

The Tetralemma.

An exercise for better decision-making in complex situations.

Beyond black-and-white thinking.

Solve complex challenges by getting creative and developing alternative options.

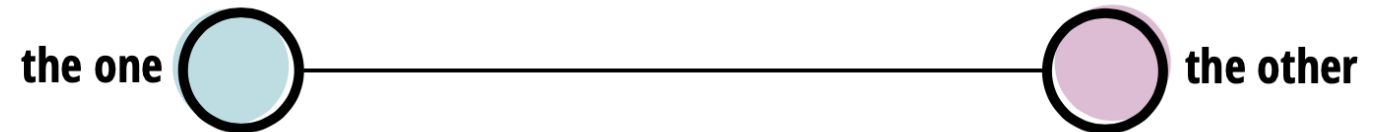
DESCRIPTION THE TETRALEMMA.

Expand your options in decision-making.

The Tetralemma is a systemic coaching instrument that was developed by Matthias Varga von Kibéd and Insa Sparrer to foster better decision-making in complex situations.

In business and life, we often find ourselves in *dilemmas*, with “di” indicating “two” options: A or B, Yes or No, This or That. Contrary to what the name suggests, the *tetralemma* assumes five options, which are interpreted and walked through according to a fixed scheme. The tool is especially useful when you have already thought through all the options you have to solve a challenge that you face, and discussed them with others several times, but still cannot make a decision that you’re fully confident with.

On the following slides, we will provide an overview of the five options the tetralemma provides, and outline the scheme that you can apply to yourself and others to allow for greater freedom of choice, and feel more confident in the decision you finally make.



DESCRIPTION THE TETRALEMMA.

triangility

Position 1 & 2: “Either” & “Or”

When we face dilemmas, we oscillate between two different or opposing poles/options to choose from. The “either-or” mentality is our default black-and-white thinking.

Position 3: “Both”

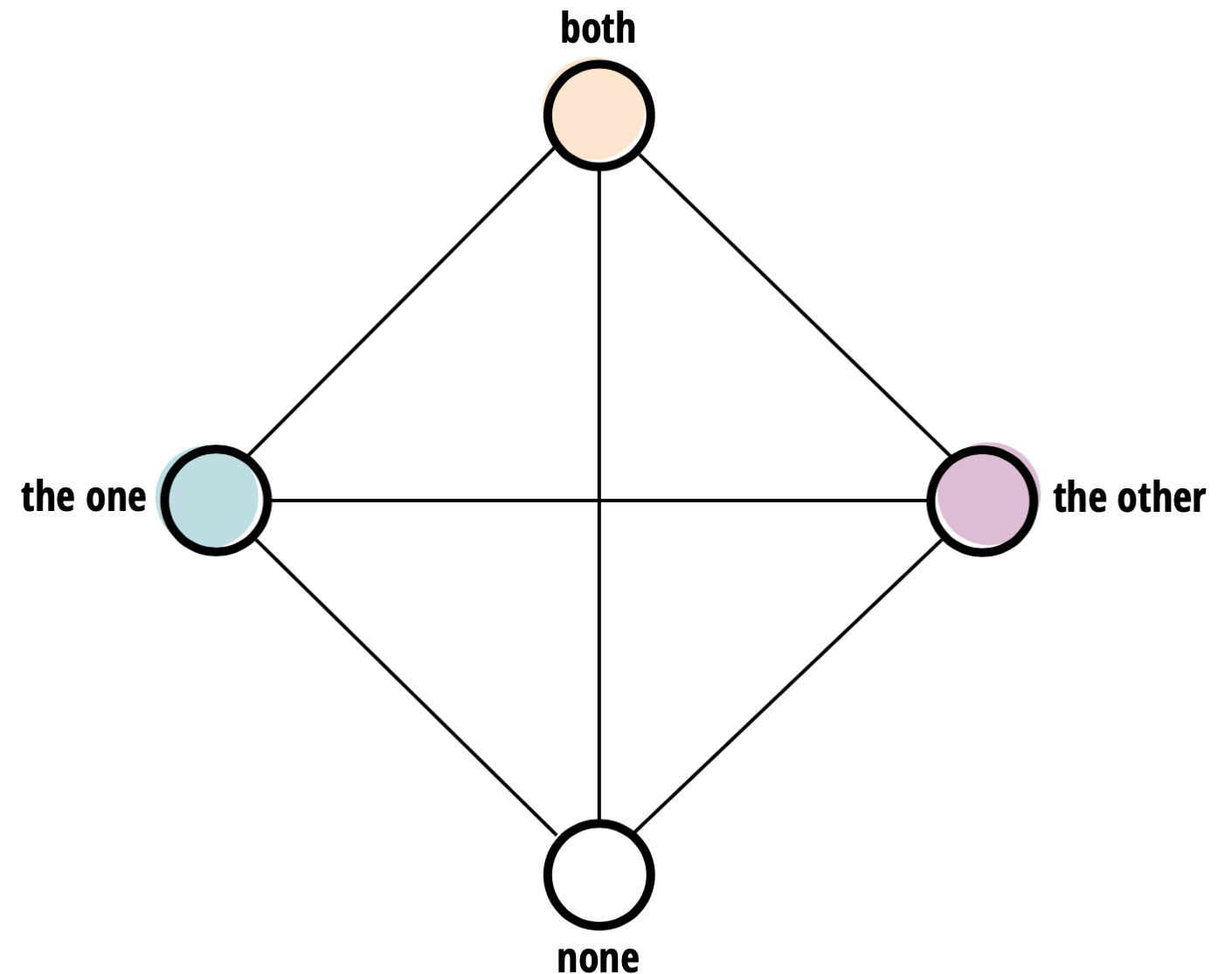
This position generally causes immediate irritation: "How is that supposed to work, both?" Here it is important not to allow for any rational discussion, but to investigate how it would *feel*/like to have both options at the same time. If this position is felt to be positive, we often already develop spontaneous ideas about how "both" could still work - we just haven't thought about this option before.

Position 4: “None”

When this position is felt to be positive, it becomes interesting. It may mean that the solution to the problem lies somewhere else entirely, or that you don't want to decide at all. This is also an option to be appreciated since not wanting to make a decision is also a decision.

Position 5: “Something else”

This position leads you out of the acute decision-making space into a more detached, external position. Here everything is - and should be - possible. Sometimes the solution to a decision problem lies in a completely different alternative that you haven't allowed yourself to think about before because you thought of it as 'crazy' or 'impossible'.



INSTRUCTION THE TETRALEMMA.

How to use the Tetralemma for complex problem solving - as a Workshop with your team

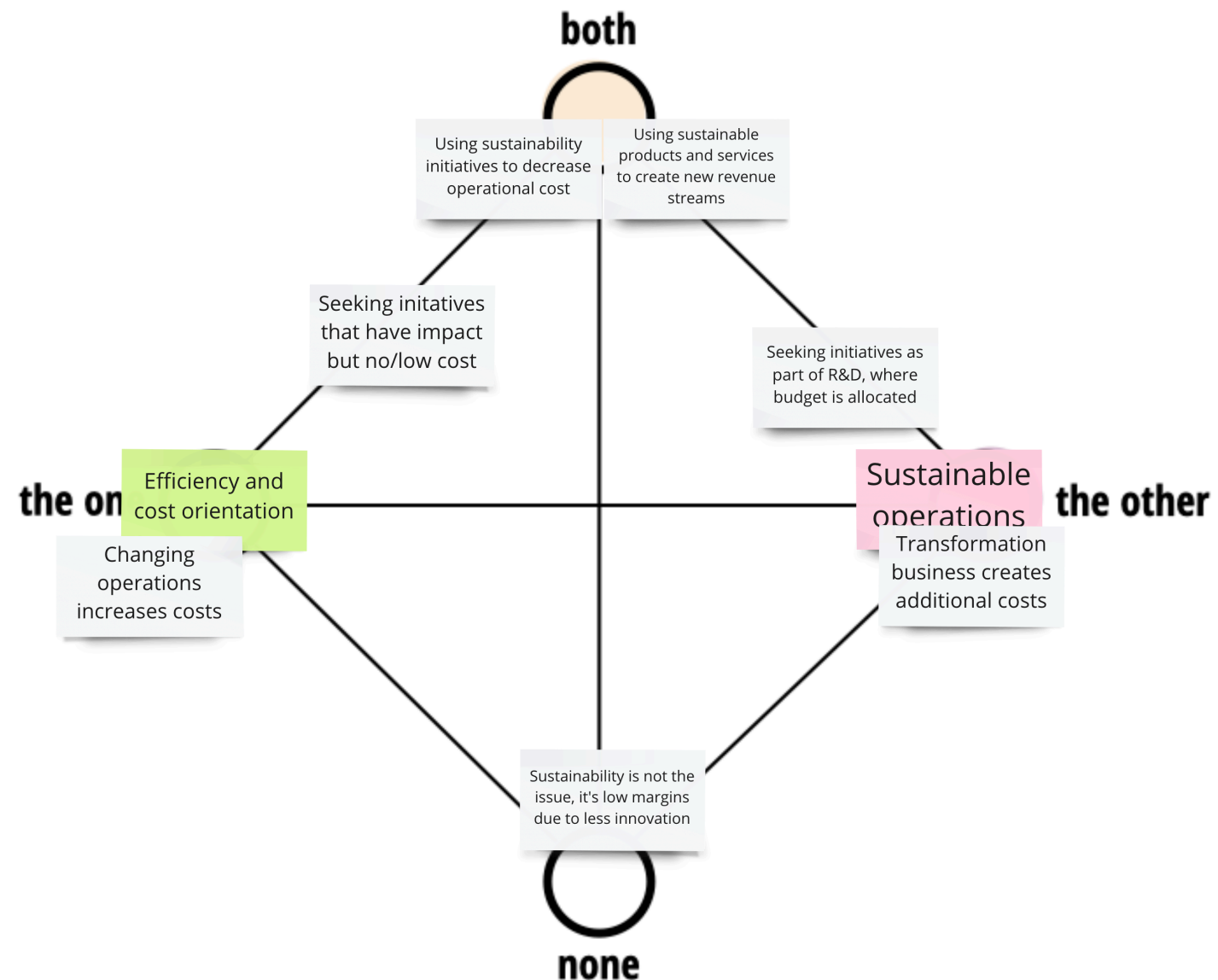
Think of a dilemma you are currently facing (an "either/or" situation) and write down the two options you have on sticky notes next to position A and B of the tetralemma. You may also write down what belief this position is based on.

In the next step, you may now get creative and develop new ways to handle the situation differently. What could be written in the other positions ("both and", "none", or "something else")?

Just let your mind run wild and be surprised at what can come out of it. If needed, use other creative methods, such as Liberating Structures TRIZ, 1-2-4-all, or Wicked Question.

Remember: the positions "Both" and "Neither" seem irritating or even provocative - allow that to happen. The point is to find new options for action that you don't think about as long as you are stuck in either-or.

Example:



triangility

Duration:

30-60min

Individual/Group:

Pair

Material:

Paper cards; Markers;
Physical space to move around

INSTRUCTION THE TETRALEMMA.

How to use the Tetralemma as a systemic exercise for complex problem solving together in a room.

In preparation for the exercise, take four big paper cards and write the four tetralemma positions on them (one position per card). Note that this exercise requires participant to have some space to move around since the power of systemic work is enhanced by the physical interaction with the content.

Step 1

Invite the individual you're working with to think of a challenge or dilemma they currently face where they struggle to make a decision. Whilst they contemplate or find group consensus on the dilemma they want to work on, place the pre-written paper cards on the floor so that they form a cross. Place them at a distance of about 1.5 metres from each other. The fifth card ("Something else") is placed with a little distance outside the cross that the other four cards form.

Step 2

Invite the person to stand between card 1 "Either" and card 2 "Or". You stand to the side and ask them to name the two alternatives again in 2-3 sentences. After having outlined both options, ask them if they can find a keyword for each option: What exactly is "Either", what exactly is "Or"?

After the person has chosen their keywords for both positions, ask them to stand on the "Either" card and close their eyes. Invite them to close their eyes and experience how this option "feels", whilst you observe what you can read from their body language: Are they standing tall or slumped, relaxed or stiff, firm or moving from one leg to the other? Is their breathing shallow or relaxed, and what can you read from their face?

After a little while (30sec-1min), ask them to describe how they feel standing there (if they haven't done so already), describing everything that they can experience inside their body. Keep your own observations to yourself for now and prevent them from intellectualising or rationalising their experience. They should simply describe their bodily feelings, as well as emotions or images that might have come up for them.

Step 3

Now ask your participant to slowly move to the second card with the option "Or". Make sure they never walk through the cross, but around, and always face the inside of the cross. Stand behind them as they arrived and closed their eyes once again and say, "This is the position 'Or'" and name the keyword for this position. Take a step back and allow the client space and time to feel inside, verbalising their experience like they did before.

Duration:

30-60min

Individual/Group:

Pair

Material:

*Paper cards; Markers;
Physical space to move
around*

INSTRUCTION THE TETRALEMMA.

Step 4

Then lead the person to the position: "Both". This position is tricky because it immediately creates the question in the participant, "How is that supposed to work?". Accordingly, as they stand on this card, you say: "This is the position 'Both'", name both keywords, and ask them not to think how both would work out together realistically, but just to tune in once again how it feels. Do the same with the next position: "None". This position you simply say: "This is the position 'None'", and step back again to listen to the words and observe the body language of the individual.

[Short version].

Think of a dilemma you currently face (and "either-or" situation) and place the different options on sticky notes next to position A and B. Then, get creative about the other two position ("both" & "none") to explore new possibilities how to navigate the situation.

triangility

Duration:

30-60min

Individual/Group:

Pair

Material:

*Paper cards; Markers;
Physical space to move
around*

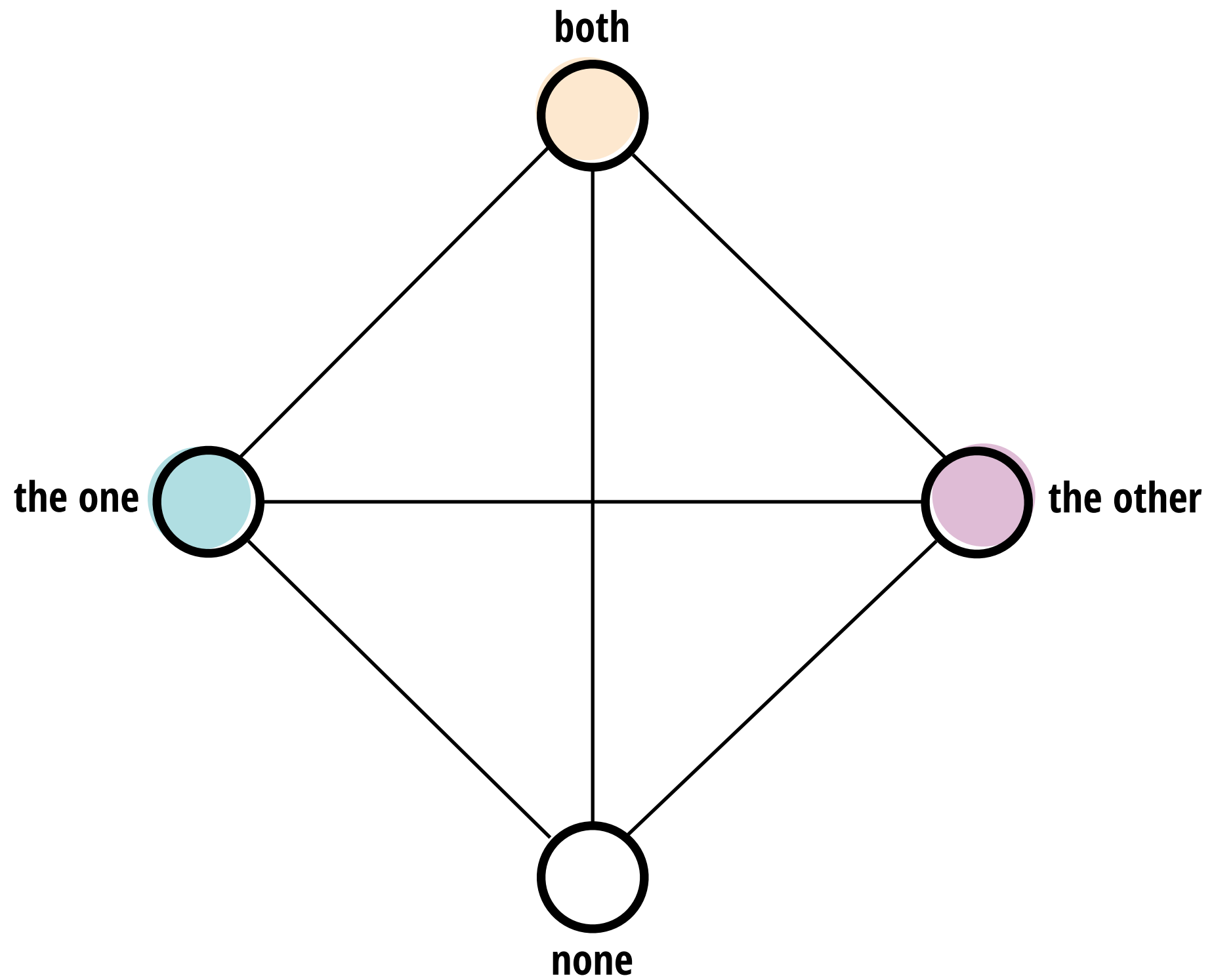


Image 2: The Tetralemma offers space with new options