



Motivation and Relaxation

Workshop by Lee Wong, 2014

soteria
CONSULTING

IMPORTANCE

- Motivation: “Internal and external factors that stimulate desire and energy in people to be continually interested and committed to a task, or to make an effort to attain a goal”
- Basically, without it, we would not do anything!
- But what causes motivation?

BACKGROUND

Folk Psychology Theory

- States humans have beliefs and desires: we are motivated to fulfil these desires.
- Not always true (*Habits & Multiple Desires*)

Neoclassical Economics

- Explores Objective values (values) and Subjective values (utility)
- Based off “Rationality” – act in best interest

BACKGROUND

Behaviourism and Reinforcement Learning

- Each individual's actions/behaviours are learned through positive/negative outcomes from previous experiences
 - May be own or other's experiences
- Often begins with 'guesses' for decisions, but gains *reinforcement* through many trials
- BUT what if we need to make a hard choice right now?

BACKGROUND

Reinforcement Learning and Decision Theory

- Focuses on *rationality* for decisions which are time-limited
 - Choose the action with the highest expected utility
- Reinforcement Learning has been shown to be a major part of many of our mental processes, and is controlled by *dopamine* in the brain

BACKGROUND

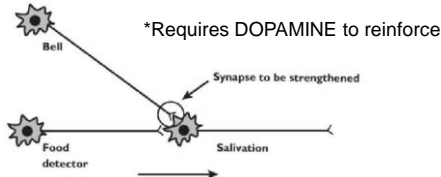
Neuroscience

- Dopamine is largely responsible for the pleasure/reward learning system neurons
- Linking different stimuli to a normally pleasurable stimuli can cause the different stimuli to also feel rewarding
 - This also works in reverse if the different stimuli results in more powerful negative reactions over the positive pleasurable stimuli!

BACKGROUND

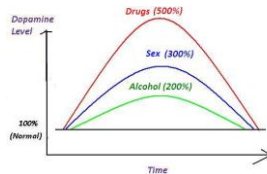
Neuroscience – Hebbian Theory

- “Cells that fire together, wire together”
- Demonstrates the strength of *neural plasticity* in humans – where neurons in the brain can learn/adapt to increase/decrease their activity (e.g. Pavlov’s Dog Experiment)



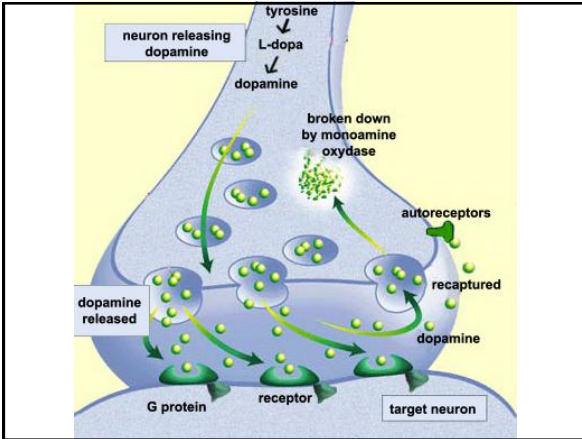
DOPAMINE

- Dopamine is the main neurotransmitter in the brain responsible for MOTIVATION:
 - Reinforcement (Reward System)
 - Mood triggers (Links/Connections)
- Drugs can be addictive due to the effects of high dopamine!
- Same with alcohol!
- So how can we increase it **healthily**?



INCREASING DOPAMINE

- Diet – eat foods rich in Tyrosine (precursor)
e.g. Dairy, meats, fish, soy products, some nuts & fruits
- Increase Anti-Oxidants Intake (protects creator cells)
e.g. Greens, orange vegetables and fruits, peppers, nuts
- Healthy Exercise & Sleep (increases production & uptake)
e.g. 30-60 minutes walk/jog/swim, 7-8 hours of sleep, sex



REWARD SYSTEM

- With higher dopamine levels, the reward system becomes more effective
- **Reinforcement Learning** links multiple stimuli together – you can apply this to studies!
- Some individuals find motivation from the reward of simply completing their work and having a break before the next workload
- Others may require extra motivation through small rewards for reaching goals on the way

REWARD SYSTEM

- Additionally, some students find it useful to link enjoyable activities (e.g. Listening to music) with studying
- So if you are finding it difficult to be motivated to study or submit assignments on time, try:
 - Listing out positive outcomes/rewards
 - Linking work with listed positives
 - Reward yourself when you reach goals
 - (Goal Setting discussed in a different workshop)

BALANCE

(Time Management discussed in different workshop)

- Divide your task into smaller tasks
- Set achievable goals with time limits
- Reward yourself for accomplishing goals
- Set aside time to relax and enjoy life

Not motivated to work on your assignment for 1 hour each weekday over 4 weeks? How about 20 hours on the final day? Extreme procrastination does not help and greatly increases stress!

PROCRASTINATION

- Different people cope with stress and work differently. Some prefer completing tasks early; others find the stress from deadlines as strong motivators to complete the task. However, stress can be unhealthy too...

OH NO! MY ASSIGNMENT IS DUE TOMORROW!!!

- Unhealthy if this stress feels like it is 'impossible'
 - To avoid this in future – LINK this negative outcome (extreme stress) with the act of procrastinating until the last minute

RELAXATION

OH NO! MY ASSIGNMENT IS DUE TOMORROW!!!

- If you ARE in a state of mind where you feel too stressed, here are some ways of staying calm
 - Breathing and Relaxation Techniques
 - Meditation and Mindfulness Techniques
 - Imagery Techniques

Gathering yourself for 15-30 minutes might help you organise work more efficiently and save time!

BREATHING & RELAXATION

Breathing, more often than not, is an automatic function of the body: However it can be regulated to promote relaxation and reduce stress.

When we feel stressed, our breathing rate and pattern changes, usually displayed through shorter, more frequent breaths. This type of breathing predominantly uses upper chest muscles.

Essentially, to facilitate relaxation we want to focus on abdominal breathing instead of upper chest breathing. This relaxed, controlled breathing for 10 minutes a day can promote positive physiological changes such as:

- Lowered blood pressure and heart rate
- Reduced levels of stress hormones in the blood
- Improved immune system functions
- Increased physical energy
- Increased feelings of calm and wellbeing

Relaxation through breathing is employed in meditation and mindfulness practices.

Source: Better Health Channel (2014)

MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS

Meditation and mindfulness techniques can build from breathing techniques to further promote relaxation.

Mindfulness meditation is the practice of being 'present in the moment'. It focuses on being aware of what is happening within us or around us, without stressing or worrying about it.

It is a relaxed state of awareness where you can observe everything internally – your thoughts, feelings and sensations; as well as the ever-changing external phenomena without trying to control anything.

Generally when individuals inspect their own thoughts and feelings, they tend to 'judge' the positives and negatives of such moments, and can work themselves into a stressed emotional state. Mindfulness and meditation encourages acknowledgement of internal processes, while simply accepting what is there instead of challenging, confronting or changing it.

IMAGERY

Building off Breathing and Meditation, Imagery can be an effective way of relaxing and reducing stress.

Once achieving a relaxed state through breathing techniques, imagery involves an individual creating or simulating an environment or situation in their head, and completely immersing themselves in that experience.

The experience may be led by others, or may be completely directed individually. One commonly heard reference is your own "happy place" – the place where you would feel most relaxed, most at ease, most comfortable.

Imagery encourages imagining ALL of your senses – your sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste – to fully recreate the experience.

Upon completion of your Imagery exercises, slowly and calmly return your senses to reality – take your time to notice each of your five senses, easing back into the world.
