

Advance Course in Social Psychology

Lecture 13 : Attitudes- Part I

Hello friends, a very warm welcome once again to all of you. Today I am going to start the fifth module titled Attitudes. In this module I am going to discuss about different behavioural dispositions based on an individual's evaluation of his or her social world. Now this evaluation can be in terms of positive feelings, negative feelings, being or feeling favourable for one person or object in the environment or unfavourable for any person or object in the environment. It can also be some emotions in terms of fear, hate, joy, pleasure or displeasure. The idea is that when we are talking about attitudes in social psychology, it has a very important role to play to understand human behaviour in any social situation.

We tend to evaluate the other person, we tend to evaluate the whole situation, we tend to collect certain information and the information which is already available to us, we weigh upon every information and then try to have a very different belief or opinion about that person or situation and that defines the further relationship or action in that particular situation. So when we are talking about attitudes, it is about person's evaluation of almost any aspect of the world. It can be any social situation, it can be any situation at the workplace, it can be any group situation, it can be any interpersonal relationship where two people who are interacting with each other and how they are evaluating one's and the other's opinion, beliefs and ideas and to what extent they align with each other. The more there is alignment between two people based on their thoughts, ideas and beliefs, the more the person will be perceived as favourable.

So people can have favourable or unfavourable reactions to issues, ideas, objects and actions. For instance, I say I like white water rafting or a specific person such as Barack Obama. These persons have a very specific quality which we really admire or we tend to align with that person based on personal characteristics and we have a very favourable opinion of that person. There can be any other person with whom we are interacting. So this is a basic understanding of attitudes.

On the other hand, attitudes are stable also. In long run, we tend to have a very permanent idea and opinion about one particular person or situation and at the same time, it also alters based on our own information or collecting more information from the environment and then altering our own attitude for that person or situation. We can define attitude as a favourable or unfavourable evaluative reaction towards something or someone exhibited in one's belief, feelings or inherited or intended behaviour. A person's reaction when we are engaging ourselves in any interpersonal interaction, how the person is putting up his opinion, belief, what are his intentions, we tend to evaluate, observe every behaviour of the other person and we try to align with those patterns of behaviours with whom we are interacting and the more is the alignment as I mentioned earlier, the more we have a favourable perception of for that person or vice versa, then we have unfavourable perception or attitude for that person. So, it is actually an evaluative tendency based on certain emotions, based on the behavioural aspect, based on certain information that is available to us for the other person.

It is a social orientation underlying inclination to respond to something either favourably or unfavourably. The more we like a person, the more we have a favourable disposition towards the other person. The more we are not liking that person, the more the disposition is unfavourable. We will try to express our unfavourable attitude towards that person in form of

disgust, in form of frowning expression, in form of disapproval or in form of hate as well. So, different kind of actions and emotions are being emanated in any social situation based on an individual's evaluation of that person to be favourable or unfavourable.

So, this is how we can define attitude. Now this is a basic understanding of what is an attitude. The other side of the attitude is that it also has some different aspects to understand. We have attitude, then it is sometimes explicit and at the same time it is implicit. As the term implies, if it is explicit, then that behaviour, the reaction we give to the other person or event, it is very much controlled.

We have a favourable attitude for the other person that favourableness is controlled and it is very much overt. We direct our behaviour in a very explicit manner. It is overt and it is easy to report and very much controlled because we want to be very much overt and explicit and apparent in our behaviour because we are showing some favourable attitude towards the other person. This is a very conscious and accessible attitude that any person would understand that I am favouring a particular person in a group situation and this is my exhibition or disposition. At the same time, sometimes attitudes are implicit as well which are very much unconscious associations between objects and evaluative responses.

For instance, if we talk about racial attitudes, may be person has preference or favourable attitude for any person irrespective of he is coming, he or she is hailing from a very discriminated race or culture because that person is helping to achieve the task. But at the same time, the implicit or insidious evaluation of that person is that this person is having low favourableness because of his racial discrimination. Now under such circumstances, it is favourable overtly but not favourable insidious. So this is an implicit attitude where we are unconscious associations are being made between objects and the evaluative responses. We are not liking the person but our responses are very much opposite to the other person because we cannot overtly express our disagreeableness or unfavourableness towards the other person.

So this is explicit and implicit. In explicit, the response is very much conscious controllable and it can be easily reported to the external environment. But in implicit, the evaluation is actually insidious but outward it is something else. So this is implicit attitude. Basically the evaluation is may be unfavourable but the response is very much unconscious in a way that we are trying to create an association between favourable and unfavourable preference for that one particular person or object.

So this is how we define the two sides of the counts of attitude that is implicit and explicit attitude. I repeat that in explicit, the nature of the attitude is conscious and controllable whereas in implicit, nature of the attitude is unconscious association between objects and evaluative responses. Even at the shops, we say that I like this product a lot but at the same time, I cannot buy it. Why I cannot buy it? Because I have some apprehensions about the evaluation of a particular product. So this is how we are trying to create an association based on favourableness and unfavourableness opinion or ideas about a person or the situation.

So this is implicit and explicit aspect of an attitude. Next comes components of attitude that is the ABC of an individual's attitude. Why ABC? Because social psychologists have identified three components of attitude. It is effective component, behavioural component and cognitive component. If we talk about effective component as the term implies, it refers to the feelings or emotions that are evoked by a particular person, item, event or object in the environment.

For instance, emotions can be of fear, it can be love, it can be hatred, it can be joy, it can be sympathy and it can be pleasure or displeasure. We feel positive and negative about the other person. We feel positive or negative about our boss at the workplaces. We at the same time, we appreciate or have a positive or favourable perception or attitude for a painting in the office which I like it a lot. At the same time, my department has won a significant award and the attitude at this point is that I am feeling proud because it is the result of our hard work.

Now here evaluation is based on the effort that has been put to achieve that goal. So this evokes a certain specific feeling that is to feel proud of your workplace. So this is how we define an effective component which is completely based on feelings which can be negative and positive as the term implies effective component. The other is behavioural component which is actually exhibited which is a disposition through an individual's action. It is a tendency to behave towards the object, person or event.

I like a particular person, my behaviour or action towards him will be very much welcoming or favourable. The other person can also understand that I am being liked by this person. This is actually an individual act towards the object depending upon cognitive and effective components. That is the fact you know about the person and how you feel about that person. You carry certain information about the other person.

Why you are liking that person or favourable person he or she is because he has some important qualities and that is why I am liking that person and it is being exhibited or showcased through our own actions towards that person. So this is behavioural component and the other is cognitive component. It is a set of information, ideas, facts and knowledge about an object. As just now I had mentioned that when I am liking a person, I like that person based on his personal characteristics. Those characteristics are favourable and he has some extraordinary qualification or some behavioural characteristics which actually makes him outstanding, different from other person.

So we collect some information, we hold some information about a particular person, object or event and based on that available information, we tend to construct a particular belief about that person. So that is the cognitive component. It can be about ourselves, it can be about an object or any person or any event how we evaluate based on only on knowledge, belief, opinions and ideas. So it is a set of information, ideas, facts and knowledge about an object and involves a person's belief or knowledge about an attitude object. For example, I like oranges, liking or disliking.

It is about effect, emotions, what you feel. So I like oranges. I eat an orange daily because I like orange. So there has to be a very favourable disposition towards orange and that disposition is that you want to have it every day.

So I eat an orange daily. So this is the behavioural component. Orange is rich in vitamins, it is good for the skin, it tastes good. Now it has certain information, the object has certain important information that it is nutritious, it is good for skin, it is good for health and it tastes good. So these are the cognitive components, the knowledge and information about the event and based on that it is your favourable attitude. So in one particular object that is orange, it has all the three components of an attitude of an individual towards orange.

It is affective, behavioural and cognitive component. The other example is I like LED bulbs. So it is called liking, disliking. It is an affective component. How you exhibit or have developed a liking or disliking for an object? I buy and use LED bulbs in my house because you have preference for LED bulbs.

So your action will be that you will buy and use it in your house. That is behavioural component. And LED bulbs consume less electricity than ordinary bulbs and it has brighter light and is more durable. So these are the important knowledge or information about the LED bulbs and based on that information you have developed an attitude that is a cognitive component of an individual's attitude. So this is how all the three components work all together to exhibit one action which shows that whether your behaviour or action is favourable or unfavourable for the other person or event.

At the same time, if attitude is implicit or explicit then attitude can also be ambivalent at the same time. Why? If it is stable in long run then sometimes it is also unstable or it has both the sides liking, disliking, favourable and unfavourable and we find it difficult to find that harmony in our attitude. So people can also be conflicted or ambivalent towards an object or a person meaning that they simultaneously possess both positive and negative attitudes towards the object in question. You have, you understand the object, person or event completely. You can identify what are the pros and cons of a particular object, person or event and based on that negative and positive both we find it difficult to have a concrete opinion or attitude for that person.

That is attitude ambivalence. It carries both positive and negative. So attitude ambivalence refers to the fact that our evaluations of objects, issues, events or people are not always uniformly positive or negative. Our evaluations are often mixed consisting of both positive and negative reactions. For instance, I say about attitude towards an enchildus. Now anybody can have ambivalent attitude towards this issue because one side is that you value obedience whatever your parents have searched for you will prefer to go for that match and at the same time you have another attitude for that that you prefer your own freedom and your personal choice.

Now in this issue both the aspects have been reflected by a person, pros and cons of arranged marriages and at the same time why you favour and why you not favour or maybe in both it can be positive as well as negative. So this is how attitude ambivalence can also exist in an individual's behaviour. So attitude ambivalence may also be the result of conflicting values. You are valuing two things, your obedience to your parents because you want to adhere to their decision and at the same time you also want to adhere to your freedom and your own personal choice. Where to bank upon? This kind of situations or evaluation of the situation leads to attitude ambivalence.

A very common object of ambivalence is food. This is another example that being a chronic dieter I have strong liking to have food or enjoy food and no doubt everybody enjoys eating but with the influence of societal pressure to maintain your health and maintain your body for example slimness then the person has to give upon certain items of food so that one can reduce weight. Now under such circumstances enjoying the food and not eating certain food items that creates a conflicting value, conflicting attitude and leads to attitude ambivalence. As a result they experience difficulty reducing their calorie intake because eating enjoyment as an effective reaction is usually the reaction to food stimuli because here the effective component

is liking food and at the same time you have to reduce the weight. So you are valuing both but at the same time there is conflicting attitude that exists within the person.

So this is how attitude ambivalence occurs within an individual's behaviour when he or she finds difficulty in maintaining that balance. Next aspect of attitude is characteristics of attitude. How to understand that what is an attitude? It is not only one single definition. There are certain parameters which define that this is an attitude if it is being charted upon certain traits or characteristics of this term. So the first is that attitude has an object that means any person object event has to occur in the situation which can be evaluated by the person or group of people in a particular situation.

So attitude has an object which is liked or disliked, favoured or unfavoured or evaluated as negative or positive. Without any specific object event or person in the situation we cannot have any attitude that becomes a neutral situation for a person. This object can be a thing any idea, person or a situation. Any idea that is being expressed in any group discussion then also people react to that opinion. Group member A or the leader is expressing his or her opinion then in what circumstances that leader will receive different kind of attitude or evaluation based on that opinion that is the object of an attitude.

At the same time attitudes are learned. It is not something very much innate. It is learned by being a part of any group situation or event. We tend to interact, we tend to observe other people and based on those interactions an attitude or opinion is being formed. It is not an inborn phenomenon.

It is not innate. It is very much acquired. Attitudes are acquired. So they are learned through social interactions and experiences. We interact with others, observe others, acquire information which leads to formation of negative or positive attitudes towards different things in the environment. Without interaction attitude formation is not possible. So, attitudes are predispositions and attitude is a predisposition means that a prior determined or learned view of a person or an object exist in a situation.

That certain information a person has about the person, object or event and how we are perceiving that object and event. So prior determination based on having some information is very important. So predisposition is here has been used based on some prior determined or learned view of a person or an object and how we tend to exhibit the same reaction while having certain information and then evaluating and then giving another reaction. This is that attitudes are predispositions.

Attitudes are relatively stable phenomena. It is not that every now and then we are changing our attitude towards a particular person. We have collected enough information, prior information and while interacting we are again getting some new information or we are adding more information to the existing one. Then again we tend to acquire some new attitude based on evaluation of that information of that person and then we form that new behavior towards that person. So an attitude is not a momentary feeling. It is a long held opinion or belief about something and can be changed from time to time.

But it is generally a relatively stable phenomenon that persist for a longer period of time. Every now and then that is also not possible. For example we are working at workplaces, we are working in a team. We are working in a team for so many years.

So we have understanding about our coworkers. So we have a very natural phenomena for our particular specific coworkers and that remains same for years and years. So this is how we tend to maintain a relatively stable attitude for every person. But definitely when we acquire a new information then attitude can also be altered. Attitude has an emotional component. It has an emotional aspect of liking or disliking in relation to an object, person or an event.

So these are very important. When we encounter any new person we generate some emotions towards that person in terms of liking, disliking, pleasure or displeasure. So that feeling or effective component actually starts a process of formation of attitude towards that person or event. Emotional component is very important when we talk about the characteristics of an attitude. And the last is that attitudes influence human behavior. A positive attitude towards an event will influence human behavior in a very favorable manner.

A negative attitude towards any event will definitely and there is high possibility that it will foster only unfavorable behavior. For instance having unfavorable attitude for non-vegetarian food. This is a culture based example. In some cultures people have unfavorable attitude.

In some cultures it is favorable attitude. It all depends on the situation that where we are interacting, where we are residing or in a particular situation and how we perceive it. As soon as the evaluation is being done it becomes a part of human behavior in form of disposition. So this is how attitude can be defined based on certain characteristics that is there has to be an object or event of person in the situation. They are learned, they are acquired and they are not innate.

Attitudes are predispositions. We have certain information prior to the event and then we tend to evaluate that situation. Attitudes are relatively stable phenomena. Attitude has an emotional component and last attitudes influence human behavior. So right now I have discussed about the meaning, definition, implicit and explicit aspect and ambivalent aspect of attitude and then comes the components of attitudes in terms of effective behavioral and cognitive component and characteristics of attitude. In the next slide I will talk about in detail about the different aspects of attitude and how attitudes are formed. For now thank you so much. Thank you very much.