Lecture 4 – Social influence

All information, assignments, articles and hand-outs will be posted to course website. Visit it regularly!

http://www.lucs.lu.se/education/extf76/

Incidental influence

We are affected and influenced by the presence of other people.

- “Mere presence” effect
  - We become slower and worse at performing tasks which are novel or difficult to us.
  - We become fast and better at performing tasks which are routine or easy to us.
  - Examples: Getting dressed, pool playing, typing tasks

- Being observed
  - The feeling, even if illusory, of being observed can lead to people adopting higher degrees of pro-social behaviour.
  - In work organization/ management theory a version of this has been known as the “Hawthorne effect” – that observing workers make them work hard (or shirk less).

- Bystander effect
  - Presence of others can sometimes inhibit prosocial action, as was first exemplified in the famous Kitty Genovese case.
  - One mechanism for this is diffusion of responsibility, and another is that the bystanders interpret each other’s actions to resolve the ambiguity of the situation.

Norms give us rules and clues about what behaviour is expected of us.

- Injunctive norms
  - Prescribe behaviour by telling us what is considered to be (in)appropriate

- Descriptive norms
  - Describe what behaviour is typical within a group

- Broken window theory
  - Highlighting descriptive norms by creating positive environments has been thought to build better behaviour.
  - Mixed empirical support

- Sometimes focusing strongly on descriptive norms might actually have the reversed effect. In those cases focusing strongly on injunctive norms is a better way of changing behaviour.

Deliberate influence

We are sensitive to group behaviour and attitudes, to the point where we can be directed and influences in our choice of actions and effort.

- Conformity
  - Asch famously demonstrated that participants will conform in their actions to the judgments of the majority, even when these are clearly wrong.
  - Degree of conformity has been found to be affected by many factors:
- Size of majority
- Gender (see Fine, 2010)
- Culture
  - One dimensions cultures differ in is degree of individualism/collectivism
  - This has effects on conceptions of the self and how strongly one relates to others
- Ingroup/Outgroup

- Ingroups and Outgroups
  - Group identity is a central part of how our social interactions are structured. In various situations we construe out- and ingroup relative to ourselves.
  - We are so sensitive to group identities that even transient and completely arbitrary divisions can lead to behaviour favouring the ingroup and disfavouring the outgroup.
  - Two mechanisms for social understanding
    - Mimicry & Chameleon effect – we tend to copy other people’s nonverbal behaviour, and we tend to like people who copy us better.
    - Gaze cueing – we will automatically look towards things that other people are attending

- Obedience
  - Given the right situation and context, people are remarkably obedient and will do things that are quite terrible.
  - Some factors that are known to affect obedience:
    - proximity to victim (-)
    - diffusion of responsibility (+)
    - closeness of authority (+)
    - mediating commander (-)
    - disagreeing experimenters (-)
    - model for resistance (-)
  - Why do we obey generally?
    - There are likely conflicting norms, which makes it harder for us to choose the “right” behavior
    - We are generally, from being children, not taught how to disobey. There is now social script to follow when disobeying. (cf. ‘professional’ protesters)
    - Escalation, once we have crossed one border, it might be harder to stop. Slippery slope.
References


