

Social Facilitation

Social facilitation is a psychological concept relating to the tendency for the presence of others to improve a person's performance on a task. While this might seem like a straightforward definition, it is actually a very complex concept with many nuances.

It also has a long history, which includes the development of a variety of theories to help explain the phenomenon in greater depth. To better understand the extent of this history and the layers of complexity, it's critical to learn about the theories, related concepts, and implications.

Definition:

In terms of a basic definition of social facilitation, social facilitation refers to improvement in performance induced by the real, implied, or imagined presence of others.

Two types of social facilitation have also been defined: co-action effects and audience effects:

- **Co-action effects:** A co-action effect refers to your performance being better on a task, merely because there are other people doing the same task as you. An example would be working at an office with coworkers instead of in a solitary environment.
- **Audience effects:** An audience effect refers to your performance being better because you are doing something in front of an audience. An example would be a pianist playing at home versus on stage in front of a crowd.

In addition, social facilitation is thought to involve three factors: physiological factors (drive and arousal), cognitive factors (distraction and attention), and affective factors (anxiety and self-presentation).

- **Physiological factors:** This refers to a higher arousal level and drive to perform that results from your physiological arousal in a situation involving social facilitation.
- **Cognitive factors:** This refers to the role of attention and distraction in social facilitation. For example, having people watch you do something might make you feel more focused, or it could be a distraction for you.
- **Affective factors:** Finally, affective factors refers to how anxiety and self-presentation influence social facilitation.

Examples of Social Facilitation

What are some examples of social facilitation in action? You've probably experienced some of these in your own life or witnessed them among people you know or those in the public sphere. Some examples include the following:

- A musician/actor/performer who becomes energized by having an audience and does a better performance
- Finding that you do better work if you go to a library than if you stay at home to study
- A weightlifter who is able to lift heavier weights when doing it in front of others versus doing it alone