

# SMART GOALS: HOW THE APPLICATION OF SMART GOALS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper provides a discussion of SMART goals and how the utilization of a SMART goals spreadsheet within the classroom can enhance student learning outcomes. The authors conducted a comparison of Management Fundamental classes from 2010 to 2011 on a major project required for the class to determine if students can improve their performances by requiring them to utilize SMART goals early in the semester. Early results indicate that this proposal may be true. This paper first reviews the history of SMART goals and then provides an example on how teachers can utilize the tool within the classroom setting to improve student learning outcomes.*

## HISTORY OF SMART GOALS

Goal setting, like other behavioral philosophies, can date back to the Greeks, such as Aristotle and Plato, where their philosophies on final causality suggest “purpose can incite action” (George, 1972) or to Sun Tzu on how “victories, not operations, are the objective” (McNeilly, 1996). Through the centuries however, human beings have rarely written and documented management and organization techniques. Thus, the idea of creating SMART goals was never formalized until much later. Scholars and practitioners claim Peter Drucker’s (1954) book, *The Practice of Management*, is instrumental in starting the development of the SMART acronym (Morrison, 2010). However, Drucker never made a direct reference to a **SMART acronym** in his book (Morrison, 2010).

During the 1940s and 1950s there were many engineering and educational publications beginning to discuss the merits of specific and measurable goals (Morrison, 2010). In early managerial and educational publications, organizational activities were labeled with specific and measurable characteristics which suggest that SMART goals and its acronym were known and fairly

prevalent. Early literature also used terms such as realistic and relevant when discussing and determining goals (Morrison, 2010). The use of a variety of words over time by both the educational and business worlds to describe goals suggests that the SMART acronym emerged organically rather than being specifically invented (Morrison, 2010).

In the 1960s, Dr. Edwin Locke while examining the relationship between motivation and goal setting explained that employees are motivated when given clear goals and are provided with feedback about their performance (Locke, 1968). His conclusions consisted of specific and challenging goals being more motivational than vague and easy ones. In 1990, he teamed with Gary Latham to develop five fundamental principles behind effective goal setting (Locke & Latham, 1990). However, there is still a lack of documented evidence that provides a definitive author to the SMART goal acronym.

SMART goals are written using the following guidelines being: 1) Specific – define exactly what is being pursued?, 2) Measurable – is there a number to track completion?, 3) Attainable - can the goal be achieved?, 4) Realistic – doable from a business perspective, and 5) Timely – can it be completed in reasonable amount of time? (Williams, 2012). Over time the SMART acronym experienced changes as more people saw the benefits of the concept. SMART goals became SMARTer goals with Exciting and Recorded becoming additional characteristics supporting its goal development activities. The SMARTer goals can be applied to many different situations such as: 1) **Process objectives** - lets you know what you are doing and how you will do it; describes participants, interactions, and activities, 2) **Impact objectives - identifying** what the long term implications of your activities are within the organization, 3) **Outcome objectives – suggesting** how you will change attitudes, knowledge or behavior, and 4) **Personal objectives** - personal development is an ideal application for SMARTer objectives (Williams, 2012).

Blanchard (1985) included SMART in his book, *Leadership and the One Minute Manager*, where he uses

the SMART objective acronym. This book was first published in 1985 and appears to be one of the first books to use the acronym. Hersey & Blanchard (1988) use the term SMART goals in the 1988 version of *Management of Organizational Behavior*. Others claim that George T. Doran (1981) developed the concept of SMART goals in the discipline of project and program management. Since this article was published in 1981 and before Blanchard's book, Doran's article appears to be the first published article documenting the SMART goals that we use today (Morrison, 2010).

Regardless of where the concept of SMART goals originated, businesses have found that it can be a valuable tool. Various training companies have developed models on how to effectively apply the tool. An Internet search of these companies can provide insight into the application of SMART goals. For example, the website of Time Management Success (2012) provides tips for managing time to become more effective. Under the tab "Set Your Goals" they discuss the topic and give a hyperlink to SMART Goal Setting where they discuss how to utilize the tool and then give a simple template, as seen in Exhibit 1, on SMART goals. This template is more simplistic compared to other SMART goals templates, but that is to be expected as they proclaim that "less is more" (Time Management Success, 2012).

Another example is Office Arrow (2011), a website which is used by small businesses to obtain tools and answers from other small businesses and has also developed a SMART Goal worksheet that can be found in Exhibit 2. The first page of this worksheet is similar to the worksheet in Exhibit 1. However, the template in Exhibit 2 is different because it lists each goal and importance of achieving each goal and also provides a spot where team members may identify potential obstacles and then discuss some solutions to those obstacles.

## **APPLICATION OF SMART GOALS WITHIN A TEAM PROJECT**

The authors gave the worksheet in Exhibit 2 to the students in two sections of the authors' Management Fundamentals classes at the beginning of the Fall 2011 semester. The authors distributed the worksheet after the students selected their teams. The students were asked to use the worksheet as a resource in helping them prepare for the major team project in the course. The team project required the students to teach a concept or two from a chapter utilizing PowerPoint slides and a video. Details on the project can be found in Exhibit 3 and in the authors' previous study on how digital media affected student learning outcomes that was presented at the 2011 ABSEL conference in Pensacola, FL (Lawlor & Hornyak, 2011).

In that study, the authors found during the Fall 2010 semester that students enjoyed the digital media project because they were familiar with the technology. The students developed very creative videos—some comical,

some serious—to explain concepts. Some videos were found on the Internet while others were formed by students. However, the biggest issue encountered was that the teams procrastinated until the very end. To help alleviate this procrastination, the instructors decided to introduce SMART goals and strive to have each team member hold themselves and all other team members accountable.

The instructors desired to improve the students' ability to plan their work, execute their plans, and improve their communication. As seen in Exhibit 4, these concepts are key student learning outcomes required by the authors' educational institution. As seen in the communication section of Exhibit 4, the goal within the university is to help students improve their skills in delivering oral presentations and to increase their ability to work effectively in groups.

After receiving the SMART goals worksheet in Exhibit 2, the students became very involved in creating their goals and establishing timeframes. Exhibit 5 presents the SMART goals from the worksheet developed by the teams of one section. As seen in Exhibit 5, typical group goals were to have the class fully understand the concepts they were presenting. The students did not get into a great deal of specifics because the goals were developed early on in the semester. However, the authors believe the students had some good ideas on how the goal could be measured and how they would know if the goal was achieved. They identified that achieving a good grade, feeling comfortable in presenting the information to the class and having positive audience feedback were a few of the ways in which they could determine if they achieved their goals. The authors observed the students actively referring to their SMART goals worksheet throughout the semester.

The students also developed a list of obstacles and solutions as seen in Exhibit 6. The student groups identified some potential obstacles such as 1) scheduling conflicts, 2) striving to find the right video and information for their presentation, and 3) ensuring all group members participate. Scheduling conflicts was the most frequently potential obstacle identified by the groups. They also identified solutions to these potential obstacles such as using technology and social networking sites to communicate, holding regular team meetings, and holding each team member accountable. Another key concern was obtaining a good grade and ensuring the presentation was delivered correctly and did not go over the time limit. The majority of the groups felt that the presentation should be completed early and that group members have the opportunity to practice.

Thus, the authors hypothesize that *Teams utilizing the SMART goals template will outperform teams that do not utilize the template.*

Early results in the Fall 2011 classes where the SMART template was utilized over the Fall 2010 classes where the template was not used indicate that students: 1) started earlier on the assignment and seemed to enjoy the assignment; 2) revised and updated their goals within the

SMART goals template as new information became available: 3) complained less about team members underperforming which resulted in peer evaluations being more equitable; and 4) provided a better quality and more professional presentation.

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## Exhibit 1

### SMART goals template from Time Management Success

(Source: <http://www.time-management-success.com/support-files/our-goal-setting-template.pdf>)

Our Goal:

Specific - What, exactly, is it that we want to achieve?

Measurable – How will we know we've achieved it?

Attainable – What is our realistic desire (10) x the possibility (10) = \_\_\_/100

Relevant - Why are we doing this? Is it really what we want?

Time Bound - When will we achieve this by?

**Exhibit 2**  
**SMART Goals Worksheet**  
(Source: www.officearrow.com)

**Today's Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Target Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Start Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date Achieved:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Verify that your goal is SMART:**

**Specific:** *What exactly will you accomplish?* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Measureable:** *How will you know when you have reached this goal?*

\_\_\_\_\_

**Achievable:** *Is achieving this goal realistic with effort and commitment? Have you the resources to achieve this goal? If not, how will you get them?*

\_\_\_\_\_

**Relevant:** *Why is this goal significant to your life?*

\_\_\_\_\_

**Timely:** *When will this goal be achieved?*

\_\_\_\_\_

**This goal is important because:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**The benefit of achieving this goal will be:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Take Action!**

**Potential Obstacles**

**Potential solutions**

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**Who are the people you will ask to help you?**

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**Specific Action Steps:** *What steps need to be taken to get you to your goals?*

<b>What?</b>	<b>Expected Completion Date</b>	<b>Completed</b>
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## **Exhibit 3 Video Project**

### ***Project & Team Journal***

***Points 200***

As a team, you are required to teach one or two principles (concepts) in the chapter you have been assigned. The teaching must be done by using various forms of multi-media (YouTube, or similar source). The video must be suitable for all audiences and not contain crude language or other inappropriate behavior. Using youtube.com or other video providers, come up with appropriate videos that explain some of the subject material in the chapter you have been assigned and then be prepared to lead a discussion on why you believe that video clip provided some useful learning material. In addition to utilizing various video clips, you will need to come up with power point slides that will discuss the content of that video or videos.

- Selection of Chapter and topic must be approved by the instructor by **September 14, 2011**.
- All projects are due on **November 14, 2011**. At that time I require:
  - Copies of your power point slides including notes that can accompany slides that are not self-evident. In addition, please ensure you include a bibliography.
  - A link to the video clip/clips
  - A team journal of all team meetings. This document needs to provide a summary and also provide details on specific team member assignments, deadlines given and comments on whether deadlines were met.

A 10% reduction per day will be made on all late papers. Be prepared to take **fifteen** minutes to present this information to the class. **Five (5) points will be deducted for every minute you go over the assigned time limit**. Additional information on project requirements will be provided within class, and via e-learning.

## **Exhibit 4 - Student Learning Outcomes**

### **I Critical Thinking**

Identify business problems, frameworks for their solution and use appropriate problem solving techniques for business problems

### **II Communication**

Communicate effectively in writing, create and deliver effective oral presentations, and contribute effectively to group discussions

### **III Integrity/Values**

Articulate ethical issues that occur in business, evaluate alternative courses of action, and evaluate the implications of those actions

### **IV Project Management**

Plan projects, work in team settings, and deliver project outcomes on time

**Exhibit 5**  
**SMART Goals created by one section**

<b>Team</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Specific</b>	<b>Measurable</b>	<b>Achievable</b>	<b>Relevant</b>	<b>Timely</b>
1	Successful completion of chapter 10 presentation on due date.	Outlining and defining key concepts in Ch. 10 clearly.	Positive audience feedback to show that our presentation was understandable	With effort and commitment our team will complete this presentation using our resources of the book and Internet	This class is required and this presentation is a large part of the grade.	By due date.
2	Help the class fully understand how perception, values and diversity effect communication in the work place	Through our group presentation and hands on activity the class will be able to fully understand how perception, values and diversity effect communication throughout the workplace.	When each member of the team can fully teach our lesson. Once the class finishes the activity the feedback we receive will show us that our goal has been accomplished.	This goal is achievable because our group is willing to give 100% and our resources are available at our disposal	Perception is more important than what a business actually is. If the audience understands that what someone perceives is more important than the truth.	This goal will be achieved after our presentation is complete and the audience has absorbed the information.
3	To inform our classmates about trade barriers and strategic alliances.	We hope to be able to present a professional-like presentation and ultimately inform our classmates of the importance of trade barriers and strategic alliances.	We will know when we have reached this goal at the end of the semester when it comes time for us to present.	This goal is very realistic for us and we have the resources to achieve this goal but if we find that we need more we will refer to the vast amount of resources that are available at the University of West Florida.	This goal is significant to our lives because it determines a large part of our grade which is important to all of us.	This goal will be achieved by November 14th.
4	To teach two key concepts to class members through use of different forms of technology.	To help our peers gather a better understanding of the principles of workplace deviance and moral development through the use of various forms of multi-media (YouTube/ PowerPoint) created by each member.	This goal will be achieved when each member is able to explain in detail each key concept to class members via PowerPoint and video by the given due date of the project. November 14.	This goal is realistic in the time frame given (13 weeks). We have all the necessary equipment and materials to complete this project including a camera for filming and PowerPoint to complete our presentation	The concepts presented through this project are relevant to any workplace situation and could potentially influence our ethics in our future careers	November 14 <sup>th</sup>

5	Effectively present and inform others on motivational theories	Make sure that by the end of the presentation learning outcomes are understood by all students in the class. We will discuss Expectancy Theory and say that we will teach the class about how employees perceive that great effort will lead to great performance.	When we feel we have given proper and adequate explanation of set topics. Once we have fully discussed what employees want from their jobs, how to link rewards to individual performance and empower employees to make decisions that their hard work and effort will lead to good performance.	This goal is realistic with effort and commitment our group is willing to put into it. We have the resources to achieve this goal such as the book and youtube.com	This goal is significant in our lives to inform others how to motivate for future management opportunities.	A week before presentation date. Each individual will complete their assignment 2 weeks before the presentation after we will all meet to put all of the pieces together and make a presentation.
6	To teach the four leadership styles	Each person will explain a different type of Leadership style with video and discussion.	When it is organized and presentable	Yes because it is a realistic goal and we have the necessary resources to achieve the goal.	To succeed in achieving a good grade due to our career goals. Business leadership will come into play when our specific jobs require us to utilize those leadership styles.	We will have this goal achieved one week before it is due. November 7, 2011.
7	Explain Planning and Decision making with visual aids and PowerPoint.	Find videos that explain the subject material in chapter 5 Describe the video to the audience using PowerPoint slides.	When we can easily describe and explain to someone with no knowledge on the topic about planning and decision making	Yes, if everyone works together and is committed. Yes, we have the resources, the internet, textbook and library.	Planning and decision making is important for organization. Constantly making decision to benefit in your life.	This goal will be achieved by Nov. 7th so we can have a week to practice
8	Teach the learning outcomes from chapter 7	To deliver an informative PowerPoint presentation to the class.	All tasks are completed by target date. Quality of PowerPoint is acceptable Receive positive feedback from classmates	Yes it will be achievable through persistent effort and good communication amongst our team.	The goals can teach teamwork. How to be a good communicator. These skills are useful at home, at work and at school.	Each task will have its own due date.



9	To complete the project on Chapter 2 efficiently.	Define management history and present it to the class in a manner they will understand it easily	When we can speak about it with knowledge and confidence.	Yes it is realistic to achieve this goal and we have the resources needed to do so.	To understand management more and become efficient leaders that will be able to have employees perform their best.	Nov. 10, a few days prior to the project to give us time to refine if needed.
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**Exhibit 6 -  
Potential Obstacles and Solutions to those Obstacles**

Frequency	Potential Obstacles	Potential Solutions
11	Scheduling conflicts Not able to all meet together outside of the classroom.	Use Technology. Social Networking. Exchange schedule sheets and emails. Email and phone. Webcam. Make set schedules. Team member compromise, alternate communication. Everyone responsible. Communication, before/after class meetings (2)
8	Finding the right video/supplement for our presentation. Abundance of	The group helping the person with video ideas. Everyone searches together and agrees (vote). Looking early. Voting.
8	Group Participation. Have group members not doing their part. Ensuring Communication is taking place	Set meeting times and responsibilities. Hold group meeting to keep everyone on track. Equal task division. Schedule meetings in advance. Take advantage of student e-mail. Choosing a different topic. Utilize alternative channels
5	Good presentation made within the timing limit. Achieving a good grade	Practice and timing selves (3). Plan for delays. Effort and hard work from all team members. Check all types of
2	Group conflict, cohesion	Discuss them and get everyone's opinions. Relax and take
2	Equal work loads.	Knowing roles beforehand. Assign responsibilities
2	Issues with Technology	Call IT Help Desk. Utilize Real Player.
2	Being distracted by the simplicity of our subject. Too much fun, not enough	Working on specific ideas. Outside work on our own
1	Accomplish goal on Time	Set dates to complete certain parts of our goal
1	Problems with filming/camera	Use a YouTube video instead
1	Deciding who will be the leader	Put the leadership names into a hat then pull
1	Public speaking anxiety	Practice