

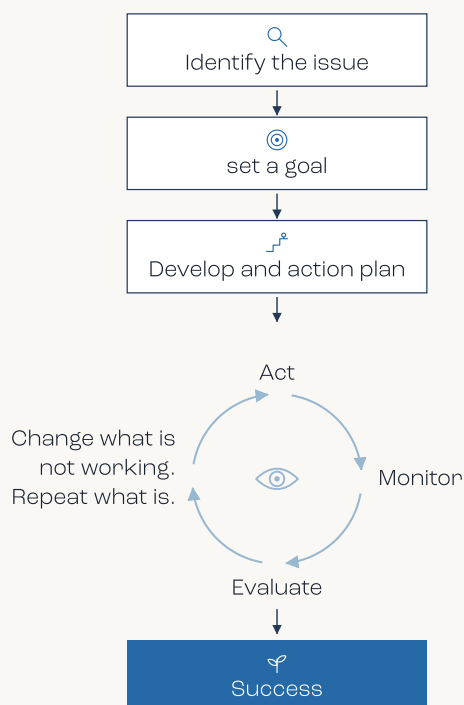
Goal Theory

01 Introduction – What is Goal Theory?

A goal can be defined as: “the purpose to which an endeavour is directed, an objective or outcome.”

Coaching and mentoring are typically goals focused. It should be a creative and thought-provoking process that inspires the coachee/mentee to maximise their personal and professional potential. The coach/Mentor is there to assist in a collaborative, solution-focused systematic approach whereby the coach/mentor helps identify goals and then guides the participant to a solution that is right for them.

02 Regulation Goal Model



Process flow

Supported by the coach/mentor, goal-focused self-regulation is a process through which the coachee/mentee sets a goal, develops a plan of action, begins the action, monitors performance, evaluates their performance by comparison to a standard and, based on this evaluation, changes their actions to enhance their performance further and better reach their goals.

Although displayed as such, the stages of the process should not be seen as separate instead they are interlinked and overlapping and may well require review along the way (the importance of monitoring and evaluation).

Feedback is critical here to enable the process. Our ability to receive and give feedback in a non-judgmental, non-defensive way is the key here in learning, observing, and developing.

03 Goal Types

There are over 20 different types of goals. Different goals require different approaches, and your discussion may require a different process for attainment. It is beneficial that these goals align with the coachees/mentee's values and motivations, hence the importance of undertaking the Values and Motivation exercises before discussing goals. Goals aligned with our values provide us with intrinsic motivation to achieve them. Understanding an individual's intrinsic motivation is key.

- **Outcome goals.** SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Bound) goals. A common focus for goal setting is linked to a desired outcome – the desire to increase profits by x% over a particular time scale. If explicitly defined, such goals allow for performance to be easily regulated and, therefore, can often lead to improved performance. However, some coachees/mentees may perceive specific, outcome-oriented goals as too demanding and may react better to broader, less clearly defined goals.
- **Distal (longer term and broader) v Proximal (shorter and more specific).** These can be worked together into a complete strategy for attainment over a determined time scale.
- **Avoidance and Approach.** A desire to move away from an outcome – to reduce stress levels at work. Although outcome-oriented, no specific detail or target is given to the goal. Approach goals are the opposite – I would like to find more time to do the activities I enjoy. They can often indicate a positive (Approach) or negative (Avoidance) mindset of the coachee/mentee.
- **Performance and Learning.** Performance goals focus on the coachee/mentee's personal ability and competence. They can often be competitive and require the attention of others; these can be powerful drivers. However, they can also impede performance, especially when the task is complex, or the coachee/mentee lacks the skills or knowledge required to complete it. Learning goals may benefit the coachee/mentee's performance more. Learning goals are seen as more positive, allowing the coachee/mentee to operate in a less threatening environment.
- **Complementary v Competing.** Mentors should beware of goals that directly conflict with each other. Sometimes this is obvious, but at times they can be deceptive. The goal of 'I want to improve the output of my team' may conflict with 'I want to delegate more to my team members'. Where possible, goals should align and complement each other.
- **Unconscious goal.** Some researchers suggest that all human behaviour constantly moves towards or away from mental goal representations. However, not all goals are consciously or explicitly held. For many people, unconscious goals are set and achieved throughout daily life – the consciously stated goal of 'losing 2 kilos by summer' may unconsciously influence the decision to cycle, walk or drive to a destination or what to have for lunch.
- **Self-concordant goals,** or those that align with the coachee/mentee's value set or motivations. This is important as it affords a higher likelihood of success and more significant input or effort. But, if the coachee/mentee chooses their goals and believes in them, they are likelier to work hard to achieve a successful outcome.
- Important to note that self-determined goals (chosen by the coachee/mentee) rather than imposed by external forces (given to the coachee/mentee by their manager or organisation) are also more likely to gain the maximum effort and satisfaction of the coachee/mentee. Time spent working with the coachee/mentee to determine authentic core values, personal characteristics, and current environment will assist in successfully attaining self-determined, concordant goals.

04 Goal Hierarchy

When setting goals, we must get the right balance between credible and aspirational. A new graduate to an organisation may set a goal of being the CEO in 12 months. Very aspirational but potentially not that credible. When we set goals, it is also important to potentially “chunk” them down. The example below is about being “promoted” as a goal – break this down into smaller areas with tangible achievements. Once we break goals into smaller sub-goals, we see more clearly what is needed. An essential part of this is also building self-efficacy. (The self-belief and confidence in one’s own ability.) When we start to achieve small goals, we feel a sense of achievement; this helps us move on to the next one.

We suggest constantly breaking down and exploring goals into achievable tasks.



05 Goal-oriented questions

This is not a comprehensive list of questions, but it will provide a framework to determine more about the goals discussed. Be prepared to explore each question further. Remember the points above about the types of goals and the value and motivations of the coachee/mentee.

1. What is important to you about achieving this goal?

2. What is it about this goal that interests you?

3. Are you clear about the outcome of this goal?

4. What does a successful outcome look like to you?

5. When do you have to achieve this goal (time frame)?

6. How can you approach this goal?

7. What can you learn from your past experiences about achieving this goal?

8. Whom do you know that can help you achieve your goal?

9. Are there any obstacles that might prevent you from achieving this goal?