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Chapter 2: Understanding Individual Behavior in Organizations

2.1 Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define "personality" and discuss its relevance to organizational behavior

- Identify the primary sources of personality differences

- Describe seven personality traits that influence employee behavior

- Describe three personality traits that are associated with political behavior in organizations

- Define "attitudes" and identify their three components

- Describe particular attitudes and their effect on organizational behavior

- Suggest ways of modifying negative employee attitudes

- Define "social perception" and describe the perceptual process

- Describe the attribution process

- Describe five common perceptual barriers and four common perceptual errors found in the interview process

- Define Experiential Learning

- Describe different learning styles

2.2 Introduction

Organizational successes and failures are due to people, whether managers or other employees. In this chapter, we look at some of the psychological and cognitive factors that determine organizational behavior. We begin with a discussion of personality and the personality traits that influence employee behavior. We then examine the impact of attitudes on employee behavior, and suggest techniques for modifying negative attitudes. Finally we discuss Experiential Learning Theory and explain the four basic learning preferences and how to develop learning flexibility. In the concluding section of the chapter, we address questions of how and why people perceive each other as they do; here we focus on attribution theory and on barriers to accurate perceptions.

2.3 The Concept of Personality

All of us have a "personality." Yours is as basic to your existence as your heart or your brain. Yet, although you have probably been using the term personality since you were young, you may not have tried to define this common word.

Most of us refer to personality when attempting to understand our own actions or those of another person. Personality is an important concept in organizational behavior because of its fundamental connection with behavior in the workplace. From the perspective of organizational behavior, **personality** can be defined as a set of relatively stable characteristics that influences a person's behavior. This definition suggests that each of us has personality traits that distinguish us from other people and that cause us to behave in a generally consistent manner across a wide variety of situations.

The question of where personality comes from is a subject of continuing debate among psychologists. Research indicates that a complex array of factors contribute to the development of personality. Chief among these factors are heredity and childhood environment, culture, family, group membership, and life experiences.

Heredity And Childhood Environment

You can probably recall being compared to other members of your family. Many of our physical characteristics such as height and hair color are inherited, as is our tendency to contract such illnesses as arthritis, cancer, and heart disease. The question of whether personality characteristics are inherited is often expressed in the context of the nature- versus-nurture debate. Those who believe that most personality characteristics are inherited argue for the influence of nature; those who feel that personality is determined by environment take the nurture position. The current thinking about nature versus nurture can be summarized as follows:

1. Both heredity and environment (and their interaction) determine the personality traits an individual will develop.

2. Whether personality characteristics are inherited or shaped by environmental factors depends on the characteristic we are talking about. Some characteristics are primarily determined by heredity, others by environment, and still others by a combination of the two.

3. Heredity defines the *range* of personality characteristics you may develop; environmental factors determine *which characteristics* (within that range) you will develop. For instance, some people are generally predisposed to blushing when embarrassed; if their upbringing teaches them to be easily embarrassed, their blushing can be seen as a consequence of both nature and nurture.

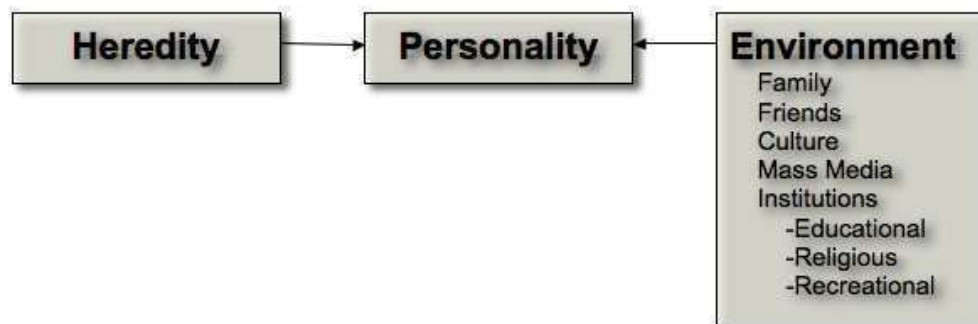Figure 2-1 shows the relationship between personality, heredity, and the environment.

Figure 2-1: The relationship between personality, heredity, and the environment.

Culture

Culture refers to the set of values and commonly held beliefs that determine which behaviors are acceptable and expected for a given group. Countries, religious and ethnic groups, and organizations all have cultures. To illustrate the impact of culture on behavior, in cultures where punctuality and order are highly valued, people tend to exhibit behaviors that express these qualities. Although cultures influence broad patterns of behavior and personality, extreme differences can exist between individuals in the same culture. This is because culture is only one among many factors that influence personality development.

Family

An individual's family has a profound impact on personality development. There are many reasons for this. As children, our initial communications are with other family members, who teach us what is right and wrong at an early age, thus influencing and shaping our values and beliefs. The importance of parents as role models is illustrated by the fact that children (often unconsciously) imitate their parents' behavior; thus, children who are constantly criticized by their parents tend to develop critical personalities. From the family environment, the child also learns what is considered acceptable (and unacceptable) behavior. Within the family context, such factors as socioeconomic status, family size, and birth order play a role in personality development. For example, an only child may have more difficulty sharing belongings with others than someone who is raised with brothers and sisters. Someone from a small town where everyone knows one another may appear to be friendlier than a person raised in Toronto, New York or Paris.

Group Membership

We belong to many groups throughout our lives. The first such group is our family. As we get older, we may join

social groups, sports teams, or special-interest groups. Each of these groups develops its own norms or guidelines of acceptable behavior. The norms of a group in which we participate, coupled with the role we play within that group, will influence which personality characteristics we develop. For instance, the oldest daughter who loses her mother may take over the role of mother, developing a sense of responsibility and caring for others at an early age. To understand an individual's personality, we must examine the characteristics of the groups in which that individual participates as well as the role he or she plays within those groups.

The influence of group membership on personality characteristics differs from that of culture in that cultures define broad patterns of behavior for individuals, whereas groups influence more specific personality traits and behaviors; this is because groups develop more precise rules and norms of behavior that members must respect.

Life Experiences

All of us have had a great number of life experiences, both good and bad, that may influence personality development. A person who has experienced many failures in life may develop low self-esteem, whereas one who has received many awards may have a great deal of self-confidence. Living in different countries and experiencing different cultures and nationalities can be very helpful in understanding your own personality and that of others, what aspects are cultural and what are unique.

2.4 Personality and Behavior

Many personality traits have been shown to influence behavior. However, as organizational behaviorists, our primary interest is in those personality traits that influence behavior in the organizational setting. In this section, we consider seven personality characteristics that affect employee behavior and three personality characteristics that are linked to political behavior in organizations.

Personality Traits In Organizational Settings

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the opinion we have of ourselves, based on such factors as personal appearance and intelligence. With respect to work behavior, first, self-esteem influences the type of job we choose. A person with high self-esteem tends to take more risks in job selection and may be more attracted to high-status or challenging jobs. High self-esteem also has a positive impact on performance. People with high self-esteem are less easily influenced by the opinions of others, tend to set higher goals for themselves, and are willing to make more of an effort to achieve goals than are people with low self-esteem. Thus, a work team made up of individuals with high self-esteem is more likely to be successful than one comprising employees with low self-esteem.

Self-esteem seems to be influenced by situational factors and the opinion of others. For instance, an employee who experiences success is likely to have higher self-esteem than one who experiences multiple failures. Conversely, employees' self-esteem may drop if they believe that the supervisor has a poor opinion of them. Given that high self- esteem among employees usually has a positive impact on organizational performance, managers need to demonstrate confidence in their employees' abilities and provide them with tasks commensurate with those abilities.

Locus of Control

Locus of control [1] refers to the extent to which people believe they can control the events in their lives. People who have a high internal locus of control (*internals*) tend to believe that the events in their lives are the result of their own behavior and actions. Conversely, those who have a high external locus of control (*externals*) tend to believe that the events in their lives are determined by chance, fate, or other people. An employee's locus of control influences his or her behavior in the organization. For instance, internals tend to be more politically and socially active than externals, more likely to attempt to influence behavior, and more achievement-oriented. By contrast, externals tend to prefer a more directive style of leadership than internals, to be more easily influenced, and to adjust less easily to changes such as job transfers. Determining the locus of control of employees puts managers in a better position to improve worker satisfaction and performance. Internals tend to experience higher levels of job satisfaction if they are allowed to participate in decision-making; externals tend to perform better in highly structured situations.

Introversion/Extroversion

Whereas **introverts** tend to be shy and inward-looking, **extroverts** tend to be outgoing and concerned with external things. Most of us display an inclination toward one or the other of these two tendencies. Within an organization, introverts perform better in quiet environments with little stimulation, whereas extroverts perform better in more lively environments (that is, environments with more people, noise, and change). Thus, while an

introvert may perform well in an independent research position, an extrovert would probably prefer a job with more people contact (for example, in management).

Dogmatism

People who are **dogmatic** tend to hold rigid beliefs, to regard legitimate authority as having absolute power, and to see the world as threatening. The highly dogmatic individual often accepts or rejects other people based on whether they agree or disagree with commonly accepted authority or values. In short, the highly dogmatic person (HD) is close-minded whereas the low dogmatic person (LD) is open-minded. Within an organizational setting, HDs work best under the direction of strong authority figures who provide highly structured work environments. LDs tend to function better in more informal settings.

Self-Efficacy[2]

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief concerning the ability to accomplish a job task. People with high self-efficacy are confident in their ability to get things done. The four principal sources of self-efficacy are past successes, witnessing the success of others in similar situations, evaluation of one's physical and emotional capabilities, and positive feedback from others.

Self-efficacy is important to organizational success because the more we believe in our ability to do something, the more likely we are to succeed. There are a number of techniques managers can use to enhance self-efficacy among employees, including providing challenging job tasks, rewarding employee performance, ensuring adequate levels of training, and empowering employees by allowing them to participate in decision- making.

Self-Monitoring

Self-monitoring refers to the extent to which behavior is based on cues from people and situations.[3] *High self-monitors* base their behavior on what they believe is appropriate for a specific situation and are sensitive to the impact of their actions on others. *Low self-monitors* , by contrast, base their actions on what they believe to be right, with little regard for the feelings of others. Thus, a low self-monitor would be more likely than a high self-monitor to tell a coworker that his or her work is unsatisfactory.

Self-monitoring has many interesting effects on employee behavior. For instance, the behavior of a high self-monitor varies from situation to situation, whereas a low self- monitor's behavior is relatively consistent. High self-monitors adapt more easily to group norms and organizational culture thanks to their ability to modify behavior according to the situation. As a result of receiving feedback, high self-monitors are more likely to change their behavior than low self-monitors, who evaluate their performance according to their own standards of conduct. Finally, high self-monitors may be more successful in teamwork situations given their ability to assume flexible roles.

Positive and Negative Affect

Affect, as a noun, refers to an emotion or a feeling. *Positive affect employees* focus on the positive aspects of themselves, other people, and the world around them. Conversely, *negative affect employees* focus on the negative in themselves, in others, and in the world around them. Employees with positive affect are absent from work less often, experience less work stress, and are more cooperative in a group setting than those with negative affect. Participative decision-making, pleasant working conditions, and constructive feedback are some of the means by which managers can enhance positive affect.

Personality Traits Associated With Political Behavior

In the organizational context, **political behavior** refers to actions that are intended to protect personal interests and advance personal goals. Unlike other types of organizational behavior, political behavior involves gaining something at the expense of other employees, groups, or the organization as a whole. Three personality characteristics associated with political behavior are need for power, Machiavellianism, and willingness to take risks.

Need For Power

People who have a need for power are driven by the basic desire to influence and lead others, and to control their environment. Such individuals are likely to become involved in political activity simply because political activity, by definition, involves controlling one's environment and influencing others. Successful managers often have a high need for power. The two forms of power that managers may wish to acquire are **personal power** and **institutional power**. Managers who are interested in obtaining personal power

Self–Test: Are You A Machiavellian?

For Each Of The Following Statements, Mark True (T) Or False (F).

1. **The Best Way To Deal With People Is To Tell Them What They Want To Hear.**

have a need to dominate others and to create loyalty to themselves, not to the organization. By contrast, managers who seek institutional power are loyal to the organization and work to inspire the same kind of loyalty from their subordinates. Managers with institutional power are more effective than those with personal power in enhancing organizational performance.

Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism refers to a pattern of behavior described by the 16th-century Italian philosopher and statesman Niccolò Machiavelli in his book *The Prince*. Machiavellian behavior involves manipulating others for personal or political gain, employing deceit in interpersonal relationships, distrusting others, and rejecting conventional moral principles. Machiavellians tend to approach situations thoughtfully and logically, are able to lie in order to protect their own interests, and are not influenced by loyalty, friendship, past promises, or the opinions of others.

_____

2. **To Completely Trust Someone Else Is To Ask For Trouble.** _____

3. **People Should Not Disclose Their Reasons For Doing Something Unless It Is Personally Advantageous To Do So.** _____

4. **It Is A Good Idea To Flatter Important People.** _____

If You Answered "True" To At Least Two Of These Statements, You May Have Some Machiavellian Tendencies In Your Personality.

Willingness To Take Risks

Some people actively seek out risky situations; others do everything possible to avoid such circumstances. (We will discuss how risk aversion influences decision-making behavior in Chapter 8.) Risk takers are more likely than risk avoiders to engage in political activity. For an employee, political activity can be risky because it can result in demotions, lower performance ratings, and a loss of influence for individuals and groups.

Personality and Performance

The similarity between man and his best pet, "a Dog," -- Scientists have finally caught on to what pet owners have known all along, a dog's got personality. It seems only fitting that man's best friend would.

Dr. Sam Gosling, an assistant professor of psychology at The University of Text at Austin carried long and rigorous research and reports the following:

1. Matching pet owners with their pet has many parallels to human dating because a lot of people choose their dog on the basis of what they look like.
2. Just as we find some human personality traits make a person a good manager, accountant or doctor, some dog personalities are better suited for working than others, and for performing specific tasks.

2.5 Attitudes

Attitudes are enduring feelings, beliefs, and/or behavior tendencies. When we say that a person has an "attitude," we usually mean that he or she has an inclination or a predisposition to respond in a positive or negative way to a person, a situation, or an event. This is because people develop attitudes based on their background and past experiences. Attitudes have the following three components:

1. *Cognitive*. The cognitive aspect of an attitude refers to beliefs and opinions about a person or a situation. For example, if you had been bitten by a dog when you were a child, you might have developed a negative predisposition toward dogs.
2. *Affective*. The affective component refers to the feelings, sentiment, moods, and emotions evoked by some person, idea, event, or object. This component is the attitude itself. For example, if you are negatively disposed toward dogs, and a dog starts growling at you, you will experience a feeling of intense dislike for it.
3. *Behavioral*. The behavioral component refers to the action taken in response to the feeling. The person in whom intense dislike is evoked by the growling dog will likely take steps to avoid the dog.

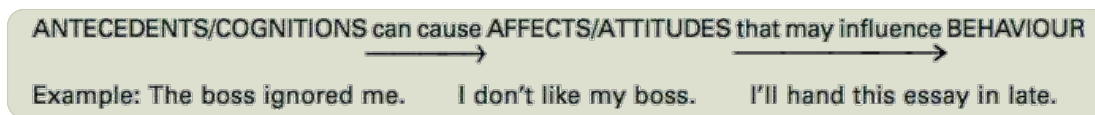Figure 2-2 illustrates the relationship between these three components.

> **ANTECEDENTS/COGNITIONS** can cause **AFFECTS/ATTITUDES** that may influence **BEHAVIOUR**
>
> Example: The boss ignored me.   I don't like my boss.   I'll hand this essay in late.

Figure 2-2: The Components of an Attitude.

Attitudes And Behavior

Attitudes are not necessarily predictive of behavior. For example, while it is customary not to talk to someone you don't like, if the person you don't like is your teacher, it is likely that you will talk to him or her. Outlined below are some of the factors that influence the relationship between attitudes and behavior.

1. *Specificity of the attitude* . The more specific your attitude, the more likely that your behavior will correspond to it. For instance, if you prefer not to eat red meat, the fact that the only dish in the cafeteria is a tuna salad may not affect your behavior. But if you have an aversion to tuna, you may well complain about the selection.
2. *Relevance of the issue* . The extent to which an issue is relevant to us influences the relationship between our attitude and our behavior. Suppose you depend on student loans to pay for your education. If the candidate from your state/town announces a party plan to cut student loans, you will likely have a negative attitude toward this politician, and since this issue is relevant to you, you will likely behave consistently with your attitude and vote for someone else.
3. *Timing* .The shorter the time between the attitude measurement and the observed behavior, the more likely the attitude will predict behavior. For example, the closer to an election that a poll is taken, the more accurately it will predict voter behavior.
4. *Personality* . The self-monitoring trait influences the relationship between attitudes and behavior. We learned earlier in the chapter that low self-monitors rely on their internal feelings when making decisions about behavior, whereas high self-monitors in the same situation are more likely to take into consideration the feelings and opinions of others. Thus, it follows that low self-monitors are more likely to demonstrate congruence between behavior and attitudes.
5. *Social norms* . Social norms influence the relationship between attitudes and behavior. For instance, a new employee from another country may have a negative attitude about women in management. However, it is unlikely that he would translate this attitude into behavior, because in Canada the presence of women in management reflects a social norm.
6. *Fear of consequences* . Sometimes our concerns about possible outcomes prevent us from behaving in a fashion consistent with our attitudes. The employee in the above example may be inclined to treat his female manager with a lack of respect, but refrains from doing so because he knows that such behavior could damage his career prospects.

Attitudes And Employee Behavior

The attitudes that can most influence employee performance are job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Let's look at these.

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Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a positive emotional state resulting from an individual's opinion of the job. Although it was traditionally thought that a person who is satisfied with the job will perform better, recent studies have shown that an increase in job satisfaction does not always lead to improved performance. Our interest in job satisfaction stems from the fact that there *are* direct links between performance and job *dissatisfaction*. For instance, people who are dissatisfied with their jobs are more likely to be absent from work, to have physical and mental-health problems,

and to quit their jobs. Measuring job satisfaction can identify aspects of the organization that may require change.

Job satisfaction is generally measured as a general overall attitude and as an attitude that contains five dimensions. These dimensions are the pay level, the work itself, the opportunities for promotion, the quality of supervision, and the level of satisfaction with one's co-workers. The most widespread method is to administer to employees a questionnaire such as the Job Descriptive Index (JDI), which asks respondents to answer Yes, No, or Cannot Decide to statements that describe their jobs. Another popular questionnaire is the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ), which asks participants to answer questions about their jobs by selecting responses from a scale of Very Dissatisfied to Very Satisfied. Some of the effects of various work factors on job satisfaction are outlined in Table 2-1.

Work Factors	Effects
Work itself	
Challenge	Mentally challenging work that the individual successfully accomplish is satisfying.
Physical demands	Tiring work is dissatisfying.
Personal interest	Personally interesting work is satisfying.
Reward structure	Rewards that are equitable and that provide feedback for performance are satisfying.
Working conditions	
Physical	Satisfaction depends on the match between conditions and physical needs.
Goal attainment	Working conditions that promote goal attain satisfying.
Self	High self–esteem is conducive to job satisfactory
Others in the organization	Individuals will be satisfied with supervisors workers, or subordinates who help them afterwards. Also, individuals will be more satisfactory colleagues who see things the same way they do.
Organization and management	Individuals will be satisfied with organization have policies and procedures designed to have attain rewards. Individuals will be dissatisfied conflicting roles and/or ambiguous roles image the organization.
Fringe benefits	Benefits do not have a strong influence on job satisfaction for most workers.

Table 2-1: Effects of Various Work Factors on Job Satisfaction.

Source: From *Psychology of Work Behavior* by F. Landy. © 1989, 1985, 1980, 1976, Publishing Company, Pacific Grove, CA 93950, a division of International Thomson. By permission of the publisher.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is the degree to which a person identifies with and feels a part of the organization.[4] The two kinds of organizational commitment that most influence employee behavior are affective commitment and continuance commitment. A person who maintains **affective commitment** remains in the organization because of a strong desire to do so. Such a person believes in the goals and values of the organization, is willing to put forth an effort on behalf of the organization, wants to be part of the organization, and is loyal to the organization and concerned about its welfare. By contrast, employees who stay in the organization because they can't afford to leave or fear losing the benefits they've gained as a result of time invested in the company are demonstrating **continuance commitment**.

Organizational commitment is of interest to managers because of its positive effects on worker performance. Employees who show high levels of either type of organizational commitment are absent less often, produce higher-quality work, are more productive, and are less likely to quit. Organizations can enhance organizational commitment by encouraging employee participation in decision-making and by providing employees with relatively high levels of job security, autonomy, and responsibility.

2.6 Modifying Negative Employee Attitudes

Employees who have negative attitudes toward their jobs often perform poorly, may have a negative influence on the attitudes and performance of other employees, and can threaten an organization's success.

Negative employee attitudes can be modified through persuasion. The extent to which a negative attitude can be changed will depend on the characteristics of the persuader, the person being persuaded, and the message.

Characteristics Of The Persuader

Four characteristics that increase a persuader's chances of success are expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and likeability. A person who is considered an *expert* is particularly persuasive. Recently, a consulting organization in Barcelona approached one of the authors to include his research on teams as part of their consulting identity as it would make their consulting work more validated and established in strong theoretical foundations. Having links with respected and well known personalities or academics can certainly influence the marketability of one's consulting practice. The advertising industry makes extensive use of such expertise to influence consumers' attitudes toward products.

Trustworthiness also increases the ability to persuade. For instance, physicians are often able to change our attitudes because we tend to perceive these professionals as honest and trustworthy. Finally, personal *attractiveness* and *likeability* influence the ability to persuade. For instance, English footballer David Beckham[5] who is the captain of the English national team and is also currently playing for Real Madrid has scored 61 goals while at Manchester United, 16 goals for the English national team and 8 goals thus far while playing for Real Madrid. Beckham's relationship with and marriage to the former Spice Girl Victoria has contributed towards him becoming a major celebrity away from football, and his name was searched for on Google more than that of any other sporting personality in 2004 and 2005. Another example, drown from the 1990s is when actress Candice Bergen was chosen to promote Sprint Canada Long Distance because research showed that she is perceived as attractive and likable.

Characteristics Of The Person Being Persuaded

You have probably noticed that some of your friends or family members are more easily persuaded than others. This is because certain personality traits affect a person's responsiveness to persuasion. Three such traits are self-esteem, attitude intensity, and mood. People with low *self-esteem* have less confidence in themselves and their ideas and therefore are more easily persuaded than people with high self-esteem. *Attitude intensity* refers to the strength of the attitude. As you'd expect, people with extreme attitudes are less likely to be persuaded than those with more moderate attitudes. Finally, the *mood* we are in also affects how easily we are persuaded. Not surprisingly, people who are in a good mood are more easily persuaded than those who are in a bad mood.

Characteristics Of The Message

A message that conveys even a hint of a threat tends to have the opposite of the desired effect on the person being persuaded. Besides ensuring that the message conveyed is non-threatening, a manager should acknowledge both sides of a given issue. Suppose the manager wishes to implement a new computer system and is meeting resistance from employees because they must invest considerable time in learning it. Instead of ignoring the employees' concerns, the manager acknowledges the hard work facing them, but points out the advantages of the new system. This kind of message is far more likely to evoke a positive response than a message that is expressed in a threatening or authoritarian manner.

2.7 Social Perception

Perception is the process through which people receive, organize, and interpret information about their environment.[6] Perceiving involves becoming aware of the world around us and processing information about that world. Perception is the method by which we come to understand ourselves, other people, situations, and events. **Social perception** is the process by which we interpret information about another person or other people. Our social perceptions help us form opinions and judgments about others. Social perception is of interest to organizational behaviorists because so many managerial activities are based on perceptions of employees. For instance, managers use social perceptions when they recruit, hire, train, and evaluate employees. To arrive at an understanding of the factors that influence social perception, we will consider the characteristics of the perceiver, the person being perceived, and the situation.

Characteristics Of The Perceiver

Five important personal characteristics of the perceiver that influence the way he or she perceives others are familiarity of the culture of the person perceived, familiarity with the person perceived, attitudes, mood, self-

concept, and thinking pattern.

Familiarity With The Culture Of Person Perceived

In the context of social perception, familiarity refers to the knowledge about the culture that the person belongs to. The more the perceiver knows about the culture, the better he/she will be able to understand and base his/her perceptions on. However, understanding a culture does not necessarily mean you would be able to be accurate in your perceptions. For example, not all Americans are individualistic and not all Chinese are entrepreneurial minded. One of the best ways to understand culture is to live in that culture for a time to understand their social perceptions in that environment. However, living in anther culture could be not only exciting but sometimes also very challenging and stressful.

Familiarity With The Person Perceived

In the context of social perception, familiarity refers to the perceiver's knowledge about the person being perceived. The more the perceiver knows about the person being perceived, the greater the amount of information available to the perceiver on which to base his or her perceptions. But just because we know a great deal about a person does not necessarily mean that our perceptions will be accurate. For instance, sometimes we ignore information that is inconsistent with our beliefs about a person. If we tend to ignore or justify the mistakes of our close friends, it's because such faults are inconsistent with our beliefs about our friends. So while familiarity influences our perceptions, it does not guarantee greater accuracy in perceiving.

Attitudes

The perceiver's attitudes influence social perception. For instance, if you accept a stereotype about a certain group of people, you will tend to perceive this characteristic in people from that group whom you meet.

Mood

The mood we are in affects the way in which we perceive others. You are probably aware that you think differently when you are happy than when you are sad. A person in a good mood tends to perceive others more positively. Imagine being escorted into a job interview by a receptionist who informs the interviewer that his car was just stolen from the parking lot!

Self-Concept

A person with a positive self-concept tends to perceive the positive characteristics of others. Conversely, a person with a negative self-concept is likely to focus on negative characteristics. The more accurate a person's self-concept, the more accurate his or her perceptions of others will tend to be.

Thinking Pattern

Your thinking pattern influences your perceptions of others. For instance, some people perceive physical traits such as height and weight more readily than they perceive personality traits. Other people are able to perceive many characteristics of a person rather than noticing just a few specific traits.

Characteristics Of The Person Being Perceived

Three characteristics of the person perceived that influence the perceptual process are physical appearance, verbal and nonverbal communication, and intentions.

Physical Appearance

Of the three characteristics of the person perceived, physical appearance has the greatest impact on social perception. We instantly note unusual physical traits. We also tend to perceive attractive people more positively; attractive people get more job offers and higher salaries. We also tend to perceive people's origins based on how they look (e.g. even though a person may look Japanese, he or she could have been born and raised in Switzerland!). In an international environment, such misreading of physical appearances happens frequently.

Verbal And Nonverbal Communication

Both verbal and nonverbal communication influence how a person is perceived. In addition to the things we say, our tone of voice and body language convey information to the perceiver. For instance, a perceiver might interpret

our ability to maintain eye contact as a sign of interest. Non-verbal communication is perhaps one of the hardest things to read when working with others as sometimes such are so enmeshed within a person's culture. In a multicultural setting, sometimes even verbal communication is misunderstood. It is therefore always wise to restate what was said to ensure that the message was heard correctly.

Intentions

How we interpret the intentions of others influences our perceptions of their personality. For instance, if you assume that your professor is going to criticize your work, you may perceive your instructor to be a negative and critical person.

Characteristics Of The Situation

One characteristic of the situation that influences perceptions is *social context*. Our perceptions of people in informal contexts (such as a golf course) tend to differ from our perceptions of those same people in more formal settings (such as a business office). Our perceptions are also influenced by the strength of the situation, meaning the strength of the behavior cues in a given situation. Some situations provide obvious cues as to what is considered appropriate behavior. For instance, suppose that two siblings who once had a disagreement and have not talked for years meet at their grandmother's funeral. Talking to each other would be appropriate behavior in that situation, even if their feelings toward each other had not changed.

2.8 The Attribution Process

The **attribution process** is the process by which we come to understand the *causes* of our own behavior and that of other people. Whenever we try to explain why someone behaves in a particular way, we make an attribution. The attributions that we make have implications for the workplace. For instance, performance appraisals are often influenced by attributions in that managers often take into account the cause of the employee's behavior. Understanding attributions can also help managers deal with conflict.

2.9 Kelly's Attribution Theory

A key question in the attribution process is how perceivers decide whether someone's behavior is the result of internal or external causes. If the cause is internal, targets have control over their behavior. Conversely, when the cause of the behavior is due to a factor beyond the control of the target, the cause is external. For instance, if you say that you failed an exam because you didn't study, the cause is internal since you control your studying; however, if you say that the exam was unfair, your attribution is external.

Social psychologist Harold Kelly[7] suggested that we can determine if a cause is internal or external by observing a person's behavior. Next, we can evaluate the information received from three information cues – namely, consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency – and ask ourselves if other colleagues or peers would behave in the same way if faced with similar circumstances (*consensus*); if the person has demonstrated this type of behavior over a period of time (*consistency*); and, finally, if the person behaves in the same way whenever confronted with similar circumstances (*distinctiveness*). Given conditions of high distinctiveness, low consistency, and high consensus, we would tend to attribute the behavior to external causes. By contrast, if distinctiveness and consensus were low and consistency was high, we would attribute the behavior to internal causes.

Whether we tend to attribute our behavior to internal or external causes depends on a variety of situational and personal factors. For instance, on some occasions, exams are unfair! Our individual personality traits also influence the type of attributions we make. For instance, people with low self-esteem are likely to attribute their failures to internal causes and their success to luck or the fact that the task was easy; those with high self-esteem attribute their successes to internal causes.

Our locus of control also influences our attributions. People with a high internal locus of control tend to attribute their behavior to internal causes, whereas those with a high external locus of control usually attribute their behavior to external causes. Achievement-oriented people often tend to attribute their success to ability and their failures to lack of effort, both internal causes. By contrast, people who generally expect to fail tend to attribute their failures to a lack of ability. This last type of attribution pattern often leads to feelings of incompetence and even depression.

Employees often make attributions about their work performance. In general, they tend to attribute task performance to ability, effort, task difficulty, or luck. Here are examples of how these types of attributions may sound in the work setting:

Ability

I delivered a good presentation because I have a natural gift for public speaking.

Effort

I delivered a good presentation because I had spent a great deal of time researching the subject.

Task Difficulty

My essay was poor because it was impossible to complete it in such a short period of time.

Luck

I submitted a poor report because everything just happened to go against me. The tendency to attribute success to internal factors and failures to external factors is known as the **self-serving bias**. A challenge for managers who evaluate performance is the employee who denies responsibility for poor performance. The self-serving bias also causes other organizational problems. Employees who always blame others for personal failures may cause interpersonal conflict with other employees and disrupt teamwork and group efforts.

2.10 Perceptual Barriers

Anything that inhibits or prevents us from making accurate perceptions is called a **perceptual barrier** or a **perceptual error**. Perceptual errors often result from the preconceived ideas perceivers hold about people and situations. Five of the most common perceptual barriers are selective perceptions, stereotypes, halo effect, projections, and expectations.

Selective Perception

In the organizational context, **selective perception** means paying attention to information that supports your ideas and ignoring the rest. For instance, if you dislike some teachers, you would tend to focus on their negative personality characteristics and ignore any positive qualities that would be inconsistent with your opinion of them. Another type of selective perception is **perceptual defense**. This is the tendency for people to protect themselves from ideas, objects, or situations that are threatening. For instance, you may ignore a person who has ideas that threaten your deeply held convictions.

Stereotypes

A **stereotype** is an oversimplified mental picture that is associated with a particular group (e.g., women are emotional, Scots are thrifty, and fat people are jolly). Stereotypes persist because people who hold them tend to practice selective perception. For example, a foreperson who believes that young people are lazy may notice that some of the younger workers are taking extra breaks, but fail to perceive that older workers are doing the same. Positive stereotypes can be as misleading as negative ones. For instance, regardless of the reality, some of us tend to stereotype attractive people as warm, kind, sensitive, and honest.

Halo Effect

The **halo effect** [8] occurs in organizations when managers provide overly favourable evaluations of employees based on their observations of isolated successes. A typical halo error made by managers is to assume that a person with a good attendance record is responsible in all areas of performance. Another is being influenced by the previous year's performance evaluations.

Projection

Projection is the tendency to attribute one's own beliefs, feelings, tendencies, motives, or needs to other people. For instance, a manager who enjoys taking on new responsibilities may project this tendency onto employees by assigning them extra job duties without first consulting them. Managers can avoid the negative consequences of projection by cultivating empathy and developing their listening skills.

Expectations

An **expectation** is the tendency to find in a situation or a person what one expects to find. Our expectations have a big impact on how we perceive the world around us. For instance, when we ask people how they are doing, we expect them to answer, "Fine, thank you." If their response is accompanied by negative body language, we may choose to ignore the nonverbal information because it is not consistent with our expectations.

2.11 Typical Perceptual Errors in the Interview Process

Selecting the best person for the job is a crucial aspect of organizational success. Perception plays a significant role in this process. Some common perceptual errors made in job interviews are described below.

- *Similarity error.* The similarity error occurs when an interviewer makes a more favorable evaluation of someone who is similar to the interviewer. For instance, an athletic interviewer with an outgoing personality might have an undeservedly positive impression of someone who is outgoing and athletic.

- *Contrast error.* The contrast error occurs when an interviewer compares the candidate to other candidates instead of evaluating the individual according to a set standard. For instance, a mediocre candidate may receive an outstanding evaluation if interviewed after several poor candidates. Similarly, a strong candidate may receive a mediocre evaluation if seen after several outstanding candidates.

- *Overreacting to negative information.* Interviewers often perceive negative information as more important than positive information. A candidate who presents negative information at the beginning of an interview is more likely to receive a negative evaluation than a candidate who presents this information at the end of the interview. This is partially due to the impact of first impressions, which is discussed below.

- *First impression error.* Sometimes people make hasty judgments or evaluations of other people based on their first impressions. The first three minutes of a job interview can determine whether the person will get the position. Research suggests that positive first impressions are more likely to change than negative first impressions.

Sometimes our expectations turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Consider the example of a manager who believes that an employee is bored with his work and may quit. The manager gives this employee minimal feedback and encouragement, and assigns the interesting work tasks to other employees. These actions provoke the employee, who previously had no intention of doing so, into resigning.

2.12 The Theory of Experiential Learning[9]

Experiential Learning Theory or ELT was developed and published by David A. Kolb in 1984. Experiential learning is a learning process involving the combination of grasping and transforming knowledge through experience. It is acclaimed as the most influential theory concerning learning, particularly in the area of managerial and leadership learning and development training programs. Its popularity and international acclaim makes this important especially because of its international and organizational focus.

The Experiential Learning Cycle

Kolb asserts that we learn by grasping and transforming information. We grasp information in two ways: Concrete Experience (CE) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC). We transform information in two ways: Active Experimentation (AE) and Reflective Observation (RO). These four ways are called learning modes. The CE learning mode is one where we interact with our environment through immersion, experiencing it with our senses, feelings and emotions; we are involved with the tangible aspects of our surroundings. On the other hand AC learning mode involves thinking about, analyzing and theorizing to gain knowledge without being immersed in the environment. The RO mode is one where we incorporate diverse perspectives from the knowledge we gained through reflection or observation and the AE mode is where the focus is to do something about the knowledge we gained. Kolb states that most effective learning happens as one goes through a cycle using four modes of learning. Constant use of these modes would also cause individuals to develop learning flexibility. One could enter the cycle at any modal point, however, entering the cycle in a particular mode indicates an individual's tendency or preference in how to grasp or transform information. Consider a person (let's call her Jane) who is promoted to the position of manager based on her superior performance as an engineer. As a manager, Jane is immersed in a

completely new work environment and in the first few months, experiences the stress related to the requirements, demands and expectations of this role. Starting her learning cycle from concrete experience, Jane would then reflect on the job and even begin to observe other managers to learn how they function successfully. She may also engage in conversations with other managers to obtain as many perspectives as possible to inform her own experience. In doing so, Jane has moved through two modes: concrete experience and reflective observation. Jane may then need to gain more knowledge and visits a book store or a library to read more about how to succeed as a new manager. As she gathers this information she comes up with her own ideas and concepts of how to succeed. At this stage Jane is engaging the third mode -abstract conceptualization – and develops her own working theories of successful behaviors for her new role. Finally, Jane decides to act by incorporating these news in her job by engaging in active experimentation (the fourth mode). As she now interacts with her environment and employs these new behaviors, she engages in concrete experience and the cycle continues. This learning cycle is shown in Figure 2-3
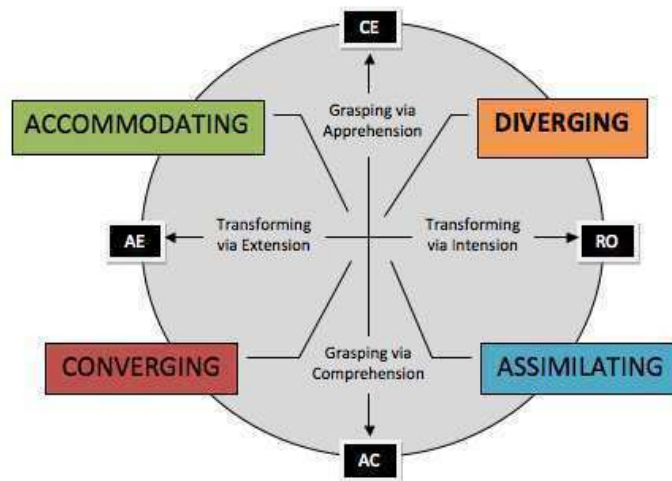

Figure 2-3: Experiential Learning Cycle with Learning Styles (based on Kolb, 1984).

Learning Styles

Going through all four modes of the learning cycle provides the ideal well-rounded learning process. However, at times one might realize a preference for particular modes and tend to skip others. Further, when we interact with others we may notice that they also have such learning tendencies. As we progress into adulthood, we develop certain predispositions or preferences for how we grasp and transform knowledge. This tendency to choose certain learning modes is indicative of a learning style. A brief description of each style is discussed.

Diverging

An individual with a diverging learning style tends to choose concrete experience in grasping information and reflective observation in transforming knowledge. Such individuals tend to be personally involved in any situation or event and are sensitive to feelings and people. Individuals with a diverging learning style also tend to view issues from many and/or different perspectives, look for the meaning of things and also carefully observe a situation before making any judgments. Their interest in knowledge and idea generation is the reason for such a style to be labeled as "diverging." As such, they tend to do well and even thrive in situations that involve the bringing together of diverse perspectives such as brainstorming. Their passion for gathering information is ideal for Figure 2.4 Experiential Learning Cycle with Learning Styles (based on Kolb, 1984.

tasks or work involving creativity or the arts, entertainment and service. Such people also tend to be imaginative, have the ability to listen with an open mind, and to function as excellent team players. In a classroom setting, discussion forums work well for individuals having diverging learning styles.

Assimilating

Individuals with an assimilating learning style tend to use abstract conceptualization to grasp knowledge and reflective observation for transforming knowledge. The diverging and assimilating styles share the same preference for transforming knowledge in that they tend to look at diverse perspectives but with a specific intention to understand. Individuals with this preference tend to distill information to seek clarity and precision. They tend to logically analyze ideas, and to plan systematically. People with this learning style have a tendency to remove themselves emotionally and instead seek to understand situations intellectually. Their focus on achieving clarity make them thrive in tasks or work areas involving theories, and ideas that promote precision such as the sciences, research and development and most academic environments. They tend to work well on their own and have very high standards in their work. In a classroom setting, assigned readings, listening to lectures and developing conceptual models work well for individuals with assimilating learning styles.

Converging

Sharing the preference for abstract conceptualization in grasping knowledge with the assimilating learning style, people with a converging learning style tend to prefer active experimentation in transforming information. Individuals with this learning style have an interest in not just understanding a situation or event but they also want to be able to take action using this knowledge. Unlike the individual that focuses on the soundness of a theory (those with assimilating learning styles), an individual with a converging learning style focuses on the practicality of theoretical models. Their propensity to use ideas to solve problems makes them ideal for careers in technology, engineering, and design. As such, they prefer to work with technical tasks than to deal with social problems or interpersonal issues. Individuals with converging learning styles thrive when they are given tasks with clear parameters or boundaries. In a classroom setting, using case studies, simulations and laboratory assignments work well for people with converging learning styles. Educational environments that focus on examinations and tests align with the converging learning style.

Accommodating

Individuals with an accommodating learning style tend to prefer immersing themselves in concrete experience to grasp information and active experimentation to transform information. Similar to individuals with diverging learning styles, those with an accommodating learning style tends to be sensitive to feelings and people and are concerned about relating to others. However, people with this learning style are also very focused on being able to get things done, take risks and influence people through action. They tend to accommodate (or adapt) to the environment they are immersed in. Such individuals focus on having "hands-on" experience as their primary mode of interacting with their environment, tending to act on their "gut" rather than using logical analysis. They also do well in tasks or jobs related to sales, marketing and management due to the emphasis on action or getting things done. As with the diverging learning style, those with an accommodating learning style also like to work in teams but with the focus on getting things done, completing a project or doing field work. In a classroom setting, completing assignments, fulfilling tangible tasks and doing presentations work well for individuals with accommodating learning styles.

2.13 Summary

Your "personality" is what distinguishes you from other people and what makes you behave in predictable ways. Much of your personality was set at an early age, owing to the influences of heredity and childhood environment, culture, family, group membership, and life experiences. Personality traits ranging from self-esteem to risk taking have a major impact on organizational behavior.

Although hidden and internal, attitudes are of prime concern to organizational behaviorists because they account for so many of our activities. Two attitudes whose influence on employee behavior is particularly strong are job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Whether negative employee attitudes can be changed depends on the persuader, the person being persuaded, and the message.

Social perceptions are influenced by characteristics of the perceiver, the person being perceived, and the situation. According to Kelly's attribution theory, we tend to attribute or "blame" outcomes either on ourselves or on factors beyond our control, depending on our perceptions and our personality. Perceptual errors prevent us from making accurate perceptions. These kinds of errors are commonly made in job interviews.

Learning styles can help us understand how we approach new situations at work or in our social settings. When we are faced with diverse situations, it is important to know if we are inflexible in how we learn or if we can be flexible toward how the situation is pressing us to behave. Understand ours and others' learning styles can help us work better with others or to lead others as it is intrinsically tied to how we can motivate ourselves and others. Not everything boils down to "personality" problems!

2.14 True/False Questions

1. Personality can be defined as a set of relatively stable characteristics that influences a person's behavior.

   (True) (False)

2. Heredity is the only determinant of the personality traits an individual will develop.

   (True) (False)

3. Attitudes are enduring feelings, beliefs, and/or behavior tendencies.

True   False

4. Job satisfaction is a positive emotional state resulting from an individual's opinion of the job.

    True   False

5. The attribution process is the process through which people receive, organize, and interpret information about their environment.

    True   False

6. Extroverts tend to be shy and inward looking, introverts tend to be outgoing and concerned with external things.

    True   False

7. If an employee has continuance commitment they will stay with the company because of their strong desire to do so and their belief in the goals and values of the organization.

    True   False

8. Perception is the process through which people receive, organize, and interpret information about their environment.

    True   False

9. Both verbal and nonverbal communication influence how a person is perceived.

    True   False

10. The attribution process is the process by which we come to understand the causes of our own behavior and that of other people.

    True   False

2.15 Multiple Choice Questions

1. Which answer best describes an example of an environmental factor that effects personality traits individuals develop?

    ○ Family
    ○ All of the above
    ○ Life Experiences
    ○ Group Membership
    ○ Culture

2. Which is not an example of a personality trait associated with political behavior?

    ○ Dogmatism
    ○ Machiavellianism
    ○ Need for Power
    ○ Willingness to take risks

3. Which is not a component of attitudes?

    ○ Perception
    ○ Affective
    ○ Cognitive
    ○ Behavioral

4. _____ is an oversimplified mental picture that is associate with a particular group.

   ○ Perceptual barrier
   ○ Stereotype
   ○ Selective Perception
   ○ Halo effect

5. An individual's belief concerning the ability to accomplish a job task is the definition of:

   ○ Self-monitoring
   ○ Organizational commitment
   ○ Self-efficacy
   ○ Affect

6. Which characteristic is not typical of Machiavellianism?

   ○ Being extremely loyal
   ○ Employing deceit in interpersonal relationships
   ○ Manipulating others for personal or political gain
   ○ Distrusting others

7. Which of these is not a factor, listed in the book, which influences the relationship between attitudes and behavior?

   ○ Specificity of the attitude
   ○ Timing
   ○ Self-efficacy
   ○ Fear of consequences
   ○ Personality

8. A characteristic that influences the way they perceive others is:

   ○ Self-concept
   ○ All of the above
   ○ Mood
   ○ Attitudes
   ○ Thinking pattern

9. "I delivered a good presentation because I had spent a great deal of time researching the subject." This is an example of which type of attribution?

   ○ Effort
   ○ Ability
   ○ Task difficulty
   ○ Luck

10. _____ means paying attention to information that supports your ideas and ignoring the rest.

   ○ Stereotype
   ○ Selective perception
   ○ Halo effect
   ○ Projection

Cases and Exercises

Case: Fringe Benefits

Although secretaries, like any other group of employees, should have their good work recognized throughout the year, many organizations save their plaudits for "Secretary Week," which generally occurs in the spring. Last year, the university's secretaries had been given a day off during Secretary Week. Though this day off was not formally entrenched, the secretaries were looking forward to the same benefit this year. Many of them had put in extra hours, without pay, during the year.

On the first day of Secretary Week, the dean of the school sent each of the secretaries a bouquet of flowers – with no mention of a day off. This year the secretaries neglected to send the dean a thank-you note. "It doesn't pay to try to be nice to people nowadays," the dean muttered to himself.

Questions

1. Where did the dean go wrong?

2. What should the dean do next year?

3. Is there anything the dean should do now?

Self-Awareness Exercise: How Do You Learn?

Think about yourself at work, with your family and close friends, and with larger groups of people (a social setting). Whenever you are dealing with something new (whether it is a new situation, a new job, or a new task), rank order your preferences as indicated below:

_____ I prefer to make sure I have all the information I need
_____ I prefer to understand clearly what it is I am doing
_____ I prefer to know what I need to work around with (what are my boundaries, limitations)
_____ I prefer to just take the plunge and do it

Which of the four statements best describe you (check one)?

_____ I am careful
_____ I am a risk taker
_____ I only take calculated risks
_____ I need as much information as I can get before doing anything

How do I behave in each of these settings? For each statement, choose one of the following (A, B, C, or D). Choose the best option. You may repeat your choice.

A. I find out as much as I can
B. I need to know why before acting
C. I need to understand what my constraints or limitations are
D. I just do or work fast

When I have to act quickly, I _____

When I am working with others (e.g. in a team), I _____

When I have to make a decision to choose between at least two alternatives, I

_____

When I have to think and understand clearly, I _____

In each of these three sets of questions, what can you infer about your preferred learning style?

Self-Assessment Exercise: What Is My Self-Monitoring Ability?

For each of the following statements, mark True (T) or False (F).

1. I have difficulty imitating someone else's behavior. _____
2. In a social gathering, I don't try to talk or behave in a way that will please others. –––––
3. I can't defend ideas unless I really believe in them. _____
4. I can easily talk about a subject that I know little about. _____
5. I assume that I can pretend just for the sake of impressing others. _____
6. I'd probably be a good actor. _____
7. It's rare for me to deliberately attempt to attract attention in a group. _____

8. I often behave differently according to the people or circumstances involved. _____
9. I don't always comply when others want me to like certain people. _____
10. I am not always the person I'd like to be. _____
11. I would not change my character to please or be accepted by others. _____
12. I have been told that I could be an actor. _____
13. I was never good at theatrical improvisation. _____
14. I have difficulty modifying my behavior in adapting to other people or situations. _____
15. In social gatherings, I normally leave it to others to tell jokes. _____
16. When meeting others, often I don't create an accurate impression. _____
17. I can easily lie to anybody without people knowing it. _____
18. I have pretended to like someone I could not stand. _____

Scoring: Count one point if True for 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 17, 18; count one point if False for any others. Sum them. If you total 11 or more, you have good control over the impression that you're creating; if you score 10 or less, the control over the image that you're projecting is limited.

Source: *Public Appearances, Private Realities*: *The Psychology of Self–Monitoring* by M. Snyder.
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2.17 Notes

1. See also Rotter, J.M. (1966). Generalized expectancies for internal vs. external control of reinforcement. *Psychological Monographs* , *80* (609).
2. For an interesting discussion of the concept of self-efficacy and high performance cycle, see Locke, E., & Latham, G.P. (1990). Work motivation and satisfaction: Light at the end of the tunnel. *Psychological Science 1* , 244.
3. Nelson, D.J., and Quick, J.C. (1994). *Organizational Behavior: Foundations, realities and challenges*. St. Paul, MN: West, p. 82.
4. Schermerhorn, J.R. et al. (1992). *Managing Organizational Behavior: First Canadian edition*. Toronto: Wiley, p. 628.
5. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Beckham
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7. Kelly, H.H. (1992). Attribution in Social Interaction. In E. Jones (Ed.), *Attribution: Perceiving the Causes Of*. Morristown, NJ: General Learning.
8. To learn more about the halo effect and the biases it creates in the context of selection and performance appraisal, see Dolan, S.L., & Schuler, R.S. (1994). *Human resource management: The Canadian dynamic* . Scarborough, ON: ITP Nelson, Chapters 6 and 9 .
9. Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as a source of learning and development.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc.

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