

# Chapter 73

## Behavioral Initiatives

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### ABSTRACT

*Organizations that operate within the behavioral perspective often focus more on the technological impact within the workplace environment rather than employee roles. They have been accused treating people as if they are technology since the feelings and emotions of the individual are not valued. They fail to appreciate the intrinsic worth of the individual (Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973). Behaviorists are “interested only in what can be observed directly” (Martinez, 2010, p.6) and since the internal feelings and emotions of people cannot be directly observed, it often goes unacknowledged. It becomes a matter of controlling employee behavior as opposed to understanding their behavior. The purpose of the chapter is to: (1) review behavioral initiatives and how technology has impacted the workplace environment; (2) employee behavior within organizational culture; and (3) examine how organizations that use the behavioral perspective align their people initiatives with their technological initiatives and goals.*

### INTRODUCTION

Employee behavior in the workplace has been both the source of elation and frustration for HR managers and corporate leaders. When employees behave as expected, managers may express joy, despite the fact that some managers do not know how to show appropriate appreciation to the employee, for a job well done. When employees

behave unexpectedly, they may receive correction so that they can improve or may be shown disapproval through termination. The typical employee wants to do a good job. People, through their jobs, are generally striving to improve their lives and their families' without damaging others.

Behavior is directly associated with what people do. What people do can be directly observed and judged even if they do not know why they did what they did. Behavioral researchers have focused on what and definitely not why people do

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what they do especially with regards to workplace performance. In direct contrast to the cognitive perspective, Wittrock (1978) described his perception of Skinner's (1957) ability to introduce reinforcement into instruction. He noted that

*Skinner emphasized the use for instruction of the notion that the environment, not the learner, determines the products of learning, the behaviors. This important concept led to the death of the mind, to accountability for teachers, who are part of the learners' environment, and to behavioral objectives, which are necessary if one teaches by associating behavior, rather than thoughts, to stimuli by frequently, immediately, and repeatedly reinforcing successive approximations of the desired behavior. (p.17)*

Wittrock felt that Skinner's view did not value the person; that Skinner gave the environment and behavioral objective more credit for the person's learning than the mind and action of the person themselves. Skinner's concept also became the predominant viewpoint of workplace learning. Traditionally, learners in the workplace were not expected to think but to do only what they were told to do by their superiors.

Organizations that operate within the behavioral perspective often focus more on the technological impact within the workplace environment rather than the roles of employee. They have been accused of treating people as if they are technology since the feelings and emotions of the individual are not valued. They fail to appreciate the intrinsic worth of the individual (Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973). Behaviorists are "interested only in what can be observed directly" (Martinez, 2010, p.6), and since the internal feelings and emotions of people cannot be directly observed, it often goes unacknowledged. Subsequently, it becomes a matter of controlling employee behavior as opposed to understanding their behavior. Some means managers can use to control employee behavior in the workplace are: selection, new employee

orientation, mentoring, goals, job design, formal regulations, direct supervision, training, performance appraisal, and organizational rewards. The use of these means has produced mixed results for organizations with respect to developing people and technology within the workplace. On-the-job training initiatives are more prevalent in behavioral based organizations. These types of organizations depend on skill transfer occurring quickly so that there is little productivity loss during technology or people development.

The objectives of this chapter are to:

- Review behavioral initiatives and how technology has affected the workplace environment;
- Review employee behavior within organizational culture; and
- Examine how organizations that use the behavioral perspective align their people initiatives with their technological initiatives and goals.

## **BACKGROUND**

Taylor (1911) introduced scientific management into the workplace. Behaviorist adopted and indoctrinated the methodological application of behaviorism (Watson, 1913) in the workplace and its application appears to be scientifically based. With the development of attribution theory (Weiner, 1985) provided explanations of how we judge people differently depending on what meaning we attribute to a given behavior. The attribution theory suggests that observing human behavior helps us determine whether the manifestation of the behavior is due to internal or external factors. This theory further suggests that the determination of the root of the behavior depends on three factors:

- Distinctiveness,
- Consensus, and
- Consistency.

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