

# The pursuit of multiple goals

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## Abstract

Juggling multiple goals is an inescapable reality of human life. Over the past two decades, the study of the nature of *multiple* (vs. single) goals has emerged to become an influential topic. To facilitate the understanding of the current state of the literature, this article presents an overview of the study of multiple goals. It first addresses the nature and impact of dual-goal relations and reviews strategies people use to manage goal conflict (i.e., choosing, multitasking, and prioritizing). It then examines ways to conceptualize the relations among a collection of goals (i.e., goal structure), highlights emerging research in this area, and discusses factors that contribute to optimizing the pursuit of multiple goals. Throughout, the review highlights knowledge gaps and the need for future research to study subjective experiences in managing multiple goals.

## 1 | THE PURSUIT OF MULTIPLE GOALS

Juggling many and varied demands is a common act of our modern-day life. Today's children and teenagers have become "exhausted superkids"—many cut sleep to squeeze in additional time for school and extracurricular activities (Bruni, 2015), still feeling overwhelmed by all they have to do (Ruiz, Sharkness, Kelly, DeAngelo, & Pryor, 2010). Working parents feel "stressed, tired, and rushed," finding it difficult to balance work and family responsibilities, and yearning for more quality time with their loved ones or to pursue hobbies (Miller, 2015). Whatever age or stage of life—whatever our particular concerns, aims, or struggles—pursuing multiple goals is an inescapable reality of being human.

In psychology, goals as topic of study has long been of interest (Lewin, 1938, 1951). Early research primarily focused on the nature and process of pursuing single goals (e.g., work, family, health, and leisure). It is particularly in the past two decades that the study of individuals' *multiple* goals has developed to become an influential topic for the understanding of self-regulation and well-being (e.g., Ballard, Yeo, Loft, Vancouver, & Neal, 2016; Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010; Kruglanski et al., 2002). Unlike single goal research, the study of multiple goals takes seriously the intrapersonal dynamics of multiple goals to understand the operation of both single goals and the goals as

a system. We review the current literature of multiple goals, focusing on how people manage dual-goal relations and the interrelations among many goals (i.e., multiple-goal structure). Throughout, we highlight gaps in the existing literature and possible future directions.

## 1.1 | How do people manage two goals?

A goal is broadly defined as the mental representation of a desired end-state—what people want or need (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). Goals can be abstract or concrete, transient or enduring, important or peripheral (Fujita, 2011; Locke & Latham, 2002). Goals can shine a spotlight on what we most want to attain or what we ardently want to avoid (Elliot & McGregor, 2001; N. E. Miller, 1944). Goals can represent both conscious and nonconscious desires (Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trötschel, 2001; Ferguson, 2008). Although goals can vary across these dimensions, goals shape behavior in predictable ways: People pay more attention to goal-relevant stimuli (Bargh et al., 2001), people exert more effort to pursue a more important or difficult goal (Locke & Latham, 2002), and people typically persist to pursue a goal until the goal has been reached or the effort is not sustainable (Fishbach & Ferguson, 2007; Forster et al., 2007).

The steady pursuit of even a single goal is challenging, yet the self-regulation story becomes more demanding (and intriguing) when one considers that every day individuals are pursuing several goals. Most individuals report pursuing 7–15 goals at a given moment in their life (see Emmons & King, 1988; Little & Gee, 2007), and these goals, when considered alongside each other, can have both positive and negative effects on goal success. In this section, we introduce these issues in the simplest form of multiple goal relations (and the one that has been most studied): the context of two goals. We define the basic forms of dual-goal relations, review implications of goal facilitation and conflict, and discuss the nature and effectiveness of three major strategies people use to regulate conflicts between goals.

In theory, dual-goal relations exist in four basic forms: Goals may have no direct relation to each other (i.e., neutral or independent; pursuing new friendships has no effect on a goal to study), a facilitative relation (e.g., pursuing new friendships helps a goal to study), a conflict relation (e.g., pursuing new friendships hinders a goal to study), and a mixed or ambivalent relation (e.g., pursuing new friendships may both help and hurt a study goal, if studying alone is more effective; Gorges & Grund, 2017; J. S. Gray, Ozer, & Rosenthal, 2017). Among them, past work has focused mostly on goal facilitation and conflict.

Goal facilitation occurs when one goal operates in the service of another goal (i.e., a means to an end; Kruglanski et al., 2002; Riediger, 2007). This idea is also called “goal coherence,” “goal integrity,” and “goal congruence” (McGregor & Little, 1998; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995; Talevich, Read, & Walsh, 2014). For instance, an individual's goal of running every day may serve a goal to lose weight and a goal to better manage stress. Many theories consider facilitation the most desirable dual-goal state because goal facilitation boosts goal progress (Freund & Riediger, 2006; Heckhausen et al., 2010; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995). This assumption finds reliable support in studies measuring subjective perceptions (i.e., self-reports) of goal facilitation. Perceived goal facilitation is associated with goal progress (Presseau, Tait, Johnston, Francis, & Sniehotta, 2013; Riediger & Freund, 2004), and goal progress predicts not only successful attainment of the goal but also psychological benefits such as subjective well-being (Klug & Maier, 2015; Wiese, 2007; see also Sheldon & Kasser, 1998).

Compared to goal facilitation, the literature on goal conflict yields a more complex outlook. Early theories of goal conflict captured the various ways individuals may be pushed and pulled towards two competing desires (N. E. Miller, 1944). Miller differentiated approach/approach conflicts where people desire two end-states at the same time (e.g., should I eat chocolate cake or vanilla ice cream?), avoid/avoid conflicts where people desire neither end-state (e.g., should I clean the bathroom or the kitchen?), and double approach/avoid conflicts where people are both pulled and repelled by both end-states (e.g., trade-offs between going out with friends vs. staying at home, both of which have positive and negative appeal). Recent research differentiates the sources

of goal conflict (Gorges & Grund, 2017; Gray et al., 2017). *Resource goal conflicts* are characterized by limited resources such as time and money (e.g., not enough time to both study and make new friends and not enough money to both purchase a house and do renovations; Riediger, 2007; Riediger & Freund, 2004). *Inherent goal conflicts* are characterized by a fundamental contradiction between the end-states of or strategies needed to attain different goals (e.g., “trying to save money by gambling”; Boudreaux & Ozer, 2013; Riediger & Freund, 2004).

Perhaps not surprisingly, research generally suggests that goal conflict has varied negative outcomes. Results of research on both standardized goal conflicts (e.g., work vs. family) and idiosyncratic goal conflicts are fairly consistent. First, conflict is associated with more difficulty in achieving goal success and more negative psychological outcomes (e.g., stress and low satisfaction; J. S. Gray et al., 2017). Second, a person's ability to maximize dual-goal success depends on the person's ability to manage and minimize the conflict between the two goals (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). Across domains, a meta-analysis (J. S. Gray et al., 2017) suggests that increased goal conflict is positively associated with psychological distress (median weighted  $r = .34$ ;  $N = 10,735$ , 42 samples) and negatively associated with well-being (median weighted  $r = -.26$ ;  $N = 7628$ , 32 samples). At the same time, research also suggests some cognitive and motivational upsides of goal conflict. For instance, thinking about goal conflict triggers a more careful search for information and reduces the bias to wrongfully accept preexisting assumptions (i.e., confirmation bias; see Kleiman & Enisman, 2018).

### 1.1.1 | Goal conflict management strategies

Thus far, the literature has documented three main sets of strategies that people use to manage dual-goal conflicts. The strategies reflect two factors: (a) committing to pursuing one versus two goals and (b) pursuing goals sequentially or concurrently.

### 1.1.2 | Choosing

One strategy to resolve a dual-goal conflict is *choosing* to pursue one of the two goals, while abandoning the other goal (see also “selection”; Freund & Baltes, 2002). People often find the process of choosing difficult (e.g., being torn; Gorges, Esdar, & Wild, 2014; cf. Freund & Baltes, 2002), and the process frequently involves effortful deliberation (Gollwitzer, 1990). Yet goal choice tends to be a common strategy people use to manage resource conflicts (Laran, 2010). This strategy is particularly prevalent in the pursuit of inherent goal conflicts, where an increase of resources (e.g., time and money) does nothing to minimize the conflict. For instance, an individual who experiences a conflict between the desire for convenient and cheap goods and a goal to avoid supporting big-box stores over local businesses can only solve the conflict by choosing which goal matters more.

Choosing is an effective strategy to the extent that people choose the “right” goal. In reality, however, it is not easy to discern effectiveness in choosing. This is because there may not be an obvious right choice; determining what is right is almost always nuanced. Research on judgment and decision making speaks to this phenomenon and suggest that a “right” choice likely depends on the individual and the situation. For instance, what is right can depend on personal value (e.g., choosing based on maximal utility values or moral principles; Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001) or social expectations in a particular situation. Take self-control as an example. The ability to choose to focus on the more important (long-term) goal over a less important (short-term) goal is socially praised as reflective of self-control (Fujita, 2011; Trope & Fishbach, 2000) and as reflecting competence more generally (e.g., Warren Buffet; Schroeder, 2008). Whether the choice is “right,” the effectiveness of this strategy depends on the capability to truly let go of one of the goals. The general ability to effectively engage in the selected goal—and disengage from the abandoned goal—is related to well-being (Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, Schulz, & Carver, 2003). This is

facilitated by an implicit motivational process whereby individuals deactivate or “forget” the unchosen goal(s), a concept called goal shielding (Shah, Friedman, & Kruglanski, 2002).

### 1.1.3 | Multitasking

A strategy opposite to choosing is *multitasking*. Although definitions of multitasking have varied in the literature (see Koch, Poljac, Müller, & Kiesel, 2018), most scholars agree that multitasking can be divided into two forms (Wickens & McCarley, 2019). One is a fully concurrent form of multitasking. Goals are pursued simultaneously, where actions to achieve both goals are carried out at the same time. For example, a person may be driving and talking, or a person may be simultaneously investing in companies that are direct competitors; in these examples, actions to pursue conflicting goals are concurrent. In most cases, concurrent actions are difficult or impossible (e.g., eating and talking clearly at the same moment) and people employ a less concurrent form of multitasking, called task-switching or interleaving. Task-switching refers to pursuing goals in rapid succession, switching back-and-forth. In its prototypical instantiation, task-switching is rapid such that people do not complete the first goal before starting to pursue the second goal. A person may eat a bite and chat and take another bite; a nanny may leave the kitchen to check on the baby and then go back to continue to monitor the stove. In these examples, the actions to pursue goals occur in succession. Whether in its more or less concurrent form, multitasking is common in approach–approach resource conflict, where people seek to maximize both desired outcomes (Ballard et al., 2016; Schmidt & DeShon, 2007).

The two forms of multitasking come with different limitations. Cognitively speaking, concurrent multitasking divides resources (e.g., attention) and limits the maximal performance of the simultaneous actions (Meyer & Kieras, 1997). The effectiveness of task-switching depends on the frequency of switching. Cognitive resources and time are needed to adjust to performing an action different from the present one. In a given amount of time, the more frequently a person switches goals, the more resources and time are spent on switching (i.e., “task-switching cost”; e.g., Rubinstein, Meyer, & Evans, 2001). This is why many performance researchers and practitioners find frequent task-switching, or multitasking in general, to be an ineffective strategy (e.g., Atchley, 2010).

### 1.1.4 | Prioritizing

The third strategy is *prioritizing*—pursuing conflicting goals in sequential order. For instance, a person may finish eating before chatting with someone, and a nanny may only start cooking after the baby is fully asleep. Prioritizing resembles multitasking in the way that they both aim to eventually achieve more than one goal. But they differ in the nature of sequencing. Prioritizing by strict definition requires the completion of one goal before the initiation of the other (Koch et al., 2018; Orehek & Vazeou-Nieuwenhuis, 2013), unlike multitasking. Therefore, the two strategies are theoretically distinguishable. That said, in practice the two may overlap depending on what time course a person is considering. Let's consider again the example of the nanny. If the nanny subsumes the goals of cooking and babysitting under one long-term goal of raising a child, the two sub-goals can be viewed as concurrent actions in the overall pursuit, which would be a form of multitasking.

The differentiation of multitasking/task-switching and prioritizing is particularly useful, however, when comparing their effectiveness. Consider a reasonable time horizon: not so brief that goals are inconsequential, and long enough that at least one of the two conflicting goals can be completed. In this frame of reference, prioritizing involves neither concurrent actions nor a rapid succession of actions. For these reasons, prioritizing avoids division of cognitive resources and minimizes task-switching cost, the downsides of multitasking. This is why prioritizing is arguably a more effective strategy than multitasking (Allen, 2015).

However, more work is needed to compare the effectiveness of the strategies under different conditions and to understand better the antecedents that lead to the likelihood of switching between goals. For instance, when considering a focal goal, individuals can focus on their level of commitment or on their level of current progress. A commitment focus encourages people to stick to the goal they have prioritized and to give up on the other goal (also referred to as “highlighting”). A progress focus licenses people to coast on the progress they have made on the prioritized goal and switch to pursue the other goal (“balancing”; Fishbach & Zhang, 2009).

### 1.1.5 | Summary

Empirical research on dual-goal relations has focused on facilitation and conflict, revealing a variety of strategies that individuals use to pursue multiple goals. Dual-goal strategy research has paid particular attention to goal conflict, but it is possible that similar strategies may operate in the context of facilitative goals (e.g., multitasking facilitative goals) or that other strategies have not yet been identified and carefully examined. Take ambivalent goal relations as an example. They show unique psychological implications, both positive and negative, incremental to the impacts of goal facilitation and conflict (e.g., association with mixed or negative emotions; e.g., Kelly, Mansell, & Wood, 2011; Moberly & Dickson, 2018). We believe there is still much to learn about the strategies that individuals use, and when and why they may be particularly effective or ineffective. For instance, research on multitasking suggests real costs to switching between goals, but it is possible that the nature of the goal relation (facilitative, ambivalent, and conflicting) moderates the extent of these costs.

Another relatively untapped research direction highlights the role of subjective experience and lay theories regarding goal relations (Kung & Scholer, 2019). For example, individuals can differ in how much they chronically prefer multitasking (e.g., Poposki & Oswald, 2010). It is not well understood if these preferences correlate with goal success; are those who prefer multitasking indeed better multitaskers? In addition, as noted earlier, depending on the level of goal identification and focus, it is possible to conceptualize the same action as a different strategy. For instance, imagine an individual who calls her mother while going for a walk. One person may conceptualize this as multitasking because of her level of goal identification (“social goal” and “exercise goal”), whereas another person may conceptualize this as prioritizing (“taking a break from work”). Similarly, an individual's time horizon plays a critical role in determining whether they conceptualize a focus on a single goal as choosing versus prioritizing; even this subtle difference may have important implications for the extent to which competing or alternate goals are shielded during goal pursuit. In addition, individuals may differ in the extent to which they believe specific strategies are possible or desirable. For instance, an individual who believes it is possible to reframe goal actions to encourage multiple means to one goal may tend to seek different solutions than an individual who does not see goal construals and relations as flexible.

We began our discussion of multiple goals by focusing on dual goal relations; even when considering this relatively simple system, the dynamics are complex. People, however, have more than two goals that they are juggling. Thus, a fuller understanding of the multiple goal space requires consideration of not only the relation between adjacent goals but also non-adjacent goals—i.e., the overall architecture of the multiple goal space.

## 2 | HOW DO PEOPLE CONSTRUE AND STRUCTURE A COLLECTION OF GOALS?

Goals vary in their positions and interrelations as a system. In contrast to the focus on direct relations between two focal goals (e.g., work and family), an investigation of goal structure takes into account both the types of relations (e.g., direct and indirect relations, facilitation and inhibition relations) and configurations of goals relations (e.g., number of goals a goal is connected to; Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Kruglanski et al., 2002). Varied traditions

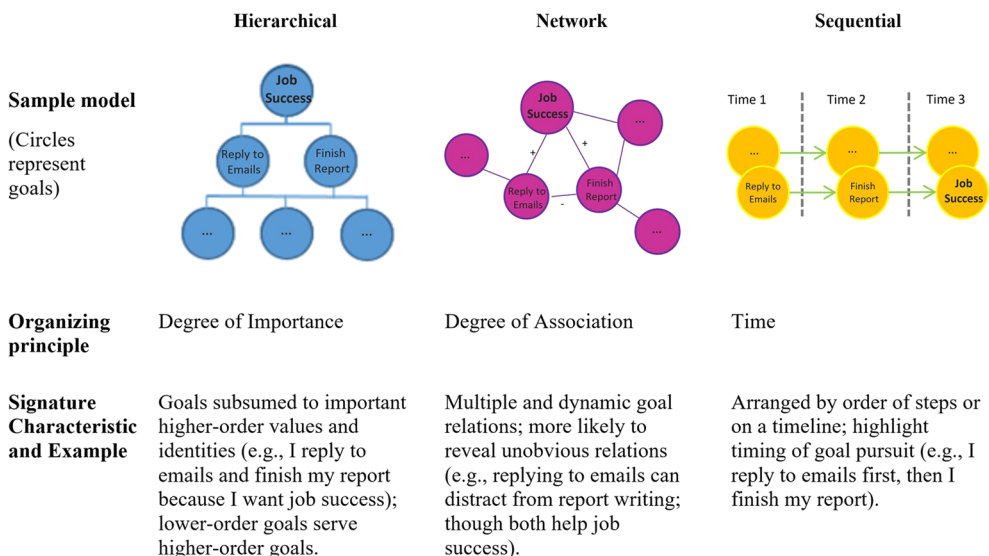
offer different scientific accounts for the principles that underlie goal structures. These theories do not necessarily reflect the actual (neurological) layout of goals in the brain (Austin & Vancouver, 1996); in contrast, they offer insight into the particular ways that multiple goals operate as a psychological system. We summarize three major principles of goal structure available in the literature, review existing work on goal structure, and highlight new research that takes a lay theory perspective to understand goal structure.

## 2.1 | Hierarchy

The most influential goal structure principle to date conceptualizes multiple goals within a hierarchy (see Figure 1). This has been particularly prominent in the study of cybernetic models and control theories of self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1982a; Powers, 1973). A hierarchy can take many forms, such as staggered loops (Lord & Levy, 1994), pyramids (Maslow, 1943), or ladders (Trope & Liberman, 2010; Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). Goals at the top of the hierarchy are usually more important (and abstract) than goals at the bottom. Within a hierarchy, higher-order goals (e.g., values and identities) dictate the purpose of the lower order goals (e.g., project goals, tasks), and lower order goals serve as means to the higher order goals (Carver & Scheier, 1982b; Lord & Levy, 1994).

## 2.2 | Network

A second organizing principle conceptualizes goal structure as an “associative” network (Lewin, 1943, 1951). Classic cognitive theories suggest that goals, like other mental representations, form a web-like network (Collins & Loftus, 1975; Hebb, 1955). In a network, goals are arranged by degree and strength of associations (Sattath & Tversky, 1977). The activation of a given goal can make it more or less likely that a connected goal is also activated (Forster et al., 2007). The more relevant goals have more or stronger associations and thus may be clustered together. Compared to a hierarchical structure, a network structure allows for more flexible goal relations and imposes fewer constraints on both how and why goals are related.



**FIGURE 1** Principles and examples of three goal structures (adapted from Kung & Scholer, 2019)

## 2.3 | Sequence

The third principle highlights a component silent in the prior two structures: time. Classic phase models of goal regulation emphasize time and distinguish between deliberation (deciding what goal to pursue) and implementation (the act of goal pursuit itself; see Gollwitzer, 1990). Life-span development models organize people's goals according to what is salient at different time points in life (Heckhausen, 1997; Heckhausen et al., 2010). Goals in sequential structures are arranged in chronological order or on a timeline, from one phase to another. Because time is linear, sequential models tend to be shaped like one or more chains, highlighting how goals unfold consecutively over time.

## 2.4 | The effects of different goal structures

Most prominent in the study of goal structure is the literature on goal systems theory (Kruglanski et al., 2002), which draws most directly from hierarchical models. The theory articulates effects of (mostly adjacent) goal configurations on self-regulation, and related studies typically manipulate the configurations of two to three goals to test effects (see Kruglanski, Chernikova, Babush, Dugas, & Schumpe, 2015). For instance, the theory proposes that a unifinality configuration is a structure where a means only serves one goal, whereas a multifinality configuration is a structure where a means serves more than one goal. Multifinal means are more valuable—a bigger “bang for the buck”—than unifinal means (Kruglanski et al., 2013), and therefore, people tend to narrowly search for multifinal means, called a “multifinal constraint” effect (Köpetz, Faber, Fishbach, & Kruglanski, 2011). However, sometimes a unifinal means is more desirable. This is true when people find the means (e.g., “a regular aerobic exercise”) that uniquely serves a focal goal (e.g., “helps maintain healthy bones”; i.e., unifinal), to be more useful than the means that serves multiple goals (e.g., “not only helps maintain healthy bones but also helps protect you from heart disease”; i.e., multifinal), called the “dilution effect” (Zhang, Fishbach, & Kruglanski, 2007).

Research on goal structure is still in an early stage. In particular, the predominant method of goal configuration manipulations (of less than three goals) affords the focus of only a fragment of an individual's overall goal structure, with the fragment consisting of only adjacent goals. The understanding of the holistic impact of an individual's goal structure—both adjacent and nonadjacent goals—is still limited. Additionally, existing work has typically assigned participants to consider particular goals (e.g., social goals and academic goals) within a standardized structure (e.g., multifinal vs. unifinal). The impact of people's idiosyncratic goal structure remains largely unknown. How do people intuitively structure their personal goals? Do they use different organizing principles and how does that impact goal pursuit? These are open questions that recent research uses a lay theory approach to begin to address.

## 2.5 | Lay goal models

Lay theories are individuals' assumptions about how things work (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Kelley, 1973). People differ in their lay theories; for example, in the domain of intelligence, some believe one's level of intelligence is fixed whereas others believe it is malleable (Dweck, Hong, & Chiu, 1993). Regardless of whether these lay theories are scientifically true, they are influential in guiding human behavior (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007). Taking a lay theory perspective, a new line of research has examined whether individuals differ in their theories about the organizing principles of their goals (i.e., hierarchy, network, and sequence), or *lay goal models* (Kung, 2018; Kung & Scholer, 2016). We propose that individuals may differ in the extent to which they emphasize these organizing principles when conceptualizing their goals, and this may have important implications for self-regulation.

To elicit lay theories in this arena, we borrowed mind-mapping techniques (Trochim, 1989). Participants are asked to freely draw a model of their goals (see Figure 2). Participants then indicate how similar their model is to each of the three organizing principles (hierarchy, network, and sequence). Validation test results showed that

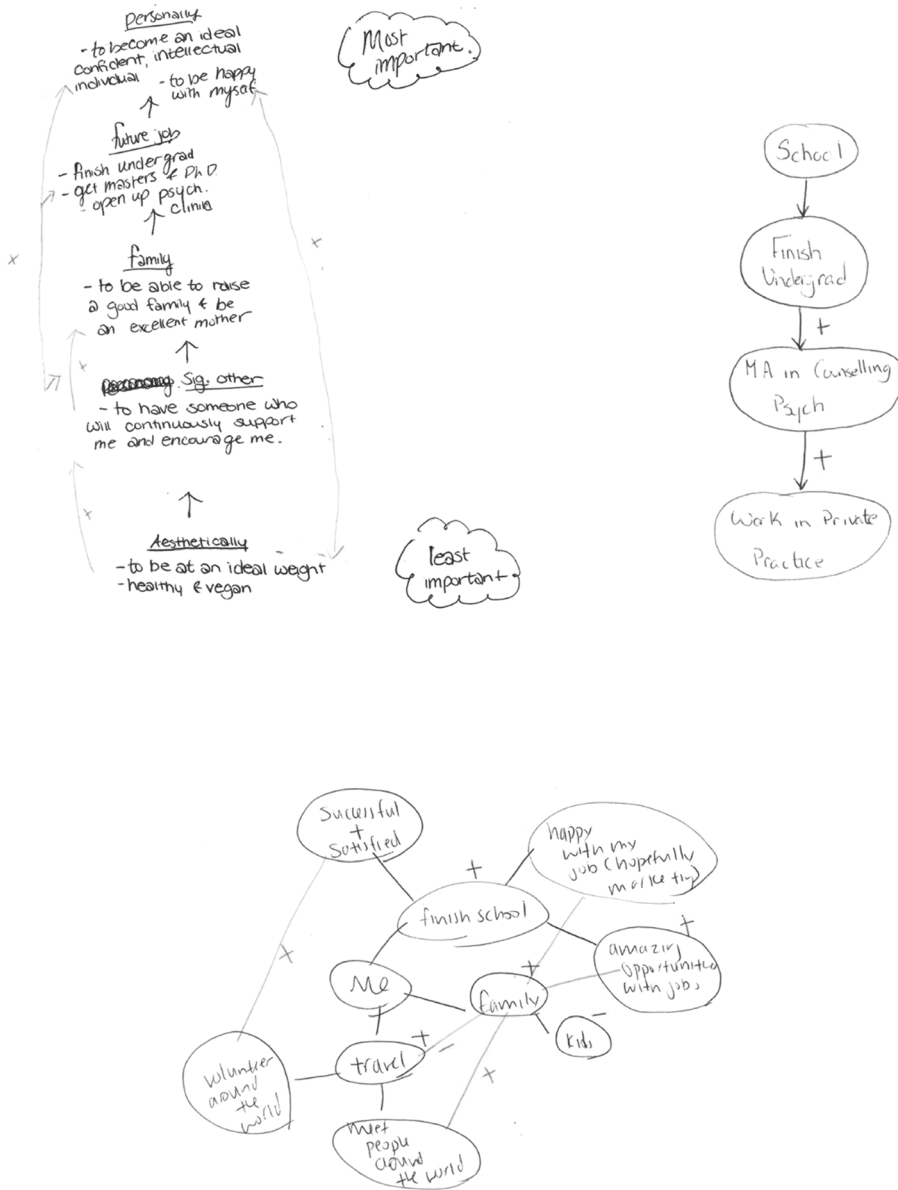


FIGURE 2 Sample goal models drawn by participants (Kung, 2018)

individuals distinguish the three principles; individual ratings are correlated with ratings of blind coders, and individuals tend to indicate one dominant principle as guiding their conceptualization of their multiple goal space (Kung, 2018). In a different study, we examined whether differences in lay goal models have downstream consequences. We manipulated goal models by randomly assigning people to visualize their idiosyncratic goals as a hierarchy, network, or sequence (Kung & Scholer, 2018). A network model, more so than the other two, highlights multiple and dynamic relations between goals. We posited that this mindset may transfer to a second task; indeed, those in the network goal model condition were subsequently better at integrating seemingly contradictory ideas, showing higher performance in an unrelated creativity task.



### 3 | OPTIMIZING THE PURSUIT OF MULTIPLE GOALS

Knowing the ways people manage a collection of goals is one side of the coin; knowing what makes people good at balancing many goals is the other side (Freund & Baltes, 2002; Lewin, 1943). The study of (multiple) goal optimization is invigorated by growing research. Here, we summarize current knowledge about factors that serve goal optimization and suggest ways forward in future research.

Goal optimization work emphasizes individual differences and views optimization as minimizing conflicting (and maximizing facilitative) relations among goals (Emmons & King, 1988; Knecht & Freund, 2017; Lauterbach, 1996; Swait & Marley, 2013). Studies have looked at associations between individual differences and goal relations, and they suggest why some people are better at managing multiple goals.

One factor is a person's *number of goals*. The more goals an individual has, the more likely there is conflict among goals (Dalton & Spiller, 2012; Hofmann, Baumeister, Förster, & Vohs, 2012). This is partly a simple function of the nature of resources. More goals consume more resources so it is more difficult to complete all the goals (Riediger & Freund, 2006). Another factor is *age*. Older adults (above 50s) consistently report more facilitative (and less conflicting) goal relations than younger adults (Riediger, 2007; Riediger, Freund, & Baltes, 2005). This age difference is associated with older adults being able to achieve more goal progress and higher emotional well-being (Riediger, 2007). However, why this age difference occurs is still not well understood (e.g., the difference does not appear to be due to education levels or goal contents; Riediger et al., 2005). Other work focuses on individuals' *self-control* ability. High self-control people avoid tempting goals (or situations that activate tempting goals), minimizing conflict among goals (Hofmann et al., 2012). Lastly, some recent work suggests *cognitive ability* could matter for goal optimization. The ability to process complex relations among goals helps people set goals that produce minimal goal conflicts (Reichman, Lieder, Bourgin, Talmon, & Griffiths, 2018).

As optimization in multiple-goal pursuits relies on minimizing conflict among goals (Emmons & King, 1988), possible strategies to manage multiple goals, in theory, are similar to dual-goal conflict management strategies (i.e., multitasking, choosing, and prioritizing). However, such strategies become more complicated as the number of goals increases. To unpack these, one can consider two basic scenarios with varying levels of optimality. The first, and probably ideal, scenario, is to achieve 100% of each of the committed goals. This is possible if a "multifinal means" is available (Kruglanski et al., 2013). For instance, the goals of developing friendships, increasing physical health, and helping others may be conflicting—due to a shortage of time to complete each individually. This is true unless one formulates a multifinal means (e.g., running a marathon with friends for a charitable cause) that makes simultaneous progress toward the three focal goals. Pursuing a multifinal means can be conceptualized as a special form of multitasking. Yet unlike traditional multitasking, a multifinal means serves multiple conflicting goals relatively seamlessly, which avoids task-switching costs and should increase effectiveness. As effective as it can be, a multifinal means is often difficult to find or simply does not exist in some situations (e.g., inherent goal conflicts).

A less-than-ideal scenario is to get as close as possible to reaching 100% of each of the committed goals. This often means reducing the number of goals, choosing to focus on just a few goals, or a set of goals that consist of the least amount of conflicting relations (Reichman et al., 2018). In practice, the challenges of this strategy are that it depends heavily on the situation (e.g., flexibility and autonomy to choose among goals) and there is no hard-and-fast rule about what number of goals should be considered optimal. A different strategy in this scenario is prioritizing, where individuals allocate more attention to the goals of higher value. In general, prioritizing goals with higher expectancies (i.e., probability of success) and goals that are central to personal identities (a.k.a. goal integration) are recommended as useful strategies (e.g., Tomasik, Knecht, & Freund, 2017). Yet in situations with approaching deadlines, prioritizing goals that are closer to the finish line appears more optimal as it increases the chance of having at least some goals completed (e.g., Schmidt & DeShon, 2007). This suggests that the nature of optimal prioritizing is a dynamic process.

Finally, as highlighted in the above scenarios, the optimality of a given strategy often depends on the situation. The ability to know how *and* when to utilize a goal regulation strategy that fits the situation (i.e., a component of

metamotivation; Scholer, Miele, Murayama, & Fujita, 2018) may be important for optimizing the pursuit of many goals. For example, each lay goal model discussed earlier presents trade-offs; to the extent that individuals recognize these trade-offs, they may be able to strategically conceptualize relations among goals in ways that best support goal pursuit. Sequential models make the concept of time—and thus progress—more salient than hierarchical or network models. This may be beneficial for some types of demands (e.g., project planning) or when attention to progress keeps one's eye on the prize; however, increased attention to low progress can also reduce goal engagement (Kung, 2018). To the extent that individuals flexibly conceptualize relations among multiple goals depending on situational demands, they may be better off. Interestingly, the use of work management software is increasingly popular (e.g., Asana, Trello, and Monday), and different forms of the software appear to coincide with the three lay goal models discussed earlier (Kung & Scholer, 2018). Investigating how managers influence their own and their employees' goal pursuit, depending on the model adopted, presents an exciting avenue for future research.

## 4 | CONCLUSION

The study of multiple goals is a burgeoning area of research with increasing relevance to the demands of modern life. Prior work in the area of multiple goals has focused primarily on relations between two goals; much more work is needed to understand the nature of overall goal structure (e.g., goal models) and optimal goal management strategies. This article highlighted both foundational work and exciting new directions in these areas, providing new insights into the dynamic, confounding, and essential act of juggling multiple goals.

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