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To Frame or Not to Frame: Improving Goal Setting

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Abstract

Goal setting is a fundamental mechanism used to enhance performance and to promote individual and organizational achievement. Accordingly, developing ways to improve goal effectiveness can be a valuable endeavor. This project proposes that **the way in which goals are framed should be positively correlated with success rates**. New Year's resolutions were determined to be framed either positively or negatively, and then compared to the self-reported success rates. The study results confirmed that goals with positive framing resulted in higher success rates than did goals with negative framing.

Introduction

An ambitious goal could be stated as, "to become a space-bearing civilization and a multi-planetary species" (Musk, 2017, p. 46). What if instead, the goal was articulated as, *I want to avoid blowing up rockets mid-flight*? Perhaps the way in which specific goals are phrased influences goal success. If so, goal framing could be an important variable to effective goal setting. "Framing is controlled by the manner in which the choice problem is presented" (Tversky & Kahneman, 1986). **Goals may be framed positively, such as emphasizing greater achievement, or negatively, such as the avoidance of failure** (Roney & Lehman, 2008).

Results
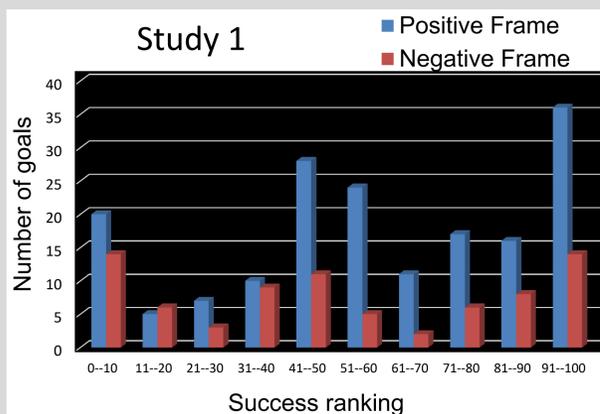
Study 1

- *n* = 265
- Positive: average success rate of 59.29
- Negative: average success rate of 51.71
- General upslope in positively framed goals and self-reported success
- **Hypothesis 1** – Confirms that goal framing is associated with goal success
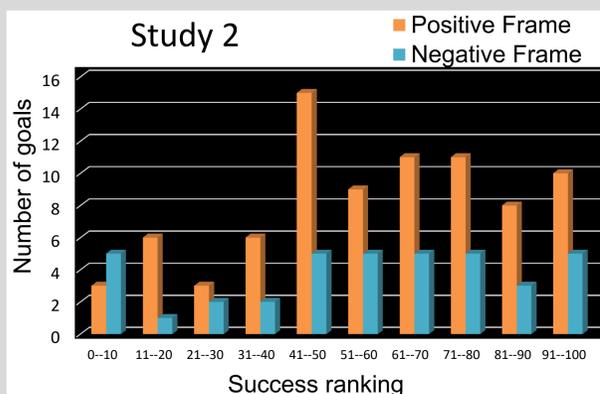
Study 2

- *n* = 124
- Positive: average success rate of 59.61
- Negative: average success rate of 58.69
- **Hypothesis 1** – Null hypothesis
- **Hypothesis 2** – Not confirmed (average success rates similar to study 1)
- **Hypothesis 3** – Correlation between success and optimism confirmed

Methods

Study 1

- Conducted as an open online survey
- (*n* = 265)
- **Hypothesis 1** - goal framing should be positively correlated with success rates
- Positive frame: "I want to *improve* my health"
- Negative frame: "I want to *lose* weight"
- Study conducted by collecting New Year's resolutions
- Goals determined to be framed positively or negatively

Study 2

- Survey conducted one month after first study
- (*n* = 124)
- **Hypothesis 1** - Goal framing should be positively correlated with success rates
- **Hypothesis 2** – Success rates should be lower than study 1
- **Hypothesis 3** – there should be a positive correlation between success and optimism

Discussion

- Goal setting is used to pursue both ambitious and routine objectives
- Behavioral economics describes an unusual quirk known as framing (Thaler, 2016)
- Goal framing was tested with survey subjects who set goals for the New Year
- Positive goal framing was found to be associated with increased success
- The first study was more conclusive regarding positive goal framing
- Optimism was found to be positively related to success
- **The evidence suggests a connection between goal framing, optimism, and likelihood of achievement**

Table 1: Goal Framing Average Success		
Goal Context	**Positive Frame**	**Negative Frame**
Survey 1 success	59.29	51.71
Survey 2 success	59.61	58.69

References

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