In this chapter, we examine three foundations of individual behavior in organizations: ability, attitudes, and learning. Specifically, we discuss how intellectual ability contributes to job performance, how employees’ attitudes about their jobs affect the workplace, how people learn behaviors, and what management can do to shape those behaviors. We also pay special attention to a particular attitude—job satisfaction—that has important implications for organizational behavior.

ABILITY

Ability refers to an individual’s capacity to perform the various tasks in a job. It is a current assessment of what one can do. Managers are less interested in whether people differ in terms of their abilities and more interested in knowing how people differ in abilities and using that knowledge to increase the likelihood that an employee will perform his or her job well.
Intellectual Ability

Intellectual ability—which encompasses mental activities such as thinking, reasoning, and problem solving—is one of the best predictors of performance across all sorts of jobs. Of course, jobs differ in the demands they place on incumbents to use their intellectual abilities. The more complex a job is in terms of information-processing demands, the more general intelligence and verbal abilities will be necessary to perform the job successfully. One reason intelligent people are better job performers is that they are more creative. Smart people learn jobs more quickly, are more adaptable to changing circumstances, and are better at inventing solutions that improve performance.

Interestingly, while intelligence is a big help in performing a job well, it doesn’t make people happier or more satisfied with their jobs. The correlation between intelligence and job satisfaction is about zero. Why? Research suggests that although intelligent people perform better and tend to have more interesting jobs, they also are more critical in evaluating their job conditions. Thus, smart people have it better, but they also expect more.

Ability and Job Fit

Employee performance is enhanced when an employee and position are well matched—what we call a high ability–job fit. If we focus only on the employee’s abilities or the ability requirements of the job, we ignore the fact that employee performance depends on the interaction of the two.

What predictions can we make when the fit is poor? If employees lack the required abilities, they are likely to fail. If you’re hired as a word processor and you can’t meet the job’s basic keyboard typing requirements, your performance is going to be poor in spite of your positive attitude or your high level of motivation. When an employee has abilities that far exceed the requirements of the job, our predictions would be very different. The employee’s performance may be adequate, but it may be accompanied by organizational inefficiencies and possible declines in employee satisfaction because the employee is frustrated by the limitations of the job. Additionally, given that pay tends to reflect the highest skill level that employees possess, if an employee’s abilities far exceed those necessary to do the job, management will be paying more than it needs to pay.

ATTITUDES

Attitudes are evaluative statements—either favorable or unfavorable—concerning objects, people, or events. They reflect how one feels about something. When I say “I like my job,” I am expressing my attitude about work. To fully understand attitudes, we need to consider their fundamental properties. Let’s examine four questions about attitudes:

1. What are the main components of attitudes?
2. How consistent are attitudes?
What Are the Main Components of Attitudes?

Typically, researchers have assumed that attitudes have three components: cognition, affect, and behavior. Let’s look at each of these components.

The statement that “discrimination is wrong” is evaluative. Such an opinion is the cognitive component of an attitude. It sets the stage for the more critical part of an attitude: its affective component. Affect is the emotional or feeling segment of an attitude and is reflected in the statement “I don’t like Jon because he discriminates against minorities.” Finally, and we’ll discuss this issue at considerable length later in this section, affect can lead to behavioral outcomes. The behavioral component of an attitude refers to an intention to behave in a certain way toward someone or something. So, to continue our example, I might choose to avoid Jon because of my feelings about him.

Viewing attitudes as made up of three components—cognition, affect, and behavior—is helpful in understanding their complexity and the potential relationship between attitudes and behavior. Keep in mind that these components are closely related. In particular, in many ways cognition and affect are inseparable. For example, imagine that you concluded that someone had just treated you unfairly. Aren’t you likely to have feelings about that, occurring virtually instantaneously with the thought? Thus, cognition and affect are intertwined.

Exhibit 2-1 illustrates how the three components of an attitude are related. In this example, an employee didn’t get a promotion he thought he deserved; a coworker got it instead. The employee’s attitude toward his supervisor is illustrated as follows: cognition (the employee thought he deserved the promotion), affect (the employee strongly dislikes his supervisor), and behavior (the employee is looking for another job). As we previously noted, although we often think that cognition causes affect which then causes behavior, in reality these components are often difficult to separate.

How Consistent Are Attitudes?

Did you ever notice how people change what they say so it doesn’t contradict what they do? Perhaps a friend of yours has consistently argued that the quality of American cars isn’t up to that of the import brands and that he’d never own anything but a Japanese or German car. Then his dad gives him a late-model Ford Mustang, and suddenly American cars aren’t so bad. Or when going through sorority rush, a new freshman believes that sororities are good and that pledging a sorority is important. If she fails to make a sorority, however, she may say, “I recognized that sorority life isn’t all it’s cracked up to be, anyway.”

Research has generally concluded that people seek consistency among their attitudes and between their attitudes and their behavior. In other words, individuals try to reconcile divergent attitudes and align their attitudes to their behavior so they appear rational and consistent. When there is an inconsistency, the individual may alter either the attitudes or the behavior or may develop a rationalization for the discrepancy. Tobacco executives provide an example. How, you might wonder, do these
people cope with the ongoing barrage of data linking cigarette smoking and negative health outcomes? Following are some possibilities:

- They can deny that any clear causation between smoking and cancer, for instance, has been established.
- They can brainwash themselves by continually articulating the benefits of tobacco.
- They can acknowledge the negative consequences of smoking but rationalize that people are going to smoke and that tobacco companies merely promote freedom of choice.
- They can accept the research evidence and begin actively working to make more healthy cigarettes or at least reduce their availability to more vulnerable groups, such as teenagers.
- They can quit their job because the inconsistency is too great.

In the late 1950s, Leon Festinger proposed the theory of cognitive dissonance to explain the linkage between attitudes and behavior. Cognitive dissonance refers to any inconsistency that an individual might perceive between two or more attitudes, or between behavior and attitudes. Festinger argued that any form of inconsistency is uncomfortable and that individuals will attempt to reduce the dissonance and, hence, the discomfort. Therefore, individuals will seek a stable state in which there is a minimum of dissonance.

No individual, of course, can completely avoid dissonance. You know that cheating on your income tax is wrong, but you fudge the numbers a bit every year and hope you’re not audited. Or you tell your children to floss their teeth every day, but you
don’t. So how do people cope? Festinger would propose that the desire to reduce dissonance would be determined by three attributes:

- The *importance* of the elements creating the dissonance. If the elements creating the dissonance are relatively unimportant, the pressure to correct this imbalance will be low.
- The *degree of influence* the individual believes he or she has over the elements. The degree of influence individuals believe they have over the elements will affect how they react to the dissonance. If they perceive the dissonance to be caused by something over which they have no control, they are less likely to be receptive to attitude change. For example, if the dissonance-producing behavior is required as a result of a boss’s directive, the pressure to reduce dissonance would be less than if the behavior was performed voluntarily.
- The *rewards* that may be involved in dissonance. Rewards also influence the degree to which individuals are motivated to reduce dissonance. High rewards accompanying high dissonance tend to reduce the tension inherent in the dissonance. The rewards act to reduce dissonance by increasing the consistency side of the individual’s balance sheet. These moderating factors suggest that individuals will not necessarily move directly toward reducing dissonance just because they experience it.

What are the organizational implications of the theory of cognitive dissonance? It can help managers to predict the propensity of employees to engage in attitude and behavioral change. In addition, the greater the dissonance—after it has been moderated by importance, choice, and reward factors—the greater the pressures to reduce it.

### Does Behavior Always Follow from Attitudes?

Early research on attitudes assumed that they were causally related to behavior; that is, the attitudes that people hold determine what they do. Common sense, too, suggests a relationship. However, in the late 1960s, a review of research challenged this interpretation of the relationship between attitudes and behavior, concluding that attitudes were unrelated to behavior or, at best, only slightly related. However, more recent research has demonstrated that attitudes significantly predict future behavior and confirmed Festinger’s original belief that the relationship can be enhanced by taking moderating variables into account.

#### Moderating Variables

The most powerful moderators of the attitude–behavior relationship are these:

- *Importance* of the attitude. Important attitudes reflect fundamental values, self-interest, or identification with individuals or groups that a person values. Attitudes that individuals consider important tend to show a strong relationship to behavior.
- Its *specificity*. The more specific the attitude and the more specific the behavior, the stronger the link between the two. For instance, asking someone specifically about her intention to stay with the organization for the next six months is likely to better predict turnover for that person than if you asked her how satisfied she was with her pay.
Chapter 2  Foundations of Individual Behavior

- **Its accessibility.** Attitudes that are easily remembered are more likely to predict behavior than attitudes that are not accessible in memory. Interestingly, you’re more likely to remember attitudes that are frequently expressed. So the more you talk about your attitude on a subject, the more you’re likely to remember it, and the more likely it is to shape your behavior.

- **The existence of social pressures.** Discrepancies between attitudes and behavior are more likely to occur when social pressures to behave in certain ways hold exceptional power. This tends to characterize behavior in organizations. This may explain why an employee who holds strong anti-union attitudes attends pro-union organizing meetings or why tobacco executives, who are not smokers themselves and who tend to believe the research linking smoking and cancer, don’t actively discourage others from smoking in their offices.

- **A person’s direct experience** with the attitude. The attitude–behavior relationship is likely to be much stronger if an attitude refers to something with which the individual has direct personal experience. Asking college students with no significant work experience how they would respond to working for an authoritarian supervisor is far less likely to predict actual behavior than asking that same question of employees who have actually worked for such an individual.

**Self-Perception Theory**  Although most attitude–behavior studies yield positive results, researchers have achieved still higher correlations by pursuing another direction: looking at whether behavior influences attitudes. This view, called **self-perception theory**, has generated some encouraging findings. Let’s briefly review the theory.11

When asked about an attitude toward some object, individuals often recall their behavior relevant to that object and then infer their attitude from their past behavior. So if an employee was asked her feelings about being a training specialist at Marriott, she would likely think, “I’ve had this same job with Marriott as a trainer for 10 years. Nobody forced me to stay on this job. So I must like it!” Self-perception theory, therefore, argues that attitudes are used, after the fact, to make sense out of an action that has already occurred rather than as devices that precede and guide action. When people are asked about their attitudes and they don’t have strong convictions or feelings, self-perception theory says they tend to create plausible answers.

Self-perception theory has been well supported by research.12 While the traditional attitude–behavior relationship is generally positive, the behavior–attitude relationship is just as strong. This is particularly true when attitudes are vague and ambiguous. When you have had few experiences regarding an attitude issue or have given little previous thought to it, you’ll tend to infer your attitudes from your behavior. However, when your attitudes have been established for a while and are well defined, those attitudes are likely to guide your behavior.

**What Are the Major Job Attitudes?**

A person can have thousands of attitudes, but OB focuses our attention on a very limited number of work-related attitudes. These work-related attitudes tap positive or negative evaluations that employees hold about aspects of their work environment.
Most OB research has been concerned with three attitudes: job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment. We’ll examine these three, as well as two other attitudes that are attracting attention from researchers: perceived organizational support and employee engagement.

**Job Satisfaction**  The term *job satisfaction* can be defined as a positive feeling about one’s job resulting from an evaluation of its characteristics. A person with a high level of job satisfaction holds positive feelings about the job, while a person who is dissatisfied holds negative feelings about the job. When people speak of employee attitudes, more often than not they mean job satisfaction. In fact, the two are frequently used interchangeably. Because of the high importance OB researchers have given to job satisfaction, we’ll review this attitude in considerable detail later in this chapter.

**Job Involvement**  Although much less studied than job satisfaction, *job involvement* measures the degree to which people identify psychologically with their job and consider their perceived performance level important to self-worth. Employees with a high level of job involvement strongly identify with and really care about the kind of work they do. A closely related concept is *psychological empowerment*, which is employees’ beliefs in the degree to which they affect their work environments, their competence, the meaningfulness of their jobs, and the perceived autonomy in their work. For example, one study of nursing managers in Singapore found that good leaders empower their employees by involving them in decisions, making them feel that their work is important, and giving them discretion to “do their own thing.”

High levels of job involvement and psychological empowerment are positively related to organizational citizenship and job performance. In addition, high job involvement is related to fewer absences and lower resignation rates.

**Organizational Commitment**  The state in which an employee identifies with a particular organization and its goals and wishes to maintain membership in the organization is referred to as *organizational commitment*. So, high job involvement means identifying with one’s specific job, whereas high organizational commitment means identifying with one’s employing organization. Let’s examine the three separate dimensions of organizational commitment:

1. **Affective commitment**: an emotional attachment to the organization and a belief in its values. For example, a Petco employee may be affectively committed to the company because of its involvement with animals.
2. **Continuance commitment**: the perceived economic value of remaining with an organization compared to leaving it. An employee may be committed to an employer because she is paid well and feels it would hurt her family to quit.
3. **Normative commitment**: an obligation to remain with the organization for moral or ethical reasons. An employee who is spearheading a new initiative may remain with an employer because he feels it would “leave the employer in a lurch” if he left.

A positive relationship between organizational commitment and job productivity appears to exist, but the relationship is modest. And, as with job involvement, the research evidence demonstrates negative relationships between organizational commitment and both absenteeism and turnover. In general, it seems that affective commitment is more strongly related to organizational outcomes such as performance and turnover than are the other two commitment dimensions. One study found that
affective commitment was a significant predictor of various outcomes (perception of task characteristics, career satisfaction, intent to leave) for 72 percent of the cases, compared to only 36 percent for normative commitment and 7 percent for continuance commitment. The weak results for continuance commitment make sense in that it doesn’t really represent a strong commitment. Rather than an allegiance (affective commitment) or an obligation (normative commitment) to an employer, a continuance commitment describes an employee who is “tethered” to an employer simply because there isn’t anything better available.

The concept of commitment may be less important to employers and employees than it once was. The unwritten loyalty contract that existed 30 years ago between employees and employers has been seriously damaged, and the notion of employees staying with a single organization for most of their careers has become increasingly obsolete. As such, “measures of employee–firm attachment, such as commitment, are problematic for new employment relations.” This suggests that organizational commitment is probably less important as a work-related attitude than it once was. In its place we might expect something akin to occupational commitment to become a more relevant variable because it better reflects today’s fluid workforce.

Other Job Attitudes Perceived organizational support (POS) is the degree to which employees believe the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. For example, an employee believes that his organization would accommodate him if he had a child-care problem or would forgive an honest mistake on his part. Research shows that people perceive their organization as supportive when the following are true:

- Rewards are deemed fair.
- Employees have a voice in decisions.
- Their supervisors are seen as supportive.

A very new concept is employee engagement, which can be defined as individuals’ involvement with, satisfaction with, and enthusiasm for, the work they do. To assess employee engagement, one might ask employees about these:

- The availability of resources and the opportunities to learn new skills
- Whether they feel their work is important and meaningful
- Whether their interactions with their coworkers and supervisors were rewarding

A recent study of nearly 8,000 business units in 36 companies found that business units whose employees had high-average levels of engagement had higher levels of customer satisfaction, were more productive, had higher profits, and had lower levels of turnover and accidents. Because the concept is so new, we don’t know how engagement relates to other concepts, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job involvement, or intrinsic motivation to do one’s job well. Engagement may be broad enough that it captures the intersection of these variables. In other words, engagement may be what these attitudes have in common.

Are These Job Attitudes Really All That Distinct? You might wonder whether these job attitudes are really distinct. After all, if people feel deeply involved in their
job (high job involvement), isn’t it probable that they like it (high job satisfaction)? Similarly, won’t people who think their organization is supportive (high perceived organizational support) also feel committed to it (strong organizational commitment)? Evidence suggests that these attitudes are highly related, perhaps to a troubling degree. For example, the correlation between perceived organizational support and affective commitment is very strong. The problem for researchers is that a strong correlation means that the variables may be redundant. For example, if you know someone’s affective commitment, you basically know her perceived organizational support. But why is this redundancy so troubling? Well, why have two steering wheels on a car when you only need one? Why have two concepts—going by different labels—when you only need one? This redundancy is inefficient and confusing.

Although we OB researchers like proposing new attitudes, often we haven’t been good at showing how each attitude compares and contrasts to the others. While there is some measure of distinctiveness among these attitudes, they do overlap greatly. The overlap may exist for various reasons, including the employee’s personality. Some people are predisposed to be positive or negative about almost everything. If someone tells you she loves her company, it may not mean a lot if she is positive about everything else in her life. Or the overlap may mean that some organizations are just all around better places to work than others. This may mean that if you as a manager know someone’s level of job satisfaction, you know most of what you need to know about how the person sees the organization.

**JOB SATISFACTION**

To make a closer examination of job satisfaction, a concept introduced earlier in this chapter, let’s consider several questions relevant to managers:

- How satisfied are employees in their jobs?
- What causes an employee to have a high level of job satisfaction?
- How do dissatisfied and satisfied employees affect an organization?

**How Satisfied Are People in Their Jobs?**

Are most people satisfied with their jobs? The answer seems to be a qualified “Yes” in the United States and in most developed countries. Independent studies, conducted among U.S. workers over the past 30 years, generally indicate that the majority of workers are satisfied with their jobs. Although the percentage range is wide, more people report that they’re satisfied than not. Moreover, these results generally apply to other developed countries. For instance, comparable studies among workers in Canada, Mexico, and Europe indicate more positive than negative results.

Research shows that satisfaction levels vary a lot depending on which facet of job satisfaction you’re talking about. As shown in Exhibit 2-2, people are, on average, satisfied with their jobs overall, with the work itself, and with their supervisors and coworkers. However, they tend to be less satisfied with their pay and with promotion opportunities. It’s not really clear why people dislike their pay and promotion possibilities more than other aspects of their jobs.
What Causes Job Satisfaction?

Think about the best job you ever had. What made it so? Chances are you probably liked the work you did. In fact, of the major job-satisfaction facets—work itself, pay, advancement opportunities, supervision, coworkers—enjoying the work itself almost always has the strongest correlation to high levels of overall job satisfaction. In other words, most people prefer work that is challenging and stimulating over work that is predictable and routine.

As you have probably noticed, discussions of job satisfaction often focus on pay. Let’s explore the interesting relationship between salary and job satisfaction. For people who are poor (for example, living below the poverty line) or who live in poor countries, pay does correlate with job satisfaction and with overall happiness. But once an individual reaches a level of comfortable living (in the United States, that occurs at about $40,000 a year, depending on the region and family size), the relationship virtually disappears. In other words, people who earn $80,000 are, on average, no happier with their jobs than those who earn close to $40,000. Take a look at Exhibit 2-3, which shows the relationship between the average pay for a job and the average level of job satisfaction. As you can see, there isn’t much of a relationship between them. Jobs that are compensated handsomely have average job-satisfaction levels no higher than those that are paid much less.

Job satisfaction is also affected by an individual’s personality. Some people are predisposed to like almost anything, and others are unhappy even in the seemingly greatest jobs. Research has shown that people who have a negative personality (those
who tend to be grumpy, critical, and negative) are usually less satisfied with their jobs. The Neutral Objects Satisfaction Questionnaire (see Exhibit 2-4) is a measure for understanding the link between personality and job satisfaction. One study showed that nurses who were dissatisfied with the majority of the items on the list were also dissatisfied with their jobs. This isn’t surprising. After all, if someone dislikes his first name, his telephone service, and even $8\frac{1}{2}” \times 11”$ paper, you’d expect him to dislike most things in his life—including his job.

The Effects of Satisfied and Dissatisfied Employees on the Workplace

Consequences manifest when employees like their jobs and when they don’t. The following text focuses on more specific outcomes of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the workplace.

Job Satisfaction and Job Performance Are happy workers more productive workers? Some researchers used to believe that the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance was nonexistent, but a review of 300 studies suggested that the correlation is pretty strong. Moreover, as we move from the individual level to the organization level, we also find support for the satisfaction–performance relationship. When satisfaction and productivity data are gathered for the organization as a whole, we find that organizations with more satisfied employees tend to be more effective than organizations with fewer satisfied employees.
EXHIBIT 2-4  Neutral Objects Satisfaction Questionnaire

Instructions: Circle whether you are on average satisfied, neutral, or dissatisfied with each of the following items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The city in which you live</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The neighbors you have</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The high school you attended</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The climate where you live</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies being produced today</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The quality of food you buy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today's cars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local newspapers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your first name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The people you know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8^{1/2}) × (11) paper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant food</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern art</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Job Satisfaction and OCB  It seems logical to assume that job satisfaction should be a major determinant of an employee’s organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) or discretionary behaviors that contribute to organizational effectiveness (like helping coworkers) but are not part of an employee’s formal job description. Satisfied employees would seem more likely to talk positively about the organization, help others, and go beyond the normal expectations in their job. Moreover, satisfied employees might be more prone to go beyond the call of duty because they want to reciprocate their positive experiences. Consistent with this thinking, early discussions of OCB assumed that it was closely linked with satisfaction. More recent evidence, however, suggests that satisfaction influences OCB, but through perceptions of fairness.

A modest overall relationship exists between job satisfaction and OCB. But satisfaction is unrelated to OCB when fairness is controlled for. What does this mean? Basically, job satisfaction comes down to conceptions of fair outcomes, treatment, and procedures. If you don’t feel that your supervisor, the organization’s procedures, or pay policies are fair, your job satisfaction is likely to suffer significantly. However, when you perceive organizational processes and outcomes to be fair, you develop trust. And when you trust your employer, you’re more willing to voluntarily engage in behaviors that go beyond your formal job requirements.

Job Satisfaction and Customer Satisfaction  Employees in service jobs often interact with customers. Since the management of service organizations should be concerned with pleasing those customers, it is reasonable to ask “Is employee satisfaction related to positive customer outcomes?” For frontline employees who have regular contact with customers, the answer is “Yes.”

The evidence indicates that satisfied employees increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. Why? In service organizations, customer retention and defection are highly dependent on how frontline employees deal with customers. Satisfied employees are
more likely to be friendly, upbeat, and responsive—which customers appreciate. And because satisfied employees are less prone to turnover, customers are more likely to encounter familiar faces and receive experienced service. These qualities build customer satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, the relationship seems mutual: Dissatisfied customers can increase an employee’s job dissatisfaction. Employees who have regular contact with customers report that rude, thoughtless, or unreasonably demanding customers adversely affect the employees’ job satisfaction.38

Job Satisfaction and Absenteeism  We find a consistent negative relationship between satisfaction and absenteeism, but the correlation is moderate to weak.39 While it certainly makes sense that dissatisfied employees are more likely to miss work, other factors affect the relationship and reduce the correlation coefficient. For example, organizations that provide liberal sick leave benefits are encouraging all their employees—including those who are highly satisfied—to take days off. Assuming that you have a reasonable number of varied interests, you can find work satisfying and yet still take off work to enjoy a three-day weekend or tan yourself on a warm summer day if those days come free with no penalties.

A study done at Sears, Roebuck provides an excellent illustration of how satisfaction directly leads to attendance, when there is minimal influence from other factors.40 A freak April 2 snowstorm in Chicago created the opportunity to compare employee attendance at the Chicago office with attendance in the New York office, where the weather was quite nice. The snowstorm gave the Chicago employees a built-in excuse not to come to work. The storm crippled the city’s transportation, and individuals knew they could miss work this day with no penalty. Sears’s policy did not permit employees to be absent from work for avoidable reasons without penalty.

Satisfaction data were available on employees in Chicago and New York, enabling managers to compare attendance records for satisfied and dissatisfied employees at the two locations: one where employees were expected to be at work (with normal pressures for attendance) and the other where employees were free to choose with no penalty involved. If satisfaction leads to attendance, when there is an absence of outside factors, the more satisfied employees should have come to work in Chicago, while dissatisfied employees should have stayed home. The study found that on this particular April 2, absenteeism rates in New York were just as high for satisfied groups of workers as for dissatisfied groups. But in Chicago, the workers with high satisfaction scores had much higher attendance than did those with lower satisfaction levels. These findings are exactly what we expected if satisfaction is negatively correlated with absenteeism.

Job Satisfaction and Turnover  Satisfaction is also negatively related to turnover, but the correlation is stronger than what we found for absenteeism.41 Yet again, other factors such as labor-market conditions, expectations about alternative job opportunities, and length of tenure with the organization are important constraints on the actual decision to leave one’s current job.42

Evidence indicates that an important moderator of the satisfaction–turnover relationship is the employee’s level of performance.43 Specifically, level of satisfaction is less important in predicting turnover for superior performers. Why? The organization typically makes considerable efforts to keep these people. They get pay raises, praise, recognition, increased promotional opportunities, and so forth. Regardless of level of satisfaction, the high performers are more likely to remain with the organization
because the receipt of recognition, praise, and other rewards gives them more reasons for staying. Just the opposite tends to apply to poor performers. Organizations make few attempts to retain them and may even apply subtle pressures to encourage them to quit. We would expect, therefore, that job satisfaction has greater influence on poor performers than superior performers.

**Job Satisfaction and Workplace Deviance** Job dissatisfaction predicts a lot of specific behaviors, including unionization attempts, substance abuse, stealing at work, undue socializing, and tardiness. Researchers argue that these behaviors are indicators of a broader syndrome that we would term *deviant behavior* in the workplace (or employee withdrawal). The key is that if employees don’t like their work environment, they’ll respond somehow. It is not always easy to forecast exactly how they’ll respond. One worker’s response might be to quit. But another may respond by taking work time to surf the Internet, taking work supplies home for personal use, and so on. If employers want to control the undesirable consequences of job dissatisfaction, they had best attack the source of the problem—the dissatisfaction—rather than trying to control the different responses.

**LEARNING**

All complex behavior is learned. If we want to explain and predict behavior, we need to understand how people learn. Let’s examine a definition of learning, three popular learning theories, and ways that managers can facilitate employee learning.

**A Definition of Learning**

A generally accepted definition of *learning* is *any relatively permanent change in behavior that occurs as a result of experience.* Several components of this definition deserve clarification:

1. Learning involves change. Change may be good or bad. People can learn unfavorable behaviors—to hold prejudices or to shirk their responsibilities, for example—as well as favorable behaviors.
2. The change must become ingrained. Immediate changes may be only reflexive or a result of fatigue (or a sudden burst of energy) and thus may not represent learning.
3. Some form of experience is necessary for learning. Experience may be acquired directly through observation or practice, or it may be acquired indirectly, as through reading.

**Theories of Learning**

How do we learn? Two popular theories are used here to explain the process by which we acquire patterns of behavior: *operant conditioning* and *social learning.*

**Operant Conditioning** Behavior is a function of its consequences, according to the theory of *operant conditioning.* People learn to behave to get something they want or to avoid something they don’t want. The developer of operant conditioning, Harvard psychologist B. F. Skinner, argued that creating pleasing consequences to follow specific forms of behavior would increase the frequency of that behavior.
He demonstrated that people will most likely engage in desired behaviors if they are positively reinforced for doing so; that rewards are most effective if they immediately follow the desired response; and that behavior that is not rewarded, or is punished, is less likely to be repeated. The concept of operant conditioning was part of Skinner’s broader concept of behaviorism, which argues that behavior follows stimuli in a relatively unthinking manner. In Skinner’s form of radical behaviorism, concepts such as feelings, thoughts, and other states of mind are rejected as causes of behavior. In short, people learn to associate stimulus and response, but their conscious awareness of this association is irrelevant.47

Any situation in which it is either explicitly stated or implicitly suggested that reinforcements are contingent on some action on your part involves the use of operant learning. Your instructor says that if you want a high grade in the course you must supply correct answers on the test. A commissioned salesperson wanting to earn a sizable income finds that doing so is contingent on generating high sales in her territory. Of course, the linkage can also work to teach the individual to engage in behaviors that work against the best interests of the organization. Assume that your boss tells you that you’ll be compensated at your next performance appraisal if you will work overtime during the next three-week busy season. However, when performance-appraisal time comes, you find that you are given no positive reinforcement for your overtime work. The next time your boss asks you to work overtime, what will you do? You’ll probably decline! Your behavior can be explained by operant conditioning: If a behavior fails to be positively reinforced, the probability that the behavior will be repeated declines.

Social Learning Individuals can also learn by observing what happens to other people and just by being told about something, as well as by direct experiences. This view that we can learn through both observation and direct experience is called the theory of social learning.48

Although social learning theory is an extension of operant conditioning—that is, it assumes that behavior is a function of consequences—it also acknowledges the existence of observational learning and the importance of perception in learning. People respond to how they perceive and define consequences, not to the objective consequences themselves.

The influence of models is central to the social learning viewpoint. Four processes have been found to determine the influence that a model will have on an individual:

1. **Attentional processes.** People learn from a model only when they recognize and pay attention to its critical features. We tend to be most influenced by models that are attractive, repeatedly available, important to us, or similar to us in our estimation.

2. **Retention processes.** A model’s influence will depend on how well the individual remembers the model’s action after the model is no longer readily available.

3. **Motor reproduction processes.** After a person has seen a new behavior by observing the model, the watching must be converted to doing. This process then demonstrates that the individual can perform the modeled activities.

4. **Reinforcement processes.** Individuals will be motivated to exhibit the modeled behavior if positive incentives or rewards are provided. Behaviors that are positively reinforced will be given more attention, learned better, and performed more often.
Shaping: A Managerial Tool

Because learning takes place on the job as well as prior to it, managers will be concerned with how they can teach employees to behave in ways that most benefit the organization. When we attempt to mold individuals by guiding their learning in graduated steps, we are shaping behavior. We shape behavior by systematically reinforcing each successive step that moves the individual closer to the desired response.

Methods of Shaping Behavior

Behavior can be shaped in four ways:

1. Following a response with something pleasant is called positive reinforcement. This would describe, for instance, the boss who praises an employee for a job well done.

2. Following a response by removing something unpleasant is called negative reinforcement. If your college instructor asks a question and you don’t know the answer, the instructor may stop calling on you. This is a negative reinforcement because the instructor has concluded that calling on you does not produce the desired response.

3. When a behavior leads to an unpleasant response, that’s called punishment, which is an attempt to eliminate an undesirable behavior. Giving an employee a two-day suspension from work without pay for showing up drunk is an example of punishment.

4. Eliminating any reinforcement of a behavior is called extinction. When the behavior is not reinforced, it tends to be gradually extinguished. College instructors who wish to discourage students from asking questions in class can eliminate this behavior in their students by ignoring those who raise their hands to ask questions. Hand raising will become extinct when it is invariably met with an absence of reinforcement.

Both positive and negative reinforcement result in learning. They strengthen a response and increase the probability of repetition. However, both punishment and extinction weaken behavior and tend to decrease its subsequent frequency.

Schedules of Reinforcement

In shaping behavior, a critical issue is the timing of reinforcements. The two major types of reinforcement schedules are continuous and intermittent. A continuous reinforcement schedule reinforces the desired behavior each and every time it is demonstrated. Take, for example, the case of someone who historically has had trouble arriving at work on time. Every time he is not tardy his manager might compliment him on his desirable behavior. In an intermittent reinforcement schedule, on the other hand, not every instance of the desirable behavior is reinforced, but reinforcement is given often enough to make the behavior worth repeating. This latter schedule can be compared to the workings of a slot machine, which people will continue to play even when they know that it is adjusted to give a considerable return to the casino. The intermittent payoffs occur just often enough to reinforce the behavior of slipping in coins and pulling the handle. Evidence indicates that the intermittent, or varied, form of reinforcement tends to promote more resistance to extinction than does the continuous form.  

Intermittent reinforcement can be a ratio or interval type. Ratio schedules depend on how many responses the subject makes. The individual is reinforced after giving a certain number of specific types of behavior. Interval schedules depend on how much time has passed since the previous reinforcement. With interval schedules, the individual is reinforced on the first appropriate behavior after a particular time has elapsed.
A reinforcement can also be classified as fixed or variable. When rewards are spaced at uniform time intervals, the reinforcement schedule is of the fixed-interval type. The critical variable is time, and it is held constant. When you get your paycheck on a weekly, semimonthly, monthly, or other predetermined time basis, you’re rewarded on a fixed-interval reinforcement schedule. If rewards are distributed in time so that reinforcements are unpredictable, the schedule is of the variable-interval type. A series of randomly timed unannounced visits to a company office by the corporate audit staff is an example of a variable-interval schedule.

In a fixed-ratio schedule, after a fixed or constant number of responses are given, a reward is initiated. A piece-rate incentive plan for which an employee in a dressmaking factory is paid $5.00 for every zipper installed is an example of a fixed-ratio schedule. When the reward varies relative to the behavior of the individual, he or she is said to be reinforced on a variable-ratio schedule. Salespeople on commission are examples of individuals on such a reinforcement schedule. On some occasions, they may make a sale after only two calls on a potential customer. On other occasions, they might need to make 20 or more calls to secure a sale. Exhibit 2-5 summarizes the schedules of reinforcement.

Reinforcement Schedules and Behavior  Continuous reinforcement schedules can lead to early satiation, and under this schedule behavior tends to weaken rapidly when reinforcers are withheld. However, continuous reinforcers are appropriate for newly emitted, unstable, or low-frequency responses (e.g., getting a reward for a perfect score on an exam). In contrast, intermittent reinforcers preclude early satiation because they don’t follow every response. They are appropriate for stable or high-frequency responses (e.g., getting a reward for a passing grade on an exam).

In general, variable schedules tend to lead to higher performance than fixed schedules. For example, as noted previously, most employees in organizations are paid on fixed-interval schedules. But such a schedule does not clearly link performance and rewards. The reward is given for time spent on the job rather than for a specific

### EXHIBIT 2-5  Schedules of Reinforcement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reinforcement Schedule</th>
<th>Nature of Reinforcement</th>
<th>Effect on Behavior</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Reward given after each desired behavior</td>
<td>Fast learning of new behavior but rapid extinction</td>
<td>Compliments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed-interval</td>
<td>Reward given at fixed time intervals</td>
<td>Average and irregular performance with rapid extinction</td>
<td>Weekly paychecks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable-interval</td>
<td>Reward given at variable time intervals</td>
<td>Moderately high and stable performance with slow extinction</td>
<td>Pop quizzes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed ratio</td>
<td>Reward given at fixed amounts of output</td>
<td>High and stable performance attained quickly but also with rapid extinction</td>
<td>Piece-rate pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable-ratio</td>
<td>Reward given at variable amounts of output</td>
<td>Very high performance with slow extinction</td>
<td>Commissioned sales</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
response (performance). In contrast, variable-interval schedules generate high rates of response and more stable and consistent behavior because of a high correlation between performance and reward and because of the uncertainty involved: The employee tends to be more alert because of the surprise factor.

Problems with Reinforcement Theory Although the effectiveness of reinforcements in the form of rewards and punishments has a lot of support in the literature, that doesn’t necessarily mean that Skinner was right. What if the power of reinforcements isn’t due to operant conditioning or behaviorism? One problem with behaviorism is research showing that thoughts and feelings immediately follow environmental stimuli, even those explicitly meant to shape behavior. This is contrary to the assumptions of behaviorism, which assume that people’s innermost thoughts and feelings in response to the environment are irrelevant.

Also, is it really shaping if the compliment was given without an intention of molding behavior? Isn’t it perhaps overly restrictive to view all stimuli as motivated to obtain a particular response? Is the only reason we tell someone we love them because we wish to obtain a reward or to mold their behavior?

Because of these problems, among others, operant conditioning and behaviorism have been superseded by other approaches that emphasize cognitive processes. However, the contribution of these theories to our understanding of human behavior cannot be denied.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGERS

This chapter looked at three major influences on individual behavior in organizations: ability, attitudes, and learning.

**Ability** Ability directly influences an employee’s level of performance and satisfaction through the ability–job fit. Given management’s desire to get a compatible fit, what can be done?

1. An effective selection process will improve the fit. Jobs can be analyzed to determine the abilities required. Applicants can then be tested, interviewed, and evaluated on the degree to which they possess those abilities.

2. Promotion and transfer decisions affecting individuals already in the organization’s employ should reflect the abilities of candidates.

3. The fit can be improved by fine-tuning the job to better match an incumbent’s abilities. Examples include changing some of the equipment used or reorganizing tasks within a group of employees.

**Attitudes** Managers should be interested in their employees’ attitudes because attitudes give warnings of potential problems and because they influence behavior. Satisfied and committed employees, for instance, have lower rates of turnover, absenteeism, and withdrawal behaviors. They also perform better on the job. Given that managers want to keep resignations and absences down—especially among their more productive employees—they will want to do the things that will generate positive job attitudes.

The most important action managers can take to raise employee satisfaction is to focus on the intrinsic parts of the job, such as making the work challenging and interesting. Although
paying employees poorly will likely not attract high-quality employees to or keep high performers in the organization, managers should realize that high pay alone is unlikely to create a satisfying work environment. Managers should also be aware that employees’ cognitive dissonance can be managed. If employees are required to engage in activities that appear inconsistent to them or are at odds with their attitudes, the pressures to reduce the resulting dissonance will be lessened when employees perceive that the dissonance is externally imposed and beyond their control or that the rewards are significant enough to offset the dissonance.

Learning Positive reinforcement is a powerful tool for modifying behavior. By identifying and rewarding performance-enhancing behaviors, management increases the likelihood that such behaviors will be repeated. Our knowledge about learning further suggests that reinforcement is a more effective tool than punishment. Although punishment eliminates undesired behavior more quickly than negative reinforcement does, punished behavior tends to be only temporarily suppressed rather than permanently changed and may produce unpleasant side effects, such as lower morale and higher absenteeism or turnover. In addition, the recipients of punishment tend to become resentful of the punisher. Managers, therefore, are advised to use reinforcement rather than punishment.