

Perception: Why Can't We See What Is There To Be Seen?

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An Active Process!

Perception – A Passive Process?

- ❑ It constructs rather than records "reality".
 - ❑ It is a process of inference in which people construct their own version of reality on the basis of information provided through the five senses.
 - ❑ It is strongly influenced by their past experience, education, cultural values, role requirements and stimuli.
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Perceptions

- ❑ Many experiments show the extraordinary extent to which the information obtained by an observer depends upon the observer's own assumptions and preconceptions.
 - ❑ Example
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What did you see?



Figure 1

Answer

- ❑ The article is written twice in each of the three phrases.
 - ❑ This is commonly overlooked because perception is influenced by our expectations about how these familiar phrases are normally written.
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Fundamental Principle 1:

- ❑ *We tend to perceive what we expect to perceive.*
 - ❑ It takes more unambiguous information to recognize an unexpected phenomenon than an expected one.
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Expectations

- ❑ Patterns of expectation become so deeply embedded that they continue to influence perceptions even when people are alerted to and try to take account of the existence of data that do not fit their preconceptions.
 - ❑ Trying to be objective does not ensure accurate perception.
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Expectations

- ❑ Patterns of expectations tell analysts, subconsciously, what to look for, what is important, and how to interpret what is seen.
 - ❑ These patterns form a mind-set that predisposes analysts to think in certain way.
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Mind-Sets

- ❑ Neither good nor bad
 - ❑ They are unavoidable
 - ❑ Objectivity is achieved by making basic assumptions and reasoning as explicit as possible so that they can be challenged by others and analysts can, themselves, examine their validity.
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Mind-Sets

- ❑ ***Mind-sets tend to be quick to form but resistant to change.***
 - ❑ Example
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Mind-Sets

Figure 2



Impressions resist change.

Mind-Sets

- ❑ Once an observer has formed an image – that is, once he or she developed a mind-set or expectation concerning the phenomenon being observed – this conditions future perceptions of that phenomenon.
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Fundamental Principle 2:

- ❑ ***New information is assimilated to existing images.***
 - ❑ That's why that gradual, evolutionary change often goes unnoticed.
 - ❑ New intelligence analysts vs. Experienced analysts
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Test of Persistence of Established Images

Figure 3



Young lady or old lady?

It is difficult to look at the same information from different perspectives.

Persistence of Established Images

- ❑ One of the difficult mental feats is to take a familiar body of data and reorganize it visually or mentally to perceive it from a different perspective.
 - ❑ Once events have been perceived one way, there is a natural resistance to other perspectives.
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Fundamental Principle 3:

- ❑ ***Initial exposure to blurred or ambiguous stimuli interferes with accurate perception even after more and better information becomes available.***
 - ❑ Established perceptions are difficult to change unless obtaining rather solid evidence.
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Conclusion: *Why Can't We See What Is There To Be Seen?*

- ❑ We tend to perceive what we expect to perceive.
 - ❑ Once an expectation (mind-set) is formed, it resists to change.
 - ❑ New information is assimilated to existing information.
 - ❑ Initial exposure to blurred or ambiguous stimuli interferes with accurate perception.
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Implications for Intelligence Analysis

- ❑ Encourage products that clearly delineate their assumptions and chains of inference and that specify the degree and source of uncertainty involved in the conclusions.
 - ❑ Support analyses that periodically re-examine key problems from the ground up in order to avoid the pitfalls of the incremental approach.
 - ❑ Emphasize procedures that expose and elaborate alternative points of view.
 - ❑ Educate consumers about the limitations as well as the capabilities of intelligence analysis; define a set of realistic expectations as a standard against which to judge analytical performance.
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