



**EN Garzia Number Line Metaphor: A Practice-Based Conceptual Model
for Identifying Barriers, Life-Direction and Pathways towards
Psychological Flourishing**

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Abstract

This article presents the Number Line Metaphor as a practice-based psychological method for supporting psychological formulation and guiding psychosocial intervention planning in psychotherapy. The method uses a number line as a metaphorical structure through which clients identify and subjectively weight supportive (α) and constraining (β) influences affecting their present life situation. These influences are represented numerically to establish an individualized Life Line position, without treating the values as standardized psychological measurements. The method provides a visual basis for organizing subjective experience, facilitating therapeutic dialogue, identifying intervention priorities, and reviewing subsequent changes in circumstances and subjective appraisal. Illustrative cases from a practice base of 30 cases during 2025–2026 demonstrate its application across differing circumstances. The article distinguishes the Number Line Metaphor from the

psychosocial interventions planned through its use and identifies methodological boundaries and directions for empirical research.

Keywords: number line metaphor; life line metaphor; psychological formulation; psychosocial intervention; subjective appraisal

1. Introduction

People seek counselling and psychotherapy for a wide range of psychological and psychosocial difficulties, including emotional distress, relationship problems, family conflict, occupational difficulties, loss, uncertainty, impaired functioning, and difficulties in adapting to changing life circumstances. Such difficulties rarely occur in isolation. A person's psychological functioning may be influenced simultaneously by personal experiences, relationships, family circumstances, occupational conditions, financial pressures, social environments, personal capacities, and available sources of support. Consequently, therapeutic understanding may require attention not only to the problem that brings a person to professional help but also to the wider circumstances and resources within which that problem is experienced.

In therapeutic practice, clients may initially describe their circumstances predominantly in terms of problems, failures, conflicts, losses, or perceived barriers. Such experiences can become psychologically dominant and may lead to broad conclusions about the person's life, functioning, or future. At the same time, clients may possess strengths, supportive relationships, previous achievements, meaningful activities, coping capacities, opportunities, and other resources that receive less attention during initial exploration. Therapeutic work can therefore benefit from a process that enables difficulties and available resources to be considered together rather than treating the person exclusively in terms of either problems or strengths.

The appraisal of circumstances is also subjective. The same external circumstance may be experienced differently by different individuals, and its perceived influence may change as circumstances, understanding, relationships, or available resources change. Stress and coping research has long emphasized the importance of how individuals appraise circumstances and their perceived capacity to respond to them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In counselling and

psychotherapy, understanding the client's appraisal of their circumstances can therefore contribute to identifying areas requiring attention as well as resources that may be available for therapeutic work.

A further practical challenge is that information emerging during counselling may remain dispersed across conversation. A client may discuss family difficulties, occupational concerns, financial pressures, personal strengths, supportive relationships, aspirations, and previous successes at different points in the therapeutic process. Although each may be relevant, their combined significance for the person's present situation and for intervention planning may not always be immediately visible. A simple visual representation may provide a shared reference through which these diverse influences can be organized and discussed.

Metaphor offers one possible means of creating such a shared representation. In psychotherapy, metaphor has been described as a way of organizing and exploring experiences that may be complex, multidimensional, or difficult to express directly (Berlin et al., 1991; Muran & DiGiuseppe, 1990). Contemporary research on therapists' use of metaphor also emphasizes the importance of collaboratively developing metaphorical meaning rather than imposing a predetermined interpretation on the client (McMullen & Tay, 2023). A visual metaphor may be particularly relevant when therapeutic discussion involves movement, direction, progress, setbacks, barriers, resources, and possibilities for change.

The **Number Line Metaphor** was developed within routine counselling, psychotherapy, and psychosocial intervention practice as a simple visual method for bringing these elements into a common therapeutic field of attention. The mathematical number line provides a familiar visual reference with positive and negative directions. Within the method, the psychologist introduces the number line as a metaphor for the client's perceived life situation. Through collaborative exploration, the client identifies influences that they experience as supportive or nourishing and influences that they experience as problematic, constraining, or retarding. These influences can then be placed on the appropriate side of the number line and assigned subjective numerical values according to their perceived influence.

The numerical values in the Number Line Metaphor are not standardized psychological scores. They do not represent symptom severity, diagnostic status, psychological functioning in a psychometric sense, or therapeutic outcome. Rather, they provide a simple representational convention through which the client can indicate the perceived influence of particular

circumstances or experiences. The individual positive and negative contributions can subsequently be considered together to establish a resultant position that represents the client's present appraisal within the particular Life Line constructed with the psychologist.

The practical purpose of this representation extends beyond identifying a present position. Once supportive and constraining influences have been made visible, they can provide a basis for collaborative psychological formulation and intervention planning. Constraining influences may identify areas requiring reduction, management, resolution, adaptation, or further therapeutic attention. Supportive influences may identify resources, capacities, relationships, opportunities, or other conditions that can be strengthened or mobilized. The Number Line Metaphor therefore does not prescribe a particular intervention for a particular client. Instead, it can assist the psychologist and client in identifying priorities and considering appropriate psychosocial interventions within established professional practice.

The method also permits consideration of possible future direction. The client may reflect on what could change if important barriers were reduced or managed and what existing or additional resources might support the desired direction. Subsequent use of the Number Line Metaphor can provide an opportunity to review changes in circumstances, perceived influences, priorities, and the client's represented position. Such repositioning is not intended to function as a standardized measure of therapeutic improvement; rather, it provides a basis for reviewing the client's changing experience and the continuing relevance of intervention priorities.

The present article examines the Number Line Metaphor as a practice-based psychological method for psychological formulation and guiding psychosocial intervention in psychotherapy. It describes the development and structure of the method, the procedure through which supportive and constraining influences are identified and subjectively positioned, and the way in which the resulting representation can inform psychosocial intervention planning. Practice-based comparative cases from 2025–2026 are used to illustrate how the method was applied across differing psychological and psychosocial circumstances. The article considers common and differing patterns across the cases and discusses the practical boundaries and current evidentiary status of the method.

2. Conceptual Foundations of the Number Line Metaphor

2.1 Therapeutic Metaphor and Collaborative Meaning-Making

Metaphor can provide an accessible means of representing experiences that are complex, multidimensional, or difficult to express directly. In psychotherapy, metaphor has been considered more than a decorative form of language; it may contribute to the organization and exploration of experience and provide alternative ways of understanding problems and possibilities (Berlin et al., 1991; Muran & DiGiuseppe, 1990). Research on psychotherapists' use of metaphor further emphasizes the importance of how metaphorical meanings are developed within therapeutic interaction and the potential value of collaborative rather than exclusively practitioner-imposed meanings (McMullen & Tay, 2023).

The Number Line Metaphor uses the familiar mathematical number line as a shared visual reference for exploring the client's present life situation. The psychologist introduces the basic metaphor, while the client determines what the different experiences and influences mean within their own circumstances. The number line therefore does not function as a predetermined questionnaire or scoring instrument. Its purpose is to provide a simple visual structure through which experiences discussed during counselling or psychotherapy can be organized and examined.

The metaphor of movement also provides a practical language for discussing change. Positive and negative directions on the line allow clients to consider experiences that they perceive as supporting or retarding their progression, while the open-ended nature of the line permits discussion of possible future directions without requiring a predetermined endpoint. The meaning of movement remains grounded in the client's circumstances and understanding rather than in an externally imposed interpretation of what a particular numerical position should mean.

2.2 Psychological Formulation Through Supportive and Constraining Influences

Psychological formulation involves bringing together information relevant to a person's difficulties, circumstances, resources, and possible avenues for change. In routine counselling and psychotherapy, information relevant to formulation may emerge gradually through discussion of presenting problems, relationships, behaviours, personal history, strengths,

environmental circumstances, and future concerns. A visual structure may help organize this information when several influences operate simultaneously.

The Number Line Metaphor organizes these influences into two broad practice-derived directions. **Alpha (α) influences** refer to factors that the client experiences as supportive, nourishing, protective, mediating, or growth-promoting. **Beta (β) influences** refer to factors experienced as problematic, constraining, threatening, burdensome, or retarding. These categories are not intended to represent validated psychological dimensions. Rather, they provide a practical structure for organizing the information identified by the client during therapeutic exploration.

The distinction between α and β does not imply that a person's life can be divided into exclusively positive and negative components. Supportive resources may coexist with substantial difficulties, and an apparently positive circumstance may sometimes create pressures or limitations. Similarly, a person experiencing considerable adversity may retain relationships, abilities, opportunities, values, or other resources that can support adaptation and change. The value of the distinction therefore lies in bringing both sides of the client's situation into therapeutic attention.

The influences identified through the process may arise from personal, relational, family, occupational, educational, financial, social, cultural, or environmental circumstances. Their relevance is determined by the client's experience and by the therapeutic context. The method consequently provides structure without requiring the psychologist to impose a fixed checklist of problems or strengths.

2.3 Subjective Appraisal and Numerical Representation

The Number Line Metaphor incorporates numerical representation because a number line provides a familiar and readily understood means of indicating direction and relative position. The client may assign a positive or negative numerical value to an identified influence according to the influence that the client perceives it to have on their present situation. These values are therefore subjective representations, not standardized units of psychological functioning.

The numerical value assigned to an influence should not be interpreted as a symptom score, severity rating, diagnostic indicator, or validated measure. A value of +4 or -4 has meaning only within the particular Life Line constructed with that client. The same numerical value may represent entirely different experiences for different individuals. The numerical representation is consequently subordinate to the client's narrative and the therapeutic meaning attached to the identified influence.

When the identified α and β influences are considered together, their contributions may be used to establish a resultant present position on the Life Line. This position provides a concise representation of how the client presently appraises the configuration of influences identified during the exploration. The calculation is a practice-based representational procedure, not a psychometric calculation. Its practical purpose is to make the client's appraisal visible and provide a shared reference for subsequent therapeutic discussion.

The numerical representation may also be reconsidered when the client's appraisal changes, when relevant circumstances change, or when supportive and constraining influences are strengthened, reduced, managed, or otherwise altered. Thus, the number provides a point of reference for therapeutic review without being treated as an objective measure of psychological change.

2.4 Strengths, Resources, Barriers, and Psychosocial Action

Psychological intervention commonly requires attention to both factors that contribute to difficulty and factors that may support adaptation and change. A problem-focused formulation may identify important sources of distress but may provide an incomplete basis for intervention planning if available resources and capacities are not considered. Conversely, a strengths-focused approach may be insufficient when significant barriers or risks remain unaddressed.

This strengths-oriented perspective is also consistent with the broaden-and-build account of positive emotions, which proposes that positive emotional experiences can broaden momentary patterns of thought and action and contribute over time to the development of enduring personal resources (Fredrickson, 2001). Within the Number Line Metaphor, supportive α influences are not treated simply as positive experiences or desirable outcomes; they may include relationships, capacities, opportunities, meaningful activities, and other

resources that can expand the person's perceived possibilities for responding to difficulties. The framework therefore provides a way of considering supportive conditions alongside barriers when formulating possible psychosocial action.

The Number Line Metaphor brings these considerations together through the identification of α and β influences. β influences can identify areas requiring attention, reduction, management, resolution, adaptation, or further therapeutic exploration. α influences can identify strengths, relationships, resources, opportunities, capacities, and other supportive conditions that may be strengthened or mobilized. The purpose is not to assume that every β influence can be eliminated or that every α influence will necessarily produce positive change. Rather, the distinction helps the psychologist and client consider what can realistically be addressed and what resources may be available to support that process.

This formulation can provide a basis for individualized psychosocial intervention planning. For example, a β influence associated with family conflict may lead to consideration of family-focused work, communication skills, boundary-setting, or other appropriate interventions. A β influence associated with occupational difficulties may require exploration of work-related stress, problem-solving, vocational concerns, or practical support. An α influence such as a supportive relationship may be considered as a resource that can be strengthened or mobilized during intervention. The particular intervention remains a matter of professional judgement and client need; the Number Line Metaphor does not prescribe a specific intervention for a particular numerical position or domain.

The method therefore functions as a guiding structure for psychosocial formulation and intervention planning. It helps connect what the client identifies as important with consideration of what may need to change, what may be strengthened, and what forms of professional or psychosocial support may be appropriate.

2.5 Future Direction and Review of Intervention Priorities

Intervention planning may also require consideration of what the client wishes to achieve or what direction they regard as meaningful. The Number Line Metaphor provides an opportunity to distinguish the client's present perceived position from a possible future direction. The latter is not a standardized target or a numerical endpoint imposed by the psychologist. It represents a possibility identified through collaborative discussion and may

involve improvement in functioning, reduction of burden, restoration of relationships, achievement of a practical goal, development of personal capacities, or movement towards another personally meaningful outcome.

The consideration of future direction also has conceptual relevance to hope theory, in which hope is understood in relation to valued goals, perceived pathways toward those goals, and the agency associated with pursuing them (Snyder, 2002). The Number Line Metaphor does not adopt hope theory as its explanatory model, nor does it treat a numerical position as a goal or pathway measure. Rather, the framework shares the practical concern with helping clients articulate personally meaningful directions and consider possible pathways within the opportunities and constraints of their circumstances. This distinction is important because a meaningful direction may require adaptation, negotiation, or acceptance rather than movement toward a predetermined numerical endpoint.

Considering a possible future direction can help connect the identified α and β influences with intervention priorities. The psychologist and client can examine which constraining influences may require attention and which supportive influences may be strengthened or mobilized to facilitate the desired direction. The resulting plan remains responsive to the client's circumstances and may change as new information, opportunities, difficulties, or priorities emerge.

The Number Line can subsequently be revisited to examine the client's current appraisal. A later position may differ because circumstances have changed, particular barriers have been reduced or managed, supportive resources have increased or become less available, or the client's understanding of their situation has changed. A change in numerical position is therefore interpreted within the context of the client's narrative and intervention process rather than as a standardized outcome score.

3. Development and Methodological Procedure of the Number Line Metaphor

3.1 Practice-Based Development and Refinement

The Number Line Metaphor emerged from routine professional practice in counselling, psychotherapy, and psychosocial intervention. Its development was not based initially on a

predetermined theoretical model or standardized assessment procedure. Rather, it evolved through repeated therapeutic encounters in which clients described multiple and sometimes conflicting aspects of their lives and required assistance in understanding how these influences related to their present circumstances and possible directions for change. Practice experience progressively led to the use of a simple number line as a shared visual reference for organizing these experiences.

The development involved an iterative process of observation, therapeutic reflection, conceptualization, and refinement. During counselling and psychotherapy, clients could describe substantial difficulties while simultaneously possessing supportive relationships, personal capacities, achievements, financial or material resources, meaningful activities, or other circumstances that could contribute to coping and adaptation. Conversely, clients who appeared to have considerable resources could experience particular problems or pressures that substantially affected their perceived functioning. These observations indicated the practical value of considering supportive and constraining influences together.

The number line provided a simple means of bringing these different influences into a common visual field. The positive and negative directions of the line allowed experiences perceived by the client as supportive or constraining to be represented according to their perceived influence. Through continued use, the procedure was refined to include identification of α supportive influences and β constraining influences, subjective numerical weighting, consideration of the combined influences, identification of the client's present position, and subsequent use of the representation in therapeutic discussion and intervention planning.

The method has remained open to individual variation. The influences identified, their relative importance, and the domains in which they occur may differ substantially between clients. The α and β categories therefore function as organizing structures for practice rather than as fixed or validated psychological dimensions. The present formulation represents a refinement of practice experience and does not claim that the method has yet undergone systematic psychometric or efficacy validation.

3.2 Establishing the Number Line

The method begins by introducing the mathematical number line as a metaphorical and visual reference. The psychologist explains that the line is being used to help the client

represent how they presently experience their life situation and the influences affecting it. The line may extend in both positive and negative directions and does not have a predetermined endpoint.

The psychologist and client then establish the client's present situation through open therapeutic conversation. The client is invited to describe the circumstances, experiences, relationships, behaviours, resources, difficulties, pressures, achievements, aspirations, and other factors that they consider relevant to their current life. The process is not dependent on a predetermined checklist. The client's account determines which influences become relevant for further exploration.

The number line is therefore introduced as a shared reference rather than a test. The psychologist facilitates the process, while the client provides the primary interpretation of the significance and influence of the factors identified. The purpose of the initial exploration is to establish a sufficiently comprehensive picture of the client's situation before assigning numerical representations.

3.3 Identification of α Supportive and β Constraining Influences

Following exploration of the client's circumstances, the identified influences are organized into two broad directions. Alpha (α) influences are those that the client experiences as supportive, nourishing, protective, mediating, or growth-promoting. Beta (β) influences are those experienced as problematic, constraining, threatening, burdensome, or retarding.

The classification is based on the client's perceived influence rather than on an externally determined definition of whether a particular circumstance is objectively positive or negative. A supportive relationship, for example, may function as an α influence for one client, while a relationship experienced as conflictual or restrictive may constitute a β influence for another. The same circumstance may also contain both supportive and constraining aspects, depending on how it is experienced.

The influences may arise from personal, family, relational, occupational, educational, financial, social, cultural, or environmental circumstances. The psychologist does not need to restrict the exploration to predefined domains. Instead, the relevant domains emerge from the client's circumstances and the purpose of the therapeutic work.

The distinction between α and β is intended to support intervention formulation rather than simple categorization. β influences can identify areas that may require reduction, management, resolution, adaptation, or further therapeutic attention. α influences can identify resources, capacities, relationships, opportunities, and other conditions that may be strengthened or mobilized.

3.4 Subjective Weighting and Positioning of Influences

Once relevant influences have been identified, the client considers the perceived influence of each factor on their present situation. Individual influences may then be assigned a positive or negative numerical value on the number line, which is used by the client as a Life Line to represent their present life position. The numerical value expresses the client's subjective appraisal of the influence rather than a standardized unit of psychological functioning. The resultant position is therefore established by combining the client's subjectively weighted α and β influences. The calculation is a representational convention rather than a psychometric calculation. Figure 1 illustrates this procedure using an example in which the client identified α influences with a combined perceived value of +4 and β influences with a combined perceived value of -8, resulting in a present Life Line position of -4. The client's Life Line position may be reviewed in successive sessions, with repositioning undertaken when changes in the identified influences, circumstances, or their subjective appraisal are observed. Movement toward the right may indicate a more favourable change in the client's perceived life position, whereas movement toward the left may indicate a less favourable change; however, the meaning of any shift remains dependent on the client's circumstances and subjective appraisal.

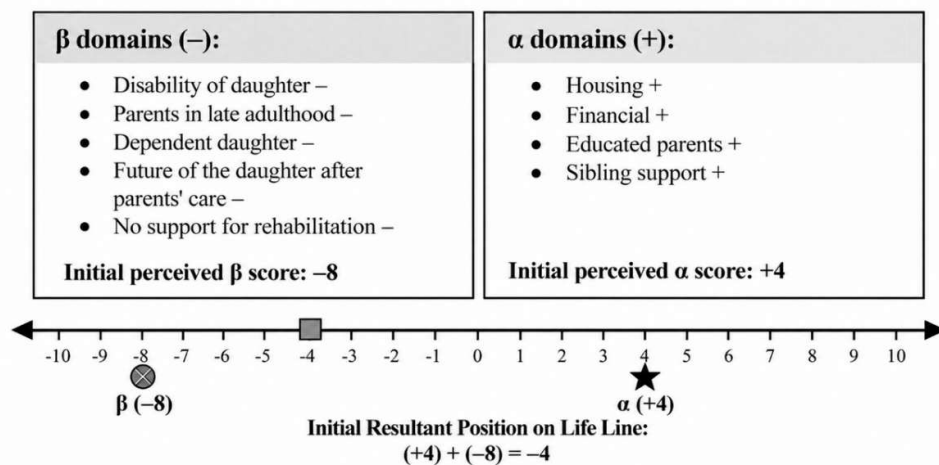


Figure 1: *Illustrative Application of the Number Line Metaphor in Establishing a Present Life Position*

Note. The number of identified α or β influences need not correspond to their combined perceived score. The numerical values represent the client's subjective weighting of the identified influences and are used to establish a representational Life Line position; they are not standardized psychological measurements.

For example, a client may identify several α influences and assign them values such as +1, +2, or +3 according to their perceived contribution. Similarly, β influences may be represented as -1, -2, -3, or other values according to the client's perception of their influence. The values are determined collaboratively through therapeutic discussion, but the client remains the primary source of meaning and weighting.

The values assigned to different influences are subsequently considered together to establish a resultant present position on the Life Line. For example, if the client identifies α influences with a combined perceived contribution of +4 and β influences with a combined perceived contribution of -8, the resultant position is represented as: $(+4) + (-8) = -4$

The calculation is a representational convention used within the method. It is not a psychometric calculation and should not be interpreted as a standardized score. The resulting numerical position has meaning only in relation to the particular influences identified and the client's interpretation of them.

The psychologist's role is to facilitate clarification and reflection rather than to determine the numerical values. If the client changes their appraisal during the conversation, the representation can also be reconsidered. Thus, numerical positioning remains connected to the client's evolving understanding of their situation.

3.5 Establishing the Present Life Position

After the relevant α and β influences have been explored and subjectively weighted, the client identifies the point on the number line that represents their present perceived life position. This position is understood in relation to the configuration of influences identified during the preceding exploration.

The central reference point, zero, is not defined as an optimal or desirable psychological state. A client may experience a position around zero as balanced, uncertain, static, stuck, transitional, or otherwise meaningful. Its significance is determined through therapeutic discussion rather than by the numerical value itself.

Similarly, a positive or negative position does not provide a complete description of the client's psychological functioning. A client positioned negatively may retain substantial strengths and resources, while a client positioned positively may simultaneously experience important difficulties or risks. The purpose of establishing the position is therefore to provide a concise visual representation of the client's current appraisal while retaining the underlying α and β influences as the substantive material for therapeutic exploration.

3.6 From Life Line Formulation to Psychosocial Intervention Planning

The principal practical purpose of the Number Line Metaphor is not the numerical position itself but the formulation that emerges from the exploration surrounding it. Once the α and β influences have been identified and represented, the psychologist and client can consider which factors appear most relevant to the client's current difficulties and which resources may support possible change.

β influences may indicate areas requiring psychological, relational, behavioural, social, family, occupational, or other psychosocial attention. Depending on the nature of the influence, an appropriate response may involve reduction, management, problem-solving, behavioural change, communication work, relationship-focused intervention, rehabilitation, skills

development, environmental modification, adaptation, or acceptance. α influences may similarly identify capacities, relationships, opportunities, and resources that can be strengthened or mobilized.

The Number Line Metaphor does not prescribe a particular intervention for a particular numerical value or α/β category. Instead, it provides a structured basis for collaborative psychosocial formulation and intervention planning. The psychologist uses professional judgement, together with the client's circumstances, needs, preferences, and goals, to determine which established therapeutic or psychosocial approaches may be appropriate.

This distinction is important. The Number Line Metaphor functions as a guiding method for intervention planning, while the subsequent counselling, psychotherapy, rehabilitation, skills development, family work, or other psychosocial intervention constitutes the professional intervention itself.

3.7 Considering Direction and Subsequent Review

Following the formulation of the present position and identification of intervention priorities, the client may be invited to consider a possible direction for change. This may involve improvement in functioning, reduction of a particular burden, strengthening of a relationship or personal capacity, achievement of a practical goal, rehabilitation, or another outcome that the client regards as meaningful.

The desired direction is not determined solely by movement toward a higher numerical value. Although movement from the negative toward the positive side may represent a more favourable perceived position, the meaning of meaningful change depends on the client's circumstances and priorities. In some situations, an important therapeutic achievement may involve maintaining a stable position despite significant external adversity, while in others a change in position may accompany changes in the configuration of α and β influences rather than a simple numerical shift.

The Number Line can subsequently be reconstructed or reviewed after therapeutic or psychosocial work has occurred. Changes may involve the number itself, the influences identified, their perceived weighting, the surrounding circumstances, or the client's interpretation of their situation. Repositioning therefore provides an opportunity to examine

what has changed, what remains unresolved, and what further intervention or support may be appropriate.

4. Analysis of Illustrative Practice Cases From 2025–2026

During 2025–2026, the Number Line Metaphor was used in routine psychological and psychosocial practice across 30 cases involving varied presenting circumstances and intervention needs. Selected examples from this practice base are presented in this section to illustrate how the method functioned in psychological formulation and in guiding psychosocial intervention planning. The purpose is not to present all 30 cases as a formal case series, nor to establish the efficacy of the method, but to demonstrate its practical application across differing client circumstances.

The illustrative examples were selected to show variation in the nature of presenting concerns, the configuration of supportive (α) and constraining (β) influences, the client's subjective positioning, and the psychosocial priorities that emerged from the formulation. The cases therefore provide practical illustrations of how the Number Line Metaphor was incorporated into established psychological practice rather than representing a predetermined intervention protocol.

Across the illustrative cases, the method provided a common structure for organizing information that was relevant to the client's present situation. Clients identified circumstances, experiences, resources, relationships, capacities, barriers, risks, and other influences that they considered significant. These were organized as α supportive influences and β constraining influences, with their relative significance determined subjectively by the client. The resulting numerical position served as a visual representation of the client's appraisal of the configuration at that particular point in time.

The cases also demonstrate that the same numerical position cannot necessarily be interpreted in the same way across individuals or across different points in the same person's life. Its meaning depends upon the particular α and β influences identified, the subjective significance attributed to them, and the circumstances in which the position was established. A change in numerical position may therefore reflect a reduction or management of constraining influences, strengthening or utilization of supportive influences, changes in external circumstances, changes in subjective appraisal, or a combination of these factors.

An important feature across the cases was the relationship between formulation and psychosocial intervention planning. The Number Line Metaphor did not prescribe or constitute the intervention. Rather, the representation provided a structured basis for identifying priorities and considering what psychosocial responses might be appropriate to the client's circumstances. The actual intervention remained dependent upon the client's needs, professional assessment, contextual conditions, and established psychological or psychosocial practice.

The illustrative cases further demonstrate that subsequent review may involve more than movement toward a numerically higher position. Repositioning may occur when supportive or constraining influences change, when circumstances change, or when the client develops a different understanding of the situation. In some circumstances, a similar numerical position may be associated with a substantially different configuration or meaning. The Life Line representation can therefore be used during review to reconsider the person's current situation and the priorities for continuing psychosocial work.

Taken together, the illustrative cases demonstrate the practical range of the Number Line Metaphor as a psychological formulation and intervention-planning method. They show how the method can bring together subjectively experienced supportive and constraining influences, make their relationship visually discussable, and assist in identifying priorities for psychosocial intervention and subsequent review. The cases are illustrative rather than evidentiary and do not establish treatment efficacy, causal effects, or generalizability. Their purpose is to demonstrate how the method operated within routine practice and to provide a practice-based basis for further systematic investigation.

5. Discussion and Implications for Psychosocial Intervention Planning

5.1 Psychological Flourishing as an Orienting Purpose

The Number Line Metaphor is oriented toward **psychological flourishing** rather than merely the reduction of psychological difficulties. Contemporary literature increasingly conceptualizes flourishing as a multidimensional form of positive functioning that extends beyond the absence of psychological symptoms to include psychological, social, emotional, and existential dimensions of well-being (Rule et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2026).

The orientation toward positive functioning is consistent with the broader development of positive psychology, which called attention to the study of positive experiences, individual strengths, and conditions that enable individuals and communities to thrive alongside the study of psychological difficulties (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The Number Line Metaphor adopts this broader orientation without treating positive functioning as the simple opposite of psychological difficulty. Supportive resources and constraining conditions are considered together because meaningful functioning may depend on the interaction between personal capacities and the circumstances in which those capacities can be expressed.

Within the present framework, flourishing is understood as the possibility of living with greater access to personal capacities, supportive relationships, meaningful activities, resources, and personally valued directions while responding realistically to constraints within the person's circumstances. This orientation is consistent with contemporary distinctions between subjective well-being and positive psychological functioning, in which flourishing involves not only how a person feels but also the conditions and processes through which effective functioning can occur (Martela, 2026).

The framework does not assume that flourishing necessarily involves movement toward a numerically positive Life Line position. Meaningful development may involve strengthening supportive conditions, reducing or managing constraints, adapting to circumstances that cannot readily be changed, clarifying values and direction, or developing more sustainable ways of engaging with one's life. Flourishing is therefore treated as a contextual and multidimensional orientation, rather than as a numerical endpoint.

5.2 Formulation and Psychosocial Intervention Planning

The illustrative cases indicate that the Number Line Metaphor can provide a practical structure for psychological formulation. Psychological formulation involves organizing information about a person's difficulties, circumstances, and resources in order to develop an understanding that can inform therapeutic work and intervention planning (Johnstone & Dallos, 2014). Within the Number Line Metaphor, the identification of α supportive and β constraining influences brings together different aspects of the client's situation and helps identify priorities for psychosocial intervention. This formulation is particularly relevant in cases involving depressive difficulties, where the individual's interpretation of adverse circumstances, perceived limitations, negative expectations, and available possibilities may form an important

part of the psychological formulation. The Number Line Metaphor does not constitute a cognitive therapy model; rather, it provides an additional structure through which such psychological experiences can be considered alongside the client's supportive resources, constraining circumstances, and psychosocial context.

The numerical position itself does not determine the intervention. Rather, the configuration of influences, their subjective significance, the client's circumstances, and professional psychological judgment provide the basis for deciding what intervention may be appropriate. Supportive influences may be recognized and utilized, while constraining influences may be reduced, managed, negotiated, adapted to, or accepted according to their nature and context.

This orientation also corresponds with contemporary positive psychological approaches that seek to attend to positive functioning and resources alongside psychological difficulties rather than treating well-being as simply the opposite of psychopathology (Wang et al., 2026).

5.3 Therapeutic Collaboration, Review, and Repositioning

The method places the client's subjective appraisal within a collaborative therapeutic process. The psychologist facilitates exploration and formulation, while the client identifies the influences that are personally significant and determines their subjective weighting. The Life Line consequently provides a shared visual reference for therapeutic dialogue without converting the client's experience into a standardized psychological score.

The representation can also be revisited during subsequent work. Repositioning may reflect changes in supportive or constraining influences, changes in external circumstances, or changes in the client's understanding and appraisal. A subsequent numerical position therefore requires interpretation in relation to the configuration and meaning of the influences rather than being treated as a direct indicator of therapeutic outcome.

5.4 Relationship to Humanistic and Positive Psychological Practice

The Number Line Metaphor brings together a strengths-oriented attention to capacities and resources with recognition of the constraints within which those capacities must be

expressed. This is important because individual capacities cannot always be effectively utilized when relational, social, economic, or environmental conditions severely restrict available possibilities.

The approach therefore does not equate positive psychological practice with simply increasing positive experiences or eliminating negative ones. Contemporary discussions of flourishing similarly emphasize that different conceptions of the good life involve multiple dimensions of functioning and that positive emotion alone does not adequately capture flourishing (VanderWeele & Johnson, 2025).

5.5 Methodological Boundaries and Future Research

The present discussion is based on selected illustrative cases from a broader practice base of 30 cases. These examples demonstrate practical application but do not establish efficacy, causal effects, reliability, or generalizability. The subjective numerical representation should not be interpreted as a standardized psychological measurement.

This boundary is particularly important because flourishing itself remains a multidimensional construct with continuing discussion concerning its conceptualization and measurement (Rule et al., 2024). The Life Line should therefore not be presented as an alternative flourishing scale or as a measure of flourishing.

Further research is required to examine how consistently practitioners can apply the method, how clients experience the visual representation, and whether its use contributes to more effective formulation, intervention planning, and therapeutic outcomes. Future studies could also examine whether and how the method relates to established dimensions of psychological flourishing, including meaning, relationships, positive functioning, and personal development.

6. Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

The Number Line Metaphor is presented in this article as a practice-based psychological

method for organizing subjective experience, supporting psychological formulation, and guiding psychosocial intervention planning. Its central value lies in bringing together

supportive (α) and constraining (β) influences within a visual representation that can be explored collaboratively by the client and psychologist.

The illustrative cases from the 2025–2026 practice base demonstrate how the method can be used across differing circumstances to identify intervention priorities and subsequently review changes in the client's situation and subjective appraisal. The Life Line position provides a point of reference for this process, but it is not intended to function as a standardized psychological measurement or as an indicator of therapeutic efficacy.

The method also reflects a strengths-oriented understanding of psychosocial practice. Supportive influences may be identified and utilized, while constraining influences may be reduced, managed, negotiated, adapted to, or accepted according to the circumstances of the individual. Psychological and psychosocial intervention therefore remains grounded in the person's actual life conditions rather than being determined by the numerical position alone.

The Number Line Metaphor should consequently be understood as a practice tool that supports formulation and intervention planning, rather than as an intervention in itself. Its application remains dependent upon professional psychological judgment, therapeutic collaboration, and the established intervention approaches appropriate to the client's circumstances.

The present practice-based analysis does not establish efficacy, causal effects, reliability, or generalizability. Further research is required to examine the method systematically, including its acceptability to clients, consistency of practitioner application, usefulness in psychological formulation, and potential contribution to psychosocial intervention and psychological flourishing. Such investigation would provide a stronger empirical basis for determining the scope and limitations of the Number Line Metaphor in psychological practice.

Ethical Considerations

The illustrative cases were drawn from routine psychological and psychosocial practice during 2025–2026. Client confidentiality was maintained through de-identification and omission or modification of identifying details. Appropriate informed consent for the use of case material was obtained where required. The presentation of case material was guided by applicable

ethical principles concerning confidentiality, privacy, informed consent, and protection of clients from potential harm. The cases are presented solely to illustrate the practical application of the Number Line Metaphor and are not used to make claims regarding treatment efficacy.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The practice-based case material underlying the illustrative analysis is not publicly available because it derives from confidential psychological and psychosocial practice records. No de-identified dataset was created for public sharing.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Tools

ChatGPT was used to assist with language refinement and literature review during the preparation of this article. The article, including its conceptualization, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions, is the contribution of the author, who takes full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the manuscript.

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