How to Write Good Goals for Work
Performance Review, Evaluation, and Professional Development

Participant Manual
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Performance Review, Evaluation, and Professional Development
PREPD
Participant Manual
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For some APOs, being asked to write goals for themselves and others as part of a performance planning and reporting process creates needless apprehension and concern. If this is an expectation that has not been required in the past, it may impose several challenges.

This guide is provided to assist those who may be writing work goals for the first time and for those who, although they might have done so before, find the task a difficult one.

An important element of the goal setting process is aligning the priorities of the APO with the needs of the unit/department or the Faculty.

The process of goal setting is most effective when the supervisor is able to guide the development of goals that support the individual as well as the department and the organization.
Pre-Test

1. Which of the following goals do you think provides the clearest description of what the employee is expected to achieve?

   a) Make one improvement over the course of the year.

   b) Talk to at least five co-workers to determine how to increase morale in the work unit.

   c) Obtain data to support the purchase of a new paper shredding machine.

   d) Reduce the number of customer complaints by 10% over the next six months.

2. Draft a goal that describes a desirable outcome for you from this workshop

   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

2. Draft a goal for work that you would like to accomplish over the next Year

   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
Why Should I Write Good Goals?

The PREPD process is designed to assist APOs in growing and developing through structured work experiences. Goals are a way to focus this development on things that matter to the University, Faculty or department, and you.

Table 1; developed by L. & R. Eyre, indicates the importance of setting goals at work, why it is useful to put them in writing, and to formally share them with others.

Table 1 – Making Plans Come About

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Probability of Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hear an idea you like</td>
<td>___%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consciously decide to adopt the idea</td>
<td>___%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decide when you will do it</td>
<td>___%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan how you will do it</td>
<td>___%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commit to someone else that you will do it</td>
<td>___%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a specific future appointment with the person you committed to, at which time you will report to him/her whether you have done it</td>
<td>___%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why Should I Write Good Goals?

Developing a Line-of-Sight

A mere 7% of employees today fully understand their company’s business strategies and what’s expected of them in order to help achieve company goals.


The function of a work goal is to clearly communicate (a) the nature of the work to be performed and (b) guidelines for determining if performance is satisfactory. Work goals are the key component of the planning stage of the PREPD cycle.

What goals are set forth in your area?
Why Should I Write Good Goals?

Cascading Goals

The development of cascading goals means breaking down the organizational goals into a series of smaller goals that describe what each unit or department needs to achieve. These goals are then broken down further until each individual in the unit has their own performance goals. In this way, progress throughout the organization is measurable (for more information see Appendix A).

Example:
Why Should I Write Good Goals?

What advantages do you see by having cascading goals?

University __________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Faculty/Department ________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

You _____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Ideally, an individual’s goals spring out of organizational goals and departmental goals as illustrated below:
Your Work Context

People often feel somewhat removed from the larger activities of an organization. For example, how does the core function of file processing fit with the overall strategic plan for the University?

It is common to hear concerns expressed by employees such as:

“My work is routine and doesn’t change. How would I write goals for it?”

“The bills have to be paid on time every month. Why do I need a goal written to do that?”

“There is no money for professional development so why would I write learning goals.”

“I just look after the laundry. If it doesn’t get done on time people just holler at me but it doesn’t make me work any faster. Why do I need a goal.”

These are good questions. To help address some of these concerns it is important to know that there are many types and levels of goals. The Dean of a faculty may want to recruit a new research team. Clearly, this goal will affect an APO but the APO may not see any direct connection to the goal. However, APO goals could develop from knowing that this is the direction the faculty would like to go.

For example, the APO may play a role in identifying and securing space or carrying out all of the necessary administrative requirements to support the project team.
Your Work Context

The following questions can be used to describe your work in the right context:

- Does your work focus predominantly on routine or non-routine work?

Another way to ask the same question is to describe your work as compliance-driven or creativity-driven. Routine work is usually designed in advance, by others, for the APO to carry out. Routine work is frequently repetitive and often documented in the form of a procedures manual. Non-routine work is seldom documented.

Place an X on the line below to indicate the degree of creativity in your role.

Compliance (routine)  Creativity (non-routine)
Well Written Goals

Well-written goals contain a verb-object component and a standards component. The verb-object component describes the nature of the work to be done and the standards provide the APO with information regarding satisfactory performance in relation to the goal.

Example:

- *Increase the amount of revenue from parking fees by not less than $100,000 per year, for each of the next five years.*

The example includes a verb-object (*increase revenue*) and standards (*amount and per year*).
Examples of Well Written Goals

Several examples of goals are listed below. See if you can find the verb-object components and the standards.

1. Create and implement a client-based financial accounting system to reduce expenditure by 10%.

2. Increase staff participation in professional development by 5%.

3. Within the next six months, reduce the loss of revenue from non-payment of registration fees from 4% to 2%.

4. Increase co-op placements by 10% while maintaining service standards.

Complete the following chart using the four statements in the examples above:

1. Verb-object________________    Standards________________

2. Verb-object________________    Standards________________

3. Verb-object________________    Standards________________

4. Verb-object________________    Standards________________

In addition to the format of a good goal there are other elements to be taken into consideration. A popular approach to determining the appropriateness of the work goal is described by SMART criteria.
SMART Goals

Specific - align specifically to the role and is clearly defined

Measurable - a qualitative or quantitative measure is established and understood

Attainable - the goal is likely to be accomplished

Realistic / Relevant - the achievement of the goal is defined in a reasonable context

Timely - the achievement of the goal is aligned with departmental/work unit priorities
Once you are able to determine how you can contribute to larger goals within the work unit the easier it becomes to write useful, relevant goals that are within your control. This section provides descriptions and examples of five (5) types of goals that can be used to trigger thoughts on what useful goals might involve. The first two types of the goals (regular and problem solving) fit into the category of Operational goals, Innovative goals fit into the category of Strategic goals; the other two types of goals (training & development and competency-based) belong to the behavioural-based goals category.
Types of Goals

**Operational**
- Regular Goals (On-going job goals)
- Problem Solving Goals

**Strategic**
- Innovative Goals

**Inter/intra personal**
- Training and Development Goals
- Behavioural-Based Goals

*Operational* goals focus on the ongoing elements of work. APOs are often in a position to operate from two perspectives – on the system and in the system. Regular goals focus on ongoing system improvement and achievement of service standards while problem solving goals look to reduce elements that take away from the effectiveness or efficiency of a system.

*Strategic* goals are used to drive innovation. They are used to set longer term direction, introduce a new value proposition, create competitive advantage, adapt to a changing environment, or launch a process of renewal. The degree to which an APO engages in strategic goal setting may be limited by position but it is likely that at some point in time, an APO may be required to develop a strategic goal.

*Behaviour-based* goals are guided by the competencies expected within the department or Faculty. For APOs, these form part of the PREPD system and take the form of CORE and UNIT competencies. Behaviour-based goals are focused on starting to do something that is not being done, stopping behaviours that take away from goal achievement or maintaining and enhancing the ability to perform the competencies. Training and development goals fall under this category as they typically enhance knowledge and skills that allow you to perform differently.
Types of Goals

Operational

1. Regular (on-going job) Goals

Many positions in a faculty or department could be considered routine or at least routine at various times of the year. Administrative staff may find their roles mostly routine with seasonal activity driving some variation. Is it possible to write goals in this type of role?

To answer this question, it is necessary to reflect and analyze prior work experiences. What caused you problems over the past year? Did the problem involve work processes, policy, or other people? If so, a goal could be a deliberate method of improving work performance or the environment.

Regular Goals:

- Relate to the basic elements of the job, generally as stated in the job description.
- Are the ongoing, major functions, and/or routine aspects which must be performed year to year.
- Are a good starting point for the next year’s planning discussion.
- Work best when they are tied to a set of service standards already developed within the unit. These can be used to guide the setting of goals directly related to unit activities.

Example:

- All Centres and Institutes have received approval according to University Policy.
- To lead, using a collaborative approach, the re-allocation of 2% of the budget within the fiscal year while maintaining current staff complement.

Regular goals are generally aimed at making improvements. Some areas of focus of improvements include:

- Product
- Service
- Technology
- Forecasting
- Quality
- Speed/cycle Times
Types of Goals

Operational

2. Problem Solving Goals

Problem solving can be viewed quite negatively and most would prefer that problems would go away but problems provide "opportunities" to make improvements.

In one situation, the administrator of a professional development fund was frustrated that she could not produce accurate reports in a timely fashion. This paved the way for the development of a goal that alleviated her frustration over time and contributed to the smooth functioning of the PD fund.

- These goals identify problems in terms of a present condition or a desired condition.
- The objective is to get from "A" to "B", by a specific time.

Example:

- To increase the rate of statistical data reporting from once a year to semi-annually by fiscal year end 2009-2010.
- To facilitate the smooth transition of staff to a new office space on time and within budget.

Problem Solving Goals are often related to an area of focus that attempts to introduce something NEW such as:

- processes
- products
- capacity
- systems
- adaptations
- technologies
- faster adaptation
Types of Goals

Strategic

3. Innovative Goals

Innovation often arises from work process issues. This is particularly true when APOs are focused on process improvement as an ongoing or continuous effort. For example, turn around time for approvals of registrations can always be reduced.

- These goals begin with the assumption that anything can be improved.
- These goals often change the character and direction of jobs, processes, procedures, etc.

Examples:

- To make a staff member available for User Acceptance Testing of the new software system this term without disruption of services.
- Introduce an improved and flexible work schedule for the work unit that is acceptable to employees.

Innovation goals are often associated with an area of focus that attempts to have a direct positive impact on the work unit, department or faculty. Some of these areas include:

- Adoption rates
- Processes, products, or policy
- Financial gains, such as reduced overhead increased margins or reduced costs
- Competitive advantage
- Organizational effectiveness - building capacity or deepening core competencies
Types of Goals

**Behaviour-based**

4. Training and Development Goals

A fully functioning performance development process must make provisions for APOs to expand their knowledge and skills on an ongoing basis. The creation of training & development goals requires input from the APO and Supervisor to best determine the type of learning opportunity required as well as the long-term aspirations of the APO.

- These goals relate to present job or future career plans.
- They may specify learning outcomes by attending courses, obtaining certifications or designations, seminars/lectures, etc.
- Others may specify more job related goals such as on-the-job training, special projects/project teams, mentoring, job shadowing or acting roles.

**Example:**

- To develop project management skills by participating in an assigned special project in 2009. A journal of learning will be submitted in conjunction with the developmental opportunity.

- To seek out a mentor who has experience implementing the new research budgeting software to a large Department by January 2010.

- To become certified in Crucial Conversations by August 2010.

Keep in mind that training & development goals also take the form of experiences and/or exposure – be creative (i.e. mentorship, building a network, coaching, secondment, job shadowing, cross training, etc.).
Types of Goals

**Behaviour-based**

5. Competency-Based Goals

Competency-based goals are all about people and their behaviors. As a starting point, it is wise to work on your own behaviors first before attempting to change the behavior of others. The performance competencies embedded in the PREPD process, identify the behaviors that are required to be a fully contributing member of the work unit.

- These goals focus on the core competencies for all APOS and the unit specific competencies defined by the work unit.
- There are specific behavioral descriptors that provide a context for acquiring or demonstrating/modeling the behaviors.
- Generally, the focus should be on approximately 3 performance competencies in a given year.

**Examples:**

- Take a proactive leadership role in the assessment project of the Faculties’ student recruitment process.
- To become a member of one of the Universities administrative committees by August 2010.
- Engage my team in an activity that builds our sense of cohesion and fosters a positive, enjoyable working group by September 1, 2009.
- To engage in a coaching conversation with each of my staff members about their career & performance development by May 1, 2009.

A common area of focus for competency-based goals is related to team work and relationships. Improvements in this area could include:

- How well people work together'
- Quality of relationships
- Level of trust
- Organizational (political) awareness
For some APOs, a record of their activities has been more important than the outcome of those activities. The PREPD system matches the outcomes of work (measured against a goal) with how those outcomes were generated (competencies).

Whether routine or non-routine, recurring or situational, all work may be viewed as a process having a result. Results are the outcome of activity, the effects of actions taken. Work goals for creative or compliance work should reflect, in measurable terms, the results expected, not just the activity to be performed.

A goal should contain a method for, and a range of measurement to clearly define the results when the goal has been met, exceeded, or not met.

Factors to consider in the description of measurement include:

- Quantity (a count or actual amount)
- Quality (measured against a standard, specified by customer, client, etc.)
- Cost (actual dollars, return on investment)
- Cycle time (speed of performance)
- Combinations

**Measurability -**

Triggers the **“WOW” and the “HOW”**
Options and Examples of Types of Measures

1. Quantity

Can the measure be counted? Ensure the goal statement includes specific output. Major projects should have target milestones and completion dates.

Example:

- **Number of students successfully completing first year studies**
- **Number of successful executive recruitment cycles**

2. Quality

Can you devise a scale? Consider using a scale as an alternative to measure results (i.e. scales of 1 to 5).

Example:

- **Satisfaction with course instructor:**
  1. Unacceptable
  2. Needs Improvement
  3. Fair
  4. Good
  5. Excellent

- **Satisfaction with information available to submit nominations:**
  1. Unacceptable
  2. Needs Improvement
  3. Fair
  4. Good
  5. Excellent
Options and Examples of Types of Measures

3. Cost

Can you calculate a cost? Consider the amount of money available and required to complete the goal.

Example:

- *The cost of dropouts in a program*
- *The cost of training*
- *The cost of system upgrades*

4. Cycle Time

Can you measure production over time?

Example:

- *Number of international student visits per year*
- *Number of projects completed in a year*

5. Combinations

Can you construct a ratio to measure your progress (% is a common ratio)?

Example:

- *Number of off-cycle payments processed/month*
- *Cost per registration*
- *Average satisfaction rating*

6. Describe the desired output in words

This is the least effective method to measure output, and generally used when you cannot count, compare, or rate results.
Once you have crafted a few possible goals for work, a useful step in the process is to examine the underlying purpose of achieving the goal.

An article written by Fred Nickols called The Goals Grid: A Tool for Clarifying Goals and Objectives identifies four relevant questions to ask about your goals (full article in Appendix B page 31).

1. What do you want that you don’t have? (Achieve)
2. What don’t you have that you don’t want? (Avoid)
3. What do you want that you already have? (Preserve)
4. What do you have now that you don’t want? (Eliminate)

The answers to these questions can be used to help analyze the focus of your work and identify possible blind spots or elements that you may have overlooked through the goal setting process.

The Goals Grid

1. **Achieve**

2. **Avoid**

3. **Preserve**

4. **Eliminate**
The Goals Grid

Write two goals for work

Based on what you know about setting goals, draft at least one goal that you would like to accomplish over the next year.

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

Draft at least one behavioural goal that you would like to accomplish over the next year.

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________
Appendix A

Aligning Performance Plans with Organizational Goals: OPM’s Eight-Step Process

INTRODUCTION

The Results-Oriented Performance Culture system focuses on aligning performance with organizational goals. For this to happen, employees must have a direct line of sight between performance expectations and recognition systems and the agency mission.

These links must be communicated to and understood by employees, enabling them to focus their work effort on those activities most important to mission accomplishment. All employees should be held accountable for achieving results that support the agency’s strategic plan goals and objectives.

To meet the requirements outlined in the Results-Oriented Performance Culture system, agencies can use OPM’s eight-step process for developing employee performance plans aligned with organizational goals. In some organizations, performance plans have traditionally been developed by copying the activities described in an employee’s position description onto the appraisal form. Even though a performance plan must reflect the type of work described in the employee’s position description, the plan does not have to mirror it. Performance plans based on position descriptions generally describe activities, not accomplishments.

Instead of focusing on activities, OPM recommends developing performance plans based on established elements and standards that address accomplishments that lead to organizational goal achievement. Each step in OPM’s eight-step process builds on the previous step. One cannot skip a step and end up with good results. The eight steps are:

Step 1: Look at the overall picture
Step 2: Determine work unit accomplishments
Step 3: Determine individual accomplishments that support the work unit goals
Step 4: Convert expected accomplishments into performance elements, indicating type and priority
Step 5: Determine work unit and individual measures
Step 6: Develop work unit and individual standards
Step 7: Determine how to monitor performance
Step 8: Check the performance plan against guidelines.
Appendix A

The following information includes brief descriptions for each of the eight steps in OPM’s process.

STEP 1: LOOK AT THE OVERALL PICTURE
Instead of beginning at the bottom of the organization with the position description to develop employee performance plans, begin the process by looking at your agency’s overall picture. Review goals, objectives, and performance measures already available. Determine which ones the employee’s work unit can affect. Consider the following questions:

• What are your agency’s general outcome goals as outlined in its strategic plan?
• What are the specific performance goals established for your program area as outlined in your agency’s annual performance plan?
• What performance measures are already in place?

STEP 2: DETERMINE WORK UNIT ACCOMPLISHMENTS
The next step in the eight-step process is to determine work unit accomplishments (i.e., products or services) using the following methods:

Method A: A Goal Cascading Method
Cascade the agency’s goals to the work unit level. Determine the work unit’s accomplishment(s) that directly affect the organization’s goals.

Method B: A Customer-Focused Method
Determine the product(s) or service(s) the work unit provides to its customers.

Method C: A Work Flow Charting Method
Develop a work flow chart for the work unit, establishing key step(s) in the work process.

Because not all work situations and structures are the same, three different methods are provided. Keep in mind, however, that cascading the agency goals to the work unit level will help align employee performance with organizational objectives and mission accomplishment.
Appendix A

STEP 3: DETERMINE INDIVIDUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS THAT SUPPORT THE WORK UNIT GOALS
The performance elements that will be measured in the overall employee performance plan can include both individual and group assignments and responsibilities. The most important, results-oriented aspects of a unit’s performance (which are its products or services) were identified in Step 2. (Other types of processes work units may want to measure and include as elements in their plans—but which are not products or services and would not be identified through Step 2—include internal group dynamics processes, such as decision-making or problem-solving processes, or group/team development.)

Elements that address individual performance can be identified using a role-results matrix. List the work unit accomplishments across the top of the matrix. List each member of the work unit or each job position down the left side of the matrix. In each cell, list the accomplishment (i.e., performance element) the member must produce or perform to support the work unit accomplishment. All performance elements should be either quantifiable or verifiable.

STEP 4: CONVERT EXPECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS INTO PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS, INDICATING TYPE AND PRIORITY
All employees must have at least one critical element. Critical elements must address individual performance only. Work unit performance can be addressed through non-critical elements. (In those agencies currently retaining two-level ratings, all elements must be deemed critical.) In Step 4 you will:

• Identify which accomplishment(s) should be included as elements in the performance plan
• Select which type of element to use
• Assign weights or priorities.

STEP 5: DETERMINE WORK UNIT AND INDIVIDUAL MEASURES
In Step 5, you will determine how to measure performance on those elements designated in Step 4.
To develop specific measures, you first must determine the general measure(s) important for each element (i.e., quantity, quality, timeliness, or cost-effectiveness). Then, determine how to measure the quantity, quality, timeliness, or cost-effectiveness for the element. If you can measure an accomplishment with numbers, record the form of measurement. If you can only describe performance (i.e., observe and verify), clarify who will appraise the performance and the factors they will appraise.

**STEP 6: DEVELOP WORK UNIT AND INDIVIDUAL STANDARDS**

The next step is to establish standards for the elements. A Fully Successful or equivalent standard must be established for each critical element. If the measure for the element is numeric, determine the range of numbers that would represent Fully Successful performance. For critical elements appraised at two levels, the Fully Successful standard identifies the level of performance below which performance is Unacceptable. For critical elements appraised at more than two levels, establish a range of performance above which special recognition may be warranted and below which a performance problem exists.

If the measure of the element is descriptive, determine what the appraiser would see or report that would verify performance is Fully Successful. For critical elements appraised at two levels, describe performance for that element below which lies Unacceptable performance. For elements appraised at more than two levels, and for elements for which stretch goals are desired, determine what performance exceeding expectations would look like. Describe what the appraiser would see happening when expectations are exceeded.

**STEP 7: DETERMINE HOW TO MONITOR PERFORMANCE**

Monitoring performance means measuring performance and providing feedback to employees. Agency appraisal programs are required to provide ongoing appraisal, which includes, but is not limited to, conducting one or more progress reviews during each appraisal period. In addition to a once- or twice-a-year progress review, which is sometimes a formal part of the appraisal process, supervisors and employees are encouraged to discuss performance informally and often.

Determine what data to collect for each performance element, which source the data should come from, and whether to collect all the data or just a sample. Determine when to collect the data, as well as who should
Appendix A

Determine what data to collect for each performance element, which source the data should come from, and whether to collect all the data or just a sample. Determine when to collect the data, as well as who should collect and who should receive the data. Review the existing reports for possible use as feedback reports. Create feedback tables or graphs where appropriate or necessary. Try to design feedback processes that give employees feedback automatically.

**STEP 8: CHECK THE PERFORMANCE PLAN AGAINST GUIDELINES**

The first seven steps of this process address the guidelines agencies should follow in aligning performance plans with organizational goals. The Results-Oriented Performance Culture system includes a key indicator agencies can use to verify they are following the guidelines.

The key indicator states performance expectations for employees should be:

- Aligned with organizational goals
- Clear, specific, and understandable
- Reasonable and attainable
- Measurable, observable, or verifiable, and results oriented
- Communicated in a timely fashion
- Key in fostering continual improvement in productivity.

Step 8 allows you to check for such aspects by answering the following questions regarding the performance plan:

- Is each of the critical elements truly critical? Does failure on one of these critical elements mean the employee’s overall performance is Unacceptable?
- Is the range of acceptable performance clear? Are the performance expectations quantifiable, observable, and/or verifiable?
- Are the standards attainable? Are expectations reasonable?
- Are the standards challenging? Does the work unit or employee need to exert a reasonable amount of effort to reach a Fully Successful performance level?
- Are the standards fair? Are they comparable to expectations for other employees in similar positions? Do they allow for some margin of error?
- Are the standards applicable? Can the appraiser(s) use the standards to appraise performance? Can the appraiser(s) manage the data collected through the measurement process?
Appendix A

• Will work units and employees understand what is required?
• Are the elements and standards flexible? Can they be adapted readily to changes in resources or objectives?
• If your program permits appraising elements at levels above the Fully Successful or equivalent level, is the Fully Successful or equivalent standard surpassable? Is it possible for a work unit’s or an employee’s performance to exceed it?

For additional information, refer to “A Handbook for Measuring Employee Performance: Aligning Employee Performance Plans With Organizational Goals.” Chapter 3 of this handbook details OPM’s eight-step process. The following Web address is the link to this publication:


September 2005
Appendix B

The Goals Grid: A Tool for Clarifying Goals and Objectives
© Fred Nickols 2000

This article originally appeared in Performance & Instruction in 1992 bearing the unwieldy title of “Objectives, Systems, Patterns, Politics and Conflict.” I’ve since clarified and simplified the title and updated the article.

Introduction

Several years back, a meeting of the Operations Executive Council in my company was focused on the five-year corporate planning effort then getting underway. At this meeting I distributed a simple framework for classifying, organizing, and analyzing goals and objectives (see the Goals Grid in Figure 1 below). My colleagues saw this framework as very useful and so I was led to present it to a wider audience in a 1992 article. The Goals Grid continues to be used and highly regarded by those who use it. It is an integral part of the problem solving approach I call “Solution Engineering.” First, however, some credit must be given where credit is due. In this case, credit is due two people: Ray Forbes and John Arnold [See End Note 1].

John Arnold’s Questions

A little more than twenty-five years ago, Ray Forbes and I were serving together as internal organization development (OD) and management consultants in the Navy’s Human Resources Management Project. Ray had occasion to work with consultant John Arnold who was at the time consulting to the project. Ray told me of three questions John Arnold liked to ask his clients:

1. What are you trying to achieve?
2. What are you trying to preserve?
3. What are you trying to avoid?

These questions highlight the multi-dimensional nature of actions and decisions. In other words, there are many different kinds of effects we might seek and that we might create [See End Note 2]. There is in these three questions a certain logical structure in which I saw a fourth question, one that is clearly related to the first three:

4. What are you trying to eliminate?
I also saw in the structure of this set of questions a link to problem solving, specifically to those two sets of conditions known as “the problem state” (What Is or what you have) and “the solved state” (What Should Be or what you want). This linkage led me to recast all four questions as follows:

1. What do you want that you don’t have? (Achieve)
2. What do you want that you already have? (Preserve)
3. What don’t you have that you don’t want? (Avoid)
4. What do you have now that you don’t want? (Eliminate)

The Goals Grid

The Goals Grid shown in Figure 1 was derived by arraying “Yes” and “No” states in relation to “Have” and “Want” conditions. The structure of this framework suggests and accommodates John Arnold’s three questions as well as the fourth question that I added.

```
+----------------+----------------+  +----------------+----------------+
|  I             |  II            |  | III            |  IV            |
| Achieve        | Avoid          |  | Preserve       | Eliminate      |
+----------------+----------------+  +----------------+----------------+
| Do We Have It?  |                |  |                |                |
+----------------+----------------+  +----------------+----------------+
| No             |                |  |                |                |
+----------------+----------------+  +----------------+----------------+
| Yes            |                |  |                |                |
```

Do We Want It?

Yes  No

Figure 1 - The Goals Grid

The Goals Grid shown in Figure 1 is a useful tool in achieving goal clarity. It prompts us to think about our goals and objectives in an organized fashion and from four different perspectives. This kind of structured, organized thinking about the aims and effects of our decisions and actions is particularly helpful in large, complex organizations where, as one wag said, “Everything affects everything else.”
Appendix B

If our goals and objectives are multi-dimensional, our actions are doubly so. Intervention in complex systems typically has “ripple” effects. Mindful of Chester Barnard’s cautions against the unintended and unforeseen effects of what we do, it is beneficial to consciously think through our objectives not just in terms of what we wish to achieve but also in terms of what we wish to preserve, what we wish to avoid and what we wish to eliminate.

Two major uses of this matrix or framework are discussed next.

Goal Clarity in Complex Systems

This section is based on an effort to improve the performance of one of the production systems in the operating division I managed at the time this article was originally written. This example illustrates just how multi-dimensional and complex our goals and objectives can be. We will also see how arriving at goal clarity in complex systems can require a more than modest effort.

The objective below was the starting point for the effort in question:
- Reduce the reject rate from 50% to less than 10%.

As stated, the objective above falls into Quadrant IV of the framework: Eliminate. It could be reworded in a more positive vein, perhaps as “Achieve a pass-through rate of 90% or better.” But, in either case, action must aim at identifying and eliminating the causes of the rejects.

The essence of this objective is getting rid of something that exists but is not wanted; namely, a reject rate that is too high (and, presumably, its contributing factors).

Adding a condition - “without increasing the cost of the operation” - makes the objective read as follows:
- Reduce the reject rate from 50% to less than 10%, without increasing the cost of the operation.

This new condition is clearly designed to avoid increasing costs in the course of reducing the reject rate. It also could be interpreted to mean that the aim is to preserve existing cost levels. But which is it - preserve or avoid? Does the distinction really matter? Why not go for both?
What has just been touched upon is the multi-dimensional nature of goals and objectives. Let’s dig a little deeper regarding the objective immediately above and see what else we can uncover about some of the less than obvious dimensions of goals and objectives.

The processing operation to which the objective above pertains is a scanning operation, part of a larger registration system that is itself a subsystem in an even larger testing, licensing, and certification system. (These are still in operation today.)

The reject rate was high because the registration forms being scanned contained gridding errors. These errors caused rejects when the documents were scanned and edited. These gridding errors were introduced by the registrants in the course of filling out the form. Eliminate the gridding errors and there would be no rejects and no work or costs associated with resolving rejects. The aim of reducing the error rate, therefore, was not merely to reduce the error rate and keep costs constant but to actually reduce the costs of processing the forms. This could be accomplished as a result of eliminating the errors which, in turn, would eliminate the work of resolving the rejects attributable to these errors. We are thus drawn closer to a different version of the original objective, which could be stated in two very basic ways:

- Reduce the number of errors made by registrants.
- Improve the quality (accuracy) of the registration forms received from registrants.

What emerged as a result of thinking through the original objective was the fact that there wasn’t a single objective, there were several: reduce errors, reduce rework, improve quality, and reduce costs. We can even spot some relationships among these objectives. Reducing errors reduces rework and improves quality, both of which reduce costs. There are connections here and thinking through the four quadrants in the goals grid helped make them. Helping make such connections is a major factor in the value of the Goals Grid.

As we will see next, the Goals Grid is also helpful in examining some of the less obvious aspects and implications of your objectives.
Appendix B

Patterns, Politics and Conflict

If anything is generally true of people it is this: they will look for patterns and attach meaning to the patterns they find. Consequently, I find it useful to examine the classifications, patterns, and possible conflicts in my goals and objectives before announcing them. This can be especially beneficial if there are any unknown, unintentional, and unwanted patterns present.

One very interesting and often quite illuminating “political” exercise is to assemble a list of objectives (your own or someone else’s), classify them in terms of the four quadrants making up the Goals Grid, and then look for patterns in the way in which the objectives are distributed among the four quadrants.

I recall still a case from my consulting days when, after thoroughly examining the objectives of the president of a certain company, I came away absolutely convinced his goals were as follows:

1. Eliminate all threats
2. Avoid all risks
3. Preserve the status quo
4. Achieve (and thus risk) absolutely nothing

In any case, goals and objectives can be classified in accordance with the Goals Grid by anyone of a mind to do so. Suppose, for instance, you find that all or most of your objectives cluster in the “Eliminate” quadrant. Might this suggest a preoccupation with the negative side of things or is it simply that you’re caught up in a bad situation? Suppose your objectives are equally divided between the “Preserve” and “Avoid” quadrants. Could this indicate an unwillingness to take risks?

Another useful exercise is to think about potential conflict between your objectives and someone else’s objectives. Who might wish to avoid what you’re trying to achieve? Who might wish to preserve what you’re trying to eliminate? Turn those same questions around: Who might gain from achieving what you’re trying to avoid? Who might profit from eliminating what you’re striving to preserve?

Finally, examining the distribution of goals and objectives in the Goals Grid can stimulate thinking about neglected categories of goals and objectives. This, of course, takes us back to the first use of the Goals Grid and so here is where we’ll end our discussion.
Appendix B

Summary

The Goals Grid is a simple, easy-to-use tool for developing goal clarity.

The Goals Grid provides a structure for examining the multi-dimensional nature of decisions and actions being contemplated in an organizational setting.

The Goals Grid also provides a structure for analyzing patterns in goals and objectives and for detecting potential conflict with the goals and objectives of others.

In short, the Goals Grid helps answer some very basic questions:

1. What are we really up to here?
2. Do we have all the bases covered?
3. What are we overlooking?
4. Have we adequately thought this thing through?
5. How do our various goals and objectives relate to one another?
6. What do the patterns tell us about our willingness to risk, to change?
7. Are we in conflict with others?

There is no procedure to be followed here, no dogma to be imposed or enforced, and no easy answers to what are basically tough questions. The Goals Grid is just a framework for thinking about and perhaps asking some questions about your goals and objectives. If you want to use it, help yourself. If you don’t, that’s your call. In the meantime, I’ll tell you what I do with my copy of the Goals Grid: I keep it posted on the wall directly in front of me so that it reminds me of things I ought to be thinking about, things like objectives, patterns, politics and conflict. Most of all, it reminds me that when I am bent on achieving one thing, it is also frequently the case that I am concerned with preserving, avoiding and eliminating some other things.

End Notes

1. When this article was published in 1992, Ray Forbes was Director of Organization Development at Northwest Airlines. He is currently a professor in the business school at Franklin University in Columbus, Ohio. John Arnold was and still is, so far as I know, president of ExecuTrak Systems, Inc., a consulting firm located in Waltham, Massachusetts.
2. I spoke with John Arnold prior to the original publication of this article and confirmed that neither the fourth question nor the four-cell Goals Grid presented in this article were part of his original thinking on the matter. His original questions were meant to establish criteria against which possible courses of action could be evaluated. The precise wording of John’s questions, which can be found in his book, The Art of Decision Making, is as follows:

- What do you want to achieve by any decision you make?
- What do you want to preserve by any decision you make?
- What do you want to avoid by any decision you make?

3. Chester Barnard, in The Functions of The Executive, took care to point out that the actions we take to realize one set of outcomes often produce a set of outcomes entirely unintended or unforeseen. He used this fact of organizational life to draw a distinction between the effectiveness and the efficiency of solutions. A solution, according to Barnard, is effective if it produces the desired results and it is ineffective if it does not. A solution is efficient to the extent it produces no offsetting “side effects” and inefficient to the extent it does, regardless of its effectiveness or ineffectiveness.

References