Perception and Learning in Organizations

- Describe the perceptual process
- The dynamics of selecting, organizing and interpreting external stimuli
- Social identity theory—which has become a leading perceptual theory in OB
- Description of stereotyping, including ways to minimizing stereotype biases in the workplace
- Attribution Theory
- Self fulfilling prophecies
- Overview of empathy and Johari Window as general strategies to minimize perceptual problems
Perception and Learning in Organizations

• Perception is the process through which people receive, organize and interpret information from their environment.

• Perception is the process of receiving information about and making sense of the world around us.

• Executives keep in close contact with staff and customers—to improve perceptions of the world around them—and to learn about the consequences of their actions.

• It entails deciding which information to notice how to categorize this information and how to interpret it within the framework of our existing knowledge.
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• Perceptual Process
• The Greek philosopher Plato wrote long ago that we see reality only as shadows reflected on the rough wall of a cave

• In other words reality is filtered through an imperfect perceptual process

• This imperfect process begins when environmental stimuli are received through our senses

• Most stimuli are screened out the rest are organized and interpreted
• The resulting perceptions influence our conscious emotions and behavior towards those objects, people and events
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- Model of the Perceptual Process
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Selective Attention

- Our five senses are constantly bombarded with stimuli

- Some things are noticed but most are screened out

- A nurse working in a postoperative care might ignore the smell of recently disinfected instruments or co-worker talking nearby
  - Yet a small flashing light on the nurse station console is immediately noticed because it signals that a patient’s vital signs are failing

- This process of attending to some information received by our senses and ignoring other information is called selective attention

- Selective attention is influenced by two factors (1) characteristics of person or object being perceived (2) characteristics of the individual doing the perceiving
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Several factors influence selective attention
Some are external and others are internal

• External factors influencing selection are
• Location – nurse station
• Colour-red
• Size
• Contrast
• Repetition
• Motion-flashing
• Novelty and familiarity-rare event – humour-unusual graphics
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**Internal factors influencing Perception:** Several characteristics of the perceiver also can influence the selection of sensory data. Some of the more important internal factors include:

- **Personality:** People pay the most attention to stimuli that reinforce their personality. Persons who accept themselves and have faith in their individuality perceive things favourably. A person with a positive self-concept is likely to notice positive attributes.

- **Personal moods:** Our emotions often filter out large blocks of information that threaten our mental state. When you feel depressed or insecure, the world is a very different place than it is when you are confident. We generally remember information that is in line with our mood than information that is not in sync with our state of mind.
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- **Experience:** Successful experience enhance and boost the perceptive abilities and lead to accuracy in perception of a person whereas failure comes in the way of self confidence.

- **Values and beliefs:** We tend to remember information that is consistent with our values and attitudes and ignore information that is inconsistent with them.

- **Expectations:** can influence your perceptions in that you will see what you expect to see/ if you imagine your boss is unhappy with performance – threatened with the termination letter/ if work is exceptionally great happy during weekend.
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- **Learning:** Learning refers to any relatively performance change in behaviour that occurs as a result of experience.

- Learning usually plays a big role in developing perceptual set.

- A perceptual set is an expectation of a particular interpretation based on past experience with the same or similar object.

- Impact of learning in the development of perceptual set.

Turn Off the Engine
What do you see?

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- Perceptual illusions/learning has taken place because of previous exposure.

Perceptual set have many implications for organisational behaviour/one classic study found that when executives were asked to determine the key problem in a complex business case, they identified the problem as falling within their particular area of work—they evidently filtered out information about other areas—HR manager said people problem—marketing executive—sales issues—production people—manufacturing issue
Motivation: Motivation also plays a significant role in influencing the process of perception. A hungry person would react quickly to the sight or scent of food than a non-hungry person.

Example: if you had been in a serious automobile accident you would perceive the white jacketed paramedic rushing to help as a fine person.

- If not motivated by need for medical help and you show this same person in the restaurant your perception will be different. That person looks like a vagabond to me. Same persons different perceptions.
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Perceptual Organisation

Once people have selected the sensory data to be perceived, they begin grouping the data into recognizable patterns. Perceptual organisation is the process by which people group stimuli into recognisable patterns.

• Much to learn how human mind assembles, organises and categorises information—ambiguous figures—figure backgroud help in understanding.

**Figure Ground Principle**

Figure (a) and (b) presents a classic example of figure-ground differentiation.
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- Figure do we see a white wine glass or a white table leg against a non-white background or do we visualise two persons facing each other against a white background?

Is the Figure a White Vase (or goblet, or bird-bath?)
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Things are often grouped together based on their

- Similarity or proximity to others-similar looking people includes several professors-assume that others in the group are also professors

- Another form of perceptual grouping is based on the need for cognitive closure-such as filling in missing information about what happened at a meeting that you didn’t attend (who was there, where it was held)

- Third form of grouping occurs when we think we see trends in otherwise ambiguous information

- Research studies have found that people have a natural tendency to see patterns in what are random events
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The Process of Interpreting

• After the data have been received and organized the perceiver interprets or assigns meaning to the information
• Perception is said to have taken place only after the data have been interpreted
• Several factors contribute to the interpretation of the data

Most important amongst them are:-

• Perceptual set – previously held beliefs about objects influence an individual’s perception of similar objects this is called perceptual set-manager develops general belief that workers are lazy
• Attribution—refers to the process of by which the individual assigns causes to the behavior he or she conceives-causes also to be determined-Manager evaluated less favourably if production high due to new machine
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• **Stereotyping:** is the tendency to assign attributes to someone solely on the basis of a category of people to which that person belongs.
  - women, doctors, professors, artists, Americans, Indians

• **Halo effects:** The halo effect refers to the tendency of perceiving people in terms of good and bad and ascribing all good qualities to one who is liked and all bad qualities to another who is disliked.

• **Perceptual Context:** The perception of an object or event depends in part on the context (surrounding conditions). Context gives meaning and value to stimuli, objects, events and situations. In an organisation, a pat on the back, an appreciative gesture, a raised eyebrow, etc will be meaningless unless they are viewed against a contextual background.
Attribution Theory: Why People Behave as they do?

- This is a theory about how people explain things. Attribution refers to the way people try to understand the behaviour of others (depending on what meaning we attribute to a given behaviour). When we begin to explain why things have happened in a certain way, we may submit, “the devil made me do it” (external attribution. Attributing the outcome to an outside agent or force) or we may admit “I am guilty, grant me forgiveness” (internal attribution, claiming responsibility for the event).

- **According to Attribution Theory, (Kelly), three factors influence this internal or external determination.**
  - **Distinctiveness** considers how consistent a person’s behaviour is across different situations.
  - **Consensus** examines how likely all those facing a similar situation are to respond in the same way.
  - **Consistency** considers whether an individual responds the same way across time.
Attribution Theory

Observation → Interpretation → Attribution of cause

- Distinctiveness
  - High: External
  - Low: Internal

- Consensus
  - High: External
  - Low: Internal

- Consistency
  - High: Internal
  - Low: External
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- **Attribution Errors**

  Research evidence suggests that when we made judgements about the behaviour of other people, we tend to underestimate the influence of external factors and overestimate the influence of internal or personal factors. This is called the *fundamental attribution error* (the tendency to attribute the behaviour of other people more to internal than to external factors).

  - this partly explains why a sales manager is prone to attribute the poor performance of his salesman to laziness rather than the new product line introduced by a competitor.

- **self serving bias**- is the tendency to attribute our favourable outcomes to internal factors and our failures to external factors (annual report of organization).

- **Self Fulfilling Prophecy**- occurs when our expectations about another person cause that person to act in a way that is consistent with those expectations.
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Other Perceptual Distortions/Errors

- Errors in perceptual judgement are called perceptual distortions. As pointed out earlier, we cannot assimilate all that we observe and hence, we try to speed-read others, based on our interests, background, experience and attitudes. Such pieces of selective perception often put us in a spot because we only see what we want to see. Apart from selective perception, there are other reasons which force us to draw unwarranted conclusions from foggy situations.

- Stereotyping
- Projection
- Primacy Effect: First impressions
- Perceptual Defense

- Halo effect
- Expectancy Effects
- Pygmalion effect
- Recency Effect – time lag
-Attribution
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- Perceptual Defence – an individual is likely to put up a defence when confronted with conflicting unacceptable or threatening stimuli

- Outright denial-modification-of the data received-change in perception but not willing to change—change in perception
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• **How to develop Perceptual Skills?**
  • Though there are no set formulas to develop the perceptual abilities, some guidelines can definitely help promote the skills of the perceiver.
    - *Avoid perceptual distortion*
    - *Make accurate self-perception*
    - *Put yourself in another person’s place*
    - *Create a good impression about yourself*

• **Improving Perceptions**
• **Developing Empathy**
• **Improving self-awareness** – Know yourself: Applying the Johari window developed by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingram—hence the name Johari
  - Becoming aware of your values, beliefs, and prejudices is a powerful way to improve your perception