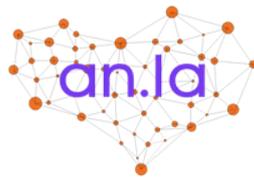


# The Architecture of Meaning

**From Cross-Cultural Data to  
Tetra-Somatic™ Framework**

December 2025

Dr. Elif Kuş Saillard



## Preface

# Meaning, Action, and The Architecture of Self

In this report, I offer a **scientific architecture of the self**, articulated through the **Tetra-Somatic™ lens**, to interpret how meaning and agency emerge from the dynamic entanglement of lived biological, psychological, social, and technological processes. Drawing on the analysis of responses to the **“Meaningful Actions” survey conducted in December 2024**, this report provides a comparative perspective on how meaning is experienced and enacted across different contexts by individuals with high levels of agency and self-awareness.

While the empirical findings reveal divergent pressures -systemic, economic, or technological- participants across cohorts converge in identifying the “self” as an obstacle. Rather than framing this as a personal deficit, the analysis introduces the concept of **ego constriction**: a context-sensitive narrowing of the self under sustained environmental pressure.

By distinguishing between self, ego, and ego constriction, **this report challenges both the myth** that all obstacles to meaning originate in the individual and the ideal of an isolated **“authentic self.”** Instead, it offers a **non-moralizing, scientifically grounded lens on meaning-making**, rooted in comparative data and the Tetra-Somatic™ framework.

It is my hope that this report contributes to **more meaningful actions and supports a more meaningful 2026.**

**Enjoy the reading.**



*Dr. Elif Kus Saillard*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This White Paper presents a comprehensive analysis of the pursuit of a meaningful life at the turn of 2025. It synthesizes findings from **two independent surveys** conducted in **December 2024**, comparing a **Turkish cohort** navigating acute structural constraints with an **International cohort** focused on psychological self-mastery.

The document is organized in two substantive parts:

**Part I: The Empirical Landscape** details the demographic profiles, specific actions, avoidance strategies, and anticipated obstacles reported by the respondents. It provides a granular look at the divergent realities of these two professional worlds.

**Part II: A Tetra-Somatic™ Interpretation** applies Dr. Elif Kuş Saillard's theoretical framework to this data. Aligning with the computational biology of **Michael Levin** and the agential realism of **Karen Barad**, this section interprets the findings not merely as survey responses, but as **evidence of a dynamic "Tetra-Somatic Process"** -the continuous entanglement of the Psycho-Soma, Bio-Soma, Socio-Soma, and Techno-Soma.

Illustration by Barbora Rezkova, 2025

# PART I: THE EMPIRICAL LANDSCAPE

## A Comparative Analysis of Turkish and International Perspectives for 2024-2025

### 1.0 Introduction: Synthesizing Two Worlds

This section presents a comparative synthesis of two independent surveys conducted in December 2024, each exploring the pursuit of a meaningful life. **Its unique value lies in the juxtaposition of two distinct cohorts: a predominantly Turkish group navigating acute, and a global cohort focused on psychological self-mastery.** By analyzing these parallel yet divergent experiences, this report offers a compelling case study in the modern duality of meaning-making, **a dynamic interplay between external context and internal cultivation.**

The core analytical framework of this report is **the central tension between individual agency** -the proactive, deliberate steps people take to create meaning- **and the structural or internal constraints** that impede this pursuit. We will explore how individuals from different contexts navigate this dialectic, asserting their will while contending with systemic pressures and personal barriers.

Our method is a comparative thematic analysis of the qualitative data provided in the two survey responses. Both surveys were announced via professional social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, attracting distinct but comparable professional cohorts. All analysis and conclusions presented herein are derived exclusively from these two data sources.

The report begins by profiling the two respondent groups to establish a demographic and psychological context. It then proceeds in three sections: analyzing the Turkish cohort, examining the international cohort, and presenting a direct comparative analysis.

### 2.0 Comparative Respondent Profile

Understanding the demographic and professional backgrounds of the two respondent cohorts is of strategic importance. These profiles provide the essential context required to interpret the nuanced similarities and differences in their perspectives on what it means to build, protect, and sustain a meaningful life.



**Table 1: Demographic and Professional Overview**

Feature	Turkish Cohort	International Cohort
<b>Total Respondents</b>	35	35
<b>Gender Distribution</b>	20 Female, 15 Male	21 Female, 14 Male
<b>Age Range</b>	20 to 55 years	32 to 73 years
<b>Geographic Profile</b>	Primarily residing in Turkey (Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir), with some expatriates in Europe and Australia.	Highly international, with respondents from the US, Sweden, France, Turkey, Poland, Germany, Italy, Singapore, and others.
<b>Primary Professional Landscape</b>	A diverse mix including teachers, engineers, academics, entrepreneurs, managers, and students.	Predominantly coaches, consultants, educators, and organizational leaders connected to the Inner Development Goals (IDG) network.

A quantitative comparison of self-reported success reveals a striking parallel. Among the Turkish cohort, **a significant majority (71%)** felt they took sufficient steps in 2024 to make their lives more meaningful. The International cohort reported a similarly high degree of efficacy, with **an average score of 4.56 out of 5** on the same measure. This **shared foundation of high agency and perceived success in 2024** makes the subsequent analysis of their strategies and anticipated obstacles particularly insightful.

## Analysis of the Turkish Cohort

### 3.0 Proactive Agency in 2024: Crafting Meaning Through Action

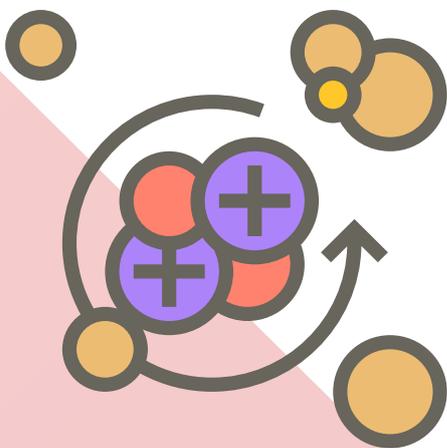
This section dissects the specific measures the Turkish cohort undertook in 2024, framing these actions as powerful expressions of individual agency pushing back against a challenging backdrop of structural pressures. Analysis reveals a deliberate effort to reclaim control and align daily life with personal values, coalescing around three primary themes: transforming one's professional life, investing in personal growth, and making foundational changes to lifestyle and relationships.

#### 3.1 Career and Professional Transformation

For many participants, the workplace was a primary arena for enacting agency. Career transformations were not merely practical moves but strategic decisions to reclaim autonomy and align work with deeper values. This theme manifested in escaping toxic jobs, embracing entrepreneurship to forge an independent path, and proactively acquiring new skills to create future opportunities.

*"Changing the workplace that caused me the most stress. I finally said 'enough' to shouldering all the responsibility. Now I'm working as a supervisor; I'm more at ease in a stress-free environment, and I have more time for [my family] and my personal life."*

*"Leaving a very stressful job and starting a more enjoyable, stress-free job that takes less time"*



### 3.2 Personal Development and Well-being

Alongside external changes, a strong focus on the internal world emerged as a cornerstone of a meaningful life. Participants invested in their mental, emotional, and physical health through professional support like therapy and coaching, viewing this internal work as a prerequisite for navigating external pressures with greater consciousness and resilience.

*"Through Erickson coaching training, I deepened my journey of self-discovery, and I liberated myself by starting to actively drive a car."*

*"Getting to know new people. I am expanding my vision with different perspectives"*



## 3.3 Lifestyle and Relationships

The third theme reveals a commitment to making foundational changes to participants' physical and social environments. **Seeking a calmer, more intentional existence**, some made radical decisions to relocate from chaotic urban centers to **more tranquil settings**.

Concurrently, **strengthening bonds with family** was identified as a critical source of meaning, grounding individuals in a network of supportive relationships that buffer against external volatility.

*"We moved from Turkey to Portugal with our three-year-old child to build a calmer life and to step away from relationships that felt obligatory but emotionally draining."*





### 4.0 Protective Evasion: Preserving Meaning Through Avoidance

Intentional avoidance emerged not as passivity, but as a strategic defense mechanism to preserve the mental and emotional resources required to exercise agency. This section examines what the Turkish cohort consciously chose to avoid in order to protect their well-being and maintain the positive changes they had cultivated.

Analysis reveals two core avoidance strategies. First, a dominant theme emerged: avoiding negative social interactions. This involved strategically distancing themselves from "pessimists" and energy-draining relationships to create a more supportive social ecosystem. Second, respondents focused on managing negative internal states. This internal discipline involved a conscious refusal to engage in self-blame or succumb to fear.

*"I avoided pessimists, those who always see the empty side of the glass."*

*"When I fell, I avoided giving myself another kick."*

## 5.0 Anticipated Obstacles for 2025: The Weight of External and Internal Worlds

This section explores the significant tension between the high individual agency demonstrated in 2024 and the formidable structural constraints anticipated for 2025.

### 5.1 External Obstacles:

#### Macroeconomic and Sociopolitical Pressures

The most dominant theme regarding future obstacles was the profound impact of national-level structural constraints. The high cost of living ("hayat pahalılığı"), financial instability, and a challenging sociopolitical climate, marked by perceived injustice and inequality, were cited as major barriers that directly threaten the capacity to plan, grow, and pursue meaningful goals.

*"The worsening economic conditions. The fact that ignorance and violence have become institutionalized in the country."*

### 5.2 Internal Obstacles:

#### The Primacy of the Self

In stark contrast to these overwhelming external pressures, a powerful counter-theme emerged: the conviction that the greatest obstacle is, ultimately, internal. Direct responses like "**Kendim**" (Myself) and "Ben" (I) were common, shifting the locus of control inward. This perspective suggests that personal fears and limiting thought patterns are the final arbiters of progress, even within a constraining external environment.

*"It is the person themselves. Our own thought patterns, lack of motivation, or fears are the biggest obstacles to progress."*

## Analysis of the International Cohort

### 6.0 Proactive Agency in 2024: Building Meaning Through Purpose

The international cohort, which reported very high efficacy in its 2024 efforts, demonstrated a clear and proactive approach to building a meaningful life. This section explores the key psychological strategies they employed to achieve a state of eudaimonic well-being.

*"Practiced qigong and wrote to myself almost daily. Emptied my calendar and opened up for meeting nature and new people, new books, new perspectives."*

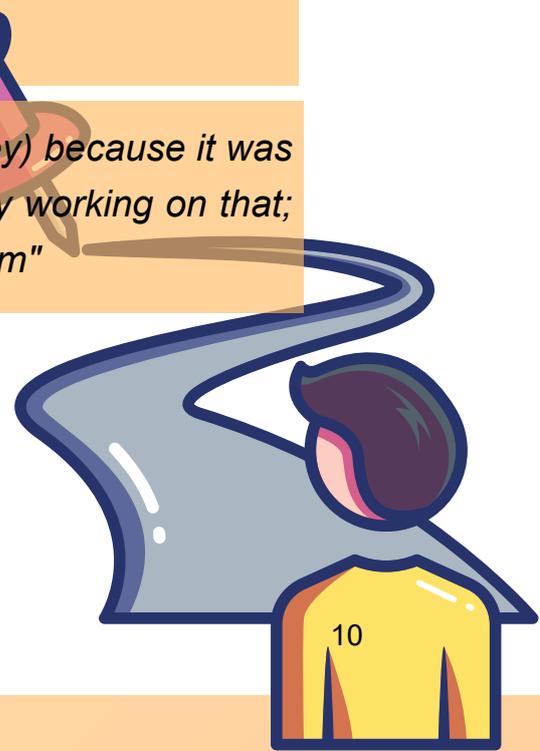
*"Reclaiming my power and influence at work, presence and impact beyond my job"*

### 6.1 Aligning Profession with Purpose

A dominant theme was the deliberate shift from work as a job to work as a vocation, a vehicle for personal values and positive impact. This psychological strategy involved concrete actions like retraining in a new field, launching value-driven projects, or taking on leadership roles that allowed them to contribute to a cause larger than themselves.

*"Taught environmental economy and policy course Emirati students, it feels the impact that can follow is bigger than I can imagine."*

*"I rejected a project at work (so I rejected money) because it was not aligned with me. I realised I won't be happy working on that; so I quit a client after 10 years working with them"*



### 6.2 Inner Development and Personal Growth

A profound emphasis was placed on cultivating self-awareness and a strong internal connection. This "inner work" was a cornerstone of their approach, achieved through diverse practices such as structured reflection, qigong, and connecting with the natural world.

*"Deepen my connection to nature, to integrate that I'm nature. Expressed my gratefulness each night before going to bed, to feel love for life."*

### 6.3 Foundational Life Changes and Prioritizing Connections

The third theme reveals a commitment to making significant, often courageous, life decisions to restructure their external world to better reflect their inner values. This included quitting misaligned corporate jobs, changing living environments, and consciously prioritizing presence with family.

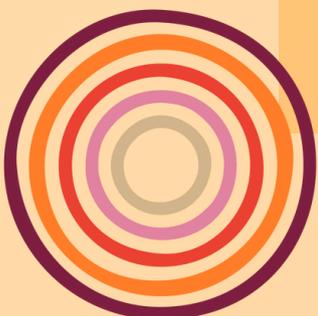
*"I did the Camino de Santiago... it brought certainty that living in an urban setting is incompatible with who I am as a person."*

### 7.0 The Strategy of Subtraction: Intentional Avoidance

For the international cohort, creating a meaningful life involved not only addition but also a form of psychological pruning or "strategic subtraction." Their avoidance strategies were sophisticated methods for protecting energy and maintaining focus on what truly matters. This strategy manifested in a commitment to disengaging from misaligned commitments and establishing interpersonal boundaries.

*"I rejected a project at work... because it was not aligned with me."*

*"Avoided to be attached to my own, inner narratives that made me small."*



# SECTION B

## 8.0 Anticipated Obstacles for 2025: Navigating Internal and External Challenges

Even this highly proactive group anticipates significant hurdles, revealing the ongoing nature of the pursuit of meaning.

### 8.1 The Internal Frontier: Self as the Final Obstacle

Strikingly, the most frequently cited obstacle for 2025 was internal. Respondents pointed directly at themselves: their ingrained habits, fears, and self-limiting beliefs as the primary barrier to future growth. Answers like "Myself only" and "me, myself and I" reveal a sophisticated self-awareness that, having achieved external efficacy, the next frontier for development lies within.

### 8.2 External Pressures and Resource Constraints

While the internal was primary, practical external challenges were also acknowledged. These included resource constraints like the lack of time and money, health problems, and the significant psychological weight of global crises.

"The wars in Ukraine and Gaza."

### 8.3 Overwhelm, Distraction, and Lack of Focus

The final theme centered on the modern challenge of maintaining focus in a world of infinite choices and distractions. Participants expressed concern about being spread too thin, the allure of social media, and the difficulty of prioritizing effectively.

"[Being] overwhelmed by too many things I try to do in parallel."



## Comparative Analysis and Synthesis

### The Pursuit of Meaning: A Tale of Two Worlds



#### 9.0 Comparing Approaches to a Meaningful Life

Moving beyond individual summaries, this culminating section directly compares and contrasts the findings from the two cohorts.

#### 9.1 Proactive Actions: Universal Pursuits, Different Flavors

At a high level, the proactive steps taken by both cohorts in 2024 show remarkable thematic overlap. **Individuals in both groups pursued meaning through three primary channels: career transformation, personal growth, and foundational lifestyle changes.** However, a **subtle nuance exists:** the Turkish cohort's narrative often framed changes as **acts of escaping negative situations**, whereas the International cohort's narrative was more frequently **centered on aligning with a positive purpose** or vocation.

### 9.2 Avoidance Strategies:

**A Shared Instinct for Protection** The similarity in avoidance strategies is striking. Both groups independently identified the critical importance of creating psychological safety by avoiding negative people and managing destructive internal states. This protective strategy appears to be a fundamental component of well-being, regardless of context.

### 9.3 Perceived Obstacles:

**The Clearest Point of Divergence** **The most significant divergence appears in the cohorts' perception of future obstacles.** The Turkish cohort is engaged in a struggle against a tangible, national system (external socio-economic pressures). In contrast, the International cohort is engaged in a struggle against more abstract, internal patterns (distraction, overwhelm).

Despite these profoundly different external landscapes, the analysis reveals a stunning convergence: **both groups ultimately identified the "self" as a primary obstacle.** This shared conclusion, however, may stem from different psychological functions. For the Turkish cohort, focusing on the self might be a necessary act of psychological survival. For the highly efficacious International cohort, it is the logical next developmental step, the final frontier of growth.

### Methodological Note: The Role of Reflexivity

It is also crucial to acknowledge a methodological factor driving this convergence. The survey's focus on "meaningful actions," combined with its recruitment via professional social media networks (LinkedIn), inherently attracted a specific profile: individuals who already possess a baseline level of self-awareness and reflexivity. Consequently, the identification of the "self" as an obstacle is likely reinforced by the very nature of a cohort willing to pause and participate in an inquiry about their own agency.

# PART II: A TETRA-SOMATIC™ INTERPRETATION

## From Empirical Data to Theoretical Insight

### 1.0 Introduction:

#### The Need for a New Framework

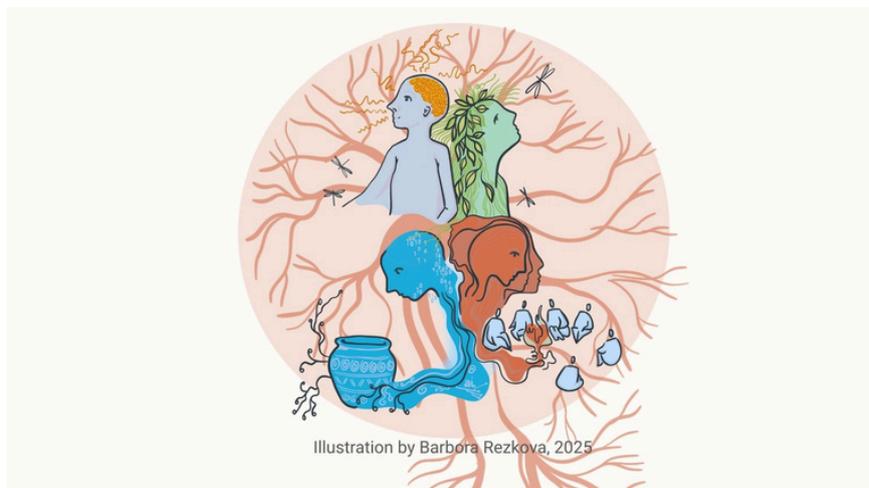
The data presented in Part I offers a compelling snapshot of human agency. Yet, to truly understand *why* these cohorts diverge in their threats but converge in their solutions, we need a robust theoretical lens.

This section moves beyond simple comparison. It interprets the empirical findings through the **Tetra-Somatic™ framework**. Aligning with the computational biology of **Michael Levin** and the agential realism of **Karen Barad**, I define the pursuit of meaning not as a hierarchy of needs, but as a dynamic integration of four distinct yet entangled bodies: the **Psycho-Soma**, **Bio-Soma**, **Socio-Soma**, and **Techno-Soma**

### 2.0 The Tetra-Somatic™ Framework: An Architecture of the Self

To interpret the qualitative data, I reject the "metaphysics of substance" that treats the self as a stable container. Instead, I adopt a "**Metaphysics of Process**," defining the self as a **Tetra-Somatic Process**, a dynamic achievement arising from the continuous entanglement of four core components, or "**lived bodies**":

- **Psycho-Soma**: The embodied narrator responsible for weaving a coherent "felt sense."
- **Bio-Soma**: The metabolic substrate providing primal energy; an agential form of living material, in line with Levin's research on goal-directed biological systems.
- **Socio-Soma**: The relational matrix where the self is constituted through roles.
- **Techno-Soma**: The extension of agency through tools and technologies.



### 3.0 Proactive Agency: Reconnecting with Logos

I interpret the proactive actions reported by both cohorts (career changes, therapy, nature connection) not merely as a checklist of tasks, but as deliberate attempts to alleviate **Ego-constriction** and reconnect with **Logos**.

In the Tetra-Somatic™ framework, **Logos** is defined as the **universal, life-generating field of meaning** that connects all humans, living beings, and matter. We can use Michael Levin's concept of "selflets" as a helpful **analogy** here: Just as smaller biological units must connect to a larger bio-electric field to function as a healthy organism, the human self must connect to the field of Logos to find meaning.

When this connection is blocked, the human experiences **"Ego-constriction"** (or Ego-squeezing). Therefore, when respondents "connect with nature" or "seek authentic work," they are essentially trying to **dilate the Ego**, opening the boundaries of their Tetra-Somatic system to let the universal meaning flow through them again.

#### 3.1 Professional Transformation as Somatic Negotiation

- **Turkish Cohort:** The career changes here were often an attempt to escape a context that forced a severe **Ego-constriction** (survival mode), preventing them from performing a meaningful role (Goffman's Role Collapse).
- **International Cohort:** Reflecting their alignment with IDG principles, they sought to synchronize their "Frontstage" performance with a broader systemic purpose, attempting to harmonize their professional Ego with the **wider ecological Logos**.

#### 3.2 Foundational Changes and the Techno-Soma

Proactive acquisition of skills (cited in the report as learning software or languages) constitutes an ontological act of enhancing the Techno-Soma. By **installing new interfaces between the self and the world**, individuals expand their capacity to interact with and participate in the world, moving from isolation to connection.



## 4.0 Protective Evasion: Somatic Boundary Management

From a Tetra-Somatic perspective, the "avoidance strategies" identified in Part I are not passivity, but a strategic function of boundary management.

Avoiding pessimists is a curation of the Socio-Soma. Internally, avoiding self-blame is a protective act for the Psycho-Soma. It prevents the Ego from collapsing into a negative feedback loop, preserving the energy required to maintain a connection with Logos.

## 5.0 Anticipated Obstacles: The Threat of Ego-Constriction

The divergence in anticipated obstacles allows us to map exactly **how the Ego is squeezed by different environments.**

### 5.1 The Turkish Cohort:

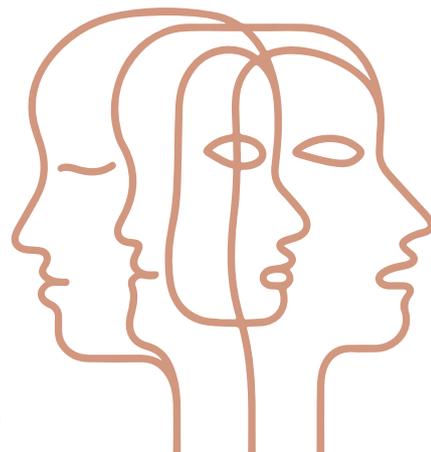
**Systemic Compression** The "external" obstacles cited by the Turkish cohort -economic instability and "institutionalized violence"- act as a massive external pressure on the Bio-Soma (survival) and Socio-Soma (security). This forces a defensive Ego-contraction, causing the self to withdraw into a protective shell to survive.

### 5.2 The International Cohort:

**Technological Compression** For the International cohort, challenges like "overwhelm" and "distraction" represent a different kind of squeeze. The "Capture" of the Techno-Soma by external algorithms fragments attention. This prevents the deep focus required to transcend the Ego and connect with the universal field, a core challenge for those seeking inner development.

### 5.3 The "Self" as Obstacle:

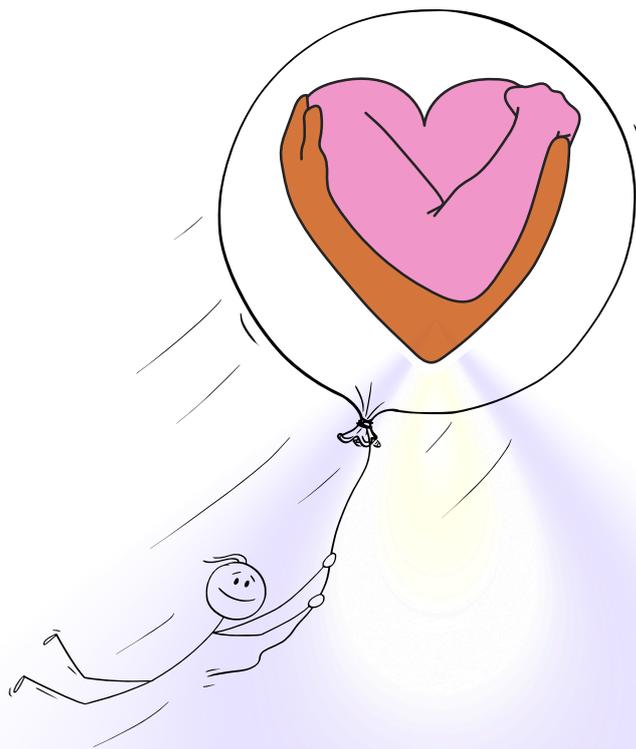
**The Ego-Centric Trap** Both cohorts identified the "self" as a key obstacle. In the Tetra-Somatic view, this is the recognition of Ego-centrism as the ultimate barrier to meaning. Whether caused by the trauma of survival (Turkiye) or the noise of abundance (International), the result is the same: the self gets stuck in its own reflection, blocked from the nourishing field of Logos.



## 6.0 Conclusion: The Dance of Context and Self

Integrating the empirical findings of Part I with the theoretical lens of Part II leads us to a unified conclusion. **The pursuit of meaning** is not a solitary psychological invention; it is an act of **participation**. The "**outer game**" (context) determines the type of pressure applied to our bodies. The "**inner game**" is the continuous effort to resist **Ego-constriction**. It is the precarious achievement of **keeping** our **Tetra-Somatic system open** and permeable to **Logos** -that universal field of meaning that connects us to life itself.

**Meaning**, therefore, is the **resonance** we feel when the Ego relaxes, and **the four bodies vibrate in harmony with the common field of existence**.



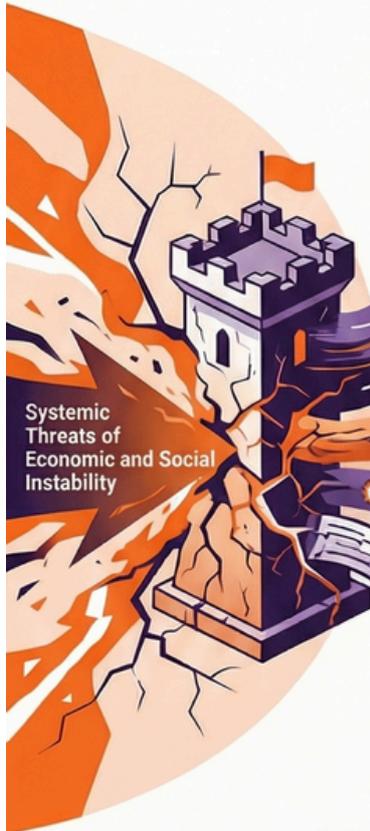
# A Framework for a Coherent Life

Based on the Tetra-Somatic™ framework by Dr. Elif Kus Saillard

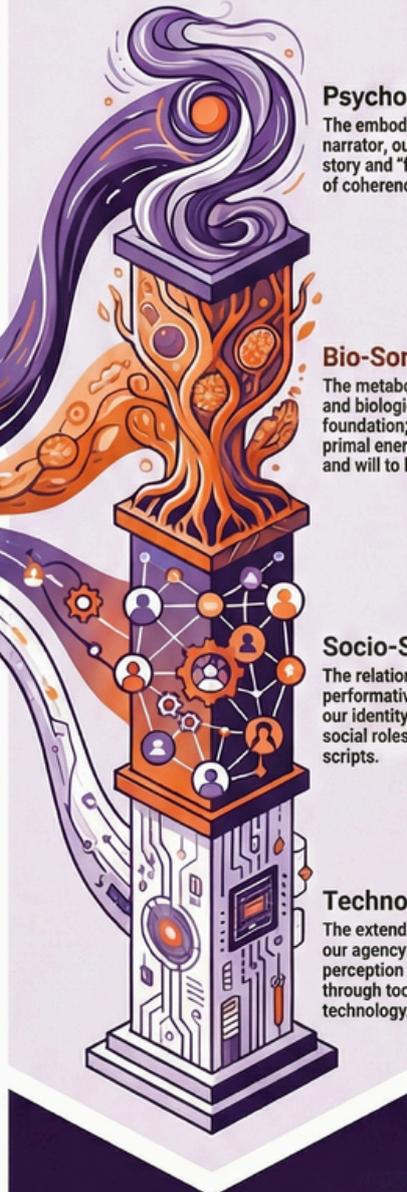
The pursuit of meaning is a dynamic process of weaving together four core “bodies” or dimensions of the self. A comparative study reveals how external pressures determine which bodies are most threatened.

## Turkish Cohort:

### The “Outer Game” Under Siege



## Tetra-Somatic™ Framework: An Architecture of the Self



### Psycho-Soma

The embodied narrator, our inner story and “felt sense” of coherence.

### Bio-Soma

The metabolic and biological foundation; our primal energy and will to live.

### Socio-Soma

The relational and performative self; our identity through social roles and scripts.

### Techno-Soma

The extended self, our agency and perception enhanced through tools and technology.

## International Cohort:

### The “Inner Game” of Mastery



### Bio-Soma Threat



High cost of living jeopardizes basic metabolic needs.

### Socio-Soma Threat



Sociopolitical instability fractures the ability to perform stable roles.

### Psycho-Soma Threat



Self-doubt and lack of focus weaken the internal narrative.

### Techno-Soma Threat



Digital “capture” and overwhelm shrink the capacity for deep work.

## The “Self” as an Obstacle: A Shared Conclusion



## 7.0 References & Developmental Sources

### Primary Theoretical Framework

- Barad, K. (2007). Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning. Duke University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1959). The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Anchor Books.
- Levin, M. (2019). "The Computational Boundary of a 'Self': Developmental Bioelectricity Drives Multicellularity and Scale-Free Cognition." *Frontiers in Psychology*.
- Levin, M. (2022). "Technological Approach to Mind Everywhere." *Frontiers in Systems Neuroscience*.
- Kus Saillard, E. (2025). The Tetra-Somatic™ Model of Self-Integration. [Forthcoming Academic Manuscript].

### Practical Applications & Key Workshops

The Tetra-Somatic framework was refined through direct applications in international workshops. While these sessions were designed as practical interventions rather than methodological tests, they served as a source of empirical feedback for the development of the model:

- Ferderer, B., Kuş Saillard, E., Geist, J., & Smith, S. (2024, May 17-18). Necessary tomorrows with IDG skills: Student dialogues and collaborative collage [Workshop conducted in partnership with Doha Debates]. Summit of the Future: Hadara Edition, Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), Doha, Qatar. <https://www.hbku.edu.qa/en/CPP-SFHE>
- Kus Saillard, E. (2024, April 16). Four bodies, one presence: Navigating AI and sustainability [Workshop]. Utrecht University & Inner Development Goals (IDG), Utrecht, The Netherlands. <https://innerdevelopmentgoals.nl/evenementen/four-bodies-one-presence-navigating-ai-and-sustainability/>

### Foundational Essays on the 4 Bodies Model (Substack Series)

The core concepts were explored in the following essays by Dr. Elif Kuş Saillard

- Kus Saillard, E. (2024, December 6). If AI can design proteins, why can't we design social life? Episode 1: A memory that organizes everything. Substack.
- Kus Saillard, E. (2024, November 29). Four Bodies™: A journey through illness, care, and integration. Substack.
- Kus Saillard, E. (2024, November 2). Language as a living field: Toward integration across Four Bodies™. Substack.
- Kus Saillard, E. (2024, October 12). 5 mind-bending ideas that will change how you see yourself, AI, and the world. Substack.

### ***Author's Note***

This report represents a pivotal synthesis in the evolution of the "**Four Bodies Model™**" The framework originated in the author's own theoretical writings and has been developed iteratively since 2024 through a dialogue between conceptual work, public-facing scholarship -including a series of essays published on Substack- and grounded applications carried out in collaboration with institutions such as Hamad Bin Khalifa University (Qatar) and Utrecht University (The Netherlands).

While these engagements were designed as educational and exploratory interventions, they provided critical empirical and experiential feedback that informed the maturation of the theoretical framework. This document functions as a conceptual bridge between the model's initial theoretical articulation and forthcoming peer-reviewed academic publications.



## Invitation

Would you like to explore **your own unique architecture of the self scientifically?**

With the **AnlaMap** method, which uses the **Tetra-Somatic™** lens, you can actively map and explore your personal Tetra-Somatic architecture **in just two weeks.**

Unlike purely theoretical or discursive approaches, this method is **moment-focused and empirically grounded**, capturing real-time patterns in how meaning and agency are enacted.

The process **illuminates underlying patterns, tensions, and alignments like a magnetic resonance of self-construction.**

**Meaningful actions** do not arise in a vacuum; **they navigate their path through a map.**

