

## **2.4 Perception and Attribution**

### **2.4.1 Perception: Meaning and Definition**

In simple terms, perception is understood as the act of seeing what is there to be seen. But what is seen is influenced by the individual, the object, and the situation. Any definition of perception should contain these three elements. Let us consider some popular definitions:

1. The study of perception is concerned with identifying the processes through which we interpret and organize sensory information to produce our conscious experience of objects and object relationship.
2. Perception is the process of receiving information about and making sense of the world around us. It involves deciding which information to notice, how to categorize this information, and how to interpret it within the framework of our existing knowledge
3. Perception includes all those processes by which an individual receives information about the environment - seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, and smelling. The study of these perceptual processes shows that their functioning is affected by three classes variables: the objects or events being perceived, the environment in which perception occurs, and the individual doing the perceiving..

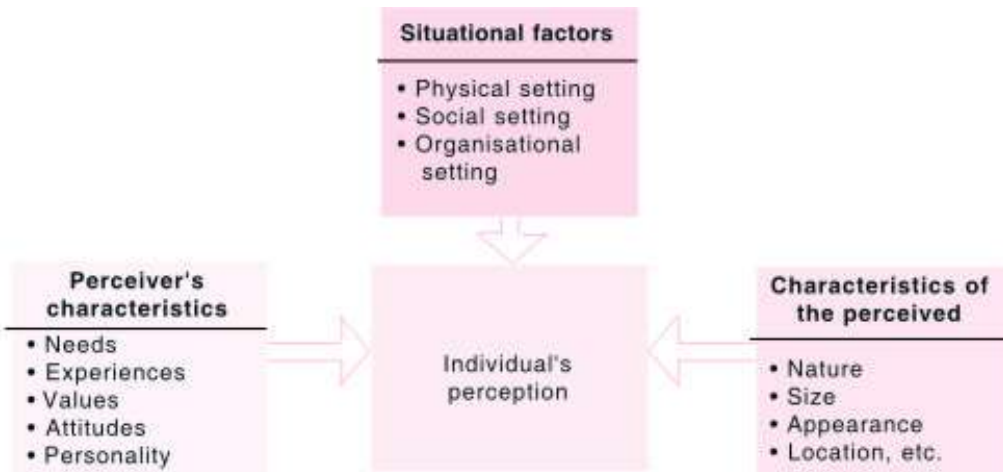
This definition contains all the three elements.

**Perception and Semantics:** There is a great deal of confusion about the terms perception and sensation. Often, they are used as synonyms. For the sake of clarity, it may be stated that the study of sensation is concerned with the initial contact between organisms and their physical environment. It focuses on describing the relationship between various forms of sensory stimulation and how these inputs are registered by our sensory organs. The raw sensory inputs are of no consequence they need to be processed and interpreted. This is the job of perception. Thus, sensation is the first step in the perceptual process. Sensation and other steps constitute the total perceptual process.

There is yet another term which forms part of the nature of perception social perception. Social perception occurs in all of us, we being unaware of it. When we meet a person for the first time, we tend to form a picture about the person. We try to organize all relevant details about the person, organize the details, so that we get an assessment of him or her. Social perception can be now summarized as the process of collecting, combining, integrating, and interpreting details about others to obtain a meaningful understanding about them. We use the terms perception and social perception interchangeably.

### **2.4.2 Factors Influencing Perception**

As understood from the third definition given above, perception is influenced by the perceiver, the object, and the situation (See illustration). All these will be explained in subsequent sections.

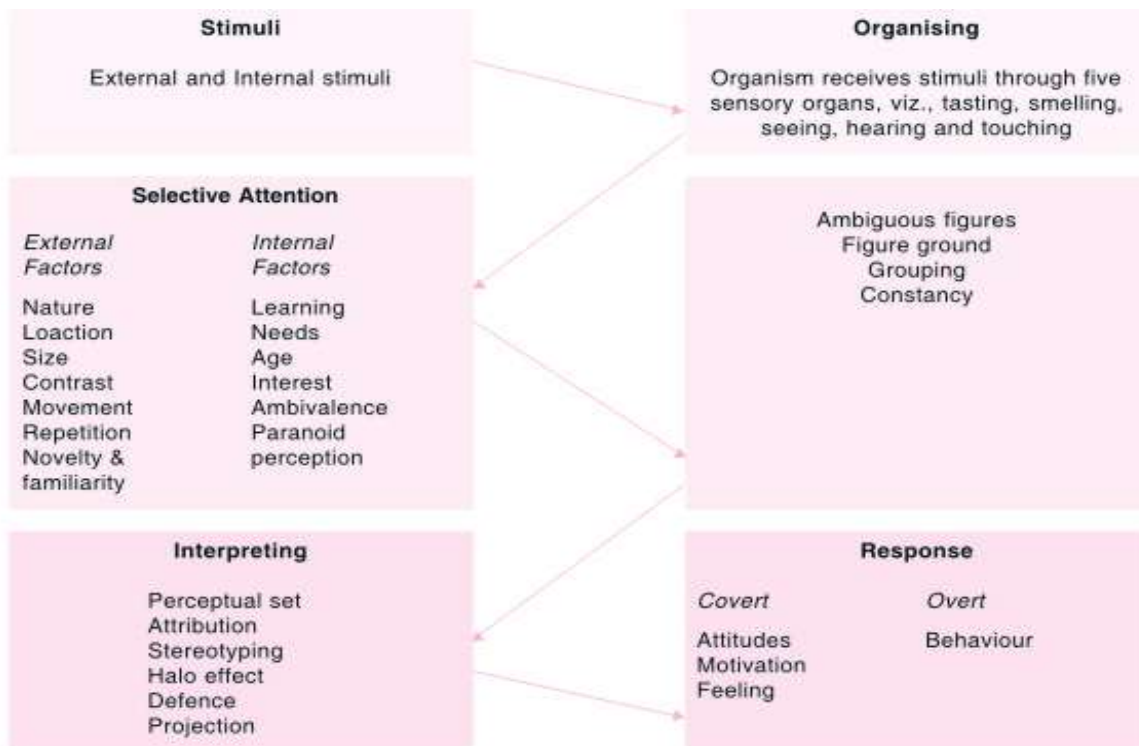


### Factors Influencing Perception

#### 2.4.3 Perception Process

Perception is a process of receiving and interpreting stimuli. As shown in above figure , the process involves a series of steps and the steps are explained in the paragraphs that follow.

The figure shows that the perceptual process begins when stimuli are received through sensory organs. Most stimuli are screened out; the rest are organised and interpreted based on various information-processing activities. The outcomes of the process are covert and overt behaviours.



### Perceptual Process

**Receiving Stimuli:** Living as we are in the world of objects, we are constantly bombarded with various stimuli, organism through the sensory organs- vision, hearing, smell, touch, taste, and kinaesthesia.\* Stimuli are received by us through these organs. Sensory organs perceive not only physical objects, they also perceive events or objects that have been repressed. We may not be able to report the existence of certain stimuli, but our behaviour reveals that we are often subject to their influence. Similarly, stimuli need not be external to us. They may be internal also. Examples of external stimuli include light waves, sound waves, mechanical energy or pressure, and chemical energy from objects that one can smell and taste. Internal stimuli include energy generated by muscles, food passing through the digestive system, and glands secreting behaviour-influencing hormones. External or internal, human beings continue to receive stimuli. When deprived of sensory stimulation, people suffer from disorientation, confusion, and emotional disturbance, and are vulnerable to persuasion and pressure. Under these circumstances, people tend to engage in warding off depression by dwelling on past experiences. Though, the stimuli may be internal or external to the organism.

**Selecting Stimuli:** Not all the stimuli received by the human organism are accepted by it. Some stimuli are noticed and others are screened out. A girl may always need a transistor to be tuned on while she is reading or writing. She happily concentrates on her lessons even as the electronic device beside her blares im songs. A nurse working in a post-operative care might ignore the smell of recently disinfected instruments or the sounds of co-workers talking nearby. Yet a small flashing red light on the nurse station console is immediately noticed because it signals that a patient's vital signs are failing The process of filtering information received by our senses is called selecting stimuli or selective attention. Several factors influence selective attention. Some of them are external and others are internal to the body.

**External Factors Influencing Selection:** The external factors influencing selection are nature, location, color, size, contrast, repetition, motion, novelty and familiarity.

**Nature:** By nature we mean whether the object is visual or auditory and whether it involves pictures, people or animals. It is well-known that pictures attract attention more readily, than words, that a picture with human beings attracts attention more than a picture of inanimate objects alone, and that a rhyming auditory passage attract attention more readily than the same passage presented as a narrative.

**Locations:** The best location of a visual stimulus for attracting attention is directly in the front of the eyes and in the centre of a page. When this location is not possible in a newspaper or a magazine, a position in the upper portion of a page is more favorable than one in the lower portion, and the left hand side receives more attention than the right hand side.

**Colour:** Colour is used to attract attention and portray realism. In a mass of black and white, a modicum of color catches the eye. When color is still a novelty, as with newspapers till recently, the addition of a cue, a single color to an advertisement will enhance its attention getting value.

Colour can be used to emphasize the attractive features of a product or to create a suitable atmosphere. High technology products such as cameras are usually produced in black or methylic finishes although some have been marketed with a less serious, sportier image, in bright primary colours. Some products, such as cars, come in

a variety of colours, but others such as toothpaste, are in a limited range of colours. It would be incongruous to use black toothpaste.

In the work environment, color can be used to enhance lighting effects, for creating pleasant surroundings, and for putting across and reinforcing safety messages.

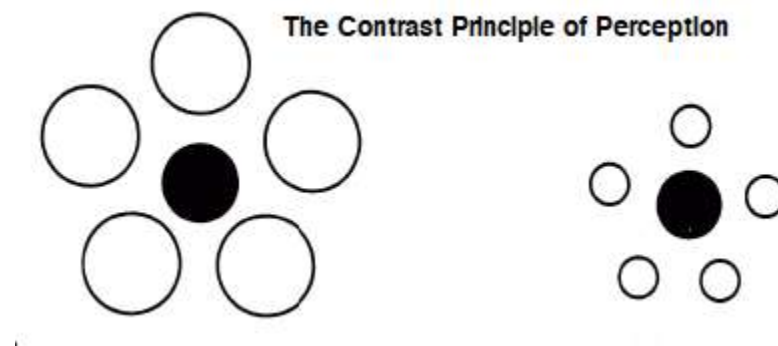
Colour has a psychological impact on an individual. It is well-known that some colours act as a stimulant and others act as a depressant. A dark blue ceiling may appear to be refreshing to begin with, but after sometime the apparent coldness may become an irritant. Table below shows the effects of different colours

| The Effects of Different Colors |                      |                    |                 |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Color                           | Psychological Effect | Temperature Effect | Distance Effect |
| Violet                          | Aggressive & Tiring  | Cold               | Very close      |
| Blue                            | Restful              | Cold               | Further away    |
| Brown                           | Exciting             | Natural            | Claustrophobic  |
| Green                           | Very restful         | Cold/Natural       | Further away    |
| Yellow                          | Exciting             | Very Warm          | Close           |
| Orange                          | Exciting             | Very Warm          | Very close      |
| Red                             | Very Stimulating     | Warm               | Close           |

**Size:** Generally, objects of larger size attract more attention than do maintenance engineering staff smaller ones. They may pay more attention to a big machine than to a small one, even though the smaller one costs as much and is as important to the operation.

A 6 foot 4 inch, 260 pounds supervisor may receive more attention from his subordinates than a 5 foot 10 inch, 160 pounds supervisor. In advertising, a full page spread attracts more attention than a few lines in the classified section.

**Contrast:** The contrast principle states that external stimuli which stand out against the background, or which are not what people are expecting, will receive their attention. Figure illustrates this perceptual principle.



The black circle on the right appears larger than the one on the left because of the background circles. In fact, both black circles are of the same size. In a similar manner, plant safety signs which have black lettering on a yellow background or white lettering on a red background are attention-drawers. Training managers utilize this factor in organising training programmes in places far away from workplaces to create contrast atmosphere.

**Movement:** The principle of motion states that a moving object receives more attention than an object that is stationary. In a work environment, the attention of a

workman will be focused more on a conveyor belt than on paintings on walls or illumination. Advertisers capitalize on this principle by creating signs which incorporate moving parts.

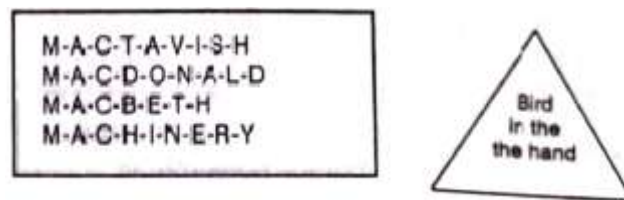
**Repetition:** The repetition principle states that a repeated external stimulus is more attention drawing than a non-repetitive one. The same advertisement of a product flashed daily on television is based on the principle of repetition. This principle also explains why supervisors have to give directions to workers over and over again for even simple tasks.

**Novelty and Familiarity:** The novelty and familiarity principle states that either a novel or a familiar external situation can serve as an attention getter. New objects in familiar settings or familiar objects in new settings will draw the attention example of this principle. Changing workers' jobs from time-to-time will tend to increase the attention they give to the task. Anything novel attracts attention fast, for example, humour animation, and unusual graphics in an advertisement stand out and are noticed.

**Internal Factors Influencing Selection:** Internal factors influencing selection of stimuli include learning psychological needs, age differences, interests, ambivalence, and paranoid perception. These factors relate to one self.

**Learning:** Learning, a cognitive factor, has considerable influence on perception. It creates expectancy in people. People tend to perceive what they want to perceive. A number of illustrations have been used by psychologists to demonstrate the impact of learning on perception. Some are shown below;

One tends to read the sentence, because of prior learning, in the triangle as 'Bird in the hand see illustration – The Learning Principle of Perception



It takes a few seconds for the reader to realize that there is an extra 'the' in the sentence. This illustration shows that learning creates expectancy in an individual and expectancy makes him see what he wants to see.

Another illustration: The individual is likely to read the last word as 'Mac-Hinery' instead of machinery. He or she is caught in what is known as 'verbal response set.'

In organisations, managers' and employees' past experiences and learning strongly influence their perceptions. For example, executives are influenced by their functional backgrounds while making decisions. They might perceive their own areas of expertise as being the most important to consider while solving problems. It is also likely that the decision makers can 'rise above' their own experiences and limitations and solve problems effectively in areas other than those with which they are most familiar.

**Psychological Needs:** Needs play a significant role in perceptual selectivity. Unreal things often look real because of deprived needs. A thirsty person in a desert, for instance, gets the illusion of water when seeing sand from a distance. In one experiment, people who were kept hungry for sometime were shown pictures and were

asked to describe what they saw in them. Most of them reported more food items in such perceptions.

Maslow wrote (1970) thus: 'For our chronically and extremely hungry man, Utopia can be defined simply as a place where there is plenty of food. He tends to think that if only he is guaranteed for the rest of his life, he will never want anything more. Life itself tends to be defined in terms of eating. Anything else will be defined as unimportant. Freedom, love, Community feeling, respect, philosophy, may all be waived aside as fripperies that are useless, Since they fail to fill the stomach.

It may be noted that frequently all of a person's Psychic energies are expended in trying to the basic psychological needs for love, esteem and adequacy. He may unconsciously interact only with those sectors of another's personality through which he can gratify these needs. Under such conditions, he can scarcely perceive the other as a whole person; only when basic psychological needs are satisfied can he appreciate the full worth of the other.

*Age Difference:* Older, senior executives complain about the inability of the new, young ones to take tough decisions concerning terminating people or paying attention to details and paper work. The young managers, in turn, complain about the old guards resisting change and using paper and rules as ends in themselves. Different perceptions of old and young executives are due to their age differences. The generation gaps witnessed in recent years definitely contribute to different perceptions.

*Interest:* Perception is unconsciously influenced by the interests of the perceiver. An architect will notice many details of buildings though he or she passes by only once. Someone else may pass the same buildings everyday for years without even observing such details. It has been argued that, in their influence on perception, interests cannot be distinguished from needs. That is, the person with a particular interest has a need to involve himself in activities pertaining to it. Yet there is some value in conceiving the two as distinct. Once they have been satisfied, most needs no longer influence perception. But if the person has a special interest, his perception is likely to be selective at any time.

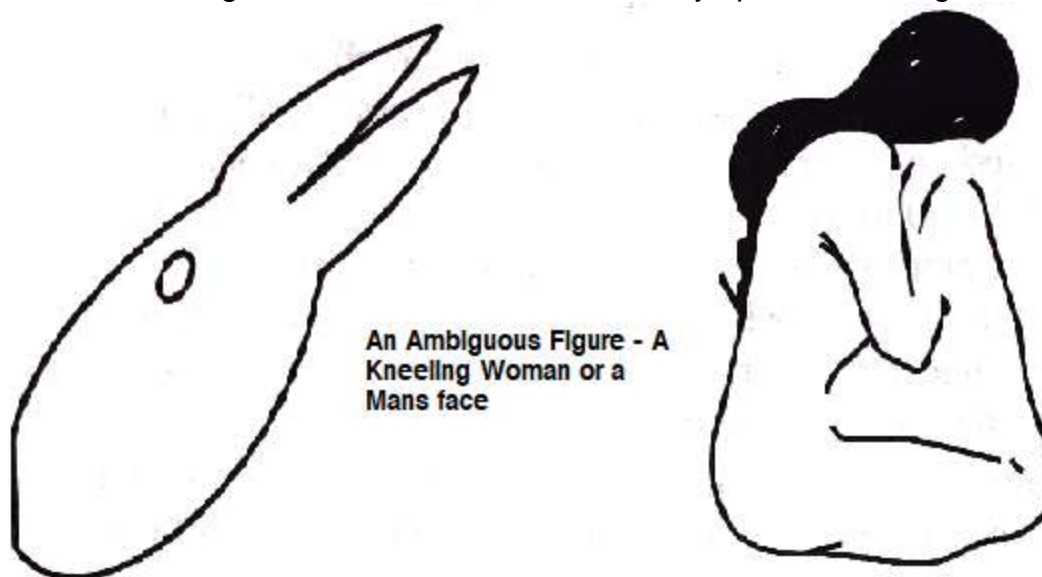
*Ambivalence:* Another factor of perceptual selection is ambivalence or mixed feelings about a situation. A young man may be ambivalent about his fiancée's virtues and shortcomings. She may be an attractive, charming, and poised woman with whom he likes to be seen, but she may also be insecure and have a poor self-concept. When she tries to compensate for these feelings by taking control of the relationship, he resents it and is anxious about the wisdom of his choice. But because of his physical attraction to her and because he wants to remain a success in his circle by having a beautiful fiancée, he represses the awareness of her negative qualities and selectively perceives only those that are favorable. Only after several years of marriage, when the selective perception of courtship has given way before the all-inclusive awareness of daily, intimate, and prolonged contact, does he become sharply aware of what he repressed.

*Paranoid Perception:* When a person's perception is so selective that he can find little common ground for communication with others, he is likely to be paranoid. It is the characteristic of the emotionally disturbed person that his perceptual field differs from that of reality and personalized interpretation. His self-concept is poor and he is very insecure, as a result of which he behaves in an inflexible manner.

**Perceptual Organisation:** Perceptual organisation is the process by which people group stimuli into patterns. Selection recognizable gives way to organisation, and the stimuli selected for attention now appears as a whole. For example, most people have a mental picture of an object made of wood and having four legs, a seat, a back, and armrests: an image of a chair. When people actually see an object having these characteristics, they are able to organize the incoming information into a meaningful whole and recognize the object to be a chair.

There is so much to learn about how the human mind assembles, organizes, and categorizes information. However, certain factors in perceptual organisation, such as ambiguous figures, figure background, grouping, and constancy are helpful in understanding perceptual organisation.

*Ambiguous Figures:* Perceptual organisation becomes a difficult task when there are confusing and disorganized stimuli in the external environment. When we first glance at the lines in figure we tend to conclude that they epitomize disorganization.



Then we suddenly begin to realize that it is a drawing and could represent either a duck or a rabbit, and then it fluctuates between the two images. Similarly, figure, we see either kneeling woman or a man's face, or perhaps both. With ambiguous figures, there appears to be a whole image.

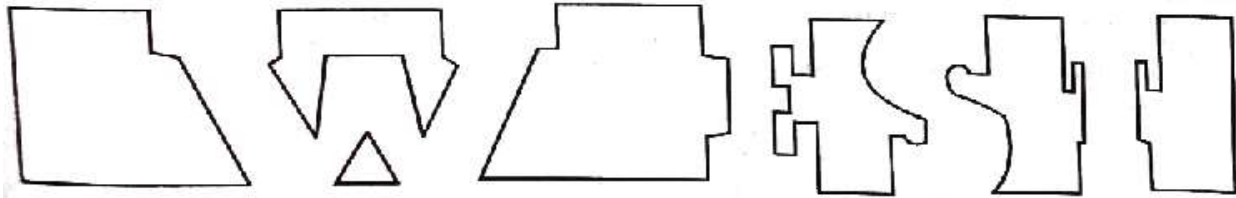
**Figure Background:** Figure ground is considered to be the most basic form of perceptual organisation.

*The background principle* states that the relationship of a target to its background influences perception. In other words, according to the principle, perceived objects stand out as separable from their general background. For example, in a noisy and crowded restaurant, one is able to hold a meaningful conversation with a colleague. This is possible because the person is capable of distinguishing the sight and sound of the colleague (figure) from the sight and sound of the other people and objects present (background). Although the individual perceives the entire scene, yet he or she responds selectively to the most relevant stimuli.

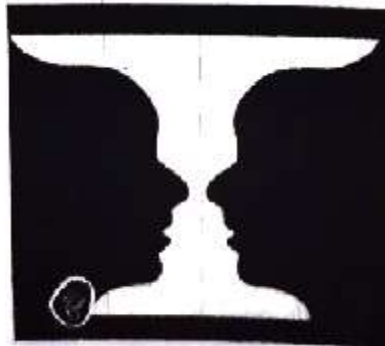
Managers face similar experiences in organisations. People pay more attention to some Stimuli than others and run the danger of overlooking relevant clues.



A look at illustration



A Ground Experiment Illustration



A Back Ground Demonstration

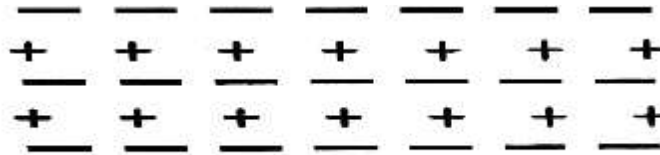
A look at the 'A Back ground Illustration' and then looking away from the illustration is an experience by itself. Most people focus on the individual figures enclosed with lines and few see any meaning. However, if one were to focus on the space between the figures, the word WEST appears. Place a piece of paper along the bottom of the figure; the word becomes even more apparent. In another illustration of figure background principle. At first the figure looks like a white vase. However, if white is taken as the background, we see two grey profiles.

What we see depends on what we see as the figure and what we see as the background. We attend selectively to stimuli by focusing on features that capture our attention. A major purpose of studying OB is to caution the reader about important stimuli. Key theories and concepts (such as motivation and leadership) call attention to variables that affect organisational performance. The trained manager knows what to look for as the dominant figure against a complex background of organisational forces.

*Perceptual Grouping:* The principles of grouping first defined by Gestalt psychologists include similarity, proximity, closure, continuity, and area.

*The principle of similarity* is exemplified when objects of similar shape, size, or color tend to be grouped together. In an organisation, for example, all employees who wear white collars may be perceived as a common group, when, in reality, each worker is a unique individual. A company might require visitors to its plants to wear yellow hard hats and employees to wear white hard hats. Employees can then easily identify people who are unfamiliar with everyday safety precautions and routines when they are in work areas. Although the principle of similarity is useful in helping people make sense of their worlds, a negative aspect of this principle is found in the perceptual stereotyping. An Illustration on the similarity principle. The signs in the figure are perceived as seven rows rather than the five columns, even though the distances between the rows and columns are equal.





Principle of Similarity

The principle of proximity underlines the tendency to perceive stimuli which are near one another as belonging together. For example, several employees in an organisation may be identified as a single group because of physical proximity. Similarly, several workers working on a machine are perceived to be one group and the group as a whole is held responsible for any failure in the machine. The principle of proximity underlines the tendency to perceive stimuli which are near one another as belonging together. For example, several employees in an organisation may be identified as a single group because of physical proximity. Similarly, several workers working on a machine are perceived to be one group and the group as a whole is held responsible for any failure in the machine. Illustration on 'Principle of Proximity' demonstrates the proximity principle.

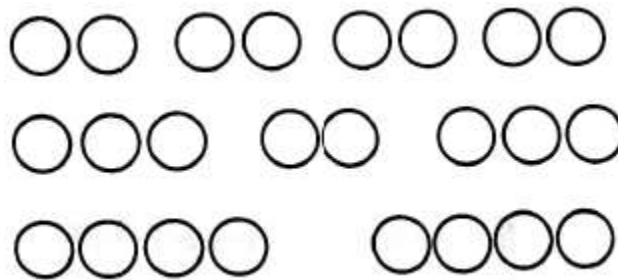


Illustration on Principle of Proximity

The eight circles in the figure are seen as pairs of two, three, or four, depending on their nearness to one another any failure in the machine. Illustration on 'Principle of Proximity' demonstrates the proximity principle. The eight circles in the illustration are seen as pairs of two, three, or four, depending on their nearness to one another.

The principle of closure states that a person has a tendency to perceive a whole where none exists. The person's perceptual process will close the gaps which are unfilled from sensory inputs. The closure principle demonstrates the perceiver's ability to



Illustration of Closure Concept

perceive a whole object even though only part of the object is evident. In an organisation, a manager facing a complex decision may be able to develop a fairly accurate understanding of the issues even though some details may be lacking. Based on experience and imagination, the manager can fill in it missing pieces needed to make a decision.

**Continuity:** Continuity is the tendency to perceive objects as continuing patterns. see illustration. In the illustration, we see curved and straight-lines as crossing each

other and having dots in common, but it requires some effort on our part to perceive a straight-line becoming a curved line at one of these intersecting points or junctions.

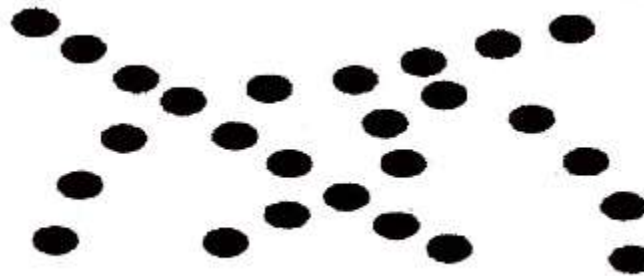
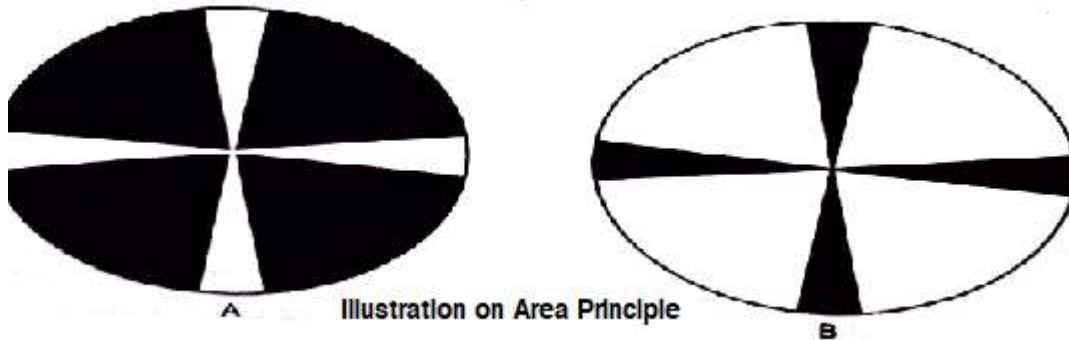


Illustration on Perceptual Continuity

Continuity is an useful organising principle, but it also have negative may aspects. For example, the tendency to perceive continuous patterns may result in an inability to perceive uniqueness and detect change. In business forecasting, a common continuity error is to assume that the future will simply reflect current events and trends.

The principle of continuity is closely related to the principle of closure, but there is a difference. Closure supplies missing stimuli, whereas the continuity principle says that a person will tend to perceive continuous lines or patterns,



**Area:** Where one part of an area depicting an ambiguous figure is smaller in size than the remainder, it is more likely that the smaller area will be seen as a figure and the rest of the total area as background. Glancing at illustration A, it is usual to see the small areas of white as the figure of a white cross and the large area of black as the background. By contrast, in illustration B , a black cross set in a white background is more likely to be seen.

**Perceptual Constancy:** A more subtle part of perceptual organisation is constancy, our ability to perceive certain characteristics of an object as remaining constant, despite variations in the stimuli that provide us with conflicting information. Such constancy amidst changing stimuli is indispensable if we are to adjust to our world. There are several aspects of constancy.

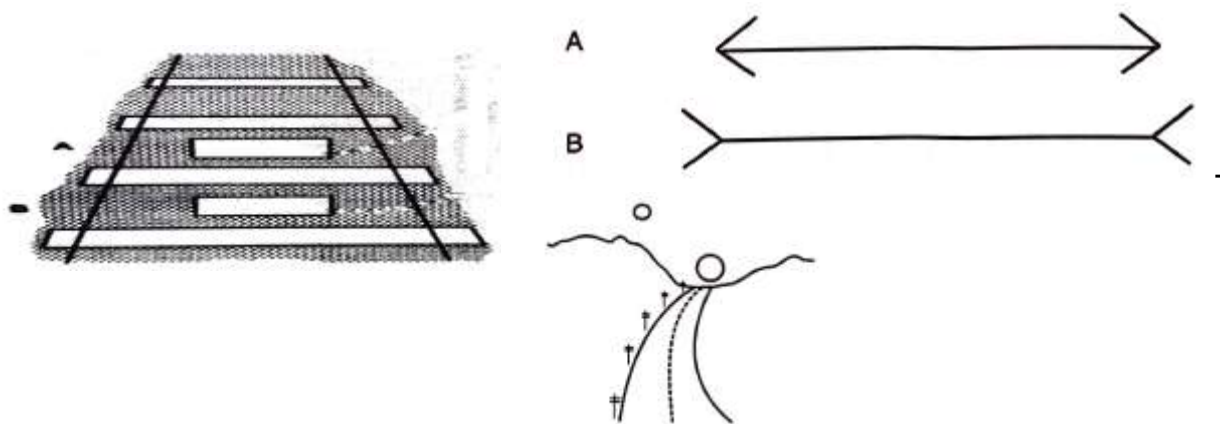
One of these, shape constancy, is exemplified whenever an object appears to maintain its shape despite marked changes in the retinal image. For example, we see the top of a glass bottle as "circular whether we view it from the side or from the top. Shape constancy works to our advantage by keeping our world of perception orderly. Imagine the confusion you would experience in a crowded car park if your car was seen as a different object according to the different retinal images produced from different viewing positions front, side, and back.

Another is size constancy, which refers to the fact that as an object is moved farther away we tend to see it as more or less invariant in size. For example, football players on the opposite side of the field do not look appreciably smaller than those closer to us on the field even though their images on the retina are much smaller.

Then there is colour constancy which implies that familiar objects are perceived to be of the same colour under varied conditions. The owner of a blue car sees it as blue whether looking at it in bright sunlight, in dim illumination, or under yellow street light.

Constancy gives a person a sense of stability in a changing world. If constancy were not at work, the world would be very chaotic and disorganized for the individual. An organisational example would be the worker who must select a piece of material or a tool of the correct size from a wide variety of materials and tools at varying distances from a work station. Without perceptual constancy, the sizes and colour of objects would change as the worker moved about and would make the job almost impossible.

Where Constancy Does Not Hold Good: Under certain conditions, constancy does not hold good, and what we see appears to be quite different from what we know to be true. These manifestations are called illusions. Three such illusions are illustrated



An Illusion can be understood as a reliable perceptual error, it is stable and not due to a hasty or careless exploration or processing of stimuli on our part. Though the lines A and B in the illustration are of the same length, we see A as shorter one. In other illustration, we see two rectangles, And B. as different even though they are of the same size. The moon illustration is an example of an illusion. The moon seems to be much larger when it appears on horizon than when it is high in the sky. But it is the same distance away from us in both cases and the image projected on the Retina also same both cases, but we see different sizes.

Another instance of illusion is one train that is stationary and the other in motion. It should be the experience of everybody you are on board a train that is stationary and you look through window at a moving train. You get an illusion that the train you are sitting in though in reality, it is the other train that is moving. This is called the illusion of induced movement. Illusions can also arise for the presentation of stimuli in rapid succession. An example of this phenomenon is the apparent backward movement of wagon wheels in an old Malayalam film.

### Perception for a successful manager:

1. Perception helps see what is there to be seen Often, what is seen is in variance with what is there leading to strained interpersonal relations.
2. Understanding what others think of you is more important the process is called social perception What others understand the self gives the person social identity
3. Not to allow perceptual biases which blind one's understanding of a situation and people, particularly while evaluating employee performance..
4. Impression management is resorted to by job-seekers. See through their game and judge candidates carefully..
5. Perception is one of the critical variables in determining individual behaviour.

### The Process of Interpreting

After the data have been analyzed and organized there arises the process of interpretation. Understanding the data is crucial as any misstep would have negative consequences.

### The Process of Checking

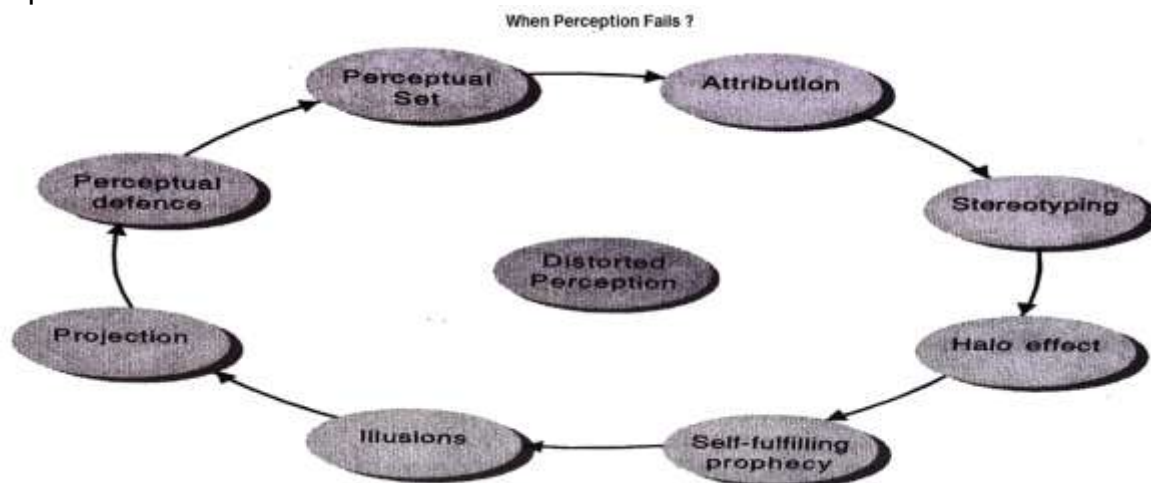
After data have been received and interpreted, the perceiver tends to check whether his interpretations are right or wrong. One way of checking is for the person himself or herself to indulge in introspection. He or she will put a series of questions to himself or herself and the answers will confirm whether his or her perception about an individual or object is correct or otherwise. Another way is to check the veracity about the interpretation with others

### The Process of Reacting

The last phase in perception is the reaction. The perceiver will indulge in some action in relation to his or her perception. The action depends on whether the perception is favourable or unfavourable: it is positive when the perception is favourable and negative when the perception is unfavourable. A worker responds favourably to the motivational intentions of a manager provided his or her understanding about his or her boss is favourable. The response is negative when his perception of the manager's behaviour is unfavourable.

### When Perception fails

On several situations, perception fails us. They include attribution, stereotyping, halo effect, self-fulfilling prophecy, illusions, projection, perceptual defence and perceptual set

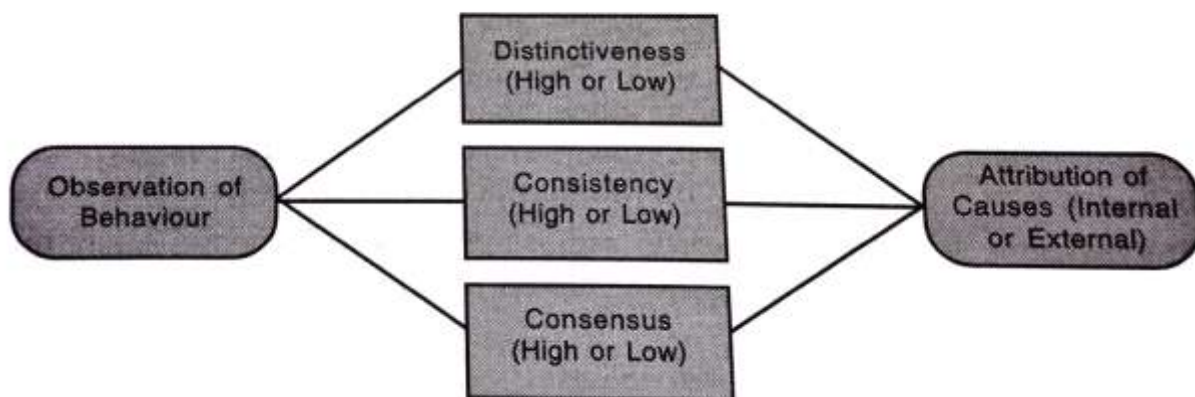


**Attribution;** Attribution refers to the process by which the individual assigns causes to the behaviour of others. People are interested not only in observing behaviour in organisations, but in determining its causes. Their evaluation of and reactions to others' behaviour may be heavily influenced by their perception that the others are responsible for their behaviour. When plant productivity increases, the manager responsible will be evaluated less favourably if the increase is attributed to new machine installed at the order of the head office than is attributed to his or her handling of the employees. A nurse who drops a tray of medicine will be excused if the incident is perceived as caused by a slippery floor, chastised if it is viewed to be caused by her clumsiness, and perhaps fired if it is viewed as a deliberate act.

Attribution is backed by a theory. The theory, a relatively new addition to the field of OB, has implications for perception, motivation, and leadership. We shall focus on the impact of attribution theory on perception. Fritz Heider and H.H. Kelly are well-known contributors to the attribution theory. This theory suggests that we observe behaviour and then attribute causes to it; that is, we attempt to explain why people behave as they do. The process of attribution is based on perceptions of reality and these perceptions may vary widely among individuals.

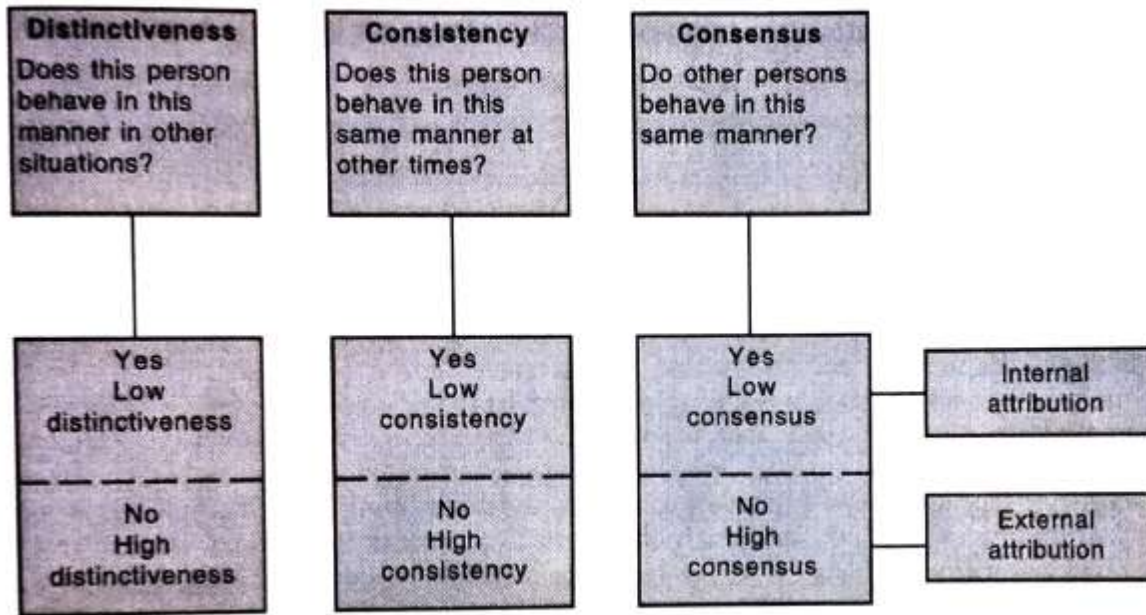
The theory posits that the behaviour of others can be examined on the basis of its **distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus**. Distinctiveness is the degree to which a person behaves similarly in different situations. Consistency is the degree to which a person engages in the same behaviour at different times. Consensus is the degree to which other people are engaging in the same behaviour. As a result of various combinations of consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness, we form impressions of our attributions to the causes of behaviour. We may believe that behaviour is caused informally (by forces within a person, for example, ability) or externally (by forces in the person's environment, for example, task, See illustration below)

The Attribution Process



Under conditions of high consistency, high distinctiveness, and high consensus, the perceiver will tend to attribute the behaviour or the distinctiveness and consensus are perceived person to external causes. When the distinctiveness and consensus are low the perceiver will tend to attribute the behaviour to internal causes (See illustration- Rule of Attribution). The combinations of high and low consistency, perceiver for a clear choice depends on choice between internal and external causes.





### Rules of Attribution

The following example will help clarify the attribution rules. Divya has done poorly in a test in her third semester MBA course and has expressed concern to her professor. Her professor, in trying to understand the possible reasons for her behaviour (doing poorly in the test), tries to determine its degree of distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus. If Divya tends to do poorly in tests in other courses (low distinctiveness), has performed poorly on earlier tests in her management class (high consistency), and if no other students in her class did poorly in the test (low consensus), the professor tends to make an internal attribution regarding Divya's behaviour. That is, the explanation for the poor performance is to be found within Divya (lack of motivation and poor study habits). On the other hand, if Divya does well in tests in other courses (high distinctiveness), has performed well in earlier tests in this professor's course (low consistency) and if other students in the course have also done poorly in this test (high consensus), the professor might make an external attribution about her behaviour. That is, the explanation for the poor result may be due to external factors (the professor administered a poor test, scored wrongly). Thus, the attributions made regarding the cause of an event have important implications for dealing with the problem.

Attribution theory has important implications for managers. If the manager attributes poor performance to internal factors, he or she can adopt certain strategies to improve those factors. On the other hand, if the manager attributes poor performance to external factors, he or she can take relevant steps to improve performance.

One can make attribution to one self. If one attributes a pay raise to hard work, he or she continues to work hard. Instead, if poor performance is attributed to external factors (such as boss's friendliness), he or she may put more effort into cementing that friendship.

**Perceptual Set:** Previously-held beliefs about objects influence an individual's perceptions of similar objects. This is called perceptual set. For example, a manager may have developed general beliefs and attitudes that workers are lazy and shirkers, and that they want to gain whatever is possible from the organisation without giving their

best to it. His or her subsequent perceptions will be influenced by this set when he or she meets a group of workers. The manager tends to interpret the behaviour of the workers according to his mental set.

**Stereotyping:** It is the tendency to assign attributes to someone solely on the basis of a category of people to which that person belongs. The process of stereotyping helps individuals assign meaning to a mass of data. Stereotype Some examples of common stereotypes are women, doctors, professors, artists, software engineers, executives, workers, and the like. At a broader level, there are Americans, Indians, Britishers, and Africans. Stereotypes of women continue to hamper their advancement in many organisations across the globe

Stereotype is not prejudice is with an information a stereotype that refers to change when present prejudice is never inlined with the stereotype is inaccurate. Stereotypes can be helpful, prejudice is not helpful.

Though stereotyping is understood as wrong or bad, this is not the case always. It is a useful process that greatly increases one's efficiency in making sense out of his or her environment. Nonetheless, stereotyping can lead to inaccuracies and negative consequences. To the extent that stereotypes create social injustice, result in poor decision making, stifle innovation cause under utilization of human resources, they contribute to ineffectiveness and inefficiency.

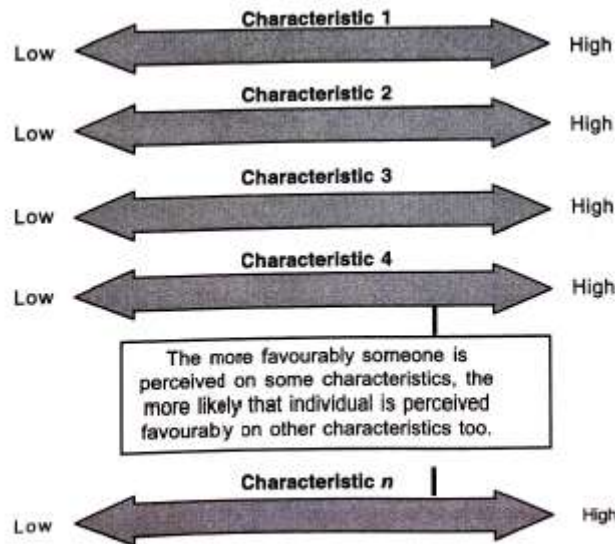
Stereotyping is a four-step process. It begins by categorizing people into groups according to various criteria such as age, sex, race, and occupation. Next, we infer that all people within a particular category possess the same traits. Then we form expectations of others and interpret their behaviour according to our stereotypes.

Stereotypes are maintained by: (i) overestimating the frequency of stereotypic behaviours exhibited by others, (ii) incorrectly explaining expected and unexpected behaviours, and (iii) differentiating minority individuals from oneself

**Halo Effect:** The halo effect refers to the tendency of perceiving people in terms of good or bad, and ascribing all good qualities to one who is liked and all bad qualities to another who is disliked. A typical example of the halo effect is a professor awarding more marks to a well-liked student. It is not so much a conscious bias on the professor's part, as that the professor likes the student, he wants him to do well in the examination, and his perception about the student's examination are influenced by what he wants to see. A common phenomenon in communication is the tendency for a receiver to evaluate information on the basis of its source. Information emanating from a VIP tends to be overrated and the same coming from an ordinary individual is likely to be discounted.

Halo effect need not always mean overrating positive characteristics. An individual may be down rated based on the negative evaluation of his or her behaviour. This process is called rusty halo or horns effect. (See the illustration 'The Halo Effect –A demonstration'.





### The Halo Effect – A demonstration<sup>17</sup>

In organisations, the halo effect often occurs when superiors rate subordinates in a formal appraisal. In this context, a manager evaluating one of his employees on certain dimensions may assume that someone who is good in one dimension must also be good at other things and rate the person highly on other aspects. Put another way, the halo effect may be responsible for finding high correlations between the ratings given to people on various dimensions. When this occurs, the resulting evaluations lack accuracy and the quality of the resulting evaluations is compromised.

**Perceptual Context:** The context in which an object is placed influences perception. (See illustration - The game of Doodles) illustrates contextual influence on perception. The visual stimuli by themselves are meaningless. Only when the doodles are placed in a verbal context do they take on meaning and value for the perceiver.



(a) The start of a 'rat race' (b) Two mice in a beer can (c) A column of ants marching through spilled whiskey

The organisational culture and structure provide the primary context in which workers and managers do their perceiving. Thus, a verbal order, a memo, a new policy, a suggestion, a raised eyebrow, or a pat on the back takes on special meaning and value when placed in the context of a work situation an individual is likely to put up a defense when confronted with conflicting, unacceptable, or threatening stimuli. The defense mechanisms put up by the perceiver may assume any of the four forms: outright denial, modification of the data received, change in perception but refusal to change, and change in perception itself. The four defense mechanisms have been culled from a study involving college students. The students were presented with the word 'intelligent'

as a characteristic of a factory worker. This was conflicting to the notion about a worker held by the students the defenses put up by the students were;

(a) Some students denied that the factory workers could be intelligent-denial mechanism.

(b) Some students said that the worker was intelligent but lacked initiative to rise above his group (associating intelligence with some other trait- modification mechanism).

(c) A few students felt that the word intelligent conflicted with their understanding of a worker. What they believed about the worker was that he was not too intelligent change in perception but refusal to change mechanism.

(d) Many of the students felt that the worker was really intelligent. But this change in perception was very subtle. For example, "He cracks jokes' because 'He is witty' change in perception mechanism.

Whatever the form of mechanism , perceptual defense is likely to play a useful role in understanding union management and supervisor – sub ordinate relationship.

**Implicit Personality Theory:** In judging and making inferences about others an individual perception are influenced by his belief that certain human traits are associated with one another. For example, the trait honesty is associated with hard working; All industrious people are perceived to be honest.

**Projection:** Under certain conditions, people tend to see in another person traits that the themselves possess. That is, they project their own feelings, tendencies, or motives judgment of others. This into the may be particularly true regarding undesirable traits which the perceiver possesses but fails to recognize in himself. For example, an individual who is himself not very energetic may see others as lazy or may explain their lack of achievement as resulting from their unwillingness to work hard. One who is dishonest may be suspicious of others and may perceive dishonest intentions in others where they do not exist. People who are afraid may interpret others' behaviour as fearful or anxious.

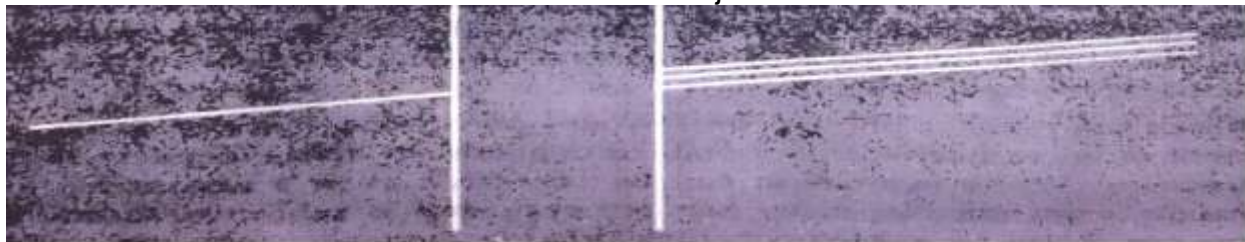
**Self-fulfilling Prophecy:** Self-fulfilling prophecy can be traced back to Greek mythology. According to mythology, Pygmalion was a sculptor who hated women yet fell in love with an ivory statue he carved of a beautiful woman. He became so infatuated with the statue that he prayed to the goddess Aphrodite to bring her to life. The goddess heard his prayer, granted his wish, and the statue came to life. The essence of self-fulfilling prophecy or Pygmalion effect as it is often called, is that people's expectations or beliefs determine their behaviour and performance, thus, serving to make their expectations come true;

Another dimension of self-fulfilling prophecy is that it occurs when our expectations about another person cause that person to act in a way that is consistent with those expectations. In other words, our perceptions can influence reality. If a supervisor believes a new employee will not be able to perform the job, this expectation influences the supervisor's behaviour towards the employee and without realizing it, may cause the new hire to perform the job poorly.

Consequently, the supervisor's perception, even if originally incorrect, is confirmed. It is for this reason that employees are more likely to be victims of negative self-fulfilling prophecy than benefactors of positive self-fulfilling prophecy. To block negative self-fulfilling prophecy, firms need to fight negative stereotypes and avoid first impressions.

**Illusions:** Perception often provides false interpretation of sensory information. Such cases are known as illusions, a term used by psychologists to refer to incorrect perceptions. There are two types of illusions: those due to physical processes and those due to cognitive processes. Illusions due to distortion of physical conditions include mirages, in which an individual perceives objects which are nonexistent, for example, water on a dry road.

Cognitive processes result in many illusions but the more common are shape illusions which often result in unsettling consequences. Consider a real world example involving the Poggendorf illusion (See Illustration). In this, a line disappears at an angle behind a solid figure, reappearing at the other side at what seems to be the incorrect position. It is reported that in 1965 two aero planes were about to arrive in New York city and because of the Poggendorf illusion, they perceived that they were on a collision course. Both pilots changed their path to correct for what they perceived as an error and thus collided. The result was four deaths and 49 injuries - all because of an illusion



**Poggendorf illusion**

Incorrect perceptions of the world around them may lead to problems to personnel. Budding managers who flame out do so because they fail to read situations properly and act accordingly. They develop poor working relationships, are too authoritarian, or have conflicts with upper management. As a result, their careers come to a screeching halt. This could have been avoided had they been able to correctly perceive what they should be doing and had the emotional maturity and ability to make the necessary changes.

### **2.4.3 Perception Process**

In the discussion on perception till now, we quoted several organisational contexts demonstrating its relevance. In this section, an attempt is made to focus further on the importance of perception.

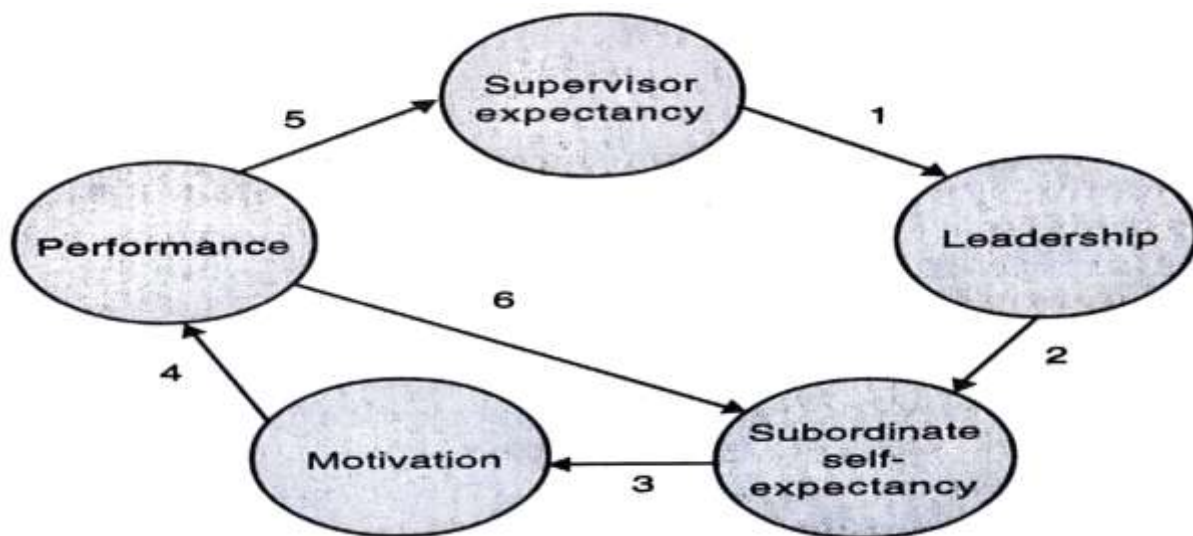
- ✓ Perception is a complex cognitive process which, in sum, is a unique interpretation of a situation, not an exact recording of it. It may reveal a picture of the world which is different from reality. Recognition of difference between the perceptual world and the real world is vital to the study of OB. A specific example would be the universal assumption made by managers that subordinates always want promotions when, in fact, many subordinates really feel psychologically forced to accept a promotion. Managers seldom attempt to find out, and sometimes subordinates themselves do not know, whether the promotion should be offered. In other words, the perceptual world of the manager is quite different from the perceptual world of the subordinates, and both may be far-removed from reality. What should be done from the manager's standpoint? The best answer is to understand the perceptual process. The application of what is understood logically follows.

The above being a general statement, specific applications of perception in organisations are analyzed in paragraphs that follow.

1. In an interview for the selection of a candidate, the interviewers' judgement about the suitability or otherwise of a candidate depends on how his or her behaviour is perceived by them. A rejected applicant might feel that he or she was wronged by the interviewers though he or she deserved selection. But the fact is that interviewers generally form an early impression that becomes quickly entrenched. If the inadequacies of the candidate are exposed early, they weigh against him or her in the final selection
2. Another perceptual issue related to hiring new employees is the problem of unrealistic expectations. Every applicant acquires, during the selection process, a set of expectations about the organisation and about the specific job the applicant is hoping to be offered. It is not unusual for these expectations to be excessively inflated as a result of receiving almost uniformly positive information. There is evidence that these inaccurate perceptions lead to premature resignations, and that realistic expectations can lead to lower turnover rates.
3. So what are realistic job expectations? They include both favourable and unfavourable information about the job. If the candidate has been provided with both favourable and unfavourable information about the job, he or she will be better equipped to cope with it and face boldly the frustrating elements of the job. The result is fewer unexpected resignations by new employees.
4. Performance appraisal is another area where perception has significant relevance. Assessment of an employee's performance depends on the perception of the person who evaluates. While evaluation can be objective as in a salesman's job where performance is quantifiable, many jobs are evaluated in subjective terms. Subjective measures are easier to implement; they provide managers with greater discretion regarding jobs that do not really lend themselves to objective measures. Subjective measures are, by definition, judgmental. To the extent that the evaluation depends on subjective measures for assessing an employee's performance, perception of who is a good' or bad' employee greatly influences the outcome of the appraisal.
5. An individual's future in an organisation is usually not dependent on performance alone. In many organisations, the level of an employee's effort is given greater importance. Assessment of an individual's effort is a subjective judgment, susceptible to perceptual distortions and bias. If it is true, as some claim, that 'more workers are fired for poor attitudes and lack of discipline than for lack of ability', then approval or an employee's effort may be a primary influence on his or her future in the organisation.
6. Another important judgment that managers make about employees is whether or not they are loyal to the organisation. An employee, specially at the managerial level who disparages the firm or looks for greener pastures outside may be labeled as disloyal, cutting off all future advancement opportunities. The issue is not whether organisations are right in demanding an employee's loyalty, but the fact is that many employers do and the assessment of loyalty or commitment is highly judgmental. What is perceived as loyalty by one decision maker may be seen as disloyalty by another, and caring and concerned by yet others. When

evaluating a person's attitude, as in loyalty assessment, we must recognize that we are again involved with a person's perception.

7. Many managerial practices depend on the Theory X or Theory Y assumptions about employees. Theory X assumes that man is (among other things) inherently lazy and irresponsible, creates the unconscious rationale for directing and controlling authoritarian management. Theory Y assumptions, include the responsibility orientation of man and his potential for creativity and contributions, resulting in quite different practices. Both sets of assumptions incorporate many of the perceptual processes that influence managerial behaviour.
8. Attempts made by individuals to project favourable impressions about themselves in the eyes of their superiors are related to the cognitive process. Popularly called impression management, the process refers to the calculated efforts made to get others to think of them in a certain way, preferably in the best possible way. Impression management might involve direct attempts to make oneself look better (such as improving one's appearance, claiming associations with highly regarded people), as well as attempts to make others feel better about themselves (such as by flattering them and showing approval for whatever they say).
9. Impression management has its impact on the success of getting a job and also on his or her career. It also has an influence on his or her relationships with others. Superiors feel better disposed towards those subordinates who manage to project better image..
10. Attempting to look good to others may take its toll on the accuracy of the information communicated. The individual trying to impress management never tells the full story particularly its negative side. Impression management is not practised only by individuals. Organisations also seek to create impressions. Called the corporate image, organisations gain considerably by the exercise. A good corporate image means better employees, expanded markets, and more responsive investors.
11. The Pygmalion effect has important lessons for managers. They need to harness the Pygmalion effect by building a framework that reinforces positive performance expectations throughout the organisation.
12. Model of Self Fulfilling Prophecy; illustrates how supervisory expectations affect employee performance. As indicated, high supervisory expectancy produces better leadership (arrow 1), which subsequently leads employees to develop higher self-expectations (arrow 2). Higher expectations motivate workers to exert themselves more (arrow 3), finally boosting performance (arrow 4), and supervisory expectancies (arrow 5). Successful performance also improves an employee's self-expectancy for achievement (arrow 6).



**A Model of self Fulfilling Prophecy**

**Specifically, managers need to do the following:**

1. Recognize that everyone has the potential to increase his or her performance.
2. Instill confidence in oneself.
3. Set high performance goals.
4. Positively reinforce employees for a job well done.
5. Provide constructive feedback when necessary.
6. Help employees advance through the organisation.
7. Introduce new employees as if they have outstanding potential
8. Become aware of ones personal prejudices and nonverbal messages that may discourage others.
9. Encourage employees to visualize the successful execution of tasks.
10. Help employees' master skills and tasks

Finally, attribution biases tend to lead to inappropriate managerial actions including promotions, transfers, lay-offs, and so forth. This can dampen the motivation and performance. Attributional training programmes assume relevance here. Base attribution process need to be explained and managers need to be taught how to detect and avoid biases.

**Managing the Perception Process**

Successful managers understand the importance of perception as an influencing factor on behaviour and they act accordingly. They are aware of perceptual distortions and also know that perceptual differences are likely to exist in any situation. As a result, they try to make decisions and take action with a true understanding of the work situation as it is viewed by all persons concerned. A manager who is skilled in the perception process will:

1. Have a high level of self-awareness: Individual needs, experience, and expectations can all affect perceptions. The successful manager knows this and is able to identify when he or she is inappropriately distorting a situation because of such perceptual tendencies.

2. Seek information from various sources to confirm or disconfirm personal impressions of a decision situation: The successful manager minimizes the biases of personal perceptions by seeking out the viewpoints of others. These insights are used to gain additional perspective on situations and the problems or opportunities they represent..
3. Be empathetic- that is, be able to see a situation as it is perceived by other people: Different people will define the same situation somewhat differently. The successful manager rises above personal impressions to understand problems as seen by other people.
4. Influence perceptions of other people when they are drawing incorrect or incomplete impressions of events in the work setting: People act in terms of their perceptions. The successful manager is able to influence the perceptions of others so that work events and situations are interpreted as accurately as possible and to the advantage of all concerned.
5. Avoid common perceptual distortions that bias our views of people and situations: These distortions include the use of stereotypes and halo effects, as well as selective perception and projection. Successful managers are self-disciplined and sufficiently self-aware so that the adverse impacts of these distortions are minimized.
6. Avoid inappropriate attributions: Everyone has a tendency to try and explain why events happened the way they did or why people behaved as they did. The successful manager is careful to establish the real reasons why things happen and avoid quick or inappropriate attributions of casualty.
7. Diversity management programmes: As firms globalize themselves, diversity management assumes greater relevance. The challenge for corporate executives is to leverage the benefits of this diversity while minimizing the perceptual and behavioral problems that tend to accompany heterogeneity.  
OB experts have designed diversity management programmes. Typically, these training programmes serve two purposes. First, they communicate the value of diversity. Second, these programmes help participants become aware of their personal biases and give them more accurate information about people with different backgrounds, thus avoiding
8. Know yourself: Apply the Johari window to know the real self. A minimize perceptual biases is to know and become more aware of one's values, beliefs and prejudice.

### **Understanding Our selves**

Perception described till now helps us understand the world around us. What is equally important is to understand the self answering typical question - who am I?

Who am I is answered by self concept. It is a unique product of many interesting parts and may be thought of as the personality viewed from within. Several dimensions add up to self concept. They include self-esteem, locus of control and self-efficiency. All these are explained at different places in the book.

### **Key Terms**

1. **Perception:** This refers to the process of combining, integrating, and interpreting information about others to gain an understanding of them. Simply told, perception refers to the act of seeing what is there to be seen. Unfortunately,



very few people see what is there to be seen, leading to conflicts, jealousies and resulting health problems.

2. **Social Perception:** The process of combining, integrating, and interpreting information about others to gain an accurate understanding of them. Social perception, unlike perception, focuses on people.
3. **Ambivalence:** Ambivalence refers to mixed feelings- the coexistence of feelings towards the same positive and negative object, situation or person. An young man may be ambivalent about his fiancée's virtues and shortcomings. But charmed by the woman's attraction, the man clouds her shortcomings and longs to meet her. There are ambivalent children too. Such children display anxiety before they are separated and are upset when the mother leaves, but they might show ambivalent reactions to her return, such as seeking close contact but simultaneously hitting and kicking her.
4. **Paranoid Perception:** When a person's perception is so selective that he or she can find little common ground for communication with others, he or she is likely to be paranoid. It is the characteristic of the emotionally disturbed person that his or her perceptual field differs from that of reality. His or her manner. Self-concept is poor and he or she is very insecure, as a result he or she behaves in an inflexible manner.
5. **Attribution:** The process which helps us understands why people behave as they do. We observe behaviour of others and then attribute causes for such behaviour. Understanding causes for behaviour is more significant than the act itself. One of the underlying principles of OB is that behaviour is always caused.
6. **Halo Effect:** Every individual has been a victim or beneficiary of the halo effect. This is a phenomenon in which an initial understanding that a person has positive traits is used to infer other uniformly positive characteristics. The opposite would also be true, in which case it is called rusty halo or horns effect.
7. **Self-fulfilling Prophecy:** The tendency of people's beliefs and expectations determining their behaviour and performance, thus making their expectations come true. Self-fulfilling prophecy can take negative and positive forms. In the positive case, holding high expectations enhances performance. This is known as the Pygmalion effect. The negative side of self-fulfilling prophecy states that low expectations lead to low performance. The negative side is known as the Golem effect.
8. **Projection:** The best example to substantiate projection is: jaundiced person sees everything yellowish. In other words, projection is the tendency of people to see in another person's traits that they themselves possess.
9. **Fundamental Attribution Error:** This refers to the tendency to underestimate the importance of external factors and overestimate the importance of internal factors when making attributions about the behaviours of others.
10. **Illusion:** Illusion refers to false interpretation of sensory information.
11. **Impression Management:** Impression management refers to the calculated efforts made to get others think in the best possible way. It involves attempts to make oneself look better. In the context of organisations, it is called corporate image.