

Scales: Practical Change Tools

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Coert Visser (coert.visser@planet.nl) is a consultant, coach and trainer using the solution-focused change approach. This approach is focused on simply helping individuals, teams and organizations to make progress in the direction of their own choice. Coert wrote many articles and a few books. More information: <http://solutionfocusedchange.blogspot.com/>

Summary - Scales are very easy to use and have many applications. Through this article I want to give you a quick guide to using them.

Scales belong to the simplest, most appealing and accessible tools that have emerged within the practise of the solution-focused approach to change management. Scales are very easy to use and have many applications. With this article I want to give you a quick guide to using them.

How do you use scales?

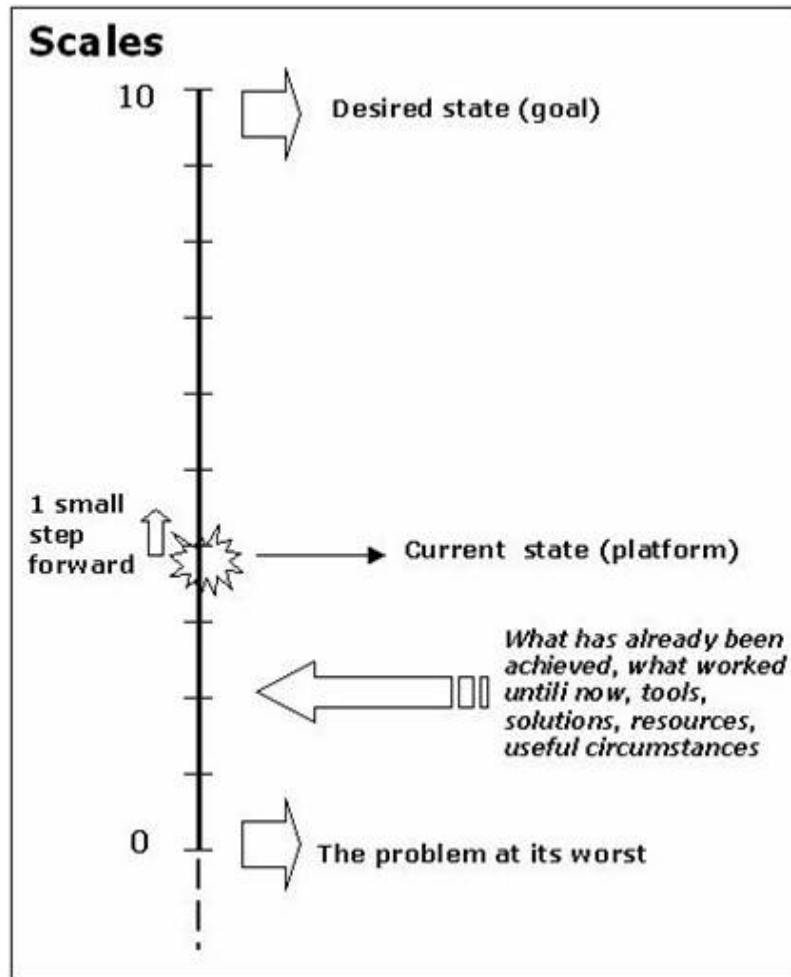
Below, I will first explain the basics of using scales:

1. Explanation of the scale: the coach explains that the scale goes from 0 to 10. 0 stands for the situation in which the problem is at its worst and 10 stands for the situation in which the problem is completely gone and the desired state has been achieved.
2. Ask for the score: the coach then asks the coachee what his current position on that

scale is (this is called 'the platform). The coach has does not judge whether this score is 'right' or not.

3. Focus on what is already there: then the coach asks how the person has already come to this position. What made this possible? Thus, the coach focuses strongly on what is already there, instead of on what has yet to be done.
4. Visualize the desired state: then, the coach invites the coachee to describe higher points on the scale. For instance, the 10 position, in which the desired state will be completely achieved.
5. Invite to take 1 step forward: then, the coach invites the coachee to take one small step forward.

The following picture shows all the elements mentioned above:



Case: communication

John is a project manager who is sent to a coach by his manager who thought he communicated too bluntly. After about 10 minutes, the coach begins to use the scale technique.

CONSULTANT: John, on a scale from 0 to 10, on which '0' stands for 'my communication at its worst' and 10 stands for 'my communication at its best', where would you say you are now?

JOHN: Mmmm... I would say about a 5 or 6... Let's say I am at a 5½ now.

CONSULTANT: A 5½ ? That is great! So

you have gone from a 0 to a 5½.. What are some of the things that helped you to do that?

JOHN: I am less impulsive than I used to be. I try to think before I say something. I have learned not to say just anything that pops into my mind. I used to do that but now I don't do that anymore.

CONSULTANT: Aha. How do you remind yourself to think before you speak?

JOHN: I have learned that it usually makes things worse. So I just say to myself: 'stop, don't say it!'

CONSULTANT: Terrific! What else has helped you achieve that 5½?

JOHN: (pause)... one thing I do is ask other

people's advice before I communicate.
 CONSULTANT: Ok. How does that help?
 JOHN: It's good to learn how other people look at a situation. You get a broader perspective. It helps me to be more subtle and diplomatic in my responses.
 CONSULTANT: More subtle and diplomatic?
 JOHN: Yes. For instance, when I had to send an email last week I was really mad at first and my first impulse was to write a furious email. But I did not do that. I wrote an email and asked a colleague to read that before I send it. Just the thought that someone will look at my text before I send it helps me to be more aware of how to write it. After she'd read it, I changed a few more things. In the end the email was much better than the one I would have sent if I'd done it impulsively.
 CONSULTANT: Ok, I can see that. Now, imagine how your communication would be at a 10. Could you describe that for me?
 JOHN: Mmmm... I guess it would be more conscious and tactful.
 CONSULTANT: How would I recognize that it was conscious and tactful?
 JOHN: There would be no badmouthing, no attacks. There would be understanding for the other person's view and position. Yet, it would be very clear what my view was too.

Different types of scales

In the process of change there are various types of scales one might use.

1. Success scale: this is the scale used most frequently. It is the scale on which 0 stands for the problems at its worst and a 10 for the desired state. This 'success' can stand for any change topic you like (coping with stress, improving sales success, solving a

conflict, and so on). Of course, you can use this scale by asking questions like: where are we now on the scale, what has helped us to get there? What would be different at the 10-position? What might be a small step forward?

2. Motivation scale: this scale is used to talk about and strengthen the motivation of individuals or groups. On this scale a 0 might stand for: I am not prepared to do anything at all to accomplish change and a 10 stands for I am prepared to do anything to accomplish this change. Again, you can ask all the normal scaling questions like the ones we mentioned above.
3. Confidence scale: this scale is used to talk about and strengthen the confidence of individuals or groups that they can accomplish change. A 0 might stand for: I have absolutely no confidence that I can accomplish this and a 10 might stand for: I am sure I can do this.
4. Independence scale: this scale we use to talk about and strengthen the independence of individuals or groups in the process of change. As solution-focused consultants we do want to help clients but don't want them to become dependent on us. On this scale a 0 might stand for: I/we cannot do this alone and desperately need outside help (from a consultant for instance). A 10 might stand for: I/we know how to proceed independently with this change process and don't need outside help anymore.

Scales are often used in one-on-one situations like coachings and appraisal conversations. But they are also very applicable in group situations. A great exercise with scaling is scale walking. I learned it from Paul Z. Jackson. This exercise can be done individually but is also very suitable for use in groups, small and large (we have done this exercise with groups up to 70 people). This is how it goes:

Scale walking

You ask the members of the group to imagine that one side of the room represents zero, the other side 10. Then you ask them to think of our current position on the scale as N and you ask all to come and stand at position N. Next, you ask them to look back at the 1 position and ask them what they see and what has brought them to position N. Then you ask them to turn around and look at position 10 and ask them how this feels. Then you invite them to come and stand at position 10 and ask them to visualize how this would be and what would be possible when they would stand here. Then they step back to their current position N and you ask them to imagine one small step forward they we might take. And then you

invite them to take this step once they have thought what it was.

Now you?

The possibilities of scales are practically endless. You can invent any type of scale you find useful.

Now imagine the following scale. 0 stands for 'Scales seem completely useless to me' and 10 stands for 'I really feel like trying this out'. Where are you now?

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