

Argument Writing On Goal Setting Theory Of Locke**Getnet Tilahun**

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Part I: Abstract

A wide variety of settings around the globe using widely different tasks in both laboratory and field settings have been conducted on the internal and external validity of goal setting theory (Latham & Locke, 2007). Researchers have concluded that goal setting theory is among the most robust, valid, and practical motivation theories of organizational behavior (Miner, 2005). But despite these robust findings, the practicability of Goal Setting Theory (GST) as a means to increase performance will not work in all culture and in all environment thereby employing MBO. Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to investigate the practicality of Locke's theory of goal setting (i.e. Specific and difficulty goals than no goals) using MBO on the area of culture and environment to evaluate how much GST practicable and feasible in the actual work setting beyond much of the laboratory or field settings.

Keywords: goal setting

Part II: Basic Claim of the Author: Specific and Difficulty Goals than No Goals

The role of goals as determinants of performance has been a central topic of research in organizational behavior since goal setting was first proposed by Locke (1968) as a core component of work motivation.

Goal setting theory is a theory of motivation that explains what causes some people to perform better on work-related tasks than others. At its deepest roots, goal-directed action is based in biology. All living organisms, from plants to animals to people, must engage in goal-directed actions in order to survive. Life is conditional; organisms have needs. Survival requires taking action that satisfies needs (Locke and Latham, 2013).

The term goal is defined by goal setting theory as the object or aim of an action. In a work setting, it might be a level of performance to be attained e.g., increase profit by 20% (Locke and Latham, 2013). Specific, difficult goals lead to higher performance than no goals as well as vague, abstract goals such as "do your best". Furthermore, goal setting increases interest and reduces boredom with a routine, repetitive task (Saari, & Latham, 1981).

More than 1000 studies in a wide variety of settings and around the globe, using widely different tasks in both laboratory and field settings have been conducted on the internal and external validity of goal setting theory (Latham & Locke, 2007). These studies have shown that specific, challenging goals lead to higher levels of performance than an easy goal or an abstract one such as an exhortation to do your best. Hence, researchers have concluded that goal setting theory is among the most robust, valid, and practical motivation theories of organizational behavior (Miner, 2003). Goal specificity increases clarity, reduces misinterpretation of the goal, and improves performance (Gelfand, et al., 2011).

The GST of motivation focuses on the goal performance relationship (Locke & Latham, 1990). The theory proposes that specific, difficult goals yield high performance levels. This seems to be universal given the boundary conditions of feedback, goal commitment, and task complexity, which also seem to be universal (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Because goals are the primary source of an individual's motivation, discrepancy reduction is simply one correlate of goal-directed action in fact, it is just another way of describing what it means to pursue a goal. The second correlate is discrepancy production, namely, setting a goal for something an individual desires. This is because they would strive to live a life free of tension. Life is a process of goal produced action (Locke and Latham, 2013).

The two core findings from nearly 400 empirical studies that led to the development of GST in 1990 were as follows: the first one is there is a linear relationship between the degree of goal difficulty and performance. Locke (1967) found that the performance of participants with the highest goals was over 250% higher than those with the easiest goals. He (Locke, 1968) derived an empirical function

based on the results of 12 separate studies. In all cases, the functions were linear except when the participants reached the limit of their ability. Ability, as pointed out below, is a moderator variable in goal setting theory. Subsequent meta-analyses provided additional support for the linear relationship (Mento, Steele, & Karren, 1987; Tubbs, 1986; Wood, Mento, & Locke, 1987). Second specific, difficult goals lead to higher performance than no goals as well as vague, abstract goals such as “do your best.” Support for this assertion was obtained from enumerative reviews of the literature (Latham & Yukl, 1975; Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981; Steers & Porter, 1974).

The problem with a do-best goal is its ambiguity as to what constitutes performance effectiveness. It is defined subjectively. Therefore, a specific, high goal eliminates ambiguity as to what constitutes high effective performance. It defines for an individual what constitutes an acceptable level of performance. Moreover, the attainment of a specific, high goal is usually instrumental in leading to outcomes that are important to an individual. Latham and Lee (1986) found that these two core findings generalize across laboratory and field settings, quantity and quality criteria, soft and hard criteria, individual and groups, and goals that are assigned, self-set, or set participatively. The research that identified the two core findings described above also identified the mechanisms by which a specific, high goal increases performance, as well as the moderator variables that enhance or attenuate the goal–performance relationship (Locke and Latham, 2013).

2.1 Goal Mechanisms

GST states that the mechanisms by which a specific, high goal leads to high performance are fourfold. The three most direct goal mechanisms are primarily motivational, i.e. First, a specific, high goal orients an individual's attention and effort toward goal-relevant activities (Locke and Bryan (1969a). Terborg (1976) found that goal specificity resulted in participants paying more attention to the task than those in the control group. In addition, a specific, high goal activates the knowledge and skills a person possesses that are necessary to attain the goal.

A second mechanism or mediator of the goal performance relationship is effort. Once an individual chooses a goal and chooses to act on it, effort and arousal vary with the demands of attaining it. In short, effort is mobilized and expended in proportion to the difficulty level of the goal (Latham & Locke, 1975; Locke, 1968).

A third mechanism is persistence, that is, the time spent to attain a goal. A specific, high goal leads people to work longer at a task than a vague or easy goal. Bavelas and Lee (1978) reported that participants with easier goals stopped working sooner than those with high goals.

They also found that those with high goals worked for a longer amount of time. Huber (1985) found that participants with high goals worked longer to complete a maze than those with moderate, easy, or do-best goals. The fourth mechanism, knowledge or task strategy, is more cognitive in nature than the other three. A specific, high goal cues an individual to draw upon the extant knowledge/skill required to attain it.

2.2 Moderator Variables

Ability is a moderator variable in GST, this is because the choice to exert effort and to persist until a specific high goal is attained (Locke & Latham, 2002). GST states that ability is a moderator variable that affects the goal performance relationship and the choice of goal because people cannot perform in accordance with a goal when they lack the knowledge and skill to obtain that level of performance (Locke (1982).

Goals regulate performance far better when feedback is present than when it is absent. Feedback allows people to decide if more effort or a different strategy is needed to attain their goal. When performance feedback is withheld, goal setting is ineffective for increasing performance (Locke, Cartledge, & Keppel, 1968).

It was argued, is a more inclusive term than goal acceptance in that it refers to one's attachment to or determination to attain the goal, regardless of its source (e.g., self-set vs. assigned goal). GST states that commitment is a moderator variable because goal difficulty level has been shown to be more

highly and positively related to performance for people with high rather than low goal commitment (Erez&Zidon, 1984).

Part III: Claims of Getnet

Contrary to the robust findings in diverse settings of GST in the laboratory and field, my claim is that it is not yet clearly and intensively stated to put the theory in to practice through MBO. Since Locke's theory didn't adequately considered in which type of culture and environment does the theory best works?

Firstly, the application of GST bring to practice by Gray Latham in the form of Management by Objective (MBO) and MBO dated popularity Drucker's (1954). MBO involves a joint determination of by subordinates and supervisors of common goals major areas of responsibility, and results expected; these measures are used as a guide for operating the unit and assessing contribution of members. But, the degree to which goals are participatively set can vary considerably and too can the extent of formalization in the sense of documents or paper (Miner, 2005). In addition to this the degree of making GS is participatory can also be determine by the type of leadership pattern followed. In this regard making GST practical in actual setting is not as simple as like that of field and laboratory setting and also will remain ambiguous as a sense of documents.

Similarly, GST doesn't work as a motivation when employee commitment is low. For example Miner (2005) explained that the application of GST is not highly related to performance in all condition. Miner(2005) noted that goals should be more highly related to performance under condition of where the individuals involved have high commitment than where commitment is at a low level. Although there have been numerous positions taken on this score, a goal, goal setting theory makes no priori assumption regarding the relative effectiveness of the different ways used to set goals. So that GST through MBO and putting to practice is difficult when employee commitment is low and there is no different ways to set goal on the basis of participant's choice. Moreover Miner (2005) explained the problem for MBO is that the motivating effect of difficult appear to be particularly susceptible to dissipation overtime, even among the particular kind of individuals who are most responsive to them, when the goal theory is not reinforced frequently.

Miner also noted (2005) the value that goal setting theory may have when an individual supervisors deals with subordinates. In this limited context it can be adjusted to the individual characteristics of the subordinate to stay with the boundaries of theoretical application and establish appropriate priorities, but it is difficult to adjust GST in to individual characteristics when the organization is involving in a diverse people with different culture so that practical feasibility of GST is challenging and difficult.

Furthermore, although, GST is used to set forward employee's effort to their goals, derives and facilitate employee to achieve their goals by integrating subordinates and supervisors through MBO, it is difficult to make the goal setting process is participatory, since the process would be constrained by various factors. As Latham (2003) explained the most important use of goal setting in organization is as a standard alone for procedure for improving performance much like MBO, but without the formalization that has come to characterize approach. As with other human resource and organizational behavior approaches, finding with regard to goal setting seems to generalize from the laboratory to the field rather than well Locke (1968).

Participative goal setting works best if people are accustomed to and comfortable with it, and when intrinsic motivation to perform is at low level, thus requiring an added inducement. In addition goal-setting procedures appear to have considerable motivational potential with the right people under the right circumstances (Locke and Latham 2013).

The second important point is, GST may fail to work when people are not with the right circumstance. Moreover, as it was explained by Yearta, Maitlis, and Briner (1995) GS (Goal Setting) within the context of a comprehensive MBO program is a more uncertain matter, especially over the long term. In the context of environmental uncertainty, establishing specific, difficult goals may be difficult and sometimes inappropriate rather individuals should be free to do their best based on their

knowledge, experience, and creativity to pursue, on a contingent basis, multiple alternative goals until the link between cause and effect is established" (Fried & Slowik, 2004). Hence uncertainty may increase differences in goal content across participants in organizational goal formulation (Hatfield & Pearce, 1994). Therefore, in the context of this GST may cause a conflict and will be difficult to apply it practically as a best means for increasing organizational performance.

The third point in GST is, organizational culture is a critical factor in the successful implementation of goal setting and also has implications for organizationally relevant outcomes as it was explained by (Gibson, et. al, 2009). But culture in GST will result in undesirable outcome like dysfunctional competition and corrosion of organizational culture when it is exercised wrongly and leads even to unethical behavior in reaching organizational goals (Gibson, et. al, 2009).

Likewise, the implementation of GST will be difficult when the organization is engaged in a multiple goal through MBO (it may causes conflict). As Ethiraj & Levinthal (2009) explained the management and coordination of multiple goals is critical in a complex organization that lead to conflict among organizational members.

Furthermore, the meaning of goal difficulty to a person's sense of self-worth and well-being varies across cultures. Specific, difficult goals motivate people in Western, individualistic societies to exert effort and be persistent until goals are accomplished (Locke & Latham, 2002). Difficult goals catalyze a differentiation between the minority who reach the difficult goal and the majority who do not. Challenging goals serve as a strong motivator for Westerners, because they offer an opportunity to distinguish oneself from others. This is not the case in collectivistic countries, where people define themselves in relational terms and as being part of a collective (Kurman, 2001).

Similarly, Goal specificity is more important in tight rather than loose cultures (Gelfand, et al., 2011). Tightness and looseness correlates with collectivism/individualism and with power distance. There is more tolerance for deviation from the norms in individualistic and low-power-distance cultures, as in most Western cultures (i.e., USA, Australia, New Zealand, Netherlands, Israel), than in collectivistic and high-power-distance cultures, where there is low tolerance for deviation from the norm (i.e., Korea, China, India, Malaysia, and Singapore) Erez & Nouri (2010).

Furthermore, challenging goals serve as a strong motivator for Westerners, because they offer an opportunity to distinguish oneself from others. This is not the case in collectivistic countries, where people define themselves in relational terms and as being part of a collective (Kurman, 2001). And in fact this is another impediment to make GST is practical.

Part IV: Conclusion

Firstly, it is apparent that setting a specific goal is better than general goal or having no specific goal, when there is goal prioritization. And also when the employee is with high intrinsic motivation provided frequent reinforcement from the supervisors to make consistent their effort through MBO (Miner, 2005).

Secondly, the application of GST will also work best only when employees are with the right circumstance (knowledge, skill and ability) provided with stable environment. As Yearta, Maitlis, and Briner (1995) found that GST fail to work within the context of a comprehensive MBO program is a more uncertain matter, especially over the long term. Hence uncertainty may increase differences in goal content across participants in organizational goal formulation (Hatfield & Pearce, 1994).

Thirdly, GST will serve as a best means to stimulate productivity when organization is exercising the right ethical behavior. But as Gibson, Maznevski, & Kirkman (2009) explained it has a potential to cause harm if the wrong outcomes are reinforced, including dysfunctional competition.

Furthermore, the meaning of goal difficulty to a person's sense of self-worth and well-being varies across cultures. As Kurman (2001) explained challenging goals serve as a strong motivator for Westerners, because they offer an opportunity to distinguish oneself from others and this is not the case in collectivistic countries. Similarly, goal specificity is more important in tight rather than loose cultures (Gelfand, et al., 2011). The meaning of goal difficulty to a person's sense of self-worth and well-being varies across cultures. Tightness and looseness correlates with collectivism/individualism and with power distance Erez & Nouri, (2010).

In sum the practicability of GST through MBO will not work when it lacks clear prioritization of goals and when there is no frequent reinforcement from supervisors. GST will also not serve as a means to attain the desired outcome when the environment is not stable. Furthermore, it is difficult to make GST practical uniformly when people are in a diverse culture, hence people reflect different senses on the bases of their choice and values. Therefore, Locke's GST needs further investigation on which typical culture does it works, and also which type of situation does it best suit to make GST more practical beyond its strong laboratory and field findings through MBO.

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