

Motivating Operation

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Motivating operations or establishing operations, are a concept in behaviorism involving the effectiveness of consequences in operant conditioning. They explain why a person wants or does not want something and why they act or do not act in a particular moment.

History

It was introduced by Jack Michael around 1980. Different terminology was introduced to describe the concept in 2004, changing it from establishing operation to motivating operation.

Concept

The concept primarily is concerned with the motivation of an organism, or what behavior a person will engage in a particular moment. It focuses on the idea that an organism is constantly fluctuating between states of satiation and deprivation of reinforcers. A simple example is created with food, food deprivation makes you "want" food and food satiation makes you "want" food less.

A motivating operation with respect to motivation has two effects: value altering and behavior altering. The value altering effect states that it alters the value of a consequence of behavior by making it more or less reinforcing. The behavior altering effect states that it immediately evokes or suppresses behaviors that have resulted in the consequence linked to the behavior in the past. The motivating operation of deprivation of food in this particular example would establish the stimulus of food as reinforcing and evoke behaviors that in the past have resulted in food, while the motivating operation of being satiated of food abolishes the stimulus of food's reinforcing effect and abates behaviors that in the past have resulted in food.

Note that this concept is different than that of the stimulus discriminate. The stimulus discriminate is correlated with the differential availability of reinforcement, while the motivating operation is correlated with the differential effectiveness of a reinforcer.

In B.F. Skinner's book Verbal Behavior, conditioned motivating operations are broken into three categories:

CMO-surrogate

CMO-transitive

CMO-reflexive

Controversy

There is some debate as to whether an organism's states of deprivation and satiation are only biological states or if they can be metaphysical states. That is, whether an organism can be deprived or satiated from only unconditioned reinforcers or if they can be deprived and satiated

from conditioned reinforcers. Leading to the theory that there are unconditioned motivating operations (UMO) and conditioned motivating operations (CMO).

It has also been used to explain Maslow's hierarchy of needs by describing the lower two levels as UMOs and the upper three levels as CMOs.

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