



The 3 Spheres of Life

Identifying Work/Life Balance



The Three Spheres of Life

The Three Spheres of Life consist of:

Work:

Work includes both paid and unpaid activities. What is work to one person may be leisure or education to another (e.g., gardening, learning new software programs, reading science journals, housework, volunteer work, etc.). It depends on how you view it.

Education:

Education involves both formal and informal lifelong learning... it includes academic programs, continuing education courses, personal and professional development courses/seminars, reading, self-instruction activities, mentorship, on-the-job training, wherever and however you are learning.

Leisure:

Leisure includes those areas where you spend your discretionary time including family, community, sport, or activities that are creative, recreational, or spiritual. Leisure involves those activities that revitalize you and allow you to come back to your work and education spheres energized and positively charged.

At different times in our lives the spheres shrink and expand in size, depending on where we choose or are required to place our energies. Sometimes we concentrate on our work with education and leisure taking a backseat. Sometimes we are learners, and work and leisure are less prominent.

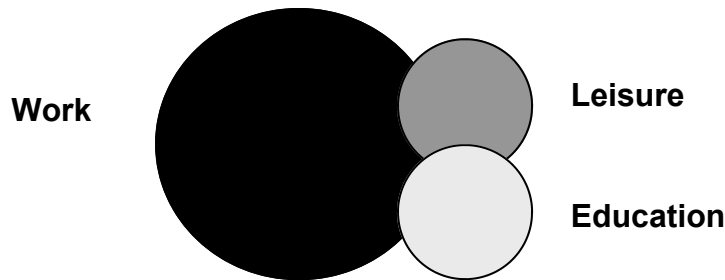
Usually we are most contented with our lives when our spheres are in relative balance, when our time and energies are spent moving amongst the spheres. On the flipside, we usually feel a void, or are most vulnerable, when we neglect one of the spheres and do not develop that aspect of our life. This is particularly apparent in times of stress, such as when we are overworked, or dissatisfied with our work, or feeling our skills are outdated.

The other thing about the Spheres of Life is that they are inter-connected. Your work is not separate from your leisure; your education is not separate from your work. Anyone who has had to take work home with them or been called away from work to deal with a family emergency knows this.

We can use this inter-connection to our benefit if we can come to see that work is an integrated part of our whole life and that each Sphere complements and supports the other. Volunteering as the treasurer for a community group (Leisure) or taking an accounting course at night (Education) can improve our financial management skills on the job (Work). In addition, if we understand that we can find meaning and fulfillment from a variety of activities in all three Spheres, we are not so apt to demand that one Sphere satisfy all of our needs

Let's take a look at four scenarios to see how the Spheres of Life connect and relate to one another.

Scenario A: Work Predominates



This scenario shows a person who is spending a great deal of time at WORK, so much so that the other two spheres are relegated to minor parts of his/her life. Perhaps it's just a particularly busy time at work, or perhaps this situation has become a way of life. This person may not even be conscious that work is dominating his/her life to the exclusion of other activities. But, if the person is stressed, dissatisfied, exhausted, or unfulfilled; it may explain why. It would be important to look at the imbalance in this person's life when s/he was looking to make a career move.

WORK

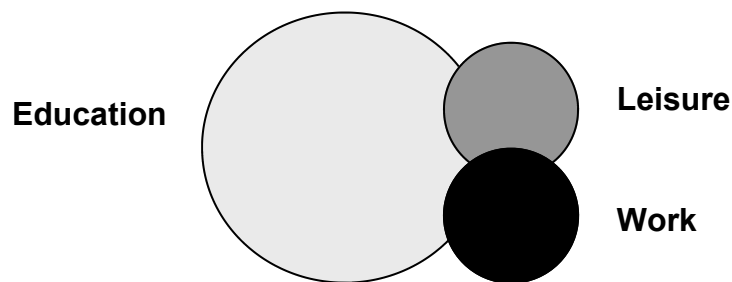
Manager of an Information Technology Services Division who supervises a large number of technical staff. The unit is always short staffed, with constant demands from users to solve technical problems quickly. The manager is frequently on-call for emergencies in the evenings and on weekends and is intensely committed to being a hands-on problem solver.

LEISURE

Plays on a curling team, but frequently has to cancel out on games due to emergencies at work. Considers him/herself to be "family" oriented, but is never far away from his/her beeper during family outings.

EDUCATION

Subscribes to all the latest computer magazines, but never has the time to read them

Scenario B: Education Predominates

In this scenario, the EDUCATION sphere dominates the person's time and relegates the other two spheres to minor roles. Typically this situation is of a specific duration—while a person is attending an educational institution full time or is trying to manage both studies and work. Problems may develop over the long term if family and leisure activities are neglected, or if the person's performance at work suffers because of the studies, or if the person is not able to find paid or unpaid work to satisfy other aspects of their life.

EDUCATION

On one year's full-time educational leave to complete a Masters Degree in Public Administration.

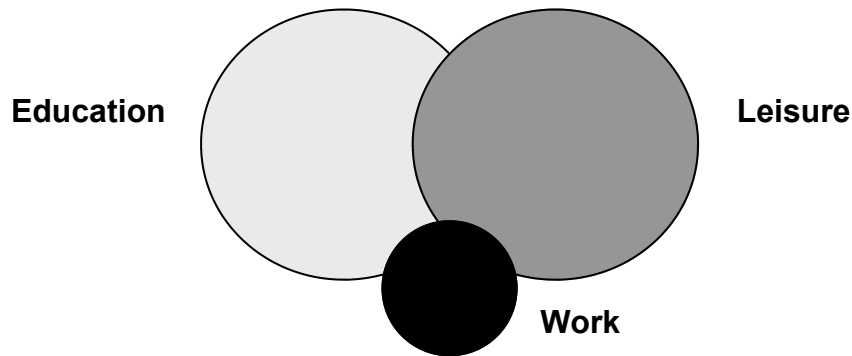
WORK

Senior Policy Analyst who has not kept in touch with the office during a time when new legislation has been passed, new policies introduced, and new software programs installed.

LEISURE

Family, friends, and social activities are squeezed in as time permits

Scenario C: Work is Minor



In this scenario, the WORK sphere is the smallest because this person is not engaged in his/her work. S/he has been in the job too long, or the job is beyond his/her capabilities/interests. The person is using the other spheres to provide meaning in his/her life and to compensate for being bored and frustrated at work. This can also be the picture of a person who is unemployed and is using the other spheres to cope with the stress and discouragement of not working. This scenario also applies to the person who is retired and has a range of activities other than work to provide meaning and satisfaction.

WORK

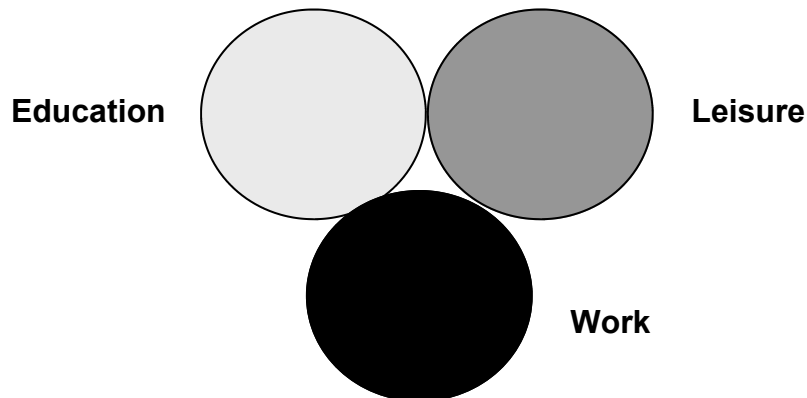
Supervisor of an established public program that has not changed focus in a decade. There has been no new money, few staff changes and no new initiatives introduced. The work is routine maintenance only.

EDUCATION

Taking a wide range of community education courses from tai chi to Gaelic.

LEISURE

Volunteer literacy tutor, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, competitive bridge player, wooden toy maker and Scout leader

Scenario D: Balanced Career Life

This scenario shows a person who is involved in meaningful activities in all three Spheres of Life—someone that has a relatively balanced life between WORK, EDUCATION and LEISURE. This person has a challenging job, but still finds time to participate in leisure time and educational activities. This person has found a way to have each sphere support and enhance the others: s/he uses work-related skills to volunteer in the community; continues to develop skills to enhance work performance; devotes time to personal interests which keeps him/her energized and is involved as a parent.

WORK

P/T Worker in Financial Services; volunteer Secretary-Treasurer, United Way campaign;

EDUCATION

Enrolled in Executive Development program; using Internet to research alternative housing construction methods; self-tutoring in new financial software programs.

LEISURE

Building bale construction house; parent volunteer at school; swims three times a week; member of a monthly book club

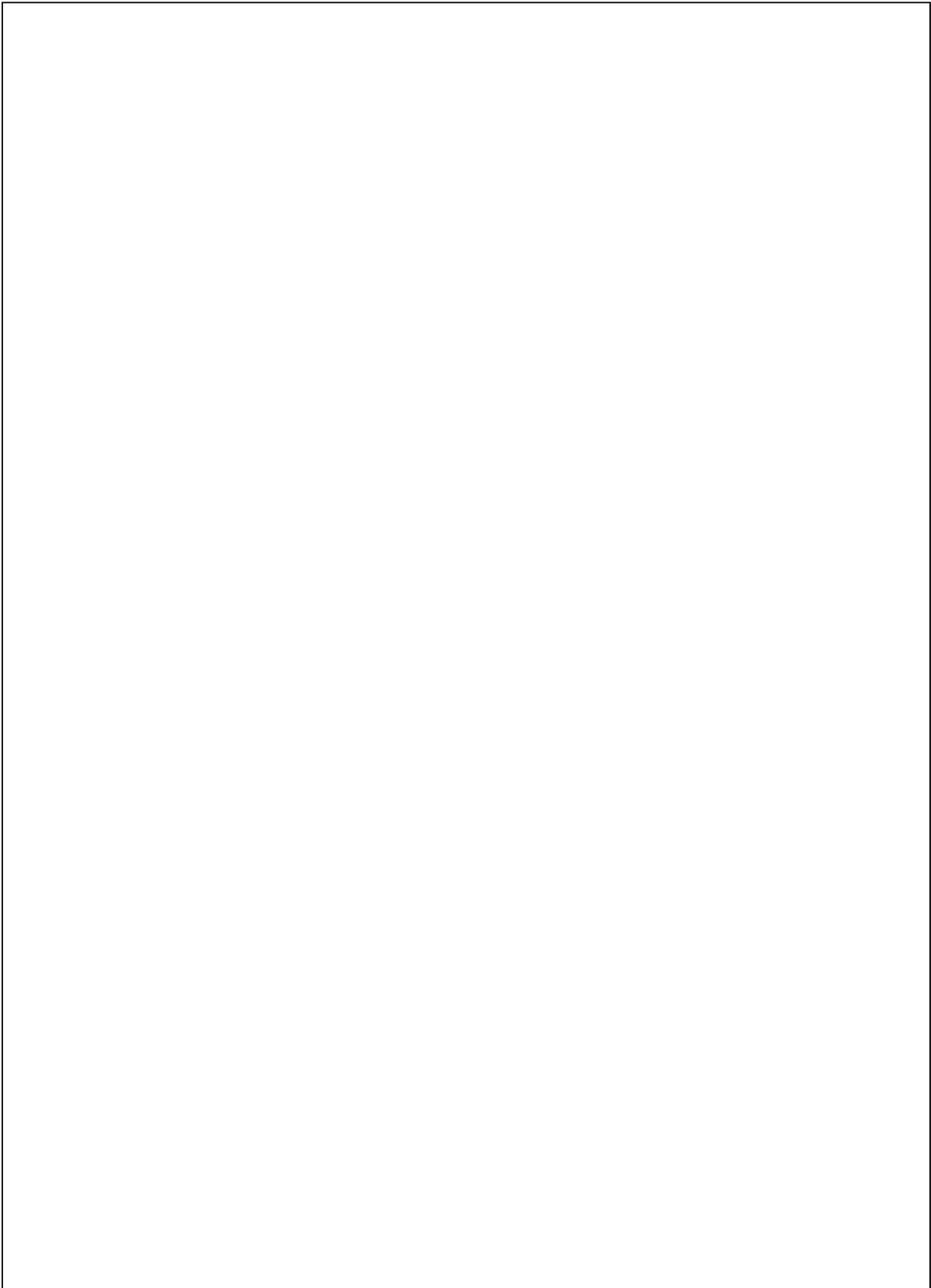
What do your Three Spheres of Life look like right now? How satisfied are you with your Spheres? Are they relatively balanced? Complete Activity 1 to find out

ACTIVITY 1: My Three Spheres of Life

1. In the chart below, list the major activities that you are presently involved with under the categories Work, Education and Leisure. Remember that the category in which you place each activity depends on how you perceive it for yourself.

WORK (PAID/UNPAID)	EDUCATION	LEISURE

2. Based on the list that you have developed, draw and label three spheres that represent the relative size of your Three Spheres of Life as they are right now

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to draw and label three spheres representing the relative size of their 'Three Spheres of Life'.

3. What is the relative size of each of your Spheres right now? How satisfied are you with the relative balance of your three Spheres?

(Balance does not have to mean 'equal'. One sphere may predominate over the others for perfectly legitimate reasons and that's fine. Just be aware that extreme imbalances over long periods of time may become problematic.)

4. What changes, if any, would you like to make to your Three Spheres of Life?
