

# Simply the Best: Using Regulatory Focus and Mode to Reconceptualize Maximization

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Introduction

**Conceptual Issues:**

- Maximizing was originally defined as the tendency to evaluate all options closely and select the *best* one (Schwarz et al., 2002)
- Three components of maximizing have been identified: high standards (HS), alternative search (AS), and decision difficulty (DD; Nenkov et al., 2008)
- However, researchers have not agreed on which of these components best conceptualize what maximizing really is (e.g., Diab, Gillespie, & Highhouse, 2008; Rim et al., 2011)
- We propose that these “components” are best conceptualized as the following:
  - High Standards (HS): The *goal* of maximizers, i.e. what maximizing *is*
  - Alternative Search (AS): One *strategy* that maximizers may use
  - Decision Difficulty: (DD) One possible *outcome* that maximizers may experience
- We also propose that examining motivational factors such as regulatory focus (Higgins, 1997) and regulatory mode (Higgins, Kruglanski, & Pierro, 2003) will provide motivational profiles that delineate adaptive or maladaptive forms of maximization

**Regulatory focus and regulatory mode:**

- Regulatory focus theory proposes two complementary motivational systems: promotion and prevention focus

Promotion focus	Concerned with advancement goals, sensitive to presence and absence of gains
Prevention focus	Concerned with security/safety goals, sensitive to presence and absence of losses

- Regulatory mode theory distinguishes between locomotion and assessment as two basic components of self-regulation

Locomotion	Concerned with (psychological) movement from end state to end state
Assessment	Concerned with evaluating and comparing entities, such as goals or means

- Promotion focus' concern with gains and advancement suggests that they should have high standards to achieve; however, their success at self-regulating should lead to low decision difficulty and frustration
- Assessment's concern with evaluation and comparison seems very close to the original conceptualization of maximizing, with high standards and evaluation of alternatives leading to difficulty with decision-making

Hypotheses

- Individuals high in assessment mode should report high DD, as well as high frustration on an actual decision task
- Individuals high in promotion focus should report high HS, but low DD, and low frustration on a decision task
- Prevention focus and locomotion mode should not be associated with any components of maximizing, and should lead to low frustration on a decision task

Study 1

**Participants:**

- 336 participants from Mechanical Turk (147 women, 44%)
- Age: range 18 to 72,  $M = 33.70$ ,  $SD = 12.09$
- Race: 64% White, 7% Black, 29% Other

**Method:**

- Participants completed four scales:
  - Regulatory Focus Questionnaire ( $\alpha = .74$ ; Higgins et al., 2001)
  - Regulatory Mode Questionnaire ( $\alpha = .81$ ; Kruglanski et al., 2000)
  - Maximization Scale (MS;  $\alpha = .66$ ; Schwartz et al., 2002)
  - Maximizing Tendency Scale (MTS;  $\alpha = .86$ ; Diab et al., 2008)

Results:

**Table 1. Regression coefficients of motivational processes predicting maximizing components**

( $\beta$ )	MS-HS	MS-AS	MS-DD	MTS
Promotion	<b>.34</b>	<b>-.12</b>	<b>-.31</b>	<b>.29</b>
Prevention	-.01	<b>-.21</b>	-.07	.01
Locomotion	<b>.48</b>	< .01	<b>-.30</b>	<b>.46</b>
Assessment	<b>.20</b>	<b>.34</b>	<b>.24</b>	<b>.26</b>

- Promotion focus, locomotion, and assessment were positively associated with high standards (and MTS)
- Only assessment was positively correlated with alternative search, whereas promotion and prevention focus were negatively correlated with alternative search
- Only assessment was positively correlated with decision difficulty, whereas promotion focus and locomotion were negatively correlated with decision difficulty
- In summary:* Promotion, locomotion, and assessment all show indications of having high standards; however, only people high in assessment seem to experience negative effects (DD) from their maximizing tendencies

Study 2

**Participants:**

- 108 online participants from University of Waterloo (70 women, 65%)
- Age: range 18 to 45,  $M = 21.38$ ,  $SD = 3.94$
- Race: 45% Asian, 26% White, 29% Other

**Method:**

- Participants completed same four scales as in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .65$  to .85)
- Engaged in product choice task, selecting one car they wished to purchase from a table displaying several characteristics of each car
- Afterward, were asked how much frustration they experienced as a result of the decision

**Results:**

- High AS was associated with high DD,  $\beta = .50$ ,  $p < .001$ ; whereas HS was not associated with DD,  $\beta = -.10$ ,  $p = .24$
- Similarly, high AS was associated with high frustration on the task,  $\beta = .28$ ,  $p = .01$ ; whereas HS was not associated with frustration,  $\beta = -.13$ ,  $p = .19$
- Promotion focus was associated with *lower* frustration on the task,  $\beta = -.28$ ,  $p = .01$ ; while assessment mode was associated with *higher* frustration,  $\beta = .22$ ,  $p = .03$
- Prevention focus and locomotion mode were not associated with frustration ( $ps > .23$ )

- Bootstrapping analysis with 5000 samples was used to estimate indirect effects of each motivational process through HS and AS (see Figure 1 and Table 2)

**Figure 1. Path diagram for mediational analyses**

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graph LR; MP[Motivational process] --> HS[High Standards]; MP --> AS[Alternative Search]; MP --> F[Frustration]; HS --> F; AS --> F
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**Table 2. Indirect effects of motivational processes on frustration, with maximizing components as mediators**

( $\beta$ )	MS-HS	MS-AS
Promotion	-.06	<b>-.14</b>
Prevention	< .01	<b>-.14</b>
Locomotion	-.15	.01
Assessment	-.06	<b>.19</b>

Conclusions

- Promotion focus and locomotion mode were positively associated with some form of maximizing (HS), but they did not also experience negative outcomes such as decision difficulty or frustration on a choice task
- Assessment mode was positively associated with all three components of maximizing, and was the only motivational process to be associated with higher frustration on the choice task
- The negative association of promotion focus and positive association of assessment mode on frustration were mediated by alternative search strategies, suggesting that alternative search may be particularly detrimental as a maximizing strategy

Implications

- This research speaks to the importance of examining motivational antecedents of maximization, as a way of explaining why some individuals maximize whereas others satisfice
- This also may help to resolve the conceptual issues surrounding maximization as a construct; if different motivational profiles reveal adaptive and maladaptive forms of maximization, it may clarify how these “components” of maximizing fit together
- Conceptualizing alternative search as one possible strategy maximizers may use opens the door for further research on other potential strategies, some of which may be more adaptive than others

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