

The Dark Side of Implementation Intentions: Some Adverse Effects on the Detection
of Alternative Situational Cues and the Pursuit of Alternative Goals

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Abstract of thesis entitled:

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Implementation intentions are defined as “if-then” plans specifying when, where, and how to conduct a goal-directed behavior, and have been found to be influential in facilitating goal pursuit. The underlying mechanisms of implementation intention effects are the heightened activation of the situational cues and the association between these cues and the corresponding reactions. Implementation intentions automatize the detection of environmental cues and the initiation of the corresponding behavior. Whether such automaticity of implementation intentions causes rigid behavior is the central issue concerned in the present studies.

In the first part of the thesis, three experimental studies investigated whether implementation intentions would interfere with the detection of and responses to alternative goal-related cues, and whether such effects would be moderated by the ambiguity between the cues specified in implementation intentions and the unplanned cues. I found that implementation intentions interfered with the detection of the alternative cues. I also found an unexpected effect of cue ambiguity, which indicated that implementation intentions would hinder not only the performance on the unplanned cues, but also the performance on the specified cues when there was a high level of ambiguity between these two categories of cues.

In the second part of the thesis, two experimental and two field studies investigated the effects of implementation intentions in multiple-goal settings. Despite the vast differences in design, the four studies on the effects of implementation intentions in multiple-goal settings consistently support the hypothesis that implementation intentions would interact with goal conflict in influencing the performance on the alternative goal (i.e., the goal being pursued simultaneously with the focal goal which has been furnished with implementation intentions). Results consistently revealed that the pursuit of the alternative goal was hampered by implementation intentions on the focal goal when these goals were in conflict, but was unaffected or even facilitated when no goal conflicts were involved. Implications of the results from these two sets of studies for the use of alternative means to reach a goal and the pursuit of multiple goals are discussed.

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實施意向指的是用以實現目標的具體計劃。它通常以“如果—那麼”的形式明確指定追求目標的行為發生的環境和以及採取的方式。實施意向對目標的達成有顯著的促進作用。實施意向的作用機制主要在於提高環境信號的激活水平，以及在環境和追求目標的行為之間建立起聯繫。通過實施意向，使得對環境信號的檢測和行為的啓動變得自動化。這篇論文的研究目的在於實施意向的這種自動性會不會帶來行為的不靈活性。

在這篇論文的第一部分，三個實驗研究考察了實施意向是否會影響對其他環境信號的檢測，以及環境信號之間的模糊性是否會中介這種影響。我們發現實施意向會使得對其他環境信號的檢測更差。當環境信號之間的模糊性很強時，對所有環境信號（包括在實施意向中指定的環境信號）的檢測都會變差。

在這篇論文的第二部分，兩個實驗研究和兩個現場研究考察了實施意向是否會影響其他目標的實現。儘管在研究方法上有很大差異，這四個研究的結果均表明，實施意向與目標衝突的交互作用影響其他目標的達成。當目標之間的衝突較小時，實施意向不會影響，或者甚至會促進其他目標的達成。當目標之間的衝突較大時，實施意向會阻礙其他目標的達成。