

PSYC 337 LEARNING

Session 12 – Learning and Behaviour Change – Part One

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Session Overview

- Sometimes individuals put up some behaviours that are undesirable or problematic
- And in such situations, psychologists can use some principles of learning to help change such undesirable behaviours to desirable behaviours.
- This session focuses on discussing how some of the learning principles discussed earlier can be applied to help change some behaviours.

Session Objectives

At the end of the session, students will be able to:

- Explain what Behaviour Change is
- Discuss the relationship between Learning and Behaviour Change
- Analyse how this affects people's acceptable and unacceptable behaviours

Session Outline

- The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:
 - Topic One: What is Behaviour Change?
 - Topic Two: The Relationship between Learning and Behaviour Change

Reading List

- Relevant text/chapters and reading materials are available on Sakai



Topic One

WHAT IS BEHAVIOR CHANGE?



What is Behaviour Change?

- Behaviour change refers to conscious steps taken to alter an undesirable behaviour to a desirable behaviour.
 - **OR** literally speaking from a bad behaviour to a good behaviour.
- For instance, changing from coming to work late, to being punctual and regular
- Behaviour depends on learning and it depends on motivation as well.
- What we learn as human beings affect our behaviour, although not all behaviours are a function of learning.
- There are processes involved in getting behaviours changed

What is Behaviour Change?

- Behavioural techniques are used to help people learn new skills and behaviour in a variety of settings.
- These learning theories have been used by learning theorists to explain a wide variety of undesirable behaviours
 - and psychological problems such as phobia, alcoholism, sexual deviance, antisocial behaviour etc.

What is Behaviour Change?

- Many practical applications have also been developed to treat such undesirable behaviours.
- Behaviour therapist thus resort to a variety of techniques for learning and relearning
- Through deliberate exposure to anxiety provoking stimuli, conditioning of incompatible reactions (Gleitman 1995), reinforcement, modelling etc. to help replace undesirable behaviours to desirable behaviours.

Topic Two

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNING AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE



The Relationship between Learning and Behaviour Change

- Do you remember the definition of learning?
- Learning is a relatively permanent change in behaviour as a result of experience.
- This means people learn and acquire new behaviours
 - which may be good (desirable) or bad (undesirable) behaviours.

The Relationship between Learning and Behaviour Change

- There are behaviours people learn over time
 - to find a job and work hard to earn a living
 - to become an armed robber in order to earn a living.
 - to avoid alcohol because it can be harmful to his health
 - to depend on alcohol and become an addict.
- Such behaviours may be rewarding or satisfying to them
 - or those are the only behaviours that they have learned.

The Relationship between Learning and Behaviour Change

- To change a behaviour, even in the smallest degree, involves repeatedly doing something new
 - or differently, or stopping doing something.
- Behaviour therapists believe that
 - **undesirable behaviours are learned and therefore they can be unlearned.**

The Relationship between Learning and Behaviour Change

- The goal of therapy is to change the undesirable behaviours through the use of learning based techniques.
 - Behaviour therapy with its emphasis on learning leads to the use of behaviour therapy methods.
- To help correct or change behaviours
 - behaviour therapists apply learning and other experimentally derived psychological principles
- The assumption is that psychological problems of individuals are learned behaviours and that these can be changed

The Relationship between Learning and Behaviour Change

- It was observed that if learning experiences can create problems, they can also help alleviate these problems.
- It has been observed that
 - people who display undesirable and abnormal behaviour have either **failed to learn the skills needed** to cope with the problems of everyday living, or
 - have **acquired faulty skills and patterns** that are being maintained through some form of reinforcement.

The Relationship between Learning and Behaviour Change

- To modify such behaviours then, people must **learn new behaviours** to replace the faulty skills
 - and unlearn their maladaptive patterns (Bellack, Hersen & Kazdin, 1990).
- New behaviour has to be learned, and
 - behaviour change has to be realistic.

The Relationship between Learning and Behaviour Change

Mechanism: Using Classical Conditioning to Change Behaviour

- Note: In classical conditioning, behaviours (responses) are learned as a result of an association between a CS and a UCS.
- If behaviour has to be **unlearned**, then
 - that association between the CS and the UCS has to be extinguished (extinction)
 - **so that a person will learn that the UCS no longer follows the CS.**
- A new behaviour can be learned if:
 - instead of pairing the CS with a UCS that is unpleasant, it is rather paired with a UCS that is pleasant so that the person is counter-conditioned or deconditioned.
- **This way a new response or behaviour can be learned.**

The Relationship between Learning and Behaviour Change

- Again, with the use of classical conditioning, people can learn new desirable behaviours and generalise it to other aspects of their lives.
- Examples of behaviour therapies based on classical conditioning are:
 - Counter-conditioning
 - Systematic desensitization
 - Flooding
 - Aversive conditioning
 - Techniques to stopping bedwetting.

The Relationship between Learning and Behaviour Change

Mechanism: Using Operant Conditioning to Change Behaviour

- Note:
 - In operant conditioning, behaviours that are reinforced are increased while those that are punished are decreased or extinguished and that is how behaviour is learned.
- Therefore:
 - if a desirable behaviour has to be learned then that behaviour has to be **reinforced** for it to **recur**,
 - and undesirable behaviour has to be **punished** or not reinforced for it to **decrease** or extinguish

The Relationship between Learning and Behaviour Change

- Behaviour therapies based on operant conditioning include:
 - token economy
 - contingency contracting
 - behavioural self-control
 - social skill training
 - biofeedback.

The Relationship between Learning and Behaviour Change

Mechanism: Using Observational Learning to Change Behaviour

- Note that
 - In observational learning, individuals learn new behaviours by observing other peoples (model) behaviours and imitating those behaviours.
 - This means that both desirable and undesirable behaviour can be observed and imitated.
- Therefore, if undesirable behaviours have to be changed, then desirable behaviours have to be modelled for an individual to observe and imitate.

The Relationship between Learning and Behaviour Change

- Behaviour therapies based on observational learning includes
 - the use of modelling to treat phobia
 - modelling to teach new skills
 - assertiveness training.

The Relationship between Learning and Behaviour Change

- The primary use of learning theories in behaviour change therefore is
 - habit formation
 - by forming good habits (desirable behaviours) such as
 - developing social skills
 - Assertiveness
 - breaking bad habits such as smoking, bedwetting, phobias antisocial behaviours etc.