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Social Cognitive Theory, basic concepts and understanding

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Social Cognitive Theory

F. Pajares (1996) In Social Foundations of Thought and Action, Albert Bandura (1986) wrote that individuals possess a self-system that enables them to exercise a measure of control over their thoughts, feelings, and actions. This self-system houses one's cognitive and affective structures and includes the abilities to symbolize, learn from others, plan alternative strategies, regulate one's own behavior, and engage in self-reflection. It also plays a prominent role in providing reference mechanisms and a set of sub functions for perceiving, regulating, and evaluating behavior, which results from the interplay between the self-system and external environmental sources of influence. As such, the self-system serves a self-regulatory function by providing individuals with the capability to alter their environments and influence their own actions.

Bandura felt that the behavioral models did not adequately explain how adults learned and that important psychological processes had been overlooked or only partially studied. The most notable finding that prompted his work was that people could learn new actions merely by observing others perform them and this did not fit into the behavioral model of learning. The enactive model that promoted leaning by performing tasks and keeping or discarding the learning based on whether the task was successful was far too limiting, particularly in complex work where to simply do the task to learn it is virtually impossible.

Albert Bandura (1977, p. 22) states, "Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling; from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. Because people can learn from example what to do, at least in approximate form, before performing any behavior, they are spared needless errors."

Of important note to the discussion of Social Cognitive Theory is the concept of latent action based on observation. A learner may very well not use what is observed for weeks, months, or indeed years. Enactive learning or practice will help solidify the learning from vicarious observational learning.

Theorists and or Authors

Theorists primarily include Bandura and Zimmerman with others to include but not limited to Rosenthal, Berger, and Schunk.

Social Cognition Key Learning Concepts

The foundation of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory is reciprocal interactions. The major break from behavioral theorists came with Bandura's model of triadic reciprocity. In this model, Bandura postulated that the person, the behavior, and the environment were all inseparably entwined to create learning in an individual. The next quote by Bandura states this quite clearly.

Albert Bandura (1986, p. 18) In the social cognitive view people are neither driven by inner forces nor automatically shaped and controlled by external stimuli. Rather, human functioning is explained in terms of a model of triadic reciprocity in which behavior, cognitive and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of each other.

Schunk (2000) According to social cognitive theory, observing a model does not guarantee learning or later ability to perform the behaviors. Rather, models serve informational and motivational functions by providing information about probable consequences of actions and affecting observers' motivation to act accordingly. Factors influencing learning and performance are developmental status of learners, prestige and competence of models, vicarious consequences to models, goals, outcome expectations, and perceived self-efficacy.

Schunk (2000, p. 108) Self-efficacy refers to personal beliefs about one's capabilities to learn or perform actions at designated levels. Albert Bandura (1997) Self-efficacy is a belief about what one is capable of doing; it is not the same as knowing what to do. In gauging efficacy, individuals assess their skills and their capabilities to translate those skills into actions.

Theorist understanding

In Pajares (1996), the description by the author of Bandura's understanding of social cognitive theory and its components is as clear as I can be on what he may understand of

this body of work. "How individuals interpret the results of their performance attainments informs and alters their environments and their self-beliefs, which in turn inform and alter their subsequent performances. This is the foundation of Albert Bandura's (1978 & 1986) conception of reciprocal determinism, the view that (a) personal factors in the form of cognition, affect, and biological events, (b) behavior, and (c) environmental influences create interactions that result in a triadic reciprocity. Because personal agency is socially rooted and operates within sociocultural influences, individuals are viewed both as products and as producers of their own environments and of their social systems.

Albert Bandura (1986) considered self-reflection the most uniquely human capability, for through this form of self-referent thought people evaluate and alter their own thinking and behavior. These self-evaluations include perceptions of self-efficacy, that is, "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Albert Bandura 1997, p. 2). These beliefs of personal competence affect behavior in several ways. They influence the choices individuals make and the courses of actions they pursue. Efficacy beliefs help determine how much effort people will expend on an activity, how long they will persevere when confronting obstacles, and how resilient they will prove in the face of adverse situations-the higher the sense of efficacy, the greater the effort, persistence, and resilience.

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