

Managers applying reinforcement theory to shape and reshape employee behaviors bu...

[Profession](#), [Manager](#)



The aim of this report is to discuss about managers applying Reinforcement theory to shape and reshape employee behaviors to overcome the restraining forces of change.

Managers can apply reinforcement theory to motivate the employees of the organization and to understand the needs of the workers and treat them equitably and motivate them by increasing the pay or by giving bonuses to achieve the goals and values of the organization.

The main objective of this report is to critically discuss about reinforcement theory and the types of reinforcement theory to motivate the employees of the organization and to see how managers apply the basic principles of reinforcement theory to encourage desired behavior and discouraging the undesired behavior through the use of reinforcers such as pay, appraisals, promotions and giving them more challenging tasks to increase the efficiency of employees.

This report on reinforcement theory gives the in depth view on B. F. Skinner reinforcement theory and a complete information on his views and also the limitations of reinforcement theory.

Chapter 2

Analysis

Reinforcement theory is defined as the process of shaping the individual behavior by rewarding the desired behavior and punishing the undesired behavior.

2. 1 Background and Development of Reinforcement Theory

BF Skinner and his associates proposed reinforcement theory of motivation.

Reinforcement theory (also called as operant Conditioning) states that individual's behavior is a function of its consequences. It is based on law of effect.

2. 2 Law of Effect

OB Mod relies heavily on the law of effect, which states that a person tends to repeat behavior that is accompanied by favorable consequences (reinforcement) and tends not to repeat behavior that is accompanied by unfavorable consequences. (Newstrom W. John, p no 111)

Reinforcement theory of motivation looks out on the perception of individuals. This theory focuses totally on what happens to an individual when he takes some action. Thus, according to Skinner, the external environment of the organization must be designed effectively and positively so as to motivate the employee. This theory is applied for analyzing controlling mechanism for individual's behavior. However, it does not focus on the causes of individual's behavior.

2. 3 Behavior Modification

Organizational behavior modification, or OB Mod, is the application in organizations of the principles of behavior modification, which evolved from the work of B. F. Skinner. OB Mod and the next several models are process theories of motivation, since they provide perspectives on the dynamics by

which employees can be motivated. (Newstrom W. John, p no 111) The figure below illustrates the basic steps in OB mod.

Source: Organizational Behavior: Managing People and Organizations by Ricky W. Griffin, Gregory Moorhead

The first step is to identify performance related behavioral events that are the desirable and undesirable behaviors. A manager of a restaurant might decide the most important behavior for the steward is to greet customers warmly and serve them.

The second step in behavior modification is for, managers to baseline the performance of each individual which is usually calculated in percentage across different time intervals. Example if any sales representative is getting around 25% of the total sales as required by the company.

The third step is to identify existing behavior contingencies or consequences of performance exactly how the employee is performing.

The fourth step is to develop intervention strategies in other words some element of the performance reward- linkage structure, process, technology, groups, or tasks is changed to make high level performance more rewarding.

After the intervention step, the manager again measures performance to determine whether the desired effect has been achieved. If not manager must again re design the intervention strategy or repeat the entire process.

Next step is to maintain desirable behaviors through positive reinforcement for example granting incentives every time a desired behavior is shown by the employee.

Finally, managers has to evaluate performance management as to how the employee are performing and by offering long term rewards like increase in pay, promotion to sustain ongoing efforts to improve performance. (Griffin W. Rickey 9th edition, p no 108½)

Chapter 4

Types of Reinforcement

Reinforcement Methods

Source: The fundamentals of Organization Behavior by Henri L. Tossi, Neal P. Mero

3. 1 Positive Reinforcement:

Thomas J. Peters, author of In Search of Excellence, emphasizes that organizations striving for success need to celebrate what you want to see more of from your employees. In order to do this it is essential to understand the concept of positive reinforcement and its easy integration into your organization.

Positive reinforcement is a standard analyzing tool that can be used in workplace, educational institutions and even in our day to day life, which is connected to performance or behavior.

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Positive reinforcement is used by managers to extract the desired behavior from the employee keeping organization success in mind.

Positive reinforcement can be achieved by observing and caring about an employee, positive reinforcement has a major impact on employee motivation, satisfaction, productivity and loyalty in attaining individual success. As well employee success contributes to the overall improvement in the organization's performance. As all of these results and success factors of positive reinforcement begin to come together, your organization will leap ahead in its increasingly competitive marketplace.

Positive reinforcement in an organization can be achieved in many ways like praising the employee if he has achieved his target and giving incentives if the employee has completed the project for the month and taking the team out for a dinner and appreciate their effort and also managers can provide training to the employees who has achieved the goals and objectives of the organization. This will be immediately followed by the positive behavior; the employee will see a link between behavior and positive consequences and will be motivated to repeat similar behaviors in future. And employees tend to repeat the same in order to gain appreciation.

Shaping is a methodical and progressive application of positive reinforcement. It occurs when more frequent, or more powerful, reinforcements are successively given as the employee comes closer to the desired behavior⁸. Even though the desired behavior is not shown by the employee, it will be encouraged by giving reinforcement for behavior in the

right direction. Shaping can be used by managers to train the employee for complex tasks/assignments.

3. 2 Negative Reinforcement:

Negative reinforcement is one which involves the removal of undesired behavior of an employee. Negative reinforcement is also known as Avoidance. In other words negative reinforcement is used to increase the desired behavior. Rather than receiving a reward following a desirable behavior, the person is given the opportunity to avoid an unpleasant consequence (Griffin W. Rickey 9th edition, p no 108½).

This also involves removal of objectionable outcomes once desired behavior is demonstrated. Example of common undesired behavior of employee in an organization

½ Employees rushing and not quality checking their own work.

½ Talking to colleagues instead of responding to customers in a timely manner which hampers the growth of the organization

½ Being unpleasant, rude or argumentative to team mates.

½ Opposing all improvement suggestions made by the managers.

½ Repeatedly raising trivial issues.

½ Taking excessive breaks.

½ Not showing interest in learning new things related to work.

Managers can apply negative reinforcement theory to control the behavior of the employee

Example 1: if the employee is not showing interest in the work and is showing casual attitude, managers can speak to the employee and cut down the incentive so that deduction may correct the behavior of the employee, so here incentive acts as a catalyst to change the behavior of the employee.

Example 2: Managers pressurize the employee if the report/project is not completed on time, these results in employee completing the report/project to avoid pressure from the manager.

Negative reinforcement is often confused with punishment, but they are not the same. Punishment attempts to decrease the probability of specific behaviors; negative reinforcement attempts to increase desired behavior.

Negative reinforcement can be used effectively by managers to reshape the behavior of the employee in the organization and change to desired behavior. So negative reinforcement is one of the standard reinforce that can be used by managers.

3. 3 Punishment:

Punishment is another process in reinforcement theory which managers can implement on employee to reduce the frequency of undesirable behaviors.

Punishment is an unpleasant, or aversive, consequence of a behavior.

Examples of punishment are verbal or written reprimands, pay cut, layoffs, loss of privileges and may be termination. (Griffin W. Rickey 9th edition, p 105)

Punishment is different from negative reinforcement, in negative

reinforcement is used to increase the desired behavior of the employee

whereas in punishment the unpleasant behavior is eliminated by having a negative event which follows the behavior of the employee. Here in

punishment the employee stops or avoids undesirable consequences.

Punishment must be used as a tool to change the behavior of the employee

and give employee a chance to correct his behavior. Besides undesired

behavior may far reach negative effects if they go unpunished. (Griffin W.

Rickey 9th edition, p no 105)

Example 1: Manager must punish the employee if he continues to

underperform after several warnings and does not show any improvements.

Punishment should be used as a last resort to change the behavior of the

employee because it may put lot of pressure and stress which may result in unpredictable outcome.

Punishment may not permanently eliminate undesired behavior because

sometimes it will be not having an alternative to the desired behavior.

3. 4 Extinction:

Extinction is referred as elimination of desired behavior when manager

hold back positive reinforcement. If rewards are withdrawn for behaviors that

were previously reinforced, the behaviors will probably become less frequent and die out. (Griffin W. Rickey 9th edition, p no 105½)

The behavior of the employee is no longer reinforced and is less likely to occur in future and may affect the organization growth, while positive reinforcement contributes to the overall growth of the organization extinction can hamper the growth by not recognizing employee performance.

Example 1: If the employee is continually praised for the promptness in which he completes his work for several months, but receives no praise in subsequent months for such behavior, his desirable behaviors may diminish.

Thus, Extinction is the most important part of reinforcement theory because it may affect the employee productivity or creativity which reflects in the employee performance. So as to avoid unwanted extinction, managers may have to continue to offer positive behavioral consequences and maintain his good performance.

If managers inadvertently or otherwise, stop rewarding valuable behaviors such as good performance, those behaviors may also become extinct.

(Griffin W. Rickey 9th edition, p no 105½)

Chapter 5

Schedules of Reinforcement

Schedules of reinforcement theory are based on when managers should apply different types of reinforcement theory to shape or reshape the desired behavior of the employees. Applying different types completely depends on the situation.

The table below shows summarizes the five basic reinforcement schedules that managers can use

Source: Organizational Behavior: Managing People and Organizations by Ricky W. Griffin, Gregory Moorhead

The two main types of reinforcement schedules are continuous and intermittent. Although the schedule of reinforcement often depends on practical considerations, reinforcement is always delivered according to some schedule. (Slocum W. John no 108)

5. 1 Continuous Reinforcement

Continuous reinforcement rewards behaviour every time it occurs.

Continuous reinforcement is very effective in motivating desirable behaviors, especially in the early stages of learning, when the goal is to familiarize the employee being conditioned with the basic ground rules of the situation.

Continuous reinforcement must be provided promptly and consistently in order to work. Managers must closely monitor the behavior of the employee to reward every time he delivers desirable behaviors. Partial reinforcement may affect the employee from showing desired behavior, if the employee is praised for every time he completes his work and will not receive any

acclamation for the subsequent works done, the employee may stop putting the extra effort.

Every time reinforcement is applied it strengthens behavior, so continuous reinforcement leads to very rapid increases in the rate of behavior. It is especially useful, then, when the task is to shape up some new behavior or behavior chain. (½Chance Paul, p no 177½)

5. 2 Fixed Interval Reinforcement

Fixed interval reinforcement is defined as the reinforcement schedule where rewards are spaced at uniform levels. The critical variable is time, and it is held constant. This is the predominant schedule for most salaried employees¹¹.

Examples of fixed interval reinforcement may be monthly salaries given to employee, pay check given on weekly basis; employees are rewarded on a fixed interval reinforcement schedule. (½Robbins, Judge, Millet, p no 59½)

In fixed interval reinforcement employee are not rewarded whenever they show desired behavior, they will be rewarded on a monthly, weekly basis unlike in continuous reinforcement employee will be rewarded every time a desired behavior is occurred.

Unfortunately, in many situations the fixed interval schedule does not necessarily maintain high performance levels.

Example: if employees know that they will be paid and visited by manager on a weekly basis, they may be motivated to work hard at that point of time, to gain praise and recognition. And other days of the week the employees may not work so hard because they have learned that reinforcement is unlikely except during the weekly visit.

5. 3 Variable Interval Reinforcement

Variable reinforcement uses time as the basis for applying reinforcement, but it varies the interval between reinforcement. This schedule is inappropriate for paying wages, but it can work well for other types of positive reinforcement such as praise and recognition and for avoidance. (Griffin W. Ricky, 9th Edition, p no 105)

Considering the above example for variable reinforcement if manager visits employees work stations any time during the week, so they will be having no idea of when the manager will be visiting their work stations, so employee will be motivated to work hard for a longer period of time.

5. 4 Fixed Ratio

In a fixed- ratio schedule, after a fixed or constant amount number of responses are given, a reward is initiated. (Robbins, Judge, Millet)

With fixed-ratio reinforcement, the number of behaviors needed to obtain reinforcement is constant. Fixed interval means it happens at the same rate at the same time. Like an allowance that you receive on the 20th of every month.

5.5 Variable Ratio

Variable Ratio reinforcement, the number of behaviors required for reinforcement varies over time. An employee performing under a variable ratio schedule is motivated to work hard because each successful behavior increases the probability that the next one will result in reinforcement¹⁴.

(Griffin W. Ricky, 9th Edition, p no 106)

Variable ratio reinforcement tends to be the most powerful of the entire reinforcement schedules because in variable ratio the number of desired behavior required for reinforcement is not important, intervals between reinforcement is very crucial, interval between reinforcement must not be too long that the employee will be demotivated and stops trying it.

Example: Variable ratio refers to getting different amount money at different times. This could be seen in someone who is paid in commission - the more cars a person sells, the more money he makes, therefore it is a ratio and he/she doesn't know how many cars they are going to sell to make money, so they must sell as many cars as possible.

Chapter 6

Being a Motivating Manager

In previous chapters we have discussed about the types and schedules of reinforcement, in this chapter we will discuss few points about how manager should motivate the employee in order to get the best results out of them:

1) Treat staff well:

Manager has to be friendly with the entire employees in the organization and also has to maintain a level of distance with his staff, which is bit complicated. Manager should motivate the employee by having timely discussions and group meetings and encouraging them for the desired behavior. Small gestures of this type help in building up of a cordial relationship.

(2) Recognize the differences:

Recognizing the difference is very difficult on the manager's part, which should be carried out very cautiously because all the employees in the organization vibrate to a different pace, so motivating one employee may affect other employee growth and can also demotivated him/her.

Understanding and recognizing the differences between the individual is very important.

(3) Set realistic goals:

Set moderate goals. Setting too high a task creates a feeling of non-achievement, right from the beginning itself. The goals set should be such which seem feasible to the employees to be achieved. A slightly higher target than expected provides a challenge.

(4) Prevent Demonization:

The job of the manager is to motivate the employee working under him, the role of manager includes both motivating and punishing the employee, but punishment must be used as an last resort to change the behavior of the employee else it may affect the productivity of the employees.

(5) Non-financial rewards:

Apart from giving incentives, pay raise, manager has to focus on non-monetary rewards such as an achievement award or a letter of appreciation which boosts the efficiency of the staffs to work harder and also gain more accolades in future which will create a competitive environment in the work place.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Reinforcement theory explains in detail how an individual learns behaviour. Managers who are making attempt to motivate the employees must ensure that they do not reward all employees simultaneously. They must tell the employees what they are not doing correct and guide them properly to ensure that all the employee work towards achieving the organization success.

The main objective of reinforcement theory is to ensure that employees perform the tasks assigned to them as fast as they can, take new projects and put their maximum efforts in achieving the tasks and increase there efficiency.

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Manager must see the employees in the human perspective and not in business perspective, so manager must give chances to the employees to move towards the desired behavior from the undesired, which helps both the employee in increasing the frequency of desired behavior and managers to be successful and build a good rapport with the employees.