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### Driven by the future

*Future time perspective across life domains and cultures*

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **General introduction**

We are all time travelers. Some of us like to travel to past experiences and to evoke past feelings and behaviors, others tend to be focused on the present moment, yet, thinking about the future is “an ubiquitous feature of the human mind” (Gilbert & Wilson, 2007; Seligman, Railton & Baumeister, & Sripada, 2013, p. 119). Already now, while reading this introduction, you are probably trying to anticipate what will come next, so you keep reading the text. However, you may also be drifting away and thinking about how you want to look fit for the summer holiday next year and thus should start exercising in the gym today. Even when we are not engaged in some task such as intentional reading or exercising, our brain is largely busy with imaginations directed towards the future (Buckner & Carroll, 2007; Mason et al., 2007). Not only humans but also other species have the ability to think about their future such as western scrub-jays who “plan for breakfast” (Raby, Alexis, Dickinson, & Clayton, 2007).



It seems obvious that human attitudes, intentions and behaviors in the present are ultimately motivated by contemplation either on the short-term (i.e., learning about the content of the text that will come in a few minutes) or the long-term future (i.e, looking fit for the next summer). Because of this inevitable embeddedness of the future in people’s lives and goal striving, the concept of Future Time Perspective (FTP) as a motivator for attitudes and behaviors has been explored across different scientific fields and disciplines (e.g., psychology, medicine, sociology, economy, neuroscience) and related to important life domains such as health, work, and education. Furthermore, FTP has also been researched as a predictor of pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors such as recycling (Milfont, Wilson, & Diniz, 2012), quality of romantic relationships (Stolarski, Wojtkowska, & Kwiecińska, 2016), and identity formation (Shirai, Nakamura, & Katsuma, 2012), and as a means to reduce pathological gambling and Facebook addiction (Hodgins & Engel, 2002; Przepiorka & Blachnio, 2016). Hence, FTP is generally conceived of as a primary “motivational space” of

humans (Nuttin, 1964, p. 63), but also as a motivational attitude that varies among individuals and may or may not promote goal-directed effortful behavior in the present.

Despite the omnipresence and potential motivational power of FTP, research on FTP has resulted in a variety of research traditions that apply different conceptualizations of FTP, hereby puzzling the field and its findings. Since 1930 – when it is believed that the first works on FTP were written (e.g., Frank, 1939; Israeli, 1930; Lewin, 1939), more than ten FTP conceptualizations have emerged. FTP has been defined, for example, as “an ability to imagine one’s future” (Gjesme, 1979), “individuals’ perceived belief about how much time they have left” (Carstensen and Lang, 1996), or “individuals’ attitude towards the future” (e.g., Nurmi, 1989; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Also, various terms have been assigned to the FTP construct (e.g., future orientation, prospection, affective forecasting, future time perspective), adding even more confusion to the FTP field. This calls for a clear definition of FTP and what it entails.

### **FUTURE TIME PERSPECTIVE**

Within the time perspective framework (e.g., Frank, 1939; Lewin, 1951; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999), FTP has been generally defined as “a cognitive motivational personality characteristic that results from goal setting” (Lens, Paixão, Herrera, & Grobler, 2012, p. 322) and has motivational consequences (de Bilde, Vansteenkiste, & Lens, 2011; Peetsma, Schuitema, & van der Veen, 2012; Seginer, 2009). In this dissertation, I approach FTP as an individual difference construct that includes attitudes towards the distal future that motivate attitudes and behaviors in the present. In this way, I draw upon Lewin’s (1939) and Frank’s (1939) time perspective framework and resulting research tradition. According to this framework, a person who reflects on the long-term future and anticipates future consequences will put more effort in his/her behavior in the present than a person who does not foresee a future.

Although a seven-year old can easily fantasize about the future, individuals develop their FTP from the age of 11 onwards (Piaget, 1955; Erikson, 1968) when a more fantasy-like future thinking is gradually replaced by a reality-driven future thinking (Klineberg, 1967). This reality-driven FTP has intrigued psychologists to theoretically and empirically study the concept of FTP and its consequences in the domains of education, work, and health. In the domain of health, FTP has been investigated as a predictor of reduced binge eating and drinking, and quitting smoking (e.g., Adams & Nettle, 2009; Guthrie, Lessl, Ochi, & Ward,

2013). In the domain of work, researchers have linked FTP to outcomes such as job satisfaction and career maturation (e.g., Kooij, Tims, & Akkermans, 2016; Marko & Savickas, 1998), whereas in the domain of education, researchers have studied the relationships between FTP and effort in learning and academic endeavors (e.g., Husman & Lens, 1999; Peetsma, 2000).

FTP theory and research suggest that FTP is an important driver of human attitudes and behaviors in the domains of education, work and health. However, due to the fragmented and confusing conceptualizations and approaches in the FTP field, no cumulative evidence exists that confirms and generalizes the robustness and magnitude of FTP as a driver of motivation and behaviors. Particularly, after more than eight decades of FTP research, we still cannot answer the question of whether *FTP is a robust driver of human motivation and behaviors within and across different life domains*. Answering this question is important because motivation in these life domains lies at the core of human functioning in these domains. Moreover, a systematic review of these domains together may provide substantial evidence that FTP effects hold across life domains, which would strengthen FTP theory. Although there are a few reviews about the motivational relevance of FTP, these reviews were mostly conducted 10 or more years ago, focused solely on one life domain (e.g., education or work), and missed to quantitatively summarize the empirical findings of prior FTP studies. The field of FTP is thus in a timely need for a systematic and comprehensive analysis as to attain powerful evidence of the motivational force of FTP in education, work and health.

Noticeably, the findings regarding the FTP effects have been inconclusive. For example, whereas some researchers found significant relationships between FTP and school achievement, or job satisfaction, others found small or even non-significant results (e.g., Andretta, Worrell, & Mello, 2014). It may be that certain study characteristics such as the FTP conceptualization, cultural context, and sample characteristics (e.g., gender and age) are responsible for the disparity of research results. In addition, as FTP has been related to a wide range of outcome types such as attitudes, behavioral intention, and behaviors, the strength of the FTP effect might also be contingent upon the specific outcome type.

Finally, research that examined FTP as a driver of human motivation did not reveal why some people put effort in their future thinking whereas others refrain from doing so. Reflection on the future is particularly relevant for adolescents who are faced with many important decisions regarding their future education and career. Research has shown that

adolescents across different countries experience a decrease in their motivation (Peetsma, Hascher, van der Veen, & Roede, 2005), which might be related to a decreasing FTP. Yet, although several FTP researchers have underlined the importance of personal and situational factors for attaining a FTP (e.g., Gomes Carvalho & Novo, 2015; Morselli, 2013), we know very little about *personal and situational variables influencing adolescents' FTP*. In this dissertation, I examine the role that adolescents' regulatory motivational orientation may play for engagement in future thinking.

## REGULATORY FOCUS AND FUTURE TIME PERSPECTIVE

Regulatory focus (RF) theory (Higgins, 1997; Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002) is rooted in one of the basic motivational principles that humans approach pleasure and avoid pain (Higgins, 1997, 1998). This theory posits that individuals differ in the types of goals they pursue and in the motivational orientations to reach these goals. Accordingly, RF theory distinguishes two basic self-regulatory foci: a *promotion focus* (i.e., orientation to achievements and advancements) and a *prevention focus* (i.e., orientation to safety and security).

Individuals' FTP likely depends on their goals and the dispositional strategies they use in reaching these goals. To illustrate this, try to think about your future at work. You may perceive your future at work as one with opportunities and challenges and, therefore, ask your boss for more challenging tasks and training. Alternatively, you may perceive your future as threatening and, therefore, ask your boss for routine tasks as to lower the risks of possible failure. If you identify yourself with the first example, you display a FTP that is driven by a promotion focus, whereas if you found yourself to fit the second example, you display a FTP that is driven by a prevention focus. Similarly, while some adolescents may think about their future on school and career as opportunities and challenges resulting in conquests, other adolescents may perceive their future as a road with possible losses that warrant more vigilance (Andre, van Vianen, & Peetsma, 2017).

RF theory has been mainly investigated in social and organizational psychology (e.g., Lanaj, Chang, & Johnson, 2012), but seems highly relevant for educational psychology and FTP research. Obviously, RF theory and FTP theory are conceptually linked as they both emphasize motivation in reaching future goals. However, the relationships between adolescents' RF and FTP on school and professional career have yet to be explored. It is possible that the extent to which adolescents think, feel, and plan about their future in school and professional career depends on their proneness to use different regulatory foci in their

future goal pursuing. This assumption that needs to be tested calls for the integration of FTP and RF theory.

Although it is well-known that parents affect the motivation and goals of their children (e.g., Dietrich & Salmela-Aro, 2013), there are no studies that examined adolescents' perception of their parents' RF. Consequently, it is unknown how this perception relates to adolescents' own RF and their FTP on school and professional career. Thus, *what is the role of parents' RF in the formation of adolescents' RF and FTP?*

Finally, although there are many studies that explored the separate motivational relevance of RF and FTP among individuals who are living in one country (e.g., Kao, 2012; Lens, et al., 2012), systematic studies on the RF and FTP constructs across countries are scarce. Specifically, there is a lack of studies that simultaneously explore adolescents' RF and FTP and how these two constructs relate to education and career-planning across different cultures. Most research on FTP and RF was conducted in developed countries (e.g., Western Europe) with similar cultural values. It seems reasonable to assume that individuals living in stable and more favorable socio-economic circumstances will have a stronger FTP than individuals from countries that encounter economic turbulence.

In a similar vein, it is possible that adolescents from more collectivistic countries that are faced with high uncertainty and socio-economic difficulties (e.g., a high level of corruption on the job market), or even historical turbulences as wars, will show a lower FTP and different RF strategies than adolescents from more individualistic, developed, and socio-economically stable countries. Also, FTP and RF may motivate adolescents from more collectivistic countries less to invest in their education and career planning as compared to adolescents from more individualistic countries. However, it is also plausible to reason that adolescents from more collectivistic countries may develop stronger motivational orientations as to fight their future uncertainty. All in all, research is needed that test these alternative propositions with instruments that are valid and comparable across different countries.

The overarching goal of the present dissertation is to explore the relationship between FTP and individuals' attitudes and behaviors in the education, work, and health domains and whether and how FTP and its outcomes are rooted in individuals' regulatory focus, across countries that differ on cultural values, socio-economic circumstances, and history.

## **PRESENT DISSERTATION**

Using a multidisciplinary and cross-cultural scope, this dissertation aims to clarify and explore the concept of FTP as a motivator for individuals' educational, work, and health

outcomes, examine regulatory foci (promotion and prevention) as antecedents of FTP, examine how both RF and FTP are related to outcomes in education and career, and to explore possible variations in these relationships among different cultural contexts. To approach this goal, I first synthesize the magnitude of FTP effects across different fields of psychology, medicine, and education and explore possible factors that can influence the FTP-outcome relationship. Second, I use RF theory (Higgins, 1997; Lockwood, et al., 2002) to study adolescents' promotion and prevention foci as antecedents of their FTP and the motivational relevance of RF and FTP for adolescents' educational and career-planning outcomes. Third, I also address the motivational importance of FTP and RF strategies of adolescents in cultures that greatly differ on cultural values, socio-economic circumstances and history.

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In order to disentangle the FTP concept and its motivational strength for individuals' outcomes in the crucial life domains of education, work, and health, **chapter 2** provides three meta-analyses on the relationships between FTP and a variety of educational, work, and health outcomes. In this chapter, I first address different FTP operationalizations and concepts and develop a conceptual framework. Second, to explore FTP - outcome relationships in the different domains of education, work, and health, I group a diversity of outcomes using the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Third, I test FTP construct type, age, gender, study design, year of publication, and culture as possible moderators of the relationships between FTP and outcomes.

Next, in **chapter 3**, I develop a theoretical framework of FTP antecedents in education and professional career and test this framework in a sample of adolescents. Specifically, I examine personal and situational variables that are conceptually linked to FTP, that is, adolescents' RF and the RF of their parents. To this end, I develop an instrument for measuring the RF of parents and test its psychometric properties.

**Chapter 4** extends chapter 3 by cross-culturally testing the theoretical model of the relationships between parent and adolescent RF and FTP and educational and career outcomes, among samples of Dutch, Serbian, and Croatian adolescents who live in cultural contexts that differ on Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions. Specifically, this chapter addresses the challenging question of whether adolescents' motivational orientations differ



across countries with vastly different cultural values, socio-economic circumstances and history.

An overview of this dissertation is displayed below.

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Focus</b>	Providing a quantitative summary of FTP as a motivator for attitudes and behaviors in educational, work, and health domain; and exploring the factors that influence these relationships	Developing a model of adolescents' RF and the RF of their parents as determinants of their FTP on school and professional career	Testing a cross-cultural model of adolescents' RF strategies and FTP as motivators for adolescents' educational and career outcomes
<b>Research methodology and design</b>	Three meta-analyses	Cross-sectional	Three-wave longitudinal, cross-cultural
<b>Sample</b>	<i>N</i> = 31,558 international participants	<i>N</i> = 347 Dutch adolescents	A total of <i>N</i> = 1,520 Dutch, Serbian, and Croatian adolescents

This dissertation ends with a general discussion integrating the key findings of the three empirical studies. Furthermore, I discuss the extent to which this dissertation advances our understanding of FTP and RF as motivators in different contexts and samples. Finally, I speculate about the implications of the study findings for the development of interventions that promote FTP and outcomes, and offer recommendations for future research.

To conclude, I hope this dissertation contributes to research on FTP by showing its motivational power and relationship with other self-regulatory variables that motivate human behavior across different life domains and cultures. Specifically, I hope this dissertation will serve as a fruitful foundation and a guidance for designing evidence-based interventions to enhance adolescents' motivation when pursuing their educational, career, and health goals. Lastly, I hope this dissertation will encourage you to believe in your hopes and dreams, and embrace the future.