

# The Contextual Nature of Life Goals: Situational and Individual Psychological Determinants of Goal Setting

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## Abstract

**Introduction.** This study examines the goal- and situation-related determination of human behavior. The concept of the contextual nature of human goals was the basis of research. According to this principle, goals should be considered (1) in a broad life context of opportunities given to individuals by life circumstances, or in terms of limitations related to them; (2) in a time context of individuals' life plans, future, ideas and their success or failure in achieving their goals. **Methods.** A questionnaire form was created in which hypothetically assumed goal setting factors (importance of goals in different spheres of life and satisfaction with their implementation, assessment of the opportunities provided by the situation, etc.) were recorded. Furthermore, the Potential for Self-change questionnaire (V. R. Manukyan, I. R. Murtazina, & N. V. Grishina), the Test of Existential Motivations (A. Längle), and the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (F. Zimbardo) were used. The sample comprised 350 subjects; 84.8 % of respondents aged 17 to 25. Correlation and factor analyses were performed. **Results.** The importance of individual goals was related to the assessment of the possibilities of achieving them in the current life situation, satisfaction with their implementation in major spheres of life, compatibility between achievements and expectations of the past, and willingness to self-change and to change life situation. The major goal setting factor, referred to the 'window of opportunities', integrates an individual's assessment of the extent to which his/her current life situation in various spheres enables him/her to realize himself/herself and his/her capabilities. The 'window of opportunities' is also characterized by significant associations with the need for self-change, the ability to consciously change the self, the

belief in the possibility of changing the self, and fundamental existential motivation aimed at meanings in life. **Discussion.** The results of this study confirm the appropriateness and necessity of context-based studies of human life goals and the heuristic value of this approach.

### Keywords

contextual principle, goal setting factors, life goals, life spheres, assessment of opportunities, time perspective

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## Introduction

The source of individual activity is one of the fundamental problems of personality psychology. Traditionally, the source of individual activity is described in relation to the proportion of individual psychological and situational determinants of human behavior. Initially, research in this field was aimed at studying strategies for human behavior in certain situations in life and the search for explanation models for individuals' behavior in certain situations in their lives (Heckhausen, 1986; Baumert et al., 2017; Champagne & Pervin, 1987; Fleeson, 2007; Funder, 2008; Parrigon, Woo, Tay, & Wang, 2017).

Along with approaches to studying the process of goal setting and the way goals 'work' in specific situations of human activity (in particular, studies by O. K. Tikhomirov, 1977), they are also considered in a broader life context. The methodological foundations for studying the goal-related determination of human behavior were established by works of S. L. Rubinstein on the determination of the life path of the individual (2003), A. N. Leont'ev on the goals and meanings of activity (1977), N. A. Bernstein on the "model of the necessary future" (1990), I. M. Feigenberg on "probabilistic forecasting" (2011), etc.

The theoretical development of human behavior regulation issues has its own history in Russian and global psychology (Merkur'ev, 2023; Inzlicht, Werner, Briskin, & Roberts,

## GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY, PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

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2021, etc.). Recently, there has been growing interest in psychological science in the study of goals that play an important regulatory role related to the direction of personal activity (DeYoung & Weisberg, 2018; Heller, Perunovic, & Reichman, 2009; Hoyle, 2010; Quirin et al., 2020). Complex systems and cybernetic theories describe goals as conscious or unconscious representations of desired states (DeYoung & Weisberg, 2018; Elliot & Fryer, 2008; Quirin et al., 2020). Researchers found that there were significant differences between the goals aimed at achieving the desired result and the avoidance goals aimed at preventing an undesirable result (Heimpel, Elliot & Wood, 2006). Recent studies have created taxonomies of situations related to goals and motives (Brown, Neel & Sherman, 2015; Rauthmann, 2016; Rauthmann et al., 2014); taxonomies of specific goals were defined (McCabe & Fleeson, 2016); a theoretical method for classifying situations based on the theory of basic motives and goals was proposed (Morse, Neel, Todd & Funder, 2015). The characteristics of situations to be considered when evaluating situations from the perspective of goals are described. In particular, these are (a) the extent to which situations can lead to favorable or unfavorable outcomes; (b) the extent to which they contribute to or hinder the achievement of the desired results; and (c) the amount of effort required to overcome the constraints imposed by situation. Goal-based models also typically contain an expectation construction: a sense of confidence or doubt that an outcome will be achieved successfully (Elliot & Friedman, 2007).

The goals that an individual sets for himself/herself are determined by his/her motivation, value system, and personal characteristics. On the other hand, goals can shape personality and regulate behavior both in the short (Di Sarno, Costantini, Richetin, Preti, & Perugini, 2022) and long term (Heller et al., 2009; Roberts, O'Donnell, & Robins, 2004; Yang, Read, & Miller, 2009).

The most important characteristic of the goal is its contextual nature; it is an integral unit of the 'person-in-situation' description that determines his/her association with the context.

Situations are still poorly studied and are 'elusive' objects of psychological research. The need to take into account situations and contexts in the study of psychological phenomenology is confronted with some methodological difficulties associated with the absence of an appropriate language to describe situations (Rauthmann & Sherman, 2018; Rauthmann, Sherman, & Funder, 2015).

Today, research interest is shifting to the field of exploring a wide range of activities in life contexts – determining life strategies, life choices, building life scenarios, etc. Therefore, the focus is on phenomena such as life plans, life tasks and goals.

The goal- and situation-related determination of human behavior has become the **subject** of our theoretical analysis, the search for methodological solutions that meet modern methodological concepts, and the empirical research study. The starting point for our study is the concept of the contextual nature of human goals, which forms the basis of research objectives and hypotheses. The main **objectives** of the study were

related to (1) theoretical analysis of the goal- and situation-related determination of human behavior and conceptualization of ideas about the contextual nature of goals; (2) the creation of methodological tools to correlate an individual's life goals with his/her assessment of the possibilities and limitations of the life situation, his/her ideas about the future, past experience of successful or unsuccessful realization of life goals; and (3) empirical verification of the proposed conceptualization of the contextual nature of goals.

The empirical study was based on **hypotheses** derived from the notion of the contextual nature of goals. Therefore, we assume that goal setting in different spheres of a person's life is related to his/her assessment of the possibilities or limitations of the life situation, its compliance with his/her expectations and plans in the past, his/her satisfaction with its implementation in these spheres, and readiness for changes to achieve goals.

## Methods

The overall aim of the research project, related to the development of theoretical ideas about the contextual nature of goal setting, was to solve theoretical, methodological, and empirical research tasks, including the development of diagnostic tools.

When developing diagnostic tools, we have taken into account the fact that the goals set by individuals in the main spheres of their lives are related to the opportunities to achieve them in specific situations. The experience of success in individual goal-achievement was studied from two perspectives: (1) satisfaction with self-fulfillment in the main spheres of life and (2) compliance between achievements and past expectations. The importance of goals depends on what individuals are ready to do to achieve them, to what extent they are ready to change their life situations or to change themselves.

The parameters for describing goals were specified in terms of the main important spheres of human life identified in previous studies on individual life scenarios and life models. The main spheres included professional and financial ones, the sphere of interpersonal relations and the personal sphere related to an individual's aspirations for self-development, personal growth, etc. (Kostromina, Grishina, Moskvicheva, & Zinovyeva 2021). In accordance with these main spheres of life, individuals' goals were specified in the following formulations: (1) "having a good job, becoming a professional, achieving a high status"; (2) "having financial security, prosperity, high financial status, and living conditions", (3) "having a good family, children, and close friends", (4) "becoming a more harmonious person, expanding individual outlook, engaging in self-education, self-improvement, and self-care".

In a specially designed questionnaire, the following items have been recorded: (1) personal relevance of goals formulated, (2) satisfaction with their implementation in the main spheres of life, (3) compatibility between the expectations of the past and the current

## GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY, PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

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life situation and achievements in certain spheres, (4) assessment of the opportunities that the current life situation provides to achieve these goals, and (5) willingness to change life situation and self-change in order to achieve the goals facing the person. A total of 40 items were included in the questionnaire.

For the online survey on the Google Forms platform, we included the authors' questionnaire, the Potential for Self-change questionnaire (V. R. Manukyan, I. R. Murtazina, & N. V. Grishina), the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI), Test of Existential Motivations by A. Längle. With these diagnostic tools, we examined theoretically predictable relationships with the indicators of the questionnaire we developed.

The methodology and justification of the project were approved by the St. Petersburg Psychological Society Ethics Committee (report No. 17 of 09/22/2022).

The empirical study was conducted between October and December 2022. The total sample size was 350 subjects. Young people took part in the survey (84.8 % aged 17 to 25); 63.8 % of subjects studied, 23.6 % – studied and worked; 45.9 % females, and 53.8 % females). We chose the youth sample because the tasks of goal setting and making plans for the future are particularly relevant at the young age.

The data collection was carried out using the Google Forms platform; the average time for completing the survey form was 35 minutes. The statistical processing was performed using the licensed IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0 statistical software package.

## Results

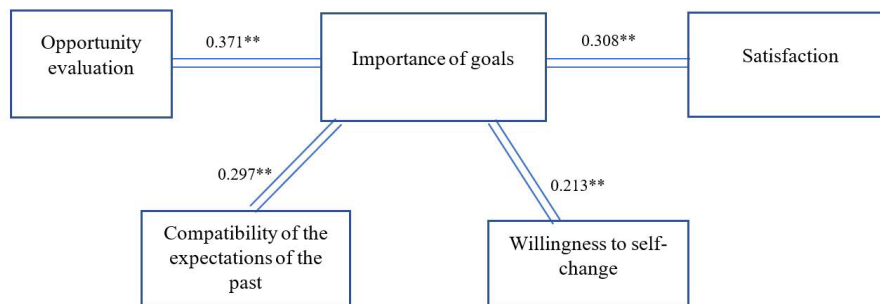
The theoretical model of goal setting, according to which goals should be studied in relation to the context of life (the opportunities and limitations of life situations) and the context of time (the past experience and ideas about the future), was confirmed by identifying relationships between the importance of individual goals in different spheres of life and the specified parameters of life and time contexts.

The importance of goals in the professional sphere ("having a good job, becoming a professional, achieving a high status") had significant positive relationships (no significant negative relationships were found in any of the correlation matrices described) with the assessment of opportunities provided by the current life situation to achieve these goals (0.371); with satisfaction with self-actualization in these spheres (0.308); compatibility between the expectations of the past and the current life situation and achievements in this sphere (0.297); and with willingness to self-change in order to achieve goals (0.213) (Fig. 1).

The importance of goals in the sphere of relations ("having a good family, children, and close friends") had significant positive relationships with willingness to change the life situation (0.265) and self-change in order to achieve goals (0.236); with evaluation of opportunities offered by current life situation to achieve these goals (0.157); and with satisfaction with current self-actualization in this sphere (0.138).

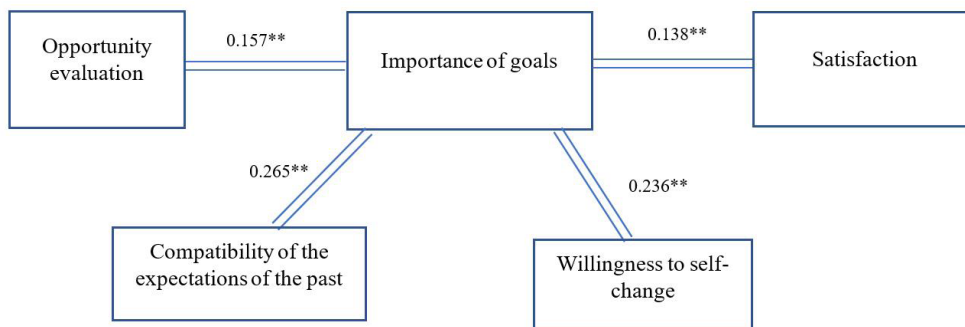
**Figure 1**

*Correlation pleiades in the professional sphere (significant positive relationships \*\*  $p < 0.001$ )*



**Figure 2**

*Correlation pleiades in the sphere of relations (significant positive relationships \*\*  $p < 0.001$ )*



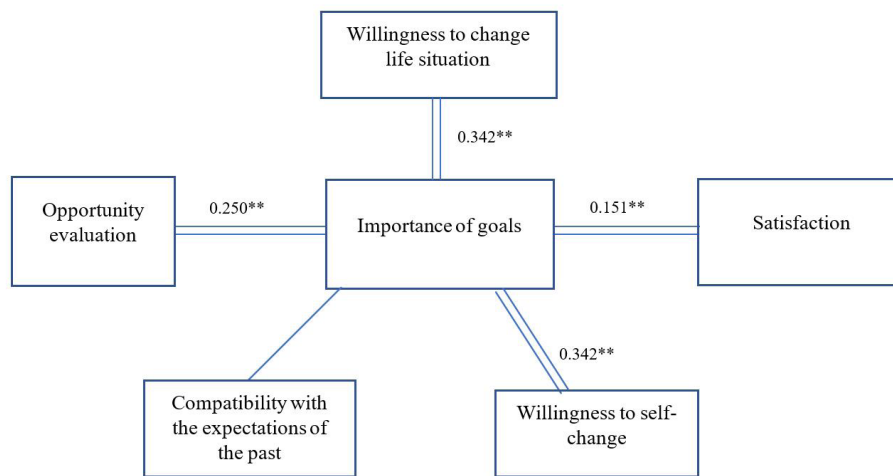
The importance of goals in the sphere of self-development, personal sphere ("becoming a more harmonious person, expanding individual outlook, engaging in self-education, self-improvement, and self-care") had significant positive relationships with willingness to change the life situation (0.342) and self-change in order to achieve

GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY, PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

goals (0.342); the assessment of opportunities offered by current life situation to achieve these goals (0.250); satisfaction with current self-actualization in this sphere (0.151); and compatibility between the expectations of the past and the current life situation and achievements in this sphere (0.137).

**Figure 3**

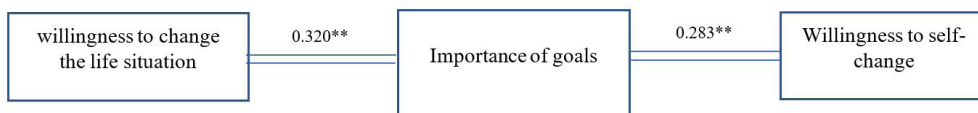
*Correlation pleiades in the sphere of self-development (significant positive relationships \* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.001$ )*



The importance of goals in the financial sphere (“having financial security, prosperity, high financial status, and living conditions”) had only two significant positive correlations – with willingness to change the life situation (0.320) and self-change in order to achieve goals (0.283).

**Figure 4**

*Correlation pleiades in the financial sphere (significant positive relationships \*\* $p < 0.001$ )*



Thus, the correlations between various parameters for assessing goal-related regulation confirmed their significance for its general understanding.

We carried out a factor analysis of the items of the diagnostic tools and variables of the questionnaire developed by us. Following the factor analysis (the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.835, Bartlett's sphericity criterion  $p < 0.001$ , which indicates the adequacy of factor analysis) using principal components analysis with varimax rotation (the rotation converged in 10 iterations) with Kaiser normalization, 11 factors were obtained that explain 60.9 % variance. The first four factors are quite consistent with each other and their understanding was the basis for data analysis (Table 1). Cronbach's alpha 0.81; 0.756; 0.738; 0.768 respectively. The remaining factors are sufficiently consistent with each other ( $\alpha = 0.524$  to  $\alpha = 0.666$ ).

**Table 1**

*Matrix of the components of the first four factors (N = 350)*

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
To what extent do your current professional activities (or studies, if you still study) open opportunities to achieve this goal? (professional sphere)	0.747			
To what extent does your current work (or future work, if you still study) provide opportunities to achieve this goal? (financial sphere)	0.745			
To what extent are you satisfied with your professional activities (work or study), how interesting and promising is it for you?	0.629			
To what extent does your current life situation (free time, necessary funds, etc.) and motivation (self-improvement, organization, etc.) provide opportunities to achieve this goal?	0.529			



GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY, PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
To what extent does your current life situation enable you to realize yourself, your potential, and your opportunities?	0.456			
To what extent are you now satisfied with your ability to develop and improve yourself?	0.383			
To what extent does your current life situation correspond to your past expectations and plans? (sphere of relations)		0.833		
To what extent does the person you are today meet your expectations of yourself in the past? (sphere of relations)		0.788		
To what extent are you satisfied with your relations with others today? (sphere of relations)		0.632		
To what extent does your current life situation correspond to your past expectations and plans? (financial sphere)			0.855	
To what extent does the person you are today meet your expectations of yourself in the past? (financial sphere)			0.838	

GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY, PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
To what extent are you satisfied with your current financial situation (to what extent can it satisfy your needs)?			0.786	
To what extent does the person you are today meet your expectations of yourself in the past? (professional sphere)				0.736
To what extent does your current life situation correspond to your past expectations and plans? (professional sphere)				0.717
To what extent does the person you are today meet your expectations of yourself in the past? (sphere of self-improvement)				0.510
Expectations and plans of the past in terms of the professional sphere				0.473
Looking back, do you think your professional status is determined by your choices, interests, and personality? (professional sphere)				0.413
Looking back, do you think your financial situation is determined by your choices, interests, and personality?			0.425	
To what extent does your current life situation correspond to your past expectations and plans? (sphere of self-improvement)				0.468

#### GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY, PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

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*The first factor* represents the extent to which a person considers his/her current situation to open opportunities for him/her to achieve goals in a particular sphere of life and can be defined as the '**window of opportunities**'. Its assessment concerned three of the four spheres of life – professional activity, self-improvement, financial sphere (despite the fact that the questions for each sphere of life were divided into different blocks of the questionnaire). The same factor included the current satisfaction of respondents with the first two spheres, their interest in them and assessment of their prospects for themselves. Therefore, satisfaction with the current situation is linked to a vision of this situation in the future. This factor integrates individuals' assessment of current situations in various spheres, enabling them to realize themselves, their potential, and future opportunities.

*The second factor* combines the answers to questions related to the sphere of relations, connecting two contexts – the image of the situation and self-image in it: the compatibility between the current situation and the expectations and plans of the past and the compatibility between the self in the present and self-expectations in the past; satisfaction with this situation in the present. In this factor, the influence of the time coordinate was clearly manifested. The assessment of satisfaction with the current situation and with self is closely related to the plans and expectations of the past.

*The third factor*, in structure, is similar to the previous one, as a specific sphere of life is again a unifying principle – material wealth. Its structure is the compatibility between the current situation and the expectations and plans of the past and the compatibility between what "You are now" and self-expectations in the past. This structure shows that these two components are integrated in individual representations. We can assume that this integration involves an emotional-evaluative component, as this factor also included satisfaction with the financial situation in the present. Compared to the second factor, the respondents perceive the current financial situation as linked to their previous choices and interests.

*The fourth factor* united the professional sphere and the sphere of self-improvement. The structure of associations in these two spheres repeats the structure of the previous two factors – the correspondence of the current situation in the sphere of profession / self-improvement to the expectations and plans of the past, as well as the correspondence of what "I am now" to self-expectations in the past. This structure shows again the interdependence of these images. In the professional sphere, we added the following judgment: "Looking back, do you think your professional status is determined by your choices, interests, and personality?"

The relationship between identified factors and personality questionnaires data was important for understanding the results obtained.

The use of the Test for Existential Motivations by A. Längle was determined by the theoretical foundations of our study, according to which the understanding of goals requires their consideration in a broad life context that goes beyond the actual life situation, and their association with the general attitude of a person to life. According to A. Längle, the first fundamental existential motivation is associated with the acceptance of the world, trust in it and willingness to find many supports in the world, including spiritual ones. The second fundamental existential motivation is related to the value of life, the third one – to the development of self-worth, self-acceptance, the fourth one – to meanings of activity and creation (Längle, Ukolova, & Shumskii, 2014). Table 2 shows their correlations with the selected factors.

**Table 2**

*Existential motivations, correlations with the questionnaire factors*

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
EM1	0.370**	0.289**	0.229**	0.205**
EM2	0.315*	0.359**	0.170**	0.215**
EM3	0.264**	0.251**	–	0.174**
EM4	0.461**	0.203**	0.226**	0.333**

*Note:* \*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

The first EM, associated with the world acceptance and support, is most pronounced in opportunity evaluation and (factor 1) in the sphere of relations (factor 2). The value of life (EM2) is most closely associated with the sphere of relations (factor 2) and with individual possibilities in it (factor 1). EM3 (individual self-worth) has the lowest correlation with assessments of the current situation, expectations of the past, and other items of

GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY, PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

our survey, which may be explained by the youth composition of the sample. Finally, the fourth fundamental motivation, EM4, which, according to A. Längle is related to meanings and, in terms of content, to the value of the future, is expectedly most closely associated with the opportunities assessed by a person (factor 1).

The data obtained show that all factors show significant correlations with individual existential motivations. The third factor related to the financial sphere of life has the lowest associations with them; the first factor, which we designate as the 'window of opportunities', is most associated with them. At the same time, it is this factor that positively correlates with the scales of the Potential for Self-change questionnaire, including the "need for self-change" as a desire for novelty, diversity, and focus on personal growth ("I want to change") ( $r = 0.262, p < 0.01$ ); "ability to conscious self-change" – the ability to conscious self-improvement, the ability to systematically bring plans to life ("it is necessary to change") ( $r = 0.327, p < 0.01$ ); "believe in the possibility of self-change" – individuals' ideas about the possibility of consciously changing their character and behavior during life ( $r = 0.259, p < 0.01$ ); with a general indicator of the potential for self-change  $r = 0.320$  ( $p < 0.01$ ). Other factors do not reveal the association between the potential for self-change, or these associations are weak.

The findings obtained emphasize the space-time coordinates for goal setting, including the assessment of the current situation, future planning and the role of expectations of the past. The inclusion of these coordinates in the goal-related study determined the use of the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory in our study. Table 3 shows the relationship between the questionnaire scales and the goal setting factors we have identified.

**Table 3**

*Correlations between the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory and goal setting factors*

Time perspective indicators	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
"Negative past"	-0.229**	-0.287**	-0.168**	-0.277**
"Hedonistic present"	-0.194**			-0.212**

GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY, PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

Time perspective indicators	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
"Future"	0.194**			0.241**
"Fatalistic present"	-0.259**	-0.140**		-0.257**
"Positive past"	-	0.110*		0.215**

**Note:** \*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

The correlation of time perspective components with factor 1 and factor 4 is the most important.

The first of them, 'window of opportunities', implies an active attitude toward time; the present and the future are not perceived fatalistically, while the orientation toward hedonism in the current situation is not accepted. Factor 4 brings us back to the professional sphere and also adds the sphere of self-improvement. This factor, like the first one, has significant positive correlations with the future, negative ones with hedonistic and fatalistic attitudes toward the present. Unlike the first factor, however, in the self-improvement factor, a person relies on a positive past.

With respect to the other results of the study that are not reflected in the data described, we should point out the tendency, as shown in the responses of participants in the study, to evaluate their life situation as a result of their own choices of life, their own contributions (which is consistent with the result of the rejection of fatalist and hedonistic attitudes previously mentioned). At the same time, the respondents' views are typical of all four spheres of life studied and allow us to evaluate them as a general attitude to life.

Another result that enables us to draw a similar conclusion is the willingness indicated by the respondents to self-change to expand the opportunities for progress in all major spheres of life activity: profession, finance, relations, and self-development. However, this willingness to change has not been linked to the willingness to change the situation of life.

## Discussion

The empirical research aimed to study individual goals in a life context, in relation to the opportunities and limitations of the current life situation, in a time context, in relation to expectations and plans of the past, their success or failure in implementation.

The starting point of our approach to analyzing goal-related determination is consistent with the ideas of classical Russian science on the determination of human activity, especially the works of N. A. Bernstein and his ideas of a "model of the necessary future" (Bernstein, 1990) and I. M. Feigenberg and the concept of "probabilistic forecasting" (Feigenberg, 2011). The "model of the necessary future" is a model, a project that reflects an individual's future plans and intentions. The concept of "probabilistic forecasting" focuses on the correlation with previous experiences, actions in similar situations. These concepts describe the determination of human activity over a wide range of periods in relation to individual future goals and objectives, and the success of its implementation in the past.

The logical continuation of this statement is the hypothesis of the contextual nature of goal setting and the need to study human goals in spatial and temporal contexts.

The results of empirical research fully confirm the legitimacy of this approach.

Goal setting in the professional sphere and self-development sphere was closely related to the assessment of the possibilities offered by the individual situation in life, satisfaction with self-actualization in these spheres, the willingness to change to achieve individual goals, the compatibility between the current life situation and his/her expectations and plans in the past; in the self-development sphere, the willingness to change the situation in life is added to this (Fig. 1, 3). The structure of factors describing goal setting in the sphere of relations also includes an individual's assessment of opportunities provided by his/her life situation, satisfaction with self-actualization in this sphere, as well as readiness to change the life situation and self-change (Fig. 2). Significant differences relate to the financial sphere associated with financial problems and well-being. Here the importance of the goals set for a person is only associated with the recognition of the need for changes – individual changes and changes in the situation of life (Fig. 4).

The analysis of factors confirmed the importance of a person's abilities in setting and achieving goals. The most important factor that describes the collected empirical data has been described by us as the '*window of opportunities*' because it integrates individuals' assessments of their situation in different spheres of life, the assessment of how much it enables them to realize themselves, their capabilities, and their potential.

This factor is the most general as it unites all the main spheres of the situation of life. Another factor combines the professional sphere with the self-improvement sphere and can be called "self-development goals".

The other two factors are organized around different spheres of life – the sphere of relations and the financial sphere.

A deeper understanding of the nature of the selected factors was achieved by studying their relationship with psychological tests that take into account the context of variables. The Test of Existential Motivation by A. Längle describes an individual's existential motivations implemented in a life context. The factors identified in our empirical study found significant associations with existential motivations: the financial sphere is the least associated with them, which is quite understandable; the 'window of opportunities' factor is the most associated. Here, the most obvious is the human desire for creation (EM4), which is meaningful and value-related, and based on accepting the world (EM1). Complementing the understanding of the nature of this factor is its relationship to the scales of the potential for self-changing – the need for self-changing, the ability to change consciously, and the belief in its potential. These data demonstrate the 'inscription' of individual goals in a broad context of life, the context of an individual's relationship with the world.

The inclusion of the Time Perspective Inventory in the study, which takes into account the time context of goal setting, was also justified. A potentially negative role in goal setting – setting goals and striving to achieve them – can be played by hedonistic and fatalistic attitudes; a positive role can be played by orientation toward the future. The experience of the past can have a vague influence: positive experiences can be supportive of an individual's current plans, but neutral or negative assessments of past experiences can stimulate an individual's desire to use them as a resource for further development.

Another confirmation, albeit indirect, of the domination of personal attitudes over situational factors was demonstrated by the fact that the willingness of an individual to self-change in order to expand his/her abilities, as a personal attitude, was a 'cross-cutting' characteristic, which penetrates various spheres of human life, regardless of their characteristics.

We can add that the readiness to self-change was not related to the readiness to change the situation of life. Our respondents distinguished between these two very different types of changes. This result is consistent with our previous studies and confirms their independent representation in study design.

The thesis on the need for contextual study of psychological phenomena as a reaction to limited and inconsistent empirical data obtained as a result of the decontextualized



## GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY, PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

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nature of the research conducted is actively supported by modern personality psychology. Attempts are being made to create research solutions that can take into account the influence of the context in one way or another. Thus, K. Geukes and his colleagues propose an integrated approach to obtaining information about the individual in the context and information about the context itself. The respondent is given a list of situations from which he/she must choose the one that best describes the context in which he/she is currently. Information on a 'contextualized' individual refers to his/her self-assessment, assessment of his/her condition and his/her behavior in a particular context (Geukes et al., 2017). Such research decisions are very typical of foreign personality psychology, and we believe that these efforts are rather 'mechanical' attempts to connect individuals and the context.

At the same time, the idea of an inseparable link between an individual and the space of his/her existence has existed in psychology since K. Lewin's concept of life space and the methodological task he set up to find a language for the general description of an individual and a situation.

Among other human activity regulators, the specific feature of the goal parameter lies in the direct relationship between the goals and the situation, the context in which they are implemented. An individual sets specific tasks or long-term goals within the framework of a specific situation of his/her activity or, more broadly, within the framework of his/her life situation. Consequently, the objectives are related to the possibilities and constraints of the situation in which they must be realized (Argyle, Furnham, & Graham, 1981; Grant & Dweck, 1999; Kruglanski, Chernikova, Rosenzweig, & Kopetz, 2014; Pervin, 1992; Yang, Read, & Miller, 2009, etc.). It is stressed that circumstances not only provide (or do not provide) opportunities to meet human needs and motivations, but that the perception of a situation itself can reflect those motivations (Morse et al., 2015). The opportunities for achieving goals therefore determine the initial decisions of individuals (enter or avoid situations) and the nature of their interaction with the situation (Diekman, Joshi, & Benson-Greenwald, 2020). As has already been noted, the most important feature of the goal is its contextual nature. This explains in large part the intensification of research on the goal concept in modern psychology, in which recent criticisms of research decontextualization and empirical data have become more and more pronounced (Heller, Watson, Komar, Min, & Perunovic, 2007, etc.).

The advantages of the methodological solution we use in empirical research are fundamentally different approaches to applying the contextual principle. It is not only the determination of variations of the observed phenomena depending on a particular context, but also the revelation of the context of the phenomena themselves. Thus, the

demonstration of this principle in the example of goal setting clearly distinguishes our approach to the study of goal setting.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the idea of human personality level structures and the correlation between personality phenomenology and different contexts of life activity (Grishina, Kostromina, & Mironenko, 2018), we proposed the level-based concept of the goal-related regulation of human activity (Grishina, 2023).

The study was based on a goal setting process model, based on the idea of the contextual nature of goals, which means that spatial-temporal characteristics must be taken into account when examining goals. The spatial context means considering specific situations in a broader format of life situations, while the temporal context means taking into account the coordinates of the time perspective of the past, present and future, as well as their role in establishing current objectives and goals in life.

The results confirmed the appropriateness and effectiveness of this method, which enables us to see the complexity of individuals' life goals in relation to their assessments of their real abilities, the level of their satisfaction with current achievements, their compatibility with past expectations, and their willingness to changes to achieve their goals. In this complex process of interaction and mutual influence of various factors, individuals' goals crystallize and direct their vital activity.

The approach we have proposed has a heuristic potential and enables us to view the prospects for further research, particularly the need to deepen and expand the issue in order to find answers to questions that are behind the visions of an individual's life situation, which enables him/her to see new opportunities or limitations that have been found to have a significant impact on individuals' life plans and life goals.

### **Research limitations**

The limitations of the study include the young age of the respondents, and we have deliberately implemented it, as setting life plans and goals is particularly relevant at the age of youth. At the same time, it is clear that the study of goal setting factors in middle- and upper-aged groups can provide different structures of the factors and different impacts on individual goals.

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**Nataliya Vladimirovna Grishina** developed the research concept and methodology, analyzed and interpreted the results, and prepared and edited the text of the manuscript.

**Marina Olegovna Avanesyan** developed the research methodology, analyzed and interpreted the results, and prepared and edited the text of the manuscript.

**Makarova Mariya Vladimirovna** collected the data, performed statistical data analysis, and edited the text of the manuscript.

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## **Conflict of Interest Information**

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.