

Chapter 7: The Basics of Experimentation

Much of the research currently done in the field of psychology is experimental. Moreover, an understanding of the principles of experimentation strengthens any researcher's potential for success.

When it is feasible, psychologists prefer experiments to other research methods because a properly conducted experiment allows us to draw causal inferences about behavior. When an experiment is well conducted, it is high in internal validity.

To review briefly, the psychology experiment has these main features: We first manipulate the antecedent conditions to create at least two different treatment conditions. At least two treatments are required so that we can make statements about the impact of different sets of antecedents; if we used only one treatment, there would be no way to evaluate what happens to behaviors as the conditions change. We expose subjects to different treatment conditions so that we can measure the effects of those conditions on behavior. We record the responses or behaviors of subjects under various conditions and then compare them using statistics. We can then assess whether our predictions are confirmed.

Independent and Dependent Variables

Experimental Hypothesis

- In the simplest experiments, an experimental hypothesis states a potential relationship between two variables: If A occurs, then we expect B to follow.

- In an experiment, variables are measurable elements that can vary or take on different values along some dimension. To be more precise, the experimental hypothesis expresses a potential relationship between two kinds of variables, the independent and the dependent variable

Independent Variable (IV)

- It is the dimension that the experimenter intentionally manipulates; it is the antecedent the experimenter chooses to vary. This variable is "independent" in the sense that its values are created by the experimenter and are not affected by anything else that happens in the experiment.

Independent variables are sometimes aspects of the physical environment that can be brought under the experimenter's direct control. Lighting (bright or dim) and noise levels (loud or soft) are some examples of environmental variables.

To meet the definition of an experiment, at least two different treatment conditions are required; thus, an IV must be given at least two possible values in every experiment. The researcher decides which values of the IV to use. These values are called the levels of the independent variable in the experiment.

If the IV is to have two levels, there must be two different treatment conditions; if three values of the IV are to be used, there must be three different treatment conditions, and so on.

For example, suppose a professor gives tests on either blue or yellow paper to see if the color of the paper influences the scores. Blue and yellow represent two

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