



Self-Regulation as a Means for Preventing Drop-out from Educational and Vocational Careers as well as Health-Related Activities

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Abstract:

Drop-out is defined as abandoning a selected course in life although it is inefficient for the individual or society according to rational criteria. Drop-out constitutes a major problem in education, vocational careers and health promotion. In the educational domain, one important goal is to raise participation in higher education, especially from families with low socio-economic backgrounds. (e. g. ,Education at a Glance 2012). With respect to vocational careers, the term Leaking Pipeline has been coined to describe the situation that, although women have better formal educational qualifications, men are still overrepresented in top positions (z. B. Ceci, Williams & Barnett, 2009). In the domain of health, it is a frequent observation that many are willing to take up a healthy life style including physical exercise, but that few establish physical activity as a fixed part in their lives (z. B. Rothman, Baldwin & Hertel, 2004).

To explain drop-out in these fields, theoretical approaches have been developed in the psychological, economical and sports sciences traditions. Among them are the

strength model of self-control (Baumeister, Heatherton & Tice, 1994), which explains failing self-regulation by depleted self-control resources (Vohs et al., 2008; Muraven, 2012), as well as volitional action-control theory (Rothman, 2000). Moreover, implicit theories about whether important prerequisites such as self-control resources are fixed and thus depletable or can be increased have been used to explain differences in self-control (Job, Dweck & Walton, 2010). In the behavioral economics tradition, a large literature deals with biases in inter-temporal choice (e.g., Loewenstein & Prelect, 1993). Drop-out from educational and vocational careers has also been explained by the concept of identity (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000, 2002, 2010). Although not named as such in the economic literature, the identity approach also describes self-regulatory processes. An open question within the identity-economic approach is, why and when people adopt certain identities that are either adaptive or maladaptive with regard to their careers. One solution might be to set the right incentives to choose adaptive identities and self-regulation strategies. An approach using minimally invasive interventions, also known as nudges (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008), is aspired.

The aim of this project is to integrate these theoretical approaches and to develop innovative, minimally invasive interventions to prevent drop-out.