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An Antecedent Perspective on Operant Contingencies

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Analysis of the *three-term contingency* forms the basis of understanding the functions of operant behavior. Contingency management is an empirically validated procedure to increase or reduce operant behavior. For example, programs designed to address aberrant behavior have demonstrated the effectiveness of contingency management. Historically, these procedures have been addressed from a consequence perspective. In this paper, we suggest that the concept of antecedent operations, specifically, motivating operations potentially extends current technologies. Additionally, we suggest that manipulating the motivating operation for a particular operant may lead to a better understanding of the evocation of operant behavior as well as the reinforcing effectiveness of the contingent reinforcement.

Contingencies of Reinforcement in Stimulus Control

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Customary applications of the three-term contingency involve close contiguity among the three terms, as expressed in the definition of a discriminative stimulus as a stimulus in the presence of which a response is reinforced. In many everyday conditions, the stimulus that controls a response, the response, and the reinforcer are often separated by substantial gaps in time. To expand the domain of stimulus control research toward such everyday conditions, the analysis presented here recommends implementation of novel laboratory procedures that degrade the contiguity among the three terms but retain the overall contingency. In

essence, delays may be inserted between stimulus and response and between response and reinforcer. Thereby, stimulus, response, and reinforcer become dissociated in time. If procedures can be generated that promote reliable control of behavior by temporally remote events, then the response will occur in temporal isolation from the stimulus that initiates it and the reinforcer that maintains it. Successful temporal separation of the three terms has various implications for definitions of stimulus control and for assessment of stimulus control in both applied and experimental analyses of behavior.

Contingent and Noncontingent Reinforcement for Intervention and Assessment with Persons with Profound Multiple Disabilities and Post-Coma Vegetative State

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Parents and professionals involved in the care and education/rehabilitation of persons with profound multiple disabilities and post-coma vegetative state are confronted with challenging objectives such as promoting the persons' responding and assessing their learning. The first of these objectives may be pursued through the use of contingent reinforcement employed within microswitch-based programmes. The second objective may be pursued through the use of noncontingent reinforcement in substitution of contingent reinforcement. Noncontingent reinforcement would be expected to weaken responding if this is due to learning and maintain responding unaltered if this is due to increased excitation/stimulation. Ascertaining that a person's responding is due to learning has very important implications for extending his or her intervention programme with new responses, increasing expectations about his or her development/recovery, improving his or her image and, possibly, revising his or her negative diagnostic label.
