

Improving International Business Practicum Education: Entrepreneurial Experiential Goal Setting, Weekly Goal Tracking, and Environmental Sustainability Focus

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Abstract. An alarm has been raised that university students are now more disengaged, disinterested, and dispassionate due to digital distractions. Goal setting and experiential practicum classes have each been argued to be a part of a solution. But existing results are mixed. We propose that combining masterly-focused student entrepreneurial experiential project goal setting with weekly goal-tracking reports results in a greater likelihood of student goal attainment. We also propose that this result is more likely when the project is related to environmental sustainability. We test these hypotheses using a practicum class in a business school at a four-year university located in the Pacific Isles that has students enrolled from many countries. Analysis indicates the tracking percentage significantly increases goal achievement probability. The results do not support gains due to SMART goal aspects of being measurable, attainable, and relevant. However, a focus on sustainability-related goals does have a statistically significant effect.

Keywords: environmental sustainability business education, mastery goal setting, goal tracking, student entrepreneurship, experiential learning, growth mindset, digital distraction, quality education.

1. Introduction

Educators are seeking methods to improve student environmental sustainability education at institutions of higher education (Fraser, Gupta & Krasny 2015), which is particularly of value for business students (Edwards *et al.* 2020),

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especially in internationally acclaimed higher education institutions (Glassman & Opengart 2016; Nemetz 2004; Rondinelli 2004); this interest is consistent with the aims of JIBE (JIBE 2024). Not surprisingly, over the last several years, many business schools across countries have added practicum classes and/or degree capstone classes that permit experiential learning of environmental sustainability topics. While these experiential learning classes are intended to be more engaging, there is however simultaneous growing concern regarding digital distraction among students at universities making these experiential learning experiences less effective (e.g., Flanigan & Babchuk 2022). Digital distraction refers to the diversion of attention away from a primary task and towards smartphones, tables, laptops, and similar “digital” technologies. Common examples of digital distractions would include checking social media, texting, browsing websites and videos, and gaming. Digital distraction can also include attempts at work-related multitasking: checking emails and messaging systems/chats, working on documents, slides, or spreadsheets, or reading/preparing for later meetings, classes, or projects instead of just focusing on the primary task. As stated by Liu (2022, p. 1201), “The extent of digital distraction among college students it found is alarming.” Flanigan and Babchuk (2022, p. 352) observe that “instructors regularly encounter student digital distraction during class.” Multiple reasons, such as “impulsiveness, Internet addiction, and habitual technology use” exist for students engaging in digital distraction (Chen, Nath, & Tang 2020, p. 1). Many other research studies call attention to this widespread, growing problem of digital distraction (e.g., Batch *et al.* 2021; Gingerich & Lineweaver 2014; Jamet *et al.* 2020; Parry & le Roux 2018; Ravizza *et al.* 2017; Wammes *et al.* 2019). Flanigan *et al.* (2023) note that while most instructors are aware of the problem, “many college level instructors are hesitant to address off-task device use in the classroom because they are worried that doing so will alienate students.” Flanigan *et al.* (2023) outline how when instructors attempt to restrict student usage of mobile devices (digital distraction prevention) the students often perceive the restrictions as a threat to their need for autonomy. This should not be surprising, given that Gen Z is particularly, as a group, more interested in feeling empowered and having autonomy in their lives, including in their learning (Averbook 2023; Cooper & Frey 2021; Ernst & Young 2023; Kim *et al.* 2022; Peterson 2023; Pradhan *et al.* 2023; Schroth 2019). Autonomy is one of the five significant emotional factors of human motivation according to neuroscience research (Rock, 2008; Rock & Cox, 2012). And autonomy’s importance has been shown to hold true in both workplace (Hansen *et al.* 2022) and educational (Tennakoon *et al.* 2023) settings. Thus, what is needed, perhaps, are interventions that preserve or even enhance a sense of student autonomy and empowerment.

We propose in this research that one autonomy improvement for business students could be the implementation in practicum, capstone, and other classes of student entrepreneurial experiential goal setting combined with weekly goal tracking reports across the semester. There is great interest in understanding the

role of experiential learning in business classes (Crosina *et al.* 2023; Glassman & Opengart 2016). We believe that when students in business classes (1) identify self-chosen experiential learning goals for (2) new business ideas/ventures of their choice, the students can gain greater sense of control, autonomy, self-awareness, self-regulation, resilience, and purpose, which translates into gaining greater personal responsibility for their own learning, becoming more aware of their own academic performance, and thus decreasing the problems associated with digital distraction noted in the introduction. However, we believe that stating goals alone are not enough; we posit that (3) required weekly tracking reports of progress toward the goal could result in metacognitive skills that help them better tackle the challenges associated with the set goal and with other goals and be able to better manage how much time and other resources are needed so waste of time and resources is minimized. And we believe the effects are stronger when (4) the students self-select goals relate to environmental sustainability over regular business metrics or personal growth goals. This last idea is very important given that “despite the importance of the strong sustainability paradigm to address or solve global sustainability challenges, the concept has not been widely incorporated into human actions and educational processes” (Quintero-Angel, Duque-Nivia, & Molina-Gómez 2023, p. 1).

This paper contributes examination of the research hypothesis that the combination of experiential, mastery-oriented goal setting and regularly occurring goal tracking within classes over a semester increases student engagement resulting in a greater likelihood of project goal attainment. We also hypothesize that likelihood of goal attainment due to goal setting and tracking is amplified even more when the project is related to sustainability topics. In the next sections, we first briefly review the concepts of goal orientation theory, outlining the distinction between goal setting and goal tracking activities. We then describe an experiment involving the combination of student experiential related goal setting and goal tracking for a semester long project in a business practicum course to improve student engagement. We interpret the results of binary regression analyses focused on the outcome of project goal attainment. The regression results do support the two proposed effects. Last, we outline several ways in which instructors can improve the sustainability (improving quality while conserving time/resources) of goal-tracking class exercises for *both* students and the instructors, as well as implications for future research and educational practice.

2. Literature

The systematic set of ideas that make up ‘goal orientation theory’ (Ames 1992a, 1992b; Dweck 1986; Maehr 1984; Nicholls 1984) are that, first, there are two main categories of goal orientations: (a) mastery goals and (b) performance goals.