

Perceptual Process, Attitudes, and Values

Perception

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

- define perception
- explain the perceptual process
- discuss the concepts of closure and figure-ground in perception
- describe stereotyping with the concepts of perceptual set and halo effect
- relate the concept of perceptual defense to everyday experiences
- define attitude and values
- understand the concepts of work satisfaction and organizational commitment
- discuss various approaches to attitude change
- explain the importance of attitude, values, and ethics for organizations
- suggest ways of developing values and ethical practices

Perception, values, and attitudes are inter-related terms. Interestingly, our values and attitudes are shaped by perceptual process, and in turn shape how we perceive things. Different people often see the same phenomenon differently, due to the different attitude or values they have for the same person, object, or event. For example, in the case of an industrial strike, a manager may perceive the immediate cause of the strike to be trivial, while the workers may see it as very serious. Similarly, an incident on the shop floor may be interpreted by the supervisor as an indication of workers' carelessness, whereas the workers may see it as a blame caused by the supervisor's high-handed attitude. When people exchange their roles, their perceptions often change differently. When a worker is promoted to the post of supervisor his or her perception of the shop floor often changes.

Our values and attitudes are shaped by perceptual processes that in turn shape how we perceive things.

There are three related terms—beliefs, attitudes, and values. Clarity about their meanings helps us to use them for personal and organizational effectiveness. Beliefs are primarily cognitive in nature. Attitudes are evaluative, affective, and conative in nature. Attitudes have referents—the objects for which they are directed. For example, when I say that I like my organization, I am expressing my attitude towards it. Similarly, when I say that I value my organization, I am expressing my values towards it.

felt trapped in a highly volatile situation, where he fumbled for a speedy and pragmatic remedy.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the motivational principles underlying the HR policies of the company?
2. Analyse Prayans' from the point of view of managing motivation of the people.
3. What new challenges is the company facing in relation to employees' motivation?
4. Suggest any changes you would like to make to raise the motivational level of the employees?

NEWS AND RESEARCH

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not liking (unfavourable) certain aspects of the referent. We shall discuss these in more detail later in this chapter.

Values are judgemental in nature. They are about preference. When we say that certain aspects of an object or situation are desirable, we express a value: some things are more desirable than others, so that we have a hierarchy of values. We shall discuss values too in more detail later in this chapter. If we want to understand how values and attitudes develop, then we need to understand the perceptual process first.

PERCEPTUAL PROCESS

In order to understand the significance of this phenomenon and to understand why people see the same situation differently, one needs to look at the several processes involved in perception.

Perception is the source of one's knowledge of the world. One wants to know the world and the surrounding environment. Knowledge is power. Without knowledge one cannot act effectively.

Perception is the process of receiving, selecting, organizing, interpreting, checking, and reacting to sensory stimuli or data.

Perception is the main source of such knowledge. Perception can be defined as the process of receiving, selecting, organizing, interpreting, checking, and reacting to sensory stimuli or data. This definition contains several aspects or processes of perception. Each process is briefly discussed below and also represented in Fig. 9.1.

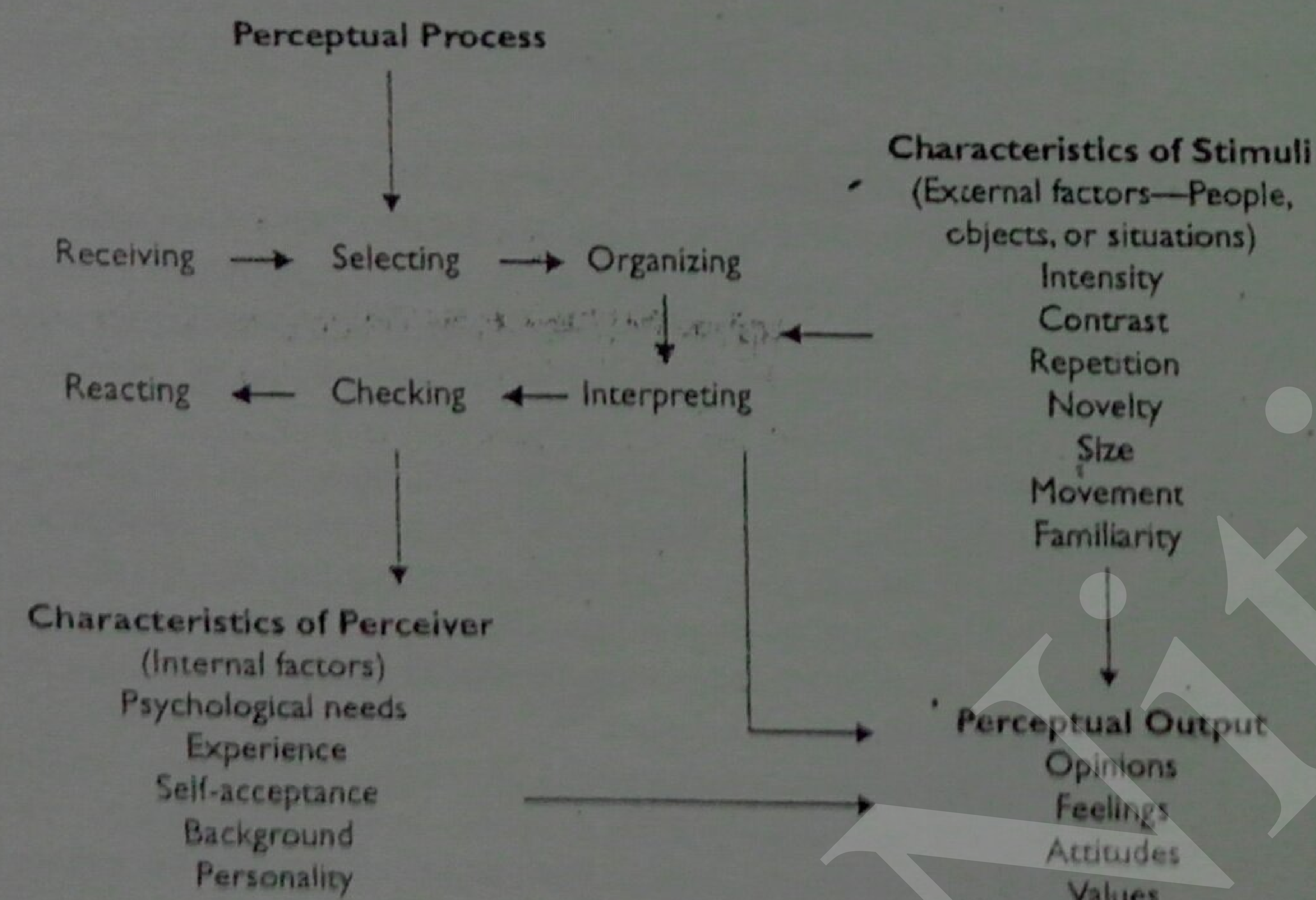


Fig. 9.1 Perceptual Process

→ **Process of Receiving Stimuli**

The first process of perception is the reception of stimuli or data from various sources. Most data is received through the five sense organs. One sees things, hears them, smells or tastes things, or touches them, and hence learns about the various aspects of things. For example, while taking a round of the shop floor, a supervisor may become aware of some trouble from smelling something strange, and may then draw the attention of a worker to something burning due to a small electrical fire. Most of the time, workers perceive several things relevant to their

jobs through touch. Similarly, our visual and auditory senses are used in seeing and listening to things continuously.

→ **Process of Selecting Stimuli**

Intensity, size, movement, repetition, familiarity, and novelty are the factors that influence the selection of stimuli.

After receiving the stimuli or data, only some are selected for our attention. It is not possible to pay attention to all the stimuli received. In order to prevent attention being unnecessarily diverted, stimuli are screened and selected for further processing. Two sets of factors govern the selection of stimuli: internal and external.

External Factors Influencing Selection

Several studies have been conducted on the factors which influence selection of stimuli. Most of these studies concern the visual perception of objects. However, these factors are equally applicable to the perception of people and situations. Some factors found important in the selection of stimuli are:

Intensity Generally, stimuli which are higher in intensity are perceived more readily than those which are low in intensity. Advertisements make good use of this factor. For example, at night, brighter lights are more noticeable than dim lights. Therefore, advertisements which are displayed in brighter light attract more attention. Similarly, during a strike, workers attract the attention of managers by shouting slogans. Such slogans, in contrast to silent demonstrations, help the agitators gain the attention of their target audience.

Size Generally, larger objects attract more attention, because they are perceived faster. Many companies use this factor by packaging products to make them look larger. Similarly, larger advertisements are perceived more easily than smaller ones.

Contrast Usually, things which differ from the familiar attract attention quickly. If one is familiar with a particular sound, a sudden change in it attracts attention. Similarly, a worker who is very different from other workers stands out. Many people, knowingly or unknowingly, do strange things to attract attention. Unusual behaviour attracts attention because of the principle of contrast. Training managers utilize this factor by organizing training programmes away from the workplace (usually in quieter places, in which contrast with the workplace may be maximized).

Movement Things which are in motion attract more attention than those which are stationary. Most advertisements displayed at night use this principle by creating the illusion of movement through a clever arrangement of lights. Short advertisement films in cinema halls or on television also make use of this principle.

Repetition Usually things which are repetitive attract attention. Some advertisers use this factor to their advantage: from time to time, the same advertisement is displayed even though the product may not be on the market at that moment. Such repetition keeps the product in the popular eye, and people perceive it better than products which do not appear frequently in the media. Frequent repetition may, however, result in semantic satiation, so that the stimuli lose their perceptive significance. Repetition catches attention only as long as it is used prudently.

Familiarity Things which are familiar attract attention, particularly when they are unexpected in a particular context. For example, in a foreign country where there are few

EXHIBIT 9.1 High Self-acceptance Pays

people of one's own nationality, one's attention is caught by a familiar face from his country. Similarly, in an organization, people notice those from the same background more, as well as pay more attention to them, than people from a different background.

Novelty This factor may seem contradictory to the factor of familiarity. However, things which are new also attract attention. When one is inured to a familiar content, novelty attracts attention. For example, a worker notices a strange or new sound in a machine immediately, noting it as a clue that something may be wrong with it. Similarly, while driving a car the driver may suddenly become aware of a strange sound from the engine, which is striking to someone familiar with the sounds normally expected from the various parts of the car.

Internal Factors Influencing Selection

In selecting various phenomena for attention, the internal factors are as important as the external. These factors relate to one's self.

Psychological need An individual's psychological needs influence his or her perception. Sometimes even things which do not exist are 'seen' because of a psychological need. For example, a thirsty person may keep 'seeing' water, such mirages are common in the desert. When people are deprived of a particular need, they perceive the concerned objects more frequently. In one experiment, people who had been kept hungry for some time were shown some pictures and asked to write down what they saw. Most of them reported perceiving more food items. In an organization, a person who has a high need for establishing good relationships with others may quickly identify those who are friendly and may be attracted to such people. Similarly, a person who has a high need to control people may be attracted to those who respond to such a need by being docile, and may therefore selectively notice such people.

Background One's background also influences one's selection of objects. People from a particular background look for people from a similar background. For example, a person educated in a management training institute may attend most to a person who has been through a similar education.

Experience Similar to background is the factor of experience. Experience prepares a person to look for people, objects, and phenomena similar to his or her earlier personal experiences. A person who has had a bad experience while working with a certain type of people may select these people for a particular kind of perception. For example, a person who has had a bad experience with people speaking a particular language may perceive people speaking that language unfavourably even in different surroundings. The same holds true for pleasant experiences. For example, those who have had a long experience of working in marketing may be attracted to people with some salesmanship ability.

Personality Personality also influences perception. An introvert may be attracted to people similar to or quite dissimilar to him or her. Various factors in the personality influence selection in perception. General attitude and beliefs also influence perception. People with a certain attitude towards female colleagues or those speaking a particular language are likely to perceive various minor things about members of these groups which may otherwise go unnoticed. Generally, things which conform to our individual beliefs and attitudes attract attention. This phenomenon will be discussed later.

Psychological need, background, experience, personality, and self-acceptance are the internal factors that influence selection.

Manish Sharma and Rajesh Singh graduated from a mediocre management institute. The director of the institute had good connections with a large MNC. The director managed to convince the company, which only went to top institutes to come to his management institute for campus recruitment. Manish and Rajesh were both selected during the interview, and both joined the MNC. At the company they met other management trainees from India top B-schools. There was a visible difference between them and the other trainees in terms of knowledge and competence. Manish, who had high self-acceptance and self-awareness, decided to learn everything that the other trainees knew to be able to compete with them. He befriended them in order to learn from them. His colleagues very willingly helped him and provided him with feedback from time to time. Manish grew significantly in a year's time.

Rajesh, on the other hand, had low self-acceptance and looked upon the other trainees as arrogant, high-headed, and big show-offs. He believed that he was in no way less than them since they were all working for the same company. He kept to himself and began to find fault with the other trainees and talked about their attitude whenever he got a chance. Romi Ghatak, another trainee, came to know of this and confronted Rajesh. Manish intervened and sorted the problem, and later talked to Rajesh. Rajesh started blaming Manish as well and stopped talking to him.

After one year, performance appraisals were conducted for all management trainees. Manish received a very good appraisal, and his boss Mr. Ravi D'Souza called him and appreciated him for his performance, willingness to learn, and positive attitude, while Rajesh did not receive a good appraisal. Mr. D'Souza decided to call him and mentor him, but Rajesh felt that the appraisal seemed biased, and he never turned up for the meeting. Soon after this, Rajesh was dismissed from his job.

Self-acceptance Self-acceptance is an important characteristic which influences perception. Self-acceptance is defined as the affirmation or acceptance of the self in spite of weaknesses or deficiencies. Self-acceptance involves self-understanding—a realistic, although subjective, awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses. Some studies have shown that those who have high self-acceptance perceive things more accurately than those with low self-acceptance. The implication of this finding is that the accuracy of perception can be increased by helping people accept themselves the way they are (Exhibit 9.1).

Process of Organizing Stimuli

After the data or stimuli have been received, these are organized in some form in order to make sense of the data received, it is necessary to organize them. This follows the principle of economy. There are three main dimensions to the organization of stimuli.

Grouping

The various stimuli received are grouped together using several factors. Some of these are as follows:

Similarity Stimuli which are similar are put together. All workers, for example, are perceived in the same category by managers and, similarly, all managers are perceived as one category by workers. Again, all financial and accounting people are grouped into one category. Further, people who belong to a particular category are perceived in a similar way. Such a grouping is called economizing perception: the advantage of grouping people into categories is that stimuli can be used for members of a category rather than perceiving each member individually.

Proximity

Objects which are close to each other are also grouped together. It is

which are in the same place would thus be grouped together. This is often reflected in people's reference to a person belonging to a particular organization or hailing from a certain place. For example, imagine there are two French, three Germans, five Americans, and two Swedes attending a music concert by Pt Ravi Shankar. We will, most likely, group them together as foreigners and perceive Ravi Shankar as being popular among foreigners without looking at the fact that there were a thousand people in the audience.

Closure There is a tendency in all of us to complete incomplete things. When perceiving the three lines shown in Fig. 9.2, the tendency is to perceive these not as three separate lines but as a triangle. The reason for such a perception is that the entire configuration is perceived as a whole, and the gaps which may otherwise prevent one from seeing the 'entirety' of the configuration are closed in our perception of it.

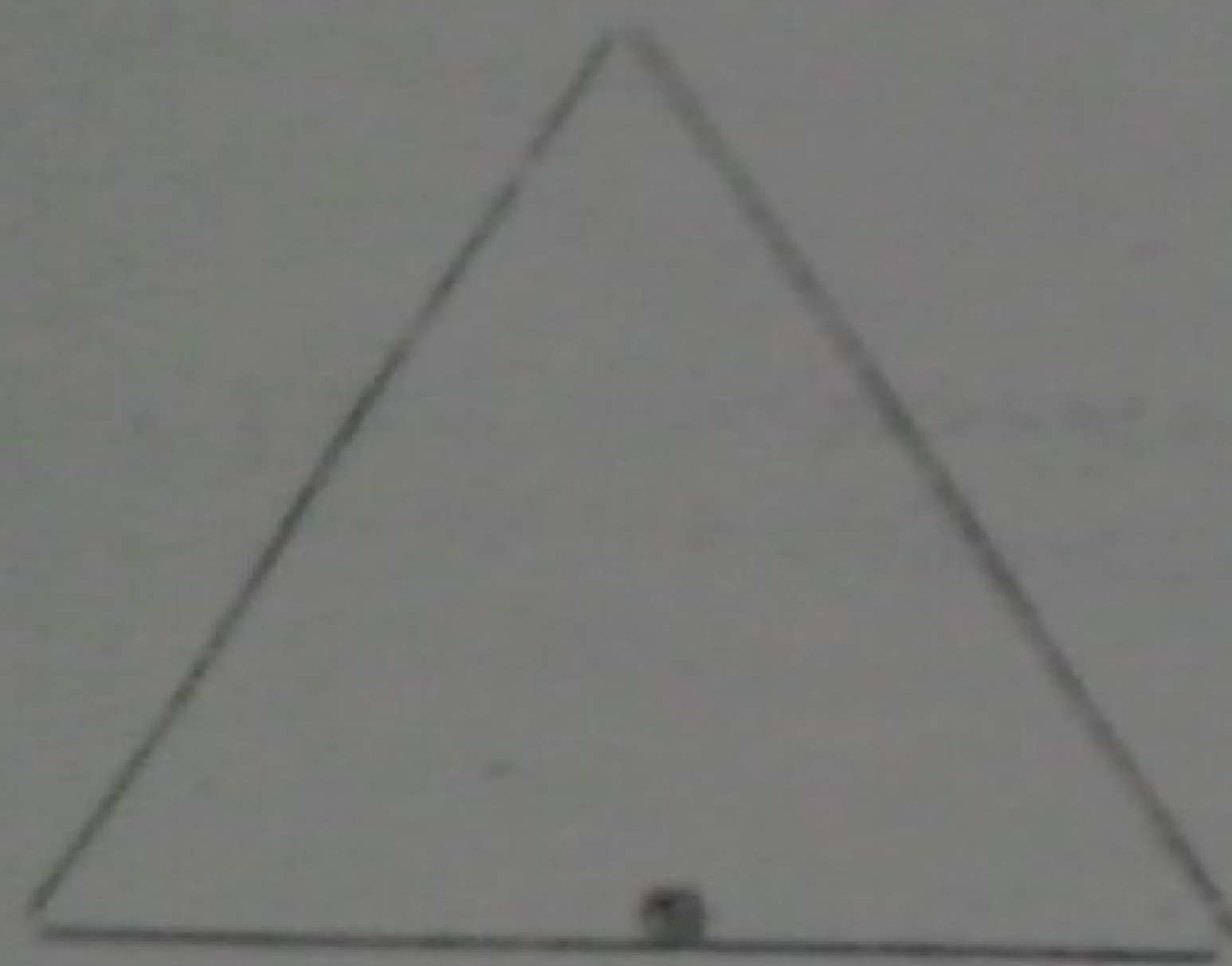


Fig. 9.2 Closure Phenomenon

This tendency to create a complete configuration is common because things are perceived as wholes rather than as parts. This tendency is reflected in our perception of things that do not exist but are created in order to complete a particular phenomenon which otherwise seems incomplete. For example, when looking at a person one may find several characteristics which indicate that the person

is lazy and irresponsible. However, one may assume several other things without checking whether the person behaves differently on those matters from the way an irresponsible or lazy person would behave. This tendency to see things in a complete form may even make a person perceive characteristics that do not exist or prevent the perception of several contradictory characteristics.

Figure-ground Another principle of organization of stimuli is called figure-ground. It is one of the most interesting and basic processes in perception. In perceiving stimuli or phenomena, the tendency is to keep certain phenomena in focus and other stimuli or phenomena in the background. For example, during a lecture, the various stimuli received by people attending are grouped into two. Certain stimuli are not in the focus of people's attention: for example, the chirping of birds outside, certain noises made by people walking outside, a conversation going on outside the room, the noise of the fan, etc. All these become the background and not much attention is paid to them.

What remains in focus is what the lecturer is saying. The stimuli are thus organized into two groups, figure (what the speaker is saying) and ground (background stimuli, which are not in the focus of attention). Thus perception may change if certain stimuli are changed from figure to ground. For example, a student who is listening to a particular lecture may suddenly hear a familiar voice, and although the conversation outside the room may be faint, may listen to that conversation with enough attention to make it the figure at that time, and what the lecturer is saying may become the ground for that moment. When a particular phenomenon or stimulus becomes the figure, it is in the focus of immediate attention; those stimuli which are the ground do not hold our immediate attention. No attention may be paid, for example, even to loud conversation next door when one is discussing something very important and is totally engrossed in one's own conversation. The ground hardly distracts if the figure is held in sharp focus.

Perceptual constancy There is a tendency to stabilize perceptions so that contextual changes do not affect them. Once an individual's height is perceived as a certain number of feet, it is continued to be so perceived even when he or she is standing at a distance, and may therefore appear to be physically smaller. The perceptual world is thus ordered according to the principle of constancy. In our perception of the three-dimensional world, this factor of constancy plays an important role.

In the organizational context, perceptual constancy may help a manager perceive similar problems from the same perspective, even if the context changes. Constancy helps in accuracy of perception in this case. While several contextual factors may influence perceptions (sometimes producing illusions), perceptual constancy helps to perceive perceptions in a particular order and to recreate this order each time similar stimuli or data are received.

Perceptual constancy refers to stabilized perceptions not affected by contextual changes.

→ Process of Interpreting

After the data have been received and organized, the perceiver interprets the data in various ways. Perception is said to have taken place only after the data is interpreted. Indeed, perception is essentially giving meaning to the various data received and interpreted. Various factors contribute to this interpretation of data; and these are discussed in Fig. 9.3.

Perceptual Set → Previous belief made perception. Previously held beliefs pertinent to the perception can influence individual perception. These general opinions or attitudes a person has, constitute the perceptual set.

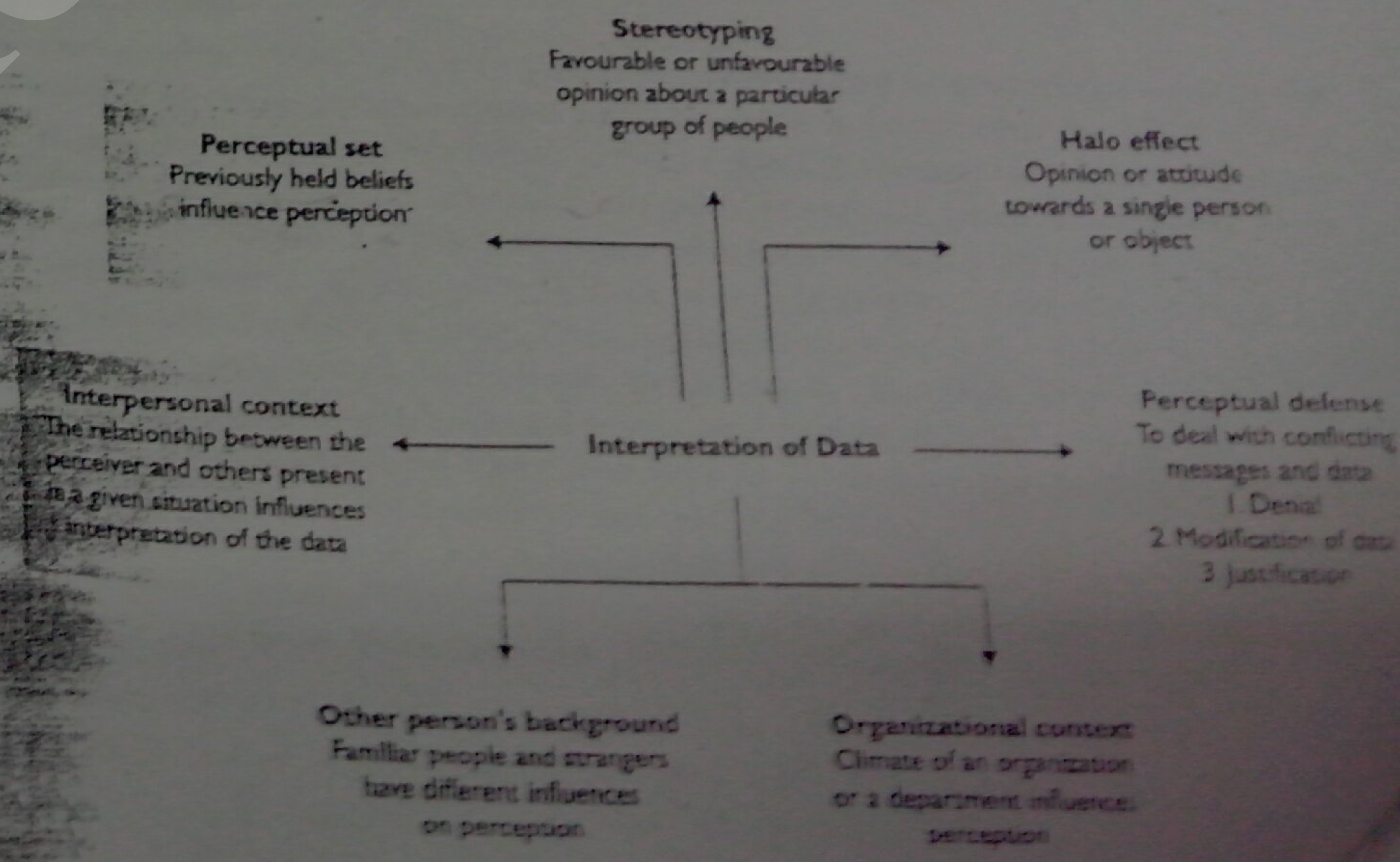


Fig. 9.3 Factors Contributing to Interpretation of Data

For example, a manager may have developed a general belief that workers are lazy, and want to get all the advantages from an organization without giving their best work, and want to get all the advantages from an organization without giving their best work, and want to get all the advantages from an organization without giving their best work, such a case, he or she already has a mental or perceptual set. His or her subsequent perceptions will be influenced by this set. When he or she meets a group of workers, this manager will tend to interpret their behaviour according to this mental set. Another manager—having different beliefs, attitudes, and opinions—may have a different interpretation of the same phenomenon.

In one study, when people were prepared to meet a 'warm' person, not only did they form a favourable opinion of the person but also behaved differently with her. The role of expectations (the so-called 'Pygmalion effect') can thus be explained by the concept of the perceptual set.

Some studies made in organizations indicate how the mental set operates. People having different individual opinions about various groups of people tend to form similar individual opinions when they meet new people based on their, without checking whether their opinions or attitudes were accurate in the first instance.

The general opinions or attitudes a person has constitute the perceptual set.

Stereotyping

Stereotypes are generalizations about groups of people to whom we attribute defined sets of characteristics. This attribution can either be positive or negative. For instance, when we stereotype a nation, or community, or gender, we may consider them as friendly or unfriendly, intelligent or dull, peace loving or quarrelsome, confident or incompetent, etc. When people form opinions about a particular class of objects or persons and act according to such opinions it is called stereotyping. The word 'stereotype' has been used to indicate a generally favourable or unfavourable opinion a person holds for a particular group of people. For example, managers perceive a manager as being more honest than a woman, just as a woman perceives another woman as being more honest than a manager. Stereotyping is necessary for economy of perception, but stereotypes also lead to prejudice, about various groups of people, which influence perception and interpretation of data (Exhibit 9.2).

EXHIBIT 9.2 Gender Stereotyping

A survey published in 2007 found that gender stereotyping was a key barrier to the advancement of women in corporate leadership, leaving women leaders with limited and conflicting options. 'The Double Bind Dilemma for Women in Leadership: Damned if You Do, Doomed if You Don't' was the third in a series of reports examining the effects of gender stereotyping in the workplace by Catalyst, a non-profit organization working to advance opportunities for women in business. The study surveyed men and women business leaders in the US and Europe. Of the 1231 participants, 296 were US senior managers and corporate leaders (158 women and 128 men) and 935 were European managers and senior managers (282 women and 653 men). The second part of the study provided qualitative analysis of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 13 women leaders in a large US corporation.

The report argued that gender stereotyping results in organizations routinely underestimating and underutilizing women's leadership talent. The 2006 Catalyst Census shows that while women make up over 50 per cent of management, professional, and related occupations, only 15.6 per cent of Fortune 500 corporate officers and 14.6 per cent of Fortune 500 board directors are women.

Ilene H. Lang, Catalyst president said, 'When companies fail to acknowledge and address the impact of gender stereotypic bias, they lose out on top female talent. Ultimately, it's not women's leadership styles that

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EXHIBIT 9.2 (Contd)

...to change fairly when organizations take action to address the impact of gender stereotyping will they be able to capitalize on the "full deck" of talent?

...highlighted previous studies demonstrating similar leadership styles among men and women. However, her research by Catalyst found that women business leaders faced persistent gender stereotyping, frequently being confronted with double-bind 'no-win' dilemmas not experienced by men. The current study found that men are still perceived as 'default leaders' while women are considered 'atypical leaders' and as violating accepted norms, irrespective of their leadership style.

The survey identified three common dilemmas currently experienced by women business leaders. Extremes perceptions of women business leaders are perceived as 'never just right'. Those who act in a manner consistent with gender stereotype (are considered 'too soft'), those who go against them are considered 'too much'.

High competence/low status. Women leaders maintain higher standards than their male counterparts and create fewer setbacks. Often, they must work doubly hard to achieve the same level of recognition for the same level of work and 'prove' that they can lead.

Competent but disloyal. Women exhibiting traditional leadership skills, such as assertiveness, tend to be seen as committed but not personable or well-liked. Those who adopt a more stereotypically feminine style are liked but not seen as having valued leadership skills.

The report suggested that organizations need to develop strategies to remove the pervasive and damaging impact of gender stereotyping from the work environment in order to take advantage of the expanding pool of female leadership talent.

Lang and Lang explained, 'While women may address double-bind dilemmas with individual strategies, the real solution organizations shifting their norms and culture to meet marketplace demands.'

Source: www.catalyst.com, accessed on 28 August 2010.

The Halo Effect → Single Person

The halo effect is similar to stereotyping. While in stereotyping the person forms an opinion or develops an attitude towards a group of people or objects, in the halo effect, the person develops an opinion or attitude towards a single person or object. If someone has a favourable attitude towards a person, his or her subsequent perceptions of the same person are influenced by this attitude. For example, if a manager has a good impression about a particular subordinate (a positive halo effect), mistakes made by the latter may be condoned or the interpretations may give the latter the benefit of doubt. When similar mistakes are made by another person about whom the manager has an unfavourable opinion (negative halo effect), these mistakes may be perceptually exaggerated as irresponsible behaviour. Further, as a result of the halo effect, the manager may tend to interpret even feedback information received according to the preconceived impression. For example, irrespective of the available information, the manager may tend to overrate one person and underrate another. Our interpretation of data and partial data (about which very few facts are available), therefore, is influenced by already held impressions.

In the halo effect, the person develops an opinion or attitude towards a single person or object.

Perceptual Defense

Perceptual defense is used by the perceiver to deal with conflicting messages and data. If the person receives threaten beliefs already held, the recipient uses perceptual defense to deal with this phenomenon. For example, if a manager gets data from a union on strike...

is taking positive steps in the direction of resolving conflicts or is doing something useful for the organization, the manager may find such data in conflict with a preconceived opinion that the union is by and large negative in its approach.

One way to deal with conflicting data is not to perceive or accept such data and to group them as unacceptable information.

One way to deal with conflicting data is not to perceive or accept such data and to group them as unacceptable information. This may be done by adopting mechanisms to defend the positions already held. Such defense mechanisms could include the following:

1. Denial of the information or data received (e.g., the manager may deny the data and simply say that workers can never be loyal to the organization and therefore any information received about their good intention is incorrect).
2. Some modification of the data received (e.g., a statement such as: 'While the workers may be showing pro-organization behaviour at this stage, by and large their intentions are negative and therefore cannot be trusted only on the basis of one incident.')
3. Justification for holding on to one's own belief (such as saying, 'The workers may be showing pro-organizational behaviour, but this is a trick and this is one of the ways of deceiving the management, and therefore their behaviour cannot be taken seriously and they cannot be trusted.' Such mechanisms of dealing with data may help a person to avoid changing or modifying own values, attitudes, and beliefs in relation to a particular phenomenon. It may be useful for organizations to be aware of such instances of perceptual defense, so as to recognize them when such defenses occur, and find ways in which such defense can be counteracted and perception improved.

One defense mechanism worth mentioning is projection. Sometimes people tend to interpret information and data received from other people in the light of their own behaviour or inclination. When a person sees his or her own characteristics in others, it is called projection. For example, a person who is strong and authoritarian tends to interpret others' behaviour in the same way. Studies have shown that people who know themselves better have more accurate ways of perceiving and interpreting data received from others. Those who do not know themselves very well tend to use their own characteristics in interpreting data. Thus, a short-tempered man tends to see others as short-tempered. Projection is more frequent in case of negative perception, although it also occurs with positive perceptions.

Contextual Factors in Interpretation of Data

Several contextual dimensions influence the interpretation of stimuli or perceptual data. The following factors are worth considering

Interpersonal context The relationship between the perceiver and others present in a given situation influences interpretation of the cues received. Studies have shown that when an interpersonal relationship is congenial, people perceive others as being similar to themselves. When the interpersonal relationship is not congenial, people tend to perceive others as being dissimilar. The implications are clear: if people can be helped to develop better interpersonal relationships in an organization, their perception of others as similar to themselves will increase, and, as a result, the grouping of their perceptions will be more conducive to the objectives of the organization.

Contextual dimensions such as interpersonal context, other person's background, and organizational context influence the interpretation of stimuli.

Other person's background Familiar people and strangers have different influences on an individual's perceptions. For example, it has been shown in one study that facts and information given by strangers have higher credibility. People tended to perceive such information more favourably than when the same information was given by familiar people. When givers of information are unknown people or when information is unexpectedly received from those whose ability to provide information is uncertain, their credibility increases.

Organizational context Several studies show that the climate of an organization or a department has great significance for the perception of various phenomena by people working in that organization or department. If the climate is congenial, the perceptions are likely to be more favourable. One study showed that in friendly and congenial climates, the perception of people's goal-related behaviour was much more accurate, although the perception of purely personal behaviour was less accurate. In organizations with a liberal and congenial climate, people's perception of organizational goals is likely to be similar and more accurate, as a result of which the efforts to achieve these goals are likely to be more concerted.

A special aspect of the organizational context is the reference group. The group to which a person belongs or wishes to belong influences his or her perception. Studies have shown that people categorize various perceptions according to their feelings about the group to which they belong. In one study, it was found that managers generally paid more attention to situations and phenomena pertaining to the group to which they belonged or thought they belonged, rather than to factors and phenomena occurring in other groups or other parts of the organization. This is an interesting aspect of perception. In order to increase a manager's interest in the affairs of the entire organization, it may therefore be necessary to help him or her become a member of various groups. Thus, if the manager is made a member of inter-departmental working groups, his or her interest in and attention to things happening in the other departments also increases. If the manager remains confined to his or her own department, his or her perception of the organization as a whole and of other departments is limited.]

→ Process of Checking

After data have been received and interpreted, the perceiver takes steps to check whether his or her interpretations are right or wrong. The process of checking may be so fast that the person is not even aware of it. Such checking may be done occasionally in order to confirm whether the interpretations or perceptions are reinforced by new data. Alternatively, data or impressions may be checked by asking other people about their perceptions. This is by way of feedback about one's own perceptions. For example, a manager who has perceived a certain characteristic in a subordinate on a few occasions may check with other managers who worked with that subordinate previously to find out whether this perception is endorsed by them. The manager may also use another method of checking which is more useful but difficult to adopt: he or she may check certain things with the person in question directly. For example, if the manager finds an employee disturbed or annoyed, instead of waiting for the employee to take the initiative in conveying his or her feelings, the manager may check with the employee whether the latter feels disturbed, or offended, or annoyed. By encouraging such checks, the source of the communication itself, the perceiver may doubt increase in his or her perceptions.

Process of Reacting

The last phase of the perceptual process is that of acting upon what has been perceived. This is usually when people do something in reaction to their perceptions. For example, a person may act on the basis of the favourable or unfavourable perceptions he or she has formed. The cycle of perception is not complete unless it leads to some action. The action may be covert or overt. Covert action implies the formation of opinions or attitudes, and overt action is a definite action in response to the perception.

The cycle of perception is not complete unless it leads to some covert or overt action.

One phenomenon which has attracted attention with regard to covert action is 'impression formation'. Impression formation refers to the way a perceiver forms an impression about an object or a person on the basis of characteristics he or she perceives, or data he or she receives from various sources. A manager has to form impressions most of the time, being required to make quick judgements. While interviewing people, for example, a manager has to form a quick opinion of the interviewees to take a decision. The more accurate a manager is in forming a realistic impression, the more effective he or she is likely to be.

One author has described four limitations in the formation of accurate impressions:

Surroundings An impression is likely to be affected by the type of situation or surroundings in which the impression is made, rather than by the person who makes the impression. For example, if someone is seen in an undesirable surrounding, the impression formed about that person is likely to be low. Similarly, if one sees another person in a posh environment frequented exclusively by people of high status, one's impression of that person is likely to be more favourable, being based on the latter's apparent affluence.

Generalizations Although impressions may be based on limited cues or data, sweeping generalizations may be made from the same. This usually happens when a person already has some stereotypes and mental sets.

Situational limitations A situation may not provide adequate opportunity for a person to show the behaviours critical to the formation of a certain impression. For example, in an interview, the interviewee may not be able to show how much commitment he or she is capable of having towards goals.

Preconceived notions An impression may be determined by the prejudices or individual reactions of the perceiver. The mental set, stereotypes, and halo effect, in particular, may influence a person's perception.

In order to increase the accuracy of impression formation, it may be useful to be aware of the various factors which influence interpretation of data. It may also be useful for a person to check from time to time the impressions he or she has formed, and to reflect on the accuracy of these perceptions, as well as question why the accuracy may be less than desired.

→ ATTITUDE

The term 'attitude' is being used quite frequently nowadays in describing people's behaviour. There are two main senses in which it is used. One is in general terms, meaning the positive or negative orientation of a person. For example, when it is said that Mala has a positive attitude

or that Geeta has a negative attitude, what is probably meant is that Mala's general orientation towards most things is positive, whereas Geeta's general orientation is negative. However, this is not a correct usage of the term 'attitude'. Attitude always has a referent, i.e., an object towards which positive or negative orientation is implied. Attitude is always 'towards' something. For example, you may say that Mohan has a positive attitude towards his organization.

Attitude always has a referent—an object towards which positive or negative orientation is implied.

Although attitudes are generally affective (or emotional) in nature, they also have a cognitive (information or knowledge) element, and a conative (action) element, in terms of acting or behaving on the basis of that feeling (Fig. 9.4). For example, my exposure to my job gives me enough knowledge about it. Then I develop a feeling for it (I like it or I do not like it). Finally, I act on the feeling—stay on in my job or quit it. So generally attitudes lead to behaviour.

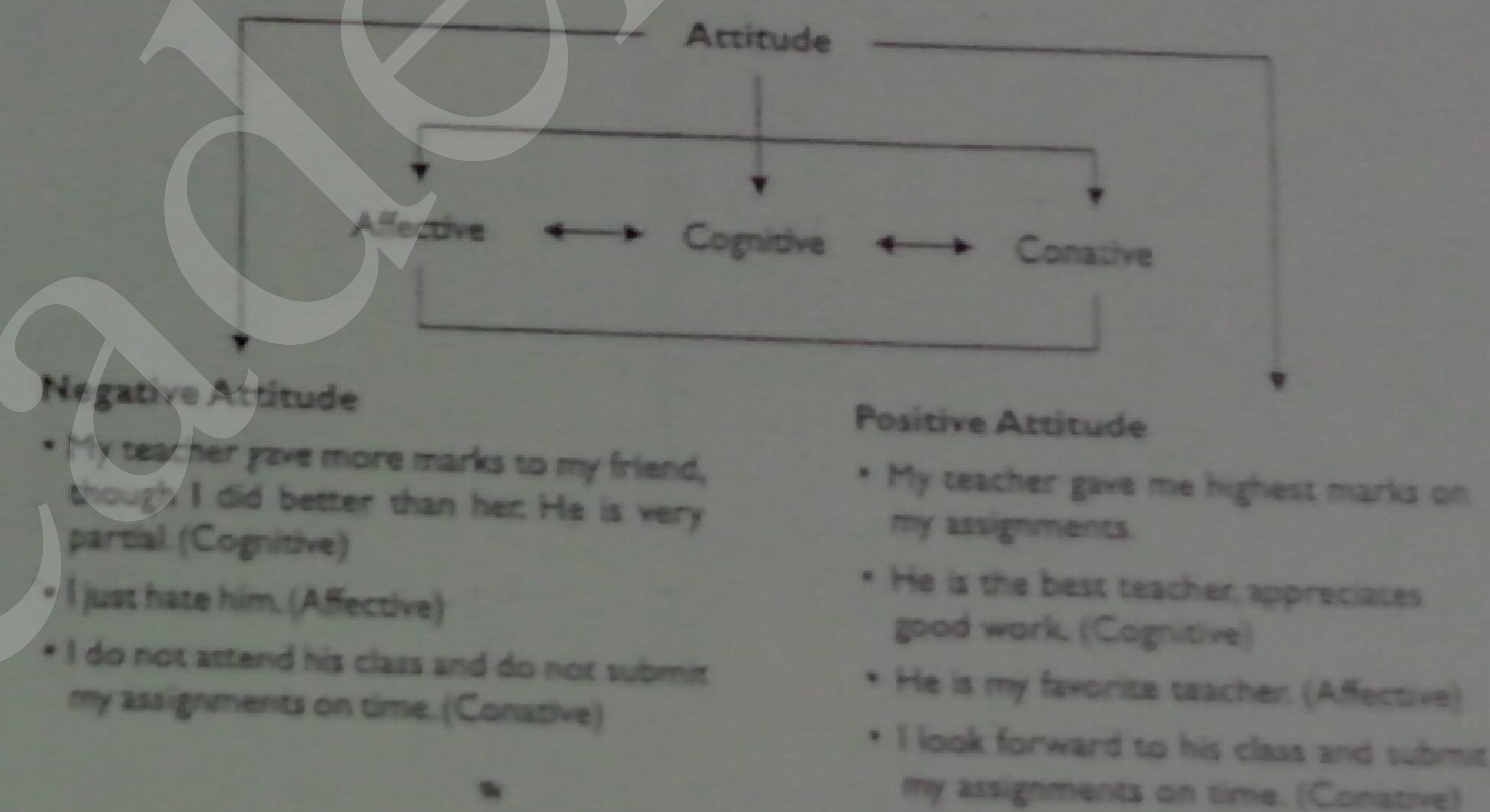


Fig. 9.4 Elements of Attitude

Attitude can also be defined as a multiplicative function of beliefs and values as given in the equation:

$$\text{Attitudes} = \text{Beliefs} \times \text{Values}$$

A belief is an association between two cognitive elements. For example, if a person believes that not spacing out one's children (having children without enough gap between their births) is injurious to the mother's health, he or she is combining two concepts—family planning and maternal health. If the person has a high value for the mother's health, then his or her attitude towards contraception is likely to be positive. However, if the above belief is not strong or the value placed on the mother's health is low, the attitude towards contraception may be negative. If either the strength of the belief or the value of maternal health is zero, the attitude will be one of complete indifference, so that this person is not likely to use a contraceptive.

A belief is an association between two cognitive elements.

Similarly, a particular religion, religion, or caste may be one cognitive element. The other element may be 'reliable', 'honest', or 'talkative'. When we connect these elements, we have a belief that persons of a certain category behave in a particular way.