

intention to attain these incentives that is analyzed as the goal. The intention to attain the incentives is understood as the higher-order goal that may be served by a multitude of lower-order goals focusing on specific behaviors (e.g., giving a party).

The analysis of human goal pursuit has, first and foremost, addressed the question of what determines goal attainment. There are two answers to this question. The first answer is provided by "content theories of goal pursuit." These theories explain differences in goal attainment in terms of what the specified goal entails. Various relevant structural features of goal content have been identified. Challenging, specific goals lead to better performances than challenging, vague goals (so-called do-your-best goals), and this is true whether goals are self-set or assigned. What matters is that people feel committed to the goal in question. The goal specificity effect is based on feedback and self-monitoring advantages, as is the goal proximity effect (i.e., proximal goals lead to better performances than distal goals). As proximal goals relate to what is to be done in the present and the near future, people find it easier to monitor their progress compared to progress toward distal goals. The latter specify intended behaviors and desired outcomes too far removed in time to monitor one's progress effectively and to provide small successes that promote self-efficacy and interest.

But thematic features of goal content are also relevant. Goals that serve the needs of autonomy, competence, and social integration foster goal attainment via intrinsic motivation, whereas goals that serve the feeling of obligation hamper goal attainment. Similar performance benefits have been observed for mastery goals (i.e., learning how to perform a given task) and for performance goals (i.e., finding out through task performance how capable one is). Mastery goals allow the individual to cope more effectively with failure. Performance goals are more effective when they are framed as approach goals (i.e., I intend to achieve good grades) rather than avoidance goals (i.e., I intend to avoid bad grades).

"Self-regulation theories of goal pursuit" provide a different answer to the question of what determines goal attainment. They explain differences in goal attainment in terms of how effectively people solve the problems associated with goal implementation. These problems pertain to initiating goal-directed actions and bringing them to a successful conclusion. For example, it is observed that planning the implementation of a goal creates a cognitive orientation (implemental mind set) that facilitates the initiation of goal-directed actions. Moreover, forming implementation intentions that link a good opportunity to act to a special goal-directed behavior furthers the initiation of this behavior in the critical situation (i.e., action

GOALS. The goal concept is commonly defined by the two related concepts of need and incentive. An animal's need (e.g., hunger) points to a respective incentive (i.e., food), and it is the animal's efforts to approach the incentive that qualify as goal pursuit. Animal psychologists focus on the attributes of goal pursuit as observed from the outside (e.g., persistence) and thus on the objective goal as defined by the researcher (i.e., the incentive the researcher chooses as a reference point for describing observed behavior). Psychologists interested in human goal pursuit analyze the subjective goal or intention of the individual. A person's need for approval, for instance, includes various classes of incentives (e.g., being popular with one's friends), and it is the person's

initiation becomes immediate and efficient and does not need a conscious intent). To prevent the derailing of an ongoing goal pursuit, people may use further action control strategies (e.g., emotion control, environmental control) geared toward removing distractions. If actual failure occurs, the experienced goal discrepancy is reduced by goal-directed behaviors when the perceived feasibility of goal attainment is high and goal commitment is strong. The resumption of a disrupted goal pursuit also depends on the person's goal commitment. However, people may take precautionary measures to avoid the disruption of goal pursuits through competing pursuits by using various goal negotiation strategies (e.g., creative integration of two different goal pursuits).

Whereas in social, organizational, industrial, and educational psychology goal pursuit is analyzed primarily in terms of effective goal attainment, personality psychologists focus on the side effects of goal pursuit in terms of subjective well-being and personality development. Commitment to personal goals (either communal or agentic) and the perceived attainability of these goals jointly predict a person's experience of well-being; this effect is mediated by the perceived progress in goal achievement. However, when the selected personal goal is poorly matched with the person's chronic needs (e.g., a communal goal with a strong power need), subjective well-being is impaired. Research on social cognition has also addressed the side effects of goal pursuit. For example, it is observed that interpersonal goals (e.g., to collaborate on solving a given problem) affect the processing of information about others (i.e., produce more accuracy-driven, less stereotypic impression formation).

Recently, the issues of goal setting and goal disengagement have received a more systematic analysis. The distal factors of age and personality attributes influence the content of the goals people set for themselves or disengage from. For instance, older people set health and leisure activity goals and disengage from occupational and material goals held in middle adulthood. In addition, fear of failure motivates individuals to set performance goals and give up mastery goals, whereas the reverse is true for success-motivated individuals. The proximal psychological processes that account for goal setting and goal disengagement, however, are based on mentally contrasting the desired outcomes with those aspects of the present status quo that impede the realization of the desired future. This creates a readiness to act, which in turn triggers feasibility-related reflections. If the perceived feasibility is high, the desired future becomes a goal that is associated with a strong commitment; if the perceived feasibility is low, the person's commitment becomes weakened.

[See also Achievement Motivation; and Motivation.]

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