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When the goal looms larger

Goal gradients refer to the change (usually increase) in motivation as a function of goal proximity. We propose that motivation does not always increase closer to the goal, and that in order to predict the shape and steepness of goal gradients one needs to look at how distance affects the two components of motivation – expectancy and value. We distinguish between several aspects of expectancy (uncontrollable probability of goal attainment, goal difficulty, sufficiency of one's action to attain a goal, necessity of one's actions to attain a goal) and several types of value (value related to high level construal, value related to low level construal), each of which has unique distance-related dynamics. We propose that motivational gradients are determined by the effect that distance has on each of these components. In a series of studies we investigated gradients of motivation, difficulty, sufficiency and necessity. We applied our notion to intergroup contexts, achievement motivation in sports and intellectual performance. Furthermore, we examined the role of fundamental needs and orientations (regulatory focus; approach vs. avoidance) on these effects.