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UNIT II

PERCEIVING AND UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

ATTRIBUTION: SITUATIONAL AND DISPOSITIONAL CAUSES

We turn now to an examination of how people observe behaviour and draw inferences about what motivates behaviour. The process of attribution— an individual's understanding of the reasons behind peoples' behaviour. Attribution theory is concerned with how individuals interpret events and how this relates to their thinking and behaviour. Heider (1958) was the first to propose a psychological theory of attribution, but Weiner and colleagues (e.g., Jones et al, 1972; Weiner, 1974, 1986) developed a theoretical framework that has become a major research paradigm of social psychology.

- **Situational vs. Dispositional Causes**

Behaviour will be attributed to an external cause when external reasons are more likely or plausible. Conversely behaviour will be attributed to dispositional factor when external causes are unlikely. In an experimental demonstration of this phenomenon, Jones, Gergen and Davis (1961) asked subjects to rate the personality of a job applicant who presented himself as either having or not having the characteristics that were a prerequisite for the job. Subjects were confident about assessing the candidate's true personality only when the candidate had displayed traits that were contrary to ones related to the job requirements.

ATTRIBUTION

Attribution theory is concerned about explaining the world and determining the reason behind the cause of an event or behavior asking "why do people do what they do". Know the reason behind behavior of other individuals and on some events, the cause behind one's own behavior as well. Theories of attribution:

1. Jones and Davis theory (The theory of correspondent inference):-

People engage in a variety of actions but only some of those reveal their personal qualities. Some attributions are dispositional or internal attributions to the person while others are situational, or external, attributions to the environment.

The theory of correspondent inference, deals with the way we utilize information about other person's behavior as a basis for making an inference about the various traits they

possess. Hence, the theory deals with how we make decisions on the basis of overt actions of other individuals about how they possess certain traits or dispositions. The task is not easy as it seems. Often one behaves in a certain way not due to dispositions but due to external factors. Socially desirable behavior is not clearly revealing of personal characteristics. We cope with such complications, by focusing our attention on certain types of actions which are most likely to prove informative Theory of correspondent inference, it is more likely concluded that the behavior of others reflects their stable traits when that behavior is freely chosen, has non-common effects and is low in social desirability.

2. Kelley theory(Covariation theory):-

There are three major types of information that we focus up onto answer why about others behavior

Consensus: consensus refers to differentiating the reaction of the person being considered to a given stimulus to that of the reaction of other individuals, the greater number of people who act in the similar manner.

Consistency: Consistency refers to which individual in question gives the same reaction time and again to a particular stimulus on other different occasions and events.

Distinctiveness: Distinctiveness refers to the extent to which the individual in question gives reactions in a similar manner to varied stimulus.

The behavior of the person in question is attributed to internal causes in a condition when both consensus and distinctiveness are low whereas consistency. The behavior of the person in question is attributed to external causes in case consensus, distinctiveness & consistency, all three are high. Lastly, the behavior of the person in question is attributed to both internal and external factors when only consensus is low, but consistency and distinctiveness are high.

IMPRESSION FORMATION AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

In a classic study Luchins (1957) gave subjects a two paragraph description of a boy named Jim. One paragraph Jim walking to school with others and participating in a member of other activities. In short he was portrayed as an extrovert. In the second paragraph, the activities described were similar but Jim did them all alone, thus appearing introvert. Subjects were presented with the two paragraphs, but the order was reversed according to condition. When asked to form an overall impression of Jim subjects' responses demonstrated a strong primacy effect. Primacy effect refers to the condition in which early information has a stronger impact than later information. If subject had read the extrovert paragraph first, they found them considerably more extraverted than if they had read the introvert paragraph first, and vice versa. More recent work confirms that indeed early information is weighted more heavily than later information. This holds true even when the later information is very salient and clearly contradicts earlier information.

On the other hand recency effects, in which later information is given more credence than early information, have been reliably produced under three sorts of conditions. First, when people are asked specifically to make a second evaluation following the presentation of new information, late information takes on more importance than earlier information. Second, if there is a relatively large time span between the presentation of new information and the initial exposure, recency effects are likely to occur. Finally, later information is given heavier weight if the task is one which people assume that practice might improve performance.

- **Schemas: Holding our Impressions Together**

Given the diversity of people and settings that one encounters passing through everyday life, we might suspect that people could easily become overwhelmed with the sheer quantity of information relating to what others are like. To avoid becoming overwhelmed, people need to organise their impressions of others. The way that they are able to do this is through the production of schemas. Schemas are organised bodies of information stored in memory. The information in a schema provides a representation of the way in which social world operates as well as allowing us to categorise and interpret new information related to the schema.

We all hold schemas relating to everyday objects in our environment. We might, for instance, hold a schema for automobiles –we have an idea of what they look like, how they are used, what they can do for us and how to differentiate them from other vehicles such as buses and horse and buggy. More importantly, from a social psychological point of view we hold a schema for particular people (one's mother, girlfriend, boyfriend, brother, or sister) and of classes of people playing a given role (mail carriers, teachers, or librarians). Each of these schemas provides a way of organising behaviour into meaningful wholes.

PROTOTYPES

The personality types that we derive in the case of person perception are organised into schemas known as prototypes. Prototypes are schemas that organise a group of personality traits into a meaningful personality type. For example, Nancy cantor and walter Mischel (1979) suggest a frequently held prototype concerns a person labeled on a general level as committed.

At the most specific level called the subordinate level— the prototype consists of different types of committed individuals for example monks, nuns and activists. At the middle level of specificity, there are basic classes of individuals: the religious devotee or social activist. The subordinate and middle levels of specificity are subsumed under the broader super ordinate level which encompasses the prototype as a whole.

The importance of prototypes lies in three directions:

I. Prototypes allow people to recall more readily, recognise and categorise information about others. In a sense then information processing capabilities are enhanced through the use of prototypes.

II. Prototypes help us to organise the social world around us. By observing relatively few traits or behaviours, we are able to categorise people into certain prototypes and this in turn allows us to form expectations about others' behaviours.

III. Prototypes allow people to plan behaviour in social interactions more readily