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# UNIT 6 LEARNING

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## Objectives

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- understand the nature of learning process
- explain the characteristics of the behaviourist and cognitive approaches to learning
- differentiate between Pavlovian and Skinnerian conditioning
- explain and evaluate the technique of behaviour modification
- explain the practical relevance of the socialisation process
- understand the concept of the learning organisation

## Structure

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- 6.2 What is Learning?
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## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

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The process of learning has great value for enriching human life in all spheres of life. All activities and behaviours that make personal, social and economic life peaceful and pleasurable are learned. Learning definitely affects human behaviour in organisations. There is little organisational behaviour that is not either directly or indirectly affected by learning. For example, a worker's skill, a manager's attitude, a supervisor's motivation and a secretary's mode of dress are all learned. Our ability to learn is also important to organisations peroccupied with controlled performance. Employees have to know what they are to do, how they are to do it, how well they are expected to do it, and the consequences of achieving good or poor levels of performance. Thus, learning theories have influenced a range of organisational practices concerning:

- the induction of new recruits
- the design and delivery of job training
- the design of payment systems-
- how supervisors evaluate and provide feedback on employee performance
- the design of forms of learning organisation



It is clear that theories of learning have significant practical implications. However, this is one of the most fundamental and controversial topics in psychology. The extremes of this controversy will be explained later, in the form of behaviourist and cognitive theories of learning.

The concept of the learning organisation became popular during the 1990s. The learning organisation is a configuration of structures and policies which encourage individual learning, with individual and organisational benefits. The organisation itself can also be regarded as an entity which is capable of learning independently of its members. Knowledge has thus become a more important asset for many organisations than materials and products. We will discuss the concept of the learning organisation later in a separate unit.

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## 6.2 WHAT IS LEARNING?

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Learning covers virtually all behaviours and is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge, attitudes and values, emotional responses (such as happiness and fear), and motor skills (such as operating a computer keyboard or riding a bicycle). We can learn incorrect facts or pick up bad habits in the same way that we learn correct facts and acquire good habits. It refers to a spectrum of changes that occur as a result of one's experience. Learning may be defined as "any relatively permanent change in behaviour or behavioural potential produced by experience". It may be noted here that some behavioural changes take place due to the use of drugs, alcohol, or fatigue. Such changes are temporary. They are not considered learning. Therefore, changes are due to practice and experience, and relatively permanent, alone are illustrative of learning.

In the definition given above, it is clear that the process of learning has certain distinctive characteristics. These are:

(i) First, learning always involves some kind of experience. These experiences may be derived from inside the body or they may be sensory, arising outside. The task of inferring whether or not learning has taken place may be an obvious one, but observable behaviour may not always reveal learning.

It is important to distinguish between two types of learning. **Procedural learning** or 'knowing how', concerns your ability to carry out particular skilled actions such as riding a horse. **Declarative learning** or 'knowing that', concerns your store of factual knowledge such as an understanding of the history of our use of the horse.

(ii) Second, the behavioural changes that take place due to learning are relatively permanent. Behaviour can be changed temporarily by many other factors and in ways which we would not like to call learning. These other factors include growing up or maturation (in children), aging (in adults), drugs, alcohol and fatigue. For example, you must have noticed that whenever one takes a sedative or drug or alcohol, one's behaviour changes. Each one of these drugs affect physiological functions leading to certain changes in behaviour. Such changes are temporary in nature and disappear as the effect of drugs wears out.

(iii) Third, learning cannot be observed directly. We can only observe a person's behaviour and draw the inference from it that learning has taken place.

A distinction has to be made between learning and performance. Performance is evaluated by some quantitative and some qualitative measures of output. For example, the number of calls a sales representative makes to customers or the quality of a manager's chairing of a committee meeting. But, learning acts as a constraint on the outcome. Normally, we cannot perform any better than we have learned, though there are occasions when the right motivational disposition and a supportive environment helps to raise the level of performance. Researchers have found that increased

motivation may improve our performance up to a point but, beyond this, increased motivation may cause a lowering of the level of performance.

## 6.3 APPROACHES TO LEARNING

This unit explains two current and influential approaches to learning, based on behaviourist psychology and cognitive psychology. These theoretical perspectives are in many ways contradictory, but they can also be viewed as complementary. It may be mentioned here that these two perspectives have very different implications for organisation and management practice.

The two approaches are based on the same empirical data, but their interpretations of these data are radically different. These approaches are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Behaviourist and Cognitives Perspectives on Learning : A Comparison**

<i>Behaviourist, stimulus-response</i>	<i>Cognitive, information processing</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>studies only observable behaviour</li> <li>behaviour is determined by learned sequences of muscle movements</li> <li>we learn habits</li> <li>problem solving occurs by trial and error</li> <li>dull, boring but amenable to research?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>also studies mental processes</li> <li>behaviour is determined by memory, mental processes and expectations</li> <li>we learn cognitive structures and alternative ways to achieve our goals</li> <li>problem solving also involves insight and understanding</li> <li>rich, interesting but complex, vague and unresearchable?</li> </ul>

### 6.3.1 The Behaviourist Approach to Learning

The oldest theory of learning states that ideas that are experienced together tend to be associated with each other. Behaviourist psychologists now speak of the association between stimulus and response. Learning is a result of experience. We use knowledge of the results of past behaviour to change, modify and improve our behaviour in future. We cannot learn without appropriate feedback. Behaviourists and cognitive psychologists agree that experience affects behaviour but disagree over how this happens.

Feedback may be either rewarding or punishing. Common sense suggests that if a particular behaviour is rewarded, then it is more likely to be repeated. If it is punished or ignored, it is more likely to be avoided. This observation is encapsulated in the behaviourists' 'law of effect' which simply states that we learn to repeat behaviours that have favourable consequences and to avoid behaviours that lead to punishment or to other unfavourable or neutral consequences.

The American psychologist John B. Watson introduced the term 'behaviourism' in 1913. Behaviourists argue that nothing of psychological importance happens between the stimulus and the response. On the other hand, cognitive theory argues that something of considerable psychological importance happens between stimulus and response.

The development of associations between stimuli and responses happens in two different ways known as **Pavlovian conditioning** and **Skinnerian conditioning**.

Pavlovian conditioning is also known as classical and as respondent conditioning. The concept and related conditioning techniques were developed by the Russian.



physiologist Ivan Petrovich Pavlov. Pavlov's work with dogs is well-known. Dog owners are still trained today in the use of classical conditioning methods. If you show meat to a dog, it will produce saliva. The meat is the stimulus, the saliva is the response. The meat is an unconditioned stimulus (US), because the dog salivates naturally. Similarly, the saliva is an unconditioned response (UR). Unconditioned responses are also called reflexes. Your pupils contract when light is shown into your eyes. Your lower leg jerks when you are struck just below the knee cap. These are typical human reflexes. Humans also salivate naturally-another unconditioned response-at the sight of and smell of food.

Suppose we now ring a bell when we show the meat to the dog. Do this often enough and the dog will associate the bell with the meat. Eventually the dog *will* start to salivate at the sound of the bell without food being present. The bell is a conditioned stimulus (CS) and the saliva is now a conditioned response (CR). The dog has now learned from that experience to salivate at the sound of a bell as well as the sight of food. All kinds of stimuli can be conditioned in this way.

This relationship of conditioned stimulus (CS), unconditioned stimulus (US), conditioned response (CR) and unconditioned response (UR) are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Relationship of Stages of Conditioning and Operations**

<i>Stages of Conditioning</i>	<i>Operations</i>
Before	Sound of the bell – Alertness (No specific response)
During	Sound of the bell (CS) + Food (US) – Salivation (UR)
After	Sound of the bell (CS) – Salivation (CR)

Suppose we now stop giving meat to the dog after the bell. The dog will continue to salivate at the sound of the bell alone. But, if we continue to do this, the association between the conditioned stimulus and conditioned response eventually suffers extinction.

It may be mentioned here that the conditioned response may also be invoked by stimuli similar to the original conditioned stimulus, such as a bell with a different pitch. This phenomenon is called **stimulus generalisation**. A complementary phenomenon, **stimulus discrimination**, can also be demonstrated by conditioning the dog to salivate at a hell of one pitch, but not at another.

The concept of generalisation accounts for our ability to react to novel situations where we perceive similarities to familiar situations. For example, the personnel manager when dealing with *a* new problem, may see certain similarities between it and a past problem and as a consequence is able to draw inferences from the past situation to illuminate the present. This is an act of generalisation on the part of the personnel manager. On the other hand, discrimination is evident when a car manufacturer highlights the positive design features of a particular car when compared with similarly priced competitive models.

However, despite the theoretical possibility of the widespread applicability of classical conditioning, most modern theorists agree that it represents only a very small part of total human learning.

Skinnerian conditioning is also known as instrumental and as operant conditioning. It was discovered by the American psychologist B.F. Skinner. Instrumental conditioning demonstrates how new behaviours or responses become established through association with particular stimuli.



Given a particular context, any behaviour that is rewarded or reinforced will tend to be repeated in that context. Skinner put a rat into a box (now known as a 'Skinner box') with a lever inside which, when pressed, gave the animal food. The rat was not taught to press the lever. However, in the process of wandering around the box, the rat eventually nudges the lever. That random behaviour is reinforced with food and it is likely to happen again.

Skinnerian conditioning is also called instrumental conditioning because it is related to behaviours that are instrumental in getting some material reward. Skinner's rat thus has to be under the influence of some drive before it can be conditioned in this way. His rats are hungry when they went into his box and their behaviour led to a desired reward.

Skinner argued that animals and humans do behave in the absence of specific stimuli. In fact, most human behaviour is of this kind, according to Skinner. Behaviours emitted in the absence of identifiable stimuli are called operants. Operant conditioning explains how new patterns of behaviour become established. Respondent conditioning does not alter the animal's behaviour, only the behaviour's timing.

Skinner also studied numerous variations on the operant conditioning theme. One important variation concerns the occasional reward of desired behaviour rather than delivering rewards in a continuous and regular manner. This phenomenon mirrors real life more closely than the laboratory experiment. For example, why do gamblers keep playing when they lose? Life is full of examples that demonstrate the power of intermittent reinforcement. In other words, desired behaviour can be maintained without regular and consistent reinforcement every time that it occurs.

The pattern and timing of rewards for desired behaviour is known as the **schedule of reinforcement**. A schedule of reinforcement establishes the pattern and frequency of rewards contingent on the display of desirable behaviour. There are two main classes of intermittent reinforcement, concerning interval schedules and ratio schedules, which are summarised in Table 3.

It may be mentioned here that the fixed ratio and fixed interval schedules and the variable ratio and variable interval schedules are not the only methods of

**Table 3: Schedules of Reinforcement**

<i>Schedule</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Implications</i>
Continuous	reinforcement after every correct response	can establish high performance, but can also lead to satiation; rapid extinction when reinforcement is withheld
Fixed ratio	reinforcement after a predetermined number of correct responses	tends to generate high rates of desired responses
Variable ratio	reinforcement after a random number of correct Responses	can produce a high response rate that is resistant to Extinction
Fixed interval	reinforcement of a correct response after a predetermined period	can produce uneven response patterns, slow following reinforcement, vigorous immediately preceding Reinforcement
Variable interval	reinforcement of a correct response after random periods	can produce a high response rate that is resistant to extinction



administering rewards. Many other possible combinations exist. However, these four schedules are the way most employees in today's organisations are reinforced. Much of the learning and resulting behaviour of every worker, supervisor, sales person, and manager is determined by when and how they are reinforced.

Understanding and then applying what is known about the administration of reinforcement can be of great assistance to modern human resource managers. In fact, one of the most important functions of all managers may well be the way they administer reinforcement to their people.

Skinner explained the development of complex patterns of behaviour with the theory of operant conditioning. This shows how our behaviour is shaped by our environment, by our experiences in that environment and by the selective rewards and punishments that we receive. He argued that thinking, problem solving and the acquisition of language are dependent on these simple conditioning processes.

Operant conditioning has been enormously influential. It has led to the widespread use of programmed learning, a technique of instruction designed to reinforce correct responses in the learner and to let people learn at their own pace. The behaviour modification techniques described later in this unit are also based on Skinner's ideas.

It is generally accepted that reinforcing desired behaviour is more effective than punishing undesirable behaviour. However, C.C. Walters and J.E. Grusek (1977) suggested after a review of research that punishment can be effective if it meets the following conditions:

- the punishment should be quick and short;
- it should be administered immediately after the undesirable behaviour;
- it should be limited to its intensity;
- it should be specifically related to behaviour and not to character traits;
- it should be restricted to the context in which the undesirable behaviour occurs;
- it should not send 'mixed messages' about what is accepted behaviour; and
- penalties should take the form of withdrawal of rewards, not physical pain.

**Activity 1**

To what extent should the punishment criteria identified above be used by managers when disciplining employees in an organisational context?

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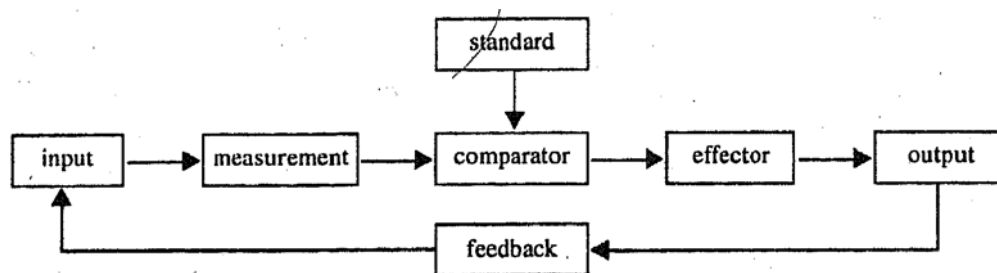
**6.3.2 The Cognitive Approach to Learning**

The rewards and punishments that behaviourists call reinforcement work in more complex ways than conditioning theories suggest. Reinforcement is always knowledge or feedback about the success of past behaviour. Feedback is information that can be used to modify or maintain previous behaviours. However, this information has to be perceived, interpreted, given meaning and used in decisions about future behaviours. The feedback has to be processed. Thus, cognitive learning theories are also called information-processing theories.

This approach draws concepts from the field of cybernetics which was established by the American mathematician Norbert Wiener. He defined cybernetics as 'the science of communication in the animal and in the machine'. One central idea of cybernetics is the notion of the control of system performance through feedback. These theories of learning are based on **cybernetic analogy**.



The elements of a cybernetic feedback control system are outlined in Figure 1



**Figure 1: The elements of a cybernetic feedback control system**

The cybernetic analogy claims that this control loop is a model of what goes on inside the mind. For standard, read motive, purpose, intent or goal. The output is behaviour. The senses are our measuring devices. Our perceptual process is the comparator which organises and imposes meaning on the sensory data, thus controlling behaviour in pursuit of given objectives.

We have in our minds some kind of 'internal representation' or 'schema' of ourselves and the environment in which we function. This internal representation is used in a purposive way to determine our behaviour. This internal representation is also called the image, also known as the individual's perceptual world.

Our behaviour is purposive. We formulate plans for achieving our purposes. The plan is a set of mental instructions for guiding the required behaviour. For example, within the master plan (get a qualification), there are likely to be a number of sub-plans (submit assignments on time, pass this course, make new friends, etc.). We can use information on how we are doing- **feedback**- to update our internal representation and to refine and adapt our plans. Feedback comes in different forms. These are:

- (i) **Intrinsic feedback** is information which comes from within our bodies, from the muscles, joints, skin and other internal mechanisms such as that concerned with maintaining balance when walking.
- (ii) **Extrinsic feedback** is information which comes from our environment such as the visual and aural information needed to drive a car.
- (iii) **Concurrent feedback** is information which arrives during our behaviour and which can be used to control behaviour as it unfolds.
- (iv) **Delayed feedback** is information which is received after a task is completed and which can be used to influence future performance.

These different forms of feedback can be understood with the help of the following example. When you submit an assignment, intrinsic feedback is of limited value. Extrinsic feedback from your evaluator is what matters and feedback is typically delayed rather than concurrent. Evaluators, of course, cannot provide concurrent feedback while you are submitting an assignment, but the longer the delay, the less effective the feedback is likely to be.

People generally have an intense desire to know how they are doing, especially if they have some degree of achievement motivation. It is generally accepted that feedback enhances individual performance. A recent comprehensive review of thirty laboratory and forty-two field experiments concluded that objective feedback had a positive effect. In general, feedback should be as positive, immediate, graphic and specific as possible to be effective.

A general guideline regarding feedback about performance is that it can be an effective positive reinforcer. For example, a supervisor faced with the problem of people taking unscheduled breaks successfully used feedback to reinforce them for



staying on the job, The supervisor calculated the exact cost for each worker in the unit (in terms of lost group piece-rate pay) every time any one of them took an unscheduled break. This information regarding the relatively significant amount of lost pay when any one of them took an unscheduled break was fed back to the employees of the unit. After this feedback, staying on the job increased in frequency and taking unscheduled breaks dramatically decreased. In this case, feedback pointed out the contingency that staying on the job meant more money.

**Activity 2**

From your own experience, identify an example of each of the four forms of feedback here. What changes in that feedback would be required for you to be able to improve your performance (on this course, at sports, etc.)?

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It may be noted here that feedback, rewards and punishments and knowledge of results also have a motivating effect on behaviour rather than simply a reinforcing effect. Several writers on motivation have argued that opportunities to learn new skills and knowledge, to understand more, to develop more effective ways of living and coping with our environment, are intrinsically motivating. The American psychologist Robert W. White (1959) suggests that we have a need to develop 'competence' in dealing with our environment and that gives us satisfaction.

**6.4 TRAINING (TRANSFER OF LEARNING)**

The basic psychological principle underlying the transfer of learning is that of generalisation of stimuli referred to earlier in connection with operant conditioning. When a stimulus is similar to the original conditioned stimulus, it tends to elicit the same response.

**Transfer**

The transfer of learning or training is the process by which the effects of training ▶ n one form of activity are transferred to another form. Many educational programmes are built on the assumption that people have the ability to transfer what they have learned in one situation to another. If transfer was not possible, there would be little justification for formal education; every element of knowledge, skill and capacity would have to be taught separately. Different types of transfer take place such as:

- (i) *Lateral Transfer*: It involves performance at the same level of complexity as the initial learning, but in a different context. For example, if a child has classroom experience of arithmetic calculations with the aid of blocks, this understanding could be transferred laterally at home if the child, having removed two balls from a box of six, realises that four are left.
- (ii) *Sequential Transfer*: It occurs when we build on a learning foundation. A fact learned today in a subject may have some relationship to a fact or idea learned tomorrow. For example, multiplication draws on an understanding of addition.
- (iii) *Vertical Transfer*: It occurs when learning at one level, such as comprehending facts about addition and subtraction, facilitates the solution of problems utilising these arithmetic operations.





(iv) *Positive Transfer*: When training or performance in one task can be transferred to another, positive transfer is said to occur. For example, learning the skills (ice-skating may aid learning the skills of roller-skating).

(v) *Negative Transfer*: It is said to occur when previous learning in a particular task hinders learning in another task. This is obvious when a motorist from India switches from driving on the left-hand side of the road to the right-hand side while holidaying in France.

### **Skill Acquisition**

Employee training can be defined as the systematic acquisition of skills, rules, concepts or attitudes that result in improved performance on the job. Employee training may be very specific as in the case of showing a telephone operator how to handle long-distance calls, or it may be less concrete as in training a manager to adopt a particular leadership style.

The acquisition of skilled performance is influenced by a number of factors. Most of these factors were proposed following simulated training sessions rather than real-life training situations. However, they command a certain degree of acceptance.

These are:

### **Knowledge of Results or Feedback**

In the last section, we have seen the effect of feedback on individual performance. Knowledge of results, preferably with appropriate comments, is important to the manager who wants to know how well operations are progressing so that remedial action can be taken, if necessary, and objectives modified accordingly. Feedback should be appropriate to the stage of learning that the learner has reached and it should concentrate on those aspects of the task that are critical for good performance. A training can become very dependent on feedback and removing it could cause a deterioration in performance.

### **Part or Whole Methods**

In the part method, the task is broken down into sections and this method is suitable where learning does not suffer from compartmentalising a body of knowledge. Typing is an example of an activity best learned by this method where each letter is practised on the keyboard before attempting whole words.

On the other hand, when the whole method is used, the total task is practised until mastered. Tasks that are best learned by this method include those where integration and rhythm are the critical features of the skill. For example, some tasks like learning to drive a car would lose their meaning if broken into chunks.

### **Massed or Distributed Practice**

Should the elements of learning a task be massed together or should they be spaced or distributed over a period of time? When the student is cramming in preparation for an examination, he or she is engaged in massed practice. In such circumstances, some students could be highly motivated with less time to forget the study material. However, for some people, massed practice can result in boredom and fatigue and impair performance.

Distributed or paced practice seems to be more beneficial for motor skill learning (for example, typing) than for verbal or more complex learning. But, as the material to be learned increases in quantity and difficulty, then paced practice has a useful function.

## 6.5 BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION TECHNIQUE

Behaviourism has led to the development of the technique of **behaviour modification**. Behaviour modification is a technique for encouraging desired behaviours and discouraging unwanted behaviours using operant conditioning. This technique was first used for the treatment of mental disorders, learning disorders and phobias, and for accident and trauma recovery. Applications of this technique have been extended to organisational settings also.

Fred Luthans developed organisational behaviour modification or 'O.B. Mod.', which consists of five main steps:

- (i) **Identify** the critical, observable and measurable work performance-related behaviours to be encouraged.
- (ii) **Measure** the current frequency of those behaviours to provide a baseline against which to measure improvement.
- (iii) **Establish** the triggers or antecedents for those behaviours and also establish the consequences - positive, neutral and negative-that follow from these behaviours.
- (iv) **Develop** an intervention strategy to strengthen desired behaviours and weaken dysfunctional behaviours through the use of positive reinforcement (e.g. money, recognition) and corrective feedback. Punishment may be necessary in some instances to inhibit unsafe behaviour.
- (v) Evaluate systematically the effectiveness of the approach in changing and improving performance compared with the original baseline measurement.

Behaviour modification, as a means of changing employee behaviour, can appear particularly attractive to managers who are in a position to manipulate the reinforcement of different employee behaviours. This approach argues that what has to be changed is behaviour and to achieve this one needs to know very little about the complex internal workings of the people concerned.

For example, desirable workplace behaviours could include working weekends to meet deadlines, attending training to develop new skills and being helpful to colleagues. Undesirable behaviours could include lateness, the production of poor quality items and being rude to customers. Behaviour modification uses the principles of reinforcement to eliminate undesirable behaviour and to increase the frequency of desired work behaviour.

Suppose a manager wants more work assignment completed on time and fewer submitted beyond deadline. Tabel 4 summarises the behaviour modification options available with the manager:

**Table 4: Behaviour Modification Options**

<i>Procedure</i>	<i>Operationlisation</i>	<i>Behavioural Effect</i>
Positive Reinforcement	manager compliments employee each time work is completed on schedule	increases desired Behaviour
Negative Reinforcement	unpaid overtime continues to be mandatory until work is completed on schedule, then overtime is rewarded	increases desired behaviour
Punishment	manager asks employee to stay late when work is not handed in on schedule	eliminates or decreases undesired behaviour
Extinction	manager ignores the employee when work is handed in late	eliminates or decreases undesired behaviour



Fred Luthans and colleagues describe the application of 'O.B. Mod.' in a Russian textile mill. To improve worker productivity, two interventions were used. First, workers were offered extrinsic rewards for performance improvement, including jeans, T-shirts with popular logos, music tapes, food, etc. Second, workers were given 'social rewards' for performing specific actions such as monitoring fabric quality and helping others. These social awards involved attention, recognition and feedback from trained supervisors. The researchers noted that this approach had a very positive impact leading to highly significant increases in performance.

The typical features of organisational applications of 'O.B. Mod.' are:

- It applies to clearly identifiable and observable behaviours such as time-keeping, carrying out checks and repairs and the use of particular work methods.
- Rewards are clearly and unambiguously contingent on the performance of the desirable behaviour.
- Positive reinforcement can take a number of forms, from the praise of a superior to cash prizes, to food, to clothing.
- Behaviour change and performance improvements can be dramatic.
- The desired modification in behaviour may be sustained only if positive reinforcement is continued.

More about Behaviour Modification technique will be dealt with in a separate unit.

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### Activity 3

How would you feel about being given food, T-shirts and praise from superior for working harder? Do you view this approach as realistic or as demeaning - and, why?

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### Socialisation Process

Cognitive psychologists regard behaviour modification as simplistic and turn to more complex social explanations and methods for organisational behaviour change. **Socialisation** is the process through which an individual's pattern of behaviour and their values, attitudes and motives are influenced to conform with those seen as desirable in a particular organisation, society or sub-culture. For example, when people join an organisation of any kind, they give up some personal freedom of action. Thus, they concede that the organisation may make demands on their time and effort, as long as these demands are perceived to be legitimate. Other members of the organisation have to teach new recruits what is expected of them.

This perspective draws on **social learning theory**. One of the most influential advocates of social learning theory has been Albert Bandura. He demonstrated that we learn new behaviours through observing and copying the behaviour of others, in the absence of any rewards or punishments. In this perspective, our capabilities for reflection and self-determination are central. We construct internal models of our environment through observation and experience and plan courses of action accordingly.

How does social learning theory apply in an organisational setting? For example, organisations tend to encourage different standards concerning:

- what counts as adequate and good work performance;
- familiarity in everyday social interactions at work;



- the appropriate amount of deference to show to superiors;
- dress and appearance;
- social activities after work; and
- attitudes to work, colleagues, managers, unions, customers.

The newcomer has to learn these standards and the ways of behaving and related attitudes that they involve, to be a successful and accepted member of the organisation. However, the individual does not have to believe that the organisation's standards are appropriate. What matters is that individuals behave as if they believed in them.

It may be noted here that the socialisation process is often informal, rather than a planned programme of instruction. The newcomers learn the standards simply by watching their new colleagues. Some organisations have formal induction programmes, but these are often brief and superficial, concentrating on mundane matters like the organisation's structures and policies, health and safety regulations, etc. Beyond formal programmes, we learn about an organisation by just being there.

Thus, socialisation is achieved without planned intervention by giving rewards such as praise, encouragement, and promotion for correct behaviour. It is also achieved by negative reinforcements and punishments like being ignored, ridiculed or fined for behavior that is out of line. We quickly learn what attitudes to take, what style of language to use, what dress obey, where to take lunch and with whom and so on.

It is to be noted here that some of the rewards for good behavior offered by organisations are material rewards in the form of money and desirable working conditions. On the other hand, some of the rewards are symbolic and social rewards such as prestige, status, recognition and public praise.

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## 6.6 BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION VERSUS SOCIALISATION

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There are two major qualifications of behaviour modification technique. These are:

- (i) This technique needs careful planning to identify specific behavioural goals and procedures for
- (ii) reinforcing the behaviours that will achieve those goals. The method can be effective when behaviour and reinforcement are clearly identified and linked. For example, follow the safety norms and we will give you cash. The method is less effective when this relationship is vague. For example demonstrate commitment and we will consider you for promotion.
- (iii) The 'rewards for good behaviour' method appears broadly consistent with American cultural values and aspirations. The transfer of this approach to other cultures is questionable.

Thus, this technique is clearly limited in its application. It is overtly manipulative, potentially ignores internal needs and intrinsic rewards and can be seen as a threat to individual dignity and autonomy. Therefore, behaviour modification requires the communication of goals and expectations to employees in unambiguous terms.

Luther and Kreitner (1985) have summarised the problems with behaviour modification. These are:

- Appropriate reinforcers may not always be available in limited and boring work settings.
- We do not all respond the same way to the same reinforcers. What one person finds rewarding may be of little consequence to someone else.



- Once started, a behaviour modification programme has to be sustained.
- There may not be enough extrinsic motivators (such as money, lunch vouchers, etc.) available.

However, they also argued that the technique has made four significant contributions:

1. Behaviour modification techniques put the focus on observable employee behaviour and not on hypothetical internal states.
2. The technique shows how performance is influenced by contingent consequences.
3. It supports the view that positive reinforcement is more effective in changing employee behaviour than punishment.
4. There are demonstrable casual effects on employee performance. It is a feature that is sometimes difficult to establish unequivocally with other behaviour change methods such as job enrichment.

In contrast to behaviour modification, socialisation has the advantage of flexibility. Social learning is dependent on the cultural context. As a process rather than a specific technique, the general approach is not restricted to one culture. For instance, Indian induction and socialisation procedures may be quite different from Swedish, American, Malaysian or Nigerian methods.

Socialisation is a process that takes place anyway, planned or not. The main issue concerns appropriate socialisation with respect to existing organisation culture and behavioural preferences.

Table 5 summarises one similarity and number of differences between the techniques of behaviour modification and socialisation.

**Table 5: Behaviour Modification and Socialisation: A Comparison**

<i>Behaviour modification</i>	<i>Socialisation</i>
Feedback needed in both approaches for behaviour to change	
planned procedure	naturally occurring, even if also planned
stimulus determines responses	individual needs determines responses
externally generated reinforcements	internally generated reinforcements
focuses on observable behaviour	focuses on unobservable internal mental states
focus on tangible rewards and punishments (money, other rewards)	focus on intangible rewards and punishments (social inclusion, material self-esteem)
clear links between desired behaviour and consequence	intangible links between desired behaviour and consequences
compliance required by external agent	conformity encouraged by social grouping

## 6.7 LEARNING ORGANISATION

The concept of the **learning organisation** is derived from the work of Chris Argyris and Donald Schon but became fashionable during the 1990s. A learning organisation is a form of organisation that enables the learning of its members in such a way that it creates positively valued outcomes such as innovation, efficiency, better alignment with the environment and competitive advantage.



Interest in the learning organisation concept have been stimulated by a number of factors. These are:

- the production of goods and services increasingly involves sophisticated knowledge;
- knowledge is, therefore, as valuable a resource as raw material;
- many organisations lost knowledgeable staff through delaying in the 1990s;
- new information technologies are knowledge-intensive;
- knowledge can have a short life span, made obsolete by innovation;
- flexibility; creativity and responsiveness are now prized capabilities;
- knowledge can thus be a source of competitive advantage for an organisation.

Mike Pedler, John Burgoyne and Tom Boydell (1997) identified the eleven features of the learning organisation. These features are summarised in Table 6.

**Table 6 : The Features of Learning Organisation**

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
A learning approach to strategy	The use of trials and experiments to improve understanding and generate improvements, and to modify strategic direction as necessary
Participative policy making	All the organisation's members are involved in a strategy formation, influencing decisions and values and addressing conflict
Informing	Information technology is used to make information available to everyone and to enable front-line staff to act on their own initiative
Formative accounting and control	Accounting, budgeting and reporting systems are designed to help people understand the operations of organisational finance
Internal exchange	Sections and departments think of themselves as customers and suppliers, in an internal 'supply chain', learning from each other
Reward flexibility	A flexible and creative reward policy with financial and non-financial rewards to meet individual needs and performance
Enabling structures	Organisation charts, structures and procedures are seen as temporary and can be changed to meet task requirements
Boundary workers as environmental scanners	Everyone who has contact with customers, suppliers, clients and business partners is treated as a valuable information source
Inter-company learning	The organisation learns from other organisations through joint ventures, alliances and other information exchanges
A learning climate	The manager's primary task is to facilitate experimentation and learning in others through questioning, feedback and support
Self-development opportunities for all	People are expected to take responsibility for their own learning, and facilities are made available, especially to 'front-line' staff

The concept of learning organisation was popularised by the work of Peter Senge whose book *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) became an international best-seller. Senge argued that work must become more learningful at all organisational levels. He identified five 'learning disciplines' for building the organisation's learning capabilities. These disciplines are summarised in Table 7.



**Table 7: Peter Senge's Five Learning Disciplines**

<i>Learning discipline</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
1. Personal mastery	A discipline of <i>aspiration</i> , concerning what you as an individual want to achieve
2. Mental models	A discipline of <i>reflection</i> and <i>enquiry</i> , concerning the constant refinement of thinking and development of awareness
3. Shared vision	A <i>collective</i> discipline, concerning commitment to a common sense of purpose and actions to achieve that purpose
4. Team learning	A discipline of <i>group interaction</i> , concerning collective thinking and action to achieve common goals
5. Systems thinking	A discipline which concern <i>understanding, interdependency and complexity</i> and the role of feedback in system development

However, the organisational application of these disciplines is more problematic and can be related to our discussion of socialisation, to encouraging the correct attitudes, values and beliefs among employees at all levels. The most important of these learning disciplines is the fifth discipline' (remember Senge's book title), systems thinking, which means understanding how complex organisations function and how they can be changed to work more effectively. Senge argues that the manager who wants more commitment, flexibility and creativity from employees is advised to provide them with lots of learning opportunities.

Weick and Westley(1996) argue that organisational learning is best understood in terms of organisation culture. Culture includes values, beliefs, feelings, myths, symbols, metaphors and rituals, which taken together distinguish one organisation or group from other. Organisations are thus 'repositories of knowledge' independent of their members, Organisation which accumulate stocks of codified, documented knowledge, independent of their members, can thus be said to learn.

## **6.8 KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

When we learn, we acquire knowledge. However, knowledge is a difficult term to define clearly. According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), there are two types of knowledge - **tacit** and **explicit**.

Tacit knowledge is personal knowledge and understanding, specific to the individual, difficult to articulate or to communicate to others because it derives from accumulated experience and includes insights, intuition, hunches and judgements.

On the other hand, explicit knowledge is knowledge and understanding which is codified, expressed and available to anyone. Nonaka and Takeuchi argue that the Japanese emphasise tacit knowledge while Westerners emphasise formal, objective, codified explicit knowledge.

It should be noted that tacit and explicit knowledge are complementary. Nonaka and Takeuchi are thus concerned with 'knowledge conversion' in which tacit knowledge is made available to the organisation on the one hand, and organisational knowledge becomes the individual's tacit knowledge, on the other.

Knowledge management concerns the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge *so that it can be shared with others and is about turning individual learning into organisational learning*. In other words, it is a technology-based technique for making tacit knowledge available more widely in the learning organisation, typically



through individual and corporate databases which can be accessed through the organisation's intranet.

The main positive and negative aspects of the learning organisation and its related concepts of intellectual capital and knowledge management are summarised in Table 8.

It may be noted here that the concept of learning organisation has remained fashionable for over a decade. This popularity has been reinforced by the growth of 'knowledge work', by the realisation that ideas generate competitive advantage and by technological developments. However, there are organisational barriers to the implementation of this 'ideal'. It will be interesting to observe whether the learning organisation remains fashionable in the twenty-first century.

**Table 8: Learning Organisation : Positives and Negatives**

<i>Learning organisation positives</i>	<i>Learning organisation negatives</i>
a rich, multi-dimensional concept affecting many aspects of organisational behaviour	a complex and diffuse set of practices, difficult to implement systematically
an innovative approach to learning, to knowledge management and to investing in intellectual capital	an attempt to use dated concepts from change management and learning theory, repackaged as a management consulting project
a new set of challenging concepts focusing attention on the acquisition and development of individual and corporate knowledge	a new vocabulary for encouraging employee compliance with management directives in the guise of 'self-development'
an innovative approach to organisation, management and employee development	an innovative approach for strengthening management control
innovative use of technology to manage organisational knowledge through databases and the internet or intranets	a technology-dependent approach which ignores how people actually develop and use knowledge in organisations

## 6.9 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. What is learning? What are its distinguishing features?
2. What are the main distinctions between behaviourist and cognitive perspectives on learning?
3. How do you distinguish between classical and operant conditioning? What relevance do these and their related laboratory-based concepts have in an organisational context?
4. Describe and illustrate the technique of organisational behaviour modification. Identify the advantages and disadvantages of this technique.
5. How can you differentiate between behaviour modification and socialisation process?
6. What is learning organisation? What are its distinguishing characteristics?
7. Why are positive and negative reinforcement usually more effective methods for encouraging behaviour change than punishment? In what circumstances can punishment be effective in encouraging behaviour change?

## 6.10 FURTHER READINGS

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