
UNIT 3 CONATIVE FUNCTIONS – NORMAL AND PATHOLOGICAL

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3.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you were explained about the meaning and definition of abnormality. We also tried to differentiate between the concepts of normality and abnormality. In this unit, we will discuss about meaning and definition of conation and certain conative functions. It will also deal with the different phases, modes, impact and measurement of the conative component of mind.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

With the help of this unit, you will be able to:

- define the meaning of conation;
- explain the phases of conation;
- describe the conative functions and issues; and
- elucidate the impact, measurement and pathology of conative component of mind.

3.2 MEANING AND DEFINITION OF CONATION

Conation is defined by Funk & Wagnalls, *Standard Comprehensive International Dictionary* (1977) as “the aspect of mental process directed by change and including impulse, desire, volition and striving”, and by the Living Webster *Encyclopedia Dictionary of the English Language* (1980) as “one of the three modes, together with cognition and affection, of mental function; a conscious effort to carry out seemingly volitional acts”.

Conation has been derived from a latin word- *conatus* which refers to an impulse or reflexive action towards an effort. You must be informed here that our mind consists of three parts- *cognitive, affective and conative*. *Cognition* refers to the knowing and understanding ,it is a measure of level of intelligence; *affective* refers to the emotional interpretation of perception, information or knowledge while, *conative* is that components of the mind that connects the knowledge and affect to behaviour , that is, it drives one to act on those thoughts and feelings.

In short, it can be said as the mental process that activates and/or directs behaviour and action. It is an inclination, a wish or drive to act purposefully. Various terms are used to represent some aspect of conation. It includes intrinsic motivation, goal-orientation, volition, will, self-direction, and self-regulation (Huitt & Cain, 2005).

It has been further explained that conation refers to behaviour which is personal, intentional, deliberate, goal oriented, or to the striving component of motivation and that it is proactive. It is considered critical for an individual to successfully engage in self-direction and self-regulation. Some examples of conation are having an achievement orientation, establishing a life vision, setting goals, and regulating one’s behaviour (Huitt & Cain, 2005).

3.3 PHASES OF CONATIVE STYLE

Huitt (1996) demonstrated different phases of conative style and also the processes involved in each phase. The phases and the processes involved in each phase has been described in the subsections below:

3.3.1 Direction Phase

The direction phase is that significant step which involves five aspects- defining one’s purpose, identifying human needs, aspiring and envisioning possible futures, making choices and setting goals by individuals. Firstly, pupose is successfully attained if the individual becomes aware of his/her needs. The second aspect refers to become aware of the “possible self.” The third aspect involves an individuals attempts to exercise of volition or the freedom to choose and control one’s thoughts and behavior. It must be noted here that volition is inter related to affection and cognition. Volition has two subcomponents: *Covert* (in which an individual takes full control of his/her actions) and *Overt* (which refers to taking control of the environment that impacts one’s actions (Corno, 1993). The fourth aspect of the direction component of conation is the setting of goals for the directions that have been chosen. Dweck (1990) differentiates two types of goals: *Mastery goals* that focus on developing competence or on the process of learning, and

Performance goals that focus on the outcome, winning, or attaining credentials. A fifth aspect of successful self-direction is to develop plans that can turn visions and goals into reality.

3.3.2 Energizing Phase

In the energizing phase an individual involves in overcoming inertia, having high self esteem, physical fitness and physical energy, paying attention, talking positively, managing emotions and having positive interaction with others.

3.3.3 Preserving Phase

The preserving phase involves engaging one self in daily self renewal, monitoring thoughts, emotions and behaviour, making self evaluation, reflecting on progress and completing tasks. Studies have shown that, motivation and persistence are important in predicting levels of expertise or knowledge. Thus conation helps in the field of education by means of helping in identifying and setting goals, focusing attention and completing tasks with the help of all the three phases mentioned above.

3.4 CONATIVE FUNCTIONS AND WELL BEING

Kolbe (1990) suggested that a healthy human being has a conative style or a preferred method of putting thought into action or interacting with the environment. Kolbe identifies four action or conative modes:

- **Fact Finder** (instincts to probe, refine and simplify);
- **Follow Thru** (instincts to organize, reform and adapt);
- **Quick Start** (instincts to improvise, revise and stabilize); and
- **Implementor** (instincts to construct, renovate and envision).

In Kolbe's formulation, it is the combination of the striving instinct, reason, and targeted goals that results in different levels of commitment and action among normal individuals. Infact, conative functions are necessary components for students and play a vital role in education of children. Students needs to develop the conative attitudes and skills in order to be self directed, goal oriented and increase their personal efficiency.

Researches indicate that volition or will or freedom of choice is a very necessary component for an individual to act or behave voluntarily. Conation is closely associated with the concept of volition, defined as the use of will, or the freedom to make choices about what to do (Kane, 1985; Mischel, 1996). It is absolutely critical if an individual is to successfully engage in self-direction and self-regulation. Further, conation intends to explain the ways through which the knowledge and emotion are translated into behavior in human beings.

3.5 CONATIVE ISSUES

Some of the conative issues one faces daily are:

- What is my life's purpose and are my actions congruent with that purpose?
- What are my aspirations, intentions, and goals?

- On what ideas, objects, events, etc. should I focus my attention?
- What am I going to do?
- What actions am I going to take, what investments am I going to make?
- How well am I accomplishing what I set out to do?

During the origin of modern psychology both emotion and conation were considered central to the field but later on cognition and behavior or action started gaining more importance. Yet, the conative issues when generated within individual it helps to prepare children and youth for adulthood (e.g., basic skills, critical thinking).

3.6 PHYSIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF CONATION

Research into the physiological aspects of the brain functions shows that the Supplementary Motor Area (SMA) is associated with the development of intention to act. The medial limbic cortex and the primary motor cortex are involved in the specification and elaboration of action.

It has also been found that conation is related to behaviour which is personal, intentional, deliberate, goal oriented, or striving component of motivation and it is proactive. It is also been associated with the concept of volition or the will of a person. It is absolutely critical if an individual is to successfully engage in self-direction and self-regulation.

Self Assessment Questions 1

State whether the statements are 'True' or 'False':

- 1) *Affection* refers to the knowing and understanding, it is a measure of level of intelligence
- 2) During the origin if modern psychology both emotion and conation were considered central to the field but later on cognition and behavior or action started gaining more importance
- 3) Kolbe identified six action or conative modes of behaviour
- 4) In the energizing phase an individual involves in overcoming inertia, paying attention, talking positively, managing emotions and having positive interaction with others

3.7 MODES OF CONATION

Conation is thought to be both instinctive and distinctive.

In discussing the conative nature of man, Fromm in his work "Human Ethics", mentioned that a man achieves virtue through the active use he/she makes of his/her powers, that is being productive. For example, when a man is uncertain in any situation he/she will attempt to use his/her power to deal with the situation. If he/she faces the reality without fear, he/she will realize that there is no meaning to life except that the meaning he/she gives to his life by living productively. An individual folds his/her powers by living productively. This is achieved by constant vigilance, being active and effortful so that it keeps him/her away from failure of being a productive person.

Fromm explains that the mental, emotion, and sensory responses to others to oneself and to things is the productive orientation of a person. Productiveness is the person’s ability to use his powers and realize his/her potentials. Common view of all thinkers regarding conation is that the person’s character can be determined through his/her actions (actions speak louder than words).

Murray’s (1938) concept of conation denotes a persistent effort, intention, volition, and an act of willing to attain a specific goal. He also states that one’s personality is continuously involved in deciding between alternative conflicting tendencies or elements. The most demanding conflicts are sometimes between two different conations. For e.g. A woman wants to be a good housewife or to have a successful career. The energy needed for conations is directed by the goal which the person has.

In the late 1940’s, Raymond Catell, explained about conational modalities. He described the instinct aspect of conation as *erg*. He explained that it was innate (inborn) psychological or physical disposition. It permits the person to acquire reactivity through certain classes of objects more readily than to others.

3.8 MEASUREMENT OF CONATION

It was Kolbe who developed an assessment tool that focuses on mainly the conative domain of mind in 1990. It assesses the *Kolbe index*. Kolbe index refers to the innate strengths of individual which are driven by universal instinct. In other words, it is the innate predispositions that activates an individual’s behaviour. Particular strengths differ from person to person, but each individual’s strengths are unchanged throughout their life. These strengths can be observed and measured as people engage in purposeful actions. They can be categorized in consistent behaviour patterns or instinctive way of striving to attain goals.

As mentioned in the previous section also, Kolbe’s system identified four action modes:

Table: Action modes measured through Kolbe’s Conative index

Kolbe Action Modes	Striving Behaviours
Fact Finder (A fact finder is an individual who has instincts to probe, redefine and simplify.)	Gathering and sharing information
Follow Thru (A follow thru is an individual who has instincts to organize, reform and adapt)	Organizing, arranging and designing
Quick Start (A quick start is an individual who has instincts to improvise, revise and stabilize)	Dealing with unknowns, uncertainties and risks
Implementor (An implementor is an individual who has instincts to construct, renovate and envision)	Handling tangibles, mechanics and space

3.9 IMPACTING CONATION

The conative component of mind can be significantly influenced by social environment. Therefore, in order to create a significant impact of conation the parents, educators, and other individuals should emphasize towards developing the conative components of mind of the child or youth, in order to enhance self-direction, self-determination, and self-regulation among them. Specifically, young people need to imagine possibilities in their lives, set attainable goals, plan routes to those goals, systematically and consistently put goals and plans into actions, practice self-observation, reflect on results, and manage emotions. These need to be addressed in a spiraled curriculum because of the developmental aspects of their successful utilization.

3.10 CONATION AND PATHOLOGY

Pathological condition of conation may lead to affective-conative exaggeration referred to as *manic-depressive or Dionysian component* where in Dionysian is less pathological in comparison to hypomanic behavior and manic depressive psychosis. It will also lead to failure of adaptive function in normal expression of primary components of temperament. Further, it may result in to narrow-mindedness or may turn an individual to be ego-centric, which is a type of *Paranoia*. Further, it may also inhibit an individual to act or behave, resulting in a type of *schizophrenia*.

Self Assessment Questions 2

Fill in the Blanks:

- 1) Kolbe who developed an assessment tool that focuses on mainly the conative domain of mind which assesses the
..... *index*.
- 2) *Murray's (1938)* concept of conation denotes a persistent effort,
..... and
- 3) Conation is thought to be both instinctive and
.....
- 4) Pathological condition of conation may lead to affective-conative exaggeration referred to as

3.11 LET US SUM UP

It can be summed up from the above discussion that conative component is an essential component of mind. The distinctive phases and components of conation is significant and essential for an individual to regulate behaviour. It can contribute significantly in educating children and adolescents. It can also be measured with the help of Kolbe's index. Any injury to the conative mind may lead to harm in self direction and result in to several mental disorders.

3.12 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Self Assessment Questions 1

- 1) False
- 2) True
- 3) False
- 4) True

Self Assessment Questions 2

- 1) Kolbe
- 2) intention, volition, and an act of willing to attain a specific goal
- 3) distinctive
- 4) manic-depressive or Dionysian component

3.13 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) What is conation?
- 2) How is conation related to behaviour?
- 3) Explain the different modes of conation.
- 4) Write about the measurement of Conation.
- 5) Describe the phases of conation.

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