%
Strongly disagree	4	3	4.76%	3.57%

Q7 If I complete a task successfully, it is probably because of my ability.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
Strongly agree	23	16	27.38%	19.05%
Somewhat agree	42	53	50.00%	63.10%
Neither agree nor disagree	12	9	14.29%	10.71%
Somewhat disagree	5	3	5.95%	3.57%
Strongly disagree	2	3	2.38%	3.57%

Q9 When I do not succeed at a task, I do not attempt any similar tasks because I feel that I would fail them also.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
Strongly agree	0	1	0.00%	1.19%
Somewhat agree	15	7	17.86%	8.33%
Neither agree nor disagree	12	7	14.29%	8.33%
Somewhat disagree	25	32	29.76%	38.10%
Strongly disagree	32	37	38.10%	44.05%

Q11 Other people have more control over their success and/or failure than I do.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
Strongly agree	4	1	4.76%	1.19%
Somewhat agree	16	9	19.05%	10.71%
Neither agree nor disagree	13	17	15.48%	20.24%
Somewhat disagree	18	13	21.43%	15.48%
Strongly disagree	33	44	39.29%	52.38%

Q14 I accept tasks even if I am not sure that I will succeed at them.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
Strongly agree	35	40	41.67%	47.62%
Somewhat agree	39	38	46.43%	45.24%
Neither agree nor disagree	7	3	8.33%	3.57%
Somewhat disagree	3	1	3.57%	1.19%
Strongly disagree	0	2	0.00%	2.38%

Q16 No matter how hard I try, things never seem to work out the way I want them to.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
Strongly agree	2	1	2.38%	1.19%
Somewhat agree	12	2	14.29%	2.38%
Neither agree nor disagree	12	9	14.29%	10.71%
Somewhat disagree	28	31	33.33%	36.90%
Strongly disagree	30	41	35.71%	48.81%

Q18 You run for a community office position and you win.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
I devote a lot of time and energy to campaigning.	44	51	52.38%	60.71%
I work very hard at everything I do.	40	33	47.62%	39.29%

Q12 I try new tasks if I have failed similar ones in the past.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
Strongly agree	17	29	20.24%	34.52%
Somewhat agree	49	45	58.33%	53.57%
Neither agree nor disagree	14	5	16.67%	5.95%
Somewhat disagree	3	2	3.57%	2.38%
Strongly disagree	1	3	1.19%	3.57%

Q15 I am able to reach my goals in life.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
Strongly agree	20	34	23.81%	40.48%
Somewhat agree	40	36	47.62%	42.86%
Neither agree nor disagree	12	7	14.29%	8.33%
Somewhat disagree	10	5	11.90%	5.95%
Strongly disagree	2	2	2.38%	2.38%

Q17 You get lost driving to a friend's house.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
I missed a turn	80	83	95.24%	98.81%
My friend gave me bad directions	4	1	4.76%	1.19%

Q19 You miss an important engagement.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
I sometimes forget to check my appointment book.	63	63	75.00%	75.00%
Sometimes my memory fails me.	21	21	25.00%	25.00%

Q20 You host a successful dinner.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
I am a good host.	68	70	80.95%	83.33%
I was particularly charming that night.	16	14	19.05%	16.67%

Q22 You owe the library \$10 for an overdue book.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
I was so involved in writing the report I forgot to return the book.	57	45	67.86%	53.57%
When I am really involved in what I am reading, I often forget when it's due.	27	39	32.14%	46.43%

Q24 Your car runs out of gas on a dark street late at night.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
I didn't check to see how much gas was in the tank.	60	66	71.43%	78.57%
The gas gauge was broken.	24	18	28.57%	21.43%

Q28 You do exceptionally well in a job interview.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
I felt extremely confident during the interview.	55	54	65.48%	64.29%
I interview well.	29	30	34.52%	35.71%

Q30 You have a wonderful time at a party.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
Everyone was friendly.	51	41	60.71%	48.81%
I was friendly.	33	43	39.29%	51.19%

Q21 You were extremely healthy all year.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
Few people around me were sick, so I wasn't exposed.	6	3	7.14%	3.57%
I made sure I ate well and got enough rest.	78	81	92.86%	96.43%

Q23 Your stocks make you a lot of money.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
My broker decided to take on something new.	24	21	28.57%	25.00%
My broker is a top-notch investor.	60	63	71.43%	75.00%

Q27 A game-show host picks you out of the audience to participate in the show.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
I was sitting in the right seat.	1	1	1.19%	1.19%
I looked the most enthusiastic.	58	58	69.05%	69.05%
I was sitting in the right seat.	26	26	30.95%	30.95%

Q29 You save a person from choking to death.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
I know a technique to stop someone from choking.	44	40	52.38%	47.62%
I know what to do in a crisis situation.	40	44	47.62%	52.38%

Q31 You win a prestigious award.

RESPONSE	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY%	EXIT%
I solved an important problem.	75	73	89.29%	86.90%
I was the best employee.	9	11	10.71%	13.10%

APPENDIX B

Method

Study Design and Procedure

This study used a 90-day, single-arm pre–post design. Participants attended one TPFA session per month over three months and had the option to join an additional mid-month support call between sessions. Participants were grouped into four cohorts based on their preferred time zone. Across the 90-day period, each participant completed the TPFA process three times. A baseline survey was administered prior to the first session, and a follow-up survey was administered at the end of the 90 days. Short qualitative surveys were also distributed during the program to capture participants’ experiences and reflections in real time. All survey data were collected and managed electronically by the NYU Initiative on Purpose and Flourishing (IPF).

Participants

92 participants completed the 90 days and three TPFA’s. 84 participants provided matched baseline and exit responses that were included in the analyses. Participants self-selected into the TPFA program and represented adults interested in structured approaches to personal development and flourishing. Because the primary goal was to assess within-person change over time, analyses focused on the matched sample rather than on comparisons to an external control group.

TPFA Intervention

In this study, TPFA was delivered in small-group, facilitator-led sessions by trained TPFA Guides. The Guides followed a standardized session structure and used *The Practical Flourishing Assessment Discovery Booklet* to support participants in completing the assessment and recording their actions over the 90-day period. Each monthly session included time for participants to complete a TPFA, briefly share progress if they wished, and identify concrete next steps to make before the following session. The optional mid-month support calls were used to provide light accountability and fellowship.

Measures

Quantitative Survey. The quantitative survey assessed items related to locus of control, resilience, self-efficacy, and attributional style at baseline and at 90-day follow-up. All items used Likert-type or forced-choice response formats and were administered in identical form at both time points. The full list of survey questions and response options is provided in Appendix A.

Qualitative Feedback. Qualitative data were collected through open-ended questions embedded in mid-program and exit surveys. These questions invited participants to describe how they were using TPFA in their daily lives, what aspects of the process were most and least helpful, and what changes they observed in themselves over the 90-day period.

Data Collection, Anonymity, and Information Barriers

All surveys were completed online via Qualtrics, using unique Participant Codes. Only the NYU IPF analytical team had access to the survey platform and the submitted data. TPFA Guides did not have access to any individual survey responses or to the Participant Codes, and members of the NYU IPF analytical team did not attend or facilitate TPFA sessions or interact with the study participants at any point during the study. This information barrier between those delivering TPFA and those handling data was designed to preserve anonymity, reduce social desirability bias, and ensure that the Guides could not link feedback to any identifiable participant.

Analytic Approach

Analyses examined changes in response distributions for each survey item from baseline to follow-up within the matched sample. Descriptive statistics focused on percentage-point shifts across Likert categories (for example, changes in the proportion of participants selecting “*strongly agree*” or “*strongly disagree*”). Qualitative responses were reviewed to identify recurring themes related to perceived benefits, challenges in engaging with the process, and recommendations for improving timing, structure, and ongoing support.