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Don't be too SMART, but SAVE your goals – proposal for a renewed goal-setting formula for Generation Y

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Summary

Research Question: What are the scientific origins of the SMART goal-setting formula? What are the motivational needs of Generation Y? How can the SMART formula be renewed to match the expectations of Generation Y?

Methods: Literature review and web research. Conceptual design.

Results: The SMART formula was found as an endemic, but non-scientific concept. A major limitation of the SMART acronym is its cognitive focus and framing. Motivational needs of Generation Y are not explicitly considered. Theoretical development of the new goal-setting formula SAVE for Generation Y: Specific, Attainable, Valuable, Elevated.

Structure of the Article: Introduction; The non-origins of the SMART formula; Psychological goal-setting needs of Generation Y, The predominant cognitive focus of SMART; The SAVE formula; The SAVE goal-setting process, Conclusions; About the author; Bibliography.

Introduction

The technology-fostered upcoming "Creative Economy" and its need for customer-oriented continuous innovation are mirrored in the attempt of organisations to adopt agile work processes (Denning, 2016). Agile organisations create a new leadership role that is less focussed on a traditional command-control role, but more on value-added leadership tasks as defining strategies and fostering a cooperative and productive work environment (Rigby, Sutherland, & Takeuchi, 2016).

The workforce that is needed to run these agile organisations will require a different skill set compared to today's demands in order to cope with this automated, highly digitalised future work environment. It needs to have a set of cognitive and social-emotional capabilities including creativity, critical thinking and processing of complex information as well as initiative, ambiguity tolerance, communication, negotiation and empathetic interpersonal skills (Bughin et al., 2018).

This technology-driven, economical and organisational development is mirrored by the social changes that are caused by the demographics in many western countries. The members of the current Generation Y, or millennials, and the Generation Z due

to hit the job market during the next decade are scarce in number and also have different mindsets and attitudes as well as motivational needs.

Given these ongoing organisational and social changes, which have a direct impact on the role and tasks of leaders, this article states that also the approach adopted by leaders to defining goals for their followers needs to be updated to reflect these changes. It develops a clearly defined formula based on the psychological findings in setting goals. To match the SMART acronym, it should also be formed as a mnemonic to create a similar practical value.

The non-origins of the SMART formula

In contrast to the above analysis, today's leadership reality seems to still be dominated by the Management by Objectives (MBO) concept (Drucker, 1954) that goes along with definition of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

The MBO concept includes a top-down, but participative goal-setting process that is concluded by objective feedback and has been found to increase work productivity (Rodgers & Hunter, 1991). Still, there are doubts about the feasibility of this approach, pointing out the missing focus on motivational factors that drive goal achievement behaviour (Jamieson, 1973).

The acronym SMART indicates five different KPIs and is used to describe the implementation of the MBO in the business practice (Wikipedia, 2021a).

However, the origins of the SMART formula remain unclear. The article by Anthony P. Raia (Raia, 1965) is considered to be one of the original references (Grant, 2012). It describes all relevant albeit without corresponding mnemonic. The author also claims that a goal doesn't need to be measurable, given a defined completion date, which would then create a "verifiable" goal. As the two goal characteristics have to be considered as interchangeable (Raia, 1965, p. 47), the original formula has to be stated as either SMAR (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic) or SVAR (Specific, Verifiable, Attainable, Realistic).

Drucker, as an original author of the MBO approach, did not define the SMART formula, nor did he explicitly analyse its different components. Nevertheless, some can still be found in his standard text, e.g. time span (1954, p. 84), which is critically reflected as the right timeline for a business objective, is not easily found. He also clearly defines the importance of showing the impact of a manager's goal on the overall goals of the company. This value of a manager's work goal needs to be derived from the company's strategy (Drucker, p. 126). Managers should be also supplied with measurement opportunities in order to self-control their objectives (Drucker, p. 131). Drucker especially focusses on the importance of self-control in achieving goals, underlining the relevance of intrinsic motivation, especially autonomy ("…he acts, in other words, as a free man", Drucker, p. 136) as a necessary prerequisite for goal achievement. All the latter elements are not directly linked to the original definition of Raia (1965).

A more recent source by Doran (Doran, 1981) is widely used as an original reference for SMART even though its deviates from the definition that is used by the different authors (Bjerke & Renger, 2017; Frey & Osterloh, 2001; Hessel, Cortese, & De Croon, 2011; Hofman & Hofman, 2011; Lawlor & Hornyak, 2012; Wikipedia, 2021b). The article defines the SMART acronym but gives no hint or reference whatsoever about the origins of this formula. Doran's formula contains Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic and Time-related as items. "Assignable", in the sense of defining the individual who is responsible for achieving the goal, has quite a different meaning here from the "Attainable" in the formula of Raia (1965) and is also not reflected in the most common usage of SMART (Table 1).

Because of this scarcity of sources, some authors also refer to non-scientific sources such as blogs in order to underline the scientific relevance of the concept (Lawlor & Hornyak, 2012).

Additional strategies include referring to sources that have used SMART – as a substitute for providing an original source for the acronym (Bexelius, Carlberg, & Löwing, 2018; Bowles, Cunningham, De La Rosa, & Picano, 2007),

Other authors (Bjerke & Renger, 2017) cope with this lack of original references by providing a multitude of citations that should prove the general acceptance and relevance of the formula, which indeed shows its wide usage in areas such as chemistry (Hessel et al., 2011), medicine (Bexelius et al., 2018; Bovend'Eerdt, Botell, & Wade, 2009) and education

(Hofman & Hofman, 2011; Lawlor & Hornyak, 2012).

Some authors do not even specify a source at all (Bovend'Eerdt et al., 2009; Conzemius & O'Neill, 2009), which opens creative spaces for individual variations, e.g. defining "S" as "specific" or "strategic" and "R" as "Results-based" (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2009).

This lack of an original reference and a clear definition of the SMART items was also underlined by a web research that found a multitude of meanings for every single element of the acronym (Rubin, 2002), which is also confirmed by a similar collection of alternative meanings per item provided in Wikipedia (Wikipedia, 2021b) (Table 1).

Table 1

Definitions of SMART (based on Rubin, 2002[1] and Wikipedia, 2021[2])

S	Specific[12], Simple[1], Specific with a stretch[1], Sensible[1], Significant[1], Strategic and specific[1]
M	Measurable[12], Meaningful[1], Motivating[12]
A	Attainable[12], Acceptable[1], Achievable[1], Action-oriented[1], Accountable[1], As-if-now[1]
R	Relevant[12], Realistic[12], Reviewable[1], Relative[1], Rewarding[1], Reasonable[12], Results-oriented[1], Relevant to a mission[1], Resourced, Realistic and resourced, Results-based[2]
T	Timebound[1], Timelines[1], Time-frame[12], Time-stamped[1], Tangible[1], Timely[12], Time-based[12], Time-specific[1], Time-sensitive[12], Timed[1], Time-scaled[1], Time-constrained[1], Time-phased[1], Time-limited[12], Time-driven[1], Time-related[1], Time-line[1], Timed and toward what you want[1], Truthful[1], Trackable[2], Time/cost-limited[2], Testable[2]

Based on the above findings and the missing original literature about the SMART acronym, it can be concluded that there is no uniform, unambiguous definition of the concept. For the sake of this analysis and the lack of any sound scientific source, it is proposed to use the current definition from Wikipedia (Wikipedia, 2021b), operationalising SMART as Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound.

Critically comparing and examining the elements of the goal-setting formula reveals certain connections, overlaps and redundancies. Specific, Measurable and Time-Based refer to characteristics of Key Performance Indicators. A defined timeline is a specific goal criterion. Having such a specific criterion enables goal attainment to be observed, which would otherwise be impossible. Thus, Specific can be seen as an inclusive concept for both Time-based and Measurable.

The term Attainable has a certain face validity as there needs to be a realistic prospect of achieving a goal, from both a practical and psychological perspective. Still, the term can have manifold meanings, which can't be clearly derived from the acronym, as no further explanation or instruction is provided.

The meaning of Relevant is even more ambiguous, as a specific context is needed. The term "relevant" automatically triggers the question "for whom?", which remains unanswered. A link to psychological concepts can be imagined but needs to be specified.

Summarising this section, it can be stated that the SMART concept for setting goals has no specific original source and is not clearly defined. It is therefore not scientifically based and thus a dubious concept upon which to build scientific research. Its bare existence is also considered as a barrier to a more in-depth reflection of how goal setting should be executed (Grant, 2012). It is therefore not even a "practical" concept, as there are no clear guidelines on how to apply it and it might even mislead practitioners in how to execute goal-setting processes.

Still, as the application of SMART is endemic, in applied research and business practice alike, the goal of this article is not to completely abandon the concept. First of all, there seems to be a need for such an easily memorable acronym for setting goals and, secondly, certain elements of the concepts have a high ecological validity and can also be derived from the existing psychological concepts of goal setting.

The aim of this article is to transform SMART into a more scientifically sound concept with clear links to the existing knowledge about human motivation and goal-setting needs. When doing this, the notion of an easily memorable acronym should also be maintained, therefore ensuring that this adapted concept can be also

applied in practice as well as for applied research.

Psychological goal-setting needs of Generation Y

An effective goal-setting approach for Generation Y members has to consider their specific emotional and motivational needs regarding their work.

Accountability for their performance outcome seems to have a positive impact on the job satisfaction felt by Generation Y members, as it seems to help modify the unrealistic expectations of entitlement (Laird, Harvey, & Lancaster, 2015), which are considered to be a common characteristic of this cohort (Twenge, Campbell, & Gentile, 2012), based on high levels of self-esteem and self-centredness (Holt, 2012).

Experiencing meaningful and satisfying work is of particular importance for Generation Y (Calk & Patrick, 2017; Holt, 2012). They are even willing to take career risks to fulfil this need, if their basic needs are covered as well (Gentile, Twenge, & Campbell, 2010). In addition, aligning individual goals with organisational ones can generate work motivation (Anderson, Baur, Griffith, & Buckley, 2017). There is also a tendency to favour idealistic values (VanMeter, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2013).

The importance of growth motivation for Generation Y can be deduced, as they show moderately higher career ambitions compared to Generation X and baby boomers (Mencl & Lester, 2014). Opportunities to grow and advance their career are of high importance (Adkins, 2015) and they are very likely to change jobs for better growth opportunities (Adkins, 2016; Campione, 2015). The requirements for the profile of their jobs is that tasks should be interesting, varied and sufficiently challenging (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014). An environment of friendly competition fosters their performance (Yıldırım & Korkmaz, 2017).

Furthermore, the younger generations expect a high level of support and coaching (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014) to attain their work goals and require a lot of feedback (Graen & Schiemann, 2013) as well as general attention and praise (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Achieving their work goals needs also be aligned with their requirement for sufficient leisure time, as the work-life balance is an important factor for work satisfaction (Anderson et al., 2017).

The need for individual support seems to increase even more with Generation Z members entering the job market, as they have higher needs in terms of emotional support and confirmation (Duffy, Twenge, & Joiner, 2019).

The mentioned research points at differences in motivational needs between the generations. There is a higher emphasis on the meaningfulness of work and varying and challenging tasks, both of which are drivers for career decisions and changes. Leaders also have to show that the defined work goals are attainable given the high importance of a work-life balance for Generation Y and to actively coach their followers to achieve their goals. In order to be able to measure their goal achievement, Generation Y members prefer accountability also in order to gain feedback.

These emotional and motivational needs have to be satisfied by leaders and to be mirrored in new kinds of leadership behaviour (Anderson et al., 2017), also fulfilling the expectations of individual-centred leadership (Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

The predominant cognitive focus of SMART

Before looking at the specifics of the existing goal setting theories and to compare them with the requirements of Generation Y, a wider perspective should be applied, starting again with the described SMART formula.

The appeal of SMART is assumed to be not only the pure mnemonic effect that comes from the similarity to the “smart” adjective, but also that the idea of the construct “goal” is linked to the positive cognitive connotation of the word “smart”. There is a clear process of positive cognitive framing (Tversky & Kahneman, 1986), which enhances the motivation for using the concept.

Who would not consider good goals to be intelligent, convincing and valuable, and therefore smart? Also, it would be hard to explain to colleagues and supervisors that a smart person as oneself is not striving to achieve smart goals as well!

Three of the five SMART elements focus on cognitive aspects (Specific, Measurable, Time-bound).

These elements can be seen as redundant, but clearly focus the concept on the cognitive aspect of a goal, underlined by the positive cognitive framing in the connotation of the term “smart”. This focus supports the assumption that organisational goals can only be achieved when pursuing rational metrics and relying on rational-cognitive processes that only need to be implemented by the organisational members.

This predominantly cognitive approach to setting goals is problematic as it ignores the motivational-emotive processes that steer goal engagement or disengagement. These two functions can be seen as go or stop signals for the human organism in order to focus its energy on a goal (J. Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2018).

This assumption that goals need to focus mostly on their rational-quantitative aspects is also challenged by the strategic goal-setting concept Effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001; Wiltbank, Dew, Read, & Sarasvathy, 2006). As it not possible to predict the future of work tasks anymore, applying a rational, KPI-oriented approach is less and less effective for achieving the results that we expect. The Effectuation method therefore tries to control the control-setting and achievement process itself and not its prediction by pre-defined KPIs.

This means that the specific, rational approach of SMART is based on the assumption that there is a predictable future and that the overriding importance of achieving the pre-defined criteria is less and less valid. Instead, we need employees who take autonomous decisions while trying to solve the problem according to their current environment, e.g. changing customer demands. This kind of employee needs to be highly motivated to cope with the challenges of a more agile goal achievement process and to come up with innovative solutions.

The disadvantages of a predominantly cognitive focus on goal setting are also underlined by the recent findings in brain research. They show that innovation is rather based on non-cognitive processes that are triggered in non-goal-oriented states of the mind. The neuronal Default Mode Network (DMN) is supposed to be directly linked with people being open to new ideas as well as their emotions and other people in social contexts (Boyatzis & Jack, 2018; Huth, de Heer, Griffiths, Theunissen, & Gallant, 2016; Jack, Boyatzis, Khawaja, Passarelli, & Leckie, 2013).

In organisational settings, the antagonistic Task Mode Network (TMN) is mostly activated by the predominant metrics and cognitive problem-solving processes (Boyatzis & Jack, 2018). The TMN describes the regions of the brain that are involved in cognitive, task-oriented activities (Fox et al., 2005).

In order to foster innovation and to prevent a dysfunctional orientation on right or wrong decisions, the DMS needs to be activated. This is achieved by coaching interactions that focus on future-oriented visions rather than on goal-setting and problem-solving activities that focus on current problems (Boyatzis & Jack, 2018; Jack et al., 2013).

Another concept that challenges a purely cognitive approach to setting goals is the “Objectives and Key Results” (OKR) approach developed at Google (Niven & Lamorte, 2016) and adopted by other companies as well (Backovic, 2018). Here, the quantitative-oriented KPIs from the MBO approach are replaced by a limited number of more qualitative-oriented key results. This is seen as a more feasible method for working areas focussing on innovation.

The described alternative goal-setting methods Effectuation and OKR both have a different focus from the SMART approach.

Effectuation rather focusses on strategic and innovation processes (Parnica, 2019).

The team approach of OKR leads to more motivation goals as it creates a purpose by the more participative process compared to a top-down KPI process. The aspect of achievability is also addressed, as a maximum number of five key results per objective has been defined that are reviewed at least every 90 days to check progress and to adapt the OKR if necessary (Hao & Yu-Ling, 2018). OKR focusses rather on a few higher-level goals and is not about setting individual goals (Niven & Lamorte, 2016). Still, it clearly defines goal elements that have a clear link to the dimensions of human motivation in comparison to the undervaluation of these elements in the SMART approach.

The SAVE formula

As there are no feasible alternatives, and as the application of the SMART formula in both business practice and applied research is still endemic, the goal

of this article is not to completely abandon the concept.

First of all, there seems to be a need for such an easily memorable acronym for goal setting, as it seems to have a high practicability. Secondly, there are elements of the concepts that have high ecological validity and can be also put into the context of the existing psychological theories of goal setting.

What is needed is a more elaborated approach to goal setting, incorporating core insights of psychological goal-achievement theories. This focus might have been prevented so far by the wide-spread assumption that the SMART formula is synonymous with work goals (Grant, 2012).

The goal of this article is therefore to transform SMART into a more scientifically sound concept with clear links to the existing knowledge about human motivation and goal-setting needs.

While doing this, the idea of an easily memorable acronym should be maintained, ensuring that this modified concept can be used both in practice and for applied research.

The concept proposed is a new acronym based on most of the SMART elements but rearranging them in a new way and replacing redundant elements by terms that reflect psychological insights provided by the most common current motivation theories. It shifts the focus of the goal-setting process from a predominantly cognitive focus towards a more motivational-emotive approach with the potential to create more effective work goals.

Besides this content-related redefinition of the goal-setting formula, an additional cognitive reframing shall be realised as well. The positive cognitive term “smart” should be replaced by the more positively emotionally charged term “save”.

Looking at the connotations of “save” (Merriam-Webster, 2021), these include “to rescue or deliver from danger or harm” or “to preserve or guard from injury, destruction, or loss”, which are clearly humanistic activities that create mutual purpose for both the actor and the recipient of the specific action. The term also incorporates business goal-oriented behaviour, such as “to put aside as a store or reserve” (accumulate) and “to make unnecessary” (avoid), therefore making it an adequate acronym for a work goal-setting process.

Specific

The term “Specific” will be also part of the new goal-setting formula. The importance of measurable, quantified criteria for goal achievement is obvious (Drucker, 1954), and quantitative goals prevail as a major driver for defining corporate goals as well as individual work goals in most industries and organisations.

Goals also need to be specific from a motivational perspective, as vague “do best goals” (Kernan & Lord, 1989) can be interpreted as being achieved at multiple performance levels.

A specific hard goal clarifies the necessary individual performance level, while a “do best goal” does not trigger maximum effort. The advantage of a specific goal is that it avoids the ambiguity of a “do best goal”, as the individual does not need to define the necessary performance and therefore can also not select the wrong performance level for achieving the goal (Latham & Locke, 1991).

Even though the proposed SAVE approach highlights the motivational aspects of goal setting, a balance between cognitive and emotive elements needs to be achieved.

Looking at the neuronal system, the Default Mode Network needs to be partially suppressed by the Task Mode Network (TMN) to enable rational cognitive processes (Anticevic et al., 2012). Also, problem-solving processes are more effective when not influenced by strong affects like anxiety (Eysenck & Derakshan, 2007).

Regarding the goal-setting process, it is therefore recommended to trigger first the TMN by defining the specifics of a work goal based on clear Key Performance Indicators such as time and quality. From an organisational perspective, these criteria need to be measurable to enable the performer to evaluate the achievement of the work goal and to make them accountable towards the relevant organisational stakeholder, thus triggering performance based on a clearly defined performance level.

Attainable

The second element of the SAVE approach still complies with SMART but starts shifting the focus towards the emotive-motivational part of goal setting by linking it to the corresponding concepts of human

motivation.

Humans tend to focus on one achievable goal at a time, not wasting cognitive and behavioural resources or time on goals that are not attainable, therefore also avoiding post-decisional conflicts (J. Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2018).

The aspect of attainability can also be found in two of the three variables of Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964). Both Effort-Performance Expectancy and Instrumentality define two different evaluations of the attainability of a goal. The former defines the assessment of the impact of individual effort on the performance of a task; the latter, the probability that the performance will lead to the desired results.

While Instrumentality is more about factual attainability, Effort-Performance Expectancy focusses on cognitive-emotive processes. A factor moderating the relationship between effort and performance is perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982, 1997), which signifies that the performer is convinced of being able to achieve the goal based on individual competencies. If this assessment is positive and the goal has been evaluated as attainable, then maximum effort will be invested, leading to maximum performance based on existing capabilities. This fostering of self-efficacy has been found equally effective for increasing performance in sports (Moritz, Feltz, Fahrbach, & Mack, 2000), amongst school students (Pajares & Schunk, 2001), and in the workplace (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

Self-efficacy can shift an average performance to a high performance level, as people with high self-efficacy are likely to pursue goals beyond their perceived capability (Latham & Locke, 1991a; Bandura & Cervone, 1983).

For setting goals, the attainability of a specific goal should preferably be communicated by the person delegating the goal, e.g. the leader. They can't assume that the follower who is supposed to attain the goal has all the necessary information to reach a positive assessment of the probability of achieving the goal. Therefore, both factual and individual probability for goal achievement need to be described in detail.

Clarifying the skills needed to process a task before delegating the task might also help to detect knowledge gaps that might prevent followers from achieving a goal. Followers might also not reveal missing competencies openly, as they might be concerned about negative consequences.

This clarification process also prevents the leader from assuming that all resources are available, which might be not the case.

The probability of a task can be differentiated into the factual and individual probabilities of goal achievement.

The factual probability includes the available resources and support factors. Their availability needs to be shared in order to enable the follower as well as to enhance his or her self-efficacy.

The individual probability needs to highlight the existing knowledge and skills of the follower which will enable them to achieve the goal. In addition to stressing the facts regarding adequate competencies, a leader needs also to communicate their confidence in the (future) performance of the follower. By doing this, self-efficacy will be fostered and performance levels will be higher than without a similar instruction.

Valuable

The personality theory of Victor Frankl (Frankl, 1959), which is based on psychodynamic concepts of Adler (Dreikurs & Adler, 1933), focusses on the importance of meaning for human beings. He derived a therapeutic approach from it, the so-called logo-therapy, which supports the development of purpose-creating cognitions and behaviour.

Contemporary state or content theories of motivation (Porter, Bigley, & Steers, 2003) define the human need for making sense. In the BUCET model (Belonging, Understanding, Controlling, Enhancing and Trusting; Fiske, 2003), "understanding" defines the human need to identify a purpose for their actions. Higgins (Higgins, 2011) defines "value" as one of three fundamental motivational needs besides truth and control.

The relevance of fulfilling people's needs for purpose lies in the positive impact on the well-being of humans (Ryff, 1989). It can be furthermore assumed that the fulfilment of purpose needs leads to a longer life span, fewer health care problems, and greater life satisfaction. (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

While the content theories of motivation are only indirectly linked to goal achievement, the process

theories are more specific about how the perception of purpose drives human performance.

A basic cognitive concept that offers insights into the basic principles of process motivation is the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance can be elicited if a self-esteem-relevant cognition such as purpose differs from the actual behaviour of an individual. This means that if a certain action is not based on a purpose, the behaviour might be avoided or changed. If this is not possible, the human mind will construct a purpose to justify the behaviour – at least retrospectively.

Based on these assumptions, purpose can also be seen as a moderator between cognitions and behaviour in goal achievement processes. Any behaviour that does not have the purpose of creating a positive outcome with regard to human survival might drain the available human energy pool, which might be then difficult to replenish in environments scarce of food. In order to avoid such life-threatening events, there seems to be a subconscious human mechanism that checks any activity regarding its purpose. Only if such a purpose is detected does the brain give the signal for action. On the other hand, any activities that are perceived as not adding value are automatically prohibited. This mechanism would explain why the purpose of an activity needs to be made explicit in order to elicit mental and physical energy for goal achievement.

Evidence for such a subconscious mechanism can be found in neuropsychological research focussing on the impact of the perceived value of an activity on performance level. Here, it has been observed that providing a purpose for a motoric activity resulted in a dramatic increase in the efficiency of the movement (Asmolov & Falikman, 2018).

Expectancy theory (Porter & Lawler, 1968; Vroom, 1964) assumes that the individual calculates the positive reward (valence or value in the Expectancy theory) of an outcome to come to a rational decision regarding its investment of effort for goal achievement. The level of performance is supposed to be directly linked to the perceived value of the possible results of achieving a goal, if certain pre-requisites such as abilities and traits (Porter & Lawler, 1968) are given.

These process models of motivation focus on extrinsic rewards, especially pay, and are therefore limited regarding their definition of value. Still, they highlight the impact of the perceived value of a goal on performance level.

Perceived importance of the goal also drives goal commitment (Klein, Wesson, Hollenbeck, & Alge, 1999). If a goal is perceived as important, it also seems not to make a difference if it is self-defined or assigned (Locke, Latham, & Erez, 1988).

For a deeper understanding of the definition of value in a goal-setting process, the different facets of content and process theories need to be integrated. The perceived value of a goal is the crucial driver for performance, but value needs to be defined in a broader sense in the terms of a genetic predisposed general human need for value-based behaviour.

This need has to be fulfilled in goal-setting processes by explicitly defining the value of a specific goal for the individual who has to attain it. Here, different levels of value can be taken into consideration. The assumption is that the fulfilment of needs is required on at least one of these levels. If more levels are satisfied, it would trigger even more effort for goal achievement.

Expectancy theories focus on personal values, which could contain extrinsic as well as intrinsic rewards (Porter & Lawler, 1968). An intrinsic reward could also be considered as the fulfilment of another intrinsic motivational need, e.g. for autonomy.

But purpose needs can also be satisfied at organisational level by pointing out the value of an activity for the organisation (Binswanger, 1990). In addition, there is an even more abstract level of social value (Schumpeter, 1909), which is expressed in how a task directly or even indirectly (e.g. by supporting the delivery of service and products from the organisation) serves a greater good for society.

Depending on the individual's social value orientation (van Winden, van Dijk, & Sonnemans, 2008), the prospect of creating social value will trigger additional effort (Offerman, Sonnemans, & Schram, 1996), which can be also described as driven by purpose needs.

Elevated

The human need for achieving goals has been identified by various researchers (H. Heckhausen, 1972; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953) and is

also seen as a universal characteristic of human behaviour (J. Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2018).

This has also been reflected in management literature, where Drucker defined that “work must always challenge the worker” (Drucker, 1954, p. 266).

The definition of achievement motivation is based on the observation that human beings strive to achieve goals, even if there is no specific value or benefit attached to them. McClelland (1961) has described achievement motivation in his concepts as the “need for achievement” and defined it as competitive behaviour that is related to a performance standard.

This kind of behaviour is also described by Porter and Lawler (1968), who claim that performance leads to satisfaction and not vice versa. Employees evaluate their own performance based on their subjective evaluation and will be satisfied by accomplishing individual performance goals.

There is empirical support for the assumption that setting a specific difficult goal will increase performance (Locke & Latham, 1984). Simply urging people “to do their best” does not increase performance. “Do your best” is too unspecific and can include a wide range of performance. Instead, specific and difficult, elevated goals will trigger effort, if supported by sufficient competencies (Locke & Latham, 1990).

Goals also have an energising function. Therefore, elevated, high goals are more energising than low goals (Locke & Latham, 2002).

People who tend to set higher goals for themselves also have a higher level of dissatisfaction with their outcomes. They are more critical about their own performance and are driven by the ambition to improve. On the other hand, there are people who are more easily satisfied with their own performance, which is reflected by lower self-set performance goals (Mento, Locke, & Klein, 1992).

Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982) can be seen as a major foundation for performance motivation. People with a higher self-efficacy pursue higher goals (Locke & Latham, 1990).

The model of the high-performance cycle (Latham, Locke, & Fassina, 2002) explains the Figure 1 relationship between goals, rewards and performance. If specific goals are set, they can be achieved based on individual performance and will then lead to satisfaction, as valuable rewards are attained combined with the experience of a high level of self-efficacy. This satisfaction and self-efficacy will then trigger the setting of even higher goals.

If a person is confident that performance can be improved and dissatisfied with the present performance, they should preferably set their goals above the level of previous performance (Latham & Locke, 1991).

The dimensions of the goal itself seem to be even more dominant than the personality of a performer, e.g. his or her general goal achievement motivation (Locke, 2001).

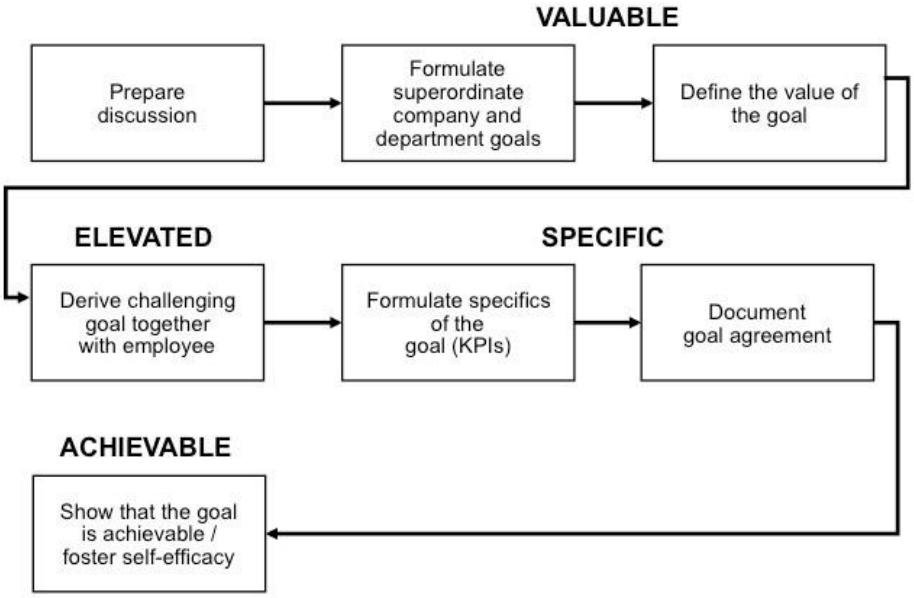
This highlights the importance of a thorough goal-setting process, in which these goal dimensions need to be defined. In such a process, the individual competencies as well as the level of self-efficacy for a specific task need to be assessed as pre-requisites for attainable goals. Based on this assessment and a diagnosis of the individual’s achievement needs, task dimensions can be defined that are elevated and therefore more difficult to perform. This will create work goals that are perceived as challenging.

The SAVE Goal-Setting Process

The four elements of the SAVE goal-setting formula (Specific, Attainable, Valuable, Elevated) have been outlined in their metaphoric sequence in order to establish the acronym.

However, their usage in organisational goal-setting practice would be in a different order, as depicted in figure 1. Here, it would be crucial to start the goal-setting process by focussing on the parts with the highest motivational impact. Accordingly, the process would start with defining the value of a certain task, followed by identifying the challenging aspects of working on an individual goal.

The SAVE goal-setting process



Focussing on the specifics would be the third step, highlighting the motivational side of goal setting in the SAVE formula compared to the cognitive-rational dominance of the SMART approach.

Before defining the value of the goal, company and departmental goals are communicated to embed the specific individual goal in its organisational context, which then directly creates purpose on the organisational and maybe even social level. This step also complies with the logic of organisational goal setting, where individual goals should be derived from the overall strategic goals to foster their achievement.

The definition of the value of the goal in the third step of the process begins with the organisational and social value, followed by the personal value, which can integrate both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational drivers, based on the actual motivational needs of the individual.

As the definition of superordinate goals and the organisational, social and personal value of the specific goal are rather unilateral messages, the whole goal-setting process should be rather inclusive, therefore eliciting additional effort by satisfying motivational autonomy needs.

This means that the definition of elevated and challenging goal elements should be a co-constructed process between leaders and followers. The perspective of the follower is crucial, as they need to perceive the goal as challenging based on their achievement needs and competency levels. A leader defining the challenge for a team member based on their own assessment might be miscalculating both aspects. This might be especially valid for the evaluation of the achievement motivation of a follower, as typically individuals with an above-average level of achievement motivation are bound to strive for leadership positions. This specific characteristic combined with a lack of empathy will lead to the misconception of followers having similar motivational needs as the leaders themselves.

After deriving the value and challenging dimensions of a goal, the specifics can be defined. Here again, the relevant KPIs should be jointly agreed. Ideally, the follower would propose the relevant indicators for goal achievement success, the role of the leaders rather being to ensure compliance with organisational quality standards and processes. An important aspect of defining KPIs is their documentation, as goal achievement can only be measured based on stable and reliable goal definitions that are not subject to human memory processes, which

are bound to fail.

The final step of the SAVE goal-setting process would be clarification that the goal is attainable. This is based on the identification of relevant resources and again the competencies and skills of the follower. Once these objective mandatory requirements are clarified, the crucial role of self-efficacy for high performance needs to be considered. Even though a leader might have the realistic assumption that a follower is fully capable of achieving the set goals, this fact needs to be explicitly shared with the follower. This additional acknowledgement will not only increase motivation and therefore effort but will also foster the stability and reliability of high-level performance, thus ensuring the final goal achievement.

Conclusions

This article has looked into the origins of the SMART concept and derived from the literature review that there are no clear origins nor a conceptual link to existing goal-setting theories. Still, there is endemic use of the formula in business practice and applied research, which shows the need for such a goal setting acronym.

As the focus of the SMART formula is predominantly cognitive, a concept is needed that clearly focusses on the motivational dimensions of work goals.

This was also considered to be relevant as the motivational needs of Generation Y have been found to be high, which implies that work goals need to provide purpose and are perceived as individual challenges. Also, the expected level of support for goal achievement is significantly higher than those of older generations.

Research on the motivational needs of Generation Z shows that they have at least the same or even higher requirements. Here, more research is needed, as this generation is just about to enter the job market.

Based on the derived motivational needs of Generation Y, an adapted goal-setting formula is proposed. Its elements are directly linked to the existing theories, and empirical findings on goal setting mirror the motivational needs of Generation Y. These elements are operationalised as SAVE (Specific, Attainable, Valuable, Elevated), even though the practical application of these elements in the defined goal-setting process are in a different order.

The theoretical and conceptual advantages of SAVE compared to the SMART formula have been suggested, and the motivational impact of each element and the corresponding goal-setting behaviour are supported by empirical research. However, empirical support for the feasibility of the SAVE concept in business practice is desired and recommended.

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