

Research Article

Major Domains Related to Application of Mental Contrasting in Daily Life

Ruchi Gautam^a, Sahil Gupta^b

^a Sharda University, Greater Noida, India

Abstract

Mental Contrasting is one of those self-regulation strategies where a desired future with present situation is harnessed as a source of motivation which if channelized properly lead to goal commitment in line with a person's expectation of success. Proper implementation of Mental Contrasting requires a fine balanced mix of certain features and this study is focused to extract and summarize certain domains related to proper application of Mental Contrasting which if kept in mind while using this technique can help any individual to gain maximum out of this. The study of these domains can also help to predict how successful Mental Contrasting would be as a technique for certain people.

Introduction

The aim of this study is to find out various traits of human psychology should work in harmony while practicing mental contrasting so that any individual gets most out of this technique. Further these traits were combined into certain domains so that understanding can become somewhat easier. Further understanding of these domains can help to facilitate further research work and studies.

Introduction

Mental Contrasting is a self-regulation technique where desired goals and the positive aspects associated with accomplishment of those goals and even the obstacles in the way of achieving those goals and their negative effects in one's life are used as a source of motivation to attain high goal-commitment.

The success of this technique depends on several domains of human psychology and if a proper harmony and balance can be achieved between all these domains, Mental contrasting can become really useful and effective method to be successful and accomplish goals in life which otherwise seem too difficult and gathering enough motivation for the same was a challenging task. Reason being that, our subconscious mind has a short-time horizon and it acts based on emotions, habits and desires. And it is tough to generate long-term motivation for our goals because our subconscious mind doesn't care, it is more inclined towards well-being in the short time frame and somehow neglects the prospect of long-term goals and

benefits related to them. Mental Contrasting helps us to have some control over the subconscious mind and gets it focused towards the promise of future rewards that are accompanied with the long-term goals.

Application of Mental Contrasting in Daily Life

Before dwelling deep into the domains that are necessary for the success of Mental Contrasting it becomes important to understand how this self-regulation technique work in the practical life. Where most of such techniques are not always properly practically defines, Mental Contrasting is one of very few techniques that have a well-defined method for implementation in practical life. If these steps are followed correctly in favourable circumstances the chances of success shoot up.

The first and foremost step is to define and think about all possible positive aspects that would be accompanied with the achievements of those goals which want to work on. These favourable positive outcomes can range from large benefits to a few smaller ones, all that is needed to be done is to visualize these benefits for long time and in a great detail and make the mind realize all happiness these goals can bring in the life as soon they are accomplished.

The other step that is as necessary as the previous one is to analyse and work out all possible obstacles that might come in the way of completing the goals made, in the same way we did with the benefits. Understanding what troubles and sadness these obstacles to our goals can bring in the future is seriously important for Mental Contrasting to work and enough time should be spent to define and understand these obstacles, then only we can make ourselves really motivated in the long-run using the process of Mental Contrast. People who used this mental contrasting technique just for few minutes, showed changes in behaviour for several weeks and were more successful in achieving their goals as compared to those who didn't used Mental Contrasting. This technique should be practiced quite often to maximize results.

If a person could visualize his/her goal and obstacles means the action of mental Contrasting is complete. This is the simplest summarization of the process of application of Mental Contrasting. This helps to motivate your subconscious mind into believing that if something can be conceived, it can be achieved too, that's how this positive-future visualization technique works.

Domains of Mental Contrasting

Based on the literature there are certain traits of human psychology especially cognitive psychology play a pivotal role in successful application of this technique of mental contrasting. Studying, understanding and using the right methods learned from these traits would certainly help to achieve more out of Mental Contrasting and would make its implementation easier and more fruitful. But it's not possible for an individual too find out all such traits, let alone working them out. That's why this study aims to define those traits for making the task of those individuals who want to use mental contrast as a tool for finding greater motivation towards their goals. Not only we intend to find all those important traits, we also focus on grouping them in well-defined and easily understood domains, making the

process easier for others. This research paper has summarized all observable traits into six major domains, explained as follows,

i. High / Low Expectation of Success and Energization

Success in any fold of life highly depends on whether we expect and believe to make thorough the challenges thrown at us, and eventually succeed. Similarly, expectations of an individual play a huge role on the outcomes of mental contrasting.

When one's expectations are high, mental contrasting leads to vigorous and extensive goal pursuit, there is a proper channelization of motivation and hence commitment to the goal increases, and people effectively strive towards fulfilling their goals. Whereas, if the expectations are low, people refrain from committing to their goals and mental contrasting in such condition is found to have negative impacts and should be avoided if the expectations aren't much high. Some other techniques might work better in such condition.

Other aspect is related to high expectations and mental contrasting that was observed in various studies is energization. How mental contrasting with high expectation of success changed the individual's commitment to goals can be understood how one's energization changed. It's found through various studies that there was a 50% increase in energization when mental contrasting is practiced with high expectations and this in turn affected goal commitment to about 20%.

It's evident from certain experiments and studies conducted in this prospect that mental contrast tune people with the frequency of their expectations and promotes selective goal pursuit. So, mental contrasting should be practiced only if one has some serious goals, and expectations high to achieve that goal. In any other situation one should refrain from mental contrasting and look for some other methods to increase the chances of success.

ii. Visualization Abilities

One of the most evident domains incorporated deeply with mental contrasting is visualization. As this technique involves visualizing positive and negative aspects of long-term goals, this requires good visualizing abilities that can be trusted and are highly accurate. Visualizing wrong aspects could hinder the viability of mental contrasting and can have opposite effects.

Hence, it is advised that before practicing mental contrasting at any scale one should hone his or her visualizing abilities and make sure that no wrong visualizations go in while practicing mental contrasting at any stage. It's just not about visualizing the positive or negative aspects, it's also important to judge the extent to which it can affect us in the long-run and this would be a great add-on to pursue mental contrasting in the right and beneficial manner.

iii. Confidence and Positive Thoughts

Positive thoughts and confidence are two major pillars over which any healthy process can be built and strengthened and mental contrasting also needs these two to be in place if the success is desired. Only positive thoughts can facilitate creation of proper, achievable and serious goals and further visualizing the right positive and negative aspects related to those

goals. Hence, it can be said that positive thoughts promote mental contrasting in many ways and if someone can't manage to plan out things in a positive manner and is clouded with negative thoughts about the goals in focus, one should first try to be more positive towards life and then practice mental contrasting.

Other hinderance to successful commitment towards long-term goals is that after sometime when the visualized positive aspects are still far from reach, doubt seeps into the mind about all the stuff one visualized and over his or her abilities to achieve them. Being confident throughout the entire process is the only way mental contrasting can guarantee some success and if one can maintain a confident attitude towards everything this technique would help eventually.

Mental contrasting should be practiced only if one is confident in his or her success. If so, mental contrasting increases the chance of success exponentially. But it's also evident from various experiments that if one lacks the necessary confidence towards his or her success, this technique became just a hinderance and such people were hurt by practicing mental contrasting. This technique should not be used as a confidence booster as well, instead it needs confidence to work well.

iv. Reasonable /Unattainable Goals and Goal Pursuit

Setting goals in sync with reason and abilities is of great significance while practicing mental contrasting. Setting reasonable goal which are within one's reach and capabilities is necessary and only such goals can be accomplished through this technique. If someone expects that he or she can achieve some unattainable goals through proper mental contrasting then they will be disappointed most of the times. This technique doesn't enhance your abilities in any way, it only helps to enhance your motivation towards a reasonable goal. So, unattainable goals should be judged properly beforehand and shouldn't be taken up. Instead, one should pick attainable and reasonable goals and then mental contrast, this will help in goal pursuit.

Making proper goals is important and breaking them into small short-term goals also helps. Following your plans every day is the key to achieving the goals and this proper planning towards goal pursuit helps getting better results out of mental contrasting. Using the motivation generated by mental contrasting in the right and planned manner is as important as anything else.

v. Self-Awareness and Self-Regulation

Self-awareness is of utmost importance for setting reasonable goals, visualizing aspects and outcomes and for certain other things that are involved with mental contrasting. If one has true understanding of his or her situation, capabilities and mental state, one can always make better choices and for such people mental contrasting would be the perfect medium to enhance motivation needed to focus on goals.

Other important ingredient to mental contrasting is having some degree of self-regulation. This can help any individual to not get carried away with the surge of the new found energy through mental contrasting. Many times, people stay focused and motivated for short

durations of time and soon after lose the plot and they lose the determination to achieve their goals. Without self-regulation and control, even timely practiced mental contrasting won't be of much use and eventually the confidence and belief would dwindle and goals would look unachievable.

vi. Future and Reality

It's difficult to visualize the future most of the times but mental contrasting requires one to make accurate assumptions about the uncertain future. Hence, far-sightedness and the skill to predict all possibilities in the future that can arise as the outcome of one's goals is needed and having such capabilities help to achieve more out of mental contrasting.

Sometimes, one's visualization and reality start to diverge to a great extent and in such situations mental contrasting fails badly. So, it becomes necessary to limit one's imagery to reality. When the imagination is grounded to reality, the brain reacts carefully to the planning and considerations and then mental contrasting help to motivate for goal attainment.

Discussion

Psychologist Gabriele Oettingen, who evolved the concept of Mental Contrasting, said that positive thinking is deceiving and may tune our brains to overlook the problems that are very much solvable in reality. Whereas mental contrasting doesn't have any such problems and it is till date one of the best future visualization method for finding motivation. All the domains discussed so far in this study can help anyone who understands and utilize them in the right way to get better results from mental contrast technique.

As mentioned, high expectations are really useful and lead to an energized state where one gets enough motivation and chances of succeeding increases. But this expectation can be kept in place only if we can make proper visualizations and set attainable goals. This can be treated as an example to look how deeply all these domains are related to each other and to mental contrasting and a proper understanding of these domains can make some drastic improvements.

Mental contrasting is found of great use in various situations and helped people to in problems like poor eating habits, low academic performance, etc. This increased self-dependency and gratitude among the users and promoted self-care habits like exercising and lifestyle modification and reduces stress.

Conclusion

It would be fair enough to conclude that mental contrasting is far better than normal techniques like positive thinking and visualization techniques. It's the perfect blend of these techniques. It is reality-bound and solution focused at its core and still one with most well-defined application process.

With a very few downsides, it can be insisted that mental contrasting can become a highly useful tool for most of the people and make goal pursue easy and results would be favourable more often. Mental contrasting is significant for goal commitment and healthy or positive

mind-sets to live a wholesome life. It also helps people in making the most of their cognitions, perceptions and actions.

Future Scope

More such domains need to be defined and work should be done to make some concrete progress in this direction such that understanding these can become acceptable as a stepping stone to actual mental contrasting process. This might decrease the failure rate of mental contrasting and may reduce negative effects of mental contrasting among participants.

Further this research paper suggests that a study should be conducted among the youth, to understand how they perceive these basic domains of mental contrasting and how applicable can be mental contrasting for them and hence researchers can derive a correlation among these domains and success of mental contrast. Researchers have designed a basic questionnaire in relation with these basic domains which can be used to extend this work and gain some practical insights for the proposed idea.

Questionnaire

There are several questions related to all the mentioned domains of Mental Contrasting and these should be presented as a form to the students asking them to evaluate themselves as correctly and honestly as possible on a scale of 4.

Scale

- 1 => Never**
- 2 => Rarely True**
- 3 => Sometimes True**
- 4 => Often True**

Table 1

Sr. no.	Scale Items
1	Are you able to self-introspect after failing to achieve good grades despite hoping and dreaming for them?
2	Do you sometimes underestimate yourself and not take any action towards your goal?
3	Has it ever happened with you that dreaming of something big fuelled the energy to undertake required actions towards it?
4	Do you ever feel that the effort you put in a particular task is proportional to your perception of its outcome?
5	Are you able to do a SWOT analysis and figure out a success rate for yourself before doing a particular task?
6	Have you ever experienced an ease in achieving your goal if you are able to pre-visualize possible obstacles that you might face?
7	Assuming you are able to visualize possible outcome in way of achieving a goal, are you then able to figure out ways to tackle those obstacles?
8	Do you undertake a task after evaluating its pros and cons?

9	If you are confident about achieving a goal, do you take more efforts towards actually achieving it?
10	Does your confidence in your strengths influence the kind of goals you set up for yourself?
11	Have you ever felt the need to put in more efforts towards your goal after receiving a motivational talk from your friend or family member?
12	Does dreaming about the success of your goal and your life after its fulfilment help work towards it?
13	Are you aware of your strengths and weakness and set goals accordingly?
14	After repeated failures, have you ever felt like you are setting unachievable goals for yourself?
15	Do you adapt the strategy of setting intermittent goals for achieving a big goal?
16	Do you consider your current situation, potential and ability while forming goals for tomorrow?
17	Do you undertake goals to showcase your strengths?
18	Do you realize the obstacle you might create for yourself in achieving your goals, like procrastinating nature etc.?
19	Do you like to work before deadlines?
20	Has the awareness of your own working style ever boosted your chances of achieving success?
21	Do you make a timetable for yourself when you want to achieve a time table?
22	Do you restructure your timetable according to unforeseen circumstances too often?
23	Do you impose high degree of self-regulations on yourself?
24	Does maintaining discipline help you achieve goals faster?
25	Does the incentive of achieving a goal make you actually work for it?
26	Does the fancy of fulfilment of goal waste your time in reality?
27	Do you have firm goals for yourself?
28	Does doing targeted studies the entire semester help you achieve better grades than studying at the exam time?
29	Do you set goals for far future?
30	When you fail to achieve a long-term goal, do you think it's because you never specified short term goals?
31	Do you feel happy after a small goal, or the burden of the bigger goal doesn't let you celebrate your little victory?
32	Have you ever felt that your reality actually contributes to your future?

Table 2: To summarize that which question belonged to which domain.

Questions/items	Related to Domain
1,2,3,4	High / Low Expectation of Success
5,6,7,8	Visualization Abilities
9,10,11,12	Confidence and Positive Thoughts
13,14,15,16	Reasonable Goals

17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24	Self-Awareness & Self-Regulation
25,26,27,28	Goal Pursuit
29,30,31,32	Future and Reality

References

- [1] Andreas Kappes, Henrik Singmann, Gabriele Oettingen, Mental contrasting instigates goal pursuit by linking obstacles of reality with instrumental behavior, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Volume 48, Issue 4, 2012, Pages 811-818, ISSN 0022-1031, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.02.002>
- [2] Angela Lee Duckworth, Heidi Grant, Benjamin Loew, Gabriele Oettingen & Peter M. Gollwitzer (2011) Self-regulation strategies improve self-discipline in adolescents: benefits of mental contrasting and implementation intentions, *Educational Psychology*, 31:1, 17-26, DOI: 10.1080/01443410.2010.506003
- [3] Blascovich, J., Weisbuch, M., & Vick, S. B. (2004). The relationship between self-esteem level, self-esteem stability, and cardiovascular reactions to performance feedback. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87, 133-145.
- [4] Klein, H. J., Wesson, M. J., Hollenbeck, J. R., & Alge, B. J. (1999). Goal commitment and the goal setting process: Conceptual clarification and empirical synthesis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 84, 885-896.
- [5] Kruglanski, A. W., & Kopetz, C. (2009). The role of goal-systems in self-regulation. In E. Morsella, J. A. Bargh, & P. M. Gollwitzer (Eds.), *The psychology of action (Vol 2): The mechanisms of human action* (pp. 350-367). New York: Oxford University Press.
- [6] Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (1990). *A theory of goal setting and task performance*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- [7] Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (1990). *A theory of goal setting and task performance*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- [8] Oettingen, G. (2000). Expectancy effects on behavior depend on selfregulatory thought. *Social Cognition*, 18, 101-129.
- [9] Oettingen, G., & Gollwitzer, P. M. (2001). Goal setting and goal striving. In A. Tesser & N. Schwarz (Eds.) & M. Hewstone & M. Brewer (Series Eds.), *Blackwell handbook in social psychology: Vol. 1. Inter individual processes* (pp. 329-347). Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.
- [10] Oettingen, G., Hönig, G., & Gollwitzer, P. M. (2000). Effective selfregulation of goal attainment. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 33, 705-732.
- [11] Oettingen, G., Mayer, D., & Thorpe, J. (2009). Promotion and prevention fantasies and the self-regulation of goal commitments. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- [12] Oettingen, G., Mayer, D., TimurSevincer, A., Stephens, E. J., Pak, H., & Hagenah, M. (2009). Mental Contrasting and Goal Commitment: The Mediating Role of Energization. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 35(5), 608–622. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167208330856>

- [13] Oettingen, G., Pak, H., &Schnetter, K. (2001). Self-regulation of goal setting: Turning free fantasies about the future into binding goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 736-753. Peale, N. V. (2007). *The power of positive thinking*. New York: Random House.
- [14] Schunk, D. H. (1989). Social cognitive theory and self-regulated learning. In B. J. Zimmerman & D. H Schunk (Eds.), *Self-regulated learning and academic achievement: Theory, research, and practice*. *Progress in cognitive development research* (pp. 83-110). New York: Springer.
- [15] Sevincer, A. T., &Oettingen, G. (2013). Spontaneous Mental Contrasting and Selective Goal Pursuit. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39(9), 1240–1254. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213492428>