Segment: People at Work

Topic 2: Perceptions and Attitudes

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Introduction

Fig.1: Perception

Many people believe their understanding of events and other people are both accurate and shared by others. In fact, most people have very different views of people, the workplace and events they have witnessed. People interpret what they see and hear and develop very different beliefs about them.

In this topic, you will learn about the different ways in which people perceive information on other people and events, and how they might react towards them.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this topic, you will be able to:

- describe the cognitive styles and perceptual process of people
- describe perceptual errors and stereotyping and how to minimise them
- describe attribution errors and how to minimise it
- apply strategies to manage emotions in the workplace.

1. Cognitive Styles

The way people think, perceive and process information influences their perceptions and attitudes. Cognitive styles are the patterns and habits people use to process information. These styles reflect the way people think, perceive, solve problems, receive and retain information, and form concepts. Differences in cognitive style do not reflect a person's ability to learn; certain styles just increase a person's tendency to think in a certain manner.

No cognitive style is inherently better than another, and researchers have found that cognitive style is not related to measured intelligence. However, because certain cognitive styles fit better with certain tasks, people with equal learning abilities but different cognitive styles may experience different levels of success in the same environment.

You have learned about personality, which relates to cognitive styles. Cognitive style refers to how people learn and evaluate information. Personality refers to a set of traits, characteristics, behaviour and predispositions that determine a person's response to life situations. For instance, your particular cognitive style (the way you interpret information) may allow you to learn best by putting things into a real-world context and by talking to other people. Or if you have a different cognitive style, you may learn best by solitary reflection and by solving a problem using a task. A person who prefers talking problems through with others might have a more extroverted personality, while a person who learns best through solitary reflection would display a more introverted personality. Thus, how people perceive, and process information has an impact on their personality preferences and tendencies.

Many different cognitive styles have been identified and classified. Perhaps the best-known cognitive style is field dependence versus field independence.

1.1 Field Dependence and Independence

Content Field dependence and independence refer to a person's tendency to view his or her environment as either comprehensive and interconnected or independent and not related to the situational context. Field dependence and independence indicate the degree to which a learner's surroundings affect his or her perception or comprehension of information.

Field-dependent people are better at learning inferential or relational concepts, learn more easily when material is presented within its social context, prefer to work with others to achieve a common goal, and tend to be sensitive to the feelings and opinions of others. Field-independent people are better at learning abstract and theoretical concepts, prefer to work independently, tend to be task-oriented and often have a personal set of goals and rewards to strive for.

As a result, field-dependent people tend to excel in the humanities and social sciences whereas field-independent people tend to excel in maths, science, engineering and other analytical fields.

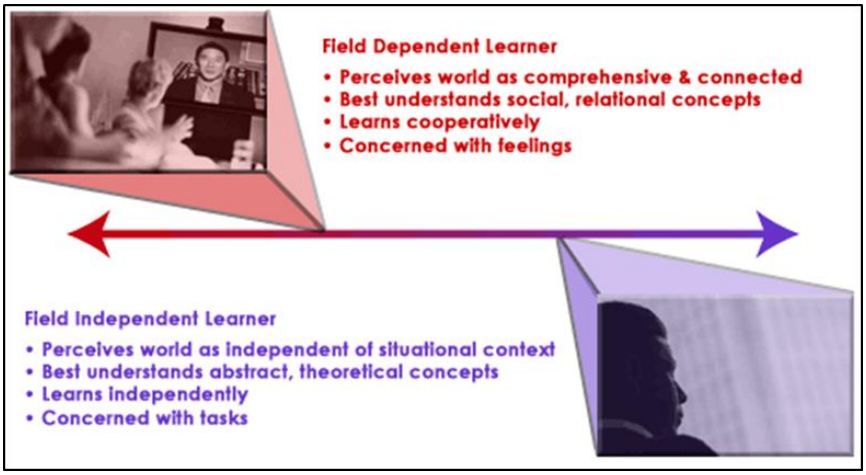


Fig.1: Graphic Showing the Cognitive Styles of Field Dependent Versus Field Independent Learners

Read below to learn about another cognitive style, reflective versus active engagement.

Reflective versus Active Engagement

This cognitive style refers to a tendency to approach environmental stimuli in a contemplative (instead of an impulsive) way. Reflective individuals prefer daily repetitions and require time for internal reflection. Active individuals prefer experiential learning and free-flowing movement from one task to another. Taking this into account, a manager should allow an employee with a reflective cognitive style time to think about the material being presented and allow an employee with an active cognitive style to immediately engage with the material.

2. How to Use Knowledge of Cognitive Styles

Understanding cognitive styles can help guide managers when they are assigning work, developing instructional strategies or applying motivational techniques. For instance, by ensuring that employees' cognitive styles fit with the kind of work that they do, managers can help avoid negative consequences of cognitive styles.

At the individual level, a good manager should be aware of his or her own cognitive style and seek out tasks and responsibilities that fit best with that style. When appropriate, he or she should also defer non-compatible tasks to others with the compatible cognitive style. For example, if a manager has a field-independent cognitive style, he or she should pursue activities that draw on his or her strengths in being self-directed, learning analytical concepts and taking a hypothesis-testing approach to learning.

Whether interacting with a client or supervising a co-worker, a manager should try to determine the cognitive style of the person with whom he or she is interacting. For example, a co-worker with a field-dependent cognitive style may need external goals and reinforcements to function effectively. When assembling, leading or operating as part of a group, a manager should be aware of internal group differences in cognitive style. For example, in assessing team performance, a manager may find that the most effective teams display high levels of social bonding and task focus. In trying to assemble such a team, the manager should consider mixing field-dependent employees, who tend to have good social skills, with field-independent employees, who tend to be task-orientated.

3. Perceptual Process and Perceptual Errors

As stated in the textbook (Champoux, J. Organizational Behavior: Integrating Individuals, Groups and Organizations. 4th ed. Cincinnati, Ohio: South-Western College Publishing, 2007), "Perception is a cognitive process that lets a person make sense out of stimuli from the environment". You are constantly exposed to stimuli from your environment. In fact, you are exposed to so much environmental stimulus that you only truly observe a portion of what goes on around you. Think back to today's commute to work. How many people were wearing

black? Were most people walking quickly or at a leisurely pace? How many people were enjoying their morning cup of coffee during this commute? Few people would be able to accurately answer these questions. The complexity of our environment forces people to process information in a way that is meaningful. This is known as selective attention within the perceptual process.

To absorb and later recall information, people create mental categories for people, places and events based on their beliefs and experiences. The ability to swiftly place events, objects and people into categories enables people to think and make decisions quickly. Unfortunately, this process of creating categories can impair perceptions. For example, when people receive information that does not fit within pre-established categories, they often dismiss the event or person as being atypical or the "exception to the rule". When later asked to recall the event or person, they will remember the person or event inaccurately; that is, they will fit the event or person to a pre-existing mental model rather than recall the unique characteristics of the event.

Sometimes, people receive information that is so new, different or important that it intensely clashes with their created categories. In these cases, people will re-evaluate their original belief and then create a subcategory that better describes the event or person.

Read the example given below.

Perceptual Process

For example, suppose Swee Hoon, a dynamic young woman, has been hired to lead a research and development (R & D) division at an organisation. But John, a manager in the R & D division, believes R & D is a place for older men who have had extensive experience in the industry. Because Swee Hoon is a young woman, she likely does not fit into John's mental category of the type of person suitable for an R & D position. This attitude is likely to affect John's perceptions of and interactions with Swee Hoon.

But what happens if Swee Hoon reveals herself to be fully competent and successful at her role? John might

- ignore her accomplishments and attribute them to external factors (e.g., the men in the department or luck).
- consider her an exception and say, "Although she can perform the job well, most young women would not be able to do so under identical circumstances".
- change his belief about the role of women as an R & D head.

3.1 Perceptual Errors and Stereotypes

You generally don't notice everything that surrounds you in the world. The world contains too much information for you to recognise and remember all of it. For example, consider the room where you sit: what does the wall behind you look like? You certainly saw it when you entered the room, but can you recall all of the details now? Because it's impossible for people to focus on everything in their surroundings, they perceive what is important to them at the moment. They also tend to view the world based on what they expect to see and therefore, perceive things that aren't there.

Read below for more information about perceptual errors

Perceptual Errors

People cannot perceive everything around them; there is simply too much information. For example, when you view a computer screen, you might be reading a sentence, but you might not be paying attention to or processing the computer logo, the colour of your desktop, the dust on the computer screen or the whir of the computer. These and a thousand other details simply escape your moment-to-moment perception!

To make sense of overwhelming amounts of information, the human mind automatically does several things.

- It groups together pieces of information, then responds to the groupings rather than the specific information.
- It focuses on, and consciously perceives, only part of the available information.
- It alters the information to fit prior expectations and mental images.

The way people view the world in terms of groupings can be shown in visual exercises, which demonstrate a universal tendency to "fill in the blanks" when we expect to see something (like a picture of a dog or a triangle) even when the figure does not objectively exist. Focusing on different aspects of a picture determines what you see.

Filling in the blanks also happens when we view other people. First, people selectively perceive the aspects of people or situations that they expect to see. In practice, this means that if a manager expects an employee to be creative, she will notice when the employee comes up with creative ideas; those perceptions, in turn, will strengthen the manager's initial assumptions.

Another phenomenon is differential or even erroneous interpretation of behaviour. For example, a manager can have different interpretations of a particularly good or poor piece of work. If the author of a document is already viewed as competent and professional, a poor job

will be interpreted as an isolated incident and not an indicator of the author's usual performance. However, if the author is already viewed as incompetent or unprofessional, then the work will be viewed as typical and an accurate indicator of ability. Likewise, silence can be interpreted as a sign of great intelligence (the person is deep in thought) or stupidity and lack of understanding.

Most behaviours and outcomes can be interpreted many ways. Sometimes people go beyond different or erroneous interpretations of what behaviour means; sometimes they even perceive things that did not happen. Just as people mentally fill in the gaps in a picture to see a triangle where none really exists, people also mentally fill in the gaps in others' behaviour in order to meet their expectations. So, for example, statements made by one person in a meeting may be attributed later to another person who was expected to make them. By the same token, statements made by the "wrong" person are often simply not heard. Finally, even when behaviours and outcomes are accurately perceived, they are often not remembered unless they match expectations. This phenomenon is called selective retention.

These perceptual errors are not intentional; in fact, people are almost always unaware they are making them, and if someone suggested they had made such an error, most people would strongly deny it. The universal nature of these tendencies, however, means that all people make them sometimes.

Reflection-Perceptual Process and Perceptual Errors

Look at the visual exercises given below. Each one is an example of ways in which people's perceptions of reality are structured.

You may record your thoughts using the personal notepad, before reading the "Expert Analysis" given below.

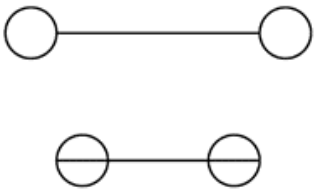
Activity: Errors and Stereotypes

1. Figure versus background

View the picture below. What do you see?

2. What is real?

Examine the picture. Which line seems longer?



3. Seeing what you expect to see—part I

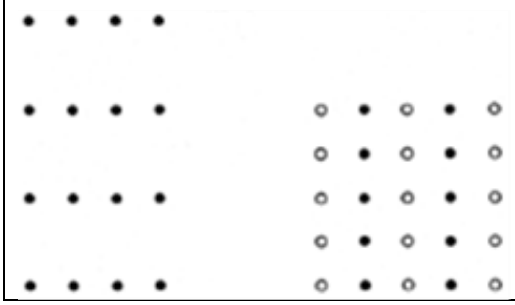
Look at the picture below. How many triangles do you see?

4. Seeing what you expect to see – part II

What do you see in the picture below?

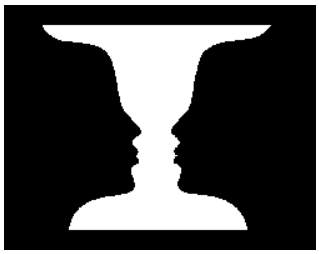
5. What makes a group?

What do you see in each of the two pictures below?



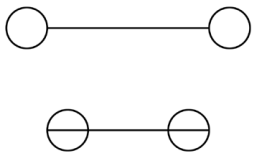
Expert Analysis

1. Figure versus background



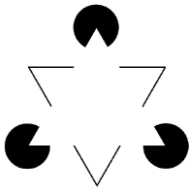
Sometimes people see a white vase. Other times, people see two black faces looking at each other. What you see depends on where you are focusing, or what part of the picture is the "figure" and what part is the background. If you focus on one aspect of the picture, you see one thing (a vase). Simply refocusing your attention on another aspect of the picture leads you to see something entirely different (the faces). The same phenomenon occurs, though far more subtly, in the way you perceive other people and situations. For example, a wonderful job can become an awful job if you focus on different aspects of it. An excellent co-worker can be viewed as a frustrating or poor co-worker if you focus on different aspects of his or her behaviour.

2. What is real?



If you measure the lines, you will see that they are exactly the same length. However, most people believe the top line is longer than the bottom line. Even if you know intellectually that the two lines are the same length, looking at the picture quickly may give you the impression that the top one is longer. People interpret the world around them and give meaning to it depending on key aspects of the context and key details. Two things that are measurably alike can seem to be quite different depending on the details. For example, a comment from one person may seem insightful, while from another it may seem obvious.

3. Seeing what you expect to see—part I



Most people see two large triangles: a white triangle with a black border with its point

toward the bottom, and an all-white triangle that overlaps it with its point toward the top. Most people also perceive that the inside, top white triangle is brighter than the page around it. In fact, there are no triangles in the picture. There are only three outlined corners and three black near-circles with a wedge removed – with no difference at all in brightness. People tend to identify and seek patterns they recognise. Once they find one, it is almost impossible for them to consider that it's just random or circumstantial. Therefore what you expect to see becomes what you see. This expectation comes from a process called "closure" – you see things that are not there, in order to see things that are familiar to you.

4. Seeing what you expect to see – part II

If you look closely, you can find a Dalmatian walking along a path, nose near the ground, moving from the lower right to the upper left side of the page. Once you see it, it is extremely difficult to look at the picture and see anything else; the ambiguous group of spots has disappeared and a clear picture of dog has replaced it. If a situation or event is confusing or unclear, people try to interpret and create meaning for it. Once they have created that meaning, however, it is extremely difficult for them to perceive events that are random or unrelated to their "version" of the event. This is true of the way people interpret the characteristics of others. For example, if people think their co-worker is arrogant or shy, they seek evidence of that trait in the co-worker's behaviour. They interpret their co-worker's behaviour in terms of their expectations, and they fail to notice behaviour that does not fit into their interpretation. If they look at the pattern of their co-worker's actions, they focus on and see, their "created" characteristics for that person – in this case, arrogance or shyness.

5. What makes a group?

Most people see the first picture as a set of four horizontal rows of dots. This is because people tend to group things that are physically close to one another, and these dots are closer horizontally than vertically. Most people see the second picture as a set of vertical lines of dots. The dots are equally distant from one another, but each vertical column looks

different from the one next to it. This perception stems from people's tendency to group things together that look alike. People tend to see things in terms of groups and entirities, rather than as individual items. And they tend to assign groups on the basis of closeness and similarity. The same factors affect people in work groups. People who are viewed as similar, or who view themselves as similar, tend to form informal groups; people who are seen as dissimilar are often viewed as outsiders. Similarity can be based on physical appearance (e.g., height, hair colour, and gender), occupation (e.g., secretary, accountant), work style, attitudes, political beliefs or any factor that is important to those in the group or those outside the group.

4. Stereotypes

Everyone creates mental categories of groups of people. Society groups people by age (babies, children, teenagers, young adults) by the kind of work performed (secretaries, executives, street cleaners), as well as by gender, race, religion and ethnic background. Mental categories, or perceptual sets, allow people to quickly describe people based on their similarity to others in that group. To see a group of young people under the age of 20 and call them "teenagers" simply describes that group of young people based on age.

Fig.3: Stereotypes

However, people often develop beliefs about people belonging to a perceptual set that may or may not be accurate. For example, if you believe that all teenagers are trouble-makers, then you would be very wary of the group of young people standing on the corner. You might behave defensively toward them because of a stereotype or perceptual set you hold about teenagers being trouble.

Because stereotypes result from mental categorising, virtually all people create and use them. However, the content of each stereotype differs. For example, many people in the United States stereotype lawyers as greedy, unprincipled and intelligent while they stereotype accountants as precise, controlled and emotionally distant. Marketing personnel are similarly preconceived as creative but unfocused and undisciplined. These preconceptions often lead people to make errors in perceiving and interacting with others.

Stereotypes often lead to selective retention.. If an employee holds a positive stereotype of a group to which a co-worker belongs, then after a conversation with this co-worker, the employee will tend to recall all their points of agreement and strong ideas. If they hold a negative stereotype of the co-worker's group, they will tend to remember the same conversation in terms of disagreement and inaccurate statements. To avoid making this kind of perceptual error, you can learn to recognise the stereotypes you hold and develop first-hand knowledge (acquired in positive settings) of people from groups you have stereotyped. This knowledge will likely contradict your stereotypes and naturally result in a greater understanding of and identification with individuals from those groups in the future. You can also check assumptions, reactions and memories to minimise the negative effects of stereotypes.

4.1 Consequences of Stereotyping

Prejudice occurs when there are unfounded negative emotions toward people belonging to a particular group. Discrimination occurs when treatment is based on class or category rather than individual merit.

Although overt manifestations of prejudice and discrimination may be less prevalent today than they once were, both still occur in more covert ways. They may be evident in the quality and quantity of interaction between dominant and non-dominant group members. Discrimination may also be manifested through performance appraisals, pay, training and promotional opportunities. Some other potential consequences of stereotyping are as follows:

- In dyads and groups, stereotyping may lead to the self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, if you are working with someone whom you believe is unqualified for the job, you will be less willing to accept his or her opinions and input. As a result, the person you are working

with may actually begin to offer less input and exhibit behaviours indicative of someone unqualified for the job.

- Stereotypes may cause members of one group to perceive members of other groups in a negative light. This serves to boost group members' social identity.
- Conflicts between the dominant group (in-group) and (out-group) may increase. Intragroup differences may be minimised while intergroup differences are maximised.
- As group competition increases, stereotypes may become more prevalent and negative. Competition within dyads may also cause more prevalent, negative stereotypes.
- When one or a few members of a stereotyped group are included in a dominant group, the group's overall productivity and creativity may be limited. This is because dominant group members may not be willing to accept the stereotyped members' ideas and viewpoints as valid.
- In group and dyadic relationships, stereotypes may lead to the under-utilisation of talent because the assignments and roles may not be based on true abilities. This may lead to low morale and job satisfaction. Stereotyped individuals may eventually leave the organisation in search of more rewarding assignments and roles.

What can be done to minimise the effects of stereotyping?

Read below to learn how you can minimise the effects of stereotyping.

Managing Stereotypes and Biases

Although it is unlikely bias will be completely eradicated from the workplace, some things can be done to decrease the likelihood of these behaviours. Some options are to

- implement company-wide diversity training programmes. Although these programmes do not help eradicate deeply-rooted prejudices, they serve several purposes: they show employees the value of having a diverse workforce and they increase people's awareness of biases and provide strategies on how to deal with them.
- provide other forums or activities within the organisation that will give employees the opportunity to know each other better (e.g., staff retreats and focus groups).
- provide training on how biases affect performance appraisals which may ultimately affect salary increases, promotions and other work-related rewards and incentives. Appraisals may be less biased if based on objective criteria and various sources.

People can also reduce bias if they

- take the time to evaluate their beliefs, values and expectations and allow others to know more about them.
- acknowledge that everyone has biases in some form or another.
- avoid making snap judgements about other people.
- discuss their perceptions with others; the greater the consensus across people, the more likely it is that interpretations are a more accurate reflection of reality.

Reflection-People Perception Exercise

Most people believe their perceptions of others are objective and accurate. However, your views and judgements are affected by your expectations, comparisons, mood and many other factors. Often two people will walk away from the same event or meeting with very different understandings of what happened and very different impressions of the people involved.

The following exercises can give you insight into some of the ways your perceptions of people are affected by your expectations and the context of the situation. To gain insight about your own perceptual process, complete the following exercises.

Exercise 1

Read below to carry out two versions of an exercise about an employee, Marjorie. Based on the description of Marjorie in each version, you are to rate your impression of Marjorie using the scales provided.

Exercise 1:Version A

First, read the description of the employee below. Then read the illustrated vignette and describe the employee using the scales provided.

Marjorie Bruning is a first-line manager in an insurance company. She is 31 years old, recently married and has been working for the company for five years. Previously, she was employed in a series of jobs in sales and human resources. She has a bachelor's degree in sociology and travelled around Europe for several years after she graduated from university. She has consistently received positive evaluations in her work. She is friendly and bright. She was promoted to her present position a year ago.

The Report

Marjorie is working on a big presentation for her boss and her boss's boss. She has been

working on the project for several weeks, collecting and organising information, preparing charts and graphs, and documenting her findings.

Marjorie is learning to use a new software program to do presentations, charts and graphs, because her boss wants this presentation to look very professional. If this report and presentation are well received, it will be a big success for both her and her boss; it might lead to a bonus and will almost certainly lead to a high evaluation. If it goes poorly, her reputation and chances for advancement will suffer. Knowing this, she has been working late hours, checking all her information and trying to make the most of the presentation software package. She has spent hours printing, collating and assembling documents. Suddenly, she knocks a cup of coffee on the painstakingly assembled original.

Describe Marjorie

Based on what you know, check on the response that corresponds with your impression of Marjorie:

1. Careful: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree
2. Successful: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree
3. Capable: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree
4. Smart: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree
5. Motivated: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree

Exercise 1: Version B

First, read the description of the employee below. Then read the illustrated vignette and describe the employee using the scales provided.

Marjorie Bruning is a first-line manager in an insurance company. She is 31 years old, recently married and has been working for the company for five years. Previously, she was employed in a series of jobs in sales and human resources. She has a bachelor's degree in sociology and travelled around Europe for several years after she graduated from University. She has consistently received positive evaluations in her work. She is friendly but not very bright. She was promoted to her present position a year ago.

The Report

Marjorie is working on a big presentation for her boss and her boss's boss. She has been working on the project for several weeks, collecting and organising information, preparing charts and graphs, and documenting her findings.

Marjorie is learning to use a new software program to do presentations, charts and graphs because her boss wants this presentation to look very professional. If this report and presentation are well received, it will be a big success for both her and her boss; it might lead to a bonus, and will almost certainly lead to a high evaluation. If it goes poorly, her reputation and chances for advancement will suffer. Knowing this, she has been working late hours, checking all her information and trying to make the most of the presentation software package. She has spent hours printing, collating and assembling documents. Suddenly, she knocks a cup of coffee on the painstakingly assembled original.

Describe Marjorie

Based on what you know, click on the response that corresponds with your impression of Marjorie:

1. Careful: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree
2. Successful: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree
3. Capable: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree
4. Smart: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree
5. Motivated: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree

Once you have completed each activity, think of some terms you would use to describe Marjorie. You may record your thoughts using the personal notepad.

Next, you may read below for an explanation of the exercise you did.

Explanation for Exercise 1: Version A

Marjorie's background is sufficiently neutral that people can interpret her abilities and nature very differently. She could be viewed as successful or unsuccessful, capable or incapable, smart or stupid, motivated or unmotivated. There is evidence to support all interpretations; for example, her years spent travelling could be considered evidence of being unmotivated or motivated. Her position as a first-level supervisor could be considered evidence of being unsuccessful or successful.

Her spilling the coffee could be viewed as evidence of being careless or of being exhausted from working long hours. The rest of the description in the vignette was purposely vague; it described the task she had to do and her effort, but not her abilities or personality.

You were given one concrete piece of information that would have been reflected in your evaluation: the version you read described Marjorie as "bright." You had that information

before you learned about her behaviour when working on the project. This gave you a specific expectation, or frame, from which to interpret her behaviour.

Most people who expect Marjorie to be bright interpret her spilling the coffee as evidence of her concentration on the task she is working on. This leads them to evaluate her as having higher levels of ability, success, intelligence and motivation.

Explanation for Exercise 1: Version B

Marjorie's background is sufficiently neutral that people can interpret her abilities and nature very differently. She could be viewed as successful or unsuccessful, capable or incapable, smart or stupid, motivated or unmotivated. There is evidence to support all interpretations; for example, her years spent traveling could be considered evidence of being unmotivated or motivated. Her position as a first-level supervisor could be considered evidence of being unsuccessful or successful.

Her spilling the coffee could be viewed as evidence of being careless or of being exhausted from working long hours. The rest of the description in the vignette was purposely vague; it described the task she had to do and her effort, but not her abilities or personality.

You were given one concrete piece of information that would have been reflected in your evaluation: the version you read described Marjorie as "not very bright." You had that information before you learned about her behaviour when working on the project. This gave you a specific expectation, or frame, from which to interpret her behaviour.

Most people who expect Marjorie to be not very bright interpret her spilling the coffee as evidence of her inability. This leads them to evaluate her as having low levels of ability, success, intelligence and motivation.

Explanation for Exercise 2: Version A

Read below to carry out two versions of an exercise about the first meeting with your new lead analyst, George. Based on the description of George in each version, you are to rate your first impression of George using the scales provided.

George

You walk into the meeting room excited and nervous. Today is the day you get to meet your new team. Your company, a midsized management consulting firm, was recently acquired by a competitor in a purchase that was opposed by your company's management and board of directors. The new joint company is being reorganised, but your job is secure. However, you have been moved into a new position and have a new team with which to work. You have heard that this company is very different from your old one, and has a different culture and work habits.

You walk in to meet your new lead analyst, George Feil. This is your first meeting with him. You have heard through the grapevine that George is extremely experienced and has worked for your previous competitor for many years. You are anxious to get along well with him. You walk in the room; what is your initial impression of George?

George is:

1. Careful: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree
2. Successful: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree
3. Capable: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree
4. Smart: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree

Explanation for Exercise 2: Version B

George

You walk into the meeting room excited and nervous. Today is the day you get to meet your new team. Your company, a midsized management consulting firm, was recently acquired by a competitor in a purchase that was opposed by your company's management and board of directors. The new joint company is being reorganized, but your job is secure. However, you have been moved into a new position and have a new team with which to work. You have heard that this company is very different from your old one, and has a different culture and work habits.

You walk in to meet your new lead analyst, George Feil. This is your first meeting with him. You have heard through the grapevine that George is extremely experienced and has worked for your previous competitor for many years. You are anxious to get along well with him. You walk into the room; what is your initial impression of George?

1. Careful: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree
2. Successful: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree
3. Motivated: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree
4. Smart: □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neutral □ Agree □ Strongly agree

Explanation for Exercise 2: Version A

The exercise gives you very little objective information about George, other than his tenure and power in the organization. You know that his organization is larger than yours, but he could be careful or careless, friendly or unfriendly, capable or incapable, smart or stupid, motivated or unmotivated. There is no evidence to support any extreme.

However, before you read about George, you looked at a picture of him. In this picture, he was wearing a formal three-piece suit. This picture was placed above the text, so it formed your first impression of George.

Many people interpret formal attire to indicate formality in behavior, distance, intelligence, precision, and motivation. On the other hand, it could certainly reflect nothing more than the culture of the organization and the requirements of the position. In point of fact, it tells you absolutely nothing about the employee on any of the dimensions that were assessed. However, your initial impression might lead you to evaluate him as having high levels of carefulness, ability, intelligence, and motivation. It might also have lead you to evaluate him as being less friendly, depending on your view of whether formality is generally required of professionals in his position.

Explanation for Exercise 2: Version B

The exercise gives you very little objective information about George, other than his tenure and power in the organization. You know that his organization is larger than yours, but he could be careful or careless, friendly or unfriendly, capable or incapable, smart or stupid, motivated or unmotivated. There is no evidence to support any extreme.

However, before you read about George, you looked at a picture of him. In this picture, he was wearing a casual sweatshirt. This picture was placed above the text, so it formed your first impression of George.

Many people interpret casual attire to indicate informality in behavior, friendliness, sloppiness, and demotivation. On the other hand, it could certainly reflect nothing more than the culture of the organization and the requirements of the position. Another possibility is that it might reflect performance that is so outstanding that the employee does not have to "dress up" to be viewed as a professional.

In point of fact, it tells you absolutely nothing about the employee on any of the dimensions that were assessed. However, your initial impression might lead you to evaluate him as having lower (or, possibly, very high) levels of carefulness, ability, intelligence, and motivation. It might also have lead you to evaluate him as being more friendly.

5. Attribution Errors

Your boss compliments you for writing a brilliant report. You take full credit, attributing your success to hard work and intelligence. You mention your "win" to a colleague who comments

that you were lucky to have been given such an easy topic on which to write. Which of these perceptions is correct?

Researchers have studied how people explain causes underlying certain events, including, who or what is to blame for failures, and who or what should be credited for successes. One of the most consistent findings from research in social psychology is that people tend to

- attribute external causes for failures when explaining personal failures
- attribute internal causes for success when explaining personal success
- attribute external causes for success when explaining the success of others
- attribute internal causes for failure when explaining the failure of others

A special case of these attribution errors is called the ""fundamental attribution error." Fundamental attribution error happens when observers underestimate situational or environmental factors (that is, external causes) and blame internal qualities and characteristics of others for outcomes. For example, Caroline, a sales manager, receives a late report from Francois, one of her field sales representatives. Rather than investigate to find out if external causes are to blame (such as a busy client call schedule or technology problems), Caroline decides Francois is lazy and not conscientious. When Caroline decides that something about Francois as a person has caused the report to be late, rather than look for external causes, Caroline has committed the fundamental attribution error.

5.1 Consequences of Attribution Errors

The most harmful consequence of attribution errors in the workplace is the misdiagnosis of performance problems. It is rare that a person's individual characteristics are solely to blame for problems. Nevertheless, people tend to blame internal dispositions of others for negative outcomes, even when external causes are partially or fully responsible. A manager who makes the fundamental attribution error may focus on changing employee attributes by sending them to training, providing counselling, transferring or even firing them without fully considering how external causes contribute to problems.

When these managers do not consider and address outside causes, new employees may soon experience the same problems as former employees who were replaced. This process can lead

to a "revolving door" of employees, creating many unnecessary costs and compounding the original problems. Thus, it is wise for all employees in an organisational system to fully consider the range of causes underlying behaviours before making decisions or judgements about others.

6. Impact of Attitudes on Relationships

Apart from the damage that negative attitudes or false perceptions can have, attitudes can also affect the relationships between people at work in other ways. When a person senses that another person has a similar attitude, he or she is more likely to seek that person's company and have a feeling of solidarity with them. Thus, similar attitudes lead to integration between members of an organisation, whereas dissimilar attitudes lead to a lack of integration between members.

7. Emotions in the Workplace

Emotions are part of everyday life; people experience happiness when things go well and anger and frustration when they encounter problems. For the most part, negative occurrences lead to predictably negative emotions and vice versa. However, negative emotions may also move people to do positive things. For example, anger may motivate people to do their part to correct an injustice, and anxiety over project deadlines may motivate people to implement better time-management techniques. However, there is a point at which these emotions become so intense that they have negative consequences.

7.1 Consequences of Intense Emotions

Have you ever been emotionally overloaded to the point where you felt you could not think clearly? If you have, then you have experienced one of the most common effects of intense emotion. Intense emotion can have a negative effect on problem-solving and decision-making.

Effective decision-making and problem-solving require people to attend to all those things that are critical to the task at hand. During times of intense emotion, this process is short-circuited. Because some of the brain's resources are devoted to its increased arousal, fewer resources are available for thinking and decision-making. This leads to less creative, more short-term

solutions and decisions. On the other hand, positive emotional states produce a positive perceptual bias that can lead to more risky and adventurous decisions and solutions. Other consequences of intense emotions on the decision-making process include an increased potential for errors in judgment, poor memory and the tendency to become overwhelmed by other thoughts.

What are the other consequences of intense emotions on people and their interactions with others? People may vent their emotions on others in the belief that it will help them feel better. However, although shouting and other forms of emotional release may provide temporary satisfaction, they do little to restore calm and emotional equilibrium. In fact, research has found that this only leads to more brain arousal and anger; this is referred to as the "ventilation fallacy".

Someone who is experiencing intense emotion is more likely to respond negatively to a situation that might otherwise have elicited a neutral response. For example, suppose that while you are on your way to the office, someone knocks your coffee out of your hand and does not apologise. When you get to the office, your colleague comments that you are late. Under normal conditions, you would most likely ignore this comment or respond in a neutral or apologetic manner. However, because of the earlier incident, you are more likely to respond to the comment in a negative or belligerent manner.

Negative emotions build on each other. If such emotions are allowed to continue unchecked, they may lead to burnout, aggression or violence. In organisations with low norms and expectations of emotional control, negative emotions can erode basic civility. Working in this kind of environment decreases people's creativity and productivity. For example, suppose your team is developing a new recruiting strategy and your co-worker Joe is in charge of the effort. When you present your ideas, Joe responds, "Your ideas seem shallow and are not well thought out. Don't waste my time with such garbage." If you are new to the department and unfamiliar with its norms of interacting, you may lose both your beliefs in your abilities and your interest in working with Joe.

Long-term reactions to this type of situation include all the basic responses to chronic stress: physical ailments, such as headaches and back pain; psychological reactions, such as

depression or mood swings; poor behavioural coping, such as alcohol or drug use; increased illness owing to a depressed immune system; and, eventually, increased likelihood of developing life-threatening illnesses, such as hypertension, heart attack or stroke.

Conversely, intense negative emotions may also be internalised to the point of "emotional implosion". Internalising or controlling strong displays of emotion over a long period of time can result in great amounts of stress. This typically leads to the same types of physiological and physical problems that result from operating in situations with very little emotional control. Although internalising emotions may keep one in line with the organisation's norms for emotional display, the individual suffers.

7.2 Managing Intense Emotions

There are many effective strategies to manage intense emotions at work. For example, if you find yourself getting angry, step away from the source of your anger and do something that will actively take your mind off the situation. Although some experts suggest that getting away from the situation is enough, others suggest that you should actively engage yourself in activities, such as physical exercise, that make it difficult to remain focused on the emotional episode.

If you are interacting with others and see the potential for some problems, then challenge the beliefs or misconceptions that are feeding these emotions. Using "active listening", in which you paraphrase back to people your understanding of the situation or what they have said, can help identify misunderstandings and prevent you from rushing to judgement. However, this has to occur before emotions escalate. Another tactic is to stop before you speak, count to 10, and decide what words you want to use before you say them.

Organisations can provide training to help employees manage their emotions more effectively. Tips for training include

- aligning training with the skills that are needed for a current or future position.
- motivating employees to improve emotional competencies by showing how it will benefit them (e.g., promotion or raise).

- providing feedback on new learning and opportunities for employees to practise the new learning.
- fostering change by identifying leaders in the organisation that can model these competencies.

8. Summary

Here is a quick recap of what we have learnt so far:

- As managers, we react to the world as we perceive it, which is not always how it really is. Our attitudes filter and influence what we perceive.
- Cognitive styles refer to certain patterns and habits that people are prone to use when processing information.
- One way of classifying cognitive styles is field dependency. In the field-dependent style, learning is comprehensive and socially-orientated. However, in the field-independent style, learning is abstract and independent.
- Perception refers to a cognitive process that allows a person to make use of the stimuli or cues from the environment.
- Stereotyping, which is creating a caricature about a group of people by exaggerating their characteristics, is one dysfunctional mode of perception. Negative consequences of stereotyping include prejudice and discrimination.
- An attribution error occurs when one incorrectly ascribes others' success to external factors and their failures to internal causes.
- Emotions are inevitable in the workplace and managers should learn to use techniques to assist themselves and their employees to manage their emotions more effectively, e.g., reducing anger by moving away from the source and engaging in activity that generates positive emotions.

9. Glossary

Cognitive styles	The patterns and habits people use to process information. Styles can be broadly classified as field dependent versus field independent or

	reflective versus active engagement.
Ability	The natural aptitudes and learned capabilities required to successfully complete a task.
Stereotype	A perceptual set that holds beliefs and perceived attributes of a target person based on the group or category to which the target belongs.
Selective retention	The tendency to remember only some events, behaviours and outcomes. People usually selectively remember information that matches their previously formed beliefs and expectations about people, jobs and situations.
Dyad	Two individuals or units regarded as a pair.
Dominant group	A group of people united by common beliefs, attitudes, or interests that characteristically excludes outsiders; a clique. Also termed "in-group".
Fundamental attribution error	A perceptual error; the tendency to attribute others' successes to external (situational) factors and their failures to internal (personal) factors.