

The aim of this project is to investigate the tendency for teleological (purpose-driven) thinking in adults. This type of thinking involves attributing causes or intentions to random events, such as believing that winning the lottery or meeting an old friend happened for a specific reason. Thinking in terms of purpose is one of the adaptive functions of our mind and can be particularly useful in social situations, helping people understand their interactions with others and their own experiences. However, if teleological thinking becomes too frequent or intense, it can lead to unfounded or erroneous beliefs, such as seeing intentionality in random events, which can sometimes have negative consequences. Despite the social significance of teleological reasoning, there is still a lack of comprehensive research on this type of thinking in adults. This project aims to fill this gap by improving methods for measuring teleological thinking, understanding the cognitive processes behind it, and examining the effects it can have on people's lives. Specific tasks of the project include refining measurement tools, investigating the psychological factors that influence teleological thinking, and determining the contexts and mechanisms that make teleological thinking lead to either positive or negative outcomes.

To achieve these goals, six empirical studies will be conducted over a period of three years. The first study will serve to develop a new psychometric tool for measuring teleological thinking in adults. The second study will use the experience sampling method to track how often and in what circumstances people engage in teleological thinking through daily surveys. Participants will report their thoughts and experiences multiple times a day to obtain a real-time picture of this thought process. The third study will examine how the ability to detect intentional actions and the ability to understand the mental states of others contribute to teleological thinking. The goal will be to determine how these mental processes influence the tendency to perceive purpose. The fourth study, combining quantitative and qualitative data, will investigate how people's sensory experiences and abilities to infer mental states shape their religious beliefs, particularly how they perceive supernatural interventions in their lives. In the fifth study, we will explore whether and how feelings of fear and lack of control can lead to stronger teleological thinking and belief in conspiracy theories. Participants will be exposed to different scenarios to examine how their emotional states influence their teleological thinking and related beliefs. The sixth study will address how teleological thinking about the purpose of various life events can improve overall well-being and sense of meaning. This study will also consider the potential role of emotion regulation skills in enhancing the positive effects of teleological thinking.

The implementation of the project will provide a deeper understanding of how and why people attribute purpose to various life events, how this can be measured, and how teleological thinking affects their lives. These studies may also contribute to raising awareness of when teleological thinking leads to positive effects and counteracting the negative consequences of this type of thinking, offering valuable insights for both individuals and society.