

In operant conditioning, punishment and negative reinforcement are often confused. Students, employees, and managers alike think these two techniques for managing behavior are similar or have the same result. However, they differ from each other in two important ways. First, punishment *reduces* the probability of an *undesired* behavior; negative reinforcement *increases* the probability of a *desired* behavior. Second, punishment involves *administering* a negative consequence when an *undesired* behavior occurs; negative reinforcement entails *removing* a negative consequence when a *desired* behavior occurs. Exhibit 5.2 summarizes the effects of the different operant conditioning techniques managers can use to encourage the performance of desired behaviors and eliminate undesired behaviors.

Managers need to take into account the fact that people differ in what they consider to be punishment. If being scolded by a supervisor after coming to work late is a source of punishment for one employee, then that employee will try as hard as possible not to be late after receiving a scolding. But an employee who hardly gives the scolding a second thought will come to work late again the next day. Some forms of punishment that organizations typically use are verbal reprimands, reductions in pay, elimination of privileges (such as personal days an employee can take off at his or her discretion), and temporary suspension. Organizations sometimes use a system of progressive punishment to try to curtail undesired behavior: the more an employee engages in the behavior, the stricter the punishment becomes.

Punishment can have some unexpected side effects and should be used only when necessary. It not only has the potential to threaten the employee's self-respect but can also create so much resentment and negative feelings toward the punisher and organization as a whole that the employee might want to retaliate. Thus, when punishment is used, managers need to be very careful that, while eliminating the undesired behavior, they do not create excessive hostility or negative feelings.

The following guidelines can help to ensure that punishment has its intended effect and does not generate negative side effects:

- Try to downplay the emotional element involved in punishment. Remember: you are punishing the person's undesirable behavior, not the person.
- Make sure the chosen negative consequence is indeed a punishment for the individual, and punish the undesired behavior immediately.²⁹ Make sure employees know why they are being punished.

EXHIBIT 5.2

Operant Conditioning Techniques

Technique	How Consequence Is Administered	Effect on Behavior	Example
Positive reinforcement	Positive consequence is given when desired behavior is performed	Increases probability of desired behavior	Employee is praised for cleaning up work station
Negative reinforcement	Negative consequence is removed when desired behavior is performed	Increases probability of desired behavior	Supervisor complains about messy work station and stops only when worker cleans it
Extinction	Positive consequence is removed when undesired behavior is performed	Decreases probability of undesired behavior	Manager refrains from laughing at a subordinate's disruptive jokes when the two have important matters to discuss
Punishment	Negative consequence is given when undesired behavior is performed	Decreases probability of undesired behavior	Manager criticizes subordinate for telling disruptive jokes when the two have important matters to discuss