
UNIT 5 LEARNING AND BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION

Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- understand the nature of learning process
- explain various theories on learning
- discuss how reinforcement helps in motivating a person to learn
- importance of learning in organisations
- understand the concept of behaviour modification
- importance of behaviour modification in organisations

Structure

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Concept and Definition
- 5.3 Theories of Learning
- 5.4 Reinforcement and Learning
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5.1 INTRODUCTION

Every action and behaviour of an individual has some element of learning involved. Behaviour is something which can be publicly viewed, but there is also an unobservable, inner cognitive behaviour which will influence the individual. Thus, the outcome can take the form of desirable or undesirable behaviour. Of course, only desirable work behaviour can contribute towards achieving organisational goals. That is why, it is necessary on the part of the individual employee to learn periodically new knowledge and skills. Further, learning

is a powerful incentive for many employees to stick to certain organisations. Learning has significant impact on individual behaviour as it influences abilities, role perceptions, and motivation. Along with its role in individual behaviour, learning is essential for knowledge management that enhances an organisation's capacity to acquire, share, and utilise its resources in ways that improve its survival and success.

In this unit, we try to understand the cognitive aspect and meaning of learning by analysing the various theories of learning. We have also discussed the role of reinforcement, both positive and negative, and its impact on employee behaviour. The unit concludes with focussing on the different reinforcement methods and its administration.

5.2 CONCEPT AND DEFINITION

The concept of learning is very important for organisational behaviour. It has assumed tremendous significance because everything that we do in an organisation, some learning is definitely involved.

The concept of learning can be used in many contexts. It refers to the process of acquiring the response adequately to a situation which may or may not have previously encountered.

A widely accepted simple definition of 'learning' is any relatively permanent change in behaviour that occurs as a result of experience. As per this definition, one cannot see the process of learning but if there is a noticeable change in behaviour then it can be said that learning has taken place. This means we are actually seeing the changed behaviour in individuals as a result of learning. Thus, learning as a concept seems to be an abstract and a theoretical one and is not observable directly.

It is also said that learning is a relatively permanent change in the frequency of occurrence of a specific individual behaviour. In an organisational setting, it is the work-set and organisational norms, which will act as objective bases for determining whether an employee's behaviour is desirable or undesirable and whether he or she needs to learn and practise productive work behaviour. Thus, it is the process by which skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour are formed and developed as a result of education, training, socialisation and experience.

Learning also occurs as a result of conditioning and restriction. A person is persuaded to adopt guidance or regulation or conformity and compliance based on each situational requirement. Moreover, people learn at different rates, times and stages during their life time. Of course, ultimately it is the individual's own needs and drives, and rewards that enhance one's potential and expertise, marketability along with increased esteem, and respect and status that will act as the motivational drive(s) in inducing the person to learn.

There are six important components of learning:

- 1) Learning involves change, although the change may be for good or bad from an organisation's point of view.
- 2) Not all changes reflect learning. To constitute learning, change should be relatively permanent.

- 3) Learning is reflected in behaviour. A change in an individual's thought process or attitudes, not accompanied by behaviour, is no learning.
- 4) The change in behaviour should occur as a result of experience, practice, or training.
- 5) The practice or experience must be reinforced in order for learning to occur. If reinforcement does not accompany the practice or experience, the behaviour will eventually disappear.
- 6) Learning occurs throughout one's life.

When employees learn, they acquire both explicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is organised and can be communicated from one person to another.

Explicit knowledge can be written down and given to others. However, this is only a small portion of total knowledge.

Majority of the people have tacit or implied knowledge. Tacit knowledge is the idea that one knows more than what he or she can tell. Tacit knowledge is embedded in our actions and ways of thinking, but is not clearly understood and therefore cannot be communicated explicitly. This knowledge is acquired through observation and direct experience. Most knowledge in organisations is tacit and one of the challenges in knowledge management is to make implicit knowledge explicit so that it may be stored and shared more easily.

5.3 THEORIES OF LEARNING

In a work setting, how can learning take place? Four theories have been used to explain how learning can take place in a work setting. These are: classical conditioning theory, operant conditioning theory, social cognitive theory, and learning theory. Of the four, it is the operant conditioning theory and social cognitive theory which are more helpful in understanding the behaviour of others.

Classical Conditioning Theory

Classical conditioning is the process by which individuals learn to link the information value from a neutral stimulus to a stimulus which in the natural course will not cause a response-. Such learned behaviours (or reflexive behaviour) may not be under an individual's conscious control. In the classical conditioning process, an unconditional stimulus (environmental event) will result in a natural response. Then a neutral environment event (also referred to as conditioned stimulus) is associated with the unconditioned stimulus, which will bring out the behaviour. Subsequently, the conditioned stimulus by itself will bring out the behaviour, which is called the conditioned response.

The name most frequently associated with classical conditioning is the Russian physiologist, Ivan Pavlov, whose experiments with the dogs led to the early formulations of the classical conditioning theory. In Pavlov's famous experiment, the sound of a metronome (the conditioned stimulus) was associated and paired with the conditioned response - the salivation response. Eventually, as per the experiment, the dogs learned to exhibit a salivation response (conditional response) to the sound of metronome alone.

The process of classical conditioning can help to understand a variety of behaviours in organisational life. The special lights displayed in front of the emergency room in any hospital will indicate that a patient who immediately needs medical attention and treatment has arrived; whereas the lights displayed across the building during the opening of a new office will indicate the feeling of joy at the opening of a new business establishment.

Classical conditioning is a passive one i.e., when something happens we react in a particular way. Classical conditioning is not used in work settings mainly because the desired employee behaviours usually do not include responses which can be changed with classical conditioning techniques i.e., it can explain only simple reflexive behaviours and not the complex behaviours that occur in organisations.

Operant Conditioning Theory

B.F. Skinner is closely associated with this learning theory. Skinner proposed that behaviour is determined from outside, which means that it is a learned involuntary behaviour. The term operant conditioning is used in context of voluntary behaviours which are called operants, for they have some influence on the environment. Skinner had opined that if certain pleasant consequences were created to reinforce desirable forms of behaviour, there would be an increase in the frequency of such behaviour. This means that people will be engaged in desirable behaviours provided they are positively reinforced. Also that rewards would be more effective, if the desired behaviour is immediately rewarded. Further, undesirable behaviour if punished, is less likely to be repeated. In fact, most of our behaviours like walking, talking, working can be termed as operant behaviour.

Social Cognitive Theory

Skinner's work was extended by Albert Bandura and others by demonstrating that people learn new behaviour in a social situation, by watching others and then imitating their behaviour. According to the social cognitive theory, the 'social' aspect indicates the involvement of individuals to learn as a part of the society and the 'cognitive' part acknowledges that individuals use thought processes to make decisions. This theory has relevance to organisational behaviour because most of the work that goes on in organisations is based on the knowledge and behaviour generated by others in that organisation.

The social cognitive theory has five dimensions. Understanding of these five dimensions will help one to realise why employees behave differently while facing the same situation.

- **Symbolizing:** People have the tendency to use symbols, which help them to process visual experiences into models which will help them to guide their behaviour and then react to their environment.
- **Forethought:** Forethought is used by persons to anticipate, plan and guide their behaviours and actions.
- **Vicarious Learning:** Almost all forms of learning involve vicariously (or sharing imaginatively in the feelings or action of other persons) by observing the behaviour of other people and the consequences of that behaviour.

- **Self-Control:** Self-control learning is said to occur when a new behaviour is learned even in the absence of any external pressure.

Managers and colleagues of employees can use self-efficacy to help employees learn to believe in themselves. This is possible by creating situations in which the employee may respond successfully to the task required.

Human resource trainers have been using the social cognitive theory in the form of programmes and offer the same to organisations so as to instil team spirit, develop leadership skills, improve an employee's (including managers) self-efficacy and bring about managerial effectiveness.

Learning Theory

Learning theory approach emphasises the assessment of behaviour in objective, measurable (countable) terms. This implies that the behaviour must be publicly observable and does not give due importance to unobservable, inner, cognitive behaviour.

In organisations, desirable work behaviours will contribute towards achieving organisational goals. Conversely, undesirable work behaviours will hinder achievement of these goals. For instance, the HR manager may find the behaviour of a shop floor worker returning late from a coffee break as undesirable; while the friends of the worker may find the same desirable because he is satisfying his social needs. In the work set-up, certain organisational norms are prescribed. The more an employee deviates from the organisational norms, the more undesirable his behaviour is. These organisational norms will vary from organisation to organisation. For instance, in companies like Infosys all employees are encouraged to open up and communicate (two-way communication) with their superiors because professional interactions is considered to be healthy. As against this, among the defence forces, questioning of superior's instructions and orders will be treated as insubordination and may even invite severe disciplinary actions against the subordinate.

To be effective, a manager has to try and identify observable employee behaviours and the environment affecting these behaviours. Then he has to make efforts at controlling and guiding employee behaviour. Thus, the manager's goal will be to provide learning experiences in an environment that will promote employee behaviours desired by the organisation.

5.4 REINFORCEMENT AND LEARNING

Reinforcement as a term refers to the psychological process of motivating a person. Though used synonymously, there is a slight difference between motivation and reinforcement. Motivation is a fundamental psychological process and a broader connotation than reinforcement. Motivation can be referred to as an intrinsic process, whereas reinforcement is related to the environment. Simply put, reinforcement will be any action that a person finds rewarding. Few common reinforcement gestures could be a pat on the back, an increase in pay, and a day off or a citation.

Reinforcement is something which enhances the strength of the response and prompts repetitions of the behaviour that preceded reinforcement. From the

above perspective it may be noted that reinforcement is not merely a reward. This means that the reward aspect is something which is presumed to be desirable from the perspective of the presenter (or manager). Although, if the employee being rewarded does not find it sufficiently rewarding, then no reinforcement will take place.

Contingency of Reinforcement

Contingency of reinforcement refers to the relationship between a person's behaviour and the preceding and following environmental events which will influence that behaviour. A contingency of reinforcement comprises of an antecedent, a behaviour, and a consequence.

It should be noted that the presenting or withdrawal of a particular antecedent increases the probability of a particular behaviour likely to occur. For instance, managers should ideally prepare 'a list of to do' items every day. This list as an antecedent helps to organise their jobs/tasks for the day and also calls for their attention on specific behaviours required. A consequence will be the outcome or result of a behaviour, which can be either positive or negative in terms of accomplishment of the goal. The manager's response to an employee's behaviour is contingent on the consequences of the behaviour.

Reinforcement, punishment, and extinction play a key role in learning process. Reinforcement is used to enhance desirable behaviour while punishment and extinction are employed to minimise undesirable behaviour.

Reinforcement is always knowledge of feedback about the success of past behaviour. Feedback is information that can be used to modify or maintain previous behaviours. However, this information has to be perceived, interpreted, given meaning and used in decisions about future behaviours. The feedback has to be processed.

Reinforcement is the attempt to develop or strengthen desirable behaviour. There are two types of reinforcement – positive and negative reinforcement.

Positive reinforcement: Positive reinforcement strengthens and enhances behaviour by the presentation of positive reinforcers. There are primary reinforcers and secondary reinforcers. Primary reinforcers satisfy basic biological needs and include food, water, and sexual pleasure. However, primary reinforcers do not always reinforce. For instance, food may not be a reinforcer to someone who has just completed a five course meal. Most behaviours in organisations are influenced by secondary reinforcers. These include such benefits as money, status, grades, trophies, and praise from others. These become positive reinforcers because of their association with the primary reinforcers and hence often called conditional reinforcers.

Positive reinforcement is based on certain principles:

- The principle of contingent reinforcement states that the reinforcer must be admitted only if the desired behaviour has occurred.
- The principle of immediate reinforcement states that the reinforcer will be most effective if administered immediately after the desired behaviour has occurred.

- The principle of reinforcement size states that the larger the amount of reinforcement delivered after the desired behaviour, the more effect the reinforcer will have on the frequency of the desired behaviour.
- The principle of reinforcement deprivation states that the more a person is deprived of the reinforcer, the greater it will have on the future occurrence of the desired behaviour.

Negative reinforcement: An unpleasant event that precedes a behaviour is removed when the desired behaviour occurs.

Just as there are positive reinforcers, there are negative reinforcers as well. Negative reinforcers are the stimuli that strengthen responses that permit an organism to avoid or escape from their presence.

We see negative reinforcement in organisations and in personal life. Supervisors apply negative reinforcement when they stop criticising employees whose poor performance has improved. Also negative reinforcement occurs when parents give in to their childrens' tantrums – especially in public places, such as restaurants and shopping malls.

Thus, both positive and negative reinforcement are procedures that strengthen or increase behaviour. Positive reinforcement strengthens or increases behaviour by the presentation of desirable consequences. On the other hand, negative reinforcement strengthens and increases behaviour by the threat of and use of undesirable consequences. Negative reinforcement is sometimes confused with punishment, because both use unpleasant stimuli to influence behaviour.

Activity 1

In the context of your role as a student, identify examples of each schedules of reinforcement that influence your behaviour. Which works best? Why?

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5.5 ROLE AND METHODS OF REINFORCEMENT

From the discussions so far we have seen that reinforcement plays a major role especially in human resources management areas such as training, appraisal, adaption to change and performance. Moreover, reinforcement is also a powerful tool to increase desirable behaviour and reduce undesirable patterns of behaviour. It is to be remembered that more than reinforces, it is the pattern (or manner) and the time in which reinforcement is administered which has an impact on the resulting behaviour. So let us have a look at the methods of administering reinforcement in organisations.

There are four methods of administering reinforcement in organisations: (a) the fixed ratio method; (b) the variable ratio method; (c) the fixed interval schedule; and (d) the variable interval schedule.

a) Fixed Ratio Method

Under this technique reinforcement is given after a certain specified number of responses are shown. A fixed ratio which reinforces after every response is called 1 : 1 to begin with when learning progresses, we shift to a fixed ratio of 2 : 1, 4 : 1, and so on and so forth.

This technique can bring about a high rate of response. This is because when the employee realises that the reinforcement is contingent upon the number of responses, then he is motivated to perform well so as to achieve the specified award. An example is that other things remaining the same, the worker's performance should remain energetic and continue to be steady.

But in reality things may not be the same and this technique may not lead to the same kind of behaviour.

b) Variable Ratio Method

As per this method, a certain number of desired behaviours must occur before reinforcer is delivered. Managers make use of a variable ratio schedule with praise and recognition. State or other lotteries use this method of reinforcement to lure patrons.

c) Fixed Interval Schedule

Under this schedule, the reinforcement is administered after a specific period of time, which is measured from the last reinforced response. For example, in a fixed interval, one hour schedule, the first desired behaviour that occurs after an hour has elapsed is reinforced.

But administering rewards as per this schedule produces an uneven pattern of behaviour. Prior to the reinforcement, the behaviour is frequent and energetic but immediately after the reinforcement, the behaviour becomes less frequent and energetic. This behaviour could be because the person knows that the next reward will take time to come. A common instance of this reinforcement is the payment of wages to employees on hourly, weekly or monthly basis.

d) Variable or Interval Schedule

Either ratio or interval schedules can be administered on a variable basis. That is, the reinforcement is given in an irregular or haphazard manner. This variable interval schedule is slightly different from the variable ratio schedule. Under this schedule, the reward is reinforced after a randomly distributed length of time rather than after a specified number of responses. For instance, if it is said that the employee is being reinforced after a 50 minute variable interval schedule, it implies that on an average, the individual is reinforced after 50 minutes though the actual reinforcement may be given anywhere from every few seconds to every 2-3 hours.

Although we have mentioned the four most commonly used methods of reinforcement, quite a few organisations use a few combinations of these four reinforcements.

5.6 PUNISHMENT

Punishment is the attempt to eliminate or weaken an undesirable behaviour. It is in two ways – one way to punish a person is to apply a negative consequence called punishers – following an undesirable behaviour. The other way to punish a person is to withhold a positive consequence following an undesirable behaviour. Even though punishment may stop an undesirable behaviour of an employee, the potential negative outcomes may be greater than the cost of undesirable behaviour.

It is generally accepted that the reinforcing desired behaviour is more effective than punishing undesirable behaviour. However, C.C. Walters and J.E. Brusek (1977) suggested after a review of research that punishment can be effective if it meets the following conditions:

- The punishment should be quick and short.
- It should be administered immediately after the undesirable behaviour.
- It should be limited to its intensity.
- It should specifically relate to behaviour and not to character traits.
- It should be restricted to the context in which the undesirable behaviour occurs.
- It should not send ‘mixed messages’ about what is accepted behaviour.
- Penalties should take the form of withdrawal of rewards, not physical pain.

Managers rely on punishment because it produces faster and immediate change in the employee’s behaviour. However, it is imperative on the part of the manager to view the long term detrimental effects of punishment and only try to use a punishment suitable to the situational requirement.

Activity 2

What type of punishment should be used by the managers of your organisation for disciplining employees? Give reasons.

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5.7 EXTINCTION

An alternate to punishing undesirable behaviour is extinction. Extinction is the weakening of a behaviour by ignoring it or making sure it is not reinforced. The rationale for using extinction is that a behaviour not followed by any reinforcer is weakened. In other words, if rewards are withdrawn for behaviour that were previously reinforced, the behaviours probably will become less frequent and eventually die out. Extinction needs time and patience to be effective.

Extinction, as a type of reinforcement is applied to reduce undesirable behaviour, especially when such behaviours were previously rewarded. From organisational point of view, if an employee is consistently late to work and thus consistently fails to get praise from his superior and is not recommended for a pay raise, then we would expect this reinforcement to lead to “extinction” of the habit of behaviour of coming late to work.

5.8 ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

The importance of learning was first put forward by a Chinese philosopher, Confucius (551-479 BC) in these words: “Without learning, the wise become foolish; by learning, the foolish become wise”. Learning refers to relatively permanent changes in behaviour occurring as a result of experience. The concept of learning organisation is not new; many authors have talked about it from others and their own past experiences. Probably, Garratt was the first to publish a book on the subject in 1987. But the concept was popularised by Senge when his famous book “The Fifth Discipline” was released in 1990. Senge’s book triggered a great deal of interest in the subject of learning organisations. A large number of publications appeared on the subject during the current decade.

Concept and Definition

In 1970s, Argyris proposed the concept of a different qualitative learning. Contrasted with traditional learning, or the ‘single-loop’ learning (involving incremental change within an existing framework), ‘double-loop’ learning emphasised testing of the underlying assumptions and achieving transformational change. Senge contrasted adaptive learning with generative learning.

David Garvin (1993), defines a learning organization as “an organization skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights.”

The above definition is of interest for a number of reasons. First, it focuses on ‘behaviour’. Second, it implies that organisations have skills, an essential one being that of learning. Third, it focuses on ‘transferring knowledge’. Finally, the use of concepts such as ‘skills’, ‘knowledge’, and ‘modifying behaviour’ indicate a language suggestive of HRD practice.

Peter M. Senge in his ground breaking book, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization*, described a learning organization as “a place where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to learn together.”

Ross, Smith, Roberts and Kleiner advocate this definition: “Learning in an organization means the continuous testing of experience and the transformation of that experience into knowledge - accessible to the whole organization and relevant to its core purpose.”

Organisational learning means the process of improving actions through better knowledge acquisition, clearer understanding, and improved performance. It is a method of detecting and correcting errors. The main issues in organisational learning are (three Ms):

- Meaning - Well-grounded definition of learning organisations; It must be actionable and easy to apply.
- Management - Clearer guidelines for practice, filled with operational advice rather than high aspirations.
- Measurement - Better tools for assessing an organisation's rate and level of learning to ensure that gains in fact have been made.

Further, a learning organisation is one which facilitates the learning of all its members, and which continuously transforms itself.

5.9 LEARNING ORGANISATION

A learning organisation:

- Is an active philosophy; not merely an organisational system.
- Believes that its only competitive advantage is learning.
- Encourages people to learn to produce the results they desire.
- Nurtures creative and innovative patterns of collective learning.
- Develops fresh organisational capabilities all the time.

New ideas are essential if learning is to take place. Whatever their source, these ideas trigger organisational improvement. However, creating or acquiring new knowledge is not enough; what is more important is the successful application of knowledge in one's own activities. Learning organisations are skilled at five main activities:

1) Systematic Problem-Solving:

- Relying on the scientific method rather than guesswork for diagnosing problems.
- Insisting on data rather than assumptions, as background for decision-making.
- Depending on simple statistical tools to organise data and draw inferences

2) Experimentation:

- Systematic searching for and testing of new knowledge. Continuous improvement in new methods and technologies.
- Successful ongoing programmes to ensure a steady flow of new ideas, even if imported from outside the organisation.
- Demonstration of organisational capabilities by introducing self-managing teams and high level of worker autonomy.

3) Learning from Past Experience:

- Companies must review their success and failures, assess them systematically and record lessons in a form that employees find open and accessible.

Intrapersonal Processes

- 4) Learning from Others:
 - Sometimes, the most powerful insights come from one's immediate outside environment.
 - Even companies in completely different businesses can be fertile sources of ideas and catalysts for creative thinking.
 - Best industry practices are to be uncovered, analysed, adopted and implemented.
 - The greatest benefits come from studying practices; the way work gets done rather than results.
- 5) Transferring Knowledge:
 - Knowledge must spread quickly and efficiently throughout the organisation.
 - Make use of mechanisms such as written and oral communications, site visits and tours, personnel rotation programmes, education and training programmes for transferring knowledge.
 - Transfer may be from division to division, department to department, or facility to facility; they may involve senior, middle, or first level managers.

Characteristics of Learning Organisation

Some of the common operational practices of learning organisations dealing with people are openness, systematic thinking, creativity, awareness of personal and organisational values, empathy and sensitivity.

Senge, who popularised the term learning organisation states that such organisations have the following five principles:

- 1) **Personal Mastery:** Creating an organisational environment, which encourages all its members to develop themselves toward goals and purposes they choose.
- 2) **Mental Models:** Reflecting upon, continually clarifying, and improving internal pictures of the world, and seeing how they shape our actions and decisions.
- 3) **Shared Vision:** Building a sense of commitment in a group, by developing shared images of the future and guiding principles and practices.
- 4) **Team Learning:** Transforming conversational and collective thinking skills, so that groups of people can reliably develop intelligence and ability greater than the sum of individual members' talents.
- 5) **Systems Thinking:** Thinking about, and a language for describing and understanding forces and interrelationships that shapes the behaviour of systems.

These principles translate into the following three key practices that enable an organisation to promote and support continuous learning:

- 1) The ability to learn from each other
- 2) The ability to learn from personal experience
- 3) The ability to learn from the system (that is, organisation successes and failures)

A learning organisation is characterised by:

Openness: The learning organisation has to be open to enquiry and tolerant of criticism and debate.

Innovation: The learning organisation has an organic structure and culture which permits it to evolve rapidly. It has a deep skill base and capacity to deal internally with complexity and uncertainty.

Strategic Orientation: The learning organisation cares both for its customer and its employees.

Pedler (1991), suggest eleven features or characteristics that will be present in a learning organisation. They are as follows:

- 1) The learning approach or strategy
- 2) Participative policy making
- 3) Informating
- 4) Formative accounting and control
- 5) Internal exchange
- 6) Reward flexibility
- 7) Enabling structures
- 8) Boundary workers as environmental scanners
- 9) Inter-company learning
- 10) Learning climate
- 11) Self-development opportunities for all

Organisations of the future will not survive without becoming communities of learning. It is absolutely essential for organisations to learn from their environments, to continually adjust to new and changing data, and just as in the case with the individual, to learn how to learn from the uncertain and unpredictable future.

Garvin argues that organisations learn through five main activities: (1) systematic problem solving; (2) experimentation with new approaches; (3) learning from their own experience and past history; (4) learning from the experiences and best practices of others; and (5) transferring knowledge quickly and efficiently throughout the organisation.

Organisational learning is the result of an ongoing process that includes the following:

Intrapersonal Processes

- 1) Assimilating information.
- 2) Translating that information into knowledge.
- 3) Applying that knowledge to real needs.
- 4) Receiving feedback to revise the information and reshape the knowledge.

Three levels of training interact to make up organisational learning:

- a) individual learning,
- b) small group learning; and
- c) whole organisational learning.

Individual learning occurs as each employee acquires the knowledge, develops the skills, and adopts the attitudes and beliefs that will help the organisation succeed.

Small group learning occurs as the members of a group discover together how best to contribute to the performance of the group as a whole. They learn from and about each other, they learn how to work effectively as a group, and how to apply that knowledge in order to achieve the purposes of the group.

Organisational learning occurs through the shared insights, knowledge, and mental models of the organisation. Organisational learning builds on past knowledge and experience, i.e., on organisational memory, which depends on institutional mechanisms (e.g. policies, strategies, and explicit models) used to retain knowledge.

Application of Learning in Organisations

Three systematic approaches to incorporating learning in organisations involve training, organisational behaviour management and discipline.

Training: Training is the process through which people systematically acquire and improve the skills and knowledge needed to better job performance. Many executive training programmes systematically attempt to develop the skills of their top managers. This is accomplished either by bringing in outside experts to train personnel in-house, or by sending them to specialised programmes conducted by outside agencies.

The principles that help in the effectiveness of training are:

- 1) **Participation:** People not only learn more quickly, but also retain the skills longer when they have actively participated in the learning process.
- 2) **Repetition:** The benefits of repetition for learning new skills or performing a task need not be emphasised.
- 3) **Transfer of Training:** What is learned during training sessions must be applied on the job.
- 4) **Feedback:** It is extremely difficult for learning to occur in the absence of feedback - that is, knowledge of the results of one's actions. Feedback provides information about the effectiveness of one's training.

Organisational Behaviour Management: It implies systematic application of positive reinforcement principles in organisational settings for the purpose of raising the incidence of desirable organisational behaviours. To be effective in using organisational behaviour management programmes, managers should:

- 1) Pinpoint the desired behaviour.
- 2) Determine exactly how will people perform the behaviour they wish to change.
- 3) Determine exactly what performance goal is being sought.
- 4) Decide exactly how the desired behaviour will be rewarded.
- 5) Facilitate learning by rewarding behaviours that come closer to the criterion.
- 6) Reevaluate the programme periodically.

Discipline: Just as organisations systematically use rewards to encourage desirable behaviour, they also use punishment to discourage undesirable behaviour. There are innumerable problems in an organisation such as absenteeism, late coming, theft, alcoholism, substance abuse, which cost companies vast sums of money. The companies manage such situations by timely administration of punishment.

Learning Disabilities

Senge in his book has identified a number of learning disabilities. Some of them are listed below:

- a) The myth of teamwork (i.e., most teams operate below the level of lowest IQ in the group).
- b) The delusion of learning from experience (i.e., attempting to understand the future by relying on the past, which means we solve the same problem over and over again, hence we make the problem worse).
- c) To offset the learning disabilities, he has enunciated Laws of the Fifth Discipline:
 - 1) Today's problems come from yesterday's "solutions".
 - 2) The harder you push, the harder the system pushes back.
 - 3) Behaviour grows better before it grows worse.
 - 4) The easy way out usually leads back in.
 - 5) The cure can be worse than the disease.
 - 6) Faster is slower.
 - 7) Cause and effect are not closely related in time and space.
 - 8) Small changes can produce big results — but the areas of highest leverage are often the least obvious.
 - 9) You can have your cake and eat it too — but not at once.

- 10) Dividing an elephant in half does not produce two small elephants.
- 11) There is no blame.

Developing the Learning Organisation

There are three primary tasks toward developing the learning organisation.

- 1) First, leaders and managers must create opportunities for learning.
- 2) Second, they must foster desirable norms and behaviours.
- 3) Third, they must personally lead the process of discussion, raise questions, listen attentively and provide feedback.

Organisations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organisational learning; but without it no organisational learning occurs. The approach that needs to be taken is that learning must be continuous and integrated so that employees understand and accept the need for change which finally results in improved work culture.

Learning organisations are not built overnight. It is a slow and steady process of cultivated attitudes, commitments and management processes. Any company that wishes to become a learning organisation can begin by taking a few simple steps. The first step is to foster an environment that is conducive to learning. The second step is to open up boundaries and stimulate the exchange of ideas. The third step is to eliminate barriers that impede learning and assign learning a higher position in the organisational agenda.

Based on a large number of case studies, Ramnarayan and Bhatnagar (1993), laid out the following factors that facilitate organisational learning:

- 1) Commitment to well-defined organisational priorities.
- 2) Effective HRD systems.
- 3) Mechanisms of collective thinking.
- 4) Flexible and participative leadership styles.
- 5) Collaboration and teamwork.

They also found the following factors that hinder organisational learning:

- 1) Culture of complacency arising from past successes.
- 2) Excessive bureaucratic and centralised methods of working leading to delays.
- 3) Narrow definition of roles of organisational members in hierarchical organisation leading to loss of creativity among employees.
- 4) Due to preoccupation with day-to-day firefighting functions, less attention is usually given to important issues of change and innovation.

5.10 BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION

Ashok was recently transferred to ABC firm's office in Mumbai. Though the

Manager did not know much about Ashok she realised that, Ashok was a little aggressive in his approach and whenever he was expected to work in a team, he would end up arguing. This was having grave impact on the other team members and the employees in the firm.

Udit worked as a clerk in accounts department of an organization. Any time a job was assigned to him, though he would try to do his best, he could never complete in time and would make lots of errors. This would not only affect his performance but would also impact the overall work of that department.

In the above case studies it can be seen that something is wrong with the behaviours of Ashok and Udit that may call for behaviour modification.

Before we try to understand what is behaviour modification, we first need to understand the term behaviour. Behaviour can be described as any overt manifestation of the individual. It can be related to what is said or done by the individual behaviour can be further described in terms of behaviour deficit or behaviour excesses. Behaviour deficit indicates absence or lack of something, where as behaviour excesses indicates certain behaviour that is not under control and is excessive. For example, in a work set up, if an employee is not been able to adequately interact with others which has resulted in lowering of team productivity and performance then it can be said that there is behaviour deficit. On the other hand is an employee has been very aggressive, which has resulted in damage to the organisational property then this can be termed as behaviour excessive. Such behaviours can cause problem and need modification.

Behaviour Modification is mainly based on learning theories and there are five main principles underlying this technique (Rao, 2003):

- 1) As human behaviour is mainly learned (except in case of maturation process), it is possible to modify it.
- 2) Behaviour can be changed based on the changes in the environment.
- 3) The principles of social learning can be effectively used to change or modify behaviour, for example, modelling can be used effectively to change behaviour (as is done in various advertisements).
- 4) The behaviour change can be an indicator of effectiveness of counselling or the behavioural modification process.
- 5) The counselling or the behaviour modification technique used needs to be based on the needs of the individual whose behaviour is to be modified.

Behaviour modification involves encouragement of desirable behaviour and removal or minimisation of behaviour that is undesirable. This can also be done with the help of reinforcement, which can be positive or negative. Behaviour modification thus involves techniques that are scientifically tested and can be used to reduce certain behaviours that are maladaptive in nature and increase behaviours that are healthy or adaptive.

The first reference to behaviour modification can be traced to an article written by Thorndike in 1911 titled “Provisional Laws of Acquired Behaviour or Learning in which he referred to ‘modifying behaviour’. Various learning theories

like Classical conditioning by Pavlov, Operant Conditioning by Skinner and social learning theory by Bandura further contributed to the development of this field. Various experiments were carried out by Skinner that indicated that behaviour could be modified with the help of reinforcements (both positive and negative).

Concepts in Behaviour Modification

Let us understand the significant concepts in this regard

- **Law of effect:** One of the main principles of behaviour modification is that the behaviour mainly depends of its outcome. Thus if the outcome is controlled or manipulated the behaviour can also be managed. For example, if the out come of tantrums by a child is gaining of the toy he/she wanted then the likelihood of this behaviour (of throwing tantrums) being repeated is high. But if the outcome is manipulated then this behaviour can be changed. Thus the law of effect has significantly contributed to behaviour modification. Law of effect states that “a person tends to repeat behaviour that is accompanied by favourable consequences and tends to not repeat behaviour that is accompanied by unfavourable consequences (Newstrom and Davis, 1997, pg 132). Thus this also requires the counsellor or the immediate superior or manager of the employee to identify the possible consequences that need to be modified or manipulated. In this regard either positive or negative reinforcement can be suitably used.
- **Positive reinforcement and shaping:** Using positive reinforcement increases the likelihood that the behaviour that is reinforced will be repeated. “A positive reinforcement is a stimulus or event which, when it follows a response, increases the likelihood that the response will be made again (Morgan et al, 1996, pg 149). For example, if an employees is punctual then this behaviour can be reinforced by his/ her manager/ supervisor by recognising it and even verbally complementing the employee. Yet another concept in this context is that of shaping. This mainly involves application of positive reinforcement in a more systematic and gradual manner. This can help shape the behaviour of the employee. For example, when a new recruit joins, the manager can systematically and gradually shape his/her behaviour towards becoming more productive by giving positive reinforcement as and when the right behaviour is displayed by him/her. Rewards can also be effectively used to promote right behaviours.
- **Negative reinforcement and punishment :** Using negative reinforcement increases the likelihood that the behaviour that is reinforced will not be repeated. “A negative reinforcer is a stimulus or event which, when its cessation or termination is contingent on a response, increases the likelihood that the response will occur again” (Morgan et al, 1996, pg 149) This mainly involves removal of an outcome that is not favourable. For example in order to avoid the smell of chemicals the employee is encouraged to use a mask. In this case the use of a safety device that is mask is reinforced due to the negative reinforcement that is created by the smell of the chemicals.

Punishment is not same as negative reinforcement and in punishment, the behaviour is followed by outcome that is not favourable. “ A punisher is a

stimulus or event which, when its onset is contingent on a response, decreases the likelihood that the response will occur again” (Morgan et al, 1996, pg 150). For example, if an employee has not been following the safety norms then he/ she has to pay a fine. Punishment have its own advantages and disadvantages. Whee on one hand it conveys strong message, on the other, the punisher may not be liked by others or the employee or subordinates.

- **Extinction:** It is also to be noted that if a particular reinforced behaviour is not reinforced, extinction of that behaviour could take place due to lack of reinforcement. For example, an employee who was earlier awarded for his/ her innovative ideas, was not reinforced recently when he/ she came up with a creative solution to an impending problem, then this behaviour is likely to become extinct. Thus the managers also need to be cautious in this regard so as to avoid certain favourable behaviours of the employees from going extinct.

5.11 BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION PROCESS

The behaviour modification process is discussed as follows:

- 1) **Setting of the goal:** The main goal of behaviour modifications is bringing about a change in behaviour, as discussed before, this change can be in terms of a behaviour that is newly developed like learning a new skill or further strengthening of a behaviour, for example, a person may have leadership skills but they can be further enhanced. It can also include maintenance of a particular behaviour like safety related behaviour and practices or hygienic behaviour and last but not the least, decreasing or eliminating the unwanted behaviour, aggressive behaviour, for example, can be completely eliminated.
- 2) **Behavioural Assessment:** As discussed above, before the behaviour modification process is started, the goal has to be whether behaviour is to be strengthened or reduce or a new behaviour is to be developed or a particular behaviour is to be maintained is to be decided. This can be decided based on the behavioural assessment. A behavioural assessment will help understand the problem in a better manner. This assessment includes the following:
 - **Frequency:** How frequent is the behaviour. For example, if a person has been aggressive just once, we can say that it was due to the situation and the person may not be as such aggressive by nature. But if the person has been aggressive a number of times then this is a matter of concern.
 - **Duration:** For how long the behaviour has been persistent is also important to be noted. For example, the duration that the employee has been aloof or upset or displaying lack of interest in job related activities.
 - **Intensity:** This has to do with the severity of the behaviour. For example, how extreme was the aggressiveness displayed by the employee.

The behaviour is further analysed with the help of functional analysis, that can be done using ABC,

A, that stands for Antecedent, that is, what happened before the behaviour B, stands for Behaviour, the behaviour of the employee C, stands for consequences. What happened after the behaviour.

3) **The intervention or techniques that could be used are specified:** To suggest or specify a particular intervention or technique it is necessary that

- the antecedent factors are mentioned and described,
- the consequences are also noted down,
- the goals of behaviour modification are specified and,
- target response that requires to be changed is noted

Once this is done then suitable technique for behaviour modification can be used.

4) **Evaluation and followup:** Evaluation and follow up are carried out to see if any change in the behaviour has taken place or not. If there are no changes in the behaviour after use of a particular intervention or technique, the same can be changed or modified.

Activity 3

Explain behavioural assessment.

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5.12 ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION (OBM)

OBM can be defied as “a programme in which manager identifies a work related behaviour and encourages the same by suitable intervention strategy having positive motivation till the undesirable behaviour is weakened and desirable behaviour is strengthened” (Singh, 2003 pg 330).

Organisational Behaviour Modification (OBM) can be described as a form of operant conditioning that mainly used by Lutherans and Kreitner in order to shape the behaviours of the employees (Quick, Nelson and Khandelwal, 2013). Stajkovic and Lutherans (1997) carried out a meta analysis of the effect of OBM on task performance. The review indicated that OBM had a positive and significant effect on the task performance of employees in both service and manufacturing organisations.

OBM can be effectively applied in an organisational set up in order to:

- Improve employee productivity
- Promote discipline amongst the employees

- Ensure and enhance the safety related behaviour of the employees.
- Development of training programs
- Employee self management

OBM also helps the immediate supervisors or managers to carry out an analysis of the employees' behaviour, the reasons for its occurrence and consequences so that it can be changed. Thus the manager/ supervisor can become more observant and learn to carefully monitor employee behaviour. In this context some of the general principles to be followed by the manager/ supervisor (Newstrom and Davis, 1997) are highlighted as follows:

- 1) **The behaviour that needs modification has to be identified:** The manager/ supervisor has to first identify the behaviour that requires modification. For example, if the employee has been frequently smoking in the workshop area, thus violating the norm of not smoking, this is the behaviour that needs modification.
- 2) **Using positive reinforcement whenever possible and sparingly using punishment:** Positive reinforcements should be used more often and punishments should be avoided and to be used only when absolutely necessary.
- 3) **Certain minor behaviours that are undesirable could be ignored:** Certain behaviours that do not have major repercussions or negative consequences could be ignored. This again will depend on the judgement of the manager/ supervisor.
- 4) **Shaping can be adequately used:** Systematic and gradual positive reinforcement can be used effectively to reinforce desirable behaviour.
- 5) **The time between the correct response or behaviour and the reinforcement should be minimal:** This is especially important as the employee will then associate the reinforcement with the behaviour and only then the likelihood of desirable behaviour being repeated and undesirable behaviour being avoided will increase. For example, if an employee achieved a target given to him in given time, then he/ she should be immediately rewarded.
- 6) **Reinforcement should be frequently provided:** This is also to be done to avoid extinction of behaviours besides to encourage desirable behaviours and discourage undesirable behaviours.

Role of Manager in application of OBM

The role of the manager and is extremely important in this context and besides above there certain other guidelines are to be followed by them (Furnham, 2005), these are discussed as follows:

- 1) All the employees should not be reinforced or rewarded in the same manner. In this regard there is no doubt that the manager has to be fair and just. However, the reinforcement or the reward should be linked to the individual performance or based on some criteria also needs to be informed

Intrapersonal Processes

- to the employees before hand. Further, the reinforcement provided should also match the behaviour or the performance output.
- 2) The employees need to know what is expected of them, only then they will be motivated to work in that direction. They should have a fair idea about whether quality, quantity or both is expected and how exactly they perform will be measured. There should be great transparency in this and further no discrimination should exist to ensure successful behavioural modification.
 - 3) Besides informing the employees about what they are doing in a right manner, they also need to be informed of what they are doing wrong. For example, if an employee is not using safety devices, he/ she needs to be informed that it is wrong. Such feedback will help in bringing about behavioural change.
 - 4) As it is said, praise in public but criticise in a closed room. In same lines any unwarranted behaviour preferably should be criticised or punished in absence of others as otherwise there could be detrimental effects as the employee may feel insulted and the necessary change will not be in the direction that it was expected.

The managers/ supervisors need to be adequately trained to use the principles and techniques of OBM in order for it to be effective. Besides the managers/ supervisor as well as the employees and the management should have positive attitude towards OBM and its application.

Criticisms of Organisational Behaviour Modification

Though to a greater extent organisational behaviour modification can be effectively used to modify behaviour, it has also been criticised. Most often the principles of behaviour modifications can be applied to very controlled situation, however, when it comes to situations involving subtle interactions and performances that are necessarily interdependent, it may not be possible to apply behaviour modification. This can be effectively used with workers or employees at lower levels, but not much evidence is available with regard to how it can be used successfully with higher level employees (Mckenna, 2012). OBM has also been criticised due to ethical issues, as it mainly involves manipulation of behaviour or even punishment and in this context what is right or wrong depends on the manager or superior. This can also be misused by the managers and they may abuse this power to control the behaviours of their subordinates. It is thus necessary that the manipulation of the behaviour is done in a constructive and positive manner

Activity 4

A) Define Organisational Behaviour Modification.

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B) Discuss the role of managers in application of OBM.

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5.13 SUMMARY

In this unit, we tried to understand concept of learning an it's relevance in organisations. Then it explained the concept of learning organisations and how they can be evolved. The the process of behaviour modification and its relevance in organisations is explained.

5.14 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- 1) What is learning? What are its distinguishing features?
- 2) What are the four basic reinforcement strategies employed in encouraging desirable behaviour and discouraging undesirable behaviour?
- 3) How do you distinguish between classical and operant conditioning? What relevance these concepts have in an organisational setting?
- 4) Explain the various approaches to learning. How does each approach differ from the other?
- 5) What are the schedules of reinforcement? In your opinion, which one of the schedules is more suitable for continuous desirable behaviour?
- 6) Define learning curves. Differentiate between positive and negative reinforcement.
- 7) What is learning organisation? What are its distinguishing characteristics?

5.15 FURTHER READINGS/ REFERENCES

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