

“How Committed Are You to Your New Year Goals?”: A Quantitative Study on the Connection of Commitment and Performance with New Year Resolutions

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How to cite this paper: Rozen, M. (2023). “How Committed Are You to Your New Year Goals?”: A Quantitative Study on the Connection of Commitment and Performance with New Year Resolutions *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 11, 415-428. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2023.119027>

Received: August 1, 2023

Accepted: September 17, 2023

Published: September 20, 2023

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Abstract

The article presents empirical survey-based research investigating the correlation between commitment to personally set goals and goals categories. The findings demonstrate a significant relationship between commitment to goal and goal category. The findings imply that goals can be attained or abandoned based on the level of commitment. One of the core statements adopted within research is that personal goals can cause higher levels of happiness. The study contributes to the foundation of goal-setting theory, which has been described as the main connection between commitment and performance. Moreover, the research enriches studies on the role of goal commitment in goal-setting and determinants of goal commitment.

Keywords

Personal Goals, Happiness, Goal-Setting, Goal Commitment

1. Introduction

Personal goal setting and consistent daily activities can help people reach their goals, aspirations, and dreams, resulting in a satisfying quality of life. People seeking to learn how to activate their lives in a certain direction, either professionally or personally, can set goals to attain a fulfilling quality of life. According to Locke and Latham’s (2002) goal-setting theory, complex goals motivate people to increase their performance. The goal-setting theory outlines four dynamics through which goals function. First, goals enable the discovery of task-relevant knowledge. Second, goals increase personal persistence as people

are willing to work hard to achieve their goals. Third, goals motivate people to put forth physiological and cognitive effort. Fourth, goals enable people to direct their focus toward goal-oriented activities.

Personal goals can target higher happiness levels by pursuing intrinsic goals (internal reward) such as physical health, affiliation, and a feeling of community. In contrast, the extrinsic (external reward) type of goals pursued is typically for one's financial success, image, and popularity (Guillen-Royo & Kasser, 2015). Successful progress toward a goal, pursuit, or endeavor can then raise positive emotions for that particular moment and event, creating an enhanced feeling of self-satisfaction and personal well-being. Studies propose that additional factors, such as goal commitment, may define the effect of goal setting (Wang et al., 2018). Höchli, Brügger, and Messner (2020) describe goal commitment as the determination to try for a goal. While the literature considers goal commitment as a determinant in goal setting, most studies focusing on internal and external rewards overlook the significance of goal commitment. This research aimed to determine the relationship between commitment to goal and goal categories.

The article is organized as follows. Section two provides an overview of the current research reflected in the literature and points out the literature gap and how this research will fill such a research gap. Section three describes the methodology, design, and a description of the data collection and analysis procedures. Section four presents the study's results. Section five discusses how the study outcomes relate to the existing literature, provides implications for the study results, and suggests areas for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Abandoned Goals

Personal goal setting (PGS) and consistent daily activity can help individuals reach their dreams, aspirations, and goals, resulting in a more satisfying and fulfilling quality of life experience. Locke and Latham (2002) describe goals as objectives of an action to achieve a certain degree of proficiency within a certain timeframe. Proficiency provides people with insights into their effectiveness in relation to the goal. Goals provide individuals with reference points that determine motivational and self-regulatory behaviors. The connection between human behavior and goals is a critical dimension in the goal-setting theory. For the current study, a goal is defined as the cognitive depiction of the desired outcome that an individual seeks to achieve (Milyavskaya & Werner, 2018). This definition differentiates goals from fantasies, which are the cognitive depiction of future outcomes that may or may not happen and do not rely on achievement (Oettingen et al., 2001). Goals, unlike fantasies, demand a commitment to a purposeful action with the probability that the desired outcome will be achieved (Milyavskaya & Werner, 2018). The aspect of commitment is critical in identifying abandoned goals as we anticipate that people are committed to attaining their abandoned goals, thereby differentiating goals from fantasies. Therefore,

we consider abandoned goals as mental representations of desired outcomes that people commit to achieve but are not actively pursued.

2.2. Characteristics of Abandoned Goals

This section draws from different theories of goal pursuit to determine the attributes that abandoned goals possess, including the specific plan people make to attain their goals, the motivation for pursuing goals, and the challenges of a specific goal.

2.2.1. Difficulty of a Goal

The goal-setting theory posits that the existence of difficult and specific goals results in improved individual task performance (Locke & Latham, 2002). This implies that set goals enhance individuals' focus since it directs efforts and attention as a motivational approach to influence performance behavior. Besides, goals allow the development of relevant strategies by influencing persistence. While the literature demonstrates that challenging goals positively impact motivation and performance, some scholars have documented the adverse effects. For example, Galinsky et al. (2002) found a reduction in satisfaction when people fail to achieve high-quality outcomes. Mussweiler and Strack (2000) reported reduced beliefs in students' intelligence and abilities when they failed to attain challenging goals. Bayuk (2015) found that difficult goals stifled effort and resulted in reduced commitment.

Besides, the specificity of goals can determine the effort directed toward goal completion. Low-order goals are specific and outline how and when people will attain the goals. For example, going to the gym two times a week. Abstract and high-order goals, such as being healthy, are not specific and are vaguely outlined. The high-order goals are unconstrained temporally and mostly demand indefinite sustenance, while low-order goals can be formed for short and long-term attainment. Low-order goals help people direct their attention to the goal compared to high-order goals. In the context of abandoned goals, scholars on low and high-order goals support abandoned goals that are vague or too easy, and therefore, people direct minimal effort to their achievement. People may ignore easy goals because they have limited satisfaction in their achievement (such as cleaning the compound) and challenging goals when they consider them overwhelming (such as writing a novel). Similarly, people may abandon the goal of working out regularly (low-order goal) while others abandon the goal of being healthy (high-order goal). This study assumes that abandoned goals have different categories and would be classified exclusively as low or high-order goals.

2.2.2. Goal Motivation

The motivation for setting goals has significant implications for goal commitment in the context of abandoned goals. Individuals may pursue goals because they connect to their values or personal interests. Personal goals can target high-

er happiness levels by pursuing intrinsic goals (internal reward) such as physical health, affiliation, and a feeling of community. In contrast, the extrinsic (external reward) type of goals pursued is typically for one's financial success, image, and popularity (Guillen-Royo & Kasser, 2015). Milyavskaya et al. (2015) found that pursuing goals for intrinsic motivation results in goal commitment while pursuing goals for extrinsic motivation results in goal abandonment. The difference between intrinsic and extrinsic goals is relevant in the context of abandoned goals as it can be assumed that extrinsic goals are susceptible to abandonment due to a lack of self-regulation mechanism or personal drive to succeed.

2.2.3. Planning

Developing a plan to facilitate goal commitment is critical once a goal is set. The intent to implement a plan entails specifying how, where, and when individuals will go about goal pursuing and the challenges they will face when pursuing their goals. For instance, when Mary seeks to lose 8 pounds but also understands her friends often invite her for dinner, which is likely to interfere with her goal. Rather than avoiding the set dinners, she sets the implementation that when her friends ask her out for dinner, she will carry her pre-packed meals and avoid going through the checkout line. The crafting of such plans enables people to prepare by mentally assessing various action courses and determining the temporal limitation of the goals, such as when to start and when to end (Elliot & Fryer, 2008). Establishing a pre-defined plan implies that people will not need to waste time in decision-making or deciding on goal-incongruent alternatives since they have their decision created in advance, therefore having the probability of pursuing their goals (Webb & Sheeran, 2007). While the intention to implement a goal has been highlighted as an effective self-regulatory approach when pursuing a goal, studies report that individuals lack the knowledge to formulate effective plans (Milyavskaya & Nadolny, 2016). Milyavskaya and Nadolny (2016) explored health goals and found that nearly half of the participants had no plans, while only 23% had concrete plans. Wrosch and Scheier (2020) found that around 33% of the participants had incorrect implementation decisions when asked to develop implementation intentions. These results depict the foundation of goal abandonment as it may be the case that individuals understand what they want to pursue but lack the insights to generate the right plan to attain the set goals.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

A descriptive quantitative approach was adopted to explore US adults' perception of their commitment to goal and goal categories. Descriptive study aligned with the objectives that conceptually defined the study. This approach focuses on producing summary data regarding the current state of a group regarding a phenomenon (Gall et al., 2017). The current study was interested in how US citizens are committed to their goals. The description of the goal categories of the

US adults and the analysis of the relation between their commitment to goal and goal categories provided new knowledge to characteristics of goal abandonment literature stream.

3.2. Participants

The population for the current study was 1000 adults in the United States. The study utilized Krejcie and Morgan's table to sample the study population. Given that the type of current study was unaware of the society variance and success or failure probability of the variable, statistical formulas were not used to estimate the sample size. Instead, Krejcie and Morgan's table was utilized to depict the maximum sample number. Besides, Krejcie and Morgan's table was used to estimate the sample size in situations with no error percentage or community variance. The study used convenience sampling, selecting participants based on their accessibility and proximity to the research (Bornstein et al., 2013). The participants were selected by posting on social media and local business bulletins. The participants were included if they were aged between 20 and 60 years. The participants who were not eligible were thanked for their interest and directed to the survey completion page. The eligible participants were directed to an informed consent page, and once consent was obtained through SurveyMonkey®, data collection began with a self-reported questionnaire.

3.3. Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a researcher-made questionnaire consisting of four questions. The instrument in this study measured whether the participants set goals for themselves during January. The participants' levels of goal commitment were measured by asking the participants whether they were committed to the goal by June. The participant responded to goal commitment by rating "Yes" or "No". Goal categories were measured by asking the participant the category that best described their goal. The participant rated the goal based on previous studies' list of goal domains. The study used Cronbach's Alpha to determine the reliability because of the general availability. In this approach, the questionnaires were used to measure the reliability. The four questions were pre-tested through the SPSS software to determine the confidence coefficient of alpha. It was revealed that the four questions were reliable for the hypothesis test, provided that the alpha coefficient was 0.8. The content validity of the four questions was affirmed by a field test of 10 participants who were not part of the study. After distributing the questionnaire for the pilot study, some of the wording and grammatical errors were corrected without affecting the layout of the questions. 10 questionnaires out of the ten distributed questionnaires were returned and affirmed.

3.4. Procedure

Once the participants had been screened for eligibility, a link through SurveyMonkey® was provided on the website to participate in the study. The informed

consent was presented before the survey began, and participants needed to check the box to consent with participation before beginning the survey. Selecting the agreement button of the informed consent granted immediate access to the survey. The participants were required to respond to four questions. The first question measured whether the participants set goals for themselves during January. The second question asked the participants whether they were committed to the goal by June. The third question asked the participants whether they had dropped the ball on their goals. The final question asked the participants about the category that best described their goal. The participant rated the goal based on previous studies' list of goal domains.

The collected data were cleansed. Data cleansing involves detecting and correcting errors and inconsistencies in a data set (Sarpong & Arthur, 2013). Missing data could be an indication of a data entry error or could be the result of incomplete responses (Meyers et al., 2013). Regardless of the reason for missing data, it must be addressed and cleaned; listwise deletion, pairwise deletion, and imputation are common approaches to addressing missing data.

3.5. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies were used to analyze the data. In addition to descriptive statistics, a non-parametric test called Pearson's chi-squared test (χ^2) was applied to examine whether there is a significant association between commitment to a goal (i.e., question 2) and goal category (i.e., question 4). Phi (ϕ), which is equivalent to the correlation coefficient r , was used to measure the effect size of the association between the two variables and indicate how big a role they can play regarding each other. The null hypothesis is that there is no association between the two variables if the Pearson Chi-Square p -value is higher than the p -value value of 0.05.

4. Results

The following results were received for appropriate questions.

Descriptive Statistics

The outcomes of descriptive statistics are shown in **Table 1** and **Figure 1**.

As shown in **Table 1**, out of 999 cases, 184 (18.4%) of the individuals reported having set at least one goal this January, while 815 (81.6%) of them had not. The results showed that people who set at least one goal for January made up the majority of respondents to the survey.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Question#1) Did you set at least one goal for yourself this January?

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	184	18.4%
No	815	81.6%
Total	999	100%

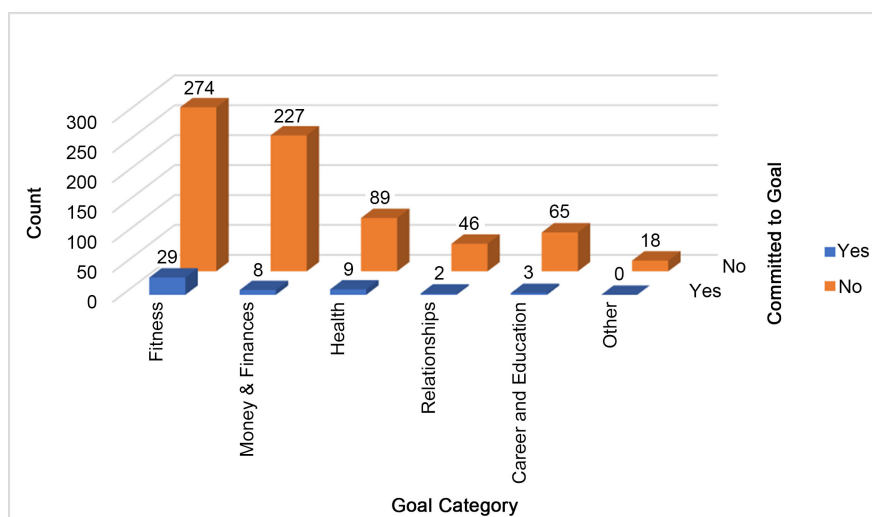


Figure 1. Descriptive statistics.

If the answer to question#1 is “yes”, are you still committed to that goal by now (June)?

Table 2 and **Figure 2** display the results of the descriptive statistics related to question 2.

Table 2 demonstrates that, of the 815 people who set at least one goal for themselves in January, 762 (93.5%) abandoned it through June, while only 53 (6.5%) remained committed to their January-set goals through June.

If you dropped the ball on your goals (answer “Yes” to question#1 and answer “No” to question#2), by what month did you drop the ball?

Table 3 and **Figure 3** display the results of the descriptive statistics related to question 3.

Table 3 revealed that out of 762 cases who set at least one goal in January but abandoned it through June, most individuals (484 cases, 63.5%) committed to their January-set goals for one month before abandoning them in February. 245 (32.2%) of the individuals dropped their goals in January, the same month of setting the goal. 21 (2.8%) of them abandoned their goals in March, 9 (1.2%) in April, 2 (0.3%) in May, and only one individual (0.1%) abandoned the goal in June.

If the answer to question#1 is “yes”, which category describes that goal best?

Table 4 and **Figure 4** display the results of the descriptive statistics related to question 4.

Table 4 shows that, of the 815 people who set at least one goal for themselves in January, 303 (37.2%) described their goals under the fitness category, 235 (28.8%) categorized their goals under the money and finance category, 98 (12%) set their goals under the health category, 48 (5.9%) set their goals under the relationships category, 68 (8.3%) set their goals under the career & education category, 18 (2.2%) set their goals under the other category, and 45 (5.5%) did not specify the category of their goals. According to the phenomenon, fitness comes first in importance, then money and finances, health, career and education, relationships, and other goals.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Question#2) Are you committed to that goal by now (June)?

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	762	93.5%
No	53	6.5%
Total	815	100%

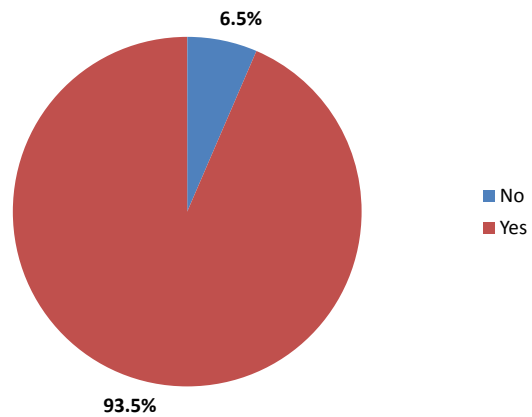


Figure 2. Descriptive Statistics for Question #2, graphical presentation.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Question#3) If you dropped the ball on your goals, by what month did you drop the ball?

Month	Frequency	Percentage
January	245	32.2%
February	484	63.5%
March	21	2.8%
April	9	1.2%
May	2	0.3%
June	1	0.1%
Total	762	100%

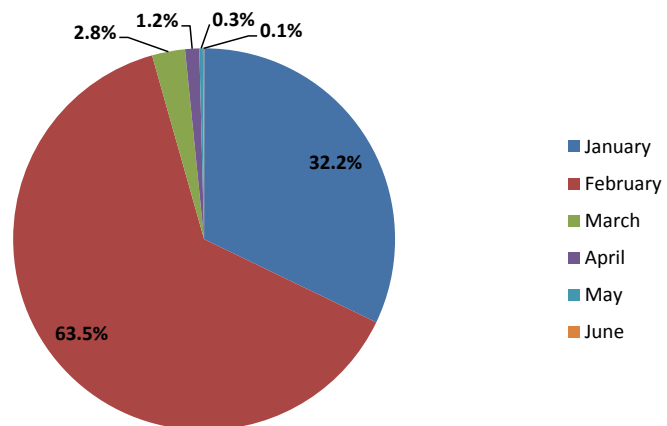
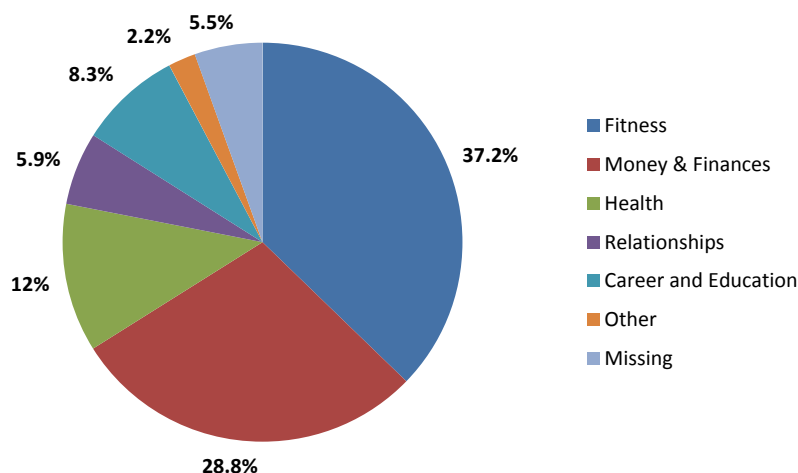


Figure 3. Descriptive Statistics for Question #3, graphical presentation.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Question#4) Which category describes that goal best?

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Fitness	303	37.2%
Money & Finances	235	28.8%
Health	98	12.0%
Relationships	48	5.9%
Career & Education	68	8.3%
Other	18	2.2%
Missing	45	5.5%
Total	815	100%

**Figure 4.** Descriptive Statistics for Question #3, graphical presentation.

In addition to descriptive statistics, a non-parametric test called Pearson's chi-squared test (χ^2) was applied to examine whether there is a significant association between commitment to a goal (i.e., question 2) and goal category (i.e., question 4). Phi (ϕ), equivalent to the correlation coefficient r , was used to measure the effect size of the association between the two variables and indicate to what extent they can play a role regarding each other. The null hypothesis is that there is no association between the two variables if the Pearson Chi-Square p -value is higher than the p -value of 0.05 (Pearson, 1900). In interpreting the strength of the relationship based on the r coefficient, Hemphill's (2003) recommendation was used. As noted by Hemphill (2003), the relationship between variables can be described as very weak if the correlation coefficient (r) ranges from 0.01 to 0.19, weak if it ranges from 0.20 to 0.39, moderate if it ranges from 0.40 to 0.59, strong if it ranges from 0.60 to 0.79, and very strong if the correlation coefficient ranges from 0.80 to 1.0. Table 5 shows the crosstabs analysis of the Pearson Chi-Square test and the effect size of Phi between commitment to goal (i.e., question 2) and goal category (i.e., question 4).

The crosstabs table in Table 5 demonstrates a significant relationship between commitment to goal and goal category due to the Pearson Chi-Square p -value of 0.042 being less than the 0.05 cutoff. The Effect Size of Phi, however, was 0.122,

indicating that there was only a very weak relationship between the two variables. The cross-tabulation findings showed that most goals across all categories had been abandoned through June. 274 (90.4%) of the Fitness goals set in January were abandoned until June, while only 29 (9.6%) were still followed through June. 8 (3.4%) of Money and finances goals were maintained through June, leaving 227 (96.6%) that were abandoned. 9 (9.2%) of the Health goals were kept until June, but 89 (90.8%) were abandoned. While 46 (95.8%) of the relationship goals were given up, only 2 (4.2%) were kept up until June. 65 (95.6%) of Career & Education goals were abandoned, while 3 (4.4%) were retained until June. The contribution between Commitment to Goal and Goal Category is shown in a 3D bar chart in **Figure 5**.

Table 5. Pearson Chi-Square & Phi tests between commitment to goal and goal category.

Goal category	Commitment to Goal		Pearson Chi-Square			Effect size of	
	No		Yes		χ^2	df	p
	Freq	%	Freq	%			
					11.516*	5	0.042
Fitness	274	90.4	29	9.6			
Money & Finances	227	96.6	8	3.4			
Health	89	90.8	9	9.2			
Relationships	46	95.8	2	4.2			
Career & Education	65	95.6	3	4.4			
Other	18	100%	0	0%			

N = 815; Missing = 45; χ^2 = Pearson Chi-Square; ϕ = Phi; Exp: Expected; * $p < 0.05$.

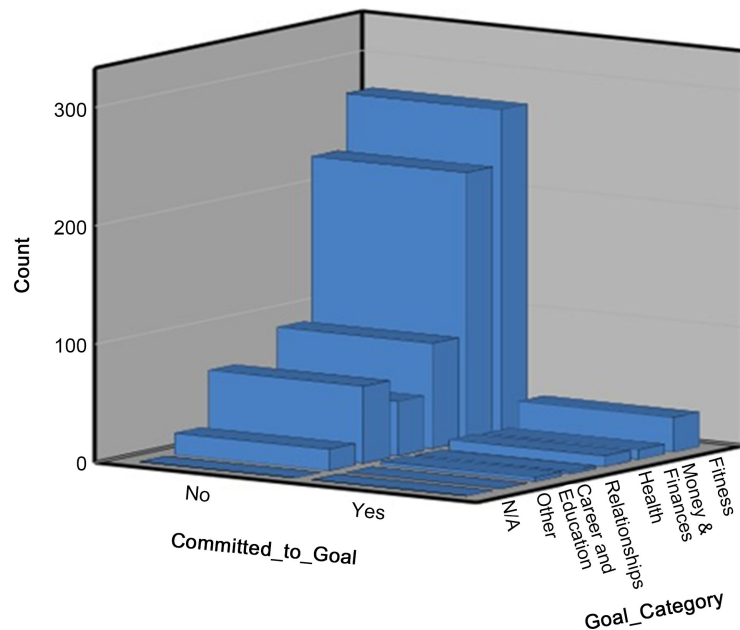


Figure 5. Contribution between commitment to goal and goal category.

According to **Figure 5**, of the goals that were abandoned through June, fitness goals contributed the most (274), followed by money and finance goals (227), health goals (89), career and education goals (65), relationships goals (46), and others (18). Fitness goals contributed the most to the goals that were kept up until June (29), followed by health (9), money and finances (8), career and education (3), relationships (2), and others (0).

5. Discussion

This research aimed to determine the relationship between commitment to goal and goal categories. It was expected that goal commitment would influence the goal categories. The main results in this study demonstrated that goal commitment influenced goal setting. The findings demonstrate a significant relationship between commitment to goal and goal category. These findings imply that goals can be attained or abandoned based on the level of commitment. Before commitment, the goals were considered attainable in January. However, most goals across all categories had been abandoned through June. Of the 815 people who set at least one goal for themselves in January, 762 (93.5%) abandoned it through June, while only 53 (6.5%) remained committed to their January-set goals through June. These findings support the University of Scranton's research that 50% of Americans make some yearly New Year's Resolutions, but less than half of the same group continued working on their resolutions for the past six months (McCreary, 2019). The data recognized that over a third of Americans never make New Year Resolutions and less than one in ten people successfully achieve their resolutions. The fact that individuals intentionally create resolutions at the beginning of the year implies they truly desire a change to encounter some new personal achievement, experience, or opportunity. Not surprisingly, the primary categories of resolutions included changes focused on self-improvement, personal body weight, money, and relationships. The resolution resembles the first aspect of purposeful goal-setting activities, regardless of whether participants could sustain the effort afterward.

The current study contributes to the foundation of goal-setting theory, which has been described as the main connection between commitment and performance. A missing component for a successful outcome is the daily activity needed to accompany the setting of such goals. Setting a meaningful goal is only the beginning step, with the real work coming into the picture as the actual incremental tasks are identified and performed on a consistent and routine basis going forward. One strategy that continues to be highlighted with successful results for achieving a goal includes physically writing down the goal. Once the original goal is written, write down all of the incremental steps to attain each [sub-] goal, and then list the targeted outcomes (e.g., milestones) timed to yearly, monthly, weekly, and daily tasks with regular monitoring to meet the goals is the primary final and important step toward the actual achievement.

Organizations can use goal-setting practices to improve performance through

behaviors and encourage innovative strategies for accomplishing an identified task (Doerr & Gue, 2013). The current study demonstrates a link between individual commitment and goal outcomes, which is in line with discoveries in various goal-setting practices that focus on patient rehab. The practice of goal attainment is equally prevalent within the profit-focused sales function (e.g., identified quotas for selling products or services to clients), emphasizing the motivational competencies of personnel sharing their wares. Company-assigned or self-set sales quotas involve a mixture of internal and external stimuli affecting the performance outcome and employ a framework relationship between goals and effort (Fu, Richards, & Jones, 2009). Life satisfaction has been linked with the achievement of goals (Diseth & Samdal, 2014), and in general, the pursuit of goals has increased [personal] well-being (Guillen-Royo & Kasser, 2015).

A potential weakness of this study was the impact of memory biases on the recall of goal commitment. The participants with past abandoned goals may have underestimated some questions to justify their goal commitment. For instance, the participants may have abandoned the goal group because they assumed it was not important to them. Likewise, the participant who attained their goals may have overestimated their ratings. For instance, some participants may have assumed that achieving goals was important to them. Such biases are associated with the use of self-reported questionnaires.

6. Conclusion

The current study demonstrated that goal commitment has a significant relationship with goal categories. This suggests that people will achieve their personal goals with high commitment. A key objective of personal goal setting is identifying ways to help people achieve a higher sense of well-being by actively pursuing articulated goals, followed by intentional actions that can lead toward greater life satisfaction. Setting and attaining identified and communicated goals positions the person for achievement of identified objectives, and when goals are met or exceeded, happiness is a typical emotion that occurs by the participant. People like to win, and achieving a specified goal or objective provides a winning feeling of satisfaction and personal success. Within goal setting, individuals experiencing the positive effects of their commitment and achievement activities can enjoy greater accomplishment, growth, and progression, thereby enhancing the potential for experiencing a more fulfilling and satisfying quality of life.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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