Why we choose, how we choose, what we choose: the influence of decision initiation motives on decision making
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CHAPTER ONE

Why We Choose, How We Choose, What We Choose: A Theoretical Introduction
Decision making is a concept closely related to freedom and self-determination. It is the activity that enables us to shape our lives. It is therefore not surprising that for a long time researchers have investigated how people decide, and how this is related to decisional outcomes, and that these questions still receive a great deal of attention. The research field of behavioural decision making is dedicated to answering these questions by deciphering the decision process, and estimating what strategies lead to the best outcome under different conditions. This field also investigates why we sometimes make decisions after extensive deliberation and at other times make them rather impulsively, and why we sometimes value our final choice more than other times. This research has identified many factors that are of influence on decision making, both situational factors such as time pressure (e.g., Ben Zur & Breznitz, 1981; Dhar & Nowlis, 1999; Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1988; Svenson & Edland, 1987; Svenson, Edland, & Slovic, 1990; Svenson & Maule, 1993), option-set characteristics (e.g., Bockenholt, Albert, Aschenbrenner, & Schmallhofer, 1991; Dhar, 1997; Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Mellers & Biagini, 1994), or the framing of information (e.g., Johnson, Payne, & Bettman, 1988; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), and more stable personality factors such as need for cognition (e.g., Levin, Huneke, & Jasper, 2000; Smith & Levin, 1996; Verplanken, 1993), neuroticism (e.g., Lauriola & Levin, 2001), or impulsivity (e.g., Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999; Wittmann & Paulus, 2008).

Although many different factors have been examined, there is one issue that has received relatively little attention, namely the influence of what types of motives lead people to start deciding in the first place (I will refer to these motives as “initiation motives” from now on). This is surprising since knowledge about these motives is important for two reasons. Firstly, recent research on decision making has increased its focus on why people at times do not decide, because decision avoidance can have very negative consequences such as pension gaps resulting from not choosing a pension plan, career dissatisfaction, and paying too much for energy or health insurance (e.g., Iyengar, Jiang, & Huberman, 2004; For an overview see Botti & Iyengar, 2004; also see Ministerie van Economische Zaken, 2007). An important reason for decision avoidance is that people are not motivated enough to initiate the decision process, and believe other things have higher priority (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996; Greenleaf & Lehmann, 1995). Since people will never come to a
decision if they never initiate the process of deciding, learning more about what motives lead people to initiate this process can be an important step in finding solutions for reducing decision avoidance. Secondly, human cognition and behaviour are strongly influenced by antecedent conditions (e.g., Alba, Broniarczyk, Shimp, & Urbany 1994; Brockner, Tyler, & Cooper-Schneider, 1992; Turillo, Folger, Lavelle, Umphress, & Gee, 2002), and some initial research suggests that the type of motives that people bring into the decision process might be important predictors of decision behaviour (see e.g. Crowe & Higgins, 1997; DeCaro & Johnson, 2007; Higgins, Camacho, Idson, Spiegel, & Scholer, 2008; Higgins, Idson, Freitas, Spiegel, & Molden, 2003). In other words, the type of initiation motives may be related to subsequent decision making processes and outcomes. The main aim of this dissertation is to further test this assumption and offer insights into whether and how different motives that lead people to initiate the process of deciding influence subsequent decision making.

In this chapter I will first give a general overview of the research area of behavioural decision making. As will become clear, much is known about decision making processes and how these processes relate to decision outcomes such as the quality or subjective valuation of the chosen option. This will be followed by a section on what is currently known about the role of motives in decision making, resulting in the conclusion that our knowledge regarding this issue is much more limited. Finally, I will introduce the research that I have conducted to expand this knowledge.

**Behavioural Decision Making**

One of the main questions in decision making research has been how people come to a decision and how this relates to the value of the outcome. Part of this research has been prescriptive, and has tried to find out how people should decide in order to reach the best possible outcome. For example, Decision Theory uses Subjective Expected Utility as a way of pinpointing the best option available. By incorporating both the value of the different outcomes and the chance of them actually occurring when that option is picked, the decision maker is able to optimize his or her decision making. In order for this to happen, decision making has to occur under perfect conditions
with full information available to a fully rational decision maker (Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1974). Decades of behavioural decision making research have shown, however, that these situations seldom occur naturally.

In contrast to prescriptive research, behavioural decision making research focuses on how people actually decide. More specific, this body of research tries to explain how people decide, how they experience the process of deciding, why they sometimes fail to decide, why different people at different times use different decision strategies, and how these decision processes lead to different objective outcomes and different subjective valuation of these outcomes. In the next sections I will first outline some of the general behavioural decision making theories that aim to describe how people make decisions, followed by a section on why people use different strategies at different times and what strategies are expected to lead to the highest quality outcomes. I will finish with a section on what determines the subjective value that the decision maker attaches to the chosen option.

**How Do People Decide?**

**Attractiveness versus Distinctiveness**

In a world of fully rational people, decision makers would look at their options, calculate the attractiveness of choosing each option separately, and choose the option that scores highest. However, decision making researchers have found and accepted that people more often than not deviate from rationality. Some examples of such deviations are the Myers effect, where the preference for option A over B is present when the option-set also contains option C, but it changes into a preference for option B over A when the option-set contains D instead of C (Busemeyer, 1979, 1985; Lee, 1971; Myers & Katz, 1962; Myers & Sadler, 1960; Myers, Suydam, & Gambino, 1965; Suydam & Myers, 1962); the disjunction effect, where situation A leads to choosing X, and situation B leads to choosing X, but uncertainty about whether one is in situation A versus situation B leads to no decision (Tversky & Shafir, 1992); or framing effects, where framing options as possible gains elicits different preferences than framing options as possible losses (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). For example, framing effects have been shown in the Asian flue paradigm. This paradigm showed that framing the success rate of different medications as the percentage of lives possibly
lost elicits riskier decision making when choosing a medication than framing it in the percentage of lives that can possibly be saved (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981).

Researchers have thus come to conclude that decision makers do not judge their options’ attractiveness in isolation of one another, but take into account the characteristics of the other options and the decision environment (e.g., Busemeyer & Townsend, 1993; Dhar, Nowlis, & Sherman, 1999). An example of a theory that tries to capture this process is Decision Field Theory (Busemeyer & Townsend, 1993). According to this theory each decision has a certain value threshold that needs to be reached by at least one option for a choice to be made. The options’ values depend on initial value judgments, fluctuation over time due to different option comparisons, recency and primacy effects, and decision duration. Thus, the value of a particular alternative at a particular point in time depends on both the decision maker’s initial value judgment of this alternative, and the value of the alternative(s) it is currently being compared to. Amongst other things, the theory is capable of explaining violations of stochastic dominance (e.g., Myers effect), preference reversals under time pressure, and the relationship between time and decision quality.

In addition to options influencing each other’s attractiveness, an option’s relative attractiveness also influences whether or not a decision is made at all. This is due to the fact that, next to attractiveness, people also greatly value distinctiveness. This means that they prefer the option with the highest attractiveness to be distinctively more attractive than the first runner up. Decision makers will even process information in a biased manner in order to create a bigger difference in attractiveness between the option they want and the ones they do not want (Tyszka, 1998). Furthermore, if they are unable to spot or create a big enough difference in attractiveness people have the tendency to choose neither option and may end up with an option with relatively lower attractiveness or no option at all (Shafir, Simonson, & Tversky, 1993). For example, when students were given a choice between buying or not buying a SONY CD-player well below list-price at a 1-day clearance sale, 66% said they wanted to buy the CD-player, and 34% said they wanted to wait and learn more about various models, thereby losing the chance of buying it for the attractive sales price. However, when an AIWA player was added as an option that was as attractive as the SONY option, 46% said they wanted to wait and
learn about various models, thereby losing the chance to use the attractive sale-offer (Tversky & Shafir, 1992).

One of the explanations given for the importance of distinctiveness is that people need reasons to justify their decision making. More specific, decision makers want to be able to both justify choosing A, and justify not choosing B or C. For example, research has shown that telling people they will have to justify their choice later on will increase their need for distinctiveness (Tyszka, 1998). Also, having reasons to back-up a choice enables decision makers to mask any biases they had whilst deciding (Norton, Vandello, & Darley, 2004). For example, managers with a discriminating preference for males over females can cover up their unacceptable bias by coming up with acceptable reasons for selecting Pete rather than Petra for a job interview, thereby avoiding social reprimands or shame. In addition, reasons or justifications can also serve as a buffer against any post-decisional regret, by enabling people to remind themselves why they made a certain choice when doubts arise about whether it was the right one to make (Shafir et al., 1993; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007). Affect may thus play an important role in our decision making.

**Affect and Emotions**

Indeed, rather than robotically depending on judgments regarding the attractiveness and distinctiveness of the options, decision makers are strongly influenced by anticipated and anticipatory feelings attached to the decision process and outcomes. Anticipated feelings are the feelings people expect to experience as a result of their choice. Examples are the anticipation of shame or regret mentioned above. When considering their options, people do not simply evaluate the options by calculating their relative attractiveness and distinctiveness. Rather, they also consider the emotional consequences of choosing them. For example, an option that is attractive but expected to trigger feelings of shame or regret when selecting it, is much less likely to be chosen than an equally attractive option that does not have these anticipated negative feelings attached to it (for an overview see Anderson, 2003; also see Regret Theory, Loomes & Sugden, 1982).

Anticipatory feelings, on the other hand, are the feelings people experience whilst deciding, and research shows that people use these feelings
as a guide to their judgments regarding both the options and the decision process. These feelings can range from unconscious affective signals communicating the attractiveness of various options (i.e., somatic markers, Bechara & Damasio, 2005; Leland & Grafman, 2005) to full-blown emotions signalling decision difficulty (e.g., Beattie & Barlas, 2001; Festinger, 1957; Janis & Mann, 1977; Luce, 1998; Shepard, 1964; Simon, 1987). Either way, their influence is quite strong and can even overrule cognitions in steering decision behavior. For example, when a certain option feels risky, but is not judged to be so, people are tempted to act on their feelings and not choose the option rather than trust their cognitive judgment. However, an option that does not feel as risky as it is cognitively judged to be is more likely to be selected than one for which feelings and cognition are congruent (Loewenstein, Weber, Hsee, & Welch, 2001). In addition to serving as a choice guide, anticipatory feelings can also influence aspects of the decision process itself, like attentional capacity (Lewinsohn & Mano, 1993), effort exertion and processing style (Luce, Bettman, & Payne, 1997), and variety seeking (Kahn & Isen, 1993). This can result in relatively different decision processes.

Different Processes at Different Times

According to dual processing theories people have two different cognitive systems they can use for decision making (for overviews see Evans, 2003; 2008). One is referred to as the more primitive system. This system is believed to be an automatic system that is also present in many animals. Decisions made with this system are made in a more shallow way based on heuristics and are more likely to be influenced by attentional and cognitive biases. These decisions tend to be made based on ‘what feels good’, rather than on the basis of cognitive deliberation. The other system is more cognitively complex. It functions at a more conscious level and is believed to be uniquely human. It is used for hypothesis testing and logical reasoning and aims to find the best possible outcome. Not surprising, using the more basic system costs less effort than using the more complex system (cf. Chaiken, 1987; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Which system is used thus heavily depends on the amount of effort decision makers are able and willing to exert.

Whether or not people are able to exert effort depends on factors like time availability (Payne et al., 1988) and prior effort exertion (Baumeister,
However, even when people have the required resources, this does not necessarily mean they exert much effort. According to the effort-accuracy trade-off, an important predictor of people’s willingness to exert more effort is the importance of the decision’s accuracy (Creyer, Bettman, & Payne, 1990; Payne, Bettman, & Luce, 1996; Tyszka, 1998). A basic assumption underlying this trade-off is that more effort exertion actually leads to more accurate decision making. Some decision strategies require people to calculate each option’s value and choose the option with the highest value (this is the case for the weighed additive rule and the equal weights rule), and these strategies are relatively effortful. Other strategies require less calculation (for example lexicographic rule -- picking the option that scores highest on the most important attribute -- or satisficing -- choosing the first option that is good enough) and these strategies require less effort. The more effortful strategies have been argued and shown to lead to more accurate decision making (Payne et al., 1988). Although this assumption that effort is positively related to accuracy has been present in decision making research for a long time (e.g., Janis & Mann, 1977), and researchers have argued the benefits of using more effortful and complex strategies (e.g., Payne et al., 1988) the assumption has recently been challenged. For example, the developers of Unconscious Thought Theory (Dijksterhuis, 2004) and Theory of Bounded Rationality (Gigerenzer & Brighton, 2009; Gigerenzer & Selten, 2001) argue and show that making decisions without extensive deliberation at times leads to qualitatively better decision outcomes. One of the reasons given for this is that the human brain is often simply not capable of processing all relevant information needed for the high-effort strategies. Answers regarding which processing style leads to better outcomes have therefore become the target of debate and renewed interest (e.g., Waroquier, Marchiori, Klein, & Cleeremans, 2010; Weber & Johnson, 2009).

In addition to “rational” factors such as the importance of decision accuracy, decision processes are also dependent on “non-rational” factors such as the emotions experienced during the decision process. For example, research has shown that the experience of negative emotions during decision making can influence the effort-accuracy trade-off by increasing the desire to process information in a thorough and accurate manner. Also, people are likely to adjust their decision making strategy to minimize negative emotions. For
example, in decisions in which deciding between options is very stressful, the decision maker will be more likely to use a decision making rule that focuses on one option at a time (e.g., satisficing) rather than on comparing options on different attributes (e.g., lexicographic rule; Luce et al., 1997).

In conclusion, it is uncertain how a decision should be made in order to reach the best objective outcome, and the factors influencing the decision process are not always rational in nature. At the most we can conclude that different circumstances ask for and lead to different decision strategies and different levels of effort. However, what is certain is that decision processes are not static and that they play a major role in determining the quality of a decision outcome.

**Decision Quality versus Subjective Value**

Thus far we have discussed some of the main theories regarding how people decide and how this might relate to the quality of the decision outcome. However, at least equally important is how the decision process relates to the subjective valuation of the decision outcome. The importance of the subjective value of a decision outcome lies in the fact that it influences factors such as choice implementation, commitment to the decision, or willingness to pay the asked price for the outcome (e.g., Curhan, Elfenbein, & Kilduff, 2009; Locke & Sadler, 2007; Oliver, Balakrishnan, & Barry, 1994; also see Feather & Rauter, 2004). Having made a high quality decision means nothing when the decision maker fails to implement the choice (e.g., having chosen which house one would like to buy, but never actually getting around to placing an offer), immediately starts doubting whether this was really the right choice (e.g., having chosen, but starting to doubt as soon as the offer is made), or when he or she is unwilling to pay for the chosen option (e.g., having chosen a house, but being unwilling to pay its worth). This section therefore explores the relationship between the decision process and the subjective valuation of a chosen option.

In decisions where the choice domain is subjective (i.e., depends on personal preferences regarding the different attributes of the options), the subjective value of the chosen option should be greater when the quality of the outcome is higher. As mentioned earlier, a person is more likely to choose the best option available when calculating the attractiveness/subjective value of
each option and locating the option with the highest value (a maximizing strategy), rather than picking the first option that is good enough (a satisficing strategy). Maximizing should therefore lead to a subjectively higher value than satisficing. However, this is not necessarily the case: maximizers (those people who attempt to find the best option) tend to even be less satisfied with their chosen outcome and experience more regret than satisficers (those people who just try to find an alternative that is good enough; e.g., Schwarz et al., 2002). Another example of the non-linear relationship between the objective decision outcome and its subjective valuation is research on discounting which has found a positive relation between the subjective valuation of a possible gain and the size of the gain, whereas no such relation was found in case of a loss (Mitchell & Wilson, 2010). Subjective value thus seems to depend on different factors than decision quality. So what determines subjective value?

As already mentioned, subjective values are heavily dependent on the characteristics of the other options within the option set (e.g., Busemeyer, 1979, 1985; Busemeyer & Townsend, 1993; Lee, 1971; Myers & Katz, 1962; Myers & Sadler, 1960; Myers et al., 1965; Suydam & Myers, 1962). Next to option characteristics, option-set size also appears to play a role. Indeed, research on option-set size has found that subjective value of a chosen option tends to decrease as option-set size increases, even though from a rational perspective the larger option-set is likely to offer qualitatively equal or better options than the limited set (e.g., Diehl & Poynor, 2010; Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). There may be several reasons for this, including that as the option set increases it becomes more difficult to identify “the best” option (e.g., Anderson, 2003).

In addition to depending on the number and quality of the other options in the option-set subjective value can also result from process factors, an example being value from fit-effects (Avnet & Higgins, 2003; 2006; Camacho, Higgins, & Luger, 2003; Higgins, 2000; 2002; 2006; Higgins et al., 2008; Higgins, Idson, et al., 2003). People differ in their preferences regarding the types of goals they like to pursue and the manner in which they pursue them, both intrapersonally (i.e., from one decision to another) and interpersonally (i.e., from one person to another). Regulatory fit theory (Higgins, 2000) states that when people pursue a goal in a manner that fits their personal preferences at the time, they will experience an ‘it feels right’ feeling. This feeling makes them more engaged in their goal pursuit. In case of decision
making this leads them to feel more certain about their judgments and resulting choice, leading to more extreme subjective valuation of their chosen option. So in case of a negative option, the option becomes more negatively valued, whereas in case of a positive option, it becomes more positively valued. For example, research has shown that when people are in a happy mood they tend to prefer the use of intuitive decision strategies in which they can rely on their feelings, whereas a sad mood leads them to prefer a more deliberative and analytical strategy. As a result of fit, happy people value their option more when they are able to make their choice in an intuitive rather than analytical manner, whereas the opposite is true for people in a sad mood (De Vries, Holland, & Witteman, 2008).

In conclusion, next to being important for determining the quality of a decision, the decision process also plays an important role in determining the subjective valuation of the decision outcome. Since both decision quality and subjective value are important in determining decisional success, finding out how to increase them is essential in decision making research.

The Influence of Initiation Motives

Motives are an important driving force behind behavior, and without any motives for making decisions people would most likely avoid all decisions and let their lives be determined by faith. Luckily, this is rarely if ever the case, since people have a general desire for self-determination, and the only way of determining one’s life is by making decisions (Beattie, Baron, Hershey, & Spranca, 1994). Still, self-determination is not the only motive that leads people to initiate decisions, and people can even have several initiation motives simultaneously.

Motives can differ from each other in two main ways. First, they can differ in strength. Second, they can differ in what type of motive they are. Even though both aspects of motives can influence behavior, this dissertation focuses on the latter. However, before I start discussing what is currently known about the role of different types of initiation motives, I will briefly describe what is known about the general role played by motivational strength.
CHAPTER 1

Motivational Strength

Most of the research that has been done on the influence of motives on decision making has focused on the strength of these motives. As can be expected, this influence on decision making is quantitative in nature. For example, having a stronger or more salient motive to reach an accurate decision leads to more effort exertion into the decision process (Creyer et al., 1990; Payne et al., 1996). Similarly, a stronger motive to acquire a rich and full understanding of the world (i.e., stronger epistemic motivation) leads to less use of heuristics and more vigilant information processing (Bouckenooghe, Vanderheyden, Mestdagh, & Van Laethem, 2007; Drolet, Luce, & Simonson, 2009). For example, people with a higher need for cognition are generally more epistemically motivated. This group has been shown to be more likely to choose the option they truly prefer based on their personal goals and preferences rather than basing their choice on a compromise rule, even though choosing the compromise is less effortful and cognitively easier (Drolet et al., 2009). But motivational strength is not the only aspect of motives that determines behavior. The qualitative differences between motives are at least as important.

The Influence of Different Types of Initiation Motives

There are many different types of motives that drive behavior. Some examples of types that have been shown to be active in decision making are approach and avoidance motives (e.g., Terry, 2010), promotion and prevention focused motives (e.g., Crowe & Higgins, 1997), intrinsic and extrinsic motives (e.g., DeCaro & Johnson, 2007), and epistemic motives (e.g., Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989; De Dreu, Nijstad, & Van Knippenberg, 2008; Kruglanski, 1989; 1990; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Despite the large number of different types of motives, there is far less research on the influence of different types of motives than on the influence of motivational strength. Moreover, there is hardly any research that examines the influence of different types of motives that lead people to initiate the process of deciding in the first place. Still, the little research that has been done suggests that different types of motives that lead people to initiate the process of deciding can result in differences in that process, as well as differences in the quality of outcomes and differences in subjective valuation of the outcomes.
Initiation Motives Affect Decision Processes

One motivational distinction that has been shown to lead to differences in the process of deciding is the distinction between promotion and prevention focused initiation motives. Promotion focused motives are motives that entail the attainment of positives, and the avoidance of missing out on these positives. An example is the promise of getting to go on a holiday if you pass your exams, but not getting to if you fail them. Prevention focused motives, on the other hand, are motives that entail the avoidance of negatives, and the attainment of safe havens that keep the negatives out. An example is avoiding summer school by passing your exams, but ending up in summer school in case of failing. Regarding decision processes, initiating the process of deciding due to promotion motives has been shown to lead to the generation of more alternatives and more risk taking in the subsequent process than initiating the process due to prevention motives (Crowe & Higgins, 1997).

Another motivational distinction that has been shown to lead to differences in the decision process is between intrinsic and extrinsic motives (Deci, 1975). Intrinsic decision making motives are motives that are directly related to the experience of the decision process itself rather than the outcome. Examples of intrinsic initiation motives are initiating the process of deciding because you expect to enjoy the decision process or because you want to learn more about the decisional domain (e.g., answering trivia questions, selecting wines in a wine course), or feeling proud to be making a decision regardless of the quality of the outcome. Extrinsic motives, on the other hand, are not related to the experience of the decision process. They are often related to the outcome of the decision. Examples of extrinsic initiation motives are initiating the search for a new job to further your career, looking for a new phone in order to increase your status among your peers, or starting to consider what to cook for dinner because you have a growling stomach. In all these cases, the eventual outcome of the process (a better job, higher status, getting rid of the growling stomach) is the reason for decision initiation. Another example of an extrinsic motive to initiate decision making would be if you offer to make some of the decisions that your overworked colleague normally makes in order to help him or her out. In this case, the ‘helping’ motive is neither process nor outcome related, but still serves as an extrinsic motive to make the decision. Intrinsic initiation motives have been related to
greater effort exertion during the subsequent decision process than extrinsic motives (DeCaro & Johnson, 2007).

**Initiation Motives Affect Outcome Qualities**

In addition to causing differences in decision processes (e.g., effort exertion), intrinsic versus extrinsic initiation motives have also been shown to lead to differences in quality of the decision outcome. For example, DeCaro and Johnson (2007) found that students who had chosen to solve a decision task involving a murder mystery out of enjoyment motives were more likely to correctly select the murderer out of a list of options than students who had chosen to solve the decision task because of the monetary pay-off for doing so.

**Initiation Motives Affect Subjective Values**

Different types of initiation motives do not only have effects on the objective value of the decision outcome. They may also affect the subjective value. As mentioned earlier, people differ in their preferences regarding the type of goals they like to pursue and the way in which they prefer to reach these goals. Since initiation motives can influence the type of goal people will pursue and the way in which they will make their decisions, these motives can have different levels of fit with people’s preferences. This, in turn, will show itself in subjective valuation of the decision outcome (Higgins, 2000). For example, motivating a decision maker to make the decision in a vigilant manner (i.e., giving them a vigilance motive) will lead to a better fit and thus a more extreme outcome valuation for someone who actually prefers vigilant decision making rather than a more explorative style (Higgins, Idson, et al., 2003). Similarly, motivating someone to make a decision in the right way rather than simply making the right decision (i.e., giving them a procedural accuracy motive) better fits decision makers with a stronger preference for this accuracy, and will lead them to value their chosen option more (Higgins et al., 2008).

In sum, even though very little research has focused on the influence of different types of initiation motives on subsequent decision making, prior research suggests that different types can lead to differences in the subsequent decision process, differences in quality of the outcome, and differences in subjective valuation of the decision outcome. Expanding this research thus is both a promising and valuable avenue for research.
This Dissertation

The main objective of this dissertation is to expand our knowledge regarding the influence of different types of motives that lead people to initiate the process of deciding on subsequent decision making processes and outcomes. As mentioned earlier, many decisions are left unmade because people never even start to consider their options. Knowing what motivates people to initiate the process of deciding can thus be a powerful tool in decreasing decision avoidance. However, since previous research suggests that differences in type of motive may play an important role in predicting decision making behavior, it is important to pinpoint what motives should be preferred for doing so. If certain initiation motives lead people to make low quality decisions or decisions they are not happy with, decision avoidance may actually be preferred. In the following I will outline my motives for the motivational types I chose to explore, as reported in the following three chapters.

Firstly, Chapter 2 describes three studies that examine the influence of the basic motivational distinction between approach and avoidance. Almost all types of motives can be categorized as being an approach motive (aimed at attaining positives) or an avoidance motive (aimed at avoiding negatives) (for an overview on this distinction see Elliot, 2008). In the context of decision making, one can for example initiate the process of deciding because one wants to achieve positives (e.g., a good outcome, a pleasant decision making process) or because one wants to avoid negatives (e.g., regret, future losses). Knowing whether and how this basic distinction between approach and avoidance initiation motives influences subsequent decision making factors was therefore a good starting point from which to continue testing the influence of other types or distinctions.

Secondly, psychological research is often criticized for its lack of external validity. I therefore wanted to test whether differences in motivational types would also influence decisions in a field setting. The third chapter therefore explores the general field of shopping decisions, and examines the influence of shopping motives on in-store decision making. In particular, I studied the effects of two basic motives to initiate the shopping process – utilitarian (going shopping because one needs certain products) and hedonic
(going shopping because one enjoys the activity) – on in-store decision making. In order to ensure that the motives were present before people initiated the process of deciding, I looked at the motives people had for entering the store and their influence on unplanned purchases, meaning shopping decisions that were made after entering the store.

Finally, although rationally speaking people should be better able to locate the option they want most by keeping their eye on the ball and focusing on selecting the option they think is best, recent research has started to cast doubt on this. For example, research has shown that taking the focus away from the outcome and focusing on process factors (e.g., making the decision in the right way) instead may lead to greater valuation of the chosen option (Higgins et al., 2008). In order to further explore this avenue I conducted several studies in which I diverted motivational attention from the outcome towards the decision process. This was done by motivating participants to learn something from the process of deciding rather than merely focusing on selecting a preferred outcome. These studies are described in Chapter 4, and show that letting people focus on learning something from the decision process rather than strictly focusing on selecting a particular outcome may be better for those people who have a greater need to understand the world.

In the final section of this dissertation, the general discussion, I will recapitulate the theoretical contributions and practical implementations of our findings. I will first discuss why it matters what types of motives lead people to initiate the process of deciding, why it is important to realize that multiple initiation motives might be active simultaneously, and which motivational types are better for which person or situation. I will then outline the importance of the findings for areas such as decision counselling, governmental policies, and marketing purposes. In short, I will show that initiation motives matter, and I will now turn to how they do.