**I/O Psych Activities**

**Motivation & Performance – Goal-Setting Theory**

**Adapted from the following sources:**

* <http://siopwiki.wikifoundry.com/page/Goal-Setting+Theory+Exercise>
* <http://mgto.org/inclass-experiments-1-goal-setting-theory/>

**Goals of the mini-lesson activity:**

According to Locke and Latham (1990)’s goal setting theory, specific, difficult, yet attainable goals are the most motivating and lead to the highest performance. This activity aims to test this theory in the class room by demonstrating how SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely) goals increase students’ motivation on a certain task.

**Descriptions of how to conduct the mini-lesson activity in the classroom:**

Make copies of the attached packets to hand out to students. 1/3 receive the packet with a specific and difficult goal (create 10 words in one minute); 1/3 receive the packet with a specific but impossible goal (create 50 words in one minute); 1/3 receive the packet with the “do your best” goal.

Select one student to help you with data collection. Randomly distribute the packets to the rest of the students, making sure that no one is aware that students are receiving different packets. Tell them to read the instructions carefully, so that they understand their goal and task. Make sure no one turns the page until the timer starts.

When everyone is ready, tell them to turn the page and begin. After 60 seconds, instruct them to turn the page and start on the next set of letters. After another 60 seconds, instruct them to turn the page again and work on the last set of letters. After 60 seconds, tell them to stop.

Have everyone score themselves by counting the total number of words they generated in each round. Then have your student volunteer collect all the sheets and input everyone’s scores into the macro to generate the graphs. While he or she is working on data collection, lead a discussion on goal-setting theory and ask students to generate hypotheses about the results.

Variations:

* You may use only the *specific, difficult* goal and the *“do your best”* goal (2 groups).
* You may use a *specific but not difficult* goal (e.g., 5 words in one minute) in lieu of the *specific but impossible* goal (3 groups).
* You may need to adjust the numerical goals to match the ability level of your class. For example, a goal of 10 words in one minute may not be difficult for students in a graduate-level seminar.

You can use the following outline as a script for walking through the activity.

1. Introduction
   1. I am passing out an activity for you to complete
   2. Important: you should only look at the first page until I instruct you to start
   3. Please read the instructions on the first page (Emphasize reading the instruction carefully, especially paying attention to the goal of the exercise)
   4. Any questions?
2. Activity
   1. Please turn to the next page and I will start the one-minute timer… Ready, Go
   2. Count how many words you got and write your score somewhere on the page
      1. *Repeat above process for rounds 2 & 3*
   3. I am going to have <student name> collect your sheets to input everyone’s scores; while she/he does that, I have a few questions for you
3. Discussion
   1. Goal-setting is one of the theories most frequently applied in organizations to motivate employees to perform their jobs well
   2. What qualities does a goal need to have in order for it to be effective?
      1. Write student responses up on the board
      2. Discuss SMART goal mnemonic and write it up on the board (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely)
   3. What was the goal that was written in this activity? Did anyone have something different?
      1. Write the three goal condition groups up on the board
   4. Was the goal that you assigned SMART? How did it influence your performance in this task?
   5. Using goal setting theory, what do you predict the results of this activity will be?
4. Conclusion
   1. Show results up on the screen
   2. Are these results what you expected? Why or why not?
   3. What other factors may influence whether these goals were effective or not?
      1. Individual differences - ability level, self-efficacy, etc.
      2. Goal orientation - learning/mastery, performance prove/avoid
      3. Goal acceptance - participation in the process and commitment to goal
   4. Key take-away from this activity: For goals to be effective at motivating employees in the workplace…
      1. Goals should be SMART
      2. Employees should be involved in goal-setting so there is appropriate goal acceptance and commitment