

Consumer Behavior

6. Learning



José Manuel Fernández Polanco
Patricia Martínez García de Leaniz

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

AREA OF MARKETING AND MARKET RESEARCH

This material is published under:

[Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)



6.1. Definition of learning

6.2. Behaviorist theories

6.3. Cognitive theories

6.4. Memory

6.1. Definition of learning

Behaviorists assume that **mental processes are unobservable** and have to be inferred. **Learning** is shown by **changes in behavior** due to **associations developed between stimuli and resulting responses**.

Cognitivists are concerned with **changes in knowledge** and focus on the **processes by which people learn information**. Learning implies that a **change in knowledge** has been **stored in long term memory**.

Synthesis. “A relatively permanent change in potential response which occurs as the result of reinforced practice”. The process by which **experience leads to changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviors**.

Engle, J. F., Blackwell, R. D. & Miniard, P. W. (1990). *Consumer Behaviour*, (6th Ed). Dryden, NY.

6.2. Behaviorist theories

Trial & error learning. Trying different responses in a problem-solving situation until an effective response is found.

Repeating the exercise results in improvements in performance as unsuccessful previous behaviors are discarded and the best ones remain.

Learning is incremental. The time required to solve the problem decreases as the number of trials increases. The more opportunities you have to solve the problem, the faster the solution.

Learning comes from direct experience. It is not mediated by any process of thinking or reasoning.

Thorndike, E. L. (1905). *The elements of psychology*. New York: A. G. Seiler.

Classical conditioning

Certain behaviors are unconditional. When associated with conditioned stimuli, unconditioned responses can be obtained. Then, unconditioned response becomes conditioned.

The Pavlov experiment

Unconditional stimulus (UCS), the food, produces an, unconditional response (UCR), salivation.

When the UCS is paired a number of times with a conditioned stimulus (CS), a bell, they result in an association causing the UCR, salivation. Further, the CS causes the conditioned response (CR) which is the same as UCR.

Pavlov, I.P. (1927). *Conditional Reflexes*. Oxford University Press.

Classical Conditioning

Reinforcement. A CR depends upon an UCS (the food). Without the expectation of the reinforcement the CS will never generate a CR.

Extinction. When the reinforcement is removed, the CR gradually disappears.

Spontaneous recovery. After a period of time following extinction, CR may reappear temporarily if CS is presented again.

Higher order conditioning. It is possible to link new CS to obtain the same CR. A combination of different CS may increase the occurrence of a given CR.

Operant Conditioning

Individuals are “operating” in the environment. During this process, they encounter a special kind of reinforcement stimulus. The reinforcement has the effect of increasing the operant and the behavior occurs just before the reinforcement.

The behavior is followed by a consequence, and the nature of the consequence modifies the tendency to repeat the behavior in the future. Reinforcements can be positive or negative, and come after the behavior. Behaviors that are negatively reinforced tend to be repeated less often.

In contrast with classical conditioning, where the emphasis is on the stimulus, operant conditioning emphasizes the response.

Skinner, B. F. (1938). *The Behavior of Organisms: An Experimental Analysis*. New York: Appleton-Century.

6.3. Cognitive theories

Cognitive approaches.

Learning is a cognitive process. There are **forms of learning** that are **purely mental** and **not conditioned by stimuli**. Problem solving involves a **pre-solution period**, in which the **subject moves through a number of possible solutions** until they find an effective way of solving the problem.

Insight learning is the mental realization of a problem's solution. It is a **completely cognitive** experience, which requires the ability to **visualize the problem and the solution internally before initiating a behavioral response**. Insight learning **results in a long-lasting change**. Following the occurrence of insight, the realization of how to solve the problem can be repeated in future similar situations.

Kohler, W. (1925). *The Mentality of Apes*, Harcourt, Brace & Co., NY.

Characteristics of insight learning.

The **transition** from pre-solution to solution **is sudden and complete.**

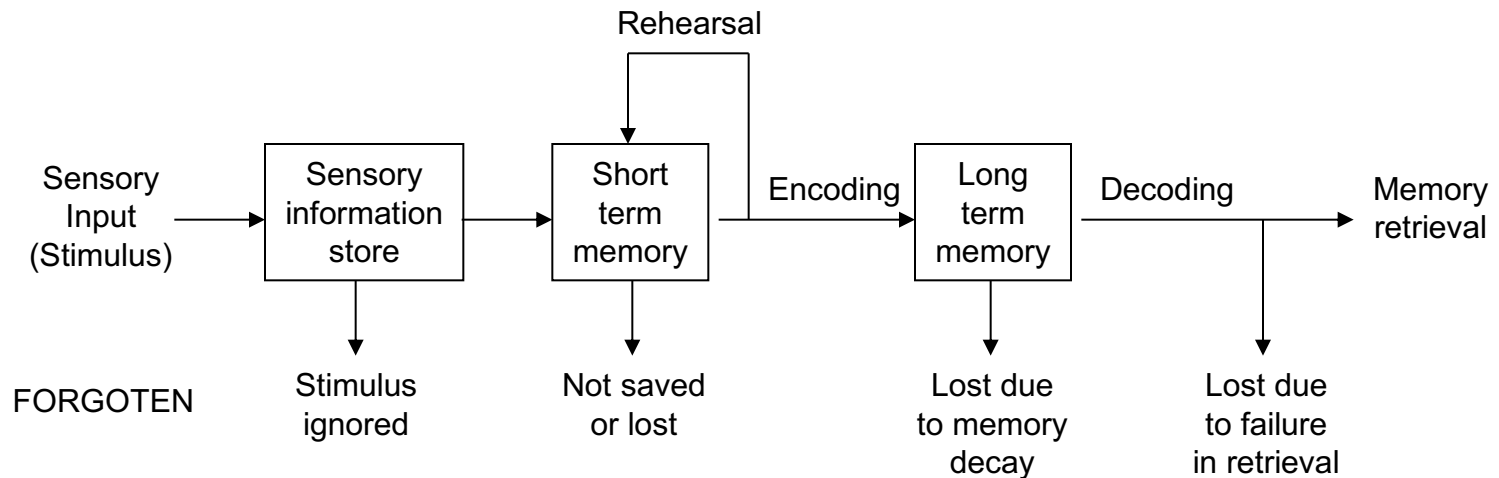
Performance based on a solution found by insight **is usually free of errors.**

A solution obtained by insight **is usually retained longer in the memory.**

A solution obtained by insight **is easily applied to other problems.**

6.4. Memory

The process of memory.



Rice, C. (1993). *Behavioural aspects of Marketing*, Butterworth Heinemann., Oxford.

Sensory information store. A sensory representation of the stimulus which is held in the mind for a brief time. Its capacity is limited by the subject's awareness.

Short term memory. Storage system capable of holding a small amount of information for a short time. Working memory with items only retained for a specific task and replaced as soon as the activity changes.

Long term memory. Stores a larger amount of information for a much longer period. Short term memory results in long term memory after a process of consolidation and repetition.

Rehearsal and elaboration. The processes of repetition and evaluation of the new information before being stored in the long term memory. Subject's interest in the information will improve these processes.

Forgetting & interference theory.

The human brain is imperfect. Forgetting **may occur at any stage of the memory process.**

Our ability to retrieve information is imperfect because **things we have learned** before and after a specific event **may interfere with our capacity to recall** the event.

Retroactive inhibition. Interference occurs when **material** that has been **learned later prevents** the **recall** of the target material.

Proactive inhibition. **Prior learning prevents retrieval** of new information.