Lesson 7: Motivation Through Consequences (MTC)

Introduction

This lesson consists of:

1. Motivation through Consequences (MTC) Theory

2. Case Study

3. Student Journal Entry

Assignment

1. **Read Course Guide**

2. When you solve a case study or act as a leader in your organization:

I*.* ***Identify*** the **Areas of Interest**.

II. ***Analyze*** the situation using MTC Theory.

A. ***Identify*** the behavior(s) the leader wants to increase/decrease.

B. ***Identify*** the consequences that presently follow the behavior/Area(s) of Interest.

C. ***Identify*** the models or examples of behavior that have been observed and imitated.

D. ***Classify*** the employee’s(s’) level of self-regulation.

III. ***Explain***

A. ***Describe*** the effect of the present consequences on the desired behavior.

B. ***Describe*** how the behavior of a model(s) has affected the behavior of the employee(s).

C. ***Describe*** how the employee’s(s’) capacity for self-regulation affects his or her current behavior.

IV. ***Select*** an appropriate theoretical leader strategy(ies) to address Areas of Interest.

V. ***Apply*** the theoretical leader strategy(ies) to the situation in the form of a specific leader plan that addresses all Areas of Interest.

VI. ***Assess***, evaluate, and revise your leader plan.

3) **Complete a Student Journal entry** for MTC Theory.

Based upon your police experience, provide an example of a behavior that has been motivated or unmotivated by consequences from the leader(s).

Motivation through Consequences Theory

“Praise makes good men better and bad men worse.”

—Thomas Fuller

This lesson addresses how leaders can direct the future behavior of followers by managing the consequences of their past behavior. The six key terms for this lesson are:

* Positive Reinforcement (Reward)
* Negative Reinforcement
* Punishment
* Extinction
* Observational Learning
* Self-Regulation

These six key terms are also the leader strategies for this lesson.

Motivation through Consequences holds great potential for the leader. By re-examining the way leaders reward and punish, by recognizing how much followers rely upon their leader’s guidance, and by capitalizing upon the powerful influences of observational learning and self-regulation, leaders can steer employees’ behavior toward organizational goals employee development. In the process, we can examine our own behavior and learn to avoid some common failures of leadership, thereby boosting our understanding of human behavior and becoming smarter, more thoughtful, and more effective leaders!

You have probably received a pat on the back for doing a task well. Did the pat on the back influence your subsequent performance? Chances are, it did. You probably tried to match or even exceed your previous level of performance. You have probably also been reprimanded for an undesirable act. Did you stop performing that act? Chances are, you may have—or you at least made sure you were not caught again. In both cases, your behavior was influenced by past consequences. One way for the organizational leader to influence the behavior and performance of followers is by managing the consequences of past performance.

This chapter deals with how a leader may use a system of rewards and punishments to help motivate followers to accomplish organizational objectives. Is there something from the scientific study of rewards and punishment that can be useful for an organizational leader? Does the frequency of reward or punishment have an impact on performance? Does it cost the leader to reward? To punish? Are group punishments and rewards effective? To address these and other questions, we will examine the theories of Operant Conditioning, Observational Learning, and Self-Regulation.

Operant Conditioning

In 1905, the American psychologist E.L. Thorndike asserted that when behavior in a particular situation is followed by satisfaction, the satisfaction will become associated with that situation. When that situation recurs, the behavior is also likely to reappear. In contrast, he stated that any behavior that produces discomfort in a particular situation is less likely to reappear when the situation recurs. Together, these two statements constitute what is called the **Law of Effect.** This theory was further developed by B.F. Skinner through controlled experiments, reinforcement schedules, and a more systematic approach into what is now known as **Operant Conditioning**.

For organizational leaders, this concept means that what happens to a follower as a result of job performance will have an effect on subsequent job performance. Although the proponents of this approach would not use the term *motivation*, the net result of understanding this process is the same for the leader—improved job performance.

Operant Conditioning is the direct application of consequences to follower behavior to either keep followers doing what the leader wants or stop them from doing what the leader does not want. There are four key concepts that underlie this theory:

1. The original research in Operant Conditioning was done training animals. As researchers learned to start and stop different behaviors in animals using these concepts and then looked to transfer what they learned to human behavior, the basic assumption was made that there is no need to communicate expectations and there is no need to understand what, if any, thinking is going on. The leader is purely reacting to follower behavior by providing rewards or punishments.
2. Operant Conditioning only applies to behavior that is actually done by a follower. If a person is not at a required place at the right time because they were chatting up a potential significant other in the break room and the leader punishes the follower, the punishment is for (and is intended to stop) the behavior (chatting up the potential significant other). It is not a punishment for being late as you cannot punish something a person does not do; you punish what they are doing instead of what you want them to do. In week 3, when we discuss counseling, you’ll see that to effectively change someone’s behavior, you must specifically indicate the behaviors that are undesired so the follower can do something about them.
3. All consequences are neutral until you see what the consequence does to future behavior. This means that the leader cannot say in advance whether a consequence is a reward or a punishment until you see what it does to the follower’s behavior in the future. Consider the example of a person who works overtime and gets paid, and then refuses to work overtime in the future. In this case, the behavior was working overtime, and the punishment was money. Working overtime is not a punishment for everyone, but in this example, it is possible the officer does not want to have to pay extra money to an ex.
4. The last concept is timeliness. To be most effective, a consequence must follow immediately after a behavior. Remember Operant Conditioning is a learning theory so when a consequence immediately follows a behavior, the follower learns what will happen when they do this behavior. For example, if you put your hand on a hot stove, the consequence to your act is immediate and painful. You learn to do something else with your hand instead of putting it on the stove. If the consequence does not immediately follow the behavior, the follower may associate with a different behavior that you did not intend to punish.

Contingencies: How Behaviors and Consequences are Combined

The combination of behaviors and consequences is referred to as contingencies. There are four contingencies: positive reinforcement (or reward), punishment, negative reinforcement, and extinction.

1. **Positive Reinforcement (reward)**

Most people are familiar with the concept of rewards. This contingency occurs when a person does something, a pleasant consequence occurs immediately following the behavior, and the person continues to do the behavior in the future. Behaviors that are rewarded (or that allow a person to escape/avoid a punishment) will continue regardless of whether the behavior is good or bad.

1. **Punishment**

The second contingency is also a familiar one – punishment. When a person does something, an unpleasant consequence occurs immediately following the behavior, and the behavior stops.

1. **Negative Reinforcement**

Negative reinforcement is often confused with punishment. When a person does something, an unpleasant consequence occurs immediately following the behavior, and the person chooses a *new alternative behavior* to avoid the unpleasant consequence. This is negative reinforcement: when a new or different behavior is followed by no unpleasant consequence (thus, avoiding or escaping an unpleasant consequence) and results in a continuation of the new or different behavior in the future.

1. **Extinction**

According to the theory, when a person does something, and there is no consequence, eventually the behavior stops. Practically, this is true of positive behaviors, such as extra effort. When there is no consequence (extinction) for an officer’s negative behaviors (ex., being late, turning in mediocre reports, and having a bad attitude), those behaviors tend to continue – similar to a reward.

Keep in mind, as a leader, you cannot label or classify a contingency until you see what the consequence does to the officer’s future behavior. If you believe that you are rewarding a behavior, yet the behavior does not continue, it is not actually a reward according to this theory. Similarly, if you believe that you are punishing a behavior, yet the behavior does not stop, it is not actually a punishment according to this theory. Also, Operant Conditioning is absolutely neutral about behaviors it encourages or discourages. It is purely about what follows a behavior.

In review:

* A behavior followed by a consequence and the behavior continues is positive reinforcement or reward.
* A behavior followed by a consequence and the behavior stops is punishment.
* A new behavior is started to avoid or escape an unpleasant consequence is negative reinforcement.
* A behavior is NOT followed by any consequence and the behavior stops is extinction.

Observational Learning: Learning from Others’ Experiences

So far, we have examined the effects of external consequences on behavior. As we have seen, external consequences that follow an action exert a powerful influence on subsequent behavior. However, it is not necessary to receive a reprimand directly to learn that a particular action is undesirable. We can also learn by observing what happens to others in similar situations. Psychologist Albert Bandura and his colleagues point out that “people can benefit from the successes and mistakes of others as well as from their own experiences.” Observing the consequences of someone else’s actions can influence our own behavior as much as a personally experienced outcome. Therefore, we are likely to imitate a behavior that brought a reward to someone else if we have the ability to perform it. Similarly, we are unlikely to voluntarily imitate a behavior that resulted in punishment for another person. This process is known as observational learning; the observed consequences are referred to as vicarious reinforcements and vicarious punishments.

It is crucial for organizational leaders to consider observational learning when administering rewards and punishments. By observing the consequences of others’ actions, we can develop expectations that specific consequences follow particular actions. Consequently, we may act as if we experienced those consequences directly. Likewise, the behavior of others that goes without consequence—meaning behavior that receives no reward or punishment—also shapes our expectations. For example, one might think, “Joe did all that work, and not a peep about it from the boss. What’s the point?” or “I can’t believe the boss didn’t get upset about what Joe did. It must be okay to do it.” Organizational leaders should recognize that the consequences given to one person can influence the behavior of others in the organization.

Self-Regulation

While our behavior is heavily influenced by both the external consequences we experience and those we observe, these factors do not fully explain our behavior. If our actions were dictated solely by external consequences, we would resemble a flag fluttering in the wind, perpetually swaying with each gust. Our behavior would depend strictly on whom we are with at any given moment. This perspective offers a rather narrow view of behavior. As humans, we have the ability to regulate our own actions and exercise self-control. While Skinner emphasizes external environmental factors to maintain scientific rigor, other psychologists, like Bandura, account for internal cognitive processes when exploring the connection between actions and their consequences. Bandura’s research helps us understand how internally generated consequences impact behavior. This concept is referred to as *self-regulation*.

The process of self-regulation involves the measurement of behavior against certain internal standards and the administration of internally imposed consequences. The table below summarizes the three components of self-regulation as formulated by Bandura.

**Components of the Self-Regulation Process**

**Performance**

Evaluative Dimensions

Quality

Quantity

Originality

Authenticity

Deviancy

Ethicalness

Results

**Judgmental Process**

Personal Standards

Modeling/vicarious consequences

Own reinforcement history

Referential Performance

Norms

Social comparison

Personal comparison

Collective comparison

Valuation of Activity

Regarded highly

Neutral

Devalued

Performance Attribution

Internal factors

External factors

**Self-Response**

Self-evaluative Reactions

Positive

Negative

Tangible Self-applied

Consequences

Rewarding

Punishing

• No Self-response

Behavior can be classified into a variety of evaluative dimensions. For example, a basketball player’s efforts may be gauged in terms of the number of points scored in a game, while a swimmer’s performance may be classified according to time. We often use quantity, quality, and originality in classifying work performance. Social behavior may be judged on the basis of authenticity, results, deviancy, and ethical quality. Indeed, a single performance involving several actions may even be classified along a variety of dimensions. A marathon runner may run at record speed (rate) and thus win the meet (results) but take a shortcut in the process (ethics). In self-regulation, the individual learns to set personal standards upon which to base judgment.

The judgment of performance may be based on several standards. Indeed, the final self-evaluation is a function of the judgment standard selected. Operant conditioning processes help explain the development of personal standards. That is, through our reinforcement history we learn which behaviors are correct. This past experience can form the basis for the assessment of present and future actions. Similarly, observational learning also accounts for personal standards. The nature of the models we encounter and the consequences of their actions also provide a basis for evaluating our own behavior.

Ideal standards of performance are often impractical or inappropriate for many of our daily activities. Consequently, we sometimes refer to others’ actions in judging our own performance. Through *social comparison processes*, we compare our own performance to that of another individual or to a group of individuals. As discussed in Equity Theory (Lesson 4, Individual Needs, Expectations, and Motivation), we tend to select as a basis for comparison others who are or have been in similar situations. Have you ever noticed students comparing examination scores? “I got a 65 on the test. What did you get?” A 65 means one thing if the group average is 92 and another if the average is 25. We also may use our performance at an earlier time and group norms as a basis for judgment. Along with comparing our performance to that of others, we also compare it to the formal and informal rules of the group.

A person’s assessed value of an activity provides another basis of judgment and has an impact on the self-regulation process. We probably do not care how we perform in situations that are of little value to us. Why spend the effort on an insignificant activity? Valued activities, on the other hand, may have a significant effect on self-appraisal. For example, extremes in self-regulated behavior can be observed among some religious groups.

Internal consequences are influenced by the perceived determinants of an individual’s actions. We are proud of good performance that results from our own effort and ability. Little self-satisfaction comes from actions resulting from external factors. Similarly, we are often critical of ourselves when failure is our responsibility, but not when it is the result of factors beyond our control.

As a result of self-judgment processes, we generate internally controlled consequences (self-responses). These may be in the form of positive or negative emotional responses such as self-pride, self-satisfaction, or self-criticism, or in the form of tangible self-administered consequences. “When I finish reading this chapter, I will get something to eat and watch television.”

It should be apparent that any given behavior produces two sets of consequences—those that come from external sources and those that are generated through self-regulation. **The organizational leader needs to be aware that both internal and external consequences influence the behavior of followers**. Further, internal and external consequences may become dysfunctional when they oppose each other. People generally experience internal conflict when anticipated external and internal consequences are incongruent. For example, the person who is ordered by a supervisor to falsify a report may experience conflict between anticipated external punishment for noncompliance with the order and anticipated internal self-reproach for compliance. If internal consequences outweigh external inducements, the internal controls will determine the action taken; but if the action produces greater external consequences than the self-evaluative process, the internal controls will have little influence on the actions.

**APPLICATION OF REWARDS AND PUNISHMENT**

Until now, we have been concerned primarily with the theory of rewards and punishment. We will now examine a reinforcement-oriented approach to motivation, discuss considerations and techniques of rewarding and punishing, and develop a functional model for applying rewards and punishment at the organizational level.

Scheduling Rewards: When does a Leader Reward?

Skinner and his associates discuss a variety of reinforcement schedules. The two general categories that are most relevant to the organizational leader include continuous and partial reinforcement schedules. Under a *continuous reinforcement schedule*, a reinforcer follows every correct response. Using this schedule increases behavior rapidly; however, when the reinforcement is removed (extinction), performance also decreases rapidly. Since it is difficult for the organizational leader to be present to observe and reward every correct response of each follower, continuous reinforcement is not very practical for use over a long period of time. Imagine the cost to the leader in terms of the time and effort it takes to praise everyone in the organization every time they did something desirable.

With *partial reinforcement schedules*, a reinforcer is not administered after every correct response. Rather, reinforcers are only presented some of the time. These schedules have been shown to be more resistant to extinction; that is, desired responses continue longer without reinforcement.

There are two basic dimensions to partial reinforcement schedules—interval versus ratio, and fixed versus variable. *Interval* refers to time (every so often), while *ratio* refers to events (every so many successful performances); *fixed* refers to a predefined schedule, while *variable* means that the reinforcement occurs irregularly but averages at a particular schedule. When we combine these as shown below, we see examples of four basic partial reinforcement schedules pertinent to our study of motivation in organizations.

**Examples of Partial Reinforcement Schedules**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Interval** | **Ratio** |
| **Fixed** | Weekly or Monthly Paycheck | Piece-rate Pay, Commission Pay |
| Variable | Praise, Recognition, Supervisory Visits | Monetary Sales Bonuses |

With a *fixed ratio schedule,* the number of correct responses is held constant. For example, in a fixed ratio five schedule, a reinforcer is administered after every five correct responses. Piece rate pay systems in which a worker is paid based on the number of units produced (a dollar for every five boxes produced) and sales commissions are examples of fixed ratio schedules. These schedules produce very high rates of response.

With a *variable ratio schedule*, the number of correct responses necessary for a reinforcer is varied from the occurrence of one reinforcer to the next, around the average. So, for example, an individual on a ten to one variable ratio schedule might receive a reinforcer after five responses, then after fifteen, then after ten, with the average of one reinforcer for every ten correct responses. Playing a slot machine represents a variable ratio schedule. In an organization, monetary bonuses lend themselves to this type of reinforcement schedule.

Salary pay schemes where the individual receives a weekly or monthly paycheck represent *fixed interval schedules*. In a fixed interval schedule, the time interval is constant (e.g., every day, each week, once a month). These schedules produce an interesting response pattern. Since only one correct response is necessary in the time interval, the response rate tends to drop off following reinforcement and then increases until a high rate occurs just before the end of the interval. If we want followers to work hard all the time, we probably do not want to use this schedule by itself. It is probably most appropriate for administering base pay.

With a *variable interval schedule*, reinforcers are administered at a variable time interval around some average. Praise, supervisory visits, and promotions may be appropriate for this type of schedule. Because reinforcers are unpredictable, response rates are very high and are extremely resistant to extinction.

For the organizational leader, the issue of reinforcement schedules can be critical. Leaders often become so involved in the day-to-day activities that they either forget to reinforce at all or revert to the time saver: “If you don’t hear from me, you’re doing alright.”

Of all the schedules, the variable interval or variable ratio, where response rate is high and extinction is low, are probably the best for most organizational situations. Variable interval is usually more convenient for the leader. In service organizations, where the types of available reinforcers are greatly restricted, variable reinforcement is particularly useful.

A Reinforcement-Oriented Approach to Motivation

As we have already learned, a reinforcement-oriented approach to motivation is generally preferable in most leadership situations. This is not only because it seems to promote higher performance levels and is more acceptable to followers, but also because it allows the leader to focus on results rather than the complex side issues of follower attitudes and emotions that result from punishment. One such approach is proposed by organizational behaviorist W. Clay Hamner and associates. They suggest a four-stage program as follows.

First, the leader conducts an *audit* (a detailed, orderly examination) of present individual performance. In other words, he examines what the follower is actually doing.

Second, the leader specifies goals—clearly defined, measurable, and published—that are developed for each follower based on the performance audit and knowledge of organizational goals. Follower goals should incorporate the specific terminology of the audit and use the audit status as a point of departure. In the process, reward contingencies, plan of evaluation, and timeframe of evaluation are clearly spelled out. When invited, followers may make contributions to the development of their goals.

Third, the follower, as measured against the goals, maintains a record of personal performance. This activity provides continuous feedback and stimulates intrinsic reward and punishment processes. The work and specific goals are so structured that recording is done frequently—daily or weekly. While the mechanics of recording and the unit of performance measurement are dependent on the nature of the job, Hamner specifies that the process should accentuate the positive approach. That is, goals should be expressed in terms of accomplishment units completed or equipment kept operating, rather than failure, number of units rejected, or equipment items inoperable.

Fourth, the leader reviews the follower-kept performance record and provides positive reinforcement such as praise, a bonus, or recognition when appropriate. This complements the intrinsic reinforcement already experienced by the follower. When positive reinforcement is withheld because of substandard performance, the follower should already be aware of the deficiency. Therefore, in most cases no action by the leader is necessary.

Such a system can be effective if appropriate reinforcers are available to the leader. While the leader can always rely on praise and approval, a more detailed discussion of organizationally available reinforcers is necessary.

Reinforcement in Organizations

Reinforcers are generally divided into two categories—*primary* and *secondary*. Primary reinforcers have value in and of themselves. These reinforcers satisfy basic human needs such as food, water, rest, and recognition. Secondary reinforcers do not have innate value; nevertheless, they usually have a powerful influence on behavior because they can be used to acquire personal need satisfiers. People learn to value money, promotion, time off, and the like because of how they can be used. Because these are learned relationships, their relative value fluctuates among followers. If a person has not learned to associate free time with rest, fun, or some other satisfying activity, it may be of little value as a reinforcer.

Just as followers learn to value secondary reinforcers, they can also learn to value or devalue an award because of the manner of presentation. The manner in which the award is presented can enhance the value of an otherwise routine award. For instance, an award that is normally presented in the leader’s office along with kind words and a handshake might be awarded in front of family, friends, and a photographer with an accompanying news release. A reception in pleasant surroundings might further enhance the value of the award. The leader’s method of presenting the award can make the same award more or less prestigious and prized, even though there may be little difference in the cost to the leader of the organization.

The value of a reinforcer can also be reduced if it is used routinely or too frequently--too much of a good thing can actually become unrewarding. Anyone who has become bored with inactivity after a few days of school vacation can attest to this. Followers may begin to take a reward for granted; hence, the worth of the prize is diminished. Such is frequently the case with awards for service rendered (as opposed to performance awards).

Technique is important in reinforcement. Although situational factors often determine appropriate techniques, the leader would do well to establish a technique around certain fundamental characteristics like sincerity, quality, consistency, and timeliness. Followers are usually quick to identify false or half praise, and the result is often resentment and tainted leader integrity. Likewise, when a follower deserves a quality compliment for a quality performance, the leader must follow through with reinforcement or his or her lack of action will serve as a non-reinforcer (recall that non-reinforcement leads to extinction of behavior). Consistency in administering rewards and punishment, therefore, enhances their effectiveness in influencing follower behavior. Inconsistency may cause confusion about what the leader expects and would thus be detrimental to good morale. Timely reinforcement, for instance, heightens the impact of a reward. That is, the sooner the reward is given following the desired behavior, the greater the influence on subsequent behavior. In the case of major awards in large organizations, delays due to administrative processing are often encountered. It may be advisable, therefore, to provide interim recognition of the behavior immediately and then to follow up with the principal award when it is ready.

Hamner outlines an appropriate reinforcement process in three steps. First, “select reinforcers that are sufficiently powerful and durable to ‘maintain responsiveness while complex patterns of behavior are being established and strengthened.’” Second, design reinforcement contingencies so that the reward is tied to the desired performance both in kind and magnitude. It is just as inappropriate to reward with great fanfare the follower who only achieves specific goals for a period of a week, as it is to give only faint praise to one who has consistently performed well above the specified goals for more than a year. Third, use the reward contingencies in such a way that the follower understands what performance is desired as well as when and how it is desired. When the leader’s expectations are not communicated as part of the reinforcing mechanism, reinforcement of the follower may be ineffective or even squandered. In this case, training may be instrumental in developing the desired performance patterns.

When the desired behavior is not simple, *shaping* may be used to build or mold it. In shaping, the leader reinforces behaviors that get successively closer to what is desired until the desired performance is achieved. Nearly everyone has been exposed to shaping. Teaching a child to swim, training a soldier to parachute, or training a young adult to fly a helicopter are examples of shaping. The teacher cannot wait for the entire act to be performed before reinforcement is given.

Punishment in Organizations

Organizational theorists are often accused of naiveté because they appear to promote reward and discourage punishment. This, of course, is not the case. The point that behavioral scientists are making is that the two have very different purposes—one promotes behavior; the other stops it.

**Although punishment can be a highly effective contingency, its execution is often very demanding on the leader. The underlying purpose of punishment should be to motivate the follower to not perform in an undesirable manner. The vindictive or malicious application of punishment for punishment’s sake produces many undesirable side effects in follower behavior.**

Not unexpectedly, the effective use of punishment has certain principles that the leader should understand. Some of these are presented below.

* The punishment should be directed at the behavior, not the follower. It is the follower’s undesirable behavior or performance that prompts the leader’s response. General attacks upon the follower’s character such as, “You zero!” or “You’re worthless!” provide no specific constructive criticism and may produce lingering, injurious effects—not to mention an uncomfortable personal relationship.
* The punishment should be rendered as soon after the undesirable behavior as possible. Delays tend to diminish the effects of the punishment and may cause confusion concerning precisely what prompted it.
* The follower should understand exactly what behavior has caused the punishment and that once the punishment is completed, the air will have been cleared, and the leader and follower will not bear a grudge.
* The punishment should be sufficiently strong to stop undesired behavior; however, it should not be excessive or unreasonable.
* The follower must know the desired behavior and be able to perform it acceptably. Continued unacceptable behavior is then the choice of the follower and punishment by the leader is justified.
* The period of punishment administration should be short. This characteristic does not imply that the follower is likely to forget the well-executed punishment lesson. Indeed, this is the lesson that is most likely to be remembered.
* The leader should not allow conflicting factors and emotions to confuse the punishment process.
* Shows of support, sympathy, misgiving, or reluctance weaken the overall effects; consequently, these punishment contaminants actually do injustice to the follower because they tend to weaken the deterrent effect of the punishment.
* Withholding or denying expected reinforcement (that is, withholding an announced promotion or canceling a work holiday) could also result in a decrease of the follower’s undesirable behavior. In other words, not following behavior with an expected positive reinforcer can have the same effect as following that behavior with an aversive stimulus. The term *timeout* comes from the idea of removing an individual from an environment where behavior will be followed by positive reinforcement. The effectiveness of the use of timeouts is directly linked to how highly the follower values the missed reinforcement; therefore, unless the leader knows the follower well, the effect of this strategy may not be precisely what is intended.

Punishment that is ineptly administered can cause hostility and other counterproductive results. This may be due to a number of factors, among which are the inability of the involved parties to divorce themselves from the strong emotions that surround the situation, the violation of the principles of timeliness and intensity, and an inability to control the immediate environment of the punishment act, thereby introducing any number of contaminants (e.g., third parties or unwanted observers).

Douglas McGregor provides an example of simple, effective punishment in the **Hot Stove Rule**. He observes the following:

We learn quickly from nature, and we learn without serious emotional problems. If we get too close to the hot stove and accidentally touch it, the reaction is immediate. What is it about the hot stove that makes it such a good teacher? It is swift: the association between our behavior and its consequences is undeniable. It is relatively intense on the very first instance of our improper response. It is impersonal: the hot stove has nothing against us as persons and doesn’t lose its temper: our behavior, our specific response, is singled out. The hot stove is unerringly consistent: regardless of who touches it or when, the result is the same. Finally, an alternative response is available: move away from the stove. The point, then, is to strive to emulate nature in carrying out disciplinary measures.

Recall that extinction of behavior—not following a particular undesirable behavior with a reinforcement—is another contingency that theoretically can be used to reduce the frequency of undesired behavior. Extinction alone is often an impractical contingency for use in organizations; sufficient time and other resources are not usually available. Nevertheless, when employed in conjunction with reinforcement, extinction can function as a co-partner in a potent leader-controlled combination.

Group Rewards and Punishments

Until now, the focus has been upon rewarding and punishing the individual. But what of the group? Most people have experienced the strong influence of effective group reinforcement in promoting unit cohesiveness and morale. Others have witnessed the repercussions of well-intended but poorly planned group punishment.

While generally the same principles of reward and punishment apply in both individual and group cases, the latter is vastly more complicated because of the greater number of personalities involved and because of their interactions, of which the leader may or may not be aware. The basic problem is that group solutions not only apply to the group collectively but to each individual in the group. It is often difficult for even the experienced leader to predict the important effects of rewards and punishments that are applied to the group. Recall that the effectiveness of a reward or punishment depends on its relative value to the person who receives it. Therefore, the various members will regard a group reward differently. It is also unlikely that all group members performed or contributed equally. Hence, the same reward may be differentially rewarding. Nevertheless, the group is a powerful influencer of behavior. When the leader can inform the group in advance about the adverse consequence of their undesirable behavior, they may exert the internal pressure necessary to avoid the adversity, and the results can be very beneficial. When the consequence is reward or punishment for individuals or subgroups within a larger body, the leader must be sensitive to the resultant perceptions of equity, fairness, and timeliness by group members who may have performed as expected, as well as those who did not. In this situation, the leader should also keep in mind that other organization members who were not involved in the performance may form their own perceptions of how the reward or punishment act was carried out. Clearly, group rewards and punishments can be effective, and they can provide relief to the hard-pressed leader who can ill afford the time to deal with multiple individual cases. At the same time, however, the leader has to be willing to sacrifice the desirability and greater precision of the individual solution.

Communicating Reward and Punishment Contingencies

The communication process carries the reinforcement or punishment message from the leader and returns feedback. As both reward and punishment messages can have far-reaching impact on the organization (recall vicarious learning), the leader must plan the communication from the follower’s point of view. That is, the leader should consider how the message will be perceived and whether that perception will correspond with the intended message. For example, will strong punishment be perceived when strong punishment is intended? The leader must also be especially sensitive to feedback with regard to impact of the communication. Asking followers directly how they perceived the punishment (or reward) is appropriate.

In fairness, the leader’s true expectations concerning the follower’s performance should be clearly communicated. Often, a leader will unknowingly ask for the accomplishment of one goal, while making the rewards contingent upon another goal’s accomplishment. To verbalize that an individual’s promotion potential is based on performance while, in fact, the promotion system is based largely on favoritism, would produce unexpected and usually undesirable results. In troubleshooting deficient follower performance, the leader should examine “what behaviors are being rewarded.” If these are not the desired behaviors, adjustments must be made.

Summary

1. **Reinforce good performance** – If someone is performing well, reward them to encourage continued success.
2. **Address poor performance** – If performance is lacking, examine the organization's reward system. Are rewards encouraging the right behavior, or are they unintentionally reinforcing the wrong actions? If the latter, adjust the reward system and give the person another chance to meet expectations.
3. **Identify the root cause of poor performance** – If rewards align with expectations but performance is still lacking, determine whether the issue is due to:
   * **Lack of ability or understanding** → Provide training or guidance.
   * **Intentional poor behavior** → Use consequences like withholding rewards, punishment, or ignoring the behavior to discourage it.
4. **Reassess after taking action** – Once steps are taken, review performance again and repeat the process as needed.

Most of the time, performance is a mix of good and bad behaviors. Leaders should reward desirable actions while correcting or discouraging undesirable ones through training, discipline, or withholding positive reinforcement.

**Reinforcement and punishment are powerful tools** for influencing performance. Reinforcement increases the chance of good behavior happening again. Punishment should reduce the chance of it continuing. However, punishment must be used carefully, as poor administration can lead to negative consequences for employees.

In conducting a comprehensive assessment of a potential reward/punishment contingency, the leader should ask the following:

1. What reinforcements and punishments are available?

2. What is the relative power of my resources?

3. What approach is to be used, and am I prepared to carry out this approach?

4. How can I best communicate my expectations and their contingencies to the follower?

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Case Study

You are the Captain in charge of the Patrol Bureau. Six months ago, you selected Sgt. Jason Simone to coordinate training of your command. Simone is widely respected as a tactical expert and a hard-working supervisor. He has fourteen years of field experience, numerous commendations (including the Medal of Valor) and his package is replete with “walk on water” rating reports. Since he became your training coordinator, Simone has jumped right into the job in many respects. He put on a firearms training day for all watches, which was widely acclaimed by course participants and drew the formal praise of the Chief. He is currently working with the In-Service Training Division to develop a new non-lethal tactical course for the entire department – another large-scale, department-wide training endeavor.

However, during the last three months, a problem has developed. A new Mobile Digital Terminal (MDT) system has been made operational, and all vehicles are equipped with in-car computers. The new computer system has a direct interface with NCIC, allowing officer to obtain criminal histories and to write their crime and arrest reports directly from the terminals in their patrol cars.

Sergeant Simone volunteered for and successfully completed an instructor’s course on the new system, but he has not provided any training to any of the watches. Most of your officers are still writing reports by hand. This causes your Records Section to manually process, duplicate, and mail the reports rather than just download them via the computer network. Also, the record clerks and supervisors have complained that they can’t get their new responsibilities done because the police officers are taking up the terminals in the station to run suspects. The detectives and the District Attorney’s office have made it clear that they are fed up with the illegible, coffee-stained reports your employees are scribbling out. During a recent audit, your command was criticized because many officers were not using the new MDT.

You get Simone and his immediate supervisor (your admin lieutenant) together to find out what’s going on. At first, Simone is a bit puzzled. He says, “Captain, when I got back from the Train-the-Trainer course, no one noticed, and no one gave me any guidance. I asked around about when folks wanted training scheduled, but no one ever got back to me. So, since there was no feedback, I went back to doing what I do best – training the department – and I figured the MDT training would take care of itself or someone would get concerned and tell me what/when I needed to get started. I guess you’re going to do that now?”

You decide to dig deeper into this mess, and you get your day watch lieutenant, Lt. James. He has been frustrated with the lack of progress recently but is beginning to see some change. He confides in you: “Hey, as long as my watch was hand-writing reports, I kept dogging them. I even got to writing ‘Notices to Correct’, and things began to change. They know I’ll hammer them if they write reports by hand, and the only way to escape my pen is to use the MDTs. They’re beginning to get the message and change.”

The one bright spot is the evening watch. The evening watch lieutenant, Lt. Rankin, has been reporting tremendous success with the new system. Everyone says the new computer has really enhanced their performance and actually given them more time to do police work. When you talk to Lt. Rankin, he credits a sergeant named Wilcott. “Yeah, it was tough at first, because everyone wanted to stick to writing manual reports. But then, it was as if Sgt. Wilcott got mad at himself. He burned the midnight oil and really learned the new system. Then, he taught it to our officers and supervisors at roll call, and now that’s all we use. Everyone on the watch is having great success with it.”

It has become clear that the Patrol Bureau must start using the new computer system exclusively, but why weren’t they changing, and what can you do about it?

Use all four steps in the Leader Thought Process.

I. (Step I) ***Identify*** the **Areas of Interest**.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

(If necessary, continue listing **Areas of Interest** on another page.)

II. (Step II) ***Analyze*** the situation using Motivation Through Consequences Theory.

What is the relationship among the Areas of Interest listed above? More specifically, is there a chronological order or **logical chain of events** that helps you make sense of the facts you have? If so, outline the time sequence of events.

From the case, which behavior(s) is the leader attempting to increase?

Which behavior(s) is the leader trying to decrease?

What consequences presently follow the behavior(s)/Area(s) of Interest? What unpleasant stimuli, if any, precede the behavior(s)/Areas of Interest?

What models of the desired behavior(s) are available for imitation? What models of other behavior(s) have been observed and imitated?

To what extent are the employees capable of regulating their own behavior by monitoring themselves and administering their own consequences?

III. (Step II) *Explain*

What is the effect of the present consequences on the desired behavior(s)/Area(s) of Interest?

How have the consequences experienced by Sergeant Simone affected his motivation, satisfaction, and/or performance?

Do the facts of the case and your explanation form a pattern that allows you to identify a fundamental or **root cause** (i.e., is there something in the case information that suggests it is the underlying cause of all or most of the Areas of Interest)?

IV. (Step III) ***Select.*** Which theoretical strategies would be effective in this situation?

Which leader strategy(ies) should the leader use?

V. (Step III) ***Apply*** the theoretical leader strategy(ies) to the situation in the form of a specific leader plan that addresses all Areas of Interest.

Beginning on the next page (and using continuation sheets if necessary), write a leader plan of action. Address all the **Areas of Interest** you have identified and translate the theoretical leader strategies into specific actions you would take and communications that you would send to the employee(s) of interest. What will you do and say to whom, when, where, and how? What do the theoretical leader actions look like in practice?

VI. (Step IV) ***Assess*** the effectiveness of your leader plan.

After your leader plan, list the measures you would use to evaluate your actions. In this step, leaders need to ask, “What information do I need to tell whether or not my leadership is having the desired effects? How will I obtain the information I need? How can it be generated? Who can help me get what I need? How often should I collect data and in what form?”

Name:

**Complete a Student Journal entry** for Motivation through Consequences Theory.

Based upon your police experience, provide an example of a behavior that has been motivated or unmotivated by consequences from the leader(s). Using MTC Theory, describe the behavior of interest, tell who was performing it or not performing it, what the desired behavior(s) were, what the consequences were, and how the consequences affected the employee’s motivation.