

Ikigai

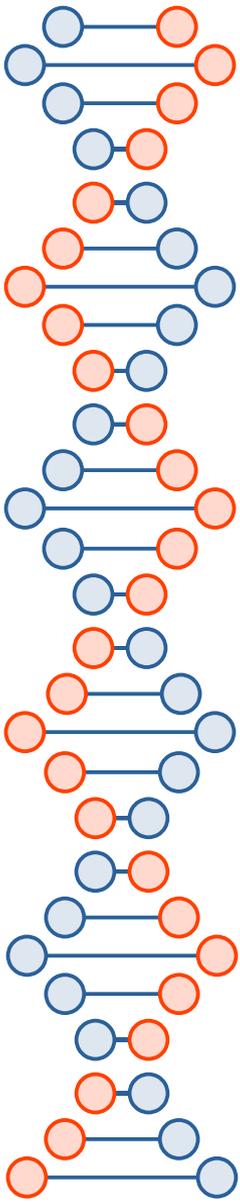
Finding Personal Purpose

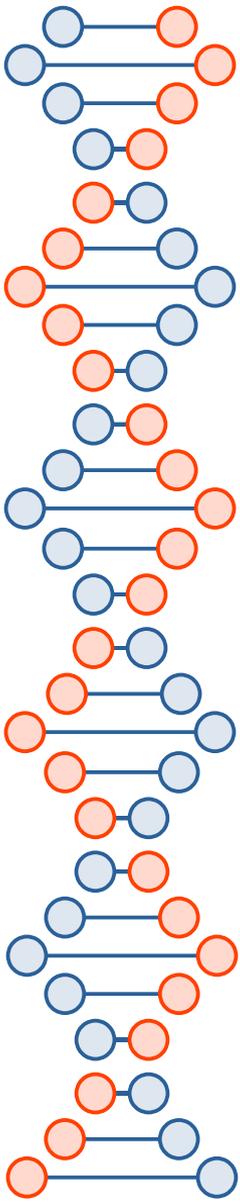
Bob Fabian

(robert@fabian.ca)

Foreground & Background

- Foreground
 - Explore the Japanese concept of ikigai in the hope that it may prove useful in finding personal purpose and meaning.
 - We may not discover the meaning of it all, but we just might find personal purposes which bring satisfaction and joy
- Background
 - Cognitive Science has changed and is changing how we think about ourselves and our minds.
 - Our mind arises from a brain that is embodied and embedded. Our bodies and our cultures are active participants in the mind.



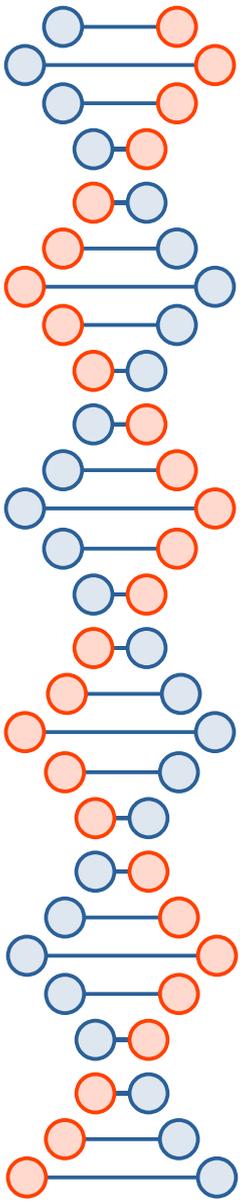


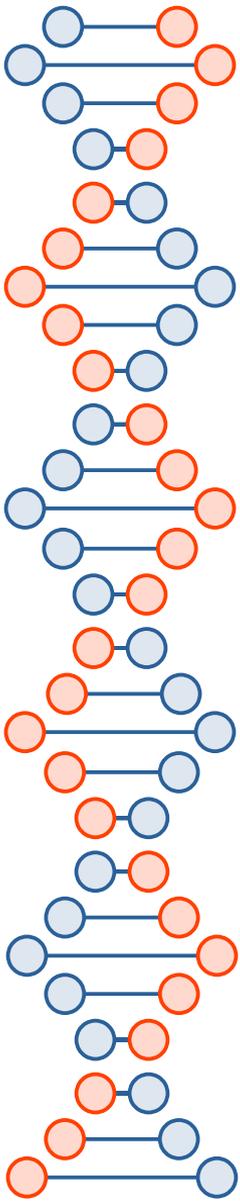
Background First

- Behaviourism was an ill-chosen path by North American psychologists.
 - To understand we need to examine what actually happens in the environment, the body and finally the brain.
- Our sensory apparatus doesn't present us with images and sounds. Pre-conscious processing takes place before we are consciously aware of what we are seeing or hearing.
 - It's all patterns, many of which were important in our evolutionary history. We are not built to directly experience the world.

Patterns & Metaphors

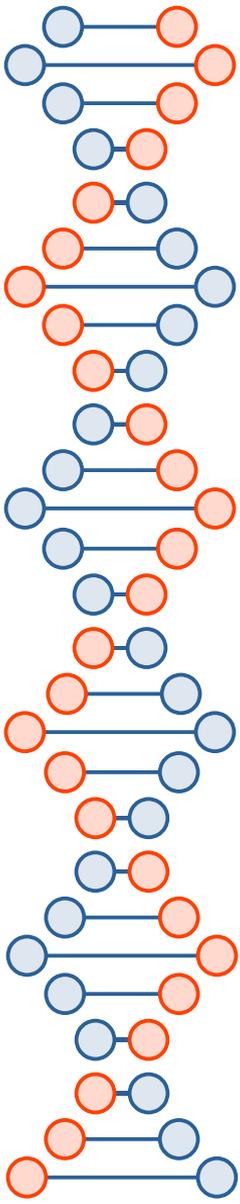
- Strong evidence that our theories – physical, social and psychological – are really metaphors with reality providing evidence that the metaphors are reasonable models of reality (or not).
 - We should beware of falling into the trap of assuming that our pet theories actually describe reality, rather than merely being metaphors that appear compatible with the patterns that we perceive.





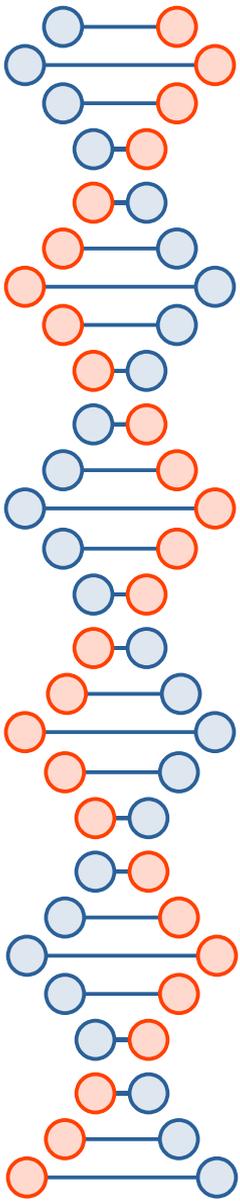
Existential Model

- Focusing on death, freedom, responsibility, and the meaning of life
 - Key point: many are troubled by the meaning of life and, in particular, the meaning of their life
 - May be particularly relevant for those of us in our 3rd or 4th age (anecdotal evidence)
- “What does it all mean?” too broad with no practical way to test proposed answers (short of faith)
- Better: “What are fit purposes for my life?”



Ikigai

- Japanese name for approach to finding or developing personal purposes that make personal and social sense
- By all reports it works (or worked) in Japan
- May not be directly translatable across cultures and times
- But may provide us with insights that we can use today in finding personal purpose
- Not the “answer”, but an approach that seems to have promise



Ikigai II

- Finding actions (from small to large) that provide personal purpose(s) that fit you and your world
 - Question: “What are fit purposes for me in my life?”
 - Preferable to: “What is *the* meaning of my life?”
- Ikigai posits that there is rarely one big purpose in people’s lives
- Ikigai argues for discovering the actions which collectively lead to fit personal purposes
 - Almost guaranteed to require change over time

The Five Pillars of ikigai

- Pillar 1: Starting small
- Pillar 2: Releasing yourself
- Pillar 3: Harmony and sustainability
- Pillar 4: The joy of little things
- Pillar 5: Being in the here and now

• Ken Mogi, *The Little Book of Ikigai*

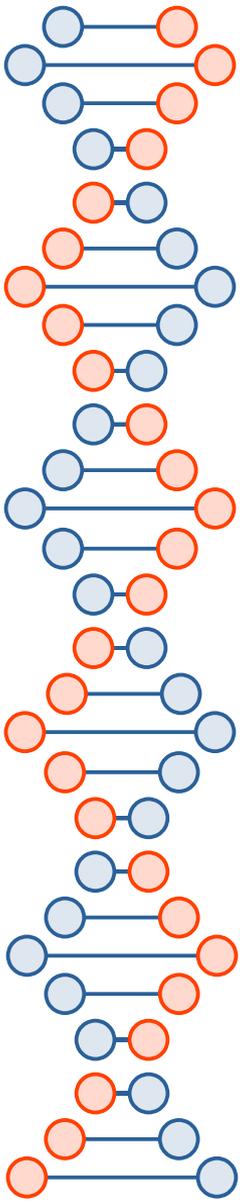
Western, Career Oriented Mis-Interpretation



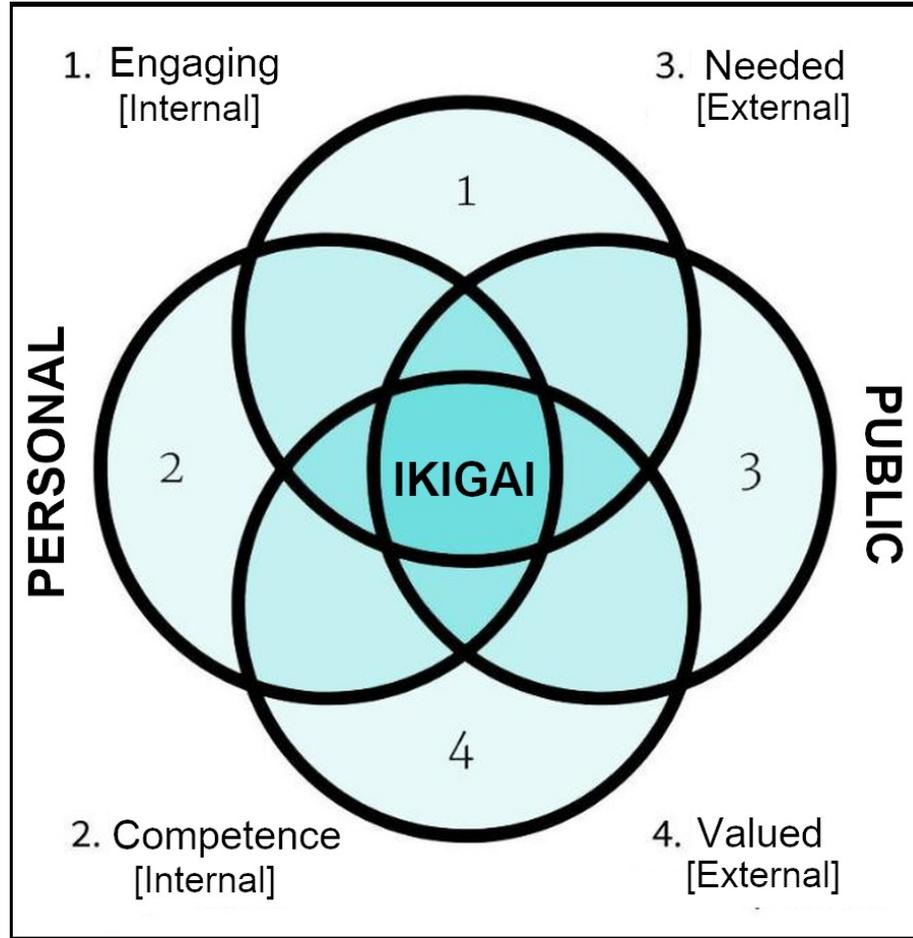
Based on a diagram by Mark Winn

Western View – Too Limited

- Needs to be scaled back. Not everyone can find a well-paying career that allows them to do what they love and what they are good at
- Doesn't apply to those of us in the 3rd or 4th age
- Doesn't apply to those who don't have or can't find a "career" that's right for them
- Better to pull back the model so that more of us could use its help in finding or developing personal purpose

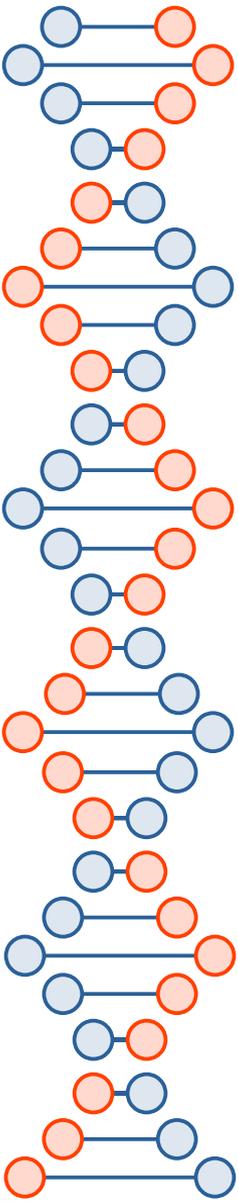


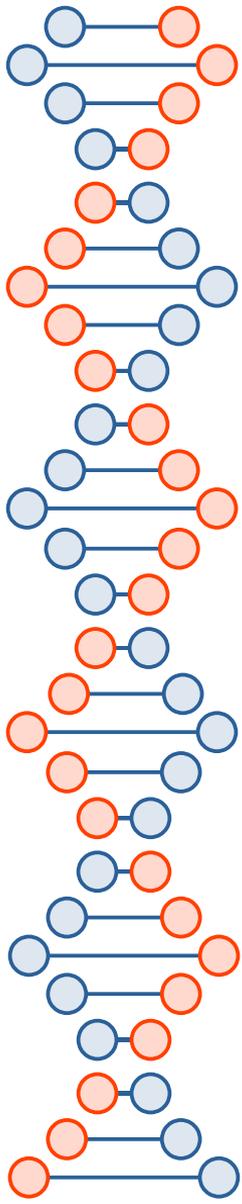
Preferred View



Scaled Back

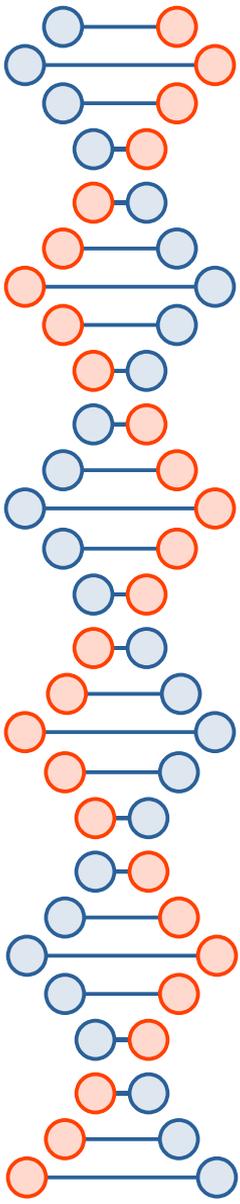
- Personal
 - It should be something that provides a measure of personal satisfaction
 - It should be something in which you have or can develop basic personal competence
- Public
 - It should be something for which you recognize there is a social need
 - It should be something which important others also find is socially important
- Needs to “fit” on both personal and public levels





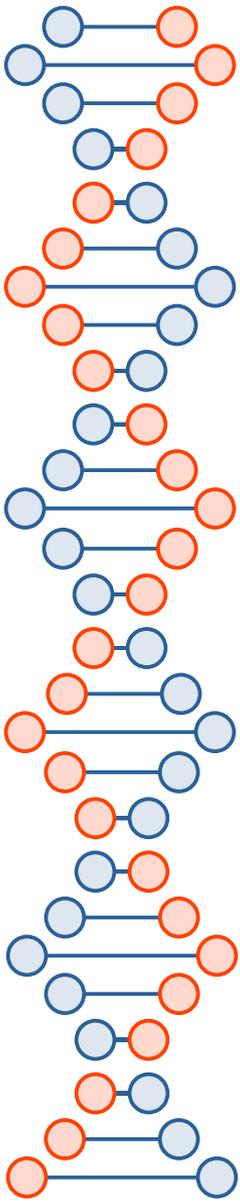
Ikigai Time Frame

- It's unlikely that your personal ikigai will spring full-blown as a result of deep introspection and thought
- A personal ikigai will develop and evolve over time and as you gain experience
- The purposes identified in your personal ikigai will evolve and change and you evolve and change
- Some distance from “What’s the meaning of it all?”, but feels both practical and satisfying



Embedded Self

- Widely recognized that the self is both embodied and embedded, specifically embedded in personally important contexts
 - Family, culture, social groups, conceptual frameworks, etc.
- We are shaped by our given and chosen contexts
- We, in turn, shape those contexts
- Feels right to have purposes which give back to those personally important contexts

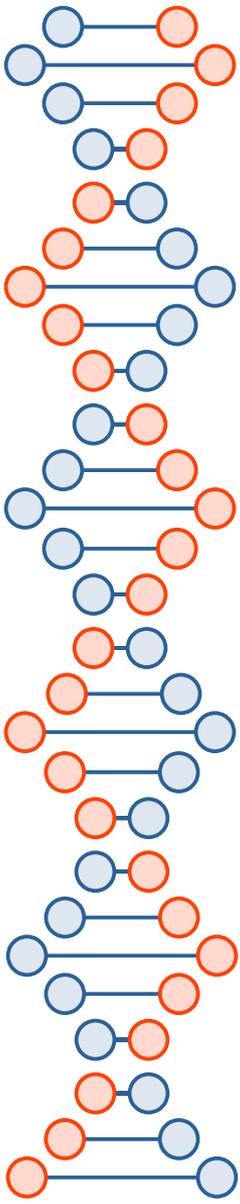


Evolving Answers

- What are fit purposes that I can use to guide my actions and development?
 - Needs to make personal sense
 - Needs to make public sense
 - Needs to develop and evolve
- There need be no big universal answers, but there can be smaller, fit personal purposes

My Evolving Ikigai

- Initially wanted to share mathematical truth unsullied by messy and dirty “reality”
- But the computer intruded in increasingly significant ways
- I shifted from math to computer science to management consulting
- Worked to find patterns that provided useful explanations, ... and shared them with others
- Open: What to do about my passion for musical patterns (especially those of J. S. Bach)?



Questions

- Is it enough to find fit personal purposes?
- Have you found any satisfying personal purposes?
- Absent the Japanese concern for community, is it reasonable to search for a Western ikigai?
- How has your basket of personal purposes (your ikigai) changed over time?
- What, if anything, will you take away from this discussion?