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Handbook of Self-Regulation

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Chapter 2 - Attaining Self-Regulation: A Social Cognitive Perspective

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Publisher Summary

There is considerable agreement about the importance of self-regulation to human survival. There is disagreement about how it can be analyzed and defined in a scientifically useful way. A social cognitive perspective differs markedly from theoretical traditions that seek to define self-regulation as a singular internal state, trait, or stage that is genetically endowed or personally discovered. Instead, it is defined in terms of context-specific processes that are used cyclically to achieve personal goals. These processes entail more than metacognitive knowledge and skill; they also include affective and behavioral processes, and a resilient sense of self-efficacy to control them. The cyclical interdependence of these processes, reactions, and beliefs is described in terms of three sequential phases: forethought, performance or volitional control, and self-reflection. An important feature of this cyclical model is that it can explain dysfunctions in self-regulation, as well as exemplary achievements. Dysfunctions occur because of the

unfortunate reliance on reactive methods of self-regulation instead of proactive methods, which can profoundly change the course of cyclical learning and performance. An essential issue confronting all theories of self-regulation is how this capability or capacity can be developed or optimized. Social cognitive views place particular emphasis on the role of socializing agents in the development of self-regulation, such as parents, teachers, coaches, and peers. At an early age, children become aware of the value of social modeling experiences, and they rely heavily on them when acquiring needed skills.

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