

This Week's Citation Classic

Smith P C & Kendall L M. Retranslation of expectations: an approach to the construction of unambiguous anchors for rating scales.

J. Appl. Psychol. 47:149-55, 1963.

[Cornell University, Ithaca, NY]

Potential raters developed rating scales anchored by observed behaviors, scaled for dimension and level. Comparability across regional groups was indicated by scale reliabilities over .97. Attention to recorded observations and separation into dimensions should improve accuracy and facilitate constructive discussion with ratees. [The *Science Citation Index*® (SCI)® and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicate that this paper has been cited in over 170 publications since 1963, making it one of the most-cited papers published in this journal.]

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"Recommending one treatment of employees over another requires comparison of results measured in different situations on comparable scales. Focusing on *observed behavior* rather than memory could foster comparability. Moreover, setting individual goals for improved performance requires supervisors to discuss actual *behavior* with employees. With the National League for Nursing, we developed Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS), vertical graphic scales defined and anchored by scaled behavioral examples. Independent groups of head nurses defined dimensions to be rated, recalled examples they had experienced, and rated location of examples as anchors along the scales. High scale reliabilities showed comparability across regional groups. The resulting BARS, upon which new observations were to be noted and scaled, proved acceptable to users.

"Lorne Kendall recognized innovative features of the procedure and urged its publication. Other researchers were apparently attracted by potential accuracy of measurement. Some concentrated on minutiae of method while neglecting important note-taking, scaling, and discussion of observations.

"Unfortunately, Lorne did not live to see the happier outcomes we had anticipated: (1) An improved recommended procedure has now been published. (See Bernardin, La Shells, Smith, and Alvares;¹ Zedeck, Kafry, and Jacobs;² and Bernardin and Smith.³) (2) The advantages and disadvantages have been adequately researched. According to Jacobs, Kafry, and Zedeck,⁴ the continued widespread use of BARS should be based upon subjective factors. BARS are acceptable to employees and raters (only, I have found, when management is trusted). Focus on observed behavior makes BARS more widely useful than other ratings—for disciplinary action, employee development, promotion, transfer, training, supervision, and job analysis. But they have *not* been shown to be superior in psychometric properties to other carefully constructed scales for assessment of overall performance. They have been expensive. Developing BARS is warranted only when management and organization are ready to use them fully. (3) They are being widely and justifiably used as research criteria. (4) Some researchers are at last generalizing the method to ratings in areas other than performance. (5) Others are finally attending to the *process* of observation, evaluation, and rating (ZeJeck *et al.*).²

"Citations resulted from these developments. More citations will result from research on such unanswered questions as, can observations actually be made independent of selective perception? How do people combine evaluative data (with or without considering explicitly scaled observations) to yield summary evaluations? How many dimensions can various raters handle conceptually? Etc.

"Scales anchored by behavioral examples are probably here to stay, because of their acceptability to employees and management and usefulness for diagnosis and research. Procedures are being developed to simplify their construction, such as computer programs and grouping of jobs with similar dimensions. Emphasis will shift from minor psychometric issues to the importance of BARS in an accurate and constructive communication system."

1. Bernardin H I, La Shells M D, Smith P C & Alvares K M. Behavioral expectation scales: effects of developmental procedures and formats. *J. Appl. Psychol.* 61:75-9, 1976.
2. Zedeck S, Kafry D & Jacobs R. Format and scoring variations in behavioral expectation evaluations. *Organ. Behav. Hum. Perform.* 17:171-84, 1976.
3. Bernardin H I & Smith P C. A clarification of some issues regarding the development and use of Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS). *J. Appl. Psychol.* 66:458-63, 1981.
4. Jacobs R, Kafry D & Zedeck S. Expectations of Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales. *Pers. Psychol.* 33:595-640, 1980.