

## the secret life of the committed careers worker speaking up for the passion

Bill Law  
the career-learning café

This is designed to take you out of your comfort zone. It's about the passion that drives our commitment to careers work. That drive is stronger than cosy-and-cuddly, it's exciting... and disturbing. It is always deep-laid - and, too-often, unspoken. You see the analogy - but back to careers work. The deep-laid can erupt when the 'why?' question is repeatedly asked:

*'I see that, but why?...'*, *'...ok, but why do you keep on about it?...'*,  
*'...it may be important to you, but why would it be important to me...?'*

Children enjoy their versions of repeated-why questioning. But, as comfortable assumptions settle into place we can lose interest in it.

But we need it, especially when we're trying to position ourselves in the minds of other people. Examples of the need to do that are writing a funding proposal, drafting an essay or article, and putting a job application together. We choose our words carefully, and self-interrogation helps us with that...

*'...why do I believe that this is such a good idea?...'*

This material examines that process. At the most probing levels it takes us to where we can declare a philosophy of careers work - we know what is necessary, well-founded and valuable. Being able to say it - not just what we believe, but why we believe it, and why it has value - is at the heart of any professionalism.

However, there is always more than one philosophical position to take - they are here called orientations. Other people pick up our orientation to issues that are important to them. And different groups do that on different bases. A parallel article (Bill Law, 2011) illustrates how that is so. Some of what we say works well for business people - they notice talk of 'employability' and 'skills'. Some reflect policy priorities - 'economy' and 'choice' get an approving nod. There is also talk of personal-and-social interests - winning murmurs of approval for 'narrative' and 'community'.

There are other orientations, and much overlap. But, however comprised, they declare who we are. And that statement can attract, repel and provoke hostility. Everything is approved by some and contested by others. We need to know more about why that is so. This material will help you to...

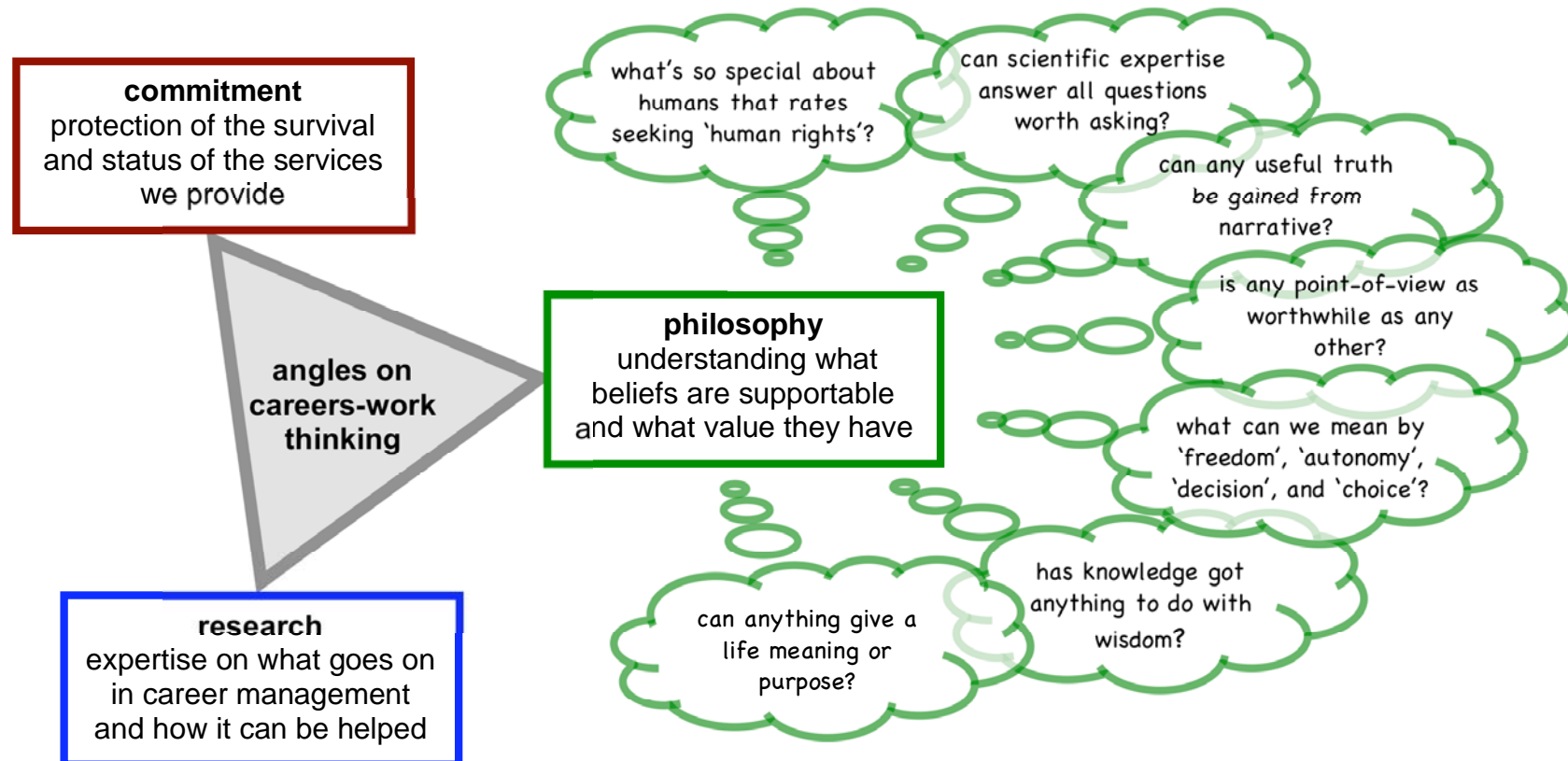
- > probe underlying careers-work orientations
- > appreciate how they are received by others
- > face-up to contested ideas
- > sharpen a self-critical professionalism
- > expand the scope of thinking-and-action

## angles on passion

That kind of probing, sharpening and expanding is critical in a changing world, because it equips us for the kind of flexibility which is critical to reform, inventiveness and creativity. That is not compliant, but principled flexibility - it doesn't lose sight of who it is.

But there is more going on in our positioning than can be voiced through philosophical orientations. Below is a triangulation of ways of saying why people might be justified in counting on us. Philosophy takes only one of the three angles.

Much of philosophy speaks of the possibility of knowing truths, rights, and beliefs. Some of this questioning is illustrated on the right below. It addresses issues at the heart of careers work. To probe each question with a repeated-why is to find that philosophy challenges what the other angles claim - it sometimes undermines them. Philosophy is good at doing that - that's why we need it.



## do you need what you can find here?

The triangulation shows that we can make our claims on the basis of (1) a commitment to defend the colleagues we value, the organisations we belong to, and the actions we take. We can also do it on the basis of (2) the science we gather, the research we undertake, and the expertise we nurture. But the 2011 article shows how such claims go down less well with other people than they do with us. They are contested...

*'...why would you expect us to take this commitment so seriously?...'*  
*'...or, for that matter, what you call your expertise?...'*

We need, then, to base our claims on (3) a probing of how well-founded, defensible and worthwhile any claim can be. This is philosophy - it is base-line thinking. It will do more than help you write a better proposal, article or cv - it puts us all in a position to talk with...

- > **students and clients** - on why we are important to them;
- > **working partners** - on why we are worth their commitment;
- > **stakeholders** - on why we support their interests

### what to find here

*for the time being you'll need to print pages 4-6  
it will go into on-line interaction at a later stage in development*

pages 4-6: - where you probe for underlying philosophical orientations. They are...

- 4: **responding** - underline key words for an aspect of your own work
- 5: **locating** - see where that belongs in a cycle of possible orientations
- 6: **displaying** - show how that maps out in a spider-gram

page 7: - an account of what your spider-gram shows and what that can mean for the way you do your work

pages 8-9: - an example of how the locating and displaying pages might be used

page 10: - a list of the publications which inform this thinking.

*people have been know to see things in a new light as a result of doing this  
you don't have to be stuck with your first thoughts - you can reprint pages 4-6 to re-position them*

**responding  
key words  
for careers-work  
orientations**

which of the words on the right best speak of your careers-work orientation?

have in mind a task to which you are applying that thinking - examples below

*on the right*

1. *underline the words that you see as useful in characterising that task*
2. *underline again those that are especially important to you*
3. *underline a third time any that you take to be critical*

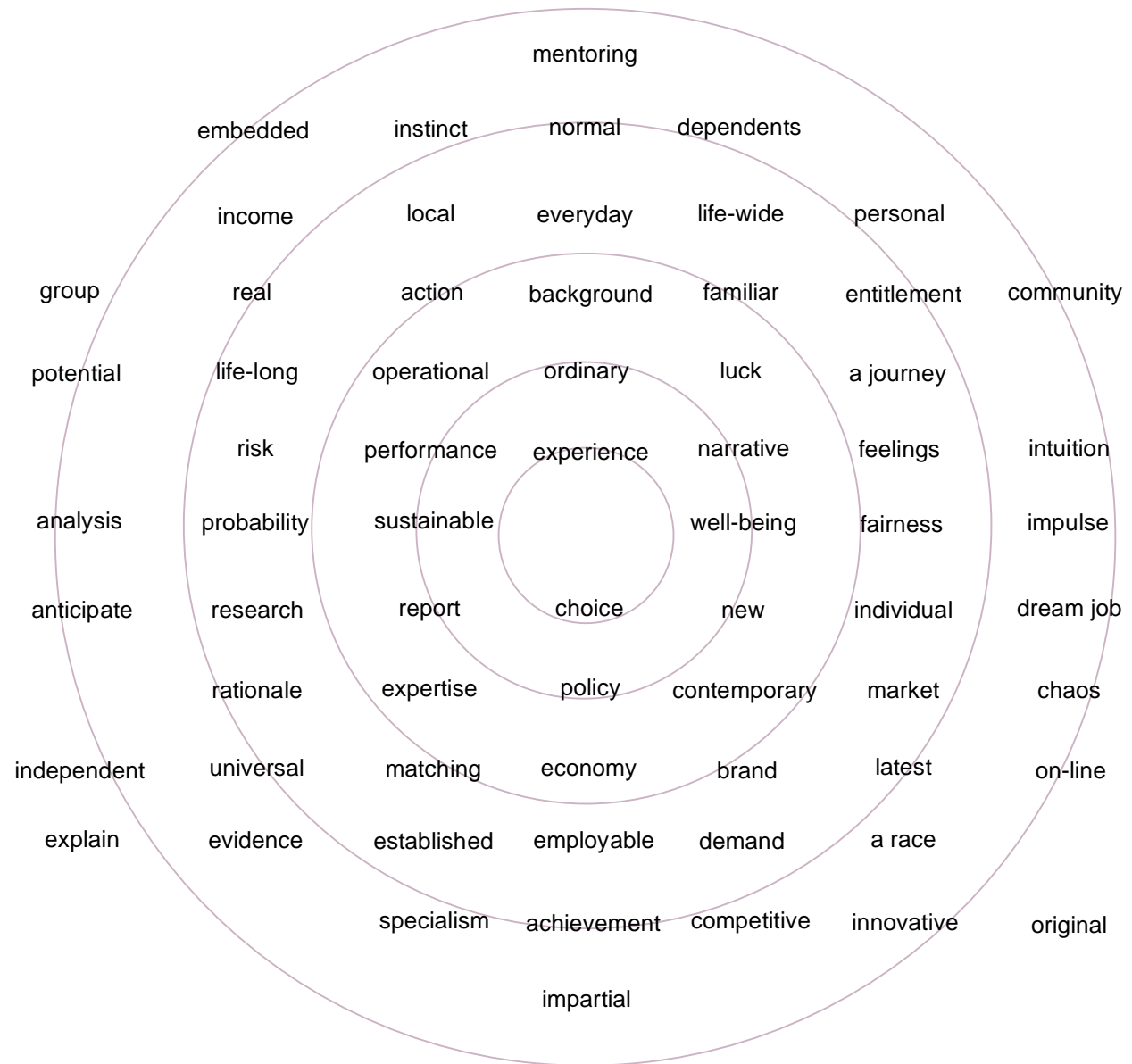
no limits to how many

**possible tasks**

a project proposal  
a job application  
an article or essay about your work  
announcement of a service

you can reprint and do this more than once - to compare...

- > your responses to different tasks
- > a declared with an ideal position
- > positions taken by different colleagues



**locating a careers-work cycle of orientations**

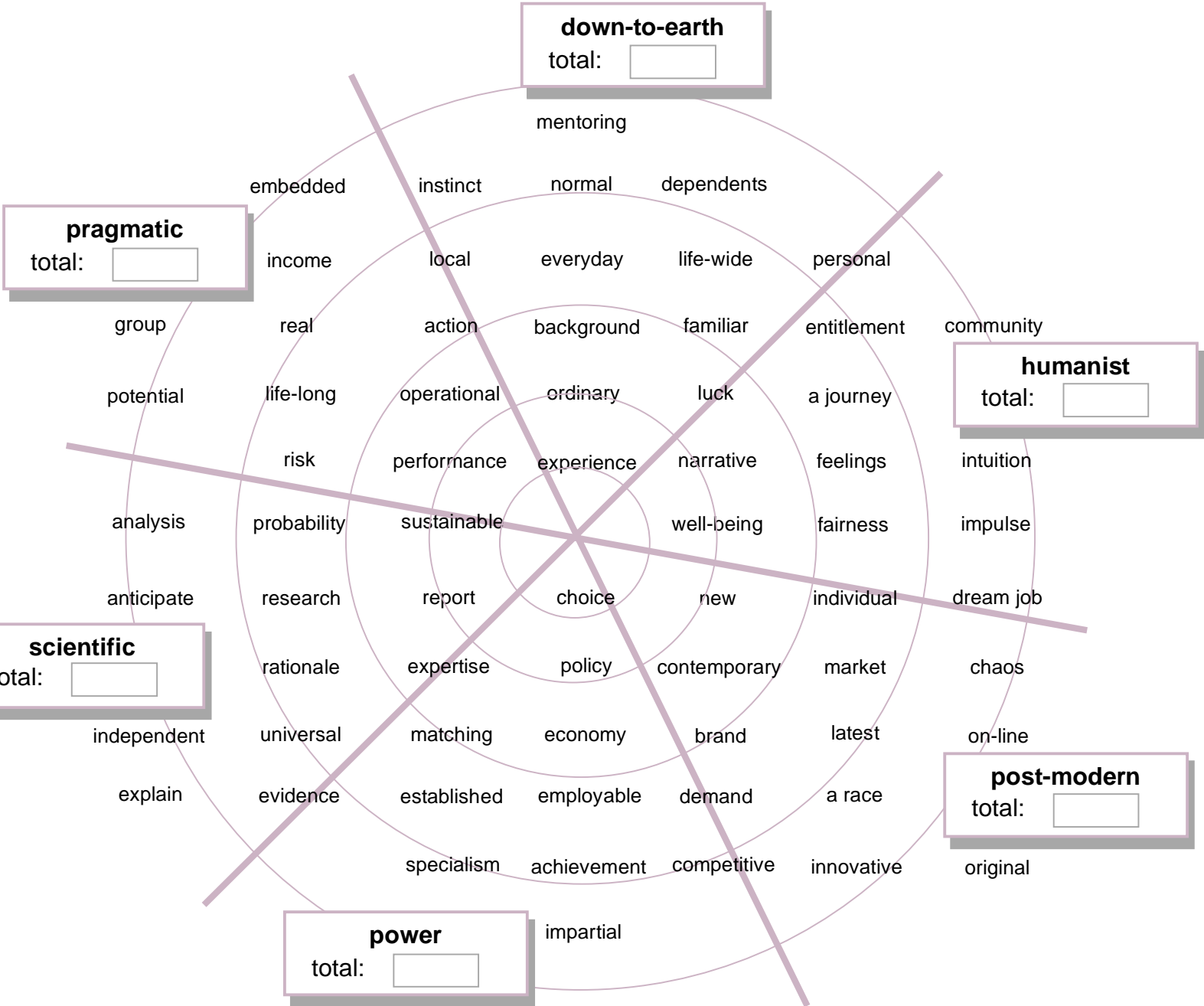
find the key words reflecting your orientations?

> transfer your underlining from the previous page to this page

> total the underlining for each sector - in its box

where there is double or triple underlining count two or three

where they are on a boundary count them on one or both sides



**displaying  
possibly  
contending  
positions in a  
philosophical  
cycle**

the spider-gram maps  
contrasting orientations  
- which may also be  
contested

> from the centre,  
shade out each  
segment - to where  
your responses  
reach

least support is at the  
centre, most support is  
at the rim

worked example on  
pages 7-8

**scientific**

**pragmatic**

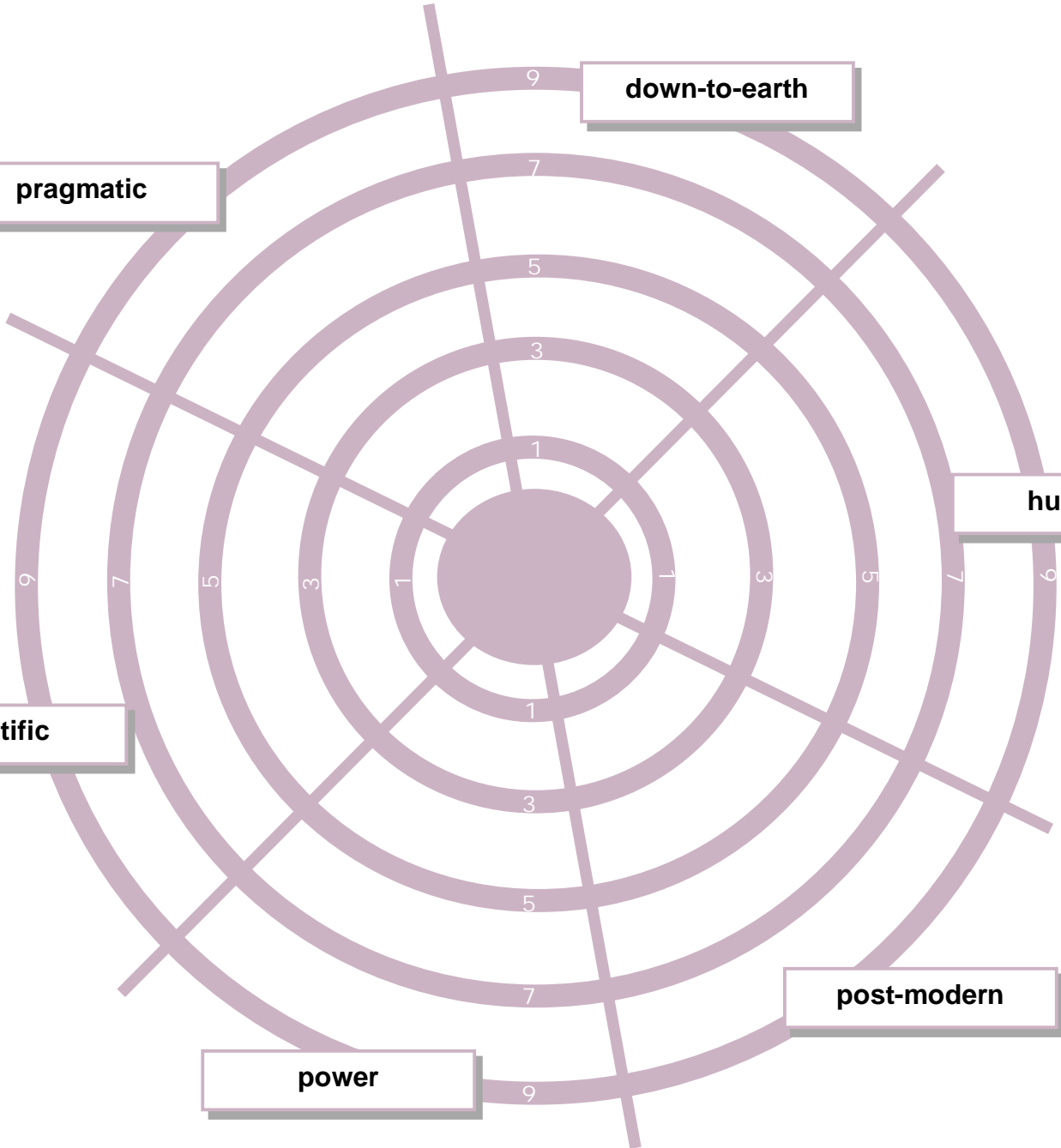
**down-to-earth**

**humanist**

**post-modern**

**power**

what task do you have  
in mind for this position



## issues, meanings and orientations

The 2011 article argues that the future of careers work depends on how we deal with four issues...

- > for **credibility** - are we trusted?
- > for **expertise** - are we sufficiently well trained?
- > for **connectedness** - are we in touch with the realities?
- > for **independence** - are we free of arbitrary influence?

The article shows how each of these issues is contested - differently-constituted groups favouring differently-argued responses, to differently-conceived situations.

The philosophical orientations underpinning those voices are illustrated on the right. Each differently assembles the language used in one of the segments on page 5. They construct the sorts of sentences that might appear in a proposal, an article or a job-application. The article suggest how they can be rewritten for conversations we need to have with our students and clients, our partners in this work, and the stakeholder who have an interest in it.

The table below signposts some of the features that attract and repel these various audiences.

<b>human</b>	strong on well-being <i>but</i> can get romanticised
<b>scientific</b>	evidence-based <i>but</i> can miss what methodology can't detect
<b>post-modern</b>	up-to-date <i>but</i> can lose touch with collective memory
<b>pragmatic</b>	useful <i>but</i> can be more impressed by impact than value
<b>powerful</b>	speaks truth to power <i>but</i> can overestimate the capability of policy
<b>down-to-earth</b>	credible <i>but</i> can reduce to the simplistic

humanist

...bringing **entitlement** to people's **individual** and **narrated** accounts of a **journey** towards the realisation of each their own **dream-job**...

scientific

...**independently** researched and **evidence-base**, bringing a clear **rationale** for **expert** implementation and **universal** applicability...

post-modern

...a **marketable on-line** approach to **chaotic contemporary** confusion, the **race** for jobs needs this kind of **innovation**...

pragmatic

...**proven** work, **embedded** in **real**, **operational** and **group-based** learning, for **life-long** use and increased **income** potential...

power

...focussed on **choice** of **employment**, firmly based in **policy** requirements, with **expertly** assessed **achievement** for a **competitive** economy...

down-to-earth

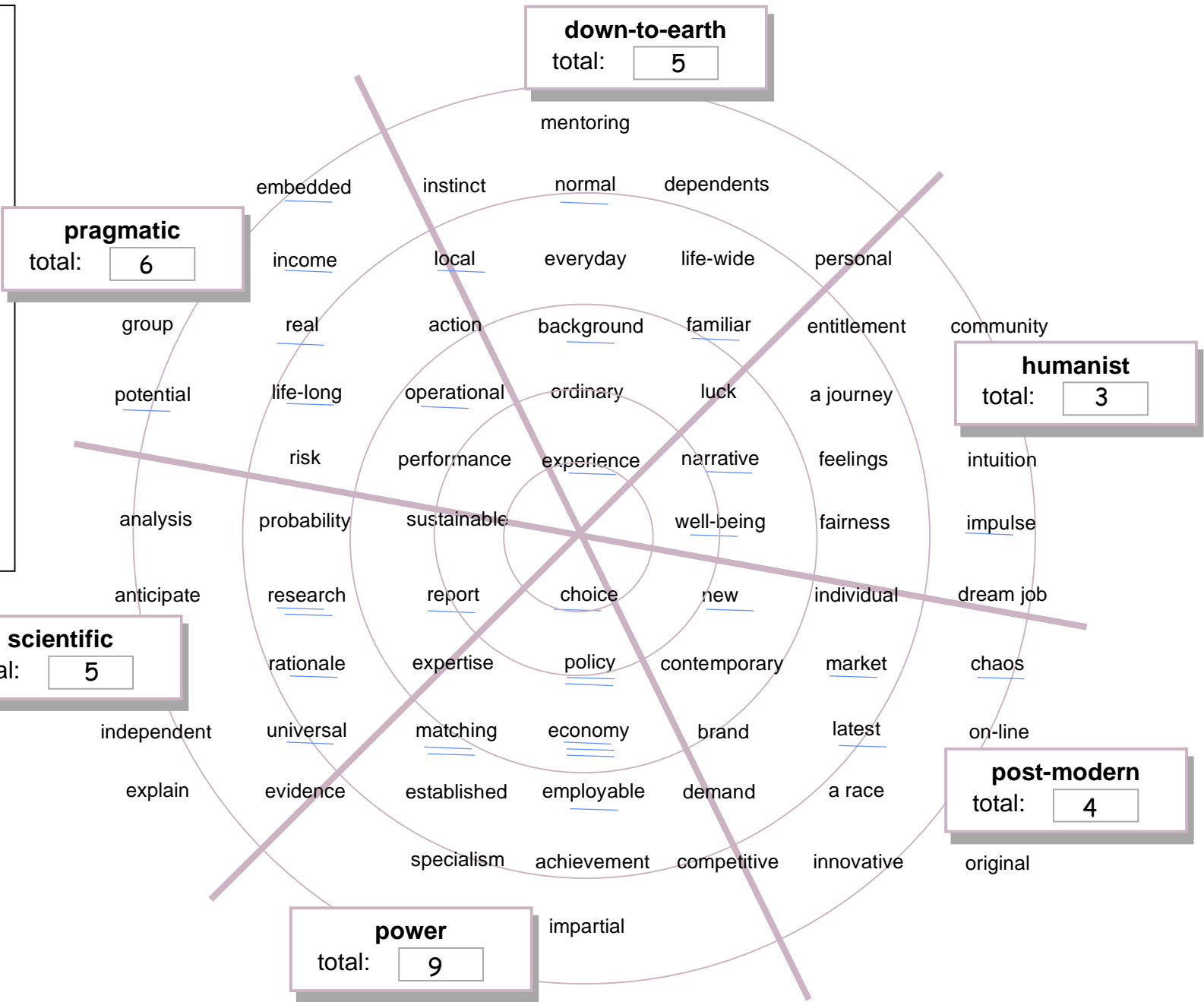
...drawing on **life-wide** **experience**, where people - from whatever **background** - access **mentoring** help, for them and their **dependents**...

**locating  
a careers-work  
cycle of  
orientations**

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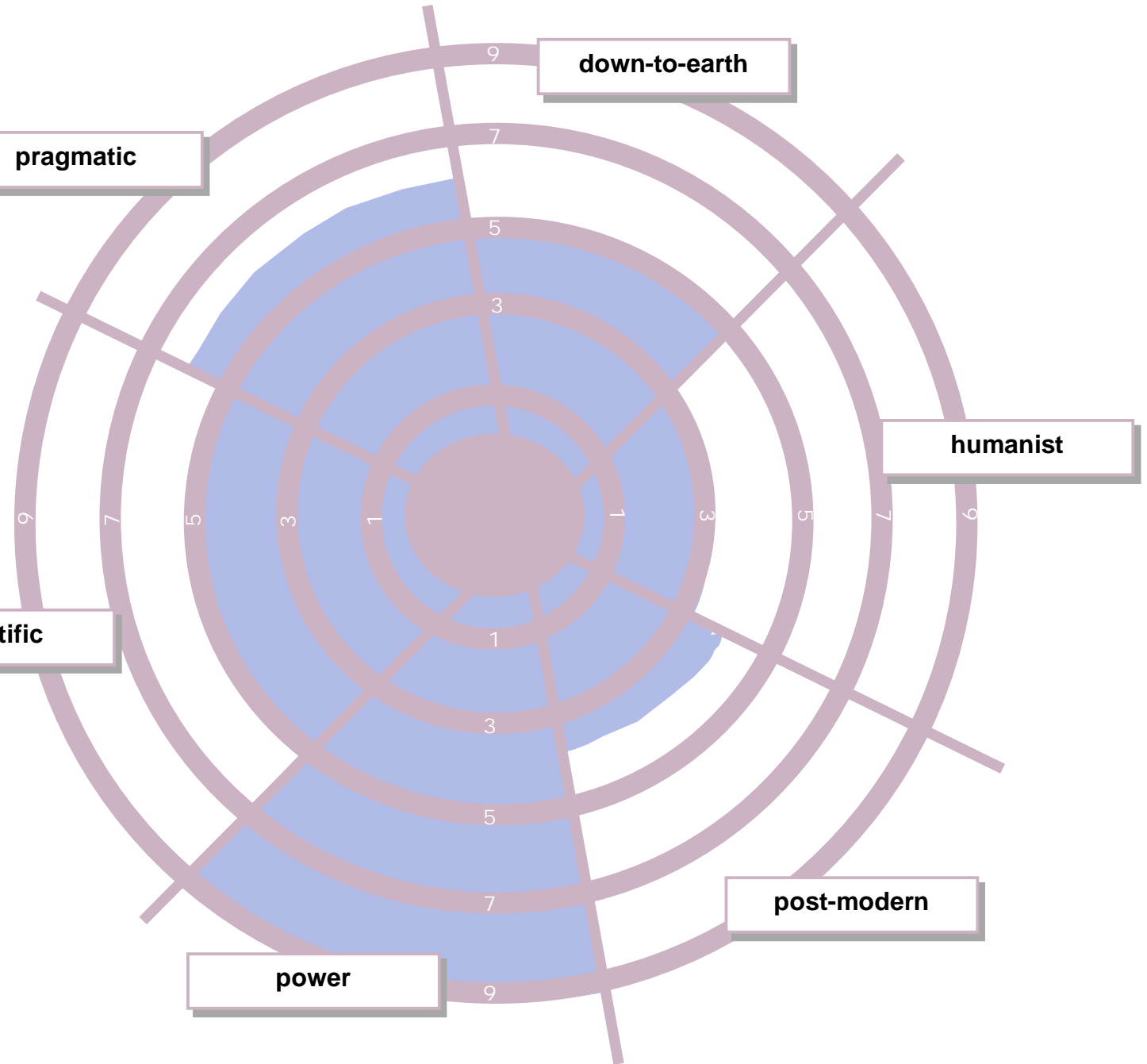
**humanist**

**post-modern**

**power**

what task do you have  
in mind for this position

project proposal



## background thinking

### contention in careers-work

Inge Bates (1990). 'The politics of careers education and guidance - a case for scrutiny'.  
*British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 18 (1)

Suzy Harris (1999). *Career Education - Contesting Policy and Practice*. London: Paul Chapman

### underlying orientations in careers work

Bill Law (2005). *Helping Personal Advisers Working With Systems*.  
<http://www.hihohiho.com/memory/cafsocnts.html>

Bill Law (2011). *Careers-work Professionalism - Strong on Career, Strong on the Causes of Career* <http://www.hihohiho.com/magazine/features/cafprofessionalism.pdf>

### ideas underpinning these orientations

Charles Taylor (1989). *Sources of the Self - The Making of the Modern Identity*.  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Charles Tilly (2006). *Why? – What Happens When People Give Reasons... and Why*.  
Woodstock: Princeton University Press

### human rights and how we recognise them

Tzvetan Todorov (2009). *In Defence of the Enlightenment*. London: Atlantic Books

Stephen Law (2011). *Believing Bullshit - How Not to Get Sucked into an Intellectual Black Hole*. New York: Prometheus Books

with **thanks** to participants in two workshops at the Spring 2011 Canterbury Christ Church Conference  
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