

In times of uncertainty and transition, it is easy to get absorbed into worrying about our careers and forgetting about other aspects of our lives. Here, we introduce to you the concept of Futureselves that will keep your focus on a **long-term, future-focused perspective** to develop yourself holistically, maintain your motivation during difficult times, and foster happiness and wellbeing.



Futureselves

WHAT IS FUTURESELVES

Futureselves are the cognitive representations of what we believe we are hopeful or fearful of becoming in the future. These selves are neurologically coded and encapsulate multiple components of our self-identity. The ability to simulate Futureselves is an evolutionary adaption that can be harnessed to increase wellbeing and promote positive self-development.

HOW FUTURESELVES WORK

- Futureselves link directly to a person's thinking, decision making, behaviour, motivation and performance.
- We are motivated both by the goal to achieve what we want as well as avoid what we fear.
- To create goal states, we need to understand both our Futureselves as well as how likely we think those selves will be realised.
- Your Futureselves can be classified into four categories: Opportunities, Dreams, Threats or Dreads.
- By creating a clear picture of the future you want to achieve or avoid, you will be motivated to set and pursue goals to drive you towards the 'selves' that you want to achieve and avoid the 'selves' that you fear, and your belief around the likelihood of these Futureselves being realised.

A Brief History

Futureselves is based on the theory of possible selves¹, a psychological concept that concerns the different words, images, and senses that we have for ourselves.

Possible selves represent individuals' ideas of their hopes, fears, goals and threats, which serve as incentives for future behaviour.

Futureselves integrates the possible selves theory as well as latest research in neuroscience as a unified theory that can be applied to promote self-development and wellbeing.

OPRA won the internationally acclaimed Brandon Hall Award 2019 for Best Advance in Career Management and Planning Technology



ABOUT OPRA

OPRA Psychology was established in 1997 and is a specialist organisational psychology consultancy.

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WHY FUTURESELVES?

We all think about ourselves in terms of multiple aspects across different domains, e.g. a self that is represented by our career, family/friends, health, and interests/hobbies. The key to Futureselves is that it deals with your whole person, focusing not just on your career but also on these other domains².

Research suggests that having more aspects to yourself and not having your identity tied only to one role can serve as a buffer to stress and negative events and increase well-being³. Essentially, we can make ourselves less vulnerable to stressful events by having a richer and more diverse sense of self that we can draw on in times of crisis.

For example, following a negative event such as losing a job, by having other aspects of self that is tied to your identity, e.g. I'm also a loving father/husband/son, who is also an avid reader or have a keen interest in fitness, you are more likely to be able to maintain a positive outlook about some of these aspects, which act as a buffer against the negative event, reducing its impact on your wellbeing.

FUTURESELVES AND GOAL SETTING

Goals help us to focus our attention and efforts toward a specific outcome, and in this case, outcomes that bring us closer to the Futureselves we want to achieve and away from those we want to avoid. Goals can be differentiated into two types – distal or long-term goals, and proximal or short-term goals.

Goals need to be scaffolded, or built upon, such that you put in place smaller short-term goals that help you work towards a larger long-term goal. By scaffolding your goals this way, you create a clear path that takes you from where you are to where you want to be in the future.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

With uncertainty and the unknown of what tomorrow will bring in stressful times, look inward at what else is within your control and create goals with respect to other aspects of yourself that you can work towards right now. Take this chance to plan your Futureselves and set goals in domains other than or in addition to your career.

- Think about the domains or different aspects of selves that are important to you, e.g. your family, health and fitness, personal development, lifestyle.
- Ask yourself what a vision of your future within those domains will look like. What would you hope to have achieved when you are say 65 years old?
- Next, think about what are the short-term goals that you will need to set for yourself that you can work on right now in order to achieve the long-term goals of your future.
- Ensure that these goals you set are SMARTER goals; Specific, Measurable, Acceptable, Realistic, Timely, Reinforcing, and Extending.
- For example, if my long-term goal is to have my family remain closely knit in the future, my short-term goal to make that happen can be to ensure we spend quality time together. A SMARTER goal that I can work on right now during this opportune time is to have a Games Night with them once a week.

¹ Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist*, 41(9), 954-969.

² Englert, P., & Plimmer, G. (2019). Moving from classical test theory to the evaluation of usefulness: a theoretical and practical examination of alternative approaches to the development of career tools for job seekers. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 56(1), 20-32.

³ Linville, P. W. (1985). Self-complexity and affective extremity: Don't put all of your eggs in one cognitive basket. *Social Cognition*, 3(1), 94-120.

Keeping Those Motivation Juices Flowing

The neurotransmitter dopamine has a huge role to play in motivation and mood.

When we move towards a goal or target, dopamine is released in the brain and invigorates action, or motivation, which propels you towards achieving something good or avoiding something bad.

This goal-directed behaviour leads us to achieve rewarding outcomes which makes us feel good. This is called the dopaminergic drive.

One way to keep this drive going is by setting incremental goals. Dopamine will flow every time you move towards something, which motivates you to keep going, and keeps you feeling good.

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