

# Colorado Probation Research in Brief

## *Output Order Reflects the Cognitive Accessibility of Goals*

Grimes, C., Solberg Ness, L., et al. (2012). "Output Order Reflects the Cognitive Accessibility of Goals." *The Journal of Social Psychology* 152(1): 5 - 16.

**Key Words:** Goals, Case Planning  
Motivation, Mindset, Collaboration

### Summary/Conclusions

Prior research has identified that goals are one mechanism for self-regulation and behavior change. The three studies, summarized here, examined if documented goal order was more closely related to mood, speed and ease of adoption, or importance. The first study suggests that a person's mood has an influence on goal order. The second and third studies results discovered that the speed and ease of access to one's goals determines the order of goals listed more than their importance.

### Limitations of Information

The populations of the studies were composed of undergraduate students which may differ from a criminal justice population. The studies did not evaluate progress or goal completion. Participants completed a goal questionnaire, which may not be representative of the goal setting process in probation appointments. Lastly, the studies did not control for external factors such as day of the week and time of the experiments.

**Caveat:** The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

According to prior research on goal theory, the process of goal development give individuals feedback about where they are in relation to where they would like to be. This process motivates individuals to continue to exert themselves to a desired state. Researchers were interested if the order of goals individuals listed was influenced by mood, speed and ease of adoption, or importance.

The first study consisted of 55 participants. Study participants were instructed to watch one of three 20 minute videos. The videos were designed to prime participants into an affiliation, power, or neutral mindset. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding goals. In the middle of the questionnaire participants were asked to write down goals. After analysis, it was discovered that the mindset of individuals had an impact on the order of goals (e.g. individuals primed in to a power mindset list power related goals earlier).

The second and third studies analyzed the relationship between goal order, importance, and adoptability. Researchers found that goal development is a complex process that is related to the value of goals; however, it appears to be more related to adoptability than goal value. While goals around spirituality and social contexts are highly valued, goals regarding health and fitness or appearance were listed earlier. It is believed that since health, fitness, and appearance are easily adopted into dai-

ly life, participants were more inclined to list those goals to pursue earlier. The researchers also believed that how often a goal is thought about potentially determines the ease and speed an individual adopts a goal.

### Practical Applications

- ✓ Since the order of the goals listed is related to goal value and accessibility, ask probationers to come up with a list of goals prior to starting the case planning process.
- ✓ Goals documented first could be pursued to establish early success.
- ✓ Try discussing criminogenic need issues prior to case planning. This may prime probationers to think specific criminogenic needs.
- ✓ Utilize collaboration to form goals that balance stability factors and individual needs of the probationer but are tied to the driving criminogenic needs of the individual.
- ✓ Consider asking probationers about the value of potential goals and what will remind them of the goals or action steps in their case plans.
- ✓ Use action steps to continually discuss and remind probationers of goals they may forget in their daily goal pursuit.
- ✓ Show probationers completed action steps. Reminding probationers progress on current case plan goals may serve as an affirmation and reminder to motivate them to continue to pursue their goals.
- ✓ Plan to provide more support on complex goals.