# Assignment 3 Few Summary

*Ali Walkley*

*September 21, 2015*

Stephen Few's article, "Effectively Communicating Numbers Selecting the Best Means and Manner of Display" was a very informative read that helped me understand the step-by-step process to build an effective graph. Building a successful graph takes practice because it is something that does not come naturally; therefore, it requires a set of skills that must be learned. I learned that the most important information for a business is qualitative information because numbers measure the performance of the company and how well they will perform in the upcoming months. This type of information is presented in graphs. To be effective at your job, you need to clearly and succinctly drive your message by understanding your qualitative data. For example, in the article an employee decides to use a radar chart to show the relationship between new hires and their skills among each other. Although this chart may look sharp, it does not effectively communicate the message. Even though a normal table is not fancy, it is less difficult to make sense of the qualitative information. Thus, there is an issue with employees in the workforce on how to properly display qualitative business information to communicate professionally. Employees need to be wary of miscommunicating their information with misleading graphs.

If you are willing to be an exception to the common businessperson, Stephen Few outlines a step-by-step process to communicate the right way and become an expert grapher. He lists the steps as follows:

1. Determine your message and identify the data necessary to communicate it. 2. Determine if a table, graph, or combination of both is needed to communicate your message. 3. Determine the best means to encode the values. 4. Determine where to display each variable. 5. Determine the best design for the remaining objects (grid lines, field key, type of text needed) 6. Determine if particular data should be featured above the rest, and if so, how.

Stephen Few further elaborates that there is a difference between using tables and graphs. A graph is used best when you can see patterns or trends in the shape of the data and tables are used for individual values that must be precise. This would identify with step three of his process in choosing the best means to encode your values and data. Graphs consist of quantitative data – the numbers – and categorical data – the labels that tell us what the numbers measure. There are three types of categorical data, which includes nominal, ordinal and interval. Nominal values do not have order and have no qualitative values. Ordinal has an order but do not represent qualitative data, and interval contains an order and represents qualitative data. Few describes that, "Numbers become meaningful only when compare to related numbers"(10). Furthermore, Few explains that one of the problems of creating graphs is the misuse of color. He recommends that we use soft colors for our graphs so when we need to have something stand out, we use one bright color. He also cautions people to not use graphs that use areas because they can be very misleading, but recommends using 2-d graphs.

Lastly, Stephen Few outlines the seven types of business data: 1. Time Series: When quantitative values are expressed as a series of measures taken across equal intervals of time (15). 2. Ranking relationships: When quantitative values are sequenced by size, from large to small or vice versa (15). 3. Part-to-Whole: When quantitative values are displayed to reveal the portion that each value represents to some whole (15). 4. Deviation Relationship: When quantitative values are displayed to feature how one or more sets of values differ from some reference set of values (15). 5. Distribution: When we show how a set of quantitative values are spread across their entire range (15). 6. Correlation: When pairs of quantitative values, each measuring something different about an entity (for example a person, department, or product), are displayed to reveal if there is significant relationship between them (15). 7. Nominal comparison: In this case there is not particular relationship between the values (15).

Choosing the right type of business data is absolutely essential in Few's step-by-step process of creating a professional graph. When building your own graph you should keep in mind the seven types of business data. As you can see, creating a graph that will effectively communicate your message takes hard work and

practice. If you follow these steps that Few outlines, you can become a better grapher in no time. I am very excited to learn to make a graph that will wow my boss in the future!