Principles of Professional Communication 1

Lecture 2 Perception

– is the truth really out there?
What is perception?

- The mental or cognitive process by which we make sense of stimuli from the environment

- Intuitive recognition or “the action by which the minds refers its sensations to external objects as cause”

- **The Matrix** – what is real?

Source: Sadler & Tucker, 1981,37
Can you read this?

fi yuo cna raed tihs, yuo hvae a sgtrane mnid too. Cna yuo raed tihs? Olny 55 plepoe out of 100 can.

i cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulacly uesdnatnrld waht I was rdanieg. The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mnid, aoccdrnig to a rscheearch at Cmabrigde Univeritisy, it dseno't mtaetr in waht oerdr the ltteres in a wrod are, the olny iproamtnnt tihng is taht the frsit and lsat Itteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it whotuit a pboerlm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Azanmig huh? yaeh and I awlyas tghuhot slpeling was ipmorantt! if you can raed tihs forwrad it.
What is perception?

- When we perceive, we select, organise and interpret stimuli or information until it has meaning for us – this does not mean that it has the same meaning for others.
- Perception is influenced by the social and cultural context in which an experience takes place.
- Perception is influenced by the learning, socialisation, experiences, deviance and creativity of the person doing the perceiving.
What is a schema?

- Schemas are mental structures that “file” chunks of information and put them together to create meaning and understanding.
- Our minds refer to schemas to enable us to more quickly process and make sense of the mass of stimuli from the outside world.
- Throughout life, you continue to gather new information and combine it with old, “filed” information to create understanding.
Types of schemas

- **People** Schemas
  - How you perceive and categorize people eg young, old, fat, good, bad, snooty, intelligent

- **Role** Schemas
  - How you perceive and categorize a person’s place in society and therefore how they should act eg mothers, politicians, teachers

- **Event** Schemas
  - How you predict what will happen in certain situations eg invited to a party, bring drinks or maybe a plate of food to share
Schemas, perception & reality

This simple concept has existed among mass media professionals for decades – *perception is reality* ... true or false?

Each person’s schema is unique – moderately in some cases, radically in others; therefore, each person’s idea of reality is unique.
Perception Quiz

- Can the naked eye see atoms, magnetic fields and gravity?
- Why does a partly submerged stick appear bent to the naked eye?
- Why does a forward moving vehicle appear to be moving backwards when captured on film?
- Does our sense of taste or smell ever diminish?
Perception Quiz cont ...

- When you dive into a bubbling surf, it feels cold, yet within minutes you feel comfortable. Has the water temperature changed?
- If you run water in the bathtub and then turn off the light, the sound of running water is suddenly louder. Why?
- When you first put on your clothes, you can feel their weight on your skin. After a while you don’t notice it. Have they become lighter?
Our senses are limited ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receptor</th>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Limitations &amp; Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eyes (sight)</td>
<td>▪ Light waves (186,00 m/sec)</td>
<td>▪ High frequency waves – ultraviolet, infrared, TV &amp; radio waves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Colours – red-green, yellow-blue, black-white</td>
<td>▪ Physical limitations – retina’s blind spot, colour blindness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Eyesight can be trained to see differences eg printers, spray painters perceive minute colour variations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mouth (taste)</td>
<td>▪ Tastes – sweet, salty, sour, bitter</td>
<td>▪ Misinterpretations due to prior intake (eg spicy food, smoking ), age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Personal tastes eg spicy food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nose (smell)</td>
<td>▪ Smells – musky, flowery, pepperminty, etherlike, pungent, putrid</td>
<td>▪ Molecular structures that are too small or large to fit nasal receptors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Smell is linked closely to memory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our senses are limited ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receptor</th>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Limitations &amp; Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Skin (touch) | ▪ Touch – pain, pressure, cold, heat | ▪ Cold spots outnumber hot spots 4:1  
▪ Women are generally more sensitive to cold than men  
▪ Extremes of heat are perceived as cold |
| Ears (hearing) | ▪ Sound waves (750 m/hour) | ▪ Low tones – low sensitivity  
▪ Low speed of sound waves means that an object/event is seen before it is heard eg high speed fighter plane  
▪ Personal interests and needs influence what we “hear” eg new mothers will awake immediately their babies cry – selective deafness |
Influences on interpersonal perception

The perceiver ...
- Motives
- Personality
- Expectations
- Prior learning
- Self concept
- Attitudes
- Experiences

The perceived ...
- Physical characteristics – size, colour, shape
- Social attributes – status
- Past experience – traditions, history

The context ...
- Place and/or time
- Situational factors
Why is understanding perception important to communication?

- Our ability to receive stimuli or information is limited eg Rubin’s reversible pattern
- Everyone has different capacities to take in stimuli or information eg blind people usually have acute hearing
- We select or filter information from around us according to what is important to us. At times we only see and hear what we choose eg selective deafness

Source: Sadler & Tucker, 1981,30

Fig 1 Rubin’s reversal pattern
Optical Illusions – 1
Optical Illusions – 2

Fig 3
M.C. Escher
Optical Illusions – 3

Fig 4 – Old Woman / Young Woman – can you see them both?

Fig 5: – does knowing that the four lines are parallel help you see them that way?

Source: Sadler & Tucker, 1981,30

Source: Sadler & Tucker, 1981,28
Why is understanding perception important to communication?

- We organise and interpret stimuli according to our past experiences and frame of reference eg how hot is a hot day to someone in London compared to Darwin?

- Stereotyping members of a racial, cultural or age group, makes it difficult to see unique qualities of individuals eg all Muslims are terrorists, all Australians like sport and drink beer, blondes are dumb
Why is understanding perception important to communication?

- A person with positive qualities will be perceived as having other equally positive qualities – the Halo Effect eg someone who is good looking will be perceived as being kind and intelligent as well.

- Our feelings, emotions, attitudes and aspirations influence our perceptions eg different interpretations of the same incident or conflict situation.
Why is understanding perception important to communication?

- We tend to generalise from past experiences no matter how specific or isolated they were eg stereotyping
- We perceive things as whole units
- We pattern information eg trying to make sense of optical illusions, the phenomenon of closure – “Which bank?”
- We tend to see good qualities in people we perceive to be like ourselves and to be critical of those we perceive to be different from us
Optical Illusions – 4

Fig 6: An engineer’s nightmare

Fig 7: What can you see in this inkblot?

Source: Sadler & Tucker, 1981,29
Fig 8: Which of these men are the tallest?

Fig 9: Are these lines parallel or crooked?

Fig 10: Are the vertical lines straight?
Optical Illusions – 6

Fig 10: How much longer is line ‘a’ than line ‘b’?

Fig 11: Are the two sides labelled ‘AA’ each the same as ‘BB’?
Finally ... why parents and teenagers will never understand each other ...