

PART I

AFTERWORD

The previous five chapters have presented our model of individual behaviour in the face of danger and have used it to give a structured discussion of a large body of research which has looked at the topic from many different points of view. The emphasis in our discussion has been upon the way in which people process information and arrive at action decisions which either consciously, or more often unconsciously, influence their health and safety. We have taken an approach which has emphasised human cognitive functions, and the way in which danger is understood. So far our discussion has only touched in passing on the emotional aspects of human behaviour. Words such as motivation, fear, self-preservation, and risk-taking have not been central to our discussions. The result has been that the tone of the book has been rather rational, analytical and dry and has not represented the full diversity and complexity of real life behaviour. We have implied that people pursue goals in a systematic, if not logical manner, but we have not discussed what those goals are, nor where they come from.

The reason for the comparative neglect of these subjects up to this point is not because they are unimportant. The volume of text in the social sciences, let alone in literature, philosophy and religion, consecrated to motivation and the purpose which people strive to achieve is alone enough to show their central place in explaining and predicting behaviour in any sphere. We also referred in our introductory chapter to the almost reflex association in the mind of many people in industry between safety and motivation. The reason that the subject has not received specific attention in any one chapter in Part I is that it pervades the whole model. It is the motor which drives it, and which therefore has an influence at each stage; it affects whether people have time to look out for hazards, whether they accept high-hazard jobs, whether they take safety precautions or risks, whether they see it as their job to point out to others that they are behaving dangerously, and whether they monitor the routine task they are doing. To treat motivation as a subject under any one chapter would have distorted what we wanted to say about it. It therefore seemed better to collect all that needed to be said under one chapter. Since an understanding of a 'motor' allows one to influence it, and so to alter behaviour, it also seemed better to hold the discussion of motivation over until Part II of the book where our focus shifts to influencing behaviour.

We have also concentrated on the static presentation of the model in Part I. It is true that mention has been made at intervals of feedback loops, and of the role of learning in developing mental models, expectations and skills. However, these topics have also not received any detailed discussion. Again the reason is that they pervade and underlie the whole model. All behaviour must be learned, or modified from the potential with which people are born. That process of learning goes on very rapidly in the early years of life, and may slow down considerably in middle and old age, but it can never really be said to cease. The behaviour of an individual on one day is a good predictor of how that individual will behave in a similar situation to the following week, but it is far from a perfect one. By definition, therefore, learning is a process by which behaviour can be influenced, and we shall deal with it as such in Part II. The two topics of learning and motivation also interact fundamentally; without motivation there is little or no learning.

We must also stress, in conclusion that the behaviour we have talked about in Part I is not the only influence upon the increase or decrease of the level of danger in a situation. Behaviour intended and suitable to decrease danger may not result in the decrease if the dynamics of the danger process are already too far out of control. Other individuals, and other physical forces also have their influence in a complex interplay. The human being thus sits as powerful but not omnipotent in the driving seat. In Part II we shall turn to look at ways in which the behaviour of the driver can be influenced.