SOMSP Newsletter 8

Tue, Nov 7, 2017 at 7:18 AM

SOMSP

Society for Mental Space Psychology

Editioral.

We are looking back upon a very fruitful and inspiring period, in which the Society has sturdily grown and has reached a new level of professionalism and organisation. We became active on Facebook, so we can now update you very quickly on all our activities and expand our community. Our YouTube channel is also now online where you will find many interesting video's about MSP.

The SOMSP Board (from left to right):

Lucas Derks, Robert Hemelaar, Jacqueline Heemskerk, René Koppelaar, Gert Arts,

Michiel Brandt, Christine Beenhakker, Ruud van Langeveld (not on this picture)

Our most important aim is to unite research and clinical practice in the field of Mental Space Psychology, and as such be an important source and a worldwide connection for everyone who is interested in this subject. Share articles with us or contribute to our foundation by supporting us with your ideas for research and development and/or scientific results and papers. Financial contributions for scientific research are also very welcome. If you would like to sponsor us financially, please contact Michiel Brandt.

Hypno-Culture Congress

Paris, 8 – 10 September 2017.

During this congress Lucas Derks gave a workshop about a new method for the treatment of moderate depression. This method, named Depression in Awareness Space (DAS) is a recently developed sequence of interventions that can be executed within the time frame of one single therapeutic session. Christine Beenhakker pointed out the effectiveness of the pilot research project, of which the results were very promising. The test results were published in the Journal of Experiential Psychotherapy in Romania and in various professional counselling magazines in the Netherlands. The whole congress was a very inspiring experience for us both, where we met up with various international colleagues and made new friends.

Workshop Depression in Awareness Space

Berg en Dal (The Netherlands) October 17, 2017

About 30 qualified therapists were trained in the research protocol of the DAS method by Lucas and Christine. Typical for the DAS approach is that it aims at the kind of depression that stems from one or more prolonged "intrusions" in the client's mental space. The types of depression that cause such intrusions are believed to result from the person's continuous repression of a 'too hard to handle' life issue. The proposed study wants to answer the question whether such a specific approach is more effective and more efficient than other forms of treatment. We wish all therapists lots of success with the treatment of their clients! The first test results can be expected by June 2018.



Knowledge

Dr. Brian Cullen works at the Nagoya Institute of Technology in Japan and is a certified trainer of hypnosis (NGH) and NLP (IANLP). We recently met Brian again at the Hypno-culture congress in Paris. He wrote an article "Goal-Stepping: setting and clarifying goals in physical space", which we highly recommend you to read! Thank you Brian for your most interesting contribution!

Christine Beenhakker BSc is a psychological counsellor in the Netherlands and a general member of the SOMSP board. The results of her pilot study on mental pace and depression "Dark Matter" were published in the Journal of Experiential Psychotherapy in Romania. This article presents some statistic figures about depression, the perspective of the DSM model of depression, an overview regarding a new emerging paradigm "Mental Space Psychology" and its connection with a hypothesis regarding lowering symptoms of depression.

Alexandru Ioan Manea is a PhD student at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences in Bucharest, Romania. He recently published an article "Mental Space meets Psychology" in the Journal of Experiential Psychotherapy in Romania. This paper outlines the basic concepts of mental space representations, its primary concepts and the connection to psychology and psychotherapy.

Joshua J. Foster e.a. published an article of a study by about spatial cognition, which we also like to share with you: *Alpha-Band activity reveals spontaneous representations of spatial position in visual working memory*. Read the interesting results of this study in the summary

Whats on.

For all activities concerning Mental Space Psychology and Social Panorama, please check our website.

7th International Conference on Spatial Cognition,
10 – 14 September 2018, Rome.
During this conference Christine Beenhakker BSc will present the first results of the DAS research project.

Goal-Stepping: Setting and Clarifying Goals in Physical Space

Dr. Brian Cullen
Nagoya Institute of Technology

One of the most commonly tasks of a coach or therapist is to help move the client's focus away from current perceived problems and then towards achieving goals that can make the 'problem' disappear or become irrelevant. There are many different kinds of goal setting processes such as the SMART model (Doran, 1981), the GROW model (Whitmore, 2002), the SPECIFY model (Bolstad, 2002), and some of my own previous work (Backwell & Cullen, 2016). All of these models are useful and help the client to become clearer about what they want and the steps required to get to achieving the goal. In most coaching or therapy sessions, the practitioner is likely to be seated with the client and working through the goal setting process with a pencil and paper. This can often yield good results, but sometimes standing up, locating the goal in the physical space around us, and moving can be even more useful.

This representation of goals and actions in physical space is in line with modern theories of embodied cognition which suggest that "cognitive processes are deeply rooted in the body's interactions with the world" and that humans routinely "off-load cognitive work onto the environment" (Wilson 2002:625). We have limits on our cognitive abilities (e.g., limits on attention and working memory), and so we naturally exploit the space around our bodies to reduce the cognitive workload. A simple everyday example of this is when we say something like "on the one hand… and on the other hand…" and literally use the space on the left and right sides of our body to organize our thinking. Despite evolution and the vastly increased cognitive functioning of modern humans over our primate ancestors, our neural resources are still primarily focused on perceptual and motoric processing, and our cognitive activity still consists mainly of real-time interaction with our environment. In these theories of embodied cognition, human cognition is not seen as something that is centralized in the brain, but rather has deep connections to the movements of our bodies. Laying out our goals and actions in physical space makes sense because "we make the environment hold or even manipulate information for us, and we harvest that information only on a need-to-know basis" (Wilson 2002:626).

These ideas of embodied cognition are entirely in line with the concepts of mental space psychology that suggest that location is a very important factor in human psychology. Setting up the goal and the steps towards the goal in a physical space can begin to both metaphorically and literally get clients moving towards their goal more effectively than writing out a list while sitting in the fixed position of a chair. This article proposes an activity called goal-stepping which can be adapted for use with any of these goal setting models. It also reports on a small-scale research study which was carried out in a Japanese university to help students to develop better goal-setting skills.

Location of Goal and Direction of Motion

If we accept the idea that using space to organize our goals is a beneficial one, the question arises as to the *location* of our goal within the physical space and the *direction of motion*, i.e., whether we should start at our goal or start at our current location. Following the basic principle of pacing the client's current map of the world, the *location* of the goal should normally be specified by the client. I generally have the client throw a pen or other small object and set the location where the object lands. This allows the client to set the overall direction, but also introduces a little bit of randomness into the location of the goal, a situation that represents the mixture of human agency and randomness that exists in the real world.

With regard to the *direction of motion*, one way to think about goals is to begin at your current situation and then to consider the actions or steps that you need to take between now and achieving your goal (Figure 1). This stepping forward towards a goal can be a useful method but sometimes the distance between you and your goal can seem daunting. For example, if you are just starting the piano and your goal is to play a show of one hour in length in front of a live audience, you may become overwhelmed by the idea of how to get there and become demotivated.

Figure 1. Starting at your current situation

An alternative method is to start at your goal and think how you can step back to your current position (Figure 2). This can often be more fun, more motivating, and more effective. One reason is that you can get a sense of the excitement that you will feel when you achieve your goal and you can bring that back to motivate you. In addition, starting with your goal follows Steven Covey's old advice (1989) in the book *7 Habits of Successful People* to "start with the end in mind," and it allows you to see much more precisely what the end result of your actions need to be and therefore to take more precise actions.

While neither of these methods is necessarily better than the other for every client situation, my own work has generally convinced me that starting at the goal and stepping back is the more effective method in helping people to achieve goals. With this in mind, the goal-stepping exercise proposed below uses this stepping back approach.

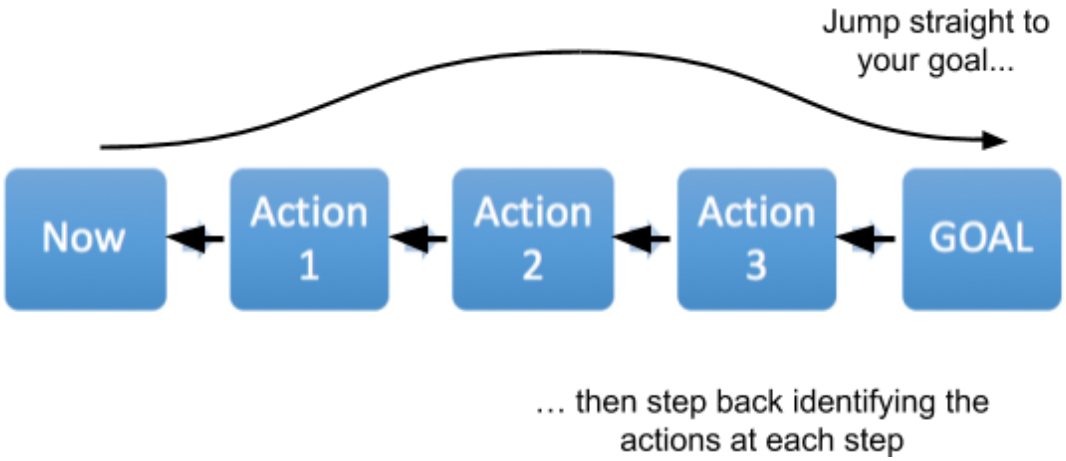


Figure 2. Starting at the goal and working backwards

Context

The goal-stepping exercise as introduced in this paper and the examples are from my work teaching in a foreign language classroom in two different universities in central Japan (n=40). The goal setting activity also acted as a language practice activity, and students took turns carrying out the role of coach and client in the exercise. Following the class, students were required to submit a report listing their goal, their steps toward their goal and their rating of several statements on a scale of 1-10 (shown in Appendix 2).

A simple version of the goal-stepping activity is given below for the context of therapy/coaching. The fuller version of the activity with examples is given in Appendix 1 as I use it with students in the classroom. If you are working primarily with single clients in a coaching or therapeutic setting, it should be straightforward to refer to Appendix 1 and simply substitute the word 'client' for 'student' and to make any other appropriate small changes to fit your context.

Goal-Stepping Activity Short Version

Part A: Help the client to visualize the goal

In most cases, this goal will emerge naturally in the course of the session. If not, you could use words such as the following or any of the goal setting models listed in the introduction to this paper, or your own usual patter. Take notes on the client's answers so that you can utilize them later.

"Think of a goal that you would like to achieve. It can be any area of your life, for example health, study, future career, money, relationships, or some other area. When do you want to achieve it? It is also good to think about the evidence that tells you that you have successfully achieved your goal. For example, what do you see, hear, feel, touch, or say to yourself when you have achieved your goal?

Part B: Physically move to the Goal and then step back to Now

1. Bring your goal to mind again.
2. Imagine your goal is located in a space at least two meters away. Which direction do you think your goal is in? You might like to throw a coin or other small object to mark the position of your goal.
3. Walk from Now to your Goal. Step into your Goal.
4. As you stand at your Goal, imagine achieving your goal as clearly as possible. *[Read back your notes on the evidence that the client gave]*
5. Take a step back. What is the action that needs to happen at this step?
   Write down the action that the client says.
6. Repeat step 5 at least three times or until the client arrives back at the original position
7. Have the client rewrite the list of actions.
8. Help the client to add missing details or chunk down any actions that are too big into smaller actions.

Options

- After stepping back all the way to Now, have the client walk forward from Now to the Goal imagining doing the actions at each step.
- If appropriate, have the client write a date for each action.
- Tell the client to find a picture to remind them of the goal and to stick it on the fridge or bedroom door or somewhere else at home to help them remember the goal. Stick up the list of actions next to the picture.

Some Useful Framing Metaphors

When carrying out this activity in a small or crowded space such as a classroom as was done in this study, different groups are likely to get in each other's way and to even cross the path of another group's goal. While this seemed like a hindrance at first, it can actually be utilized as a metaphor for the fact that all of our goals in life may put us in the path of other people's goals. Similarly, obstacles in the environment such as desks or chairs need not necessarily be moved out of the way to make the process easier. Instead, the client/student can be encouraged to view them as metaphorical representations of the obstacles that occur in life as we attempt to carry out our goals.

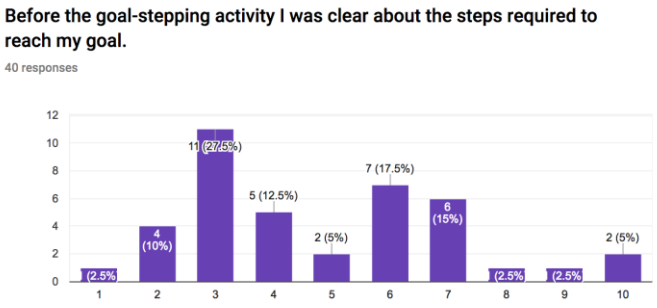
One other little fun metaphorical trick is having the client throw a coin or other small object to mark the position of their goal. This gets across the idea that goals do not have to be exact as long as we know that the right direction to move towards them. These types of metaphors can be used equally well in single-client situations or group situations.

Post-Activity Questionnaire

After the activity, students filled in a questionnaire via Google Forms and used the same form to submit a report about their goal. These questions are shown in Appendix 2. The questions were designed to allow for a simple before-after comparison on three areas: clarity about steps required to reach goal, motivation towards the goal, and belief that the goal is achievable. An additional question examined whether they found physical movement to be useful in the activity.

Results and Discussion

Figure 3 and 4 show student responses to their *clarity* about the steps required for the goal before and after the activity.



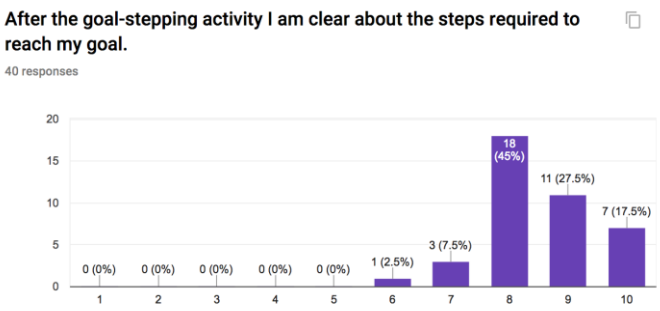
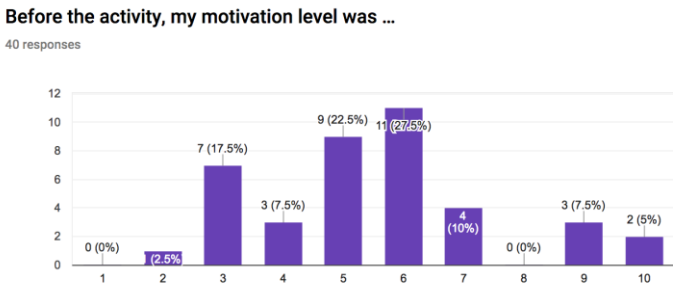


Figure 3 and 4. ***Clarity***

Figure 3 and 4 show the level of *motivation* towards the goal before and after the activity.



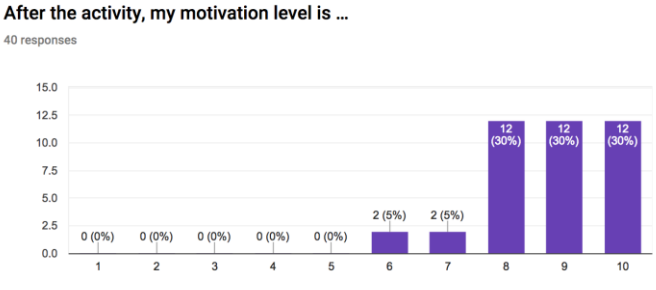
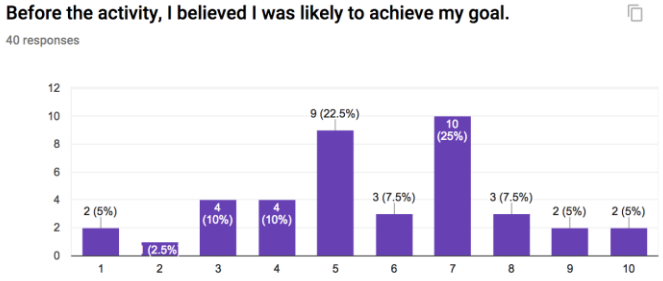


Figure 5 and 6. ***Motivation***

Figure 5 and 6 show the strength of *belief* that the goal will be achieved before and after the activity.



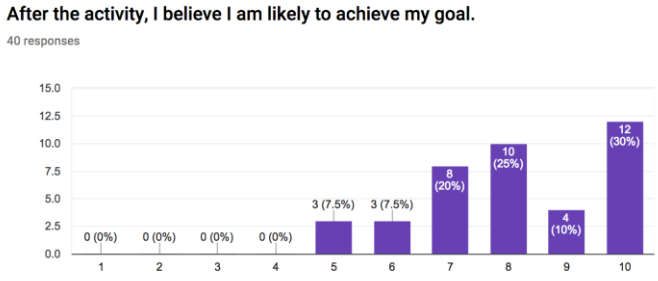


Figure 7 and 8: Belief

As the graphs in Figures 3-8 show, this short activity was very useful in all aspects. Even though the students were had only received simple instructions and had not been formally trained in goalsetting or coaching techniques, they were clearly able to guide another student in a way that significantly helped. A summary of the change in mean value for each case is shown in Table 1 below.

	Before Goal-Stepping	After Goal-Stepping
Clear about steps required	4.8	8.5
Motivation to achieve goal	5.5	8.7
Likely to achieve goal	5.8	8.1

Table 1. Change in variables from before to after goal-stepping activity

Paired t-tests were also carried out for each of these three variables and the differences were found to be statistically significant in all cases to a confidence interval of 99% ($p<0.01$). In other words, we can be almost positive that this before-after variation was not due to random fluctuations in the data.

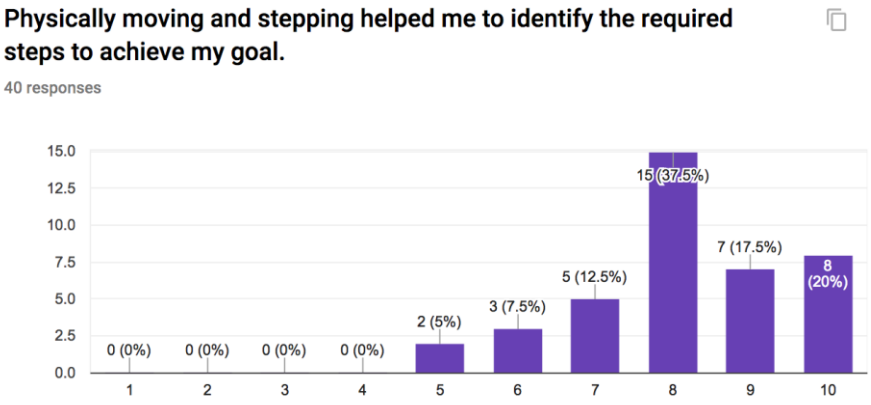


Figure 9. Physically moving was useful

Figure 9 shows that the students also clearly found that physically moving and stepping helped them to identify the required steps to achieve the goal (mean value=8.2).

Conclusion

From this simple study, it is clear that goal-stepping has strong positive effects on clarifying the steps required to carry out goals, the motivation to do so, and the perceived likelihood of achieving the goal. Three suggestions might be made for future research:

a) While the participants reported that physically moving was helpful, this research study did not make a comparison between goal-setting with physical movement and more traditional goal-setting techniques without physical movement. While it seems highly likely that movement through a physical space does allow us to extend and better manipulate information within our mental space, it is recommended that future research makes a direct comparison between a control group that does goal-setting without movement and an experimental group that does goal-stepping.

b) In future research it would be useful to examine whether the amount of space provided has any relationship to the change in clarity, motivation, and belief. One possible hypothesis is that having more space between Now and the Goal would naturally produce actions of smaller chunk-size.

c) It would be useful to investigate the effect of obstacles or other people in the physical space. One hypothesis is that these will impinge negatively on cognitive processes because the obstacles in physical space also interfere with internal mental psychological space.

References

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2. Bolstad, R. (2002). *Resolve: A new model of therapy*. Crown House Publishing.
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4. Doran, G. T. (1981). There's a SMART way to write management's goals and objectives. *Management review*, *70*(11), 35-36.
5. Whitmore, J. (2002). Coaching for performance: GROWing people, perfomance and purpose. *J. Whitmore.–Boston: Nicolay Brealey*.
6. Wilson, M. (2002). Six views of embodied cognition. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, *9*(4), 625–636.

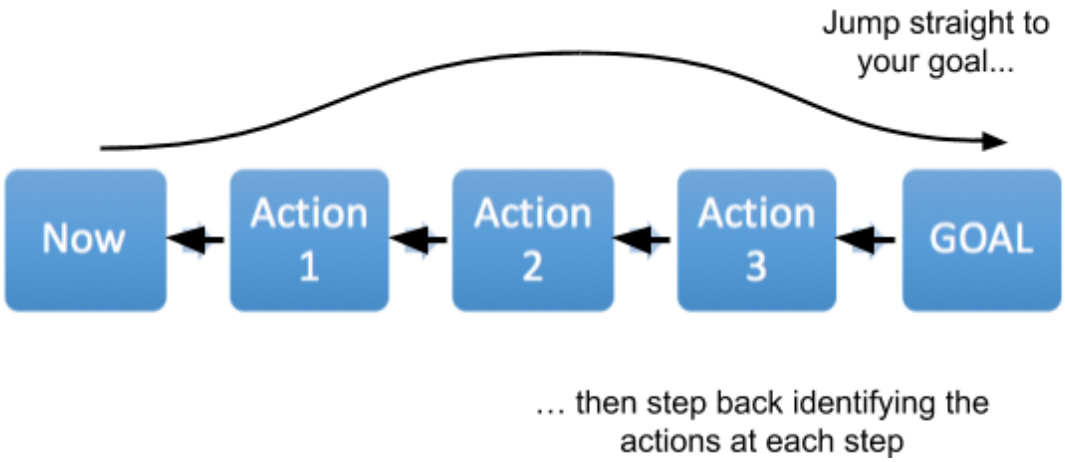
Appendix A - Student Handout

"Think of a goal that you would like to achieve. It can be any area of your life, for example health, study, future career, money, relationships, or some other area. When do you want to achieve it? It is also good to think about the evidence that tells you that you have successfully achieved your goal. For example, what do you see, hear, feel, touch, or say to yourself when you have achieved your goal?

1. Think of your goal.
2. Imagine your goal is located in a space two meters away. You might like to throw a coin or other small object to mark the position of your goal.
3. Walk to your goal. Step into your goal.
4. Visualize achieving your goal as clearly as possible.
5. Take a step back. What is the action that needs to happen at this step?
   Tell your partner and he/she will write it down.
6. Repeat step 3 at least three times or until you arrive back at your original position
7. Write your list of actions and the other details on the *Report* page.

Write these details on the *Report* page. Explain your goal to your classmate(s) in as much detail as possible.
One way to think about goals is to consider the actions or steps that you need to take between now and achieving your goal.

Another way is to start at your goal and think back. This can often be more fun, more motivating, and more effective.



Goal-stepping is an easy and fun way to help you to clarify and achieve your goals. You imagine that your goal is located in a space about 2 meters (or more) away from you. Then you step into your goal and trace back the action steps that got you from your current position to the goal.

1. Think of your goal.

2. Imagine your goal is located in a space two meters away. You might like to throw a coin or other small object to mark the position of your goal.
3. Walk to your goal. Step into your goal.
4. Visualize achieving your goal as clearly as possible.
5. Take a step back. What is the action that needs to happen at this step?
   Tell your partner and he/she will write it down.
6. Repeat step 3 at least three times or until you arrive back at your original position
7. Write your list of actions and the other details on the *Report* page.

Sample Dialogue

Partner A: Please guide B. Words in *italics* are instructions for you. Do not read them to B!

A. What is your goal?
B. My goal is _____.
A. Imagine your goal is in that space over there. (*point to floor about 2 meters away*).
Please walk there and step into your goal.
(*Wait until B has reached the space*).
Now, imagine you have achieved your goal. Close your eyes and really imagine it clearly!
What can you see? What can you hear? How do you feel?
What do you say to yourself?
Take a step back. "What is the action you need to take at this step?"
B. I have to _____ (*Write down B's answer*)

Repeat the question at least three times or until B arrives back at original position. Write down all B's answers.

When B is back at the original position, read B's steps to B in reverse order.
Is there anything missing? (*Write down any missing steps that B says*)
What little action can you do today?

Options

- Find a picture to remind you of your goal. Stick it on your fridge or bedroom door or somewhere else in your home to help you remember your goal.
- Stick up your list of actions next to your picture.

Report

Your name: _____
Student number: _____
My goal is _____
_____
I will achieve my goal by _____
When I achieve my goal, (write your evidence)_____
_____

Steps to Achieve my Goal

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix 2 - Questionnaire

Please answer the questions using the scale of 1-10 (1=Not at all 10=Absolutely)

1. ___ Before the goal-stepping activity I was clear about the steps required to reach my goal.
2. ___ After the goal-stepping activity I am clear about the steps required to reach my goal.
3. ___ Before the activity, my motivation level was …
4. ___ After the activity, my motivation level is …
5. ___ Before the activity, I believed I was likely to achieve my goal.
6. ___ After the activity, I believe I am likely to achieve my goal.
7. ___ Physically moving and stepping helped me to identify the required steps to achieve my goal.