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# GOAL SETTING AND EVALUATION IN COMMUNICATIONS COURSES: AN EXERCISE

by  
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## Introduction

If one wishes to evaluate the quality of learning in a communications course, three factors require attention: learning goals, learning structures, and evaluation of learning. This paper describes a brief exercise in goal-setting and evaluation but does not consider the matter of learning structures.

Progress toward goals depends, first of all, upon a reasonably clear statement of those goals. Goal statements should be specific, explicit, feasible within the learning context, and pertinent to the student. Learning progress depends, secondly, upon evaluative feedback, preferably from multiple sources. In the case of interpersonal communication, evaluation feedback can be gathered from at least three sources: peers, supervisor (instructor) and self.

Learning goals can be determined by either, or both, instructor and student. It is probably unwise to exclude either although the relative proportion of contribution by each depends upon various factors beyond the scope of this discussion. Evaluation can be continuous, periodic or one-time. Continuous evaluation is quite demanding of time and effort; one-time evaluation tends toward arbitrariness; some degree of periodic evaluation is usually feasible and fair.

## Subjectivity-Objectivity In Evaluating

Typically, there are three sources from which to get evaluative feedback ratings. First, we can do self evaluation. Second, we can get evaluations from peers. Finally, we can obtain supervisory evaluations from someone who has had more experience and has acquired more skill than the student possesses. Ordinarily, this would be an instructor or supervisor.

One excellent method of evaluating is to videotape a communication event, i.e., a role-played personnel interview or leading a meeting, and then replay it for the purpose of observation and evaluation. In this approach, it is possible to make any one of the three types of evaluation: self, peer or supervisor. The same can be done with a sound recording although the non-verbal effects of body language are not accessible when a sound recording is used.

It is also possible to evaluate an unrecorded, live communication event from memory. Of course, a degree of objectivity is lost when we try to recall our impressions from memory as is required in self-evaluation of an unrecorded meeting.

Table 1 indicates the relative subjectivity-objectivity (S-O) values when methods of evaluating are combined with different types of raters. For example, a supervisor's rating of a videotape has a high objectivity value of 9 while a self-rating of a remembered, communication learning event has low objectivity value of 1.

Table 1  
S-O Values

Index of S-O Values	Value Rater	Supervisor	Peer	Self
Medium		3	2	1
Video-tape	3	$3 \times 3 = 9$	$3 \times 2 = 6$	$3 \times 1 = 3$
Sound Recordings	2	$2 \times 3 = 6$	$2 \times 2 = 4$	$2 \times 1 = 2$
Live	1	$1 \times 3 = 3$	$1 \times 2 = 2$	$1 \times 1 = 1$

Factors Influencing Goal Selection

The learning goals which one specifies depend upon such factors as: present level of skill or knowledge, opportunities for learning and practice which are available to the student (feasibility), amount of time allotted to study and/or practice, and personal-professional aspirations of the student.

The question of balance between objectives specified by an instructor and those formulated by individual students I leave unexplored. My own teaching experience has "taught" me that the level of motivation and commitment to learning by students is noticeably increased if they have something to say about both their learning objectives and methods of evaluation. However, as the course instructor, I certainly consider it my responsibility to provide for adequate evaluation procedures and I reserve the right to set some but not all of the learning goals.

The Exercise: Goal-Stating

Now I will describe and direct us through a goal-setting and evaluation exercise. For this exercise you will need: a felt pen, about 20, 5 x 8

blank file cards, a piece of Holdit re-usable Plastick, a blank, smooth wall (or, alterntely, 4' - 6' of butcher paper and a roll of masking tape). You will also need a copy of the Skill Evaluation Scale which I will handout later.

For this exercise (you may want to do a modification of this with students in your classes) I will ask you to work in small groups of 2, 3 or 4. The purpose of this grouping is to provide mutual assistance in goal stating and defining evaluation options. However, the group must necessarily be small in order to make individual goal setting possible and to keep communication complexity reduced.

Step 1. Form small groups.

Step 2. Read the following explanation and again with your partner(s) on what is meant by the explanation.

With your partner(s) you are to make a list of at least 5 but not more than 10 learning goals which you believe are appropriate for students in an interpersonal communications course. With the felt pen write each goal on a separate card. Use the following guidelines to aid in goal stating:

- i. Each goal statement should logically follow from the preface phrase:  
"As an effective interpersonal communicator, I should be able to...(ex. lead a staff meeting)".
- ii. Use active verbs whenever possible. For example  
NOT: "...should be able to 'understand how' to speak before a group"  
INSTEAD: "...should be able to speak before a group."  
NOT: "...should 'know about' group dynamics."  
INSTEAD: "...should be able to identify and describe 'pairing', 'gate-keeping', 'no-lose relationship', etc."
- iii. Whenever possible, the statement should refer to explicit, observable activities or performances.
- iv. Each statement should be short (8 words or less).
- v. Goals can be at different levels of generality. For example: "conduct an interview (general)"; or "ask open questions (specific)".
- vi. Interpersonal communication is a complex process and includes at least three basic elements: attitudes, knowledge and skills. Attitudes are vitally important but difficult to define and evaluate. Knowledge can be demonstrated through discussion and writing and is more easily evaluated than attitude. Skills (activities, performances) can be even more easily evaluated inasmuch as they are (usually) observable behaviors. If possible, goal statements should be made for some of each of the three basic elements.

Step 3. In discussion with your partners, check out that the goal statements are explicit, clear and written with active verbs if possible.

Step 4. Agree on a list of ten goals, discarding duplicate or unclear goals. Using the Plastick, place the goal statements on the wall. (If the wall is unsuited for sticking cards up, then write the goal statements on the butcher paper and then tape the paper to the wall.)

Exercise: Evaluation

Step 5. After posting the learning goals, next decide on a suitable method of demonstrating the attitude, knowledge or skill. Each way of demonstration should be written on a separate card and posted opposite the learning goal statement.

For example:

Learning Goals:

1      Should be able to:  
ask open questions.

2      Should be able to  
articulate a theory  
of communication.

etc.

Demonstrated by:

Tape recording a  
simulated loan client  
interview.

Drawing a Johari  
Window Diagram and des-  
cribing the model  
features in writing.

Step 6. When the learning goals and methods of demonstration have been completed, then together with your group partners, examine the feasibility of evaluating the degree to which each attitude, skill or knowledge as demonstrated might be evaluated on the 6-point scale which follows:

Interpersonal Communication Evaluation Scale

Performs this communication task with <u>outstanding</u> quality, initiative and adaptability, and can <u>teach others</u> to perform this task.	6
Performs this communication task with more than acceptable quality and with <u>initiative and adaptability to special problem situations</u> .	5
Performs this communication task with <u>more than acceptable</u> quality and <u>does not</u> require direct supervision.	4
Performs this communication task <u>well</u> , <u>usually without</u> assistance and/or supervision.	3
Performs this communication task satisfactorily requiring only <u>periodic supervision</u> and/or assistance.	2
Can perform this communication task, but requires <u>considerable supervision</u> and assistance.	1
Is <u>not able</u> to perform this communication task satisfactorily for participation in a work setting.	0

Most learning goals which are identifiable can also be evaluated against this scale, although it may take a degree of ingenuity to determine how a particular attitude can be demonstrated and evaluated.

Goals/Evaluation: Communication/Tasks

Instructions: Write in those communication skills, activities or tasks which you and your instructor(s) agree would be beneficial to your overall development as an interpersonal communicator and for which there is some opportunity to learn.

SKILL/TASK STATEMENTS As a communicator, I should be able to:	Student Ratings				Instructor Ratings				Peer Ratings			
	Initial	date	final	date	Initial	date	final	date	Initial	date	final	date
1.												
2.												
3.												
4.												
5.												

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