Motivating Behavior Through Conditioning and Learning

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Learning Objective:

* Students will define and summarize conditioning and learning theories in 15 minutes.
* Students will be able to describe the relation between motivation and conditioning and learning.
* Given examples, students will relate motivation with rewards and punishments.
* Given reinforcement schedules, students will be able to define and determine examples.

Introduction

Conditioning and learning related to motivating behavior involve using environmental stimuli to influence behavior. Whether the behavior is wanted, or unwanted, external cues are used to guide a new response enforced by the stimuli. The new response is then repeated when given the associated stimuli. For example, every time a mother and daughter go for a walk the mother will put her tennis shoes on and grab her headphones. When the mother puts her tennis shoes on and grabs her headphones creating a stimulus, the daughter will associate that with going for a walk as a response. Positive reinforcements, negative reinforcements, and punishment are methods most commonly used when motivating behavior through conditioning. **Positive reinforcement** is being used when desired behavior is rewarded. **Negative reinforcement** involves encouraging certain behaviors by removing a negative outcome or stimulus. **Punishment** includes introducing an undesired stimulus to discourage unwanted behavior. These principles can be used by individuals to control their own behavior, as well as others’ behavior. They are the most commonly used methods to change one’s actions resulting in desired outcomes.

Classical conditioning

Classical conditioning can be very powerful and is beneficial in understand how organisms learn and adapt within the environment.

**Classical Conditioning** is the association of a neutral stimulus and another stimulus to result in a desired response. It was first discovered by Ivan Pavlov who was a Russian psychologist in the late 19th century. He studied the digestion of dogs and was intrigued by dogs salivating at the sight of food. He observed the dogs and also noticed the dogs salivating at the sound of the bell that was used to bring them food. This response, Pavlov called the conditioned response. The **conditioned response** was a learned response from a previously neutral stimulus of the bell. The bell he called the **conditioned stimulus**.

There are four basic components within classical conditioning: unconditioned stimulus(US), unconditioned response(UR), conditioned stimulus(CS), and conditioned response(CR). The US is a stimulus that triggers a response naturally. The response that is naturally triggered is the UR. The CS is a stimulus that was neutral, but is now triggered a desired or learned response. The learned response is called the CR.

Classical conditioned can be used or applied in various areas, such as education, marketing, and psychology. Within education, classical conditioning can be used to motivate students to pay attention within their schoolwork. This can be executed by associating a specific stimulus with a positive experience. This creates a CS and CR motivating students to learn with positive attitudes and outcomes. This situation can be similarly used within marketing. It can be used by associating products with positive outcomes. Within psychology, classical conditioning can help to explain how previously neutral stimulus can change to be associated with a negative emotional outcome or response. For example, a specific place or situation associated with fear. This process can be called fear conditioning and can assist in understanding the development of anxiety disorders.

How Is Classical Conditioning Motivating?

People experience classical conditioning every day without realizing it. It can be a very strong tool in obtaining desired behavior. It creates strong connections between previously neutral stimulus and a specific response motivating people to repeat desired behaviors in hopes of receiving the reward, or positive reinforcement, from the specific behavior. An example of this would be a person continuously receiving a reward after hearing a particular sound. A person will associate that sound with receiving a reward and become excited when hearing that specific sound. This phenomenon can be called **conditioned reinforcement**. It can be used as a strong motivator for different behaviors.

Operant Conditioning

Within operant conditioning, behaviors are encouraged or discouraged due to consequences that follow. It is helpful in shaping behavior by using given consequences.

**Operant conditioning** is defined as a learning process. It is associated with consequences, whether they are positive or negative. “Operant” refers to behaviors operating based off the environment to determine or produce specific consequences. Operant conditioning was first defined by B.F. Skinner. He was an American psychologist who discovered and developed the idea of the operant chamber, or Skinner box, which studies behaviors within animals in response to different reinforcement types.

Operant conditioning can be applied within educational areas, parenting areas, and business areas. Within education, this is used with students for shaping their behavior with rewards and negative punishments, such as loss of privileges. With parenting, it is similar to the educational areas with students. It can shape a child’s behavior through positive reinforcements or negative reinforcements. Business areas use this similar as well with guiding desired behavior with employees. Rewards being used can be promotions while negative consequences can be demotions.

Operant conditioning in important in psychology, specifically in studies of addiction and behavior therapy. For example, it can help to explain how addictive behaviors can be altered with positive reinforcements as well as negative reinforcements. For example, the pleaser of using drugs and the consequence of negative physical and social aspects of drug use. Similarly with behavior therapy, operant conditioning can be helpful in shaping desired behaviors with using positive reinforcement and using punishment to weaken undesired behavior.

How Is Operant Conditioning Motivating?

Operant conditioning is motivating because of its use of positive or negative consequences. When a behavior is followed by a reward, the likelihood of a person repeating the behavior is increased. If a behavior is followed by a punishment, the likelihood of the behavior is decreased. An example of this is a child being rewarded for doing well on a test. The child will be more likely to study hard to do well on the next test. If the child was do perform poorly on the test followed by being punished by their free time being taken away, the child may also decide to study harder to do well on the next test.

Observational Learning (Social Conformity)

**Observational learning** can also be known as social learning or modeling. It is a process that involves learning by observing others. This process can take place through direct observation of others’ behavior or through social media, or other forms of indirect observation. The first person to study this was a Canadian psychologist named Albert Bandura. He developed the **social learning theory**.

With observational learning, we observe the behaviors from others around us as well as the consequences that follow. People then tend to change their own behavior based off what they observe. An example of this is a child watching their parents being kind and helpful to others. The child is more likely to be kind and helpful to others because they observed their parents being kind. It works the same with if the child observes their parents behaving rudely to others. The child will most likely act rude from watching their parents acting rudely.

Observational learning leads to **social conformity**. Social conformity is the process of adapting our behavior to agree with a specific group of society to appear usual or normal. It can occur consciously and unconsciously. The desire for social acceptance and the fear of social rejection can influence social conformity to take place. An example of this is coworkers taking a coffee break regularly at the same time every day, a new employee may feel they must also take a coffee break. They may feel pressured into taking the break due to fear of social rejection or to obtain social acceptance.

Observational learning is motivating due to people being able to observe the possible outcomes following a specific behavior. This allows the person to observe rather than engage in the behavior not knowing the outcome. Individuals will make informed decisions based off what they observe from the behavior in the given situation. For example, students receiving rewards for completely their homework. Other students who did not complete their homework will observe this. They will be motivated to complete the next homework assignment.

Motivating Rewards

**Motivating reward** help shape behavior in a positive aspect. It is something that is given to a person after a desired behavior is achieved. The intention for motivating rewards is to increase the likelihood of the desired behavior reoccurring in the future. Motivating rewards can be tangible or intangible items. Examples of the items are money and gifts or social approval and recognition. Motivating rewards are meant to be perceived as desirable or meaningful. It is key for a person to have the want for the reward in order to be motivated to complete the desired behavior and repeat it in hopes of obtaining the reward.

Motivating Punishments

Motivating punishments is also used to shape behavior similarly to motivating rewards. It involves applying a negative consequence following an undesired behavior. Its goal is to reduce the likelihood of the behavior reoccurring in the future. The key for motivating rewards is the consequence should be perceived as significant to an individual. It should affect the individual enough for them to not desire it. Punishments can be tangible or intangible. Examples of punishments can be loss of privileges or social disapproval and criticism.

Conclusion

Motivating behavior through condition usually involves applying environmental stimuli to influence different behaviors. These behaviors can be desired or undesired. The common methods in conditioning used are positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, and punishment. Different methods include classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and observational learning. They are each very strong tools for motivated desired behavior. In other cases and used in different ways, these methods could also be used to influence undesired behavior. These methods can be used in various fields to influence and motivate different behaviors and change how a person acts. This topic can be important within psychology to help influence different behaviors for people with developmental disabilities.

Key Take-Aways

* Conditioning and learning influences desired or undesired behavior with environmental stimuli
* Classical conditioning used a previously neutral stimulus and another stimulus to result in desired responses.
* Operant conditioning encourages or discourages behaviors with positive or negative consequences.
* Conditioning is used to motive individuals to repeat desired behaviors through associating a particular stimulus to a positive experience.
* Observational learning influences behavior through individuals observing others and imitating their actions or sometimes their attitudes.

Discussion Activity

1. What are your thoughts on the effectiveness of classical conditioning in shaping behaviors in different areas such as education, marketing, and psychology?
2. In your opinion, what are the most significant benefits of using operant conditioning in shaping behavior in areas such as education, parenting, and business?
3. How do you feel about the concept of social conformity and the impact of observational learning on shaping individuals’ behavior?
4. What are the four basic components of classical conditioning and how do they work together?
5. In what ways can classical conditioning be applied in different fields, such as education, marketing, and psychology?
6. How does operant conditioning use consequences to shape behavior and what is its significance in addiction and behavior therapy?

Key Terms:

-Positive reinforcement- reward given for desired behavior

-Negative reinforcement- encouraging wanted behavior by removing a negative stimulus

-Punishment- undesired stimulus to discourage unwanted behavior

-Classical conditioning- the learning process of an organism learning to associate a neutral stimulus with a stimulus that triggers a desired response

-Conditioned response- trained response to previous neutral stimulus

-Conditioned stimulus- stimulus given to initiate desired response

-Conditioned reinforcement- stimulus reinforcing an organisms’ behavior through a learned association

-Operant conditioning- associated with consequences, either positive or negative

-Observational learning-learning through the process of watching behavior from others

-Social conformity- changing one’s behavior in response to society; acting or agreeing with a specific group to be seen as usual

-Social learning theory- developed by Albert Bandura, theory that states social behavior is influenced by and learned through observing and imitating others’ behaviors.

-Motivating reward- tangible or entangled item given to an individual after a desired behavior is achieved.

-Motivating punishment- applying a negative consequence following an undesired behavior

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