Chapter 2

Foundations of Individual Behavior
After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

- Contrast the two types of ability.
- Define intellectual ability and demonstrate its relevance to OB.
- Identify the key biographical characteristics and describe how they are relevant to OB.
- Define learning and outline the principles of the three major theories of learning.
- Define shaping, and show how it can be used in OB.
- Show how culture affects our understanding of intellectual abilities, biographical characteristics, and learning.
Ability

An individual’s capacity to perform the various tasks in a job.

Made up of two sets of factors:

- Intellectual Abilities
  - The abilities needed to perform mental activities.
  - General Mental Ability (GMA) is a measure of overall intelligence.
  - Wonderlic Personnel Test: a quick measure of intelligence for recruitment screening.
  - No correlation between intelligence and job satisfaction.

- Physical Abilities
  - The capacity to do tasks demanding stamina, dexterity, strength, and similar characteristics.
Dimensions of Intellectual Ability

EXHIBIT 2-1

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Nine Basic Physical Abilities

- **Strength Factors**
  - Dynamic strength
  - Trunk strength
  - Static strength
  - Explosive strength

- **Flexibility Factors**
  - Extent flexibility
  - Dynamic flexibility

- **Other Factors**
  - Body coordination
  - Balance
  - Stamina
Biographical Characteristics

Objective and easily obtained personal characteristics.

- **Age**
  - Older workers bring experience, judgment, a strong work ethic, and commitment to quality.

- **Gender**
  - Few differences between men and women that affect job performance.

- **Race** *(the biological heritage used to identify oneself)*
  - Contentious issue: differences exist, but could be more culture-based than race-based.
Other Biographical Characteristics

- **Tenure**
  - People with job tenure (seniority at a job) are more productive, absent less frequently, have lower turnover, and are more satisfied.

- **Religion**
  - Islam is especially problematic in the workplace in this post-9/11 world.

- **Sexual Orientation**
  - Federal law does not protect against discrimination (but state or local laws may).
  - Domestic partner benefits are important considerations.

- **Gender Identity**
  - Relatively new issue – transgendered employees.
Learning

Any relatively permanent change in behavior that occurs as a result of experience

- **Learning components:**
  - Involves Change
  - Is Relatively Permanent
  - Is Acquired Through Experience
Theories of Learning

- **Classical Conditioning**
  - A type of conditioning in which an individual responds to some stimulus that would not ordinarily produce such a response.

- **Operant Conditioning**
  - A type of conditioning in which desired voluntary behavior leads to a reward or prevents a punishment.

- **Social-Learning Theory**
  - People can learn through observation and direct experience.
Classical Conditioning

- Pavlov’s Dog Drool
- Key Concepts:
  - Unconditioned stimulus
    • A naturally occurring phenomenon.
  - Unconditioned response
    • The naturally occurring response to a natural stimulus.
  - Conditioned stimulus
    • An artificial stimulus introduced into the situation.
  - Conditioned response
    • The response to the artificial stimulus.

This is a passive form of learning. It is reflexive and not voluntary – not the best theory for OB learning.
Operant Conditioning

- **B. F. Skinner’s concept of Behaviorism:** behavior follows stimuli in a relatively unthinking manner.

- **Key Concepts:**
  - Conditioned behavior: voluntary behavior that is learned, not reflexive.
  - Reinforcement: the consequences of behavior which can increase or decrease the likelihood of behavior repetition.
  - Pleasing consequences increase likelihood of repetition.
  - Rewards are most effective immediately after performance.
  - Unrewarded/punished behavior is unlikely to be repeated.
Social-Learning Theory

- Based on the idea that people can also learn *indirectly*: by observation, reading, or just hearing about someone else’s – a model’s – experiences.

- **Key Concepts:**
  - Attentional processes
    - Must recognize and pay attention to critical features to learn.
  - Retention processes
    - Model’s actions must be remembered to be learned.
  - Motor reproduction processes
    - Watching the model’s behavior must be converted to doing.
  - Reinforcement processes
    - Positive incentives motivate learners.
Systematically reinforcing each successive step that moves an individual closer to the desired response.

Four Methods of Shaping Behavior:

– Positive reinforcement
  • Providing a reward for a desired behavior (learning)

– Negative reinforcement
  • Removing an unpleasant consequence when the desired behavior occurs (learning)

– Punishment
  • Applying an undesirable condition to eliminate an undesirable behavior (“unlearning”)

– Extinction
  • Withholding reinforcement of a behavior to cause its cessation (“unlearning”)

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Schedules of Reinforcement: A Critical Issue

Two Major Types:

– Continuous Reinforcement
  • A desired behavior is reinforced each time it is demonstrated

– Intermittent Reinforcement
  • A desired behavior is reinforced often enough to make the behavior worth repeating but not every time it is demonstrated
  • Multiple frequencies
Types of Intermittent Reinforcement

- Ratio
  - Depends on the number of responses made.

- Interval
  - Depends on the time between reinforcements.

- Fixed
  - Rewards are spaced at uniform time intervals or after a set number of responses.

- Variable
  - Rewards that are unpredictable or that vary relative to the behavior.
## Schedules of Reinforcement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reinforcement Scheduled</th>
<th>Nature of Reinforcement</th>
<th>Effect on Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Reward given after each desired behavior</td>
<td>Fast learning of new behavior but rapid extinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed-interval</td>
<td>Reward given at fixed time intervals</td>
<td>Average and irregular performance with rapid extinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable-interval</td>
<td>Reward given at variable times</td>
<td>Moderately high and stable performance with slow extinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed-ratio</td>
<td>Reward given at fixed amounts of output</td>
<td>High and stable performance attained quickly but also with rapid extinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable-ratio</td>
<td>Reward given at variable amounts of output</td>
<td>Very high performance with slow extinction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Behavior Modification (OB Mod)

The application of reinforcement concepts to individuals in the work setting

- Follows the Five-Step Problem-Solving Model
  1. Identify critical behaviors
  2. Develop baseline data
  3. Identify behavioral consequences
  4. Develop and apply intervention
  5. Evaluate performance improvement
Problems with OB Mod and Reinforcement

- OB Mod ignores thoughts and feelings.
- OB Mod may not explain complex behaviors that involve thinking and feeling.
- Stimuli may not be consciously given as a means of shaping behavior.

Modern managers and OB theorists are using cognitive approaches to shaping behavior.
Global Implications

- **Intellectual Abilities**
  - Structures and measures of intelligence generalize across cultures.

- **Biographical Characteristics**
  - Not much evidence on the global relevance of the relationships described in this chapter.
  - Countries do vary dramatically on their biographical composition.

- **Learning**
  - Again, not much evidence currently exists – we cannot generalize at this point.
Three Individual Variables:

- Ability
  - Directly influences employees level of performance.
  - Managers need to focus on ability in selection, promotion, and transfer.
  - Fine-tune job to fit incumbent’s abilities.

- Biographical Characteristics
  - Should not be used in management decisions: possible source of bias.

- Learning
  - Observable change in behavior = learning.
  - Reinforcement works better than punishment.