

Reinforcement Theory of Motivation

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

Reinforcement theory of motivation overlooks the internal state of individual, i.e., the inner feelings and drives of individuals are ignored by Skinner. 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. This theory is a strong tool for analyzing controlling mechanism for individual's behaviour. However, it does not focus on the causes of individual's behaviour.

The managers use the following methods for controlling the behaviour of the employees:

- ✓ **Positive Reinforcement-** This implies giving a positive response when an individual shows positive and required behaviour. For example - Immediately praising an employee for coming early for job. This will increase probability of outstanding behaviour occurring again. Reward is a positive reinforce, but not necessarily. If and only if the employees' behaviour improves, reward can said to be a positive reinforcer. Positive reinforcement stimulates occurrence of a behaviour. It must be noted that more spontaneous is the giving of reward, the greater reinforcement value it has.

- ✓ **Negative Reinforcement-** This implies rewarding an employee by removing negative / undesirable consequences. Both positive and negative reinforcement can be used for increasing desirable / required behaviour.
- ✓ **Punishment-** It implies removing positive consequences so as to lower the probability of repeating undesirable behaviour in future. In other words, punishment means applying undesirable consequence for showing undesirable behaviour. For instance - Suspending an employee for breaking the organizational rules. Punishment can be equalized by positive reinforcement from alternative source.
- ✓ **Extinction-** It implies absence of reinforcements. In other words, extinction implies lowering the probability of undesired behaviour by removing reward for that kind of behaviour. For instance - if an employee no longer receives praise and admiration for his good work, he may feel that his behaviour is generating no fruitful consequence. Extinction may unintentionally lower desirable behaviour.

Implications of Reinforcement Theory

Reinforcement theory explains in detail how an individual learns behaviour. Managers who are making attempt to motivate the employees must ensure that they do not reward all employees simultaneously. They must tell the employees what they are not doing correct. They must tell the employees how they can achieve positive reinforcement.