

THE IMPACT OF OPERANT BEHAVIORISM ON THE AUTHENTIC LEADER DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the relationship between the education of authentic leadership and the operant behavior of B. F. Skinner. The paper aims to demonstrate the concepts and distinctive aspects of operant conditioning in the progression of behavior modification and the education of authentic leadership. This paper gives an approach of where to go and what can be achieved through the method of operant conditioning of Skinner. The concrete and practical implementation of this theory in the education and development of authentic leaders, is based majorly on the researches and work carried out by Bruce J. Avolio. Taking into consideration the fact that the authentic leader is based associated with positive experiences and reinforcements, we have another reason to relate the operant behaviorism with the authentic leader.

Keywords: Operant behaviour, operant conditioning, cognitive, positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, authentic leadership.

Happiness is a product of operant reinforcement; the things which make us happy are the things which reinforce us (B. F. Skinner Personality J. Burger).

Introduction

The greatest quest today is in the search for leaders. Several organizations are investing so much funds and are budgeting so much towards the development of leaders. Studies on the styles of leadership today are numerous with varying models. The competition of organisations and corporation today is increasing. However, the competition is that organizations are distinguished by small changes or differences. Thus, hard work is required..

In this context, our judgment on today's contemporary difference is to study the development of the authentic leader as it is the main focus of the

current study. Consequently, the study of the authentic leader is old, but in the context of scientific studies, it is new.

However, there are still no final definitions on the dimensions and characteristics of this style of leadership. What is important to note is that, like all other styles of leadership, a leader is not born but made through education. In support of this opinion, we will present some scientific arguments of learning processes and behavior. However, it argues that methods of Skinner's operant learning are very significant in the development of an authentic leader.

As the infant child begins to falter and walk, the parent and relatives try to express their satisfaction through cheering or similar forms. Hence, these concepts continue with various forms. Even when the child begins school, the child is being rewarded by the parents when he/she has good, very good, and excellent grades. This reward process of the child continues in the home or family by giving gift items after appraisal. The same thing applies throughout the learning process, and indeed, the learning process accompanies man throughout his life. However, B.F. Skinner quoted that: *“Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten. B. F. Skinner”*⁷⁰. Through this, we clearly understand learning as an important process for behavior modification.

The aforementioned methods and forms are not only rewards which affect the behavior conditioning through positive and negative reinforcements, but are actions which through the behavior modification, comes the confidence and reliance upon the individual.

The strengthened or weakened behavior is as a result of the impact of reinforcement, which is stimulus response and reinforcement. Thus, this is the basis of the work of Skinner. The reinforcement is a fundamental process in behaviorism, where Skinner controls the behaviors and modifies them. Skinner sees the positive and negative reinforcement to be strengthening the positive and erasing the negative, to produce behavior modification, and foster the development of preferred behaviors.

In fact, we have also argued that the conditional behavior brings more confidence than the unconditional behavior. Thus, this general model can be a bit more complex.⁷¹

Following the ideas of the Skinner's theory of learning (e.g. Skinner, 1969), the systematic modification of behavior should begin with the consequences, i.e. reward and punishment. In this regard, various options to

⁷⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B._F._Skinner

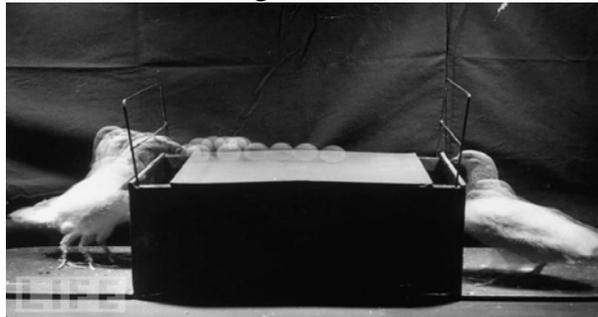
⁷¹ Operant Leadership and Employee Citizenship: A Question of Trust? Robert S. Rubin, William H. Bommer, Daniel G. Bachrach . The Leadership Quarterly 21 (2010) 400–408

increase the desired behavior and reduce the unwanted behavior are available to the leader.

Therefore, leaders seem to live in a difficult time because globalization, politics, technological developments and social networks, exerts pressure on the public, while the public in these conditions needs leaders to proffer solutions to them.⁷²

Joseph Wolpe referring to the methodology of B.F. Skinner, taught his daughter how to slide from the top of the slide with a phobia height.⁷³ Initially, Joseph Wolpe took his daughter which was at the end of the slide without raising any centimeter from the ground. Then after his daughter became familiar with the slide, he asked her (the daughter) to distract her from the ground at only 5 cm, and he brought her to 10 cm height until the girls slides freely from above. From here began the method of systematic desensitization, a legend method in the field of positive psychology which is widely used today. In fact, it is more of a behavioral therapy, because it educates the individual how to divide the behavior from the easiest to the difficult. This is done by creating the trust for what appears difficult, and educating the individual on everyday life to assume the modification of numerous and difficult behaviors. On the other hand, we considered the study of B.F. Skinner with pigeons by which he learned how to play ping pong. Somehow, it seems incredible just as Pygmalion effect.

How did he learn from the pigeons on how to play ping pong? He placed them on a small table; and on the center of the table, he threw a ping pong ball and whenever the pigeons hit the ball towards the proper destination, he rewarded them with food while the errors were not considered. Gradually and step by step, the pigeons reached the proper point of playing ping pong. The rat in the cage was left without eating. Over time, as the hunger was increasing which is associated with the adrenaline amount, the rat adds to the movements until it accidentally touches the crank or the lever that rewards with food. Therefore, through this incidence, the rat learns to directly touch the lever that brings the food.



⁷² http://www.kho.edu.tr/Dokuman/enstitu/tezler/Serkan_Cosar.pdf

⁷³ Ciroka Ndricim, Cikël leksionesh. Psikologji Bihejviorale , 2007

As in the case of the girl with the slide and also that of the pigeons, we have the division of behaviors which is known by Pavlov and Watson as the psychology atom. In this progression, we have the increase of the self-reliance of the girl towards an action and an achievement that probably will not ever modify reliance and self-confidence to achieve the difficulty. However, to climb to the height seems to be a very important and significant process.

The positive reinforcement to what is rewarded and avoiding what is not rewarded is a very important process towards behavioral modification in the logical fantasy of every individual.

In fact, B.F. Skinner is the founder of behavior modification through positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement. The positive reinforcement is when the result of a behavior has a positive stimulus. Therefore, if the authentic leader does not have positive stimuli, he would not behave naturally with full reliance. Hence, we think that its authentic behaviors are the result of positive reinforcements which gives him reliance and self-confidence.

Methods of positive reinforcement are among the most used in organizational environments because they maximize the achievements and performance of each individual in the organization. This begins from the monetary rewards to the different methods such as praises, career advancement etc. Empirical studies for the past 20 years showed that the application of theories of reinforcement has a 17 percent increase in performance. In addition, many reinforcement techniques such as the use of praise, provides higher performance for lower costs.⁷⁴

What connects the authentic leader more with the operant conditioning and positive reinforcement by taking away from the classic radical conditioning of Watson is the fact that positive reinforcement does not ignore the facts of consciousness and the experience of consciousness (B.F. Skinner, 1969). E. Tolman was among the first of the school of behaviorism who used the intentional behavior to distinguish Skinner from Watson in ignoring consciousness.

This approach of the theory of learning or motivation is usually considered as classic and/ or behavioral, and the appropriate stage in the development of the theory of leadership is called an operant period (e.g. Ashour and Johns, 1983).

Based on many studies today on authentic leadership, we see clearly that the concentrations are the characteristics which form the authentic leader. Also, we observed some thoughts that focus on the impact that the

⁷⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leadership>

authentic leaders have to followers, based on their performance or behaviors that are essential for the organizational environment.

While we think to stop precisely at a very important concept, if the authentic leader is learned and if learned, with what psychological processes does it operates? Do the experiences of the individual give him reliance and self-confidence, causing his behavior to be continuously in the process of modification and reinforcement? In these circumstances, we face the fact of behavior plus consciousness. Furthermore, Skinner unlike Watson does not ignore the processes of consciousness in the framework of intentional behaviorism of Tolman line (the study with labyrinths).

Avolio & Gardner (2005) stated that:

Luthans and Avolio initially defined the authentic leadership "as a process that draws from both positive psychological orientations, and is highly developed in organizational context which results in the process of self-awareness and self-regulation of positive behaviors by the leaders and collaborators, thus promoting the positive self-development." (Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

Is the self-regulation step by step?

If a child move and falls when learning to ride a bicycle, he will become more careful as he learns to ride the bicycle. The repetition of actions gives hope that he is learning, and creates the motivation and positive reinforcement he needs. Thinking in this manner, the individual tends to be self-regulated.

In this continuation of thoughts, the aforementioned processes of self regulation, learning, self monitoring, self efficacy, self reinforcement, and verbal behavior are operant of Skinner, but if they were imitation or modeling, they would be the concepts of Albert Bandura. It should be noted that modeling could be effective in observing the followers toward the authentic leader, but not their development.

In this respect, the authentic leader and dimensions of authentic leaders are more in tune with Skinner's processes than with those of Albert Bandura. However, authentic word itself cannot stand alongside the words imitation and modeling. (Luthans & Avolio, 2003: 243; Bruce Avolio, William Gardner, Lubbock Tara, and Suzanne Peterson (2008)). In their suggestion that the work with the authentic leader consists of four points, the abovementioned authors⁷⁵ in the fourth point suggest to study whether the authentic leader can be learned. The presentation of definitions and

⁷⁵<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1021&context=managementfacpub>

dimensions of authentic leaders will help us clarify our hypothesis and the idea that the authentic leader can be developed through the operant methods of Skinner.

We conclude that authenticity in view of the development seems to be developed and continues to develop dynamically in the environment in relation to people, colleagues, and family. Hence, collaborators are those who contribute to positive and negative reinforcements.

Reinforcements are processes that affect consciousness in the sense of confidence and reliance.

If the self-confidence of the authentic leader comes from experience, then experience itself is a repetition of behaviors. On the other hand, if the motivation is mobilized by confidence, it turns out that the experiences of positive reinforcements are elements that increase motivation. On the other hand, if hope is generated from combined repetitions, then we arrive at a clear conclusion that we are dealing with operant and cognitive behaviorism starting from E. Tolman, and detailed by Skinner.

It is also another form of **complex learning**, but it does not include the reward which according to Tolman is the **latent learning**. However, in his study with rats, he showed that rats knew the way into the labyrinth without placing the food in its proper position. From here, we can clearly understand behavioral cognitivism⁷⁶.

Optimism is a product of positive experiences and positive reinforcements. Peterson (2000) believes that optimism is motivated and motivating, and in this context, the optimism of behavior modification must have high motivation at work. Also, high moral reflection is required during the performance.

Another contribution of Skinner's Operant is that in his studies on applications in education, he believes that more than punishment would not make someone better because punishment does not change or improve someone's behavior. Furthermore, Skinner states that supporting the expected behavior will have a tendency of repetition being improved as behavior. At the same time, this process in the application of individual behavioral modification affects the growth of optimism. If one of the characteristics of leaders is rhetoric, this is again Skinner's methodology that has contributed significantly to the development of verbal behavior. Therefore, this means that one of the functions of a leader is rhetoric or speech-making, of which Skinner provides an appropriate guidance to develop.

To show how the behavior is affected by these reinforcements, Skinner showed the programs of reinforcement.

⁷⁶ Ndricim Ciroka Psikologji biheviorale, Cikël leksionesh, 2009

Continuous Reinforcement: This reinforcement is realized when the rat is still rewarded with the repetition of behavior.

Fixed Intervals Reinforcement: This process is realized by means of time intervals. When the rat needs to measure time itself, time would be assigned. If it presses the crank at this time, it is rewarded. But if otherwise, the rat is not rewarded. It happens that they receive a reward or a jetton (some food) when they have pressed many times for a certain time interval. Therefore, this is how rats slow down the process of finding reinforcement and increase velocity when approaching the time.

Fixed Ratio Program: When determining the ratio of a press, it is rewarded with x amount for three presses 5, 7, 10, 15 etc.

Consequently, with variable intervals, rats failed to orient because they do not determine the rhythm between the proceeding and the reward. Then, we have the mechanism of the game by which we create a situation that no one knows when we will win again, probably like in games of chance, bingo etc.

Verbal Behavior

According to Skinner, sounds released by people when they speak and the crank of the rat when reinforced by the findings of food has similarity. From this, Skinner had an interest on verbal behavior. The sounds of a baby are reinforced by the culture where he grows, but independent verbal behaviors are reinforced by the mechanism of culture. For verbal behavior, Skinner believes that two people are required: one who speaks and the other who listens. When the speaker has a reaction, he makes a sound for the listeners. Thus, there is a possibility to control the other behavior that would follow from the speaker based on the reward and punishment from the listener. We know that, if the listener smile or welcomes the words of the speaker, then the speaker can reinforce the proceeding and vice versa. Subsequently, if the listener frowns or does not welcome the sayings of the speaker again in this proceeding, the speaker may reinforce behaviors. This opinion of Skinner was related to children who begin to talk, and how they are rewarded or punished by parents. Therefore, they are reinforced. He has summarized these opinions in his publication "*Verbal Behavior*" (1957)⁷⁷.

The verbal behavior is important because authentic leaders are distinguished based on their high level of communication with followers.

⁷⁷ Ndricim Ciroka Psikologji biheviorale cikel leksionesh, 2009

Conclusion

Based on the above-mentioned considerations, we arrived at the following conclusions:

- The positive reinforcement increases motivation.
- The positive reinforcement increases self-confidence.
- The operant conditioning is the most advanced method in the modification of behaviors, mainly in positive improvements.

The operant behaviorism and cognitive behaviorism are strong arms to develop an authentic leader. Therefore, according to Avolio, it is the cornerstone for the development of other styles of leadership.

The authentic leader is an ethical and a high moral leader. Today, the authentic leader is the most valuable leader in business and corporations, life, as well as in public administration and in the political sector.

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