

Planning and the Control of Action

Peter M. Gollwitzer (Psychology), University of Konstanz (Germany)

Goal attainment is not yet secured solely by forming strong commitments to highly desirable and feasible goals. There is always the subsequent issue of implementing a set goal, and one wonders what people can do to enhance their chances of being successful at this second phase of goal pursuit. A promising answer seems to be the following: People may plan out in advance how they want to solve the problems of goal implementation. But what are these problems? There are at least four problems that stand out. These problems include getting started with goal striving, staying on track, calling a halt, and not overextending oneself. I will describe research showing that making if-then plans (i.e., form implementation intentions) on how to deal with these problems does facilitate solving these problems. Thereafter, I will ask whether implementation intentions foster goal attainment even under conditions that are commonly viewed as not amenable to self-regulation by planning (e.g., when unwanted automatic responses are to be controlled). Finally, I will report research showing that implementation intentions can even foster goal striving in those samples (e.g., children with ADHD) that are known to suffer from impaired action control.