

Communication

Response-Stimulus Concept of Motivation & the Bhagavad Gita

Subba Rao Pulapa

Introduction

Operant conditioning of learning states that learning occurs as a consequence of behavior i.e., Responseà Stimulus (RàS). Operant conditioning is used by organizational behavior researchers to explain the effectiveness of managers (Judith L. Komaki, 1986).

Concept

Some employees work with commitment and sincerity. Working sincerely with commitment is employee response (R). Some managements recognize such employees and reward them as stimulus (S). Employees who are rewarded by the management for their commitment and sincerity, are motivated to repeat their behavior of sincerity and commitment. Stimulus (S) to the primary response (R) leads to repetition/ enhancement of such a be-

havior. Thus, the concept response leads to stimulus (RàS) can also be applied to motivation. Rewarding an employee who works for longer hours/ with commitment through an incentive is an example of stimulating or motivating an employee. Some employees normally work for longer hours out of their sincerity, and commitment or interest in the job. However, some employees do so with an expectation of an incentive or favor.

Management normally stimulates or motivates self-committed employees to repeat their response/behavior. This may be referred to as Response-Stimulus (R-S) Motivation Concept. In fact, Bhagavan Sri Krishna, 5,200 years ago while preaching the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna just prior to Kurukshetra War (a part of Mahabharat-great epic of India) told that the way people approach Me, I reward them accordingly (The Bhagavad Gita, 4:11). Bhagavan Sri Krishna categorically indicated that He rewards people in the way they approach Him. It does mean that people have to worship the Lord to get their desires met by the Bhagavan Krishna.

Subba Rao Pulapa worked as Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor, and Professor of Management in various Universities in India and abroad including Sri Krishnadevara University, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh

In addition, the Lord reveals Himself to the people in the way they consider Him (The Bhagavad Gita, 4:11). For example, Prince Druva has performed deep penance and austerities with pure devotion for six months and then Lord fulfilled his desire (Srimad Bhagavatam, 4:9). Thus, the Response-Stimulus concept of Motivation is similar to what Bhagavan told to Arjuna 5,200 years back. Classical behaviorists attributed learning to the connection between stimulus and learning. According to them, stimulus leads to response as indicated by classical conditioning (Weiss, 1990). Application of classical conditioning of learning to motivation indicates that rewards offered by management (Stimulus) leads to employee motivation (Response). But, application of operant conditioning of learning indicates that some employees are motivated and then management rewards such employees. However, people who are selfless and self-committed are motivated without expecting any reward.

Action Without Expectation

Bhagawan Sri Krishna explained in the Bhagavad Gita about action without expectation (The Bhagavad Gita, 4:22). An individual is motivated to act without expectation of results, provided he/she thinks selflessly like mother nurtures her child or a religious preacher preaches. Individual in such a case, views and treats positive results, negative results and 'no results' situations equally. Response-Stimulus concept of motivation indicates that an individual is stimulated to repeat

his/her action, when he/she is rewarded to his response. Most of the people as well as employees are stimulated to repeat their actions, provided they are rewarded immediately. Some people and employees would continue to be stimulated even if they are not rewarded immediately, viewing that they would be rewarded in the long-run. But a few individuals who are selfless are stimulated to repeat their actions whatever the results may be i.e., whether they are rewarded or not. It is viewed that most of the stakeholders in religious organizations, some stakeholders in non-government organizations (NGOs)/ not for profit organizations (NPOs) continue to be stimulated irrespective of the response/ reward. Such people are never attached to the results of fruit of action including recognition for their contributions. Lord Krishna says such an individual is never entangled to his/her action and he/she then is free from any further expectations. Such people who are motivated and act without attachment to results are like sages (The Bhagavad Gita, 4:19). Employees of this category are also found in business organizations, though rarely.

It is viewed that this concept of motivation is greatly applicable in religious organizations as the stakeholders normally act selflessly, moderately applicable in non-government organizations (NGOs)/ not for profit organizations (NPOs) and to a little extent in other organizations. However, application of this theory would result in complete concentration of individual on work to give best of oneself rather than employing interventions with expectations/ predetermined goal.

Conclusion

Motivation to respond/act without attachment to results would (i) enable individuals to achieve their highest level of needs; (ii) contribute to satisfaction of service provider as well as receiver; (iii) facilitate near-equal distribution of resources and opportunities in the organization/ economy; (iv) free the parties from grievances and (v) in harmonious and peaceful human relations.

However, the major limitation of this concept would be its application in religious organizations to a greater extent, in not-for-profit organizations/non-government organizations to a moderate extent and in for-profit organizations to a limited extent, provided people are selfless. In fact, people are expected to be selfless in religious and not-for-profit organizations.

References

- Judith L. Komaki (1986), "Towards Effective Supervision: An Operant Analysis of Comparison of Managers at Work", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 17 (2): 270-79.
- Srimad Bhagavatam, Canto-4, Chapter-9.
- The Bhagavad Gita, Chapter-4, Verse-11
- The Bhagavad Gita, Chapter-4, Verse, 19.
- The Bhagavad Gita, Chapter-4, Verse, 22.
- Weiss, H.M. (1990), "Learning Theory and Industrial and Organizational Psychology" in Dunnett, M.D., and Hough, L.M., (eds), *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Consulting Psychologist Press*, :170-221.