Individual and group performance

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Core ideas

Social facilitation is when the presence of others changes individual performance, often improving simple or well-learned tasks but weakening complex or unfamiliar tasks.

Drive theory explains social facilitation by arguing that other people increase arousal, which strengthens the dominant response.

Evaluation apprehension explains performance change through concern about being judged rather than mere physical presence.

Social loafing is reduced individual effort when people work in a group and their own contribution is less identifiable.

Social impact theory helps explain loafing because responsibility can feel spread across more people as group size increases.

Research on culture and monitoring asks when group performance improves or declines in real workplaces, such as collectivist groups or employees under electronic observation.

Key terms

Social facilitation: A change in performance caused by the presence of others.

Drive theory: The idea that others increase arousal and strengthen a person's dominant response.

Dominant response: The response a person is most likely to give in that situation.

Evaluation apprehension: Concern about being judged by others.

Social loafing: Putting in less effort when working in a group than when working alone.

Social impact theory: The idea that social influence depends on factors such as strength, immediacy and number of people.

Collectivist culture: A culture where group goals and interdependence are usually emphasised.

Electronic performance monitoring: Using technology to observe, record or assess employee performance.

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Further detail and evidence

Key study: Claypoole and Szalma (2019), Experiment 1, extended social-facilitation research to electronic monitoring during monotonous vigilance.

106 US university volunteers, 65 female and mean age about 20.6, entered electronic-presence or control conditions, 53 per group.

Participants monitored two-digit numbers and responded to critical signals. Electronic presence combined webcam and video-recorder monitoring; controls worked alone without them.

Correct detections, false alarms and response times were measured across a 24-minute task in four six-minute periods: performance data rather than self-rated concentration.

Monitored participants detected more signals (0.6906 versus 0.6038), made fewer false alarms and responded faster overall.

Vigilance still deteriorated with time: monitoring improved average performance rather than abolishing the vigilance decrement.

Social facilitation means performance changes in the presence of others, often improving simple/well-learned responses and impairing difficult/new ones. Drive theory proposes increased arousal strengthens the dominant response; evaluation apprehension emphasises concern about being judged.

Social loafing is reduced individual effort when contributions are pooled. Social impact theory considers how the influence of social sources is divided across targets: accountability can weaken as responsibility is spread. Identifiable contributions and meaningful shared goals can reduce loafing.

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Continued

Earley (1993) compared individual, in-group and out-group performance in different cultural contexts. Collectivist participants performed especially well with an in-group; individualists showed reduced performance in group conditions relative to alone. Group membership matters alongside cultural orientation; do not equate nationality with every individual's beliefs.

Claypoole and Szalma's designated Experiment 1 tested electronic monitoring during sustained attention. The combined webcam/recording condition improved detection and other performance indices relative to being alone, while vigilance still declined over time. Monitoring is therefore not a guarantee of constant perfect concentration.

Applying the ideas

A practised task may benefit from evaluation-related arousal, while a novice may make more errors under scrutiny. A group output hiding individual effort can encourage loafing. Monitoring a single person's vigilance is different from testing effort in a pooled group task.

Evaluation and connections

The conclusion supports electronic social presence as an influence on attention. Standardised measurement aids reliability, but a brief student laboratory task may not generalise to workplaces.

Evaluate apprehension about evaluation, privacy and consent, and individual/situational influences. Experiment 1 is required; Experiment 2 methodology is excluded in 2027.

Experimental monitoring offers control, but a short student task differs from real employment, incentives and privacy expectations. Between-culture comparisons need equivalent tasks and attention to within-culture differences. Evaluate benefits alongside stress, trust, consent and whether quality is being measured as well as output.