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Expectancy Violation Theory

Expectancy Violation Theory focuses on the unexplained behaviors of people during interaction, and the response to those actions. According to communicationtheory.org, there are two types of expectancies; Predictive and prescriptive expectancy. Predictive Expectancy is defined as “defining the communication and interaction happening within a particular environment or context”. Prescriptive Expectancy is defined as “People displaying behaviors appropriate to the existing environment.” In this paper, a general overview of Expectancy Violation will be covered, as well as when it is appropriate to violate expectations.

Surprises

When is it appropriate to violate someone’s expectations? According to changingminds.org, a surprise is a good time to violate someone’s expectations. People have standards of how a conversation, or interaction should happen, but predict the outcome of that same conversation and/or interaction by either judging the person or thing being interacted from general observation, personal experience or from other sources. This being stated, a preconceived notion that teenagers do not want to learn about adult responsibilities means the speaker will not be extremely enthusiastic to talk about such responsibilities.

Surprising someone is not always a good time to violate expectancies. Upon violation of a person’s standards, two (main) outcomes can occur; positive and negative. An example of a positive surprise is a student consistently submitting low standard work to a professor. That professor will begin to expect nothing but low grade work, and eventually create a notion that there is no point in grading that person’s work if it is all the same. That student suddenly

surprises the professor by submitting high quality work, therefore violating the professor's expectations. An example of a negative surprise is an honor student being expelled for plagiarism. Many people expect honor students to be above standard students in terms of academic integrity. In this case, it is alright to violate an expectation with a surprise when the outcome of the surprise is efficacious.

Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is a major part of daily human interaction. By sneezing and immediately reaching for tissue, even if nothing came out of that person's nose, can be a message, and the sneezer never said a word (just made a sound). Nonverbal communication is the process of telling a story, without vocally expressing that story. When interacting with someone from a distance, people create a standard of how a conversation based on what the person does before the conversation actually starts.

Here is an example; a tutor is meeting its student for the second time, and from the one meeting the two had, the tutor thinks the student is stressed. The tutor spots the student from a distance, and can clearly see that the student is full of energy and looks completely relaxed. Upon actually starting tutoring, the tutor finds out that the student was worried about being late to the prior meeting due to oversleeping that day. The tutor expected the student to look, act and (potentially) sound stressed. In this case, it was okay for the student to violate the tutor's expectation by being energetic and relaxed.

Following the two (main) outcomes that can occur from expectancy violation, many would assume that a positive violation is desired. In the previous example, the student violate the tutor's negative expectation by being energetic; however, that can also be seen as a negative violation

(the student is nullifying the initial expectation). The tutor may expect that student to be energetic every time. Channingminds.org states that a good way to violate expectancy is by having low standards. If the tutor expects the student to be awake and comprehensive, but not exactly energetic, then a positive violation is occurring.

Different Levels of Space

In the American society, personal space is highly valued, as well as in Japan. In the Middle East, personal space is not as valued. Psychology expert Kendra Cherry states that physical space, along with nonverbal communication, tells people a great deal of information. She labels intimate space as 6-18 inches, personal space as 1.5-4 feet, social space as 4-12 feet, and public space as 12-15 feet. If a person wants to appropriately violate someone's expectancy based on space, the right message has to be included in that violation.

When invading intimate space uninvited, the invader is stating that they want to be more intimate. It is okay to violate the intimate space expectation when the person being violated is an extremely close friend, family member, or intimate other. If the person being violated does not match the criteria previously stated, then it is okay to violate the personal space expectancy. Personal space consist of close friends, not-so-close family members, associates and co-workers. Co-workers can tilt over into the social space expectancy as well. It is okay to violate social space when the violator is a new associate, a friend and anyone the violator does not know. It is always okay to violate public space. When violating expectancies, it would be favorable to have positive violations, but a negative violation can also be desired. For example, negatively violating a dictators rules to behead an innocent victim is perfectly okay. By doing that, the violator also positively violated the victim's expectations, leaving two people happy and one actually angry.

Conclusion

Expectancy violation is the focus on unexplained behaviors of people during interaction and the responses that accompany those violations. There are two types of expectancy violations; prescriptive and predictive expectancy. Predictive expectancy is communication and interaction happening within a particular environment. Prescriptive expectancy is displaying behaviors appropriate to the existing environment. When violating a person's expectations, positive violations are desired, with exceptions. Knowing the different levels of space allows someone to violate expectations on levels. Violation can occur in various forms, such as nonverbal and verbal.

References

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