INTRODUCTION TO ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Dear student

Please take note that we’ve included some supplementary material for this semester. The two chapters we included are important and you’ll be assessed on the content contained here. Use the information below in conjunction with your study guide.

The new unit on Perception should be studied just before Learning Process and Memory in your study guide.

The new unit on Role Theory should be studied just before Group Dynamics in your study guide.

I wish you a productive study year.

Mrs Elaine January-Enkali

Course coordinator – Introduction to Organisational Psychology

Unit 1

Perception

Introduction

You will agree that people are in constant contact with their environment by means of perception. So what is perception? Perception is a process by which individuals organise and interpret what they experience through their senses, in order to give meaning to their environment (Kruger, Steyn, Botha and Herron, 2015). Perception is thus important for people to survive, because they must continuously react to dangers and threats from the environment. In a typical work environment, most accidents occur because workers fail to observe certain dangers. Also, it is important for employees to observe their environment in order to do their jobs successfully.

Objectives

Upon completion of this unit you will be able to:

- define perception and clarify the nature of it
- expound the various ways of focusing attention
- outline factors that influence attention focus
- summarise the information processing model of perception
- explain the gestalt theory of perception observation
- outline perceptual uniformity

1. The Nature of Perception

Perception can be defined as the ways in which information is received, processed and interpreted by the human brain (Jordaan & Jordaan, 1998 as cited by Kruger et al, 2015). Let us look at this more closely:

The senses are the specialised organs eg our ears, that react to a specific type of impulse or stimulus. So, what than is a stimulus? A **stimulus** is any form of energy that a person reacts to (for example, sound waves)

Every moment of a person’s life is bombarded with thousands of simultaneous stimuli. It is basically impossible to be aware of these stimuli, so people only pay attention to certain of them. This selective realisation of specific stimuli is called sensation. A sensation is thus the feeling a person has in reaction to the information gained through the senses.

It is only when this sensation has been interpreted by the brain that it is called a sensation. People have five general senses, as you all know, namely **hearing** (ears), **sight** (eyes), **smell** (nose), **taste** (tongue) and the **pain and touch senses** (nerve ends and tactile corpuscles in the skin). In the work context, hearing and sight is important, and we will thus pay special attention to them.

*How important is the senses of hearing and sight in your specific work environment? Write down as many practical examples as possible.*

2. Attention

People cannot pay attention to all sensory information at the same time, but they have to direct their attention at specific events or objects. **Attention focus** is the way in which people’s attention is directed at specific events or objects.

2.1 Ways of focusing attention

The ways in which people can direct their attention to objects vary from the unconscious and involuntary to the conscious and purposeful focusing of attention.
2.1.1 Marginal attention
When people are unaware of the events around them, because their focus of attention was maybe somewhere else, their perceptive senses will warn them if anything important happens in the environment that would affect them. An example would be that within a work situation, Chris will suddenly become aware that the machine he is working on making a strange noise, even though his attention has been focused on something else in his work and he was up to than totally unaware of the machine’s sound.

2.1.2 Selective attention
In order to concentrate or focus attention, one object or event must be selected from the various stimuli occurring around the person. This concentration of attention can be voluntary or involuntary. Have you noticed that loud people are more likely to be noticed in a group than quiet ones? Extremely attractive or unattractive people also stand out in a group. These are all examples of selective attention.

2.2 Factors that influence attention focus

2.2.1 External factors:
External factors are external characteristics of perceived objects or situations. The following is important according to Kruger et al (2015).

- **Intensity**
The more intense the external factors, the higher the probability of those factors being perceived, for example, a loud alarm will attract people’s attention immediately while a soft alarm would be ignored.

- **Size**
The bigger the object, the higher the probability that it will be perceived, for example, a very large warning sign in the workplace will be more noticeable than a smaller one.

- **Contrast**
External stimuli that stand out against the background will draw a person’s attention more than one that does not stand out for example, black letters on a white background will be more noticeable than a single stimulus.

- **Repetition**
Stimuli that are repeated will be more noticeable than a single stimulus for example, in the work situation one may find that instructions that are repeated have greater impact than instructions that are not repeated.

- **Movement**
Moving objects are noticed more easily than stationary objects. For example, warning lights that flash in the workplace will attract more attention than a normal light.

- **Familiarity and novelty**
A familiar object in a new situation or a new object in a familiar situation drawn attention, for example, rotating employees in the workplace will increases the worker’s attention to the job he/she is performing.
2.2.2 Internal factors:

Each person has a unique way of reacting to his/her environment. Internal factors can thus be described as factors that are inherent to the individual himself/herself. These are:

- **Attitudes and expectations**

  People have pre-determined attitudes towards and expectations of other people and objects. In other words, people will notice events and objects that reinforce their prior expectations and will not even notice events that contradict their prior expectations.

- **Motives**

  People’s motives do not only serve as a driving force for their behaviour, but also for the way in which they perceive situations. Example, a person who is strongly motivated by money will see money-making opportunity in everywhere in the work place.

- **Personality**

  Everyone has their own style according to which they organise their environment. People mostly do not notice things that upset them.

- **Interests**

  People’s various interests make the generally more susceptible to certain perceptions and less so to others. Example, a person who is interested in cars will perceive small details of cars that someone else will not notice.

- **Behaviour acquired from previous experience**

  People learn from previous experience to either heighten their perceptions or ignore certain stimuli, e.g. diamond sorters are trained to discover weak spots in diamonds that the general public will not notice.

Let’s now do an activity to see if you understand all the aspects regarding perceptions you have read so far.

**Activity**

**Time Required:** You should take about 10 minutes to complete this activity.

1. Briefly discuss the nature of perception
2. Briefly discuss the various ways of attention focus
3. Discuss the various external factors that encourage attention focus.
1. Perception can be defined as the ways in which information is received, processed and interpreted by the human brain.

The senses are the specialised organs, e.g., our ears, that react to a specific type of impulse or stimulus. So, what is a stimulus? A stimulus is any form of energy that a person reacts to (for example, sound waves).

Every moment of a person’s life is bombarded with thousands of simultaneous stimuli. It is basically impossible to be aware of these stimuli, so people only pay attention to certain of them. This selective realisation of specific stimuli is called sensation. A sensation is thus the feeling a person has in reaction to the information gained through the senses.

2. Marginal attention

When people are unaware of the events around them, because their focus of attention was maybe somewhere else, their perceptive senses will warn them if anything important happens in the environment that would affect them. An example would be that within a work situation, Chris will suddenly become aware that the machine he is working on is making a strange noise, even though his attention has been focused on something else in his work and he was up to then totally unaware of the machine’s sound.

- Selective attention

In order to concentrate or focus attention, one object or event must be selected from the various stimuli occurring around the person. This concentration of attention can be voluntary or involuntary. Have you noticed that loud people are more likely to be noticed in a group than quiet ones?

3. Intensity

The more intense the external factors, the higher the probability of those factors being perceived, for example, a loud alarm will attract people’s attention immediately while a soft alarm would be ignored.

- Size

The bigger the object, the higher the probability that it will be perceived, for example, a very large warning sign in the workplace will be more noticeable than a smaller one.

- Contrast

External stimuli that stand out against the background will draw a person’s attention more than one that does not stand out for example, black letters on a white background will be more noticeable than a single stimulus.

- Repetition

Stimuli that are repeated will be more noticeable than a single stimulus for example, in the work situation one may find that instructions that are repeated have greater impact than instructions that are not repeated.

- Movement

Moving objects are noticed more easily than stationary objects. For example, warning lights that flashes in the workplace will attract more attention than a normal light.

- Familiarity and novelty

A familiar object in a new situation or a new object in a familiar situation
3 The Information Processing Model of Perception

This model is based on the principle that that information is received in the form of a stimulus (input). It then goes through a series of phases during which it is processed and eventually give cause to a reaction (output) (Kruger et al, 2015).

Let’s look at these phases more closely:

3.1 Stimuli

Stimuli are the external physical energy that activates receptors. Sound waves activate the capillaries in the ear, which then directly or indirectly causes behaviour.

3.2 Short – term sensory storage

Each sensory system has a mechanism in place which extends the physical stimulus for a short while after the stimulus has physically ended. If the attention is focused on something else, the short-term store makes it possible for the information to be temporarily retained until the brain can address it.

3.3 Perception

The information is now processed by higher levels of the nervous system. The stimulus is recognised, identified and categorised by comparing it to related data already stored in the memory. By means of the process of perceptual coding, the incoming pieces of information are organised into a meaningful whole.

3.4 Decision-making and choice of response

A person must choose what to do with information after it has been perceived. This phase is a critical step in the model because the correctness of the decision may carry major cost implications.

3.5 Execution of the response

After deciding on a course of action, the message (decision) has to be transmitted to the relevant points of the body (muscle). The choice and the execution of the response are unconnected.

3.6 Feedback

People continuously monitor the consequences of their behaviour. The method of feedback depends on the situation. Visual feedback (when a person sees the results of their response) is the most common method but feedback through the other senses can be equally important.

3.7 Attention

Most of the information stored in our short-term sensory memory needs no further consideration, but we are continuously forced to focus our attention on the remaining information that needs action.

3.8 Application of the model

Please note that the model is a simplification of the perceptual process and not all aspects should be taken literally. The sequence is not always as described in
the preceding paragraphs. Differentiation between the phases is also not always as clear.

Think of a crisis that you had which need your immediate reaction. Analyse your response to the crisis by means of the information processing model.

4. Spontaneous Perceptual Observation

This section discusses the way in which the stimulus as whole reaches the brain. A few general principles are important here:

4.1 Gestalt laws

There are few principles according to which perceptual observations are organised and they are known as gestalt laws (Kruger et al, 2015)

4.1.1 Figure and ground

The differentiation between figure and ground is the most basic principle of perceptual organisation. The figure is the element of perception that the individual focus attention on and which is meaningful to him/her. The ground is the relatively meaningless background that the individual also perceives but pay less attention to. Example, you are at a party and listen to a conversations of your group of friends but also hear the conversation of other people or the background music.

4.1.2 Perceptual grouping

In any perceptual situation, various pieces of information are collected to form a meaningful whole (pattern or shape). Four types of groupings can be distinguished:

4.1.3 Proximity

People are normally inclined to group elements of stimuli that lie close to each other into one form. For example in the work situation, people who work in close proximity together are viewed as a work group and therefore a unit.

4.1.4 Similarity

People tend to group elements of stimuli that correspond in colour, shape or texture together in one unit. For example, in the workplace, minority groups, such as female workers, are seen as a unit.

4.1.5 Symmetry

People have a tendency of grouping together the elements of stimuli in such a way that symmetrical (rather than asymmetrical) forms are observed.

4.1.6 Continuity

People are inclined to observe elements of stimuli in such a way that certain characteristics or patterns persist to the exclusion of other characteristics.
5. Perceptual Uniformity

Perceptual uniformity provides a measure of stability because of objects being seen in the same, or in a similar way each time. It occurs predominantly in view of the following characteristics (Kruger et al 2015).

5.1 Uniform style

An object is not perceived to be larger just because the object is closer to the person, even though it projects a bigger image on the retina of the eye. For example, a person does not assume that a car is shrinking when it drives away.

5.2 Uniform shape

A door that is half-open, completely open or completely closed, looks totally different on the retina of the eye and yet it is perceived as the same door.

5.3 Uniformity of colour and clarity

The colour and clarity a person’s shirt will depend on the light he/ she is standing or on the shadow cast on the shirt. It will be perceived as the same shirt and not a different shirt when the person wearing it walks into a room with a yellow light.

6. Spatial Placement of Auditory Information

It is important for individuals not only to be able to perceive and understand sounds but also to know from which direction they are coming and how far away the sound is (Kruger et al, 2015).

6.1 The distance of auditory information

A person can usually clearly distinguish between sounds that are far away and those that are relatively close by. The estimation of the distance from the source of sound is normally acquired through the following:

6.1.1 Loudness of sound

Sound that is load is usually perceived to be close by and a softer sound is perceived to be far away.

6.1.2 Previous experience

The relative loudness of a sound is also judged by previous experience. For example, if John is used to the sound of the machine he is working on, and the sound of the machine suddenly doubles, he will get a fright and investigate the cause.

6.1.3 The tone colour of the sound

The tone colour of a sound diminishes in complexity when a sound is far away. For example, the loud bang that dynamite exploding far away makes, sounds different to a gunshot that is equally loud but at a closer distance.

6.2 Direction of auditory information

It is not always easy to establish the source of sound waves, but an estimation of the direction occurs almost spontaneously. The following four methods are important:
6.2.1 Difference in time
The difference in the time in which two sirens go off, can determine the direction of the auditory information.

6.2.2 Difference in intensity
The sound waves are slightly softer at the ear that is furthest from the sound.

6.2.3 Effect of head movements
The effect of time and intensity differences is increased when a person moves his/ her head slightly when he/ she is listening. The movement of the head cases a change in the intensity and duration of both ears hearing the sound and enables a person to determine the direction of the sound (Kruger et al, 2015).

6.2.4 Addition of visual stimuli
The auditory senses are not always adequate enough to determine the direction of sound so we usually look to see where the sound is coming from.

Activity 2

**Time Required:** You should take about 15 minutes to complete this activity.

1. Briefly discuss the information processing model.
2. Provide an explanation of the gestalt law.
3. Discuss the different types of perceptual uniformity.
This model is based on the principle that information is received in the form of stimuli (input). It then goes through a series of phases during which it is processed and eventually give cause to a reaction (output) Let us look at these phases more closely:

- **Stimuli**
  
  Stimuli are the external physical energy that activates receptors. Sound waves activate the capillaries in the ear, which then directly or indirectly causes behaviour.

- **Short – term sensory storage**
  
  Each sensory system has a mechanism in place which extends the physical stimulus for a short while after the stimulus has physically ended. If the attention is focused on something else, the short-term store makes it possible for the information to be temporarily retained until the brain can address it.

- **Perception**
  
  The information is now processed by higher levels of the nervous system. The stimulus is recognised, identified and categorised by comparing it to related data already stored in the memory. By means of the process of perceptual coding, the incoming pieces of information are organised into a meaningful whole.

- **Decision-making and choice of response**
  
  A person must choose what to do with information after it has been perceived. This phase is a critical step in the model because the correctness of the decision may carry major cost implications.

- **Execution of the response**
  
  After deciding on a course of action, the message (decision) has to be transmitted to the relevant points of the body (muscle). The choice and the execution of the response are unconnected.

- **Feedback**
  
  People continuously monitor the consequences of their behaviour. The method of feedback depends on the situation. Visual feedback (when a person sees the results of their response) is the most common method but feedback through the other senses can be equally important.

- **Attention**
  
  Most of the information stored in our short-term sensory memory needs no further consideration, but we are continuously forced to focus our attention on the remaining information that needs action.

There are few principles according to which perceptual observations are organised and they are known as gestalt laws (Kruger et al, 2015)

- **Figure and ground**
  
  The differentiation between figure and ground is the most basic principle of perceptual organisation. The figure is the element of perception that the individual focus attention on and which is meaningful to him/her.
- **Perceptual grouping**

In any perceptual situation, various pieces of information are collected to form a meaningful whole (pattern or shape). Four types of groupings can be distinguished namely, proximity, similarity, symmetry, continuity.

3 **Uniform style**

An object is not perceived to be larger just because the object is closer to the person, even though it projects a bigger image on the retina of the eye. For example, a person does not assume that a car is shrinking when it drives away.

- **Uniform shape**

A door that is half-open, completely open or completely closed, looks totally different on the retina of the eye and yet it is perceived as the same door.

- **Uniformity of colour and clarity**

The colour and clarity a person’s shirt will depend on the light he/ she is standing or on the shadow cast on the shirt. It will be perceived as the same shirt and not a different shirt when the person wearing it walks into a room with a yellow light.

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**References**


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**Keywords/Concepts**

- **Stimuli:** The external physical energy that activates receptors
- **Visual senses:** Light enters the eye through the invisible protective layer and the small opening of the eye that is surrounded by the coloured part.
- **Auditory senses:** Sound is a stimulus produced by fluctuations in air pressure that are triggered by vibrations.
- **Perceptual uniformity:** Perceptual uniformity provides a measure of stability because of objects being seen in the same, or in a similar way each time.
Unit summary

In this unit you learned that people are in contact with their environment by means of perception and therefore perception in the work situation is deemed important.
Unit 2

Role Theory

Introduction

In every organisation where people have to work and interact with one another, each individual must assume certain behavioural roles so that the organisation can function in an orderly way. Each employee must satisfy certain expectations, and these forms of behaviour must also satisfy certain norms. In your particular organisation, you also have your specific roles and there are certain things that are expected from you. In addition to that, you are also expected to behave according to organisational norms.

Objectives

Upon completion of this unit you will be able to:

- describe the nature of roles
- define role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload and underload.
- explain the origin of role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload and role underload.
- understand the consequences of role conflict, ambiguity, overload and underload.
- describe how role problems can be overcome

Prescribed reading


Additional reading

There is no additional reading for this unit.

1. Nature of Roles

A role is behaviour or the activities of a person in a particular social context. The individual’s role can involve both his/her occupation and his/her life outside the work context (Kruger et al. 2015).

Let’s look closer at these different activities.
1.1 Role expectations

Roles are mostly functional and this results in role differentiation. Roles can also be formal or informal.

Formal roles consist of the formal post that an employee holds and the requirements for the position are normally clearly defined.

Informal roles differ a great deal and are very often volatile. A manager, for example, can fulfil three different roles such as:

1.1.1 Interpersonal role

The manager takes the role of figurehead, which is a ceremonial role. The manager also plays a leadership role because he/she must motivate and encourage the rest of the staff to achieve goals and objectives. In addition to that, the manager also plays a liaison role, since he/she is often involved in negotiations outside the organisation.

1.1.2 Informational role

A great deal of the manager’s time is devoted to receiving or giving information.

1.1.3 Decision- making role

This role involves aspects such as deciding which projects to accept and what resources to use to help employees to complete their projects.

As we already said, a role have three components, these are expectations, perception and behaviour components.

The expectation component refers to the role that is expected of an individual. Role expectations are the approaches adopted by the role transmitters (head of the division) to the role expectations of a role receiver (a staff member belonging to a division)

The role expectations also refer to the norm that an individual should adhere to. A norm is the way in which the group expects an individual to behave (Kruger et al. 2015).

The perceptual component refers to the way in which an individual sees or experience him/herself in specific role and the privilege and duties that is going along with that role.

The behavioural component refers to the type of behaviour that a person displays in a certain role.

In-text question

What do you think other people expect of you in your specific role?
What norms must you adhere to in your role?

It is important to note that managers must have the ability to adapt quickly to the various roles required of them. When a manager and a worker come into contact with one another, each is expected to understand at least three roles, such as his/her role as a manager, the role of the employee, his/her role as seen or perceived by the worker.
Activity 1
Time Required: You should take about 5 minutes to complete this activity.

1. Describe the nature of roles, using your own work related examples
2. Distinguish between role expectations and norms
3. Describe the behaviour component of a norm, supporting your answer with a relevant example.

Feedback

1. A role is behaviour or the activities of a person in a particular social context. The individual’s role can involve both his/her occupation and his/her life outside the work context.
   Roles are mostly functional and this results in role differentiation. Roles can also be formal or informal. Formal roles consist of the formal post that an employee holds and the requirements for the position are normally clearly defined. Informal roles differ a great deal and are very often volatile.

2. The expectation component refers to the role that is expected of an individual. Role expectations are the approaches adopted by the role transmitters (head of the division) to the role expectations of a role receiver (a staff member belonging to a division). The role expectations also refer to the norm that an individual should adhere to. A norm is the way in which the group expects an individual to behave.

3. The behavioural component refers to the type of behaviour that a person displays in a certain role.

2 Role Conflict

Role conflict is described as the simultaneous existence of two or more role expectations where agreement with one expectation makes it difficult to fulfil the other expectations (Kruger et al. 2015).

2.1 Causes of role conflict

2.1.1 Unreasonable expectations and time limits

The employee experiences serious conflict when he/she must satisfy the expectations of a number of people within a certain time limit.
Also, different people have different expectations associated with a specific role.

2.1.2 The type of post

The description of certain posts/positions already creates a form of potential role conflict.

2.1.3 Multiple role fulments

Most people must satisfy a number of role expectations in society and this also gives rise to role conflict.

2.1.4 Conflict between the interests of the group and the organisation

What is beneficial to the group spirit of employees is not necessarily beneficial to the organisation and may hence lead to conflict among employees.

2.1.5 Conflict associated with personal values and convictions

People can also experience role conflict associated with the task that they are required to carry out and with their personal values and convictions.

Reflect on a time in your career where you were required to perform a task that was against your personal convictions. How did you handle the situation?

2.2 Consequences of role conflict

Role conflict results in intense feelings of anxiety, tension and stress.

Role conflict may also result in a lack of job satisfaction

Research also indicated a link between role conflict and poor work performance among professional, technical and clerical staff.

Lastly, role conflict reduces employees’ trust in and respect for themselves and other people, which may result in poor communication with others.

3. Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity occurs when people feel uncertain about certain aspects of their work, such as the extent of their responsibilities, what is expected of them and how to divide their work time between various duties (Kruger et al. 2015).

3.1 Causes of role ambiguity

- The size and complexity of modern organisations
- Since organisations become bigger and more complex, the chances of overlap and duplication of duties are greater.
- Fast rate of change
- Rapid changes in technology and in the external environment of an organisation may give rise to role ambiguity.
- Changes in social structures within organisations, for example, when divisions are frequently regrouped.
• Restrictions placed on the flow of information, for example, the fact that an employee should follow the channel of communication when having a dispute or problem.

• Ambiguity regarding employees’ responsibilities

• Employees may be uncertain about the limits to their authority, application of rules and regulations as well as the punishment that can be expected when these are disobeyed.

• Vague goals

• Goals set in organisations are often not clearly defined and may result in uncertainty and role ambiguity.

3.2 Consequences of role ambiguity

• Anxiety, tension and stress

• Employees who do not know what is expected from them often experience anxiety, tension and stress because of misunderstandings. This becomes even more serious if employees realise that promotions or salary increases are at stake.

• Poor work performance

• Role ambiguity is often linked to a lack of interest among employees, resulting in reduced performance.

• Low level of job satisfaction

• If an employee does not know what is expected from him/her he/she will experience low job satisfaction.

• Poor self-image

• An employee who does not know exactly what is expected of him and is not completely sure what goals to pursue may experience feelings of guilt, and in that way develops a poor self-image.

4 Role Overload and Underload

4.1 The nature of role overload

Role overload occurs when so many duties and responsibilities are given to a job holder in a particular role that he/she cannot satisfy all the demands. There is a distinction between quantitative and qualitative overload.

Quantitative overload occurs when an individual is expected to complete more work than they can deal with in a given period.

Qualitative overload occurs when employees feel that they do not have the necessary abilities and skills to carry out their work (Kruger et al. 2015).

4.2 The nature of role underload

Just like role overload, role underload can also lead to stress. To expect too little from an employee is just as bad as expecting too much of that person. Role underload leads to boredom and monotony, which may cause stress.

We can also distinguish between quantitative and qualitative role underload.

Quantitative role underload results in boredom as employees spend hours with no challenge to stimulate them.
Qualitative role underload occurs when workers are expected to carry out only routine and repetitive tasks, without any form of cognitive stimulation.

4.3 Causes of work overload and underload

Role overload can arise because of a change in work status such as promotion. To avoid difficult tasks, an employee may concentrate on too many easy tasks to camouflage the fact that he/she cannot cope with the difficult tasks.

4.4 Consequences of work overload and underload

If an employee cannot cope with all his/her responsibilities, or if he/she is expected to perform tasks that are beneath their abilities, they may begin to doubt their own proficiencies. A stressful situation such as this could lead to the development of a poor self-image and reduced work performance (Kruger et al. 2015).

5 Overcoming Role Problems

- Role conflict can be reduced by recommending that employees, who have set excessively high expectations and standards for themselves, should reduce these to a more achievable level.
- Role problems can be reduced by making the interests of employees in an organisation more compatible with one another.
- Efforts can be made to establish the right organisation structure to prevent role problems.
- Conflicting expectations can be eliminated to prevent role conflicts.
- Employees in new roles often experience role problems. They should be given enough time to get used to the demands of the new job.
- The situation in which an employee experience role problems can be restructured. The choices between alternative decisions can thus be simplified for the employee.

Activity 2

Time Required: You should take about 10 minutes to complete this activity.

1. Discuss the causes of role conflict
2. Discuss the consequences of role ambiguity.
3. Discuss the ways in which role problems can be overcome in organisations.
Unreasonable expectations and time limits

The employee experiences serious conflict when he/she must satisfy the expectations of a number of people within a certain time limit.

Also, different people have different expectations associated with a specific role.

- **The type of post**
  
  The description of certain posts/positions already creates a form of potential role conflict.

- **Multiple role fulfilments**
  
  Most people must satisfy a number of role expectations in society and this also gives rise to role conflict.

- **Conflict between the interests of the group and the organisation**
  
  What is beneficial to the group spirit of employees is not necessarily beneficial to the organisation and may hence lead to conflict among employees.

- **Conflict associated with personal values and convictions**
  
  People can also experience role conflict associated with the task that they are required to carry out and with their personal values and convictions.

Anxiety, tension and stress

Employees who do not know what is expected from them often experience anxiety, tension and stress because of misunderstandings. This becomes even more serious if employees realise that promotions or salary increases are at stake.

- **Poor work performance**
  
  Role ambiguity is often linked to a lack of interest among employees, resulting in reduced performance.

- **Low level of job satisfaction**
  
  If an employee does not know what is expected from him/her he/she will experience low job satisfaction.

Role conflict can be reduced by recommending that employees, who have set excessively high expectations and standards for themselves, should reduce these to a more achievable level.

- **Role problems can be reduced by making the interests of employees in an organisation more compatible with one another.**

- **Efforts can be made to establish the right organisation structure to prevent role problems**

- **Conflicting expectations can be eliminated to prevent role conflicts**

- **Employees in new roles often experience role problems. They should be given enough time to get used to the demands of the new job**

- **The situation in which an employee experience role problems can be restructured. The choices between alternative decisions can thus be simplified for the employee.**
References


Keywords/Concepts

Role expectations: Different behaviours that are expected from someone in a particular role

Role conflict: The simultaneous existence of two or more role expectations.

Role ambiguity: When people feel uncertain about certain aspects of the work.

Role overload: When so many duties and responsibilities are given to a worker that they cannot satisfy all the demands.

Role underload: When too little is expected from an employee.

Unit summary

In this unit you learned that the nature of roles can be described as a pattern of activities associated with certain rights and obligations. Roles also consist of norms and expectations with regard to the way in which a person should behave.