

Psychological Distance and Self-Consistent Behavior

Alison Ledgerwood and Yaacov Trope

New York University

Self-regulation problems often involve failure to act according to one's goals. People may want to improve their health, work, or social relationships, but sometimes fail to pursue those goals even when they possess the pre-requisite skills. The proposed chapter explores how distance from a situation (temporal, spatial, social, probabilistic) affects the role of one's primary goals and values in guiding one's responses to the situation. It is proposed that any kind of distance from a situation increases the likelihood that the situation will be represented in terms of a superordinate features that convey its perceived essence (high-level construals) rather than in terms of subordinate features (low-level construals). Because primary goals and values are high-level self-concepts, they are more likely to be applied to more distant situations. As one gets closer to the situation, one's responses are increasingly more likely to depend on secondary considerations. The proposed chapter will review research showing that psychological distancing and priming of high level construal (compared to low level construal) increases the likelihood of individuals acting in line with core aspects of the self.