

Robert Jervis's 14 Hypotheses on Misperception

1. Decision makers fit incoming information into their existing theories and images.
 1. Theories will have greater impact on an actor's interpretation of data when the data is ambiguous and when the actor is confident in their theory.
2. Actors establish their theories and expectations prematurely, and are often closed to new information.
3. Actors can more easily assimilate new information into their images of others if that information comes in a trickle rather than an avalanche. Surprises force us to reassess things honestly.
4. Misperception of an adversary is least difficult to correct in the case of a recognised but presumably unfilled conceptual role becoming occupied.
5. When messages are sent from a different background of concerns and information than is possessed by the receiver, misunderstanding is likely.
6. When people spend a great deal of time drawing up a plan or making a decision, they expect that the message they wish to convey is obvious to the intended receiver.
7. Actors often do not realise that actions intended to project a given image may not have the desired effect because the actions themselves do not turn out as planned.
8. Decision-makers perceive other states as more hostile than they in fact are.
9. Actors perceive the behaviour of others as more centralised, disciplined, and coordinated than it really is.
10. Because a state gets most of its information about other states' policies from the others' foreign offices, it tends to assume that the position of a foreign

office stands for an entire foreign government.

11. Actors overestimate the degree to which others are acting in response to what they themselves do when the others behave in accordance with the actor's desires. We always suffer from Protagonist Syndrome.
 1. Actors tend to believe that the hostile behaviour of others is best explained by the other side's motives rather than by its reaction to the first side.
12. When actors do not conceal their true intentions, they tend to assume that others accurately perceive these intentions.
13. If it is hard for an actor to believe that the other can see him/her as a menace, it is often even harder for him/her to see that issues important to him/her are not important to others.
14. Actors overlook the fact that evidence consistent with their theories may also be consistent with other views.

5 Safeguards against Misperception

1. Be aware that nobody makes unbiased interpretations of new information; rather, we are inevitably influenced by theories we expect to be verified.
2. Examine your attitudes to see if they contain supporting beliefs which aren't actually logically linked.
3. Make your assumptions, beliefs, and predictions which follow from them as explicit as possible.
4. Prevent individuals and organisations from letting their task, future, or identity become tied to specific theories or images of other actors.
5. Always have a devil's advocate in the decision-making process.