The Behaviour of People at Work

Lecture Title: Cooperations, alliances, and friendships

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Course Outline

Module 6. Life outside work: parental care and relationship with kin

Module 7. Solutions for the individual in the team: self-esteem

Module 8. Solutions for the team: status, rank and dominance

Module 9. Solutions for the team: cooperation, alliances, and friendships

Module 10. The modern organic workplace: built around people

Solutions for the team: co-operation, alliances, and friendships

Understanding the mechanics behind altruistic behaviour

Module 9:
Solutions for the team: co-operation, alliances, and friendships

- The puzzle of altruisms
- Co-operative alliances
- Reciprocal altruism
- The problem of cheating
- The co-operating strategy
- Promoting co-operation
- Solving the problem of cheaters
- Cheater detection mechanisms
- Emotions involved in co-operation
- Friendships

Kindness to strangers

- More than 150 people in the United States and nearly 100 in Great Britain donate a kidney to a complete stranger each year.

- The Carnegie Corporation has recognised more than 10,000 ordinary Americans who knowingly put themselves in grave danger in order to rescue someone from death. One out of every five of those Carnegie medals was awarded posthumously because the honouree had died while trying to help.
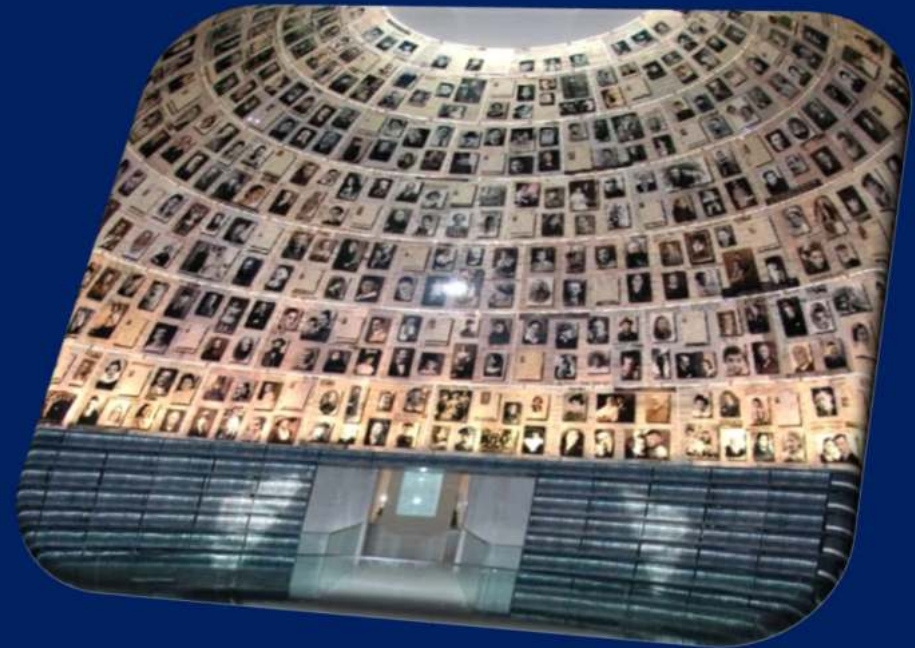
The World Holocaust Remembrance Centre in Jerusalem honours more than 27,000 non-Jews who risked their lives and their liberty to rescue Jewish people during the Holocaust.

The puzzle of altruism

- We've already seen how one form of altruism can evolve when the recipients of the aid are genetic relatives.

- The great puzzle is: how could altruism among non-relatives evolve, given the competitive adaptations produced by natural selection? In other words, how does a species like ours, programmed by evolution for selfishness, come to behave selflessly? This is the problem of altruism.

Co-operative alliances

- The evolution of cooperative alliances is one of the adaptations dedicated to dealing with the problems of group living.

- We need to remember that group living is a critical context for human evolution. Living in a group has shaped our past and continues to shape our present and future.

Reciprocal altruism

- This theory states that adaptations for providing benefits to nonrelatives can evolve as long as the delivery of benefits is returned or reciprocated at some point in the future.

- The beauty of reciprocal altruism is that both parties benefit: a win-win situation.

- This is the economic concept of gains from trade - each party receives more in return than it costs to deliver the benefit.

Consider two hunter friends with erratic success. If the successful hunter shares his meat with his friend, he incurs a loss, but it is small because he may have more meat than his family can consume. The gain to his friend, however, is large, because it saves him from starvation. The situation may be reversed. Both friends benefit from reciprocal altruism more than they would if each selfishly kept all the meat for himself.

The problem of cheating

- The reciprocal altruist needs to ensure that the benefits it bestows will be returned in the future. Someone could pretend to be a reciprocal altruist but then take the benefits without responding in kind later.

- This is the problem of cheating.

- There is evidence to suggest that humans have evolved specific psychological adaptions designed to solve the problem of cheating.

The problem of reciprocal altruism is similar to a game called the "prisoner's dilemma". This is a hypothetical situation in which two people have been thrown in prison for a crime they are accused of committing together and of which they are indeed guilty.

The prisoners are held in separate cells so they can't talk to each other. Police interrogate both of the prisons, trying to get each to rat on the other. If neither one implicates the other, the police will be forced to set them both free for lack of evidence.

The co-operating strategy

- The winning strategy in iterated prisoner's dilemma is called tit for tat. Three features of this strategy represent its success:

1. Never be the first to defect, always start by cooperating, and continue to cooperate as long as the other player does also.
2. Retaliate only after the other has defected – defect immediately after the first instance of non-reciprocation.
3. Be forgiving – if a previously defecting player starts to cooperate, then reciprocate the cooperation and get on a mutually beneficial cycle.

"First, do unto others as you wish them to do unto you, but then do unto them as they have just done to you."

Promoting co-operation

1. Enlarge the shadow of the future – if the other individual thinks that you will interreact frequently in the extended future he/she has a greater incentive to cooperate.
2. Teach reciprocity. Promoting reciprocity not only helps oneself by making others more cooperative, it also makes it more difficult for exploitative strategies to thrive.
3. Insist on no more than equity. Greed is the downfall of many, and the beauty of tit for tat strategy is that it does not insist on getting more than it gives.
4. Respond quickly to provocation. If your partner defects on you, a good strategy is to retaliate immediately, sending a strong signal that you will not tolerate being exploited.
5. Cultivate a personal reputation as a reciprocator. This will make others seek you out for mutual gain.

Reciprocal exchanges and the vulnerability to cheating

- Reciprocal altruism works because both parties benefit through mutual exchange. The problem is however that many potential exchanges do not occur simultaneously. This is why reciprocal exchanges are vulnerable to cheating.

- "If I give you a benefit now, I must trust that you will reciprocate and give me a benefit at some later time. If you fail to reciprocate, then I have incurred a net cost."

Solving the problem of cheaters

People have evolved cognitive capacities to solve this problem:

1. The ability to recognise many different individual humans.

2. The ability to remember the histories of interaction with different individuals.

3. The ability to communicate one's values to others.

4. The ability to model the values of others.

5. The ability to represent costs and benefits, independent of the nature of the items exchanged.

Psychologists' face off reveals humans can recognise 5,000 people

University of York says first evidence-based study nails down facial-recognition ability

▲ The scientists asked volunteers to spend an hour recalling as many faces as they could from their private lives, covering old school friends, work colleagues, past partners and colleagues. Photograph: Jason Reed/REUTERS

The next time an old friend meets your greeting with a quizzical who-are-you stare, you're right to take offence: new research suggests the average person can recognise 5,000 different faces.

Cheater detection mechanisms

Cheater-detection is highly sensitive to perspective. Consider this.

"If an employee gets a pension, he has worked for 10 years."

What constitutes a violation of the social contract depends on who you ask.

If you ask an employee, they seek out workers who have put in more than 10 years but not received a pension.

When participants take the perspective of the employer, they seek out workers who have worked for fewer than 10 years but who have taken a pension.

Detecting the genuineness of altruistic acts

Just as people can detect and remember cheaters, they also have the ability to detect the genuineness of altruistic acts.

Consider two men giving a dollar to a homeless person. In one you detect that the man has genuine sympathy for the plight of the homeless and this is what motivates his desire to help.

In another case you find the man doesn't care at all but is merely giving to impress his date. Which one would you seek for a cooperative venture?

Emotions involved in co-operation

Altruists tend to display more "genuine smiles" than non-altruists.

People are especially likely to feel strong gratitude towards friends who help them out, even more than to genetic relatives that do.

People are bothered when someone they've helped out fails to express gratitude.

People experience the emotion of guilt when they fail to help others.

These emotions presumably function to motivate others to cooperate, to punish those who do not cooperate, and even to motivate oneself to deliver benefits to others.

Friendships

Friendships are fundamental to human social life.

People direct great effort towards the formation and maintenance of friendships, investing time, energy, money, and emotional resources.

Across different cultures, friendship is reliably linked to the experience of positive emotions such as happiness.

An alliance model for friendships

- The central premise here is that humans often get into conflict and having a network of alliances is crucial to navigate these problems and emerge on the winning side.

- This model proposes that humans have evolved computational systems to rank different friends' loyalty to themselves.

The costs and benefits of friendships

- Friends provide one another with benefits: they offer each other food and other resources, help each other solve problems, provide help navigating social hierarchies, and even help in mating.

- Along with benefits, however, friendships also carry potential costs: competition and rivalry, by competing for access to same resources such as high-quality mates, and by interfering with each other's strategies in what is known as strategic interference.

- The profile of costs and benefits differs from friendship to another, but also from cross-sex to same-sex friendships.

Thank You!