



SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY: A VERY BRIEF SUMMARY

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Social Exchange theory is an important psychology and sociology concept that views relationships as result-oriented social interactions and contents that people perform a cost-benefit analysis prior to entering into a relationship and/or undertaking a task, essentially assessing the risks and rewards that it might bring.

Proponents of this theory maintain that people will pursue relationships and new goals when rewards are greater than cost (net profit), and abandon them when the costs are greater than reward (net loss). However, because the value of costs and rewards are highly subjective and intangible, it is argued that individuals make choices about their relationships and goals based on how they perceive the costs and benefits. Athletes, for example, may reduce their level of commitment to a coach relationship and/or a pre-determined goal if the perceived costs start to outweigh the advantages because the “thing” that was initially considered to be of high reward and low cost evolved into something that requires additional costs for lower rewards.

Applying the above concept to coach-specific situations would mean considering how athletes and coaches might appraise the value of their relationships and the goals they are pursuing (i.e., the perceived benefit relative to the perceived cost) and ensuring that measures designed to increase the potential for positive outcomes are in place.

Even if there are a few costs involved (and human behaviour dictates that there probably will be) if the potential for positive outcomes outweigh the possibility of negative results, then the costs will hold little or no value. The theory’s aspect of personal evaluating, however, prevents this decision from being automatic and involves analysing possible alternatives through a process that weighs costs and benefits against a person’s comparison levels.

This analysis may drive a person to the conclusion that the goal he or she is currently pursuing is still better than anything else that’s out there – a decision that may also cause a person to reassess the cost vs benefit value of an existing objective.



Paul Perkins is an associate Professor at the University of Canberra and a member of the Australian Institute of Sport High Performance Coach Development Team. He is a dedicated, passionate and experienced coach, educator and researcher with an extensive background in the Australian sport sector and a passion for helping others and seeing people succeed. Paul is skilled at, and highly experienced in developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating multi-layered sport-based development initiatives and has a thorough understanding of deductive, inductive and abductive reasoning and how these different processes can be used to draw conclusions, make predictions, and/or construct explanations. Whilst Paul’s research has been multi-disciplinary and positioned within the broader societal context, he is currently exploring the benefits of more social and collaborative approaches to coach learning and is interested in contributing to long-term positive outcomes through the use of Australian First Nations methodologies.



SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY: A VERY BRIEF SUMMARY

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Underpinned by the three core concepts below, Bandura's (1987) Social Learning Theory, which he later renamed as Social Cognitive Theory, explains how individuals are able to learn and develop new skills and behaviours through the observation of others, interpreting their actions, and imitating them (Bandura, 1986; 1987).

1. People can learn through observation

The first concept of Bandura's theory is the view that observational learning is dependent on information processing, which occurs between observing the behaviour **[stimulus]** and deciding to imitate it or not **[response]**. Bandura and his colleagues demonstrated this point with their famous bobo doll experiment (Bandura et al., 1961).

The study involved 72 pre-school aged children (36 males/36 females) observing an adult acting aggressively toward a bobo doll (a soft inflatable doll) and included the following conditions:

1. **The model-reward condition:** children observed a second adult give the aggressive model praise and a treat for a "great performance".
2. **The model-punished condition:** children observe a second adult reprimand the model for the aggressive behaviour.
3. **The no-consequence condition:** children simply saw the model behave aggressively.

Later when each child was left alone in a room with the bobo doll and the props used by the adult, the subjects imitated the actions that they had witnessed. For example, the children who witnessed the model-reward and no-consequence conditions were more willing to imitate the aggressive acts than those who witnessed the model-punished condition.

From this study Bandura, concluded that the motivational factors were responsible for the different behaviours and noted three different forms of observational learning can occur:

- > **Live modelling:** An individual observes a behaviour or action in a real-world situation.
- > **Symbolic modelling:** An individual observes a behaviour or action displayed by real or fictional characters in books or visual media.
- > **Verbal instructional modelling:** An individual is verbally supplied with a description or explanation of a behaviour.

2. Internal mental states are important to learning

Described by Bandura (1996; 1997) as '*intrinsic reinforcement*', the second concept of his social learning theory implies that an internal reward such as satisfaction or pride must be present for learning to be effective.

3. Learning does not necessarily lead to a change in behaviour

The final concept of Bandura's theory proposes that not all observed behaviours are effectively learned. According to Bandura (1996; 1997), certain factors influence the success of social learning and a number of requirements must be followed to ensure new learning is achieved. These requirements are described in the table below, along with examples of how they could be applied to a sport situation.



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Requirements	Bandura's description	Sport example
Attention	The individual notices something in the environment	A new athlete observes the behaviour and attitude of other more experienced athletes and the coach
Retention	The individual remembers what was noticed	Confidence Passion Determination Teamwork
Reproduction	The individual produces an action that is a copy of what was noticed	The new athlete adopts these values and attempts to apply them at future training sessions
Motivation	The environment delivers a consequence that enhances the probability the behaviour will occur again	Positive reinforcement and encourage from the coach and athletes

Key Points

- > While the modelling may sometimes be deliberate and planned, it often occurs incidentally as part of routine interaction with various players in the social world of the learner (Bandura, 1996; 1997).
- > The effectiveness of social learning depends on the level of attention that the learner directs to the model, the extent to which the learner is able to code and retain the information, attempts by the learner to reproduce the modelled actions (with repeated attempts usually leading to improved performance), and the motivation of the learner (Bandura, 1996; 1997).
- > Intrinsic reinforcement, such as satisfaction and pride associated with performance of the action, is essential to ongoing motivation. Notably, motivation can be influenced by observing any rewards or punishment experienced by the model because of the observed action (Bandura, 1996; 1997).
- > Social learning is not just a matter of mentally recording an observed behaviour and then replaying it, but instead depends critically on the way in which the learner functions as an active agent in transforming, classifying and organising the modelling stimuli into easily remembered schemes that can be accessed for the purpose of reproducing the behaviour (Bandura, 1996; 1997). This means that different individuals exposed to the same modelling may have different learning outcomes.

References and further reading

- > Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice- Hall.
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