

THE TARGET MODEL

A Mainly Visual Presentation

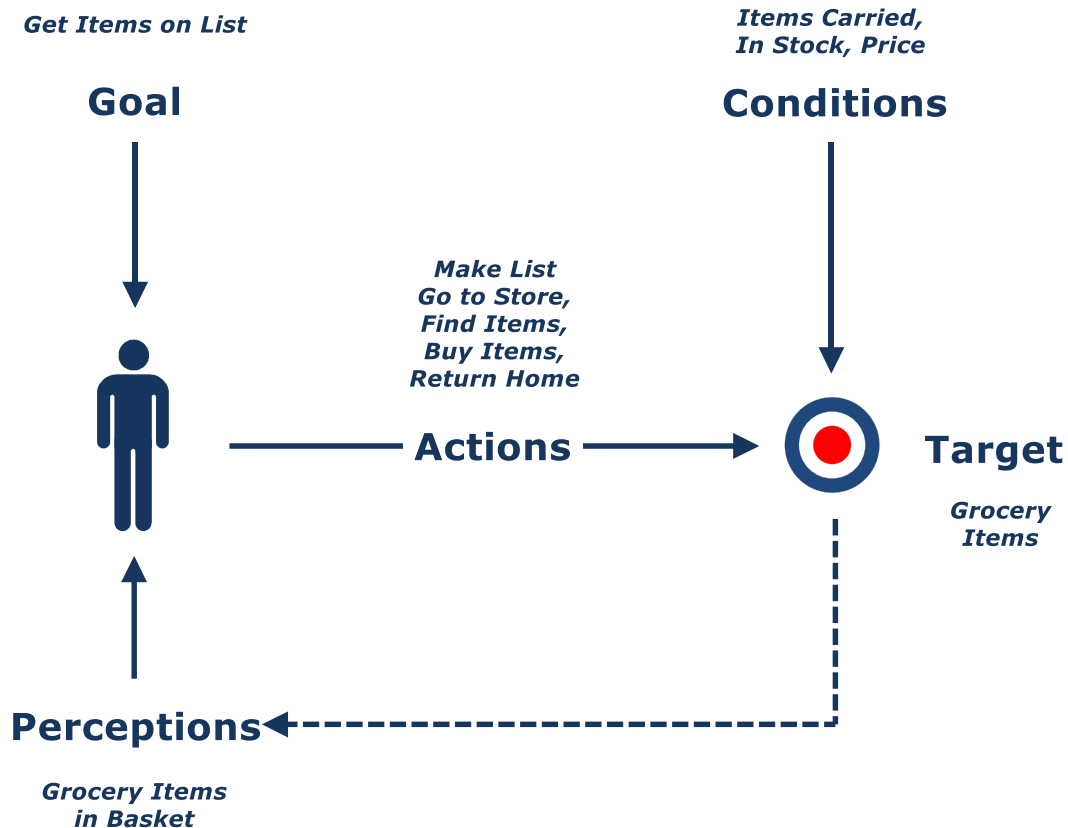
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This document was created from the Notes version of a PowerPoint presentation and consists of numerous graphics accompanied by a minimum amount of text. It presents The Target Model of Human Behavior and Performance, also known as The GAP-ACT Model.

Going to the Grocery Store



The target – or targets in this case, are grocery items.

Most of us have a goal when we do this and it's usually written down – in the form of a grocery list that specifies which grocery items we're going after.

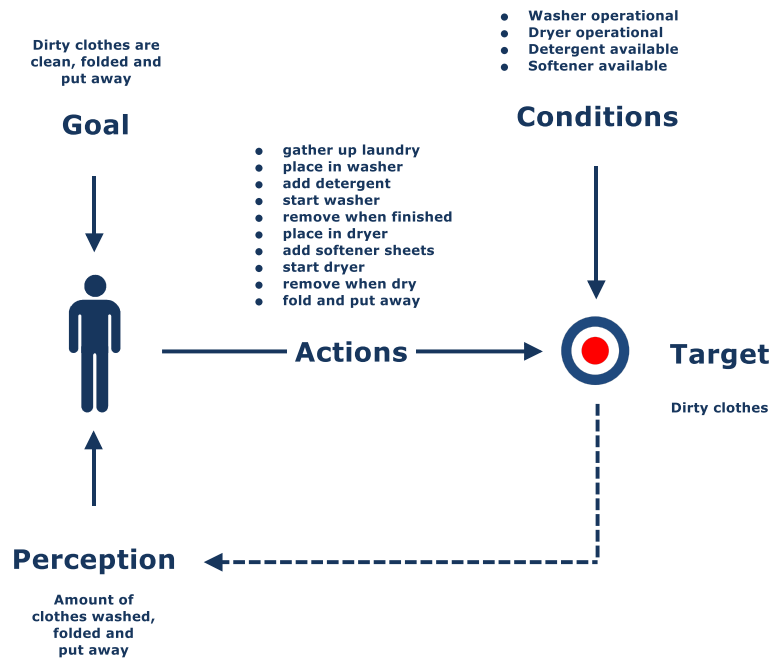
List in hand off we go to the store. We walk the aisles, find the items, buy them, and head back home.

Like as not, we check off the items on our list as we're making our way around the store. Thus, we can see how we're progressing and we can tell when we're done.

Assuming the items we're after are carried, in stock and the price is acceptable, we encounter no problems. But, if they're not, that's a different matter.

Now for another little mundane example: Doing the laundry.

Doing the Laundry



In my house, I do the laundry, so I'm intimately familiar with this one.

The target is pretty obvious: dirty clothes.

The goal is that the dirty clothes are clean, folded and put away.

The list of actions is familiar enough.

And it's pretty easy to keep track of how you're doing and when you're done.

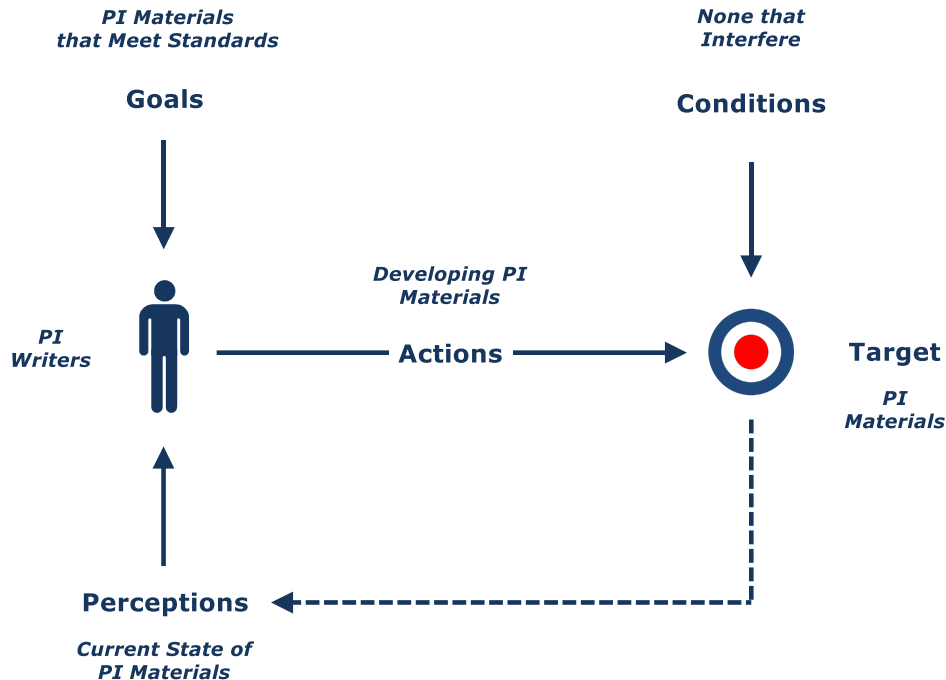
Assuming you have the necessary supplies and nothing goes wrong, progress and completion are pretty much guaranteed.

Now, let's move a little closer to the workplace.

The next example is from my Navy days: when I ran the Navy's Programmed Instruction Writer's Course in San Diego.

The Target (GAP-ACT) Model: A Mainly Visual Presentation

Programmed Instruction Materials



As the person in charge of the Navy's Programmed Instruction Writer's course, I had decided to rewrite it and I took an unusual approach.

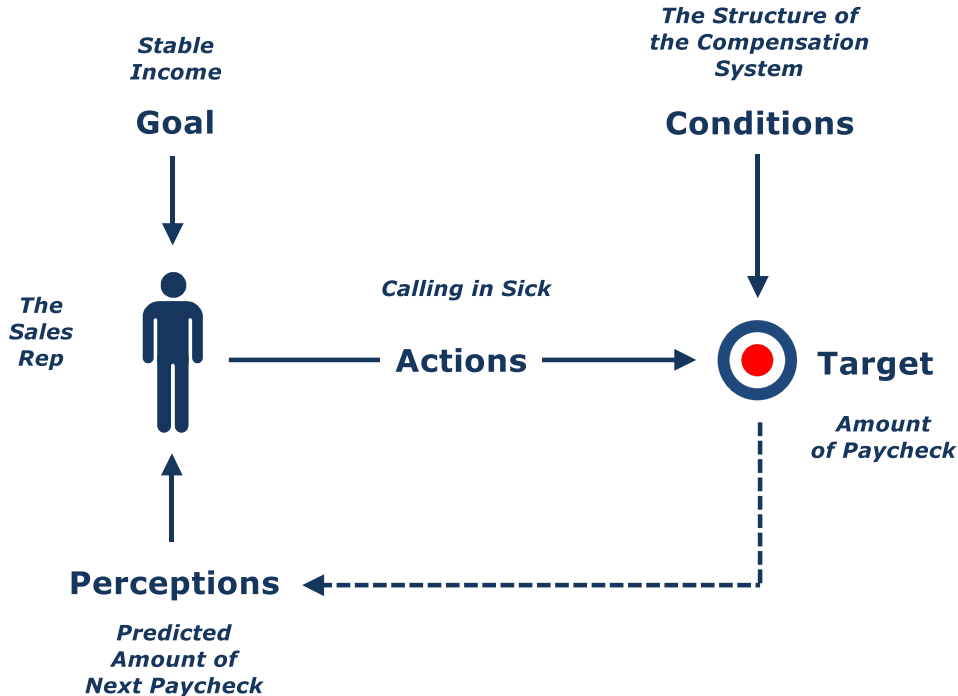
Instead of training the attendees in how to write or develop programmed instructional materials, they were taught how to evaluate them.

My reasoning was that if they could properly evaluate such materials, then they should also be able to produce acceptable PI materials. In other words, they could evaluate their own work products and adjust their approach accordingly. And indeed they could.

PI materials were the target. The goal was to produce materials that met the standards. The actions consisted of developing or writing such materials. The writers were kept informed as to progress and completion by way of their own perceptions of the materials they were producing. There were no interfering conditions.

The redesign of the course was successful. The trainees could not only produce acceptable PI materials, overall they did so much better and more quickly than with the previous design.

The Calling in Sick Puzzle



This example illustrates a situation that puzzled a sales manager at a company where I was doing some consulting work.

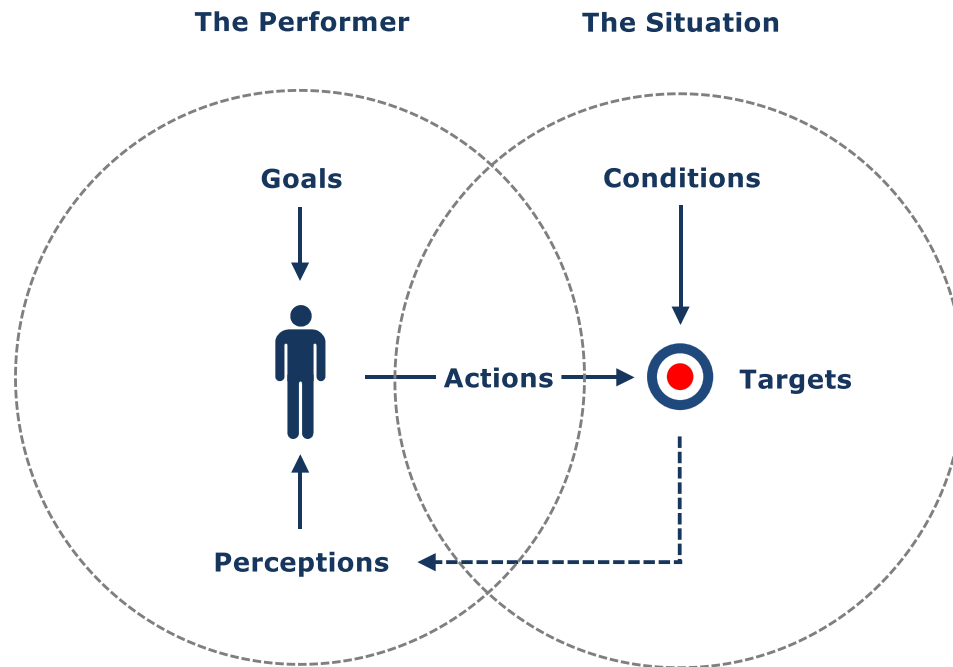
One of the best sales reps would occasionally call in sick – even though the rep was on a roll and even though the sales manager knew the rep wasn't sick. The sales manager asked me to look into the situation.

I had to drink a lot of beer and shoot a lot of pool with the sales crew but eventually I got to the bottom of the matter.

It seems the rep in question was more interested in getting a regular paycheck than in having one that went up and down with commissions, even though the total of the paychecks was the approximately the same.

Sick time was paid for on the basis of average sales and it was paid in the paycheck immediately following the sick time. Commissions were always delayed two weeks. So, if the rep was having a bad week, he would take sick time the week before those low commissions were to be reflected in his paycheck. In short, he was managing his paycheck.

The Target (GAP-ACT) Model



Here, then, is The Target (GAP-ACT) Model of Human Behavior and Performance.

To begin, we have a performer and a situation.

The performer takes actions that are meant to affect some variable embedded in the situation, to bring it to some specified value and keep it there.

The performer's goals specify the intended or desired value for the target variable.

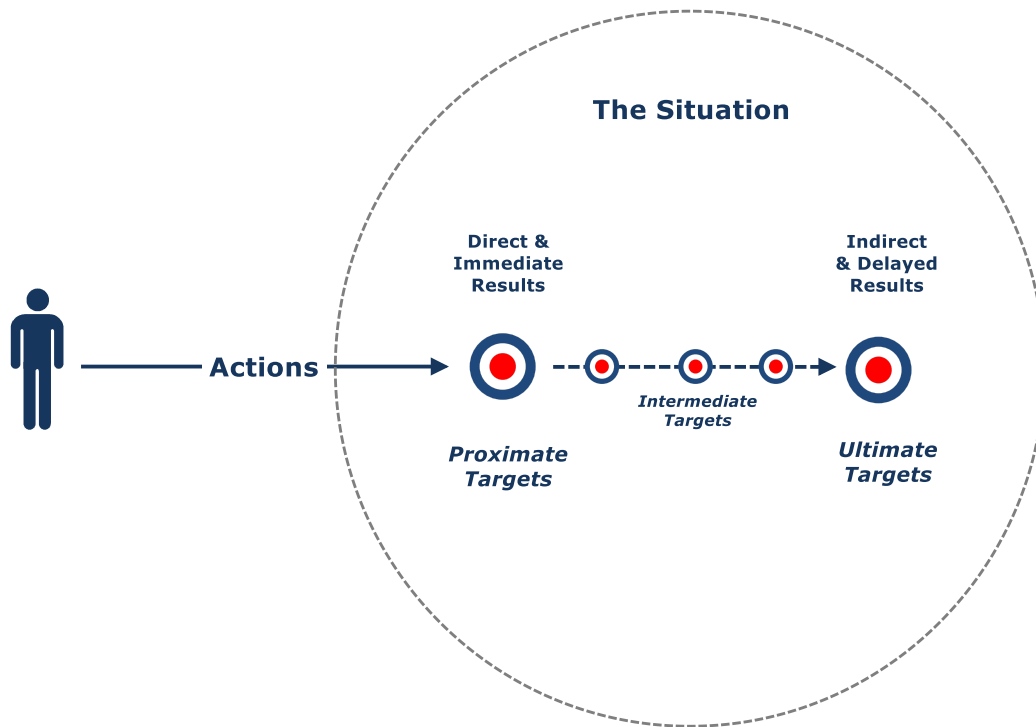
The performer's perceptions keep him or her informed as to progress and completion.

As performers, we keep at it until what we perceive to be the actual or current state of the target variable matches our intended state for it.

There are often other conditions, other actors and factors that affect a target variable. Unless they are overwhelming, our actions compensate for them. But, if they are overwhelming, we don't hit the target.

That's the gist of it but it does get a little more complicated.

From Proximate to Ultimate



Sometimes our targets are nearby in space and time. The results of interest are the direct and immediate outcomes of our actions.

On other occasions, the targets of interest are distant in space and time. The results of interest are indirect and delayed.

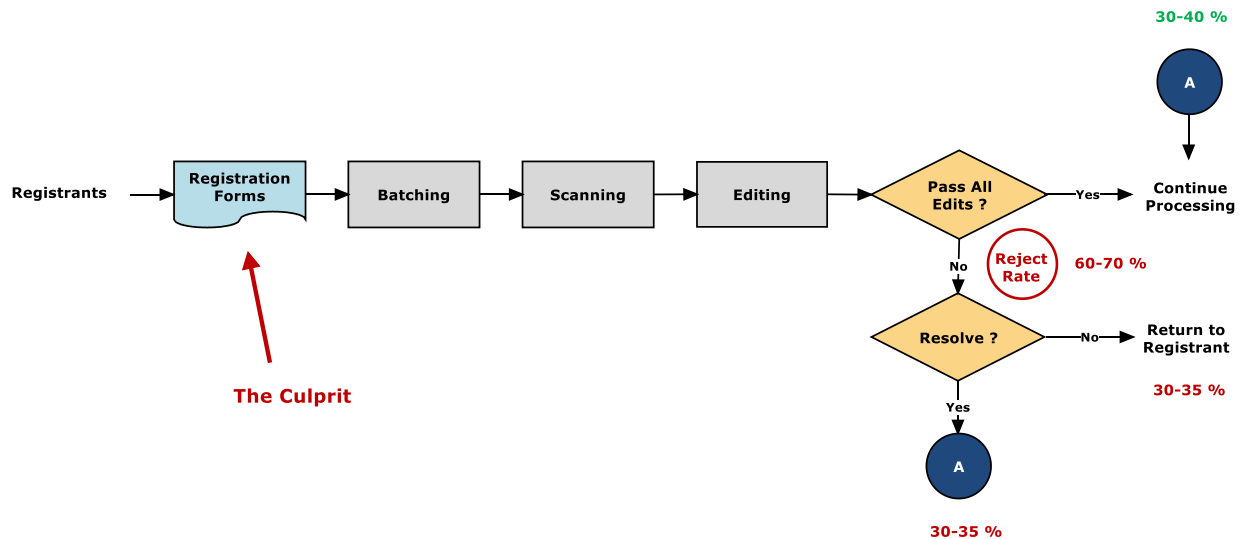
Consequently, we must concern ourselves with how the direct and immediate results of our actions “ripple through” the situation and lead to those indirect and delayed results.

In other words, we must be concerned with linking proximate and ultimate results.

This means we must also identify and bring about the intermediate results that lead from proximate to ultimate results. We must hit those intermediate targets as well.

The next examples will illustrate these relationships.

The Reject Rate Problem



A division director at a testing company where I worked asked me to look into an operational problem.

The operation processed registration forms for a professional certification examination. The registrants received a seat assignment at an upcoming test administration.

Only about one-third of the registration forms could be successfully processed on the first pass.

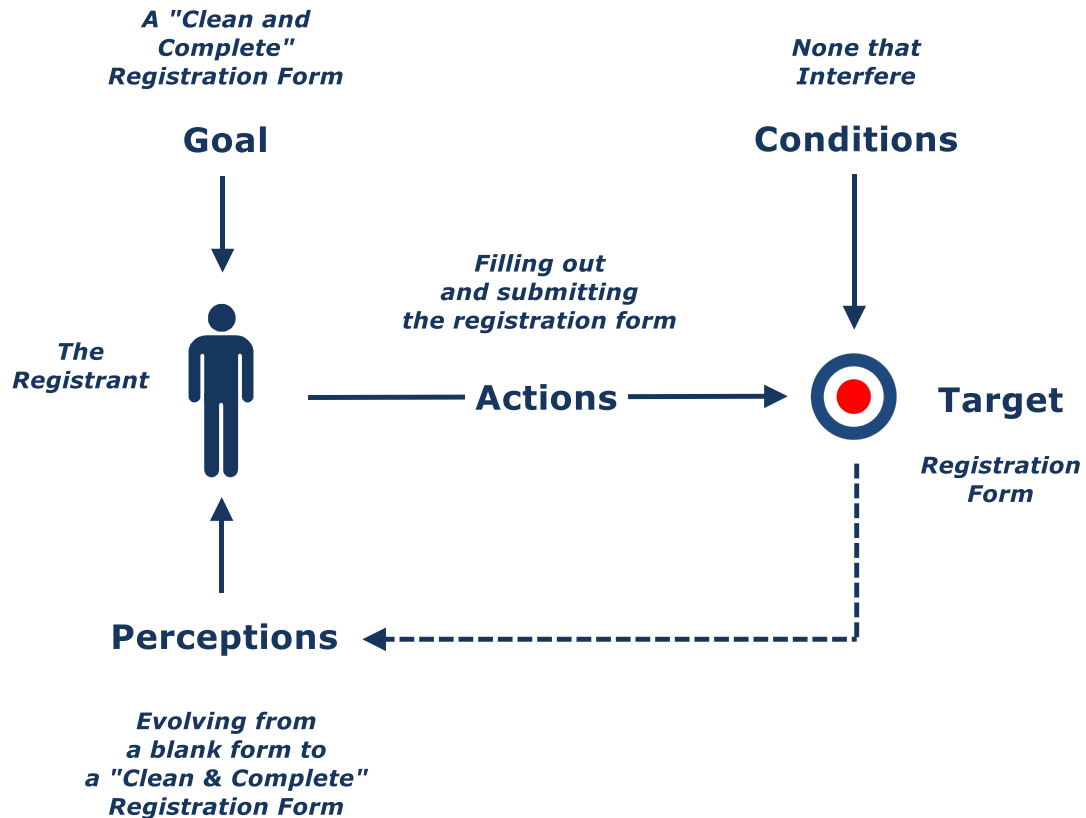
About half of the rejects could be corrected or resolved by clerical staff and about half had to be returned to the submitters.

An initial investigation quickly revealed that the registration forms being received were riddled with errors.

It was very clear that any solution had to result in the registrants doing a much better job of completing the registration form.

The Target (GAP-ACT) Model: A Mainly Visual Presentation

In An Ideal World



The target was the registration form.

In an ideal world, the registrants would want to submit what the testing company called a "clean and complete" registration form.

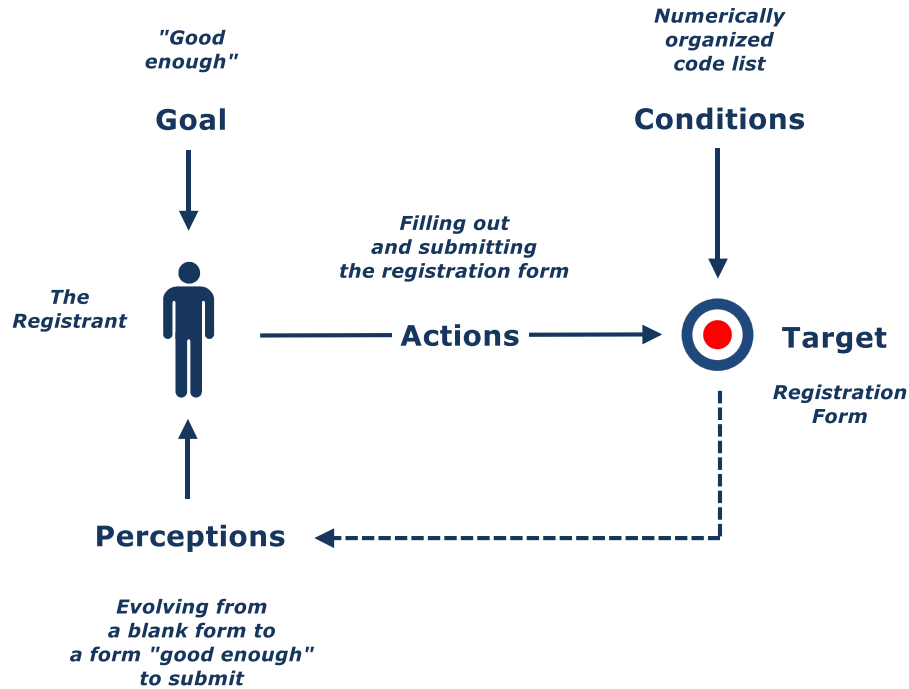
Moreover, as they filled out the form, they could tell how they were progressing and they could tell when the form was "clean and complete" and could be submitted.

And, there would be no hindrances or obstacles in their way.

But that wasn't reality.

The Target (GAP-ACT) Model: A Mainly Visual Presentation

In the Real World



The registrants viewed the registration form as a bureaucratic necessity. They saw no connection between it and their goals. Consequently, their goal for the registration form could be summed up as “good enough” – and that often meant however they filled it out was good enough.

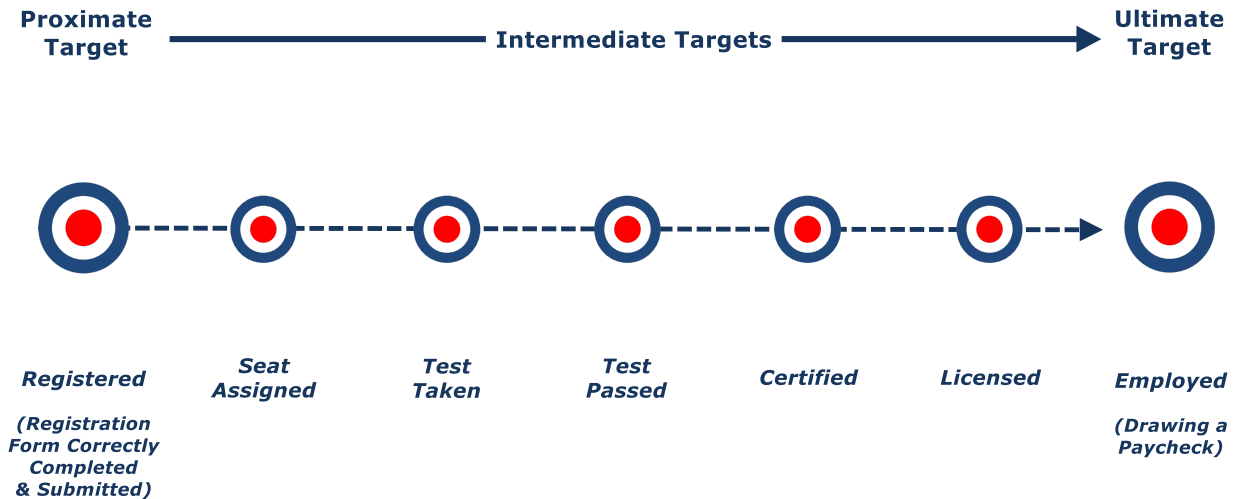
A complicating condition, one that accounted for almost half the rejects was a numerically organized code list.

The registrants had the names of the institutions where they had been trained and where they hoped to be employed. They were expected to provide the identifying code for both institutions. However, they had been provided with the same code list used by the testing company. It was organized by code number, not institutional name. Frustrated, no doubt, the registrants frequently entered any code from the list (and sometimes ones that weren't on the list).

Although coding errors accounted for half the rejects, there was still the other half which could only be described as the result of sloppy work. And so the investigation went deeper.

The Target (GAP-ACT) Model: A Mainly Visual Presentation

The Registrants' Proximate to Ultimate



The graphic above illustrates the linkages between the registrants' ultimate goal of being employed and drawing a paycheck and a "clean and complete" registration form.

The registrants wanted to be employed and drawing a paycheck.

First, however, they had to be licensed. In order to be licensed, they first had to be certified. To become certified, they had to pass a test and, of course, they had to take it before they could pass it.

To take the test, they had to have a seat assigned at an administration and to get a seat assignment they had to register with the testing company.

Registration was in fact on the critical path to their goal of becoming employed. It was an important proximate target and result for them. The problem was they weren't aware of that.

My Proximate to Ultimate



My ultimate target was the reject rate. I wanted to get it down. My client, the division director, wanted it down too but that was a means to other ends for him (see his Ultimate Targets in the diagram above).

The reject rate tied to the quality of the registration forms and that tied to the registrants' behaviors in filling out the form. Those, in turn, related to their goals for the form (and, as it happened, to a barrier in the form of that numerically organized code list).

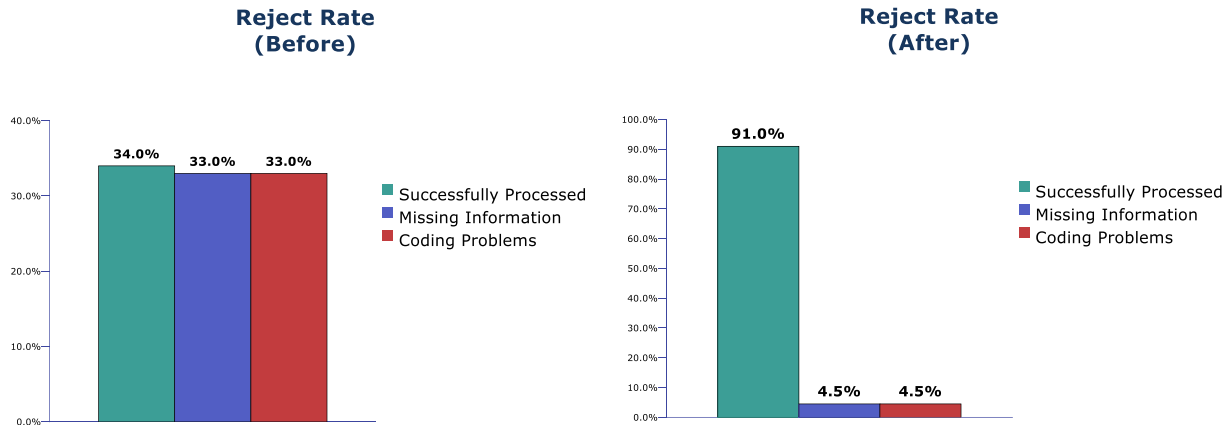
Driving all this – from the registrants' perspective – was their perception of the role the registration form played in relation to their own goals. At the time, many of them didn't see it as playing a role of any importance.

My only avenue for affecting all this was by way of the instructions to the registrants for filling out the registration form.

And so the instructions for filling out the registration form were rewritten, emphasizing the importance to them of a properly completed registration form. They were also provided an institutional code list that was alphabetically organized. The results were quite dramatic.

The Target (GAP-ACT) Model: A Mainly Visual Presentation

Before and After

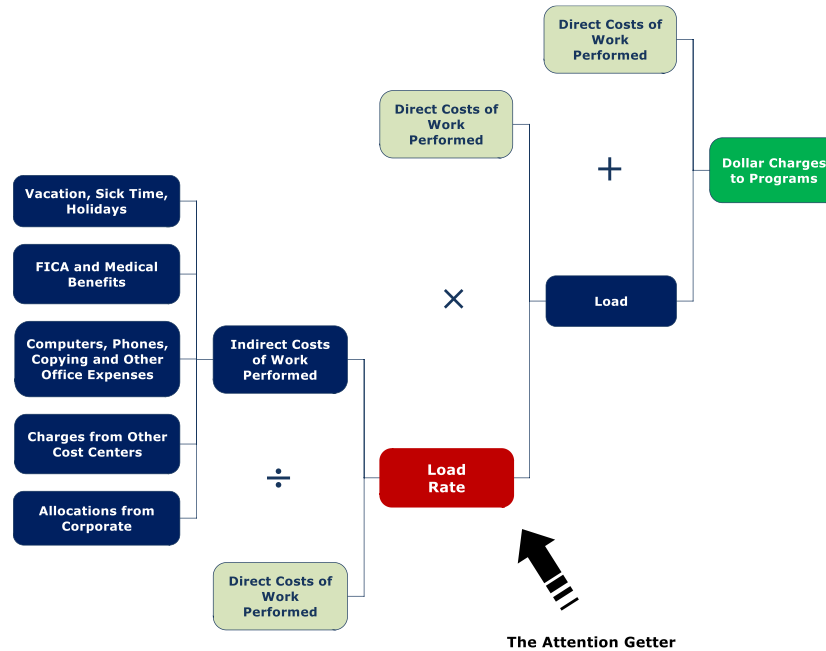


When we started out roughly one-third of the registration forms were successfully processed on the first pass. One-third of the forms were rejected then reworked and resolved, and one-third were returned.

Afterward, slightly more than 90 percent were successfully processed on the first pass with less than five percent reworked and less than five percent returned.

When the division director was asked if he wanted the reject rate taken even lower, he said, "Nah, I've got bigger fish to fry."

The Load Rate Problem



My client, the division director, was promoted to VP of another operation and it seems my reward for solving the reject rate problem was to succeed him as the division director.

Shortly after taking over, the division in question, along with some others, was moved to a new and more expensive location and the division was situated in 20,000 square feet instead of the 16,000 square feet it had previously occupied.

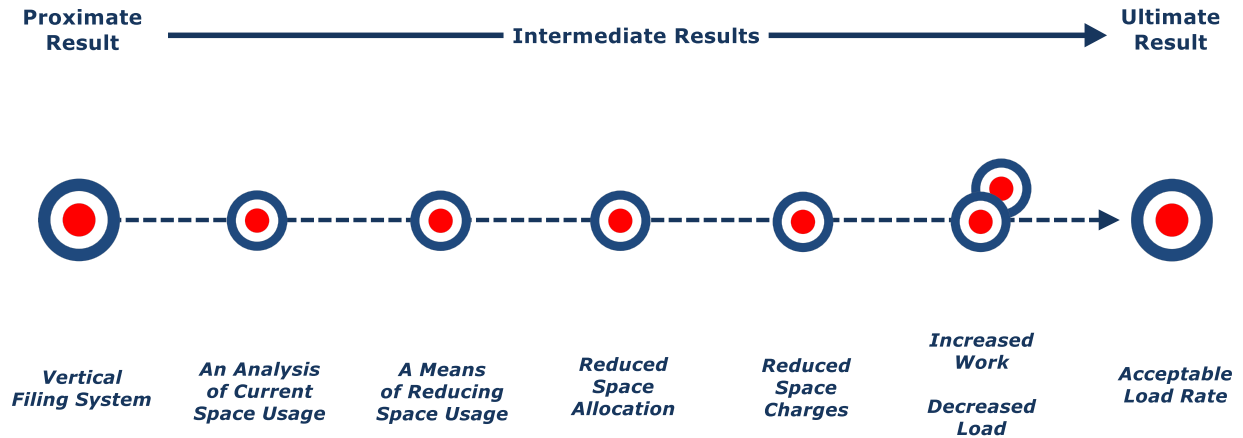
It wasn't long before the program managers who "owned" the programs operated in my division were beating on me about the "load rate" being too high.

The combination of more space and more expensive space meant that the indirect costs of the work performed in the division had increased; however, the direct costs were roughly the same. The load (indirect costs) and the load rate had increased and the program managers were after my scalp, threatening to move their programs to another division that had a lower load rate.

So off I went in search of a solution, one that could tie some action on my part to a reduced load rate.

The Target (GAP-ACT) Model: A Mainly Visual Presentation

The Load Rate: Proximate to Ultimate



The ultimate target was an acceptable load rate. No one expected it to be as low as it had been but everyone expected it to be much lower than its new high.

The structure of the system through which charges to programs were calculated offered two possibilities for getting the load rate down: increase the amount of work performed by the division (i.e., increase direct charges) or find some way of reducing the indirect charges.

There was no additional work for my division on the horizon so my only option was to find a way of reducing charges for space. My only option for doing that was to reduce the amount of space corporate allocated to my division and that meant I had to find a different way of utilizing space and that, of course, led an analysis of current space usage.

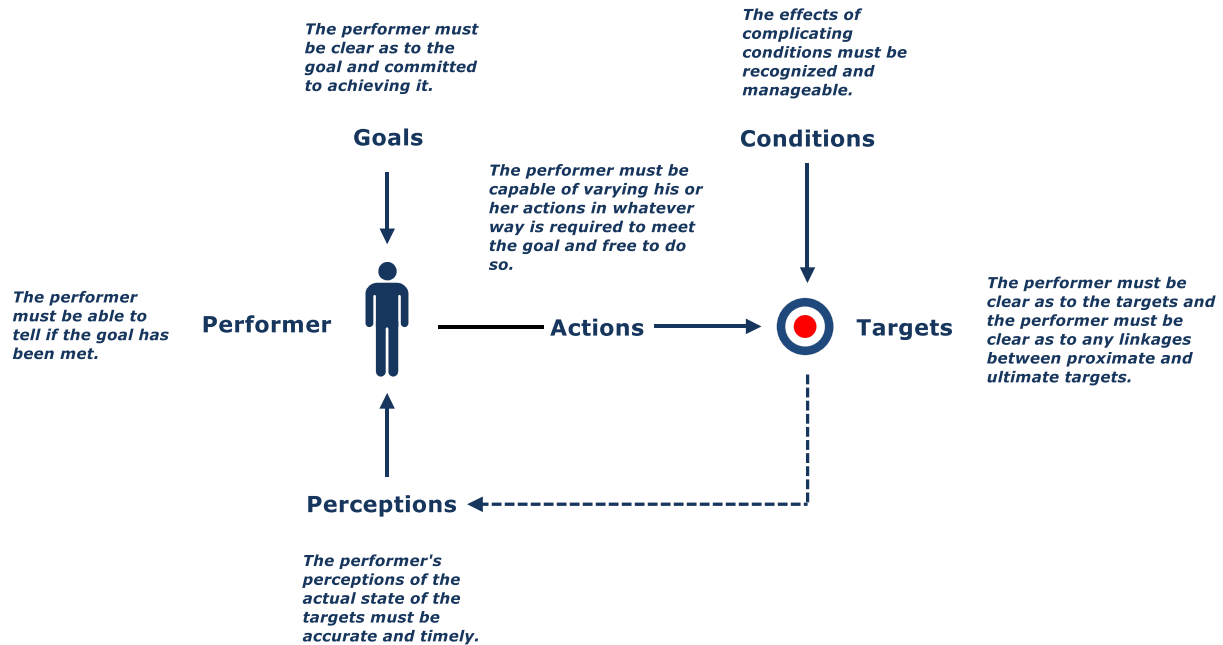
As it turns out, my division's 20,000 square feet consisted of 5,000 square feet in one building and 15,000 square feet in another. The operation in the 5,000 square feet location used tub files, which meant it ate up space in the horizontal plane. A shift to vertical filing systems would significantly reduce its footprint and allow me to fold it back into the main area.

The tub files were replaced with vertical filing systems, the two spaces were consolidated, 5,000 square feet were turned back to corporate, and the division's load rate was lowered enough to placate the program managers.

With this series of examples behind us, let's look at the requirements the Target Model poses in relation to human performance.

The Target (GAP-ACT) Model: A Mainly Visual Presentation

Some Cold, Hard Facts about Human Performance



Consider the annotations above as some cold, hard facts about human performance in light of the Target (GAP-ACT) Model.

They express some requirements that must be satisfied if performance is to meet expectations.

Look them over and then we will continue.

The Target (GAP-ACT) Model: A Mainly Visual Presentation

Some Things to Do in Support of Performance



The preceding requirements suggest some things that can be done to support performance – yours or someone else’s.

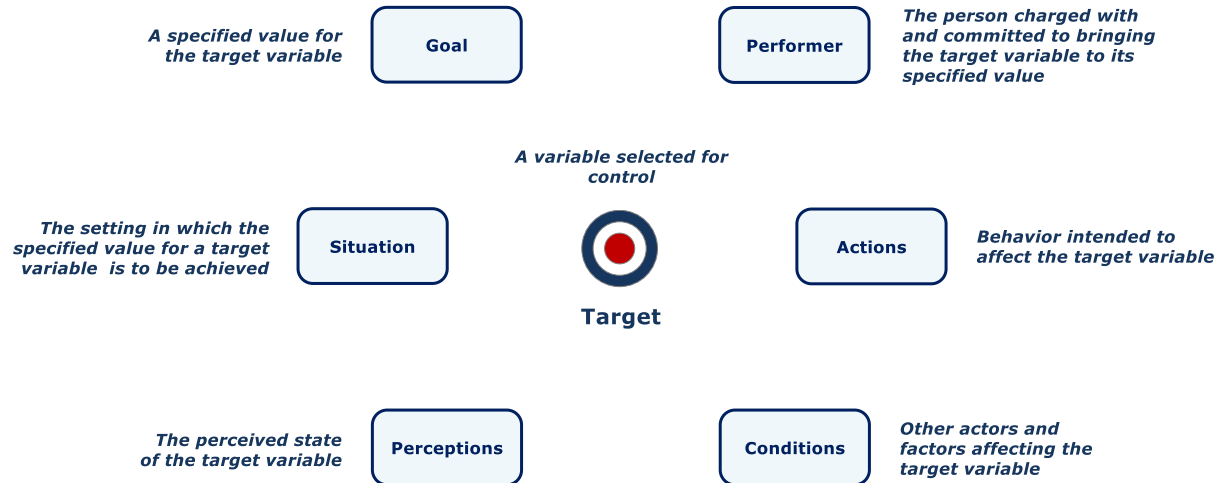
These avenues for supporting performance are depicted in the annotations above.

The ones in red are those I consider especially important.

As before, look them over and then we’ll continue.

The Target (GAP-ACT) Model: A Mainly Visual Presentation

The Seven Elements of Human Performance: A Recap



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The Target (GAP-ACT) Model suggests seven elements of human performance. They are shown above and they serve as a recap of this presentation.

First is the *target*, some variable selected for control. Second is the *goal* which specifies the intended state of the target variable, the result to be achieved. Third is the *performer*, the person charged with and committed to achieving the result (i.e., hitting the target). Fourth is the *situation*, the structural setting in which the target variable is embedded and in which actions are taken. Also found in the structure of the situation are linkages connecting proximate, intermediate and ultimate results and target variables. *Actions* are fifth; they are intended to affect the target variables. The performer's *perceptions* are sixth; they inform the performer as to the current or actual state of the targets. The performer compares the goal and the actual state of the target to identify any gap or error and thus the efficacy of his or her actions. Seventh and last are the other actors and factors that also affect the target variables. On occasion, these complicating *conditions* can interfere with or impede hitting the target.

This concludes this presentation of The Target (GAP-ACT) Model of Human Behavior and Performance. Thanks for taking the time to look through it.

A final note and some links to additional relevant resources and contact information for me are provided on the next page.

The Target (GAP-ACT) Model: A Mainly Visual Presentation

A Final Note

In case you've been wondering about the alternate name of GAP-ACT for the Target Model, GAP stands for Goals, Actions, Perceptions. ACT stands for Actions, Conditions, Targets. It is also a useful reminder that when we perceive a gap, we act and, conversely, no gap means no action. We act to keep things the way we want them and when they are that way no action is necessary.

Links to Additional Resources

- [Helping Other People Hit Their Performance Targets](#)
- [Manage Your Own Performance: No One Else Can](#)
- [Managerial Performance: Achieving Stable Results under Varying Conditions](#)
- [PCT 101: A Perceptual Control Theory Primer](#)

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