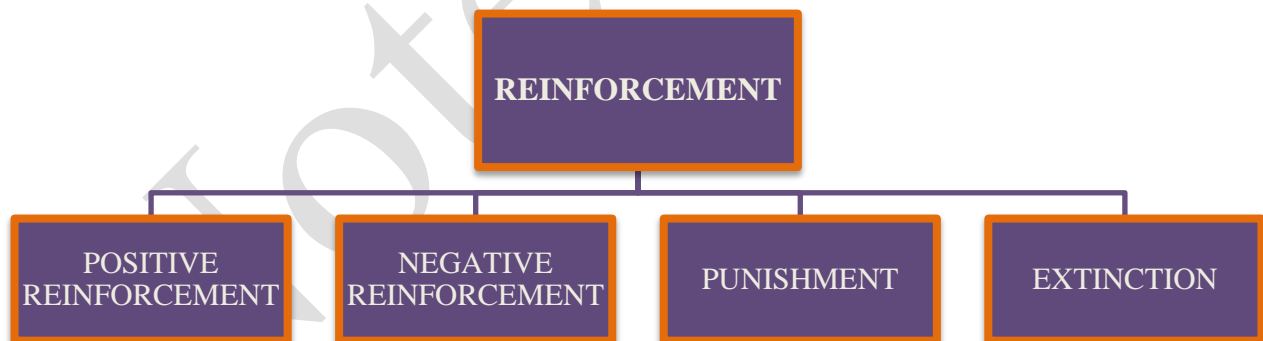# Reinforcement

Reinforcement theory was proposed by **BF Skinner** and his associates. It states that individual's behavior is a function of its consequences. It is based on "law of effect", i.e., individual's behavior with positive consequences tends to be repeated, but individual's behavior with negative consequences tends not to be repeated.

Reinforcement is a process to develop or strengthen pleasing behavior. Reinforcement hypothesis is the method of shaping behavior by controlling the consequences of the behavior. In reinforcement theory, a combination of rewards and/or punishments is used to strengthen desired behavior or put out unwanted behavior. Any behavior that produces a consequence is called operant behavior, because the individual operates on his or her environment. Reinforcement theory focuses on the relationship between the operant behavior and the related consequences, and is also called as operant conditioning. Skinner argued that the internal needs and drives of individuals can be ignored because people learn to exhibit certain behaviors based on what happens to them as a result of their behavior. 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. Management team must always try to shape employee behaviors to get better contributions to the company. This can involve supporting positive behaviors or reducing negative behaviors.

The managers use the following **methods for controlling the behavior of the employees**:

- **Positive Reinforcement:** This implies giving a positive response when an individual shows positive and required behavior. For example - Immediately praising an employee for coming early for job. This will increase probability of outstanding behavior occurring again. Reward is a positive reinforce, but not necessarily. If and only if the employees' behavior improves, reward can said to be a positive reinforcer. Positive reinforcement stimulates occurrence of behavior. This means that positive reinforcement reinforces you to do the job in the best possible way.

- **Negative Reinforcement:** This implies rewarding an employee by removing negative / undesirable consequences. Both positive and negative reinforcement can be used for increasing desirable / required behavior. For example, if an employee follows the order of his boss and completes his work in time he may not be harassed or criticized by his boss. Here harassment or criticism works as a negative reinforcement which the employee learns to avoid by completing his task and following the order if his boss.

- **Punishment:** In punishment, an undesired behavior is followed by an unpleasant outcome. It decreases the occurrence of the behavior. For example, if a salesperson does not complete his target, his boss withdraws bonus or perks or demotes him. The fear of withdrawal or demotion makes him the salespersons to complete their tasks.

- **Extinction:** It implies absence of reinforcements. In other words, extinction implies lowering the probability of undesired behavior by removing reward for that kind of behavior. Some scholars have called it do nothing strategy. For instance - if an employee no longer receives praise and admiration for his good work, he may feel that his behavior is generating no fruitful consequence. Lack of praise or reinforcement refrain the employee in doing good work. Extinction may unintentionally lower desirable behavior.