



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI
SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Name of the Student : SATWIK UPADHYAY

Roll Number : 176141011

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Thesis Title: Goal Selection and Goal Pursuit: The Role of Self-concordance and Implementation Intentions

Name of Thesis Supervisor(s) : Dr. Nachiketa Tripathi

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SHORT ABSTRACT

The pursuit of long-term goals profoundly influences behaviour and life satisfaction, yet how individuals select these goals has largely remained underexplored in research. Current theories of goal-directed behaviour provide limited insight into how people actively seek goals or whether they wait for them to emerge. Additionally, individuals vary in their ability to choose goals that align with their true selves. Many pursue unfulfilling goals for years, often unaware of better-fit alternatives. Therefore, selecting self-appropriate goals is a skill, especially relevant in today's autonomous and gig work environment, driven by rapid technological disruptions resulting in a continuous upgrade of existing individual skills and learning. The present research investigates goal selection difficulties through the self-concordance framework, rooted in self-determination theory to support meaningful goal-setting. Complementary self-management techniques, such as implementation intentions, further enhance goal-relevant behaviour and well-being.

In an experimental study (Phase 1, N=407), participants rated candidate goals on intrinsic and extrinsic content, personality alignment, values, and motives before selecting two goals. In a longitudinal follow-up (Phase 2, N=202), participants assessed goal feasibility and the impact of implementation intentions on life satisfaction and goal progress. Results revealed that intrinsic goal selection predicted higher self-concordance, with alignment between goal content, values, and motives. Self-concordant goals lead to better outcomes than goals pursued out of obligation or pressure. Implementation intentions strengthened the link between self-concordance and goal satisfaction, irrespective of progress. Structuring one's goals through planning boosts both goal progress and well-being, especially when the goals reflect one's true self.

This thesis advances Self-Determination Theory by integrating perspectives from Goal Systems Theory, Construal Theory, and even philosophical insights from the Mandukya Upanishad to show that sustainable motivation and life satisfaction stem not just from achievement but from authentic engagement with our goals. Future directions include exploring adaptive learning processes that enable a quick assessment of one's experiences and evaluate the highest potential for reward/goal achievement amongst available goal choices.