4 Perception and Attribution

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

1. Discuss the perception processes
2. Explain how culture affects perception
3. Present a three-stage model for understanding social perception
4. Highlight the factors that affect each stage of the perception process
5. Discuss the biases that affect perception and the difficulties of overcoming them
6. Present ways to manage perceptual biases

A Texas Woman CEO in the United Kingdom ▶

When Marjorie Scardino cracked the ultimate glass ceiling at Pearson PLC in 1977, she challenged well-established perceptions on both sides of the Atlantic. Scardino was the first woman to become CEO of a U.K. top 100 company, a conglomerate that owns the Financial Times newspaper, Penguin Books, Madam Tussaud's wax museums, several educational institutions in various countries, and half of The Economist. Pearson had over 17,000 employees at the time. Scardino's credentials were clearly not the usual credentials for the top executive of a British conglomerate. She is an Arizona-born Texan, a former rodeo-barrel racer, a lawyer, and a former journalist, and someone at the time with little experience running a major multibillion dollar global conglomerate.

But it worked. When Scardino took over, Pearson's returns on equity lagged far behind those of its competitors. Before she stepped down in 2012 after a 15-year tenure, Scardino's achievements included doubling the number of Pearson's employees, tripling its profits, seeing an increase in share prices of more than 80%, and transforming a sleepy company into a global powerhouse.[1]

How did this unlikely "outsider" rise to the top of a very conservative corporation based on another continent and become one of the most respected CEOs in the United Kingdom? After law school, Scardino joined the Associated Press in West Virginia. She then teamed up with her husband to start a Pulitzer–winning newspaper in Georgia. When the newspaper failed, the couple came to New York, where Scardino became CEO of the Economist's North American operations and later the CEO of the magazine's global operations, where she boosted earnings by 130 percent in just four years.[2]

Scardino admits to being aware of the skepticism she faced at Pearson: "I had analysts in on the first day and I could feel them thinking, 'Who is this person?' and I started wondering, 'Who is this person?'"[3]

There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception.

—Aldous Huxley

What you see and what you hear depends a great deal on where you are standing. It also depends on what sort of person you are.

—C. S. Lewis

The more I see, the less I know for sure.

—John Lennon

But she moved quickly to establish herself and push the company forward. During her first week, she sent an e-mail of self-introduction to all 17,000 employees. "I do my best in an atmosphere of energy, some urgency, and a good amount of humor," she wrote. "I do not want to be associated with an organization that's not decent and fair."[4] After just seven months on the job, she announced her intention to double Pearson's market capitalization and sent the company's stock soaring. She promised: "There will be more changes. But for now our aim is to get every business to perform better."[5]

Scardino often wore a baseball cap at meetings and sprinkled colorful American slang throughout her communications. She clearly was not shy about getting attention. Pearson's chairperson called her "an enthusiast and enthuse."[6] Her egalitarian attitude, in contrast to traditional British reserve, made her decidedly approachable. Her style was described as a mixture of Boston blue stock, Southern good ol' girl, and dock-worker,[7] with a self-deprecating style.[8] Scardino, the feisty executive who says she learned from her failures—"I learnt that you can fail and you don't die"—is not ready to retire at 66: "I don't even use that word because, first of all, that's what old people do, and secondly, that's what you do after dinner."[9]

Marjorie Scardino's career and challenges illustrate the role of perceptions in organizations. She has had to cope with cultural and gender stereotypes and to manage people's perceptions in order to operate effectively in her role as leader of a major corporation. A key to her success has been understanding herself, others, and the world around her. As all leaders do, Scardino had to observe people and situations, gather information, interpret that information, and make decisions based on facts and on many subjective interpretations. To be effective, she had to manage how others viewed her. That's something all leaders and managers have to do.

Stereotyping Muslims

We are constantly bombarded with so many cues from our environment that we cannot pay attention to them all. It may be pleasantly cool in the room where you are now sitting. You may have some music in the background and hear the hum of the air conditioner. The chair you are sitting on may be comfortable but your reading light insufficient. You will likely pay attention to some of these cues and ignore others. The world is not so much an objective reality, but is rather what we perceive it to be. This is especially true in social situations. A large majority of a leader's job involves sifting through information and deciding what is relevant and what is not, then acting based on those choices. People working with Scardino were undoubtedly distracted by her accent and even by the fact that she was a woman in what had always been a man's position. They had to decide whether those factors were important or not. They had to decide what was perception and what was reality. This chapter will explore the way we perceive other people, our organizations, and the world beyond.

SELF-ASSESSMENT 4.1

WHAT STEREOTYPES DO YOU HOLD?

All of us have stereotypes of various groups. The stereotypes we hold depend on our culture, where we grew up, and many other influences from our family, friends, and personal experiences. The following self-assessment is designed to help you explore the stereotypes you hold, their sources, and their consequences.

1. Identify Your Stereotypes

Using the following table, identify several stereotypes that you hold about different groups; for each one, write down what you believe to be its source and any possible personal experience you have had that you think directly supports the stereotype. You should target stereotypes that you would like to change. One example is provided. Remember that this is a self-assessment, not to be shared with the class or your instructor; there are no right or wrong answers. The more honest you are, the more you will benefit from the exercise.

Stereotype	Source	Personal Experience
Example: • Asians are team members, not leaders.	• My grandfather always said that • I've learned about Asian cultures being community oriented • The business press always says they work well in groups	• My Chinese team member last semester was very quiet • Asian students rarely talk in class or try to take over team meetings • My friend's roommate is Asian and very quiet
•	•	•
•	•	•
•	•	•
	•	•

How easy was it for you to remember your stereotypes? How easy is it to remember their source? How about the personal experiences?

2. Looking for Disconfirmation

For each of the stereotypes you listed in step 1, consider events or evidence that you have directly or indirectly experienced that contradict your stereotype. You may have to work hard at this step, as you are not likely to remember contradictory examples easily. Again an example is provided.

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(Continued)

Stereotype	Disconfirmation
Example	
• Asians are team members, not leaders	• The Chinese are leading the world in many areas of business • Asians are leaders and entrepreneurs in the high tech industry • The Japanese are courageous military leaders • Japan is one of the leading economies in the world
	•
	•

How easy was it to come up with disconfirming examples? Why is it so hard to remember disconfirming evidence and information? What can you do to start changing the stereotypes you hold?

Perception

What Is Perception?

Perception is the mental process that we use to understand our environment, while **social perception** is the process of gathering, selecting, and interpreting information about how we view ourselves and others. Whereas perceiving the physical environment is relatively objective and testable, information about people is often subjective and open to interpretation. This makes social perception a subjective rather than objective process.[10] When we interact with others, there are many cues and signals that beg for our attention. We consider the way people dress; their facial and other physical characteristics; their tone of voice and accent; nonverbal behaviors; their eye contact with others; how often they smile; and the message they communicate. We cannot pay attention to everything at once, so we pick and choose what is important. A key part of a manager's job is to assess social situations, to pick and choose what is important and what is not, to evaluate people, and to act on that evaluation. The perception process is an essential part of managing people.

Perception: the mental process we use to pay attention selectively to some stimuli and cues and not to others

Social perception: the process of gathering, selecting, and interpreting information about how we view ourselves and others

Closure: the process of filling in missing information to understand a stimulus

Perception Process

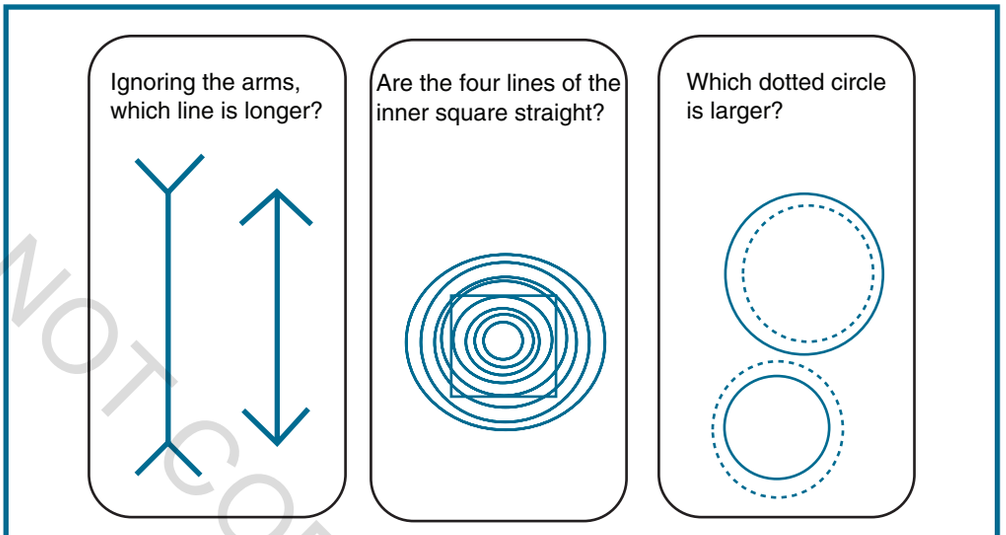
Because the perception process requires us to select, interpret, and use stimuli and cues, the process is subject to considerable error, a serious drawback. Take a few minutes to examine the images in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2. The drawings in the first figure are classical tests of physical perception. Did you make the same errors as most people? Even though we can measure the images objectively, and we know we are making errors in our perception, we are still not able to perceive the images accurately. In Figure 4.2, the corporate logos have hidden cues; but once you see them, you won't miss them again. What we see is subject to perception and therefore to error.

Another example that highlights the power of perception is shown in Figure 4.3. The figure demonstrates **closure**, which refers to how we fill in missing information to understand a stimulus. We know that the figures are a rectangle and a

What Do You Think?

▶ Some people argue that giving many people in the organization impressive sounding titles helps them gain "presence" in their interactions with others and thus improves the work. Others say that only applies to certain industries. Others say it makes no difference anywhere. What do you think?

FIGURE 4.1 COMMON PERCEPTION ILLUSIONS



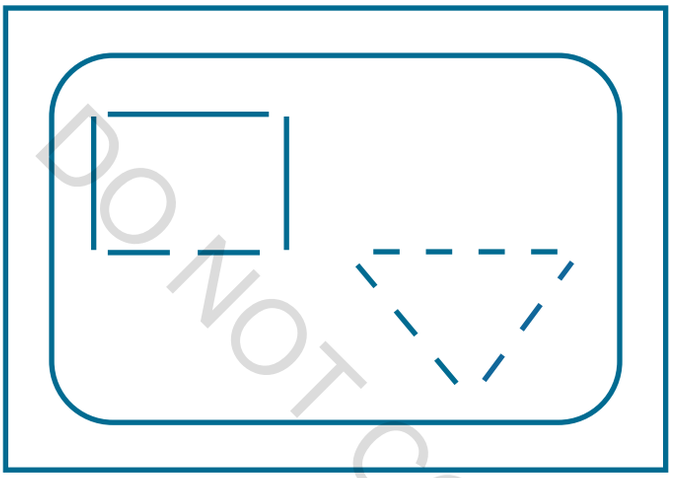
Use a ruler to answer these questions. The answers may surprise you!

FIGURE 4.2 PERCEPTION AT WORK: WHAT DO YOU SEE IN THESE FAMOUS CORPORATE LOGOS?

Do you miss them? The lion and gorilla in Pittsburgh Zoo? The two people eating Tostitos? The kiss in the K? The cyclist in the R of Tour? The 31 in BR? The arrow under Amazon that points from A to Z – the logo? The arrow between E and X?

triangle, although the lines are not complete. We complete them. Closure is a crucial part of the perception process. When we do not have all the facts—which is most of the time—we rely on assumptions to fill in missing information. Closure allows us to finish an unfinished picture or to interpret an unclear situation by completing it based on our previous experiences. Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 illustrate physical perception. However, similar processes affect social perception. We simply do not see everything and we fill in information as needed.

FIGURE 4.3 CLOSURE



Consider how closure can affect a manager's evaluation of an employee. A manager who supervises 25 people has limited contact with each employee. Over the past six months, however, one customer has complained about a particular employee and the manager has personally observed a loud argument between the same employee and a supervisor from another department. When compared to everything else the employee may have done, these two samples of behavior are limited, but they are the most direct information the manager has and are the ones that stand out. Based on these two samples, and having little time to gather more information, the manager may use closure to fill in the picture and decide that the employee has a short fuse and the potential of being a troublemaker.

What Would You Do?

▶ You are interested in working for a company that does extensive business in Central and South American countries. You know that being fluent in Spanish will give you an edge. You are currently taking a Spanish course that will improve your basic conversational knowledge of the language. Since you expect to be somewhat fluent by the time you actually get the job, you are wondering if you should write in your résumé that you are fluent in Spanish.

Culture and Perception

Culture includes the behavior, norms, values, and assumptions associated with a certain group. Culture, then, affects how we view the world and interpret events. All work-related behaviors—from your method of greeting others, to your style of work, the way you dress, how you resolve conflict, and how you provide feedback to your employees—are affected by culture.[11] Behaviors have meaning only within a certain cultural context. Once outside a familiar cultural context, people interpret what you say and do in different and unexpected ways.

For example, an Australian or American employee interprets a manager's admission that he does not know the answer to a question as an indication that the manager hasn't come across the situation before. He simply doesn't know the answer. In contrast, a French or Brazilian employee is more likely to interpret the manager's admitted lack of knowledge as incompetence. The interpretations differ because France and Brazil have cultures in which there is a higher power differential between managers and employees than in Australia or the United States. In high-power distance cultures, people with power are treated with high deference and expected to have corresponding knowledge. Simple behaviors that are perceived and interpreted one way in one culture are interpreted differently in another culture.[12] We see and interpret situations from our own cultural perspectives, and, not surprisingly, misperceptions are at the core of many cross-cultural communication problems. If managers or employees lack information or are unfamiliar with cross-cultural situations, they are likely to provide closure by relying on information and assumptions based on their own culture. And they may completely miss what is really happening.

Sorry Doesn't Translate

Consider the example of a native of America, Ms. Thompson, who starts working for a large firm in Spain. Her boss, Mr. Rodriguez, meets with her on the first day. After lengthy greetings, Mr. Rodriguez inquires about Ms. Thompson's family, her father's and her grandfather's professions, her mother's family, and her siblings. He spends a considerable amount of time making what appears to Ms. Thompson to be irrelevant and inappropriate small

talk about her family and personal background, travels, personal interests, and her impressions of Spain. Ms. Thompson, who is experienced at interviewing and avoiding personal questions, carefully sidesteps all these inappropriate questions. The meeting lasts one hour without her having been told much about her assignments or Mr. Rodriguez's expectations. She is baffled. Mr. Rodriguez for his part is irritated and concerned that Ms. Thompson does not talk about her family and is evasive about her background. How does she expect to connect with people if they know nothing about her and her family? He cannot trust someone without knowing her personal background. Both individuals in this case perceive and interpret the situation from their own cultural perspective. Social and family ties are the key to the fabric of Spanish society[13] and therefore important to Mr. Rodriguez. Ms. Thompson, on the other hand, is used to the U.S. workplace where personal issues are not relevant and considered inappropriate. Mr. Rodriguez is simply trying to establish that his new employee has the essential and necessary family background to be trustworthy; Ms. Thompson, based on her cultural background, is appropriately avoiding these personal issues. From our outside view, it is obvious that the cultural misperceptions here are based on different cultural values and assumptions.

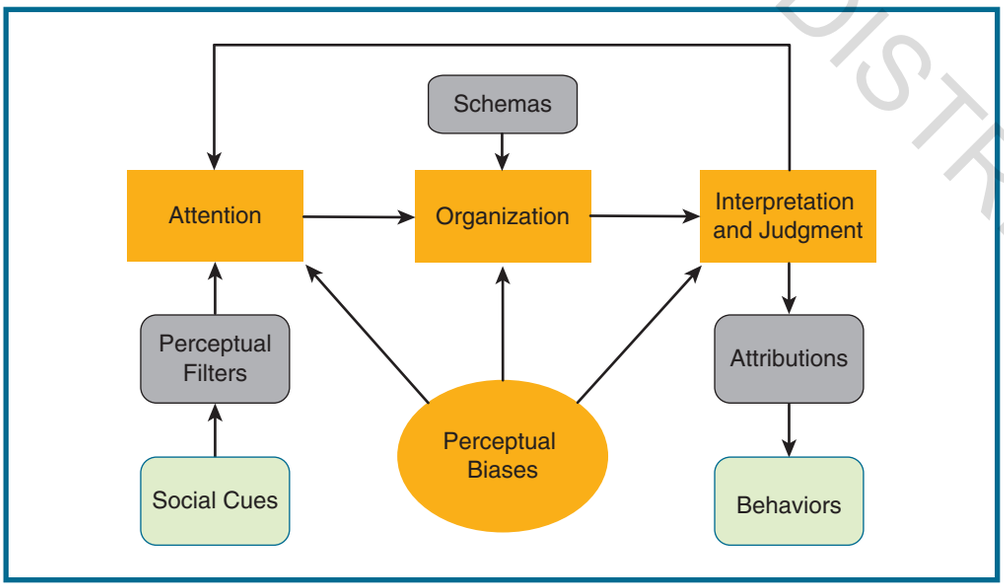
What Do You Think?

▶ You are a manager conducting the first 6-month performance review of an engineer in your department. He is from New Delhi, India, and where he studied in a well-regarded program. He married a U.S. student who was studying abroad in India and has been in the United States for less than one year. You have not had much time to interact with him and have heard neither positive nor negative things about him. While you are asking him a series of questions, he keeps looking down and seems to avoid making eye contact with you. This is making you uncomfortable. What do you think?

The Three Stages of Perception

Social perception is a multistage process, as presented in Figure 4.4. In the following sections, we examine each of the three stages and consider the factors that affect each.

FIGURE 4.4 THE THREE-STAGE PERCEPTUAL PROCESS



Our perception of others often depends on superficial things such as physical characteristics. Even how someone dresses can heavily impact how we view or judge others. Does your perception of the man on the right differ from your perception of the man on the left? How so?

Attention Stage

The first stage of social perception involves paying attention to signals from the environment. The **attention stage of perception** involves selection of stimuli, cues, and signals to which we will pay attention. What do we notice? What grabs our attention? For example, as your professor stops to read his notes for a moment in class, you suddenly pay attention to the keys he is jiggling in his pocket. That noise may then lead you to pay attention to his particularly ill-fitting baggy pants. Or, in a work situation, your new boss's Southern accent may be terribly distracting. Or an older manager may first notice her new employee's barely hidden tattoos and multiple piercings. In all these cases, something out of the ordinary grabs the attention of people and may distract them from their task.

In the attention stage of perception, we consciously or unconsciously select what we will pay attention to. The process of letting some information in while keeping out the rest is called the **perceptual filter**. At the core of the perceptual filter is **selective attention**—that is, we pay attention to some, but not all, physical and social cues. Many factors determine what makes it through our perceptual filter during the attention stage. Culture is one factor; another is salience.[14] **Salient cues** are those that in some way stand out. We use salient elements and cues more heavily than others in our perceptual process. In the examples above, the jingling keys and baggy pants, the Southern accent, and the tattoos and piercings all became salient.

Attention stage of perception: the selection of stimuli, cues, and signals to which we will pay attention

Perceptual filter: the process of letting some information in while keeping out the rest

Selective attention: the process of paying attention to some, but not all, physical and social cues

Salient cues: those cues that are somehow so striking that they stand out

What determines the salience of one cue as opposed to others? All else being equal, we pay attention to cues that are novel, unusual, brighter, more dynamic, or noisier than others. Factors that are visible and obvious are also likely to be more salient. For example, race, particularly skin color, can be a key factor in salience for some but not for others.[15] Similarly, a tattoo and piercings that may appear mundane to a 21-year-old may be unusual and therefore salient for the older manager. A new employee is novel by definition, particularly in a department that does not hire many new employees. The other employees' attention will be focused on that new employee. For a while, everyone will remember what he wore, how he talked, what he said, and how he reacted. Similarly, women and minorities still stand out in some situations and therefore receive more attention than others. When a person is the salient element in the environment, he gets caught in everybody's perceptual filter and therefore gets attention. Similar behaviors from other employees are likely to go unnoticed, but everyone sees the new person. In such a case, the smallest slipup or mistake may damage the new person's future in the organization.

Intensity of stimuli is another factor that affects salience. You are likely to pay attention to a loud voice, a brightly colored shirt, or someone's strong perfume. For example,

those who wear brightly colored clothes are more likely to be remembered after a meeting—though not always positively.[16] Cultural differences may also make events stand out in our minds. For instance, standing close to others during conversation is considered normal in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cultures. These behaviors go unnoticed in those regions. However, the same behavior is, for the most part, unusual in the United States where people feel uneasy if a coworker stands too close while talking to them or touches their arm or shoulder during a conversation. That coworker's behavior is salient, which means it is something that you are likely to pay attention to and remember.

Holding a Gun

In all these examples, we remember people and make decisions about them because they stand out. Their salience gets them trapped in our perceptual filter. This does not mean that you should necessarily work at making yourself salient so others can remember you better. People may remember you better, but they may also evaluate you in more extreme ways.[17] Once information grabs our attention, we need to organize the cues and information in meaningful sets that we can use later.

Organization Stage

The second stage of the perception process is **organization**. During this stage we organize the information that our filters have allowed through. We group information into meaningful, orderly, and useful sets. We assign new information to categories that already exist and are familiar to us; we create relationships among the various parts; create new sets; and put things into bundles that we can remember.

Schemas

The major process at work in this stage is the use of schemas.[18] **Schemas** are mental or cognitive models or patterns that people apply to understand and explain certain situations and events. They are frameworks that allow us to fill in information in social settings. For instance, people use schemas in the closure process to help complete incomplete pictures. Although we may be aware of some of the schemas we hold, they usually operate at a subconscious level.

Schemas at Work

Here's an illustration of the schema process. We all have schemas about what happens on the first day of a new job. You'll meet with your new boss and coworkers, get a tour of the department or building, be introduced to others, and be given information about the job and assignments. You expect a light work day with a lot of information overload. The schema about "the first day at a new job" tells you what is "normal" and what is not. Based on this schema, you can determine whether anything unusual takes place. Not meeting with your boss (who sat in her office all day and never acknowledged you) or being given a stack of work without any introduction would suggest something negative because it violates the expectations set by your first-day schema.

Organization stage of perception: the organization of information that the perceptual filter has allowed through during the attention stage

Schemas: mental patterns that people apply to understand and explain certain situations and events

Schemas are useful in that they allow us to process information quickly. They help us remember details and complete gaps in what we perceive. Using schemas makes us very efficient information organizers, and, for that reason, they allow us to remember people and events better. On the negative side, schemas can lead to error: We use closure too quickly to fill in information we do not have and come to a hasty conclusion. (The advantages and disadvantages of schemas are summarized in Table 4.1.) Think back to the

GLOBAL SOCIETY

HEINEKEN'S PR CHALLENGE

How does a Dutch beer maker find itself entangled in a dog fighting event in Mongolia? The wonders of instant viral communication!

Heineken is a century and half-old Dutch beer company with 70,000 employees in 71 countries and over 250 international, regional, local, and specialty beers, including Amstel Light and Dos Equis, and other beverages that cater to a global market. It calls itself the world's most international brewer and carefully manages its image by selecting events and partners to showcase its brands. It most recently sponsored the latest Bond movie, Skyfall, and actively participated in a global campaign to reduce the harmful effects of alcohol. The company emphasizes respect for individuals, the cultures and the communities where it operates, and relies on a clear code of ethics.[19] In spite of the careful image and culture building, Heineken was surprised when a picture of an organized dog fighting event in a night club in Mongolia showed up on the Internet with Heineken banners in the background in April of 2012.

The picture quickly went viral and animal rights activists and many others all over the world called for a boycott of Heineken. Social media was buzzing with denunciations and cries of outrage. One Facebook user stated: "I'm not having anything to do with your product or events you sponsor—anywhere—until you sort this out. Disgraceful!"[20] It took Heineken some time to confirm the veracity, and even the location of the picture, which was taken almost a year prior, and then find the venue to investigate why its banners where so clearly visible next to a dog fighting ring. It was finally clarified that the company had sponsored an event, unrelated to dog fighting, in the same nightclub the evening before, and that the banner had not been removed.

The response from Hieneken was strong: "We fully understand the level of negative feeling amongst consumers based on what they have seen. We encourage our consumers to continue to use social media channels to alert us to any situation where they feel our brands are being misrepresented, so that we can take the appropriate actions."[21] The company further moved to cut all relationships with the venue where the fight had occurred and reiterated that: "As a company and a brand owner, we do not and would never knowingly support any event, outlet or individual involved in this type of activity. It is against our company and brand rules and—more important—against our company values."[22]

The controversy was a reminder of the challenges that today's companies face from events all over the world over which they have limited control. A carefully developed and managed image and reputation can quickly go up in smoke due to a viral campaign. Constant vigilance and preparation to expect the unexpected are part and parcel of managing in a global world. Heineken's success in dealing with this crisis was due to its quick response and to putting a strong, very human face on its apology, a response that addressed the concerns of its large, global customer base.

1. How does culture impact perceptions?
2. What can managers do to avoid misperceptions based on culture?

first-day-on-the-job example. You may interpret the boss's failure to greet you and your getting work without explanation as negative and as an indication of a cold workplace. But your boss and coworkers may have been dealing with a major crisis that day and simply did not have time to chat with you.

TABLE 4.1 SCHEMAS IN THE BALANCE

Disadvantages of Schemas	Advantages of Schemas
May lead to over-interpretation	Efficient way to organize information
Ignores information that does not fit	Provides information
Hard to change	Helps us remember

Another disadvantage of schemas is that they resist change. This resistance is due in part to our lack of awareness of the schemas we hold—we cannot change something we do not know exists. Another problem is that even when we are aware of schemas, we are not willing to give them up easily. If you have several years of good work experience, you have already formed schemas of appropriate boss-employee relationships, the way coworkers are supposed to behave, and the way leaders are supposed to behave. You have developed those schemas over a long period of time and you consider them effective. But that might also mean that you find it difficult to accept anything that is different from what you are used to. Facing situations that do not fit our schemas often requires us to spend extra energy and creates some stress, until we can interpret the information that does not fit correctly.

Schemas and Culture

Our schemas for various situations and events are greatly influenced by our cultural background.[23] In the northeastern part of the United States, interaction among people tends to be more formal and businesslike. In southern states, social hospitality and politeness are the norm. A Southerner working in New York City may find her coworkers cold and rushed; a New Yorker in Arkansas may feel that people are not moving fast enough and spending too much time on useless greetings and niceties. Crossing international borders leads to further challenges, as you may remember from the example of Ms. Thompson in Spain.

In many parts of the world, formal interaction, respect for authority, and the presence of clear status symbols characterizes the boss-employee schema. An employee in India calls her boss by his last name and shows him many signs of respect and deference. Because typical U.S. schemas are based on more informal work relationships, the U.S. employee working in India who does not defer to the boss and uses first names is likely to appear rude. His behavior does not fit in the Indian schema of proper boss-employee relationships. Similarly, the U.S. schema about smiling differs from those of others culture. In the United States, smiling is a sign of friendship and indicates a person's degree of niceness and happiness. In many Asian cultures, smiling, especially for men, can indicate a lack of seriousness or respect. The Korean proverb "The man who smiles a lot is not a real man" spotlights how the Korean smiling schema contrasts with beliefs in some Western cultures.

Different organizations with different corporate cultures also create different schemas regarding what is and is not expected and acceptable. For example, joking, being goofy and playful and very informal is part of the culture of Southwest Airlines. Those flying regularly with Southwest are used to the flight attendants singing safety instructions, cracking jokes, and playing tricks on passengers, all behaviors that are a reflection of the values of the company. Having fun, enjoying yourself, and not taking yourself too seriously are part of the stated culture.[24] Part of a job interview at Southwest is to ask candidates to tell jokes—not a likely event in most other airlines in the world.

Shaping Work Perceptions

Southwest Airlines Advertising Specialist Lindsey Bailey poses inside the engine at a launch party at Southwest Airlines headquarters at Love Field in Dallas. Southwest Airlines is known for its fun and friendly culture.

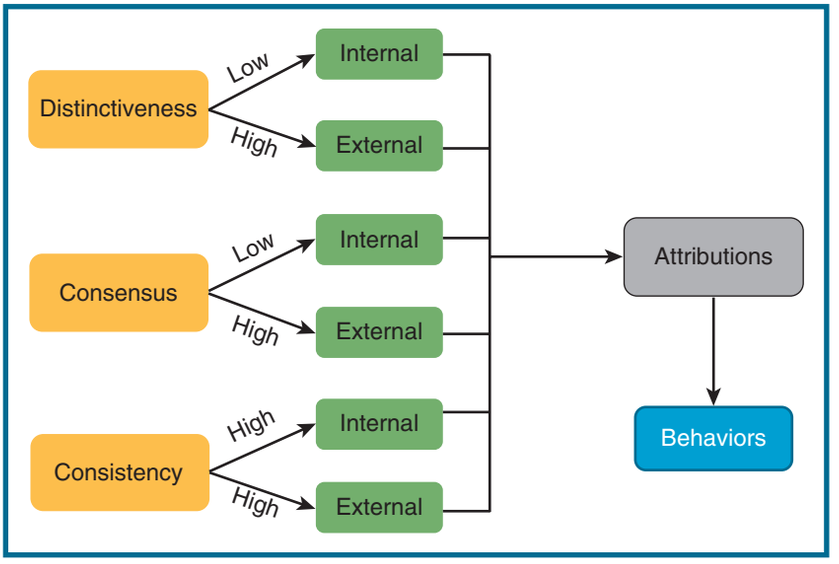
When interacting with others, we need to be aware that our schemas are likely to affect our perception. Some information fits into existing schemas and is quickly organized and stored away. Other information may not fit an existing schema. This may lead to the creation of a new schema, or may cause what does not fit to be forgotten because it contradicts what we already know and we may have no ready-made category to help us store it. For example, many women have experienced making statements and suggestions in meetings and their male colleagues either not remembering those suggestions or attributing them to male colleagues.[25] The traditional schema of women being less competent, able to deal only with people, and maybe not fully belonging in the workplace, is still operating for many people and prevents them from remembering when women make contributions. Even Marjorie Scardino faced such stereotypes when her successes were attributed to male executives who reported to her!

Interpretation and judgment stage: the clarification and translation of organized information to allow for the attribution of meaning

Interpretation and Judgment Stage

In the third part of social perception, the **interpretation and judgment stage**, we clarify and translate information we have organized so we can decide on its meaning (see Figure 4.5). Through interpretation, we make a judgment or form an opinion about the event or the person and we decide the cause of the behavior. This process is critical in organizations where a manager's job involves evaluating employees, customers, suppliers, and various business partners. For instance, you observe that your new employee is polite and friendly to the people she meets and spends time getting to know them. You wonder whether she is simply behaving as most people would when they start a new job or whether she is a particularly nice and outgoing person. To decide, you need to assign a cause to her behavior, a process we discuss next.

FIGURE 4.5 THE INTERPRETATION AND JUDGMENT STAGE: ATTRIBUTIONS



The Attribution Process

The process of inferring and assigning a cause to a behavior is called the **attribution process.**[26] One of the first steps in the attribution process involves deciding whether the cause of a behavior is internal or external (see Figure 4.5). If you make an **internal attribution**, you attribute the cause of behavior to factors within the control of or "inside" the person. These are factors that are permanent and stable (such as personality, values, or natural ability) or less permanent (such as effort or motivation). Because internal attributions refer to the person, they are also called personal attributions. For example, you would say: "Mary is late for work because she is lazy," or "Sergio did well on the exam because he worked hard." We make **external attributions** when we think that factors "outside" the person are the cause of behavior. These are factors such as the physical setting, task difficulty, the organizational culture, the presence and behavior of other people, or luck. Because external attributions refer to the situation as the cause of behavior, they are also called situational attributions. An example would be: "Mary is late for work because she has to drop her child off at day care," or "Sergio did well on the exam because it was easy."

Causal Attribution Theory

Attributions are a central factor in any social perception process. In managerial situations, most decisions regarding people require managers to make attributions about the cause of behavior (see Figure 4.5). For example, when interviewing a potential employee, managers need to decide whether the person has real talent and potential—an internal attribution, or whether he is simply well prepared for the interview—an external attribution. The same attribution process operates in performance reviews. While some performance data may be objective, it is still subject to some interpretation. Is the high performer bright and hardworking (internal attributions) or just lucky to have landed a big client through pure coincidence (an external attribution)? What about the employee who had a bad year? Was it for lack of effort or ability, or because of a tough territory or uncooperative coworkers?

Attribution Theory

Deciding the cause of behavior—making attributions—is essential in the manager's decision about what to do about an employee's good or bad performance. A manager might not rank a performer who had top results in an easy territory as high as a person whose performance results were slightly lower but worked very hard and had a tougher assignment. The poor performer who did not try will be rated more harshly than the equally poor performer who tried hard but lacked the necessary training to do the job well. All personnel decisions regarding raises, training, promotions, discipline, and so forth similarly require managers to make attributions.

As demonstrated by the examples, effort and ability are used in internal attributions, while task difficulty and luck are the major factors used in external attributions.[27] Managers, just like all of us, are likely to overuse internal attributions and underutilize external ones.[28] For example, managers evaluating employees are more likely to assume that lack of ability or effort and motivation are the cause of poor performance. They are much less likely to attribute poor performance to situational factors, such as lack of training, poor support from other employees, poor equipment, or even their own poor leadership.

Attribution process: the process of assigning or attributing a cause to a behavior or event

Internal or personal attribution: the process of assigning a cause to a behavior that is related to internal factors within a person

External or situational attribution: the process of assigning a cause to a behavior that is related to factors external to the person

Information We Use to Make Attributions

When making either internal or external attributions, we use three types of information: distinctiveness, consensus, and consistency[29] (see Figure 4.5).

- First, we consider whether the behavior we are evaluating is unique or *distinctive* to a particular task or situation. Does the person behave like this in all situations? If yes, then we are likely to attribute the cause of the behavior to the person. If not, then we may consider situational causes. To show how this factor applies in an organizational setting, a manager evaluating his employees would look at the distinctiveness of the employees' performance histories. Do they perform as well at all tasks or is the good performance unique and specific to computer-related tasks? If the performance is specific to one or a few tasks and therefore distinctive to a situation, an external attribution is more likely.
- The second factor in making attributions is *consensus*. Does everybody act the same way or is the person acting in a particularly unusual way? Did everyone in the poor performer's team have trouble with a new process or is the employee in question the only one? If others behave similarly, meaning that there is consensus, we are likely to make an external attribution.
- The last factor is *consistency*, whether there is a consistent pattern of behavior. Depending on what is consistent, we may make either internal or external attributions. If there is no consistency, we have trouble making any kind of judgment; high consistency is needed in order to make an attribution. A manager would have trouble making an attribution about an employee whose performance is highly inconsistent from one month to the next and from task to task.

Attributions we make about others' behavior determine our own actions. If a manager attributes poor performance to lack of training rather than lack of effort, she is likely to be less critical and offer a constructive course of action. Although the process of making attributions about others is somewhat similar to that of making attributions about our own behaviors and actions, there are several key differences.

Making Attributions About Our Own Behavior

Attributions and Actions

Although we have access to more information about ourselves than we do about others, researchers have found that we tend to follow the same patterns to decide the cause of our own behaviors as we do to decide why others behave as they do.[30] We consider our actions and behaviors and deduce our intentions and attitudes from them. This concept, known as **self-perception theory**, refers to people's tendency to look for internal and external factors when asked to explain the cause of their own actions.[31] Self-perception suggests that we do not always behave intentionally or consciously know the cause of our own behavior. Instead, we do something, and then we try to figure out why we did it.

Self-perception theory: a theory suggesting that people make attributions about themselves by looking at their behavior

The self-perception theory of attribution leads to some interesting results. Consider how we explain our action when we're rewarded for what we did. For example, how would a professional basketball player who gets a large bonus for playing well explain his performance? Would he say he really loves the game or attribute his performance to the high bonus? How would the employee who often volunteers to help other coworkers without getting any tangible reward explain her behavior? Interestingly, when we receive high tangible external rewards for our actions, such as money or public recognition, we are more likely to see the external reward as the cause of our behavior. Conversely, when there are no clear external rewards, we tend to attribute our behavior to internal causes. The top designer is more likely to tell you that

she worked hard because of the bonus rather than the love of her job. The helpful employee who gets no obvious reward will tell you that he really enjoys helping others. The tendency to make external attributions about our own behavior when an external reward is given is called **overjustification**.[32]

Overjustification has many implications for managers. It suggests that giving people substantial external rewards for doing tasks they enjoy may reduce their internal motivation to do the task. If the reward is large and important enough, people are likely to make an external attribution—that is, they see the reward rather than their internal motivation as the cause of their actions. As a result, their internal motivation to perform may be reduced and they may be less likely to perform as well, unless they keep receiving the high rewards. This process may provide one explanation for the low performance of some star athletes, who seem to put forth little effort, in spite of high salaries. The implications of overjustification are that, whenever possible, managers should emphasize internal factors and make them salient to maintain employees' internal interests and motivation. High public recognition and reward can provide short-term results, but they may backfire in the long run.

Because we act on the basis of our attributions about others and ourselves, it is essential that our attributions be as objective as possible. Misjudging an employee may have serious legal, ethical, and performance-related consequences. It is important that managers hire, promote, demote, reward, and fire the right people for the right reasons.

What Would You Do?

▶ Anita has been at her job for three years. She has not been the highest performer, but she has received consistently good evaluations. She is part of a 30-person department with just one supervisor. Anita has applied for a promotion. While reviewing her file, her manager notices occasional mentions of less-than-average performance in a few tasks. One is related to dealing with customers; another is related to some budget issues; a third has to do with a poorly done report. The manager is wondering what is going on. Should she consider Anita for a promotion? What would you do?

Fuzzy Attribution Styles

How Perceptions Shape Our Lives

Perceptual Biases

As you saw in Figures 4.1 and 4.2, our perception can be inaccurate and incomplete. We pay attention to some but not all information, we use closure and schemas to be quick and to organize information, and we make interpretations and judgments that are subject to biases and errors. These errors are, to a large extent, a normal and inevitable part of the physical and social perceptual processes. However, we can manage specific perceptual errors. In the following section, we identify several common perceptual biases, the difficulty in overcoming them, and ways to manage them.

Our perceptual abilities allow us to process a vast amount of information quickly and efficiently. However, this efficiency often leads to ineffective decisions because we do not process the information thoroughly or correctly. Instead we often take cognitive shortcuts, such as ignoring information that does not fit our expectations or making assumptions based on perceptions rather than objective facts. The shortcuts we use to be efficient and that can create distortions are called **perceptual biases** (see Table 4.2 for a summary). These, in turn, lead to mistakes in judgment. When these biases operate, we stop gathering information and instead rely on our assumptions to fill in the missing information.

Overjustification: the tendency to make external attributions about our own behavior when an external reward is given

Perceptual biases: distortions in perception, often caused by cognitive shortcuts, and that lead to mistakes

TABLE 4.2 PERCEPTUAL BIASES

Biases	Description
Fundamental attribution error	The tendency to underestimate situational factors and overestimate personal factors when making attributions about others' actions
Actor-observer difference	The tendency to rely more on external attributions when explaining our own actions
Stereotypes	A generalization about an individual based on the group to which the person belongs
Halo or horn effect	Use of a one characteristic to create a positive or negative impression that dominates other information
Similar-to-me effect	Developing a liking for a person that we perceive is similar to us and disliking those who are different
Primacy and recency	A tendency to overemphasize either early information—in the case of primacy, or most recent information—in the case of recency
Self-serving bias	The tendency to accept credit for success and reject blame for failure

Fundamental Attribution Error

Fundamental Attribution Error

We mentioned earlier our tendency to underestimate situational factors and overestimate personal factors when making attributions about others' actions. This tendency is called the **fundamental attribution error**.[33] For example, if your boss is unresponsive, you are more likely to blame the behavior on his lack of interpersonal skills or on his being distant and cold than on the pressures he is facing or how overloaded he is. Similarly, you are more likely to attribute the uncooperative behavior of a fellow manager to her personality rather than to a lack of time. These attributions lead us not to give people the benefit of the doubt.

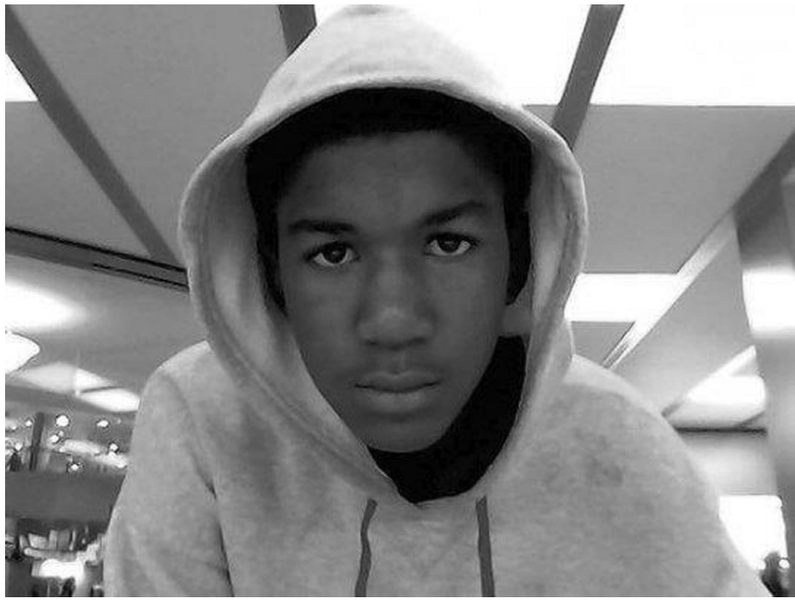
Fundamental attribution error: the tendency to underestimate situational factors and overestimate personal factors when making attributions about others' actions

The fundamental attribution error can have serious consequences. Because of this bias, we often make an incorrect internal attribution about people who are victims, blaming them for what happens to them. For example, in the much publicized case of the Floridian teenager, Trayvon Martin, who was shot by a self-appointed neighborhood watchman, the fact that Trayvon was wearing a hoodie became the focus, overshadowing many of the critical issues in the case.[34] In perceiving others, we tend to focus on internal factors.

Actor-observer difference: the tendency to rely more on external attributions when explaining our own actions

But the fundamental attribution error works in reverse when we are looking for causes of our own behavior. When we explain our own actions, we rely more on external attributions. This process is called the **actor-observer difference**.[35] While we tend to make internal attributions about the behavior of others and often fall prey to the fundamental attribution error, we tend to make external attributions about our own behavior. The reason for this difference is that access to different types of information leads to different perspectives. In contrast to what others perceive, we have information about our own history and how we behave in different situations. As a result, we have views of the distinctiveness and consistency of our own behavior that are likely to differ from observers' views. Because of the different perspectives, environmental factors are more salient to the actor than to the observer, so an actor is more likely to make external attributions.

Consider the case of a relatively new employee who has just had a run-in with a client. The employee knows from his prior encounters with other clients in previous jobs that this particular client is unusually rude, difficult, and overly demanding. The employee has been in sales for many years and has rarely run into this type of trouble. He also knows that his father's recent illness has created a lot of stress for him and contributed to his uncharacteristic lack of patience. The employee knows that his behavior is distinctive to this situation. From his point of view, the client's rudeness is the focus. These factors all lead the employee to decide that the cause of the problem is the client, an external attribution, not himself.



Perception and stereotypes played a key role in the Trayvon Martin case. Something as simple as a hoodie, which Martin was wearing the night he was shot, can impact how we view others.

The situation looks different to his boss. She does not yet have extensive information about her new employee's style or performance. Because the client has complained about the employee's lack of responsiveness, her attention will be focused on the complaint and the employee. Another factor that could affect her perception is that clients rarely call to complain. The manager who observes the situation makes an internal attribution about the cause of the employee's behavior. She may decide that he is inexperienced and needs training or that he is impatient and not well suited for this type of job (both internal attributions.)

What Would You Do?

▶ You have a brilliant jerk in your office, smart, insightful, but overly self-centered and, to be honest, supremely annoying. What would you do?

The example illustrates how the actor-observer difference and the fundamental attribution error can lead to poor judgment, disagreement, and misunderstanding. Awareness of the bias, however, can help managers avoid these pitfalls. Managers can also take extra steps to overcome the bias. In our case, for instance, the employee and the manager could resolve their differences with an exchange of information, more objective data collection, good listening, and more experience working together.

Stereotypes

A **stereotype** is a generalization about an individual based on the group to which the person belongs. Such groups may include race, gender, sexual orientation, functional area, and so forth. Stereotypes are so powerful that they can prevent us from recognizing individual differences and performance. For example, research shows that the majority of the U.S. population still has negative views of African Americans and Hispanics.[36] Other recent research suggests that the color of a political candidate's skin continues to affect voters' decisions.[37] Similarly, women managers continue to be viewed as primarily able to deal with people well,[38] while other studies indicate that people generally fail to give female managers credit for their accomplishments.[39]

Shrewd GA Business Woman

Stereotype: a generalization about an individual based on the group to which the person belongs

Why do stereotypes operate? The main reason is that they allow us to become fast and efficient information processors. Based on our stereotypes, we can quickly select information we will pay attention to in making a judgment about the person. We therefore

do not have to continue gathering information and can concentrate on the many other stimuli that beg for our attention. But although stereotypes help us process information quickly, they compromise effectiveness and accuracy. Once formed, stereotypes are resistant to change.

How do stereotypes operate? If a stereotype is activated in the attention stage, we use it as the basis of our perception and stop gathering information. Because we stop paying attention, we fail to notice information that may contradict the stereotype. Stereotypes also influence the way we interpret and judge a person. For instance, a commonly held stereotype of the Asians is that they are good followers and team members, but not good leaders. If you rely on this stereotype, you are likely to stop collecting information about the leadership behaviors that your Asian employee is demonstrating. Instead, you may start searching for information that confirms her excellent team behaviors. Think back on the exercise at the beginning of this chapter. Your stereotypes are likely to make it easy to remember information and examples that confirm them, but it may be harder for you to remember disconfirmatory evidence. How can you change if you simply do not have the right data?

Consider the challenges that Marjorie Scardino of Pearson faced. She used to be a rodeo-barrel racer, then moved to newspaper publishing to the *Economist* to CEO of a global conglomerate. Since her first day, the British newspapers questioned her credentials and her fitness for the job. Some questioned how a mother of three had time to run a major British company. Others poked fun at her spouse, calling him the "house-husband." People even attributed several of her successful decisions to male executives in the company rather than to Scardino's creativity and strategic skills. Scardino fought back against the stereotypes with disarming humor and excellent people-management skills.[40]

Halo Effect

Halo-Horns and Similarity Effects

The halo-horn effect is another bias that usually affects perception during the attention and organization stages.[41] The **halo effect** occurs when a general impression or evaluation of one characteristic of a person or situation creates either a halo, a positive impression, or horns, a negative impression, that becomes the central factor around which all other information is selected, organized, and interpreted. For example, a study in the United Kingdom indicates that a person's first name can have a significant impact on how the person is perceived. Another example is when someone is introduced as an "Apple" or "Google" employee. Because of the reputation of these companies, we are likely to quickly form an impression of the person.

Halo effect: a bias that occurs when a general impression or evaluation of one characteristic of a person or situation creates a positive impression that becomes the central factor around which all other information is selected, organized, and interpreted

A powerful factor that can create a halo or horns is the "similar-to-me" effect.[42] The **similar-to-me** effect occurs when we develop a liking for a person that we perceive is similar to us and dislike those who are different. A lack of similarity can be very serious in a cross-cultural situation when the other person is bound to be different, and as a result, potentially disliked.

Similar-to-me: developing a liking for a person that we perceive is similar to us and disliking those who are different

Halos and horns are triggered automatically as we interact with people. As with other biases, they are not easy to avoid. Being aware of how halos or horns operate and understanding their effect on our perception is one of the best defenses. If we allow them to operate, we will fail to see individual differences in people with whom we work, thereby clouding our judgments about others' behavior.

Primacy and Recency

Do you believe that first impressions are important? If you do, you are correct. The importance of early impressions is called the **primacy effect**. It refers to a tendency to overemphasize early information. People tend to remember early information and it tends to color their later perceptions. The early information provides an organizing structure that influences other perception stages. In some cases, the first impression becomes a halo or horns that affects later information gathering and interpretation of a person's behavior. Shawn Graham, partner in a marketing brand strategy company, believes that the first impression you make on your new boss is essential: "I've got to be on my best behavior because the way I present myself early (both good and bad) could typecast me for months to come."[43]

The primacy effect suggests that the new employee who makes a bad mistake will have difficulty overcoming it. As a matter of fact, research indicates that most of us form a strong and long-lasting impression in the first few minutes we meet someone. The flip side of the primacy effect is the **recency effect**, whereby we pay attention to the most recent information at the expense of earlier data. The recency effect takes place most often when there is a time lag between the early and later information. For instance, consider a manager who has not had much contact with an employee during recent months. The manager is likely to base her performance review on the employee's activities on the latest project, without giving enough weight to earlier examples of work and performance. Similar to halos and horns, primacy and recency bias our perception mostly at the attention and organization stages. They provide organizing structures that influence the other information that is gathered and how it is organized.

Self-Serving Bias

Although actors are quick to make external attributions about their own shortcomings, they are also quick to accept credit—an internal attribution—when they succeed. The tendency to accept credit for our success and reject blame for failures is called the **self-serving bias.**[44] On the one hand, when we do poorly on a test, mess up a presentation, lose a client, or fail to achieve our goals, we blame situational factors rather than make internal attribution about our own lack of effort or ability. We blame the unfair professor, the inattentive audience, the demanding client, or unreasonable company goals. On the other hand, we tend to believe we are successful because we are smart and work hard. Few of us give credit readily or completely to our boss's coaching and motivational skills or to simply having been lucky when we perform well. Case studies of cheating in schools show that cheaters even consider their cheating to be act of selflessness and generosity. One student caught giving another an inflated score said: "A kid who has a horrible grade-point average, who, no matter how much he studies is going to totally bomb this test, by giving him an amazing score, I totally give him . . . a new lease on life."[45]

You can see many examples of the self-serving bias operating in the business press. Have you noticed how often business executives take credit for the success of their firms, but blame the economy, the competitors, government regulations, the global market, or other external factors for poor performance and failure? We all have a tendency to glorify ourselves and give positive consideration to things that directly affect us.[46] The recent case of Lance Armstrong, the now infamous Tour de France cyclist, provides yet another example.

Primacy effect: a tendency to overemphasize early information

Recency effect: a tendency to overemphasize the most recent information rather than earlier data

Self-serving bias: the tendency to accept credit for our success and reject blame for failures

With accusations of doping and Armstrong being stripped of his seven titles, neither Armstrong himself, nor any of the officials of the International Cycling Union, accepted any responsibility for what has been described as a successful and professional doping program; they simply blamed one another.[47]

The combination of all the biases makes for interesting interaction between managers and their employees. Stereotypes, halos-horns, and primacy-recency may bias the information managers gather. Additionally, managers are likely to blame poor performance on their employees' lack of skills and effort whereas the employees blame it on their managers' poor leadership skills. On the other hand, both will tend to believe that their own ability and hard work led to success and they forget to give the other side much credit. Given the amount of information we have to process, being efficient is necessary and desirable. Perceptual biases allow us to be efficient and quick in our social perception, but they can also cause errors.

Difficulty in Overcoming Biases

Now that we are aware of the potential biases in perception, why can't we simply avoid them? Three factors make this task harder than it looks. First, we have a *need for consistency* that pushes us to look for information that supports our assumptions and beliefs.[48] As a result, we either avoid looking for or we ignore information that disproves our perceptual biases. These avoidance techniques give us a greater sense of control over events. For instance, managers who have already decided to open an international branch office may look only for positive information that confirms their decision and ignore any contradictory input.

Sheryl Sanberg, Facebook COO, believes that women are held back by others' stereotypes and by how they perceive their own roles in organizations and in their family. In your own words, explain how this is an example of channeling.

Second, *channeling* reinforces our biases.[49] **Channeling** is the process of limiting our interaction with another so that we avoid receiving information that contradicts our judgment. Channeling is also called **confirmatory hypothesis testing** because we set up the situation to confirm our hypotheses about others. Research suggests that managers evaluating various opportunities use confirmatory strategies and as a result make poor decisions.[50] For example, if you dislike someone, you may not interact with or may be aloof toward her. Because of your actions, the other person is likely to respond in cold and unfriendly ways, thereby providing you with further evidence of the correctness of your perception. In another instance, a manager's perception that a Japanese subordinate lacks creativity may lead her to assign him to routine tasks. The employee then does not have the chance to demonstrate his creativity. The manager has channeled the employee's behavior to confirm her perceptions.

Channeling or confirmatory hypothesis testing: the process by which we limit people's interactions with us so their behavior supports our expectations

Channeling can have a profound effect on organizational behavior. For example, research indicates that women are generally perceived by both male and female managers to be less competent, less capable of leading, and more likely to quit because of family pressures. In accordance with such stereotypes, many managers behave in ways that will confirm them. They provide women with fewer training opportunities, limited exposure to diverse experiences, and more routine, less challenging assignments. Why should they waste resources on low-potential employees who are likely to leave? In many professions, women are still bypassed for key promotions because the position requires that they supervise men or that they travel extensively.

What Would You Do?

▶ Are there reasons to think men are more effective leaders or managers; are there reasons to think that women are more effective leaders or managers?[51]

The third reason it is difficult to overcome our biases is one of the most powerful. The **Pygmalion effect** or **self-fulfilling prophecy** refers to the way in which the strength of one's expectations and perceptions cause those expectations to become reality.[52] Pygmalion was a mythological Greek sculptor who fell madly in love with the beautiful female statue he had carved and named Galatea. The strength of his love and his prayers to the goddess Aphrodite brought his creation to life. The myth of Pygmalion is used to describe the process by which our beliefs and expectations come to be reflected by others to the point that they behave as we originally expected.

Research into the Pygmalion effect showed that when teachers were given bogus information about their pupils' reading ability and even their IQ scores, the children's performance began to actually mirror those expectations.[53] Other research relating the concept to management has shown similar results. For example, successful CEOs use more positive language and believe that they will succeed whereas less effective ones focus on negative factors.[54] Through a variety of verbal and nonverbal messages and behaviors, managers consciously and unconsciously communicated their expectations to their employees and even to outsiders. The employees who are perceived to have potential, who have a positive halo, or who are similar to the manager based on work and non-work-related factors are treated differently from those who are not on the "A" list. Those who are expected to succeed are assigned more challenging tasks, benefit from clearer communication and more frequent and more positive feedback, and are coached more actively. Those who are not expected to succeed typically do not receive any of these benefits. Both groups are rewarded further for confirming the original stereotype and any actions and behaviors that do not fit expectations are ignored, forgotten, or explained away. Eventually, employees in both groups confirm the managers' expectations, further reinforcing the managers' belief that their perceptions are reality.

Nixon's Perceptions

Perceptual biases in organizational settings have serious repercussions. The organization may not treat individuals fairly and may be held legally accountable as a consequence. Additionally, the organization may be deprived of potentially high performers and saddled with poor performers. For example, if several top managers' negative stereotypes of older workers result in those workers being passed over for promotion or being fired, the organization may never be able to take advantage of marketing to and developing products for aging baby boomers and senior citizens, a growing segment of the market. Similarly, organizations that channel women's behavior because of gender stereotypes ensure that the stereotypes become reality. The serious legal implications aside, the potentially missed opportunities are costly and the organization is the ultimate loser.

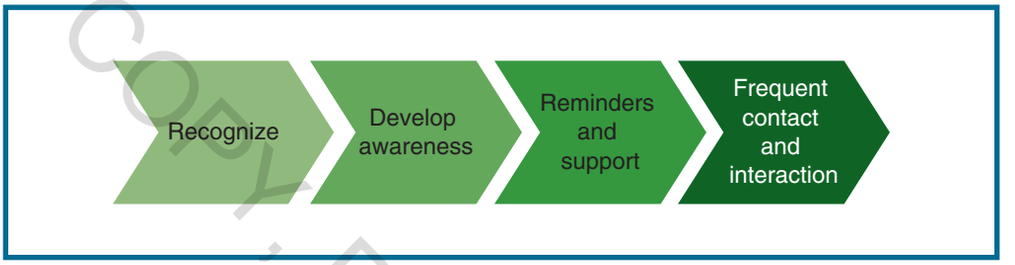
Pygmalion effect or self-fulfilling prophecy: the process by which one's expectations and perceptions becoming reality because of the strength of the original expectation

The social perception process is by nature subjective, so it is bound to have some biases and errors. Although biases cannot be avoided entirely, awareness of the potential pitfalls of the social perception process can help managers minimize errors and help turn potential problems into advantages. In addition, managers and employees must learn to actively manage the perceptual process.

Managing Biases

Individuals and organizations can take four key steps to reduce the negative effects of perceptual biases and to improve decision making (see Figure 4.6).

FIGURE 4.6 MANAGING BIASES



1. *Recognize the biases*. In this first step, you can learn to recognize biases through informal and formal training. For instance, this chapter should help you identify situations in which your decisions might be affected by perceptual biases. But you can also help others recognize their biases. Cross-cultural and diversity training is a specialized type of training that can help manage cultural stereotypes and attributional biases. Such training can encourage participants to identify stereotypes they hold, recognize when those stereotypes may be influencing them, and work on developing alternative views.
2. *Develop awareness of the areas and situations in which biases are most likely to operate*. Training helps to develop this awareness, but training and awareness alone are usually insufficient. You may be quite sensitive to perceptual biases immediately after reading this chapter but may find that in a few weeks or months you've forgotten about them.
3. *Offer constant reminders and support*. Leaders and managers in organizations need to offer reminders and support to others to prevent them from reverting to old biases. Repeatedly and consistently, leaders need to discourage negative biases and reinforce the positive aspect of any stereotyped groups.
4. *Provide opportunities for frequent contact and interaction*. Given that the biases prevent us from gathering information, any opportunity to interact with others enhances the chance that people will come across more objective information. Increased contact can help reduce stereotypes, the negative impact of the primacy effect, or attributional errors that often take place. You should look for chances to engage with different types of people.

CREATIVITY AND CHANGE

SPEAKING OF LEADERSHIP . . . MASCULINE OR FEMININE?

Many years ago, Jan Perkins and I wrote an article that asked whether the rising tide of women in positions of management and leadership would change those fields, or whether those same women would be changed by their experience and the traditional leadership model would prevail. That same question has been raised again in a variety of books and articles over the last couple of years, many probably stimulated by Sheryl Sandberg's highly publicized book *Lean In.*

One article reported on a worldwide survey that asked respondents what they thought were the most important skills and characteristics of leaders, then asked which of those characteristics were associated with a feminine perspective and which were associated with a masculine perspective. The first finding was that people who demonstrate collaboration, flexibility, selflessness, and are ready to share credit were likely to be the most successful leaders—and that these were all considered feminine qualities. Some masculine qualities, like resilience and decisiveness, were on the list of positives but further down, whereas others like ego and pride were all the way at the bottom of the list.

A similar article offered the seven most important characteristics of today's leader:

1. Empathy: Being sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of others
2. Vulnerability: Owning up to one's limitations and asking for help
3. Humility: Seeking to serve others and to share credit
4. Inclusiveness: Soliciting and listening to many voices
5. Generosity: Being liberal with time, contacts, advice, support
6. Balance: Giving life, as well as work, its due
7. Patience: Taking a long-term view

While we can question whether these surveys convey an accurate picture of leadership today, certainly most folks would acknowledge that effective leadership is increasingly becoming "feminized." This doesn't necessarily mean that women are better leaders than men, rather it means that people showing more traditionally feminine traits—and these could be men as well as women—are likely to be more successful in their leadership roles. It doesn't appear to be a matter of gender but one of style.

In an earlier post, I wrote that leadership styles need to change with the times, with cultural history. "To be a better leader, you have to relate to the particular time and culture in which you live. That time and that culture are constantly changing. And your leadership must change as well. In fact, the best leaders are those who can match their personal growth and development with the changing world around them."

Most men who occupy top positions in business, governments, and nonprofits—and they are still mostly men—entered their first jobs in an era dominated by top-down hierarchical practices and the tough, masculine traits associated with them. But time and culture march on. Today neither men nor women employees are likely to respond well to that traditional masculine model. They don't want to be bossed around, regulated in their behavior, or told what to do. Wise leaders, both men and women, will see the evolving set of expectations and adopt many of the more feminine characteristics listed above.

In this, women probably have a little head start, but we all know women managers who adopted the most heavy-handed masculine traits as they rose up the corporate ladder. If they can adapt in one way, men can surely adapt in the other.

When Jan and I wrote our article over thirty years ago and asked whether women would change the workplace or be changed by it, we expected to know the answer by now. But we don't. Cultural change takes a long time. And, of course, there are other variables at play. The environment of business and government is changing in ways that support new styles of leadership that, for example, require more flexibility and less ego.

Both men and women leaders will have to be attentive to those changes and the changes in leadership they will demand. At this point, however, we can say that, whether it's the influence of more women in the workplace or whether it's the influence of changes in the environment, a more feminine model of leadership seems to be emerging. Leaders of all types should take notice.

Source: Adapted from Robert B. Denhardt, Speaking of leadership . . . masculine or feminine? Leadership@USC Blog, accessed at http://leadershipusc.blogspot.com/.

Summary and Applications for Managers

Perception is a mental process that involves paying attention selectively to some stimuli and cues. Social perception plays a key role in our everyday life and in our activities at work, but it is inherently flawed and subject to many biases. These biases are often accentuated when we move across cultural boundaries. The same behavior may be perceived differently in different cultures and therefore have very different meanings. Effective managers use information about the social perception process to become aware of their biases and how others may perceive them.

1. *Remember that the perceptual process is inherently flawed and subject to bias*. People see the world differently and how we each view the world shapes how we make judgments and how we behave. Be aware of the various instances where biases and perceptual errors may affect how you view and interpret things.

2. Because culture provides complexity and often an unknown situation, *cross-cultural interactions are particularly subject to perceptual errors*. We are more likely to use closure and fall prey to perceptual biases when we are unfamiliar with a situation. Therefore, being in a new cultural environment or interacting with someone from a different culture is a situation that is especially likely to be subject to biases and errors. When you are facing a cross-cultural encounter, whether it is while traveling abroad, working with a foreign national, or even when working with someone from another cultural group within your own country, take a minute to stop and slow down your attributional processes. You are more likely to jump to inaccurate judgments in those situations, so stop and ask yourself where your reaction is coming from.

3. *Spend some time to become aware of your stereotypes*. Everyone has stereotypes about one group or another. It is part of being human. While stereotypes are often wrong, they are also a natural part of how we perceive the world. Having stereotypes about various groups may be a personal matter, but acting based on those stereotypes as a manager is an entirely different thing. You should examine your personal stereotypes and decide whether you would like to change them, but you should not act based on them when you are managing others.

4. *Increased interaction helps provide more information*. The more time we spend with our coworkers and employees, the more we get to know them and the less likely we are to base our judgments and attributions on biases or errors. While it is not always practical to get to know every one of your employees well, especially if you have a large group of people reporting to you, you should make an effort to interact with them and keep track of their performance.

5. *Don't rely on your memory; we don't remember things as well as we think we do*. In order to prevent various biases and errors from affecting your judgment and causing mistakes, keep notes on events and important issues. You are less likely to simply "fill in" the missing parts based on your own biases, or to use the most easily available piece of information instead of the most relevant one, to make a decision.

6. *Be aware of the power of the fundamental attribution error.* We are much more likely to make personal attributions about the cause of others' behaviors. We tend to think, often inaccurately, that people behave the way they do because of who they are, rather than because of external factors. Stop and think before you assume that your employees are performing poorly because of their own traits or abilities. Make an effort to fully consider the power of the situation in shaping people's behavior.

7. *The self-fulfilling prophecy and other errors make it very hard for us to disconfirm our expectations*. Be aware of how much power, subtle and not so subtle, expectations have on people's behavior. You shape what others do, and they shape what you do, to a much greater extent than you think. Stop and evaluate your own behavior and how it influences what others do, before you judge and evaluate them.

8. *Perceptual biases and errors are very important in managerial decision making and in many other managerial situations*. While our biases may lead us to misjudge people and miss out on great opportunities in our personal lives, in organizations,

our errors can have serious ethical and legal consequences. Managers have the responsibility of being as objective as possible. An inaccurate judgment about an employee may lead to serious consequences for the employee, for you, and for your organization. Use the information about the perceptual process wisely to become more effective.

9. *Carefully manage the image you present in the workplace.* Managing impressions and careful self-presentation are neither unethical nor shady. The key is to focus on providing accurate information and actively managing when and how you present that information. Knowledge of perceptual issues can help you in that process.

Key Terms

Actor-observer difference 126

Attention stage of perception 118

Attribution process 123

Channeling or confirmatory hypothesis testing 130

Closure 114

External or situational attribution 123

Fundamental attribution error 126

Organization stage of perception 119

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Exercise 4.1 Dealing With Stereotypes and Ethical Issues

You are aware that a manager in your department holds strong negative stereotypes about African Americans. The manager makes numerous jokes and other derogatory comments in private conversations. Although you cannot point to specific instances where his bias has affected his business decisions, you are uncomfortable with his behavior and worried about its implications for your organization. Do you consider his behavior unethical or politically incorrect? Would that make a difference in what you would do?

Exercise 4.2 Perceptual Process at Work

1. Individual Work

Read the following short case carefully and as often as you think is necessary for full understanding. You will not be able to refer to it until the end of the exercise as instructed by your instructor.

> A well-liked college instructor had just completed making up the final exam and had turned off the lights in the office. Just then, a tall, dark, and broad figure appeared and demanded the exam. The professor opened the drawer. Everything in the drawer was picked up and the individual ran down the corridor. The dean was notified immediately.

Answer the following questions about the case you have just read without referring back to the case. Circle *T* if the statement is true or correct, *F* if it is false, and ? if you are not sure or cannot tell.

1.	The thief was tall, dark, and broad.	T	F	?
2.	The professor turned off the light.	T	F	?
3.	A tall figure demanded the examination.	T	F	?
4.	The examination was picked up by someone.	T	F	?
5.	The examination was picked up by the instructor.	T	F	?
6.	A tall dark figure appeared after the professor turned off the light.	T	F	?
7.	The man who opened the drawer was the professor.	T	F	?
8.	The professor ran down the corridor.	T	F	?
9.	The drawer was never actually opened.	T	F	?
10.	Three people are referred to in this case.	T	F	?

2. Group Work

- Without turning back to the case or changing any of your answers, compare your answers with those of your group members. Discuss any discrepancies. The goal is not to come to an agreement and a common group answer, but to explore areas of differences and their causes.
- Now that you have discussed the case in your group, how many questions do you think you answered correctly?

3. Scoring and Discussion

Your instructor will provide you with the scoring key for the questions. What explains your score? What processes are operating? What are the implications?

Case 4.1 A Smile Is Just a Smile, or Is It?

After obtaining a business and engineering degree in South Korea, Hun Lee Kim spent six months in a management training program at a prestigious U.S. university. He had three years of work experience in Korea and Singapore and he was hoping to get a one- or two-year internship in a large U.S. high-tech firm before he returned home. He was most interested in the experience, and salary and benefits were not of consequence to him. All his efforts for the past three months had failed and Hun Lee was very discouraged.

Hun Lee had prepared a detailed résumé and attached a picture of himself in which he was careful to project a serious expression that would show potential employers his respect for them and the importance he attributed to finding a job. Out of the fifty letters and resumes he sent out, he received only two in-person interviews and one phone interview. Even with the poor economy, all his other classmates, several of whom were foreign nationals like him, had eight to ten interviews within the first few weeks, and most had had attractive offers.

For both his interviews, Hun Lee gathered considerable information about the company and was extremely well prepared. During the interview, he was careful to show respect, not to interrupt the managers who were talking to him, and to answer their questions very clearly. In both cases, Hun Lee found the interviews silly and childish. He thought that they joked around too much and did not appear to be taking the interviews seriously. However, he made sure

that he demonstrated his commitment and avoided conveying a frivolous attitude.

Jerri Hirsch, the internship director, was puzzled by Hun Lee's lack of success. He was one their best students and had much to offer as an intern. She decided to call the HR directors of the companies that interviewed him to find out what was going on. The first one said, "The guy was really unfriendly. He looks good on paper, but is he just too uptight. We have a lot of young employees here and we are open and friendly. He just didn't fit well." The response from the second one was kinder. "Hun Lee did not appear to have much initiative. This is just an internship, but we always look for people who have the potential to contribute long-term. He knew the facts, but not much more." The phone interviewer was kinder; she stated: "Maybe he was nervous on the phone. I'm sure he is nice, but he was so serious."

1. What are the causes of Hun Lee's lack of success?
2. What role do cultural stereotypes play?
3. What attributional processes may be operating?
4. If you were Jerri Hirsch, how would you explain the situation to Hun Lee, and what advice would you give him?

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