

# People work harder when expecting a future challenging task

November 17 2009

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Consumers will work harder on a task if they're expecting to have to do something difficult at a later time, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

In today's fast-paced world, [consumers](#) frequently undertake unrelated tasks in a sequence. An individual might make a grocery list, decide whether to take out a home improvement loan, search the Internet for a vacation spot, and choose a dinner location—all before preparing lunch. "It seems reasonable to expect that when consumers know that they will have to work hard on a future task, they will devote less effort to the current task, in order to save energy for the upcoming demanding task. This is not what we found," write authors Anick Bosmans, Rik Pieters (both Tilburg University, The Netherlands), and Hans Baumgartner (Pennsylvania State University).

In a series of five studies, the authors observed that the more difficult a future task was expected to be, the harder consumers worked on a current task. "For example, consumers consulted more information on a web page when they were asked to evaluate a new soft drink when they expected that they would later on have to work on a difficult and demanding task," write the authors. Other participants were better able to come up with weight loss ideas when they believed they would have to work hard on a future job.

The authors titled the [phenomenon](#) the "get ready mindset." "People seem to prepare themselves mentally for upcoming tasks, but in doing

so, the resources that are freed up for the future task carry over to current tasks," the authors explain. "We found consistent evidence that if the mind gets ready to perform later, it is set to go now."

The authors found that the "get ready mindset" can be attenuated and even reversed when people are better at separating tasks, either because the situation helps them to do so or because they are habitually better at keeping tasks separate.

"These results imply that the amount of effort that consumers will invest in the decision-making process (such a searching for information, generating ideas, or evaluating alternatives) is dependent upon the anticipated difficulty level of future tasks," the authors conclude.

More information: Anick Bosmans, Rik Pieters, and Hans Baumgartner. "The Get Ready Mindset: How Gearing Up for Later Impacts Effort Allocation Now." [Journal of Consumer Research](#): June 2010 (published online October 20, 2009).

Source: University of Chicago ([news](#) : [web](#))

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