Unit 5 DB Lecture:

Welcome to our Unit 5 Discussion Board! This week, you will read about goal setting, rewards and reinforcement in organizations, and how compensation can be tied to performance. The focus of the study in Unit 5 includes the characteristics of effective interventions that can be used to change behavior and lead to target outcomes for organizations.

Goal setting, when used correctly, can be a powerful intervention to change behavior in organizations; however, it can be a challenging endeavor for organization leaders. A general rule when setting goals is that goals should be challenging, yet attainable. If a goal is too challenging, it may never be achieved and, as a result, there will be an overall decline in behavior. But, if a goal is set too low, you may limit the potential for high performance. Making the goal very clear, with a defined time limit, will set the stage for high performance.

To ensure all necessary components are included in goals, the acronym SMART may be utilized. SMART stands for specific, measureable, achievable, relevant, and time bound. Although Daniels is critical of using this when creating goals because it is missing an important component, positive reinforcement, SMART creates a clear starting point and format for creating clear goals. Incorporating a reinforcement contingency with the SMART goal approach allows one to clarify how and when behavior will be reinforced. When evaluating goals, consider whether they meet all of the characteristics of SMART goals and ensure that the behaviors and results discussed are objective and measureable. Also, decide on the reinforcement criteria. Remember that it does not matter how SMART a goal is if the consequence is not appropriately delivered once the criteria is met.

Another method that can be utilized to ensure effective goal setting is to set smaller goals along the way and to make changes slowly. It is not the most effective process to expect the same change across all performers. This, like any other process, should be individualized by evaluating the performer’s baseline level of performance and gradually building on that. This process of setting small goals and gradually changing them is referred to as shaping. Shaping is reinforcing approximations to target goal and gradually increasing the requirement over time. This approach may seem counterintuitive, especially in organizations where time is money, but the fastest way to improve performance is by reinforcing small improvements along the way. Research shows that the amount of change is equal to the amount of reinforcement provided. This means more reinforcement equals higher performance.

In behavior analysis, shaping is thought of as an art form and is an extremely effective tool that can be utilized in coaching, managing, and supervising. In order to use shaping effectively, one must be able to break down the goal or the target into smaller targets, reinforce meeting those targets, and gradually increase the reinforcement requirement over time. For example, if the goal is to increase the number of customers with completed checkouts in 1 hour from 5 to 10, one might start out by reinforcing checking out 5; once the employee is reliably checking out 5, then move to only rewarding at 7, and so on, until the goal of 10 is obtained. This allows the performer to quickly contact the reward while continually striving to work towards the ultimate result for the organization. Shaping, just as with many of the other interventions we have discussed this term, may take more time at the front end but will lead to longer lasting results overall.

There has already been much discussion about reinforcement and improving performance in organizations. There are many different ways in which this can be maximized to ensure that an organization is seeing more desirable behaviors and decreasing the occurrence of undesirable behaviors. Outside the behavior analytic world, there is often criticism of the use of rewards, stating that they interfere with intrinsic motivation. The age-old statement, “That’s what they are getting paid for,” does not get us very far when we are trying to change performance. People should do many things, but behavior goes where reinforcement flows, so if we want people to perform at certain levels, the reinforcement needs to match the expected performance. Just as with other interventions, when implemented correctly, rewards and recognition can help improve an organization, and those not implemented correctly could negatively impact an organization.

One common recognition system used by large organizations all over the US is the employee of the month system. This is a great demonstration of why the principles of reinforcement are important when implementing any reward system. Although employee of the month is implemented with the best of intentions, it is rarely effective in changing staff behavior. In relation to the rules that make reinforcement effective, the employee of the month system does not highlight specific performance. The performer rarely knows why he or she is receiving the reward in the first place. It also has very weak contingencies, as the reward is presented long after a specific behavior has occurred, so the likelihood that it will improve performance is limited. Potentially, one of the biggest drawbacks to this type of system is the fact that it is competitive and only allows one individual to gain the reward. This violates an important rule of reward systems, that there should be no losers. The employee of the month system creates losers out of every other team member who does not win the award. Organizations can provide more effective awards for performance simply by increasing the frequency of delivery, ensuring there is a clear contingency tying behavior to reward, ensuring the rewards are individualized, allowing the performer to identify why he or she earned the recognition, and ensuring that there are a variety of reinforcers — not just money.

An additional method used in organizations to increase performance is compensation and performance appraisal. Remember the PIC/NIC analysis from Unit 3? The most effective consequence to increase behavior is positive, immediate, and certain. In most organizations, pay is positive, immediate, and future. This means it does not have a large impact on the day-to-day work of an individual. As a matter of fact, most common pay structures provide the same pay to someone who shows up at the office, stays for 8 hours, and accomplishes nothing and to the person who comes to the office, stays for 8 hours, and completes five assignments. The same can be said for annual bonuses; again, due to the delay between when behavior occurs and when the reward is delivered, these do very little to impact day-to-day behavior.

Using pinpointing to address performance and pay in organizations is a manner in which typical pay structures can be changed to support high performance. One way this can be achieved is through the use of a performance matrix. This is a flexible manner in which a performer can be ranked daily on a variety of activities that are critical to his or her job roles and responsibilities and contributions to the outcomes for the organization. Performance can be objectively evaluated with clear measures tied to behavior and results in the organization. With a performance matrix, employees are truly paid based solely on their performance.

Thank you for viewing the Unit 5 Discussion Board lecture!