

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

Programme: Bachelor of Arts (Second Year)

Subject: Psychology

Course Code: PSC 104

Course Title: Social Psychology II

Unit: 03

Module Name: Social facilitation

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Notes

Allport asked participants to write down as many associations as they could think of two words printed at the top of an otherwise blank page (eg. Building and laboratory).

They were allowed to work for three one-minute periods, and performed this task both alone and in the presence of two other persons.

Results were clear: Ninety three percent of all the participants produced more associations when working in the presence of others than when working alone.

On the basis of such findings, Allport and other researchers referred to the effects of performance of the presence of other persons as social facilitation, because it appeared that when others were present, performance was enhanced.

But other research soon reported exactly opposite results: performance was worse in the presence of an audience or other people performing the same task. How could the presence of others sometimes enhance and sometimes reduce performance? Robert Zajonc offered an answer.

Zajonc's drive theory of social facilitation: Other persons as a source of arousal

Informal experience suggests that the presence of other persons in the form of an interested audience can increase our activation or arousal. Zajonc suggested this might provide a solution to the puzzle of social facilitation

When arousal increases, our tendency to perform dominant responses (the ones that are most likely to occur in a given situation) also rises. Such dominant responses, in turn, can be correct or incorrect. If this is so, then it follows logically that if the presence of an audience increases arousal, this factor will improve performance when dominant responses are correct ones, but may impair performance when such responses are incorrect.

Another implication of Zajonc's reasoning –which is known as the drive theory of social facilitation because it focuses on arousal or drive is this: The presence of others will improve individuals'

performance when they are highly skilled at that task in question, but will interfere with performance when they are not highly skilled—for instance, when they are learning to perform it.

Many studies soon provided support for Zajonc's theory. Individuals were more likely to perform dominant responses in the presence of others than when alone, and their performance on various tasks was either impaired or enhanced, depending on whether these responses were correct or incorrect in each situation.

Additional research found that social facilitation effects did not occur if the audience was blindfolded or showed no interest in watching the person performing a task.

As reasonable as these conclusions seem, however, they didn't appear to apply in all situations. Studies conducted with animals found that performance of simple tasks was facilitated by the presence of an audience.

Several findings support the distraction-conflict theory. For example, audiences produce social facilitation effects only when directing attention to them conflicts in some way with task demands. Individuals experience greater distractions when they perform various tasks in front of an audience than when they perform alone.

Research findings have confirmed that social facilitation stems from cognitive factors—not just heightened arousal as Zajonc proposed.