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Academic Script

1. Introduction

Hello friends! As we continue our journey through the course in Organizational Behavior, today we discuss perception and related topics. We will start with its definitions, discuss related concepts, and see how perception is linked with making judgments in day to day life. Perception is often described as that process which plays a key role in how we interpret ourselves, others, and numerous events occurring in the world around us. Imagine that a person whom you do not know is running fast towards you. Would that person be coming to harm you, help you, or is not even aware of you? These are some examples of conclusions we make, and the data that we receive from our sense such as vision, help us a lot.

2. Definition

Defining **Perception**, it can be said it is a process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment. The perception however can be different than objective reality. For e.g. in the case of a glass half filled with liquid in it. One can perceive that it is half empty, another can take it as half full, or another perception can be drawn as it is full, half with water and half with air in it. In this case all the perceptions are right accordingly but at a point contradict with the other two. This happens in most of the situation in real life.

The study of Perception is important because people's behavior is based on their perception of what reality is, not on reality itself.

3. Factors influencing the Perception

A number of factors influence to shape and sometimes to distort perception. These factors can reside in the perceiver, in the object or target being perceived or in the context of the situation in which the perception is made.

When one looks at a target to interpret, it is heavily influenced by the personal characteristics. Characteristics include attitude, personality, motive, interest, past experiences, expectations, moods etc. For e.g. we normally think of a politician to be corrupt, a saint to be ethical and loyal, a doctor to be 100% skillful regardless of their individual traits.

Characteristics of the target we observe can affect what we perceive. Loud people are more likely to be noticed in a group than quiet ones. We, generally, perceive an object in relation to the context. The relationship of the target to its background influences the perception. In most of the instances, unconscious comparison is done, i.e. the loud people are more noticed in the group of people where some of the members are quiet which in turn shifts one's individual share of attention wholly to the louder person.

Context is also important. The time at which we see an object or event can influence our attention, as can location, light, heat, or any other situational factor. A person dressed in a partywear outfit will obviously grab attention when he is in the boardroom in the meeting at 9 a.m.

4. Attribution theory

We judge people on the basis of assumptions we make about their beliefs, motives or intentions behind their particular actions and behavior.

The theory explains the ways in which we judge people differently, depending on the meaning we attribute to a given behavior. It suggests when we observe an individual's behavior, we attempt to determine whether it was **internally** or **externally** caused.

Here, the internally caused behavior is believed to be in the control of an individual where as externally caused behavior is assumed to be done by an individual through the situational circumstances.

The determination largely depends upon three factors:

(1) Distinctiveness

Distinctiveness refers to whether the behavior of an individual differs in different situations.

For e.g. whether the employee is working overtime today because he wants a leave tomorrow or is out of his believed importance of completing work on time.

(2) Consensus

If everyone who faces the similar situation behaves in the similar manner, we can say it to be consensus.

For e.g. if all the students asked to reach on time face the constraint of rain on the way to be late than their estimated time, however, everyone of them reach at different time before deadline.

(3) Consistency

It can be seen in a person's action as if he responds the same way over time or not. The more consistent the behavior, the more we are inclined to attribute it to internal causes.

Consensus	Distinctiveness	Consistency	Type of attribution
High consensus	*High distinctiveness*	*Low consistency*	*External*
Everyone else behaves the same way.	This person does not usually behave this way in different situations.	This person does not usually behave this way in this situation.	
Low consensus	*Low distinctiveness*	*High consistency*	*Internal*
No one else behaves the same way.	This person usually behaves this way in different situations.	Every time this person is in this situation, he or she acts the same way.	

5. Common shortcuts in Judging Others

While judging people, we generally use shortcuts to draw decisions. Such techniques may allow us to make accurate perceptions rapidly and provide valid data to make predictions. However, their accuracy is not guaranteed. They can get us into trouble, one should be cautious.

Selective perception

Any characteristics that make a person, any event or any object to stand out increases the probability of us noticing and

perceiving it. The reason being it is impossible for us to assimilate everything we come across. For e.g. we are more likely to notice the cars like our own, we notice one or two in a crowd doing same thing. We can't observe everything going on about us, we engage in selective perception.

We can't assimilate all that we observe, we take in bits and pieces. We don't choose randomly, we select according to our interests, background, experience and attitude. Looking at what we want to look can create biasness in the decision which cannot be accurate.

Halo effect

When we draw a general impression about an individual on the basis of a single characteristic, such as intellectual, appearance, sociability etc., a halo effect is operating. For e.g. if you admire people because of their beauty, you will find difficult accepting people not so beautiful regardless of their other qualities.

Contrast effect

We don't evaluate person in isolation, it has some influence of context. For e.g. an interviewer who is frustrated because of the previous candidate, the immediate candidate may face the reactions.

Stereotyping

When we judge someone on the basis of our perception of the group to which he or she belongs, we are using the shortcut called stereotyping.

We sometimes depend upon generalized perceptions to simplify decision-making process. It can be done on the basis of gender, age, race, religion, ethnicity, weight etc. For e.g. Youngsters are overconfident.

Stereotypes can be deeply ingrained and powerful enough to influence life and death decisions. The people who are being stereotyped sometimes face bad results because of others.

6. Specific applications of shortcuts in Organization

In organizations, people judge each other, we evaluate the behavior, the ways of work being carried out by different people in the organization, the appreciation given by boss etc. All these affect our work and our work environment created by us.

Employment Interview

Many a times, the interviewers make their decision about an employee within fraction of seconds on the basis of the candidate's appearance. If the impression created is negative, very less chances are there for the decision to change if done within first 5-7 mins. A positive impression is primarily created by not having the unfavorable characteristics rather than favorable ones.

Performance expectations

Sometimes people attempt to validate their perceptions of reality even when they are faulty. An individual's behavior at work is affected by the expectations of the employer that can be described by self-fulfilling prophecy or Pygmalion effect. It describes the increased level of expectations of performance sometimes resulting in increased level of output. The expectations become reality.

Performance Evaluation

Evaluation of an employee's performance is subjective as it speaks about the evaluator as much about the employee. The evaluation may include any or all of the errors we discussed above by the evaluator. The appraisals like promotion, pay rise,

continuation of employment are some of the positive outcomes of the evaluation.

7. The link between perception and individual decision making

There are many decisions being taken by officials everyday at workplace like which candidate to be recruited among all the interviewed candidates, how much to invest in which portfolio, how to make subordinates perform certain tasks, how to pitch the particular consumer, how to allocate pay rises, etc. Different decisions are made at different level like operational decisions, managerial decisions, higher management decisions, all of their choices are influenced by the perceptions of the individual.

In decision making, the process occurs as a reaction to existing problem. It can be described as it is done to achieve some desired state than the current by means of some changes considering all the available alternatives. For e.g. if one takes an initiative to support any societal reform, one need to decide some changes at individual level. Not all the problems are labeled, may be the situation which is problematic to one is another's satisfactory state of affairs. It is highly perceptual that one is able to identify the problems if prevailing. For e.g. the current communication gap between two persons of a team may lead to effect the execution of the project, the leader may identify it as an issue to be looked at or may neglect.

In the process to decide, we require to interpret and evaluate the gathered information which is screened, processed and interpreted. Which of the available data is considered relevant is upon the perception of the individual. As we discussed before,

the perception can lead to create biases in the process and affect the decision.

8. Decision making in organizations

In addition to rational decision making process, there is a need to understand the general decision making errors made by professionals at workplace along with above described perceptual errors.

Rational decision making

The rational decision making process is generally observed to be the best as it helps in making consistent and value-maximizing choices within specified constraints. The steps are as followed:

1. Identify the problem
2. Identify the decision criteria
3. Allocate weights to the criteria
4. Develop the alternatives
5. Evaluate the alternatives
6. Select the best alternatives

The model relies on number of assumptions which includes, the decision maker has complete information about the situation, he is unbiased, is able to identify all the relevant options, can conclude with the best option. Practically, people choose the options which are more acceptable to them than the optimal one.

In reality, to use rational model, there will be a need to gather a lot of information about all the options, compute applicable weights and then calculate values across a huge no. of criteria which costs time, energy and money.

9. Bounded Rationality

The human mind has limited capabilities to understand and relate all the information necessary to optimize what we see, hear and come through so generally people respond to complex problems by whatever they understand at first. Sometimes, the problems themselves are so complicated that they are tough to be solved by breaking it into rational model so we generally satisfice ourselves by doing whatever seems to be appropriate solution to us.

For e.g., while choosing our career, choosing the school or college or a job, we generally don't optimize, instead just satisfice. No one carefully identifies all the criteria, properly evaluates all the criteria, considering all the alternatives available.

From the above discussion, we can say that the human minds operate within the confines of bounded rationality. The mind tries to construct the simplified model of the situation being presented and then behaves rationally with that simplified model. In this process, once the problem is identified as stated above, we try to find alternatives and their criteria. The criteria are ample in number. We go for the criteria which are more conspicuous and adaptable to us which may be familiar or tried-and-true. Next we review them but not in a comprehensive manner. Instead, we focus on alternatives that differ only in a relatively small degree from the choice currently in effect. While going on the known path, we review alternatives only until we identify the solution which meets the acceptable level of performance. Here the search ends with a satisficing solution i.e. the 1st acceptable one.

The process helps in reducing complexity and time consumption sometimes. For e.g., to roam around the whole city to find out

who is the best tailor to stitch a regular outfit costs a lot of energy, time and money . One cannot test all the tailors at a time at all the required parameters.

10. Intuition

The intuitive decision-making model has emerged as an important decision-making model. It refers to arriving at decisions without conscious reasoning. When we recognize that managers often need to make decisions under challenging circumstances with time pressures, constraints, a great deal of uncertainty, highly visible and high-stakes outcomes, and within changing conditions, it makes sense that they would not have the time to formally work through all the steps of the rational decision-making model. Yet when CEOs, financial analysts, and healthcare workers are asked about the critical decisions they make, seldom do they attribute success to luck. To an outside observer, it may seem like they are making guesses as to the course of action to take, but it turns out that they are systematically making decisions using a different model than was earlier suspected. Research on life-or-death decisions made by fire chiefs, pilots, and nurses finds that these experts do not choose among a list of well-thought-out alternatives. They don't decide between two or three options and choose the best one. Instead, they consider only one option at a time. The intuitive decision-making model argues that, in a given situation, experts making decisions scan the environment for cues to recognize patterns. Once a pattern is recognized, they can play a potential course of action through to its outcome based on their prior experience. Due to training, experience, and knowledge, these decision makers have an idea of how well a given solution may

work. If they run through the mental model and find that the solution will not work, they alter the solution and retest it before setting it into action. If it still is not deemed a workable solution, it is discarded as an option and a new idea is tested until a workable solution is found. Once a viable course of action is identified, the decision maker puts the solution into motion. The key point is that only one choice is considered at a time. Novices are not able to make effective decisions this way because they do not have enough prior experience to draw upon.

11. Summary

Perception is a frequently mentioned and widely discussed topic. It is relevant for managers and organizations because it affects important outcomes such as whether employees support change in the organization, the extent to which they support it, employee attitude towards their work and their organization, employee motivation and commitment at work, quality of interpersonal relationships at work, decision making, organizational performance, competitiveness and the organization's ability to attract and retain employees. Three elements shape perception: the perceiver, the target or the perceived and the situation or context within which the perception occurs. There are attributes of each of these elements that shape the perception by interacting among themselves.