

LEADER DEVELOPMENT AND BANDURA'S SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

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Introduction

The social learning theory was developed by Albert Bandura in 1977. Its concepts are deeply rooted in conventional learning theories (Akers & Jennings, 2016). The main thesis, however, of social learning theory is that an individual learns from his or her interaction with others (Bandura, 1977). The interaction is best understood in the context of society. Bandura (1977) claimed that an individual develops behaviors of others through observation. This happens when, after the observation, the individual imitates and assimilates the behavior he or she has observed in others. The assimilation and imitation of the observed behavior are made even stronger when the experiences involved in the observation are positive, that is, they include rewards pertinent to the behavior (Brezina & Piquero, 2017). Bandura (1977) defines imitation as the process of actually reproducing the motor activity an individual has observed in others.

In recent years, social learning theory has been cited as a vital element in the promotion of desired behavioral transformation and of sustainable human resource management (Deaton, 2015). In fact, social learning theory has arguably been one of the most influential learning and development theories (Kattari, 2015). According to David (2015), social learning theory has often been referred to as the bridge between cognitive learning theories and behavioral learning theories due to its scope which includes motivation, memory, and attention. Regarding this, however, Bandura (1977) argued that not every kind of learning may be attributed to direct reinforcement. This explains why Bandura (1977) incorporated a social element into social learning theory, claiming that new behaviors and information can be learned by merely observing other individuals.

Learning From Other Principle

The fundamental proposition of social learning theory is that an individual learns from others, and vice versa (Bandura, 1977). This learning from other principles happens through observation, imitation, and modeling. As Crain (2015) argued, these principles are presumed to operate in the same manner. For example, learning via observation may occur irrespective of the individual's age. Because exposure to powerful or influential models may occur at any time, learning by modeling becomes a constant possibility (Bandura, 2018).

Bandura explained in his social learning theory that an individual's behavior is molded through interaction with peers and the environment (Kattari, 2015). Bandura's theory is recognized in the field of counseling and psychology, assisting professionals in informing individuals about their behavior and how to change negative behaviors (Kattari, 2015).

Bandura also submitted that individuals become attached to environments where they are socially acknowledged and become dependent on peers and adults who are willing to communicate with them, which in turn, supports positive behavior changes (Kattari, 2015).

Hanna et al. (2013) theorized that the principle behind Bandura's social learning theory is that an individual's behavior is produced from both peers and environment, not the result of the attributes independent of each other. The idea that individual behavior is defined as a constant mutual communication among intellectual, behavioral, and environmental stimuli is supported by prior research (Hanna et al., 2013).

Cognitive and Operant Interpretations

Bandura identified two mechanisms of learning central to the social learning theory: cognitive and operant interpretations. The two interpretations create a four-step process. The first suggests that the individual is aware of something within the environment. Second, the individual memorizes what he or she observes. The third step refers to an individual's specific

behavior. Fourth, the environment indicates a response that prevents the behavior from reoccurring in the future. Overall, the outcome of the four-step process highlights how individual responses to environmental stimuli can be examined as either positive or negative (Hanna et al., 2013).

Social Learning Theory and Leadership

In so far as modeling is concerned, social learning theory also plays a role in leadership (Demirtas et al., 2019). The presence of a role model has an immense impact on the development of leaders. Kang (2019) claimed that other than followers, some leaders are more likely to be ethical than others depending on the observations from an existing model. The identification, internalization of values and attitudes, and emulation depend on the portrayed behavior of the model which includes how the model deals with the decision and consequences of their actions (Presbitero & Teng-Calleja, 2019).

Demirtas et al. (2019) asserted that a role model is proven to be a precursor of ethical leadership. Concerning this, Hu et al. (2018) stated that role modeling is a side-by-side phenomenon as role models are commonly known through their daily conduct and interactions. The way role models behave and treat others has a vital effect on other people around them. Individuals who have workplace role models identified characteristics and behaviors that affected their behavior. Setting high ethical standards and holding accountability are found to be associated with leadership (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019). In line with these traits are honesty and fairness. Ghanem and Castelli (2019) further discussed that humility as well as the willingness to learn from mistakes and experiences take a toll on being a leader.

Saha et al. (2020) stated that there are three possible types of role models that affect the development of a leader. These three types are early childhood role models, career mentors, and top managers. The study concluded that early moral development with the influence of

senior leadership is a requirement in creating the tone of an organization that is most likely to succeed as results showed that an ethical mentor positively affects the growth of a leader, making one more ethical as identified by their peers and colleagues (Karim et al., 2019).

This supports the findings of Presbitero and Teng-Calleja (2019) regarding the relation of social learning perspective in leadership as early childhood models do not automatically show relevance to ethical leadership as seen in the workplace. Additionally, top manager role models do not necessarily serve as the only model with regards to social learning theory. Hence, having a proximate ethical role model throughout a person's development would have a greater chance of helping a person become an effective leader.

Conclusion

Albert Bandura's social learning theory has been applied to and tested by many previous studies the scope of which is multifarious. It has been tested in criminology (Nicholson & Higgins, 2017), parent pain behaviors (Stone & Walker, 2017), self-care behaviors of pre-diabetic individuals (Chen et al., 2015), and in the purchase decision-making process of consumers. The application of the social learning theory in these studies implies no less than its scientific legitimacy. Simply put, the findings of these studies strengthen the applicability of the social learning theory, particularly in the development of leaders.

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