

Using the Hedonic Calculus Worksheet¹

Prepared by Mitchell W. Robin, Ph.D.

Introduction:

Many people, most - probably, come into therapy to work on an issue that they or others targeted as something worth the time, effort and energy to change. For example, they wish to work on overcoming their anxiety, depression, or rage. Some people come into therapy concerning a life altering choice that they are considering making. For example, they are contemplating starting a new business, or leaving an old one; or they may be considering marrying or divorcing a partner.

If the decision concerns choosing between an obvious pleasure and an obvious pain, e.g., doing something we truly enjoy or having our head hit with a stick, I suspect most of us would choose to avoid the stick and take the pleasure. However, many choices are not as obvious and sometimes we can find ourselves immobilized because we cannot clearly see which of life's choices might provide the greatest long term hedonism or pleasure.

This Hedonic Calculus Worksheet was developed to assist my clients, my students, and others to evaluate the respective benefits and losses surrounding each of the possible options they are faced with when making a choice. This worksheet, by itself, is not meant as a substitute for therapy or for discussing alternatives with appropriate Mental Health practitioners. However, it can be a useful adjunct to help us clarify our alternatives.

¹**Please Note** - The worksheet, and this introduction and instruction sheet, may be used freely for your personal use or it may be distributed freely to your clients, **WITH ONE PROVISIO**: You may not alter it in any way with out my express written permission and you can only reproduce it exactly as it appears here (Including any typos or spelling errors).

Using the Hedonic Calculus Worksheet²

Prepared by Mitchell W. Robin, Ph.D.

Instructions:

1. Begin by listing the benefits you experience in the current situation. There may be many good reasons for maintaining the status quo. These benefits might be emotional, social, financial, or intangible. List as many as you can think of.
2. Next, list all the benefits, real or hoped for, for one of the possible choices you are contemplating. If there are many alternatives create a different worksheet for ***each*** of the possible alternatives and then list the real or hoped for benefits for each of the other alternatives. (For one of my clients the status quo was keeping the current job, alternatives that were being considered were finding a different job in the same industry, working harder for advancement at the current job, or making a complete career shift which probably would require re-tooling and getting an advanced degree. For another, the status quo was staying in a long term marriage despite the constant arguments and fights. Alternatives being considered were: seeking couples counseling, finding a lover, or getting a divorce.) Note that we are comparing benefits to benefits. Try not to compare the lengths of each list - some people get hung up on the fact that one list has 6 items and the next one might only have one or two.
3. Then list the costs or liabilities to maintaining the status quo. List as many as you can think of.
4. Finally, list the costs or liabilities for the choice(s) that is/are under consideration.
5. It may be helpful to do each of these lists, both the benefits and the costs at different times, or on separate pieces of paper. In this way you might avoid the stumbling block of trying to keep each list "balanced". It is not necessary that you find an equal and opposite cost for each benefit. Attempting to do so will only further muddy the choices being considered and frequently leads to further immobilization.
6. When all of the benefits and liabilities are listed go back over each list and rank each item on them using a scale from 1 to 5. Use +1 to +5 for the Benefit lists, use -1 to -5 for the liabilities lists. Remember 5 is used for those items that you feel have either the greatest benefit or liability, 1 is used for those items that you feel have either the smallest benefit or liability.
7. After you have ranked each item add up the totals for each of the lists - there will be at least four totals: Total Benefits from the status quo list, Total Benefits from the Change I am Contemplating list, Total Costs from the status quo list, and finally Total Costs from the Change I am contemplating list.

²**Please Note** - The worksheet, and this introduction and instruction sheet, may be used freely for you personal use or it may be distributed freely to your clients, **WITH ONE PROVISIO**: You may not alter it in any way with out my express written permission and you can only reproduce it exactly as it appears here (Including any typos or spelling errors).

