Chapter 3

PART 2: Basic Human Processes

Chapter 3

PERCEPTION AND LEARNING: UNDERSTANDING AND ADAPTING TO THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Chapter Outline

Social Perception and Social Identity: Understanding Others and Ourselves
The Attribution Process: Judging the Causes of Others’ Behavior
Perceptual Biases: Systematic Errors in Perceiving Others
Stereotyping: Fitting People into Categories
Perceiving Others: Organizational Applications
Learning: Adapting to the World Around Us
Training: Learning and Developing Job Skills
Organizational Practices Involving the Use of Reward and Punishment

Special Sections

Making Sense Out of Common Sense
A Creative Approach to Avoiding Stereotyping

In a Diverse World
Performance Evaluations: Comparing the United States and Japan

How to Do It
Using 360-Degree Feedback: Three Success Stories
After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Distinguish between the concepts of social perception and social identity.
2. Explain how the attribution process works and describe the various sources of bias in social perception.
3. Understand how the process of social perception operates in the context of performance appraisals, employment interviews, and the cultivation of corporate images.
4. Define learning and describe the two types most applicable to OB: operant conditioning and observational learning.
5. Describe how principles of learning are involved in organizational training and innovative reward systems.
6. Compare the way organizations use reward in organizational behavior management programs and how they can use punishment most effectively when administering discipline.

Preview Case

Keeping the Enterprise Growing

In 1957, Jack Taylor, the sales manager of a Cadillac dealership in St. Louis, had an intriguing idea: Instead of selling cars outright, it might be more profitable to rent them repeatedly on a short-term basis. Enterprise Rent-A-Car was born. Rather than competing with industry giants Hertz and Avis, who targeted business travelers by offering rentals at airports, Taylor aimed Enterprise toward a different market—individuals seeking temporary replacements for their damaged or stolen cars. From this modest start, Enterprise Rent-A-Car has grown into a company with more than 57,000 employees in 6,800 offices (within 15 minutes of 90 percent of the U.S. population). And, with over 800,000 vehicles in operation it is the largest car rental company in North America.

As the business was growing, Taylor’s son, Andy, helped his father by working in rental branches, assisting customers, washing cars, doing whatever was needed. Picking up all he could about the business, Andy Taylor worked his way up the ladder and now is chairman and CEO. Under his leadership, Enterprise quickly became a multibillion-dollar company (revenue of about $9 billion in 2006) that expanded into Europe (the United Kingdom, Germany, and Ireland) and developed spin-off businesses (e.g., corporate fleet services and truck rental).

To help ensure success, Taylor works tirelessly, acknowledging that “It doesn’t matter how smart or talented you are if you are not willing to put in the work for future success.” To ensure that employees do, he put a plan into place that rewards them for their performance. From the assistant manager level upward, Enterprise employees are paid a salary plus a percentage of their branch’s profits. As a result, they benefit directly from their hard work and those of their teammates with whom they work closely.

Taylor acknowledges that the business experience he got on the job was invaluable, saying, “Through my early experiences at Enterprise I was able to see firsthand the importance of customer service and employee development.” So that today’s employees can benefit from the same types of experiences, Enterprise promotes people from within the company. In fact almost all of the company’s senior managers started out staffing rental offices and worked their way up the corporate ladder as management trainees. In fact, Taylor believes that advancing in Enterprise’s training program is like picking up your MBA on the job—“an MBA without the IOU,” as he puts it.

Andy Taylor emphasizes that Enterprise’s success comes not from an overarching focus on profit, but the fundamental belief that he and his father share—that profit follows naturally when you put people first. Indeed, making Enterprise a pleasant place for people
to do business is the company’s objective. One way Taylor does this is by visiting local
offices to keep his finger on the pulse of the business—and to not pass up any opportuni-
ties to share his beliefs about the importance of keeping customers satisfied. He also puts
people first by giving back to the community by making generous donations (both personal
and corporate) to local charity groups, such as the United Way. As Taylor put it, “It will be
very satisfying if people say that, no matter how big our company got, we always stayed
true to our goals of putting people first and always doing the right thing.”

Based on recent indications, this is being recognized by others: In 2006, Enterprise was
named as the best rental car company (by Market Mettix) and the rental car company ranked
highest in customer satisfaction (by J. D. Power and Associates), and in 2007 it was featured
as offering the best entry-level jobs (in Princeton Review). If there is any merit to these
accolades, it’s safe to say that Mr. Taylor’s approach to business appears to be paying off.

Clearly, Enterprise Rent-A-Car represents a major business success. We believe that OB
plays a big part in this for two reasons. First, it’s clear that Andy Taylor learned a great
deal about what it took to succeed by observing his father. And learning, as you might
imagine, is a vital process when it comes to performing effectively on the job, whether it’s
at the very top, as in this case, or learning lower-level skills. Second, Mr. Taylor demon-
strated a keen sensitivity to his employees, recognizing how they felt and how they wished
to be treated. At the same time, he also was concerned about the way other people perceived
him and the company, a key element of the process known as social perception.

Because social perception and learning are so fundamental to the way people behave
in organizations, we devote this chapter to describing these topics in detail. Specifically,
we begin by discussing the various processes that are responsible for social perception,
and discuss the specific ways they operate in organizations. Then, we move on to the
topic of learning. Here too, we cover both the basic principles that are responsible for
successful learning, followed by specific applications of these principles on the job. After
reading this chapter, you will come away with a good understanding of some of the basic
psychological processes that occur not only at Enterprise, but in all organizations on an
ongoing basis.

Social Perception and Social Identity: Understanding
Others and Ourselves

Obviously, when it comes to forming opinions about people, there is a subtle, yet powerful,
process going on—a process by which people come to judge and understand the people
and things with which they come into contact. This process, known as social perception,
will be described here. Then, after focusing on how we come to make judgments of others,
we will examine the other side of the coin—namely, how we come to develop identities of
ourselves. As you read about these phenomena, you will learn about processes that are so
basic that you probably never thought about them before. As you will see, a great deal of
insight can be derived by making explicit these important processes that we generally take
for granted.

Social Perception: What Are Others Like?

Suppose you meet your new boss. You know her general reputation as a manager, you see
the way she looks, hear the words she says, and read the memos she writes. In no time at
all, you’re trying to figure her out. Will she be easy to work with? Will she like you? Will
she do a good job for the company? On the basis of whatever information you have avail-
able to you, even if it’s very little, you will try to understand her and how you will be
affected by her (see Figure 3.1). Put differently, you will attempt to combine the various
things you learn about her into a meaningful picture. This process is known as social
perception—the process of combining, integrating, and interpreting information about
others to gain an accurate understanding of them.

social perception
The process of combining,
integrating, and interpreting
information about others to gain
an accurate understanding of
them.
Meeting New People: An Opportunity for Social Perception

Meeting new people presents many opportunities to combine, integrate, and interpret a great deal of information about them—the process of social perception.

The social perception process is so automatic that we are almost never aware that it's happening. Yet it goes on all the time in organizations. Indeed, other people—whether they're bosses, coworkers, subordinates, family, or friends—can have profound effects on us. To understand the people around us—to figure out who they are and why they do what they do—may be very helpful. After all, you wouldn't want to ask your boss for a raise when you believe he or she is in a bad mood! Clearly, social perception is very important in organizations, which is why we examine it so carefully in this chapter. 1

Specifically, we explore various aspects of the social perception process in the sections that follow. To begin, we describe the attribution process—that is, the way people come to judge the underlying causes of others' behavior. Then we will note various imperfections of this process, errors and sources of bias that contribute to inaccurate judgments of others—as well as ways of overcoming them. Finally, we will highlight specific ways in which the attribution process is used in organizations. Before getting to this, however, we first turn attention to an even more basic matter—coming to understand who we are, ourselves.

Social Identity: Who Are You?

How would you answer if someone asked, “Who are you?” There are many things you could say. For example, you could focus on individual characteristics, such as your appearance, your personality, and your special skills and interests—that is, your personal identity. You also could answer in terms of the various groups to which you belong, saying, for example, that you are a student in a particular organizational behavior class, an employee of a certain company, or a citizen of a certain country—that is, your social identity. The conceptualization known as social identity theory recognizes that the way we perceive others and ourselves is based on both our unique characteristics (i.e., personal identity) and our membership in various groups (i.e., social identity). 2 For an overview of this approach, see Figure 3.2.

Social identity theory claims that the way we identify ourselves is likely to be based on our uniqueness in a group. Say, for example, that you are the only business major in an English class. In this situation, you will be likely to identify yourself as “the business major,” and so too will others come to recognize you as such. In other words, that will become your identity in this particular situation. Because we belong to many groups, we are likely to have several unique aspects of ourselves to use as the basis for establishing our identities (e.g., you may be the only left-handed person, the only one to have graduated...
FIGURE 3.2
Social Identity Theory: An Overview

According to social identity theory, people identify themselves in terms of their individual characteristics and their own group memberships. They then compare themselves to other individuals and groups to help define who they are, both to themselves and others.

Who am I?
- I am 6 feet tall
- I am outgoing
- I am interested in sports

Who am I compared to...
- Other individuals
- Members of other groups

PERSONAL IDENTITY
(my characteristics)
- I am 6 feet tall
- I am outgoing
- I am interested in sports

SOCIAL IDENTITY
(groups to which I belong)
- I am an American
- I am an employee of XYZ Company
- I am a student at Big State University

A question we often ask about others is “why?” Why did Tonya not return my call? Why did John goof up the order? Why did the company president make the policy she did? When we ask such questions, we are attempting to get at two different types of information: (1) What...
is someone really like? (that is, what traits and characteristics does he or she possess?) and (2) what made the person behave as he or she did? (that is, what accounted for his or her actions?). As we will see, people attempt to answer these questions in different ways.5

**Making Correspondent Inferences: Using Acts to Judge Dispositions**

Situations frequently arise in organizations in which we want to know what someone is like. Is your opponent a tough negotiator? Are your coworkers prone to be punctual? The more you know about what people are like, the better equipped you are to know what to expect and how to deal with them. How, precisely, do we go about identifying another’s traits?

Generally speaking, the answer is that we learn about others by observing their behavior and then inferring their traits from this information. The judgments we make about what someone is like based on what we have observed about him or her are known as correspondent inferences.6 Simply put, correspondent inferences are judgments about people’s dispositions, their traits and characteristics that correspond to what we have observed of their actions (see Figure 3.3).

**Challenges In Judging Others Accurately.** At first blush, it would appear to be a simple matter to infer what people are like based on their behavior. A person with a disorganized desk may be perceived as being sloppy. Someone who slips on the shop floor may be considered clumsy. Such judgments might be accurate, but not necessarily! After all, the messy desk actually may be the result of a coworker rummaging through it to find an important report. Similarly, the person who slipped could have encountered oily conditions under which anyone, even the least clumsy individual, would have fallen. In other words, it is important to recognize that the judgments we make about someone may be inaccurate because there are many possible causes of his or her behavior. Someone’s underlying characteristics certainly may play a large role in determining what they do, but as we will explain in the next section, it is also possible for behavior to be shaped by external forces. (In our examples, these external factors would be the coworker’s actions and the slippery floor.) For this reason, correspondent inferences may not always be accurate.

Correspondent inferences also might not be accurate because people on the job tend to conceal some of their traits—especially those likely to be viewed as negative. So, for example, a sloppy individual may work hard in public to appear to be organized. Likewise, the unprincipled person may talk a good show about the importance of being ethical. In other words, people often do their best to disguise some of their basic traits. In summary, because behavior is complex and has many different causes, and because people sometimes purposely disguise their true characteristics, forming correspondent inferences is a risky business.

![Diagram](image_url)

**FIGURE 3.3**

**Correspondent Inferences: Judging Dispositions Based on Behavior**

One of the ways in which we come to judge what others are like is by making inferences about them that follow from what we have observed of their behavior. Such judgments, known as correspondent inferences, are frequently misleading. How might the inference summarized here be inaccurate?
Making Accurate Inferences About Others. Despite such difficulties, we can use several techniques to help make more accurate correspondent inferences.

First, we can focus on others’ behavior in situations in which they do not have to behave in a pleasant or socially acceptable manner. For example, anyone would behave in a courteous manner toward the president of the company, so when people do so, we don’t learn too much about them. However, only those who are really courteous would be expected to behave politely toward someone of much lower rank—that is, someone toward whom they don’t have to behave politely. In other words, someone who is polite toward the company president, but condescending toward a secretary is probably really arrogant. The way people behave in situations in which a certain behavior is not clearly expected of them may reveal a great deal about their basic traits and motives.

Similarly, we can learn a great deal about someone by focusing on behavior for which there appears to be only a single logical explanation. For example, imagine finding out that your friend accepts a new job. Upon questioning him, you learn that the position is very high paying, involves interesting work, and is in a desirable location. What have you learned about what’s important to your friend? Not too much. After all, any of these are good reasons to consider taking a position. Now, imagine finding out that the work is very demanding and that the job is in an undesirable location, but that it pays very well. In this case, you’re more prone to learn something about your friend—namely, that he highly values money. Clearly, the opportunity to make accurate correspondent inferences about people is far greater in situations in which there is only one plausible explanation for their behavior.

Causal Attribution of Responsibility: Answering the Question “Why?”

Imagine finding out that your boss just fired one of your fellow employees. Naturally, you’d ask yourself, “Why did he do that?” Was it because your coworker violated the company’s code of conduct? Or was it because the boss is a cruel and heartless person? These two answers to the question “why?” represent two major classes of explanations for the causes of someone’s behavior:

- **Internal causes of behavior**—explanations based on actions for which the individual is responsible.
- **External causes of behavior**—explanations based on situations over which the individual has no control.

In our example, the internal cause would be the person’s violation of the rules, and the external cause would be the boss’s cruel and arbitrary behavior.

Generally speaking, it is very important to be able to determine whether an internal or an external cause was responsible for someone’s behavior. Knowing why something happened to someone else might better help you prepare for what might happen to you. For example, in this case, if you believe that your colleague was fired because of something for which she was responsible herself, such as violating a company rule, then you might not feel as vulnerable as you would if you thought she was fired because of the arbitrary, spiteful nature of your boss. In the later case, you might decide to take some precautionary actions, to do something to protect yourself from your boss, such as staying on his good side, or even giving up and finding a new job—before you are forced to do so.

Kelley’s Theory of Causal Attribution. When it comes to social perception, the question of interest to social scientists is: How do people go about judging whether someone’s actions were caused by internal or external factors based on three types of information: consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness.

- **Consensus**
  
  In Kelley’s theory of causal attribution, information regarding the extent to which other people behave in the same manner as the person we’re judging.

- **Consensus**

  - The approach suggesting that people will believe others’ actions to be caused by internal or external factors based on three types of information: consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness.

- **Kelley’s theory of causal attribution**

  The approach suggesting that people will believe others’ actions to be caused by internal or external factors based on three types of information: consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness.

- **Kelley’s Theory of Causal Attribution**

  When it comes to social perception, the question of interest to social scientists is: How do people go about judging whether someone’s actions were caused by internal or external causes? An answer to this question is provided by **Kelley’s theory of causal attribution**. According to this conceptualization, we base our judgments of internal and external causality on observations we make with respect to three types of information. These are as follows:

  - **Consensus**

    - The extent to which other people behave in the same manner as the person we’re judging. If others do behave similarly, consensus is considered high; if they do not, consensus is considered low.
Consistency—the extent to which the person we’re judging acts the same way at other times. If the person does act the same at other times, consistency is high; if he or she does not, then consistency is low.

Distinctiveness—the extent to which a person behaves in the same manner in other contexts. If he or she behaves the same way in other situations, distinctiveness is low; if he or she behaves differently, distinctiveness is high.

According to the theory, after collecting this information, we combine what we have learned to make our attributions of causality. Here’s how. If we learn that other people act like this one (consensus is high), this person behaves in the same manner at other times (consistency is high), and that this person does not act in the same manner in other situations (distinctiveness is high), we are likely to conclude that this person’s behavior stemmed from external causes. In contrast, imagine learning that other people do not act like this one (consensus is low), this person behaves in the same manner at other times (consistency is high), and that this person acts in the same manner in other situations (distinctiveness is low). In this case, we would conclude that this person’s behavior stemmed from internal causes.

An Example. Because this explanation is highly abstract, let’s consider an example that helps illustrate how the process works. Imagine that you’re at a business lunch with several of your company’s sales representatives when the sales manager makes some critical remarks about the restaurant’s food and service. Further imagine that no one else in your party acts this way (consensus is low), you have heard her say the same things during other visits to the restaurant (consistency is high), and that you have seen her acting critically in other settings, such as the regional sales meeting (distinctiveness is low). What would you conclude in this situation? Probably that she is a “picky” person, someone who is difficult to please. In other words, her behavior stems from internal causes.

Now, imagine the same setting, but with different observations. Suppose that several other members of your group also complain about the restaurant (consensus is high), that you have seen this person complain in the same restaurant at other times (consistency is high), but that you have never seen her complain about anything else before (distinctiveness is high). By contrast, in this case, you probably would conclude that the restaurant really is inferior. In this case, the sales manager’s behavior stems from external causes. For a summary of these contrasting conclusions, and an example, see Figure 3.4.

![Figure 3.4: Kelley’s Theory of Causal Attribution: A Summary](image-url)
Perceptual Biases: Systematic Errors in Perceiving Others

Computers may analyze information in an accurate, unbiased, tireless fashion, but the same cannot be said about human beings. We are far from perfect when it comes to gathering information about others and then making judgments about them. In fact, it is more likely to be the rule than the exception that our judgments of others will be imperfect. After all, we are not exactly unbiased in the judgments we make. As you might imagine, this can lead to serious problems for individuals and the organizations in which they work. In this section, we explore this state of affairs in some detail.

Researchers have noted that there are several systematic biases that interfere with making completely accurate judgments of others. These reflect systematic biases in the ways we think about others in general. Collectively, these biases are referred to as perceptual biases. We consider several such biases in this section of the chapter.

The Fundamental Attribution Error

Despite what Kelley’s theory may imply, people are not equally predisposed to reach judgments regarding internal and external causality. Rather, they are more likely to explain others’ actions in terms of internal causes rather than external causes. In other words, we are prone to assume that others’ behavior is due to the way they are, their traits and dispositions (e.g., “she’s just that kind of person”). So, for example, we are more likely to assume that someone who shows up for work late does so because she is lazy rather than because she got caught in traffic. This perceptual bias is so strong that it has been referred to as the fundamental attribution error.8

This particular bias stems from the fact that it is far simpler to explain someone’s actions in terms of his or her traits than to recognize the complex pattern of situational factors that may have affected their actions. As you might imagine, this tendency can be quite damaging in organizations. Specifically, it leads us to prematurely assume that people are responsible for the negative things that happen to them (e.g., “he wrecked the company car because he is careless”), without considering external alternatives, ones that may be less damning (e.g., “another driver hit the car”). And this can lead to inaccurate judgments about people.

The Halo Effect: Keeping Perceptions Consistent

Have you ever heard someone say something like, “She’s very smart, so she also must be hard-working”? Or, “He’s not too bright, so I guess he’s lazy”? If so, then you are already aware of a common perceptual bias known as the halo effect.9 Once we form a positive impression of someone, we tend to view the things that person does in favorable terms—even things about which we have no knowledge. Similarly, a generally negative impression of someone is likely to be associated with negative evaluations of that person’s behavior. Both of these tendencies are referred to as halo effects (even the negative case, despite the fact that the word “halo” has positive connotations).

In organizations, the halo effect often occurs when superiors rate subordinates using a formal performance appraisal form. In this context (which we will describe more fully later in this chapter), a manager evaluating one of his or her employees highly on some dimensions may assume that an individual who is so good at this particular thing also must be good at other things. The manager would then be likely to evaluate that person highly on other dimensions (see Figure 3.5). Put differently, the halo effect may be responsible for finding high correlations between the ratings given to people on various dimensions. When this occurs, the resulting evaluations are lacking in accuracy, and the quality of the resulting evaluations is compromised.

The halo effect applies not only to individuals, but to work teams as well (a topic we will discuss in Chapter 8). Consider, for example, the way we tend to bias our perceptions of the teams for which we root as sports fans. Because we desire to see our team in a favorable light, we attribute positive characteristics to it when it wins (“This is the greatest team
The more favorably someone is perceived on some characteristics, the more likely that individual will be perceived favorably on other characteristics, too.

FIGURE 3.5
The Halo Effect: A Demonstration
One manifestation of the halo effect is the tendency for people rating others to give either consistently high ratings (if the individual is generally perceived in a positive manner), or low ratings (if the individual is generally perceived in a negative manner). Because each rating dimension is not considered independently, inaccurate evaluations may result.

team halo effect
The tendency for people to credit teams for their successes but not to hold them accountable for their failures.

similar-to-me effect
The tendency for people to perceive in a positive light others who are believed to be similar to themselves in any of several different ways.

selective perception
The tendency to focus on some aspects of the environment while ignoring others.

However, if our team loses, we tend to blame the loss on the mistakes or poor performance of one particular player ("The team is still good, but that one player ruined it for us"). This is known as the team halo effect—the tendency for people to credit teams for their successes but not to hold them accountable for their failures.

The team halo effect has been demonstrated clearly in a recent study. In this investigation researchers asked college students to recall either a successful team experience or an unsuccessful team experience in which they had participated. They were then asked to complete a questionnaire indicating the extent to which they attributed that outcome to either the team as a whole or to the performance of a particular individual. The results, summarized in Figure 3.6, support the existence of the team halo effect. Specifically, whereas the team as a whole was believed to be much more responsible for good performance than for poor performance, specific team members were believed to be only slightly more responsible for good performance than for poor performance. In fact, participants attributed poor team performance more to certain individuals on the team than to the teams as a whole.

The Similar-to-Me Effect: “If You’re Like Me, You Must Be Pretty Good”
Another common type of perceptual bias involves the tendency for people to perceive more favorably others who are like themselves than those who are dissimilar. This tendency, known as the similar-to-me effect, constitutes a potential source of bias when it comes to judging other people. In fact, research has shown that when superiors rate their subordinates, the more similar the parties are, the higher the rating the superior tends to give. This tendency applies with respect to several different dimensions of similarity, such as similarity of work values and habits, similarity of beliefs about the way things should be at work, and similarity with respect to demographic variables (such as age, race, gender, and work experience).

This effect appears to be partly the result of the tendency for people to be able to empathize and relate better to similar others and to be more lenient toward them. However, it also appears that subordinates tend to be more trusting and confident in supervisors whom they perceive as similar to themselves than those perceived as dissimilar. As a result, they may have a more positive relationship with such individuals, and this may lead superiors to judge similar subordinates more favorably.

Selective Perception: Focusing on Some Things While Ignoring Others
Another perceptual bias, known as selective perception, refers to the tendency for individuals to focus on certain aspects of the environment while ignoring others. Insofar as we operate in complex environments in which there are many stimuli that demand our attention, it makes sense that we tend to be selective, narrowing our perceptual fields.
Evidence for the Team Halo Effect

According to the team halo effect, people tend to recognize teams more for their successes than for their failures. This effect was demonstrated in an experiment showing that people held teams much more responsible for good performance than for poor performance whereas individual team members were considered only slightly more responsible for good performance than for poor performance.

Source: Based on data reported by Naquin & Tynan, 2003; see Note 10.

This constitutes a bias insofar as it limits our attention to some stimuli while heightening our attention to other stimuli.

As you might imagine, this process occurs in organizations. In fact, research has shown that top executives asked to indicate the functions of their organizations that contribute most strongly to its effectiveness tend to cite functional areas that matched their backgrounds. For example, executives whose backgrounds were in sales and marketing perceived changes in a company’s line of products and services as being most important. Similarly, those who worked previously in research and development focused more on product designs than on other issues in their perceptions of the business environment. In other words, executives tend to be affected by selective perception. That is, they give greatest attention to those aspects of the business environment that match their background experiences. Keeping this tendency in mind, it is easy to understand why different people may perceive the same situations very differently.

First-Impression Error: Confirming One’s Expectations

Often, the way we judge someone is not based solely on how well that person performs now, but rather, our initial judgments of that individual—that is, our first impressions. To the extent that our initial impressions guide our subsequent impressions, we have been victimized by first-impression error.

As you might imagine, this error can be especially problematic in organizations, where accurately judging others’ performance is a crucial managerial task. When a subordinate’s performance has improved, that needs to be recognized, but to the extent that current evaluations are based on poor first impressions, recognizing such improvement is impossible. Likewise, inaccurate assessments of performance will result when initially good performers leave positive impressions that linger on even when confronted with evidence suggesting that one’s performance has dropped (for a summary, see Figure 3.7).

Research suggests that the first-impression error may take very subtle forms. For example, in one study, corporate interviewers evaluated prospective job applicants by viewing the application blanks and test scores of prospective employees. The more highly
Interviewers judged the applicants based on these two criteria alone, the more positively the applicants were treated during the interview process. In fact, candidates who made initially positive impressions were treated more positively during the interview (e.g., they were spoken to in a more pleasant interpersonal style). Thus, instead of using the interviews to gather additional unbiased information, as you would expect (and hope!), the recruiters studied appeared to use the interviews simply to confirm the first impressions they had already developed on the basis of the test scores and application blanks. This study provides clear evidence of the first-impression error in action.

Because the perceptual errors we’ve discussed thus far can lead to poor judgment on the job, it’s important to consider some ways of overcoming them. For some suggestions in this regard, see the suggestions summarized in Table 3.1. Although some of these guidelines may be difficult to follow, they can help the many forms of perceptual errors we’ve discussed thus far. As such, the effort required to put them into practice promises to be well worthwhile.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecies: The Pygmalion Effect and the Golem Effect

In case it already isn’t apparent just how important perceptions are in the workplace, consider the fact that the way we perceive others actually can dictate how effectively people will work. Put differently, perceptions can influence reality! This is the idea behind what is known as the self-fulfilling prophecy—the tendency for someone’s expectations about another to cause that individual to behave in a manner consistent with those expectations.

Self-fulfilling prophecies can take both positive and negative forms. In the positive case, holding high expectations of another tends to improve that individual’s performance. This is known as the Pygmalion effect. This effect was demonstrated in a study of Israeli soldiers who were taking a combat command course. The four instructors who taught the course were told that certain trainees had high potential for success, whereas the others had either normal potential or an unknown amount of potential. In reality, the trainees identified as belonging to each of these categories were assigned to that condition at random.
TABLE 3.1 Suggestions for Overcoming Bias in Social Perception

Biases in social perception are inevitable. Fortunately, however, there are things we can do to reduce their impact. Here are several guidelines to follow to help you perceive others more accurately in the workplace. We realize that many of these tactics are far easier to say than to do. However, to the extent that we conscientiously try to apply these suggestions to our everyday interactions with others in the workplace, we stand a good chance of perceiving people more accurately.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not overlook the external causes of others’ behavior.</td>
<td>The fundamental attribution error leads us to discount the possibility that people’s poor performance may be due to conditions beyond their control. To combat this, ask yourself if anyone else might have performed just as poorly under the same conditions. If the answer is yes, then you should not automatically assume that the poor performer is to blame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate people based on objective factors.</td>
<td>The more objective the information you use to judge others, the less your judgments will be subjected to perceptual distortion. So, whenever possible, judge work performance more on quantifiable measures of quantity (e.g., sales volume) and quality (e.g., error rate) than on personal judgments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid making rash judgments.</td>
<td>It is human nature to jump to conclusions about people, but when you can, take the time to get to know people better before judging them. What you learn may make a big difference in your opinion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite this, trainees who were believed to have high potential were found at the end of the training session to be more successful (e.g., they had higher test scores). This demonstrates the Pygmalion effect: Instructors who expected their trainees to do well found that the trainees actually did so.

Researchers also have found that the self-fulfilling prophecy works in the negative direction—that is, low expectations of success lead to poor performance. This is known as the Golem effect. Illustrating the Golem effect, researchers have found that paratroopers whose instructors expected them to perform poorly in their training class did, in fact, perform worse than those about whom instructors had no advance expectations. Clearly, this effect can be quite devastating, but fortunately, it can be overcome.

A recent study compared the performance of female military recruits enrolled in a special training program for Israeli soldiers whose limited schooling and mental test scores put them at risk for success in the military. Platoon leaders in the experimental group were told, “You will be training recruits whose average ability is significantly higher than usual for special recruits” and that “you can expect better than average achievement from the recruits in your platoon.” Leaders of the control group were not given any such information, and their recruits showed the Golem effect. However, no such effect was found in the experimental group, suggesting that even those who are expected to perform poorly can be kept from doing so by being led to believe that success is possible.

Why do self-fulfilling prophecies occur, both the Pygmalion effect and the Golem effect? Research into the underlying processes responsible for self-fulfilling prophecies suggest that both types of self-fulfilling prophecies operate according to the four steps summarized in Figure 3.8.

The lesson to be learned from research on self-fulfilling prophecies is very clear: Managers should take concrete steps to promote the Pygmalion effect and to discourage the Golem effect. When leaders display enthusiasm toward people and express optimism about each person’s potential, such positive expectations become contagious and spread throughout the organization. As a case in point, consider the great enthusiasm and support that Gordon Bethune showed toward employees of Continental Airlines in 1995 when he took over as that bankrupt company’s CEO. It would have been easy for him to be unsupportive and to show his disappointment with the workforce, but he did just the opposite.

Golem effect
A negative instance of the self-fulfilling prophecy, in which people holding low expectations of another tend to lower that individual’s performance.
CHAPTER 3 • PERCEPTION AND LEARNING: UNDERSTANDING AND ADAPTING TO THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Only a few years after Bethune was at the helm, the airline turned around to become one of the most successful carriers in the sky today. Although the changes he made to the airline’s systems and equipment helped, these things alone would not have been enough if the employees felt like failures. Indeed, Bethune’s acceptance and enthusiasm toward members of Continental’s workforce contributed greatly to giving the encouragement needed to bring the airline “from worst to first.”

Stereotyping: Fitting People into Categories

What comes to mind when you think about people who wear glasses? Are they studious? Eggheads? Although there is no evidence of such a connection, it is interesting to note that for many people, such an image lingers in their minds. Of course, this is only one example. You can probably think of many other commonly held beliefs about the characteristics of people belonging to specific groups. Such statements usually take the form: “People from group X possess characteristic Y.” In most cases, the characteristics described tend to be negative. Assumptions of this type are referred to as stereotypes—beliefs that members of specific groups tend to share similar traits and behaviors.

Deep down inside many of us know, of course, that not all people belonging to a specific group possess the negative characteristics with which we associate them. In other words, most of us accept that the stereotypes we use are at least partially inaccurate. After all, not all X’s are Y; there are exceptions (maybe even quite a few!). If so, then why are stereotypes so prevalent? Why do we use them?

Why Do We Rely on Stereotypes?

To a great extent the answer resides in the fact that people tend to do as little cognitive work as possible when it comes to thinking about others. That is, we tend to rely on mental shortcuts. If assigning people to groups allows us to assume that we know what they are like and how they may act, then we can save the tedious work of learning about them as individuals. After all, we come into contact with so many people that it’s impractical, if not impossible, to learn everything about them we need to know. So, we rely on readily available information—such as someone’s age, race, gender, or job type—as the basis for organizing our perceptions in a coherent way. It’s simply efficient to do so.

FIGURE 3.8

The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: A Summary

The processes underlying the self-fulfilling prophecy are summarized here. As indicated, it may produce positive effects (known as the Pygmalion effect) or negative effects (known as the Golem effect).
So for example, if you believe that members of group X (those who wear glasses, for example) tend to possess trait Y (studiousness, in this case), then simply observing that someone falls into category X becomes the basis for your believing that he or she possesses Y. To the extent that the stereotype applies in this case, then the perception will be accurate. However, such mental shorthand often leads us to make inaccurate judgments about people. This is the price we pay for using stereotypes.

The Dangers of Using Stereotypes in Organizations

The problem with stereotypes, of course, is that they lead us to judge people prematurely, without the benefit of learning more about them than just the categories into which they fit. Still, we all rely on stereotypes at least sometimes; their temptation is far too great to resist.

Negative Organizational Impact: Inaccurate Information. As you might imagine, organizational decisions can only be as good as the accuracy of the information that goes into making them (we will discuss this in detail in Chapter 10). Because stereotypes often are inaccurate, it’s easy to imagine how using them can have detrimental effects on the kinds of judgments people make in organizations. For example, if a human resources officer believes that members of certain groups are lazy, then she purposely may avoid hiring or promoting individuals who belong to those groups. That officer may firmly believe that she is using good judgment—gathering all the necessary information and listening to the candidate carefully. Still, without being aware of it, the stereotypes she holds may influence the way she judges certain individuals. If the individual in question would have been a good hire, the company loses out—and of course, so too does the individual.

The result, of course, is that the fate of the individual in question is sealed in advance—not necessarily because of anything he or she may have done or said, but by the mere fact that he or she belongs to a certain group. In other words, even people who might not intend to act in a bigoted fashion still may be influenced by the stereotypes they hold.

Negative Individual Impact: Stereotype Threats. It is important to note that stereotypes don’t influence only how people are perceived and treated by those who hold stereotypes, but also how members of stereotyped groups act as a result. Consider, for example, how people tend to live up to—or more properly, “down to”—the negative stereotypes that people hold about them. In an important study, African Americans and whites took a verbal ability test. Consistent with the stereotype that they are intellectually inferior (although actually false), the African Americans performed more poorly than the whites. But, this occurred only when the test was described as a measure of intelligence. In other words, the African Americans conformed to the stereotype. Importantly, however, when the same test was given to a comparable group of African Americans and whites, but was described in ways that suggested nothing about intelligence, both groups performed equally well.

This idea—that stereotypes constrain behavior when a member of a stereotyped group is placed in a situation in which poor performance can be taken as an indication of the group’s deficiency—is the basis of what is known as a stereotype threat. Specifically, a stereotype threat is the uncomfortable feeling that people have when they run the risk of fulfilling a negative stereotype associated with a group to which they belong. Apparently, individuals facing situations in which they run the risk of substantiating a negative stereotype become so fearful of performing poorly in that situation that their performance actually suffers, making it possible for them to be taken as evidence of the very stereotype that they hoped to disprove (for a summary, see Figure 3.9).

Stereotype threats apply not only to African Americans, but to any group whose members are subjected to stereotypes—which, potentially, is anyone. In one study, for example, a stereotype threat was created in a group of white male students by telling them that the research in which they were participating was designed to determine why Asian students perform better than Caucasians on tests of mathematical ability. It was found that these participants performed significantly more poorly than a comparable group of white men who were not told anything about the reason for the test (i.e., a control group in which
Performance is lower (in keeping with stereotype) when negative stereotype is identified than when not identified. Yes No

Performance on the Stereotyped Dimension

Expected performance based on stereotype

When members of a negatively stereotyped group are in a situation in which poor performance can be taken as an indication of their group’s deficiency, they tend to substantiate the stereotype by performing poorly. The uncomfortable feeling experienced in this situation is known as a stereotype threat. Everyone is subject to experiencing stereotype threats.

In some cases, the negative effects of stereotyping go beyond hurt feelings, lowered performance and lost opportunities. Stereotyping also can be very costly to its victims financially. A study by the National Bureau of Economic Research conducted over a 10-year period found that white women who were overweight by an average of 65 pounds earned hourly wages that were, on average, 7 percent lower than wages of their nonoverweight counterparts. As the scientists noted, that’s like losing the pay boost that would have been earned by a year of education or three years of work experience. Interestingly, both overweight and nonoverweight women held the same kinds of jobs and had the same levels of experience, suggesting that the lower pay of obese women reflects society’s negative stereotypes toward them. It’s fascinating to note that the same effects of weight on pay were not found among African American women. Although there may be several possible explanations for this racial difference, greater acceptance of different body types and fewer negative stereotypes about obese women among African Americans appears to be a key factor.

It’s important to acknowledge that the effects of stereotyping others are not always as profound. Referring to accountants as “bean counters” and professors as “absent minded” are observations that also reflect stereotypes—ones that appear to be only mildly negative. Still, it must be cautioned that holding stereotypes of people in various groups run the risks of promoting unfair discrimination (Chapter 6), causing miscommunication (Chapter 9), and generating interpersonal conflict (Chapter 11). Given the problems associated with stereotyping, it is important to consider ways of combating it. For a look into this issue, see the OB: Making Sense Out of Common Sense section on page 104.

**Perceiving Others: Organizational Applications**

Thus far, we have identified some of the basic processes of social perception and have alluded to ways in which they are involved in organizational behavior. Now, in this section,
As you know from experience, it’s hard to refrain from stereotyping. It comes to us automatically and we do it unintentionally. If you have an image of a particular group in mind, you will be inclined to conjure it up whenever you encounter a member of that group. Accordingly, it would appear that stereotyping others is something about which we really cannot do too much.

Research has shown, however, that stereotyping might not be as inevitable as you think. What, then, can be done to put the brakes on the stereotyping process? For one, this can occur when people are motivated to keep from stereotyping (e.g., because doing so threatens their images of themselves). In other words, those who really don’t want to engage in stereotyping can keep themselves from doing so. More precisely, they can keep themselves from acting on whatever stereotypes they may have.

However, it’s also possible to ensure that stereotypical images never enter your mind in the first place. In other words, if your thinking takes different routes, it’s possible to avoid activating stereotypes. The trick is to adopt a mindset to “think differently.” After all, if you avoid your typical associations between groups and their stereotypical characteristics, they are unlikely to come to mind.

You might think that you can do this simply by suppressing those thoughts from consciousness. This doesn’t work, however. If you intentionally try to keep a thought out of your head, you actually are making yourself even more aware of it—what scientists refer to as making it “hyper-accessible.” To do this you would have to think about the very thing you want to avoid, which makes you think of it even more. This is known as the rebound effect. So, forcing stereotypes out of your mind isn’t going to help.

There’s another approach, however. Instead of intentionally trying to avoid stereotypes, actually thinking differently by attempting to be creative (see Chapter 14)—or even thinking about times you were creative—can eliminate triggers of the well-established connections on which stereotypical thoughts are based. Research has found that people who were asked to think of various creative things they did over the years were significantly less inclined to describe members of various groups in stereotypical ways than were others who were not asked to think about their own creativity.

Scientists take this as an indication that focusing on “thinking differently” helps people overcome the automatic activation of stereotypes. In other words, adopting the mindset to “think differently” interferes with the kind of thinking required to trigger stereotypes (which, of course, tend to be well engrained).

This raises an important and provocative question: What can be done to discourage stereotyping in the workplace? The answer isn’t easy, of course. In keeping with the rebound effect, simply telling yourself not to engage in stereotyping isn’t going to work. However, keeping yourself thinking creatively, taking different approaches to things in the work you do, is likely to keep your mind from letting those stereotypes come to awareness. This is a fragile process, as you might imagine, because—again, as per the rebound effect—as soon as you catch yourself thinking that you are fighting stereotypes, you are likely to become more aware of them.

Although this notion hasn’t yet been tested in the workplace, it would seem that adopting the “think differently” mindset on a regular basis might be not such a bad idea. For those whose jobs permit creative thinking, and for individuals who are capable of pulling it off, it just may keep stereotypes from entering into your mind. If your focus on thinking differently doesn’t make you any more stereotype-resistant than those around you, then at least your efforts stand to make you more creative, and that can’t hurt (again, see Chapter 14).
The impressions prospective employers form of us may be based on subtle behaviors, such as how we dress and speak, or more elaborate acts, such as announcing our accomplishments (see Figure 3.10). They may be the result of calculated efforts to get others to think of us in a certain way, or be the passive, unintended effects of our actions.

When it comes to the employment interview, for example, there are several things job candidates commonly do to enhance the impressions they make. In an interesting study researchers audiotaped the interviews between college students looking for jobs and representatives of companies that posted openings at the campus job placement center. The various statements made by the candidates were categorized with respect to the impression management techniques they used. Several tactics were commonly observed. Table 3.2 lists these specific tactics, gives an example of each, and shows the percentage of candidates who used these techniques. Interestingly, the most common technique was self-promotion, flatly asserting that one has certain desirable characteristics. In this case, candidates commonly described themselves as being hardworking, interpersonally skilled, goal-oriented, and effective leaders.

Importantly, the study also found that candidates used these impression management techniques with great success. The more they relied on these tactics, the more positively they were viewed by the interviewer along several important dimensions (e.g., fit with the organization). This study not only confirms that job candidates do indeed rely on impression management techniques during job interviews, but also that these cultivate the positive impressions desired. With this in mind, the job interview may be seen as an ongoing effort on behalf of candidates to present themselves favorably, and for interviewers to try to

**FIGURE 3.10**

**Dressing for Success Requires Dressing for the Job**

It’s important for employees to make favorable impressions on their coworkers by wearing the clothing expected of them on the job. For many today, this consists of “business casual” attire. At most small, high-tech companies, for example, where casual dress (sometimes, very casual) is standard, an employee would look out of place showing up in a formal business suit. Likewise, a T-shirt and jeans would make an unfavorable impression in the executive suite, where the classic business suit remains standard attire. The most positive impressions may be made by dressing in the manner considered appropriate for the job.
TABLE 3.2 How Do Job Applicants Go About Presenting Themselves Favorably?

Researchers have systematically recorded and categorized what job applicants say to present themselves favorably to recruiters interviewing them. Here is a list of techniques found during one study along with the percentages of participants using them. Descriptions and examples of each technique are given as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impression Management Technique</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage Using Technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-promotion</td>
<td>Directly describing oneself in a positive manner for the situation at hand (e.g., “I am a hard worker”).</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal stories</td>
<td>Describing past events that make oneself look good (e.g., “In my old job, I worked late anytime it was needed”).</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion conformity</td>
<td>Expressing beliefs that are assumed to be held by the target (e.g., agreeing with something the interviewer says).</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entitlements</td>
<td>Claiming responsibility for successful past events (e.g., “I was responsible for the 90 percent sales increase that resulted”).</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other enhancement</td>
<td>Making statements that flatter, praise, or compliment the target (e.g., “I am very impressed with your company’s growth in recent years”).</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancements</td>
<td>Claiming that a positive event was more positive than it really was (e.g., “Not only did our department improve, it was the best in the entire company”).</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcoming obstacles</td>
<td>Describing how one succeeded despite obstacles that should have lowered performance (e.g., “I managed to get a 3.8 grade point average although I worked two part-time jobs”).</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justifications</td>
<td>Accepting responsibility for one’s poor performance but denying the negative implications of it (e.g., “Our team didn’t win a lot, but it’s just how you play the game that really matters”).</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuses</td>
<td>Denying responsibility for one’s actions (e.g., “I didn’t complete the application form because the placement center ran out of them”).</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on information in Stevens & Kristof, 1995; see Note 31.

See through those attempts, trying to judge candidates accurately. As the evidence suggests, this task may not be as simple as it seems.

Performance Appraisal: Formal Judgments about Job Performance

One of the most obvious instances in which social perception occurs is when someone formally evaluates the job performance of another. This process, known as performance appraisal, may be defined as the process by which people (typically superiors) evaluate the performance of others (typically subordinates), often on an annual or semi-annual basis, usually for purposes of determining raises, promotions, and training needs.32

An Inherently Biased Process. Ideally, this process should be completely rational, leading to unbiased and objective judgments about exactly how well each employee performed and how he or she should be treated. However, based on what we have said about perception thus far, you’re probably not surprised to learn that the performance evaluation process is far from objective. Indeed, people have a limited capacity to process, store, and retrieve information, making them prone to bias when it comes to evaluating others.33

Several such biases have been observed by researchers. For example, it has been found that people’s ratings of others’ performance depends on the extent to which that performance is consistent with their initial expectations. Researchers in one study, for example, asked bank managers to indicate how well they expected their newest tellers to perform their jobs.34 Then, four months later, they were asked to rate the tellers’ actual job performance. It was found that managers gave higher ratings to those tellers whose performance matched their earlier expectations than to those who did either better or worse than predicted. These effects are unsettling insofar as they suggest that the improved performance of some employees may go unrecognized—or, worse yet, be downgraded! Of course, to
the extent that human resource management decisions are made on the basis of several sources of information, besides judgments by a single superior, it is unlikely that such biased judgments will go uncorrected. Nevertheless, these findings clearly underscore a key point: Perceptions are based not only on the characteristics of the person being perceived, but the perceiver as well.

This conclusion is supported by research showing several different attribution biases in evaluations of job performance. Consider, for example, research illustrating how the similar-to-me effect operates in a performance appraisal situation. A study conducted at a bank, for example, has shown that the more tellers do things to cultivate positive impressions on their superiors (e.g., do favors for them, agree with their opinions), the more the superiors view those tellers as being similar to themselves. And, the more similar they are believed to be, the more highly the superiors evaluated their work.35

As you might imagine, employees often attempt to make themselves look good to superiors by offering explanations of their work that focus on the internal reasons underlying their good performance and the external reasons underlying their poor performance. Indeed, two equally good performers are unlikely to receive the same performance ratings when different attributions are made about the underlying causes of their performance. Managers tend to give higher ratings to individuals whose poor performance is attributed to factors outside those individuals’ control (e.g., someone who is trying hard, but is too inexperienced to succeed) than to those whose poor performance they attribute to internal factors (e.g., those who are believed to be capable, but who are just lazy and holding back). In other words, our evaluations of others’ performance are qualified by the nature of the attributions we make about that performance.

Findings such as these illustrate our point that organizational performance evaluations are far from the unbiased, rational procedures one would hope to find. Instead, they represent a complex mix of perceptual biases—effects that must be appreciated and well understood if we are to have any chance of ultimately improving the accuracy of the performance evaluation process. As you will see in the OB in a Diverse World section (p. 108), cultural differences in the performance appraisal process complicate things further.

Corporate Image: Impression Management by Organizations

It is not only individuals who desire to cultivate positive impressions of themselves, but entire organizations too—what has been termed corporate image.36 Just as people can think positive things about you as an individual with respect to many aspects of yourself, so too can corporate images be based on many aspects of an organization’s activities.

Positive Corporate Images: Who Has Them And Why Do They Matter? Each year, Fortune magazine asks thousands of executives to rate the images of companies throughout the world. The survey asks respondents to focus on eight particular aspects of company performance: innovation, employee talent, use of corporate assets, social responsibility, quality of management, financial soundness, long-term investment, and quality of products/services. Recent survey results, Fortune’s top 10 “most admired companies” for 2006, are identified in Table 3.3.37 As you might expect, this list contains lots of familiar names. It also identifies a wide variety of things that companies do that contribute to these positive images.

As you might imagine, the impression an organization makes on people can have a considerable effect on the way they relate to it. Indeed, a positive image pays off handsomely: Companies that present positive images of themselves to the public are favored by consumers. In fact, many individuals go out of their way to support companies that have good images.38 For example, companies adopting sound environmental practices (e.g., by following appropriate laws and guidelines and avoiding unnecessary pollution or other negative environmental practices) enjoy positive corporate images and tend to perform well financially.39

At the other extreme, people sometimes go so far as to boycott organizations that engage in practices they find undesirable. Over the years, for example, some people credit boycotts aimed at Nestlé for getting that company to stop allegedly dangerous practices
Beyond individual biases that make the process of evaluating work performance inherently imprecise, widespread cultural differences also are likely to make a big difference when it comes to performance appraisal. In other words, the way people tend to evaluate others’ work is likely to be influenced by the nations from which they come. This shouldn’t be too surprising if you consider that people from various countries differ with respect to several key variables involved in the performance appraisal process, such as how willing people are to be direct with others and how sensitive they are to differences in status. This point is illustrated clearly by comparing U.S. and Japanese companies with respect to the performance appraisal practices they use.

Although direct supervisors are likely to conduct appraisals in both countries, the ways they go about doing so are very different in several key respects. For example, the American worker’s job performance typically is appraised annually. However, in Japan, judgments of how effectively a worker is developing on the job usually occur monthly. Then, an overall evaluation of performance effectiveness is given only after a long time has passed—usually 12 years—making it possible for a highly meaningful assessment to occur. Although this may make little sense in the United States, where long-term commitments to companies are atypical, this approach is possible in Japan, where employees and companies tend to be highly loyal to each other, and where loyalty is rewarded by lifetime employment and regular promotion.

The United States and Japan differ as well in terms of precisely how performance appraisals are conducted. In the United States, companies almost always rely on an official form to provide a precise written record of a supervisor’s evaluation. In Japan, however, such directness would be considered inappropriate, and comments about performance are handled orally in a very subtle manner. In keeping with their bluntness, Americans generally are not reluctant to rebut (or, at least, to ask questions about) the judgments made about them. However, very few Japanese employees would consider challenging their supervisors so overtly, politely accepting their supervisors’ judgments.

Finally, in the United States, it is almost always the individual worker who is evaluated. In Japan, however, the group or work team tends to be judged as a whole. This reflects the fact that Japanese society generally values collective efforts; people pitching in to work together is what matters most. Americans, by contrast, tend to be far more concerned about their individual performance and their individual rewards.

Although you may find these differences to be interesting curiosities, Americans doing business in Japan and Japanese people doing business in the United States widely recognize the importance of such differences. Indeed, the willingness of American managers from General Motors and Japanese managers from Toyota to understand what it takes to appraise one another’s work is considered a key determinant of the long-term success of the joint venture between these two automotive giants.

regarding sales of its infant formula, and at General Electric (now, the world’s most admired company) for getting it out of the nuclear power plant business. Bottom line: Corporate images matter greatly to consumers.

But consumer support is not the only benefit. Extending our discussion of the job recruitment setting, not only do individual candidates want to make good impressions on prospective employers, but employers want their job offers to be accepted by the best candidates. Research has shown that a company’s image is strongly related to people’s interest in seeking employment with it. Specifically, the more favorably a company’s reputation is considered to be (based on the Fortune magazine survey), the more interested prospective employees are in working there. This is important because to function effectively, organizations must do a good job of recruiting the best prospective employees.

How Are Corporate Images Communicated? In light of the importance of having a positive corporate image, it is important to consider the means through which organizations communicate those images to others. In other words, how do we come to make judgments about what various organizations are like? Obviously, we learn a great deal from stories in the news and from what other people tell us. However, as you might imagine, organizations also take proactive steps to communicate positive images of themselves.
One thing that influences a company’s image is the amount of information people have about it from recruitment ads. In general, longer ads are associated with more positive images. This may not only be because of what is said in the ad, but the mere length of the ad itself. Specifically, because recruitment ads emphasize the benefits of employment with a firm, longer ads describe more benefits than shorter ones, thereby creating even stronger positive images. Moreover, to the extent that people believe that longer ads reflect a company’s commitment to obtaining good employees (by their willingness to invest in a large ad), they may be more impressed with a company as a prospective place to work (see Figure 3.11).

Another mechanism that organizations use to promote their corporate images is their annual reports—a company’s official statement to its stockholders on its activities and financial state. These booklets contain such things as letters from CEOs and descriptions of projects and future plans—in short, information that helps shape the image of the company both in the minds of employees and stockholders.

Traditionally, annual reports have been strikingly beautiful glossy booklets with elaborate photography and glitzy images, trappings of success designed to instill confidence in the minds of investors. In recent years, however, many companies—St. Paul Companies and Avery Dennison among them—have spared such expenses, issuing bare-bones annual reports.46 The reason: To promote an image of austerity. Because today’s

---

**TABLE 3.3 Which Companies Have the Best Reputations?**

Based on a systematic survey of 10,000 executives and experts in various industries, *Fortune* magazine determined the most admired companies for 2006. As indicated, these companies were admired in many different ways.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Admira bile Qualities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>General Electric</td>
<td>Breeds the best management talent and has engaged in some of the most successful management practices. GE also has been very quick to adopt changes when necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>FedEx</td>
<td>Besides offering top delivery service, FedEx also has several programs in place to help sustain the environment. It also offers great perks to employees, such as free rides on its airplanes anywhere in the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Southwest Airlines</td>
<td>The longtime leader in low fares and reliable service, Southwest is one of the very few consistently profitable air carriers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Procter &amp; Gamble</td>
<td>Never staying still, P&amp;G has made enormous investments in scientific research to help make its everyday household products highly innovative. The company also has many initiatives in place to promote diversity in the workplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Starbucks</td>
<td>This profitable company is regarded highly for its generous treatment of its employees (e.g., profit is shared), its socially responsible behavior (e.g., “fair trade” coffee policy), and its high-quality products (around the world, Starbucks’ products are consistently good).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Johnson &amp; Johnson</td>
<td>As the world’s most comprehensive manufacturer of health-care products, J&amp;J is involved actively in research designed to improve the health and well-being of people everywhere. A talented management team has kept the company growing in size and profitable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Berkshire Hathaway</td>
<td>This financial management company regularly has outperformed various stock market indexes. The company is so well managed that despite losses due to Hurricane Katrina, its insurance division, GEICO, has enjoyed unprecedented gains in market share and profitability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dell</td>
<td>In the computer industry, in which many companies (e.g., IBM, Gateway, Compaq) either have shrunk greatly in size or have been forced to consolidate with others, Dell is firmly entrenched as the top manufacturer of personal computers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Toyota</td>
<td>Despite technical problems and resistance from dealers, Toyota’s Prius has proven to be a successful gas-electric hybrid—the first serious alternative to the internal combustion engine in automotive history. The company is highly innovative, although incredibly conservative and methodological in its approach to business and engineering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Microsoft</td>
<td>Ongoing innovations in operating systems and the continuous development of new products have been making Microsoft even more of a leader in the market for computer software than ever. The company also has been extremely generous in giving back to the communities in which it operates.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: Based on information reported by *Fortune*, 2006; see Note 41; and the Web sites of the companies listed.*
FIGURE 3.11
Employee Recruitment Advertising: An Important Way of Promoting a Corporate Image

As you look at this ad, what image comes to mind of the Jersey City Fire Department? Chances are, you think of it as a place in which you can do exciting, challenging work that really makes a difference in the community. This is precisely the image that the Jersey City Fire Department has in mind as it endeavors to attract dedicated firefighters to its force. The fact that you may be getting this impression illustrates just how powerful recruitment ads can be when it comes to promoting corporate images.

Source: Reprinted by permission of the Jersey City Fire Department.

Learning: Adapting to the World Around Us

Thus far in this chapter we have focused on perception, one of the basic human psychological processes most actively involved in explaining behavior in organizations. However, another process is equally important—learning. After all, learning is involved in a broad range of organizational behaviors, ranging from developing new vocational skills, through changing the way people do their jobs, to managing them in ways that foster the greatest productivity. Not surprisingly, the more a company fosters an environment in which employees are able to learn, the more productive and profitable that organization is likely to be.47 Naturally, scientists in the field of OB are extremely interested in understanding the process of learning—both how it occurs, and how it may be applied to the effective functioning of organizations.
Before we turn our attention to these matters, we should first explain exactly what we mean by learning. Specifically, we define learning as a relatively permanent change in behavior occurring as a result of experience. Despite its simplicity, several aspects of this definition bear pointing out. First, it’s clear that learning requires that some kind of change occur. Second, this change must be more than just temporary. Finally, it must be the result of experience—that is, continued contact with the world around us. Given this definition, we cannot say that short-lived performance changes on the job, such as those due to illness or fatigue, are the result of learning. Like so many concepts in the social sciences, learning is a difficult concept for scientists to understand because it cannot be observed directly. Instead, it must be inferred on the basis of relatively permanent changes in behavior.

Although there are several different kinds of learning, we will examine two that are most inclined to occur in organizations. These are operant conditioning and observational learning.

**Operant Conditioning: Learning through Rewards and Punishments**

Imagine you are a chef working at a catering company where you are planning a special menu for a fussy client. If your dinner menu is accepted and the meal is a hit, the company stands a good chance of picking up a huge new account. You work hard at doing the best job possible and present your culinary creation to the skeptical client. Now, how does the story end? If the client loves your meal, your grateful boss gives you a huge raise and a promotion. However, if the client hates it, your boss asks you to turn in your chef’s hat. Regardless of which of these outcomes occur, one thing is certain: Whatever you did in this situation, you will be sure to do it again if it was successful, and to avoid doing again if it failed.

This situation nicely illustrates an important principle of operant conditioning (also known as instrumental conditioning)—namely, that our behavior produces consequences and that how we behave in the future will depend on what those consequences are. If our actions have had pleasant effects, then we will be likely to repeat them in the future. If, however, our actions have unpleasant effects, we are less likely to repeat them in the future. This phenomenon, known as the Law of Effect, is fundamental to operant conditioning. Our knowledge of this phenomenon comes from the work of the famous social scientist B. F. Skinner. Skinner’s pioneering research has shown us that it is through the connections between our actions and their consequences that we learn to behave in certain ways. We summarize this process in Figure 3.12.

**FIGURE 3.12**

The Operant Conditioning Process: An Overview

The basic premise of operant conditioning is that people learn by connecting the consequences of their behavior with the behavior itself. In this example, the manager’s praise increases the subordinate’s tendency to perform the job properly in the future. Learning occurs by providing the appropriate antecedents and consequences.
Reinforcement Contingencies. Operant conditioning is based on the idea that behavior is learned because of the pleasurable outcomes that we associate with it. In organizations, for example, people usually find it pleasant and desirable to receive monetary bonuses, paid vacations, and various forms of recognition. The process by which people learn to perform acts leading to such desirable outcomes is known as positive reinforcement. Whatever behavior led to the positive outcome is likely to occur again, thereby strengthening that behavior. For a reward to serve as a positive reinforcer, it must be made contingent on the specific behavior sought. So, for example, if a sales representative is given a bonus after landing a huge account, that bonus will only reinforce the person’s actions if he or she associates it with the landing of the account. When this occurs, the individual will be more inclined in the future to do whatever helped get the account.

Sometimes we also learn to perform acts because they permit us to avoid undesirable consequences. Unpleasant events, such as reprimands, rejection, probation, and termination are some of the consequences faced for certain negative actions in the workplace. The process by which people learn to perform acts leading to the avoidance of such undesirable consequences is known as negative reinforcement, or avoidance. Whatever response led to the termination of these undesirable events is likely to occur again, thereby strengthening that response. For example, you may stay late at the office one evening to revise a sales presentation because you believe that the boss will "chew you out" if it’s not ready in the morning. You learned how to avoid this type of aversive situation, and you behave accordingly.

Thus far, we have identified responses that are strengthened—either because they lead to positive consequences, or the termination of negative consequences. However, the connection between a behavior and its consequences is not always strengthened; such links also may be weakened. This is what happens in the case of punishment. Punishment involves presenting an undesirable or aversive consequence in response to an unwanted behavior. A behavior accompanied by an undesirable outcome is less likely to reoccur if the person associates the negative consequences with the behavior. For example, if you are chastised by your boss for taking excessively long coffee breaks, you may be considered punished for this action. As a result, you will be less likely to take long breaks again in the future.

The link between a behavior and its consequences also may be weakened by withholding reward—a process known as extinction. When a response that was once rewarded is no longer rewarded, it tends to weaken and eventually die out—or be extinguished. Let’s consider an example. Suppose for many months you brought boxes of donuts to your weekly staff meetings. Your colleagues always thanked you as they gobbled them down. You were positively reinforced by their approval, so you continued bringing the donuts. Now, after several months of eating donuts, your colleagues have begun dieting. So, although tempting, your donuts go uneaten. After several months of no longer being praised for your generosity, you will be unlikely to continue bringing donuts. Your once-rewarded behavior will die out; it will be extinguished.

The various relationships between a person’s behavior and the consequences resulting from it—positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, punishment, and extinction—are known collectively as contingencies of reinforcement. They represent the conditions under which rewards and punishments will either be given or taken away. The four contingencies we discussed are summarized in Table 3.4. As we will see later in this chapter, administering these contingencies can be an effective tool for managing behavior in organizations.

Schedules Of Reinforcement: Patterns Of Administering Rewards. Thus far, our discussion of whether a reward will be presented or withdrawn has assumed that the presentation or withdrawal will follow each occurrence of behavior. However, it is not always practical (or, as we will see, advisable) to do this. Rewarding every desired response made is called continuous reinforcement. Unlike animals performing tricks in a circus, people on the job are rarely reinforced continuously. Instead, organizational rewards tend to be administered following partial reinforcement (also known as intermittent reinforcement) schedules. That is, rewards are administered intermittently, with some desired responses reinforced and others not. Four varieties of partial reinforcement schedules have direct application to organizations.
Fixed interval schedules are those in which reinforcement is administered the first time the desired behavior occurs after a specific amount of time has passed. For example, the practice of issuing paychecks each Friday at 3:00 P.M. is an example of a fixed interval schedule insofar as the rewards are administered at regular times. Fixed interval schedules are not especially effective in maintaining desired behavior. For example, employees who know that their boss will pass by their desks every day at 11:30 A.M. will make sure they are working hard at that time. However, without the boss around to praise them, they may take an early lunch or otherwise work less hard because they know that they will not be positively reinforced for their efforts or punished for not working.

Variable interval schedules are those in which a variable amount of time (based on some average) must elapse between administering reinforcements. For example, a bank auditor may make surprise visits to branch offices an average of every six weeks (e.g., visits may be four weeks apart one time, and eight weeks apart another time). The auditor may be said to be using a variable interval schedule. Because the bank managers cannot tell exactly when their branch may be audited, they cannot afford to slack off. Another inspection may just be closer than they think! Not surprisingly, variable interval schedules generally are more effective than fixed interval schedules.

Fixed ratio schedules are those in which reinforcement is administered the first time the desired behavior occurs after a specified number of such actions have been performed. For example, members of a sales staff know that they will receive a bonus for each $1,000 worth of goods they sell. Immediately after receiving the first reward, performance may slack off. But as their sales begin to approach $2,000, the next level at which reward is expected, performance will once again improve.

Variable ratio schedules are those in which a variable number of desired responses (based on some average) must occur between the administration of reinforcements. People playing slot machines provide a good example. Most of the time when people put a coin into the slot they lose. But, after some unknown number of plays, the machine will pay off. Because gamblers can never tell which pull of the handle will win the jackpot, they are likely to keep on playing for a long time. As you might imagine, variable ratio schedules tend to be more effective than fixed ratio schedules.

The various schedules of reinforcement we described here have a number of important similarities and differences. We have summarized these in Figure 3.13. As you review this diagram, it is important to keep in mind that these schedules represent “pure” forms. Used in practice, several different reinforcement schedules may be combined, making complex new schedules. Still, whether they operate separately or in conjunction with one another, it is important to recognize the strong influences that schedules of reinforcement can have on people’s behavior in organizations.
Observational Learning: Learning by Imitating Others

Although operant conditioning is based on the idea that we engage in behaviors for which we are directly reinforced, many of the things we learn on the job are not directly reinforced. Suppose, for example, on your new job you see one of your fellow sales representatives developing a potentially valuable sales lead by joining a local civic organization. Soon thereafter, talking to people around the office, you find out that yet another one of your colleagues has picked up a lucrative lead from a civic group to which he belongs. Chances are, after observing this several times, you too will eventually make the connection between joining such groups and getting sales leads. Although you may not have made useful contacts from such groups yourself, you would come to expect these leads to pan out on the basis of what you have observed from others. This is an example of a kind of learning known as observational learning, or modeling. It occurs when someone acquires new knowledge vicariously—that is, by observing what happens to others. The person whose behavior is imitated is referred to as the model.

Steps In The Observational Learning Process. For people to learn by observing models, several processes must occur (for a summary of these, see Figure 3.14).
1. The learner must pay careful *attention* to the model; the greater the attention, the more effective the learning will be. To facilitate learning, models sometimes call attention to themselves. This is what happens when supervisors admonish their subordinates to “pay close attention” to what they’re doing.

2. People must have good *retention* of the model’s behavior. It helps to be able to develop a verbal description or a mental image of someone’s actions in order to remember them. After all, we cannot learn from observing behavior we cannot remember.

3. There must be some *behavioral reproduction* of the model’s behavior. Unless people are capable of doing exactly what the models do, they will not be able to learn from observing them. Naturally, this ability may be limited at first, but improve with practice.

4. Finally, people must have some *motivation* to learn from the model. Of course, we don’t emulate every behavior we see, but focus on those we have some reason or incentive to match—such as actions for which others are rewarded.

**Examples Of Observational Learning In Organizations.** A great deal of what is learned about how to behave in organizations can be explained as the result of the process of observational learning. For example, observational learning is a key part of many formal job instruction training programs. As we will explain in the next section, trainees given a chance to observe experts doing their jobs, followed by an opportunity to practice the desired skills, and given feedback on their work, tend to learn new job skills quite effectively.

Observational learning also occurs in a very informal, uncalculated manner. For example, people who experience the norms and traditions of their organizations and who subsequently incorporate these into their own behavior may be recognized as having learned through observation. Indeed, people tend to learn the culture of their organizations (a topic that we will discuss in Chapter 14) through observational learning.
It is important to note that people learn not only what to do by observing others, but also what not to do. Specifically, research has shown that people observing their coworkers getting punished for behaving inappropriately on the job tend to refrain from engaging in those same actions themselves.\textsuperscript{54} As you might imagine, this is a very effective way for people to learn how to behave—and without ever experiencing any displeasure themselves.

The principles of learning we have discussed thus far are used in organizations in many different ways. In the remaining part of this chapter, we discuss formal approaches to incorporating the various principles of learning in organizations: training, and practices involving the systematic use of rewards and punishments: organizational behavior management and discipline.

### Training: Learning and Developing Job Skills

Probably the most obvious use to which principles of learning may be applied in organizations is training—the process through which people systematically acquire and improve the skills and knowledge needed to better their job performance. Just as students learn basic educational skills in the classroom, employees must learn job skills. Training is used not only to prepare new employees to meet the challenges of the jobs they will face, but also to upgrade and refine the skills of existing employees. In fact, it has been estimated that American companies spend about $365 billion on training annually (a billion dollars per day!).\textsuperscript{55} What’s more, the amount of time and money spent training employees has been increasing steadily over the years.\textsuperscript{56}

#### Varieties of Training

Training takes many forms. Some training is quite informal in nature, consisting of having experienced employees take new employees under their wings to show them how to do the job in question. Most of the time, however, training involves highly systematic, formal efforts to teach employees how to do specific things that are required for job success. We now review these methods.

**Classroom Training.** As a student, you already are familiar with classroom training. In this method, instructors describe various requirements of the job and provide tips on how to meet them. Typically, people learning new skills in the classroom are given an opportunity to practice these skills, either in a simulated work setting or on the job itself.

Consider, for example, how people are trained as account representatives at the collection agency, OSI. The account reps are the individuals who call consumers to arrange payment on seriously delinquent accounts. The reps receive four days of intensive classroom training, covering things such as approaches to take in getting people to pay, procedures to follow for sending payment, payment programs available to the consumer, and the laws that bill collectors are required to follow. This classroom training is supplemented by making simulated practice calls in which the budding reps get to practice their new skills. Following this training, they are allowed to make actual calls, but these are closely monitored by experienced personnel who stand ready to guide the trainee as needed.

**Apprenticeship Programs.** Growing in popularity today are formal apprenticeship programs, in which classroom training is systematically combined with on-the-job instruction over a long period (often several years in the case of skilled tradespeople such as carpenters, electricians, and masons). Recognizing the importance of such programs in developing human resources, the federal government has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in apprenticeship programs, encouraging training partnerships between government and private industry.\textsuperscript{57} To ensure that people going into various trades are trained to appropriately high standards, many apprenticeship programs often are designed and regulated by professional trade associations (for an example, see Figure 3.15)
Cross-Cultural Training. Today, given the increasing globalization of the workplace, it is not surprising that companies are sending their employees to work abroad. A growing number of companies are discovering that employees are more likely to succeed in their overseas assignments when they have been thoroughly trained in the culture of the country in which they will be living. Sure, it helps to know the language of the host country, but that’s just the beginning. If you’ve ever lived in another country, or even visited one, for

TABLE 3.5 Summary of Techniques Used in Cross-Cultural Training (CCT)

People working overseas often are trained for their assignments using one or more of the techniques described here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural briefings</td>
<td>Explain the major aspects of the host country culture, including customs,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>traditions, everyday behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area briefings</td>
<td>Explain the history, geography, economy, politics, and other general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>information about the host country and region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cases</td>
<td>Portray a real-life situation in business or personal life to illustrate some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aspect of living or working in the host culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role playing</td>
<td>Allows the trainee to act out a situation that he or she might face in living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or working in the host country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture assimilator</td>
<td>Provides a written set of situations that the trainee might encounter in living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or working in the host country. Trainee selects from a set of responses to the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>situation and is given feedback as to whether it is appropriate and why.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field experiences</td>
<td>Provide an opportunity for the trainee to go to the host country or another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unfamiliar culture to experience living and working for a short time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

cross-cultural training (CCT)
A systematic way of preparing employees to live and work in another country.

Corporate Universities. Many companies (e.g., Apple Computer, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and Sprint, to name only a few), are so serious about training that they have developed their own corporate universities—facilities devoted to handling a company’s training needs on a full-time basis. Established in 1927 and still going strong, the first corporate university is the “General Motors Institute,” which trains employees on almost every skill required by GM’s tens of thousands of worldwide employees. Among the best known facilities is McDonald’s “Hamburger University,” in which McDonald’s franchisees learn and/or polish the skills needed to successfully operate a McDonald’s restaurant. Like several other companies, such as Saturn and Motorola, McDonald’s has its own campus with full-time instructors (see Figure 3.16).

Most corporate universities, however, are less elaborate programs run by either the human resources department or a few top executives. Even very small Internet start-ups can have their own corporate universities by using any of a growing number of firms that provide this service. Although the curricula vary widely, most corporate universities emphasize leadership development (which we address in Chapter 13).

Executive Training Programs. Another popular form of training is executive training programs—sessions in which companies systematically attempt to develop the skills of their top leaders, such as how to use computer software, or more general skills, such as how to get along with others. This is accomplished either by bringing in outside experts to train personnel in-house, or by sending them to specialized programs conducted by

FIGURE 3.16
Corporate Training at McDonald’s Hamburger University
Headquartered in a beautiful park-like campus in Oak Brook, Illinois, and with branches in seven different countries, Hamburger University (HU) is the center for formal managerial training at McDonald’s. Executives and mid-level managers are offered various courses in leadership skills and financial management. Even lower-level managers are trained in ways of maintaining and troubleshooting restaurant equipment. Training at HU is considered a stepping-stone along the path to career advancement: Among HU’s 75,000 graduates are some of McDonald’s top executives.
Taking advantage of today’s high-tech opportunities, many companies are finding that it’s both convenient and effective to offer executive training online, using \textit{e-training}.

**E-Training.** These days, because the investment in computer technology required to reach people in remote locations is so small, the vast majority of companies conducting training do at least some of it online. The term \textit{e-training} is used to describe training based on disseminating information online (e.g., through the Internet or a company’s internal intranet network). Online training is so popular, in fact, that savvy investment companies (e.g., Chase Capital and Merrill Lynch) have been funneling tens of millions of dollars into companies such as Ninth House and GlobalLearningSystems, which provide multimedia employee training.

In recent years, many companies have found it useful to use e-training. For example, the Buffalo, New York–based Delaware North, a contract foodservice company, has used e-training as an efficient way to bring employees up to speed on new operations. According to Sherri Steinback, the company’s manager of technical training and special projects, “We were rolling out a new financial application to over 125 units, and we needed an efficient way to train a diverse group scattered across the country.”

E-training also has been used in a wide variety of different industries (see Figure 3.17).

Compared to traditional, classroom-based corporate training programs, the primary benefits of online training are: (1) the flexibility it offers trainees, (2) the speed and efficiency it offers, and (3) reduced cost. Despite these benefits, e-training is far from perfect. One problem that many companies are facing is that it is very costly for them to produce self-paced, online training materials (about six to eight times more, in many cases), which drastically cuts into any short-term savings that may result.

**FIGURE 3.17**

E-Training in the Restaurant Business

These employees of the Bahama Breeze restaurant chain are discussing modifications in service policies communicated as part of the Web-based training system used by the parent company, Darden. Such e-training efforts are central to efforts to ensure high quality, uniform training at Darden’s restaurants throughout the country.
Probably the most serious limitation is that many workers are uncomfortable with it. Even the most computer-savvy employees may find it deceptively easy to click ahead, thinking they know material that they really don’t know that well. Others simply miss the social aspect of learning, the one-on-one experience they have in the classroom with their peers and the trainer (which, for some, may be a distraction). Indeed, some experts agree that one advantage of the traditional classroom experience is that it brought people together out of the office, a benefit that the more impersonal experience of sitting in front of a computer screen just cannot offer. In view of this, online technology may best be considered an adjunct to the total training package, a single tool rather than a replacement for the traditional, in-person training experience.

Principles of Learning: Keys to Effective Training

As you might imagine, no one approach to training is ideal. Some techniques are better suited to learning certain skills than are others. The reason for this is that various techniques incorporate different principles of learning, that is, the set of practices that make training effective. Not surprisingly, the best training programs often use many different approaches, thereby assuring that several different learning principles may be incorporated into training.65

To appreciate what these particular principles are, just think about some of the ways you learned skills such as how to study, drive, or use a computer. Four major principles are most relevant.

Participation. People not only learn more quickly, but also retain the skills longer when they have been involved actively in the learning process. This is the practice of participation. The benefits of participation apply to the learning of both motor tasks as well as cognitive skills. For example, when learning to swim, there’s no substitute for actually getting in the water and moving your arms and legs. In the classroom, students who listen attentively to lectures, think about the material, and get involved in discussions tend to learn more effectively than those who just sit passively.

Repetition. If you know the old adage “Practice makes perfect,” you are already aware of the benefits of repetition on learning. Perhaps you learned the multiplication table, or a poem, or a foreign language phrase by going over it repeatedly. Indeed, mentally “rehearsing” such cognitive tasks has been shown to increase our effectiveness at performing them.66 Scientists have established not only the benefits of repetition on learning, but have shown that these effects are even greater when practice is spread out over time than when it is lumped together. After all, when practice periods are too long, learning can suffer from fatigue, whereas learning a little bit at a time allows the material to sink in.

Transfer of Training. As you might imagine, for training to be most effective, what is learned during training sessions must be applied to the job. This is the idea of transfer of training, the degree to which training generalizes to actual work experiences. In general, the more closely a training program matches the demands and conditions faced on a job, the more effective that training will be. A good example is the elaborate simulation devices used to train pilots and astronauts. By closely simulating actual job conditions and equipment, the skills trained are expected to transfer to the job.67

Feedback. It is extremely difficult for learning to occur in the absence of feedback—that is, knowledge of the results of one’s actions. Feedback provides information about the effectiveness of one’s training, indicating improvements that need to be made.68 For example, it is critical for people being trained as word processing operators to know exactly how many words they correctly entered per minute if they are to be able to gauge their improvement (see Figure 3.18).

One type of feedback that has become popular in recent years is known as 360-degree feedback—the process of using multiple sources from around the organization to evaluate the work of a single individual. This goes beyond simply collecting feedback from superiors, as is customary, but extends the gathering of feedback from other
sources, such as one’s peers, direct reports (i.e., immediate subordinates), customers, and even oneself (see Figure 3.19). Many companies—including General Electric, AT&T, Monsanto, Florida Power and Light, DuPont, Westinghouse, Motorola, Fidelity Bank, FedEx, Nabisco, and Warner-Lambert—have used 360-degree feedback to give more complete performance information to their employees, greatly improving not only their own work, but overall corporate productivity as well. To get a feel for how some companies are using this technique, see the How to Do It section on page 123.

In sum, these four principles—participation, repetition, transfer of training, and feedback—are key to the effectiveness of any training program. The most effective training programs are those that incorporate as many of these principles as possible.

Organizational Practices Involving the Use of Reward and Punishment

Earlier, in describing operant conditioning, we noted that the consequences of our behavior determines whether we repeat it or abandon it. Behaviors that are rewarded tend to be strengthened, repeated in the future. With this in mind, it is possible to administer rewards selectively to help reinforce behaviors that we wish repeated in the future. This is the basic

FIGURE 3.18

Feedback: A Critical Principle of Learning

For learning to be effective, people must have feedback about how well they are performing. Specific information of this type helps learners make adjustments in their performance so as to bring it up to standards. Although feedback comes from many sources, this is unlikely to be one of them.

Source: www.CartoonStock.com
principle behind organizational behavior management. It’s also possible to influence workers’ behavior by using discipline. This, of course, involves the use of punishment, a contingency of reinforcement we described earlier. We now describe both organizational behavior management and discipline in organizations.

**Organizational Behavior Management**

When management experts refer to organizational behavior management (or OB Mod, for short), they are describing the systematic application of positive reinforcement principles in organizational settings for the purpose of raising the incidence of desirable organizational behaviors.71

OB Mod programs have been used successfully to stimulate a variety of behaviors in many different organizations.72 For example, a particularly interesting and effective program has been used in recent years at Diamond International, the Palmer, Massachusetts company of 325 employees that manufactures Styrofoam egg cartons. In response to sluggish productivity, a simple but elegant reinforcement was put into place. Any employee working for a full year without an industrial accident is given 20 points. Perfect attendance is given 25 points. Once a year, the points are totaled. When employees reach 100 points, they get a blue nylon jacket with the company’s logo on it and a patch identifying their membership in the “100 Club.” Those earning still more points receive extra awards. For example, at 500 points, employees can select any of a number of small household appliances. These inexpensive prizes go a long way toward symbolizing to employees the company’s appreciation for their good work.
If you think about it, the practice of giving questionnaires to various people in an organization to assess how large groups of them feel about each other can serve a lot of purposes. Not only might the survey findings be used to help assess job performance, but it also can be used for many other purposes as well. For example, 360-degree feedback can be used to systematically assess training needs, to determine new products and services desired by customers, to gauge team members’ reactions to each other, and to learn about a variety of potential human resource problems. To better understand these and other uses of this popular tool, we will now consider three specific examples of 360-degree feedback in action.

- **Promoting change at the Landmark Stock Exchange.** The Landmark Stock Exchange is one of several smaller stock exchanges that operate in the United States. Eclipsed by the giant exchanges, such as the New York Stock Exchange and NASDAQ, Landmark has been striving to become the best marketplace in the world by providing faster and more accurate movement of stock than its well-known competitors. Meeting this objective requires a willingness to go along with rapid change and innovation. To see how it was doing in this regard, Landmark implemented a 360-degree feedback program that provided employees with feedback in such key areas as consulting others, inspiring others, team building, and networking. This feedback was then used as the basis for providing systematic training in ways to change any behaviors found lacking.

- **Developing leaders at Leher McGovern Bovis.** Leher McGovern Bovis (LMB) was responsible for the renovation and restoration of such New York City landmarks as the Statue of Liberty and Grand Central Terminal. LMB is unique in the construction industry in the attention it pays to developing its employees’ leadership skills, preparing them for senior positions in the company. Company officials implemented a 360-degree feedback program that helped identify people’s readiness for advancement to leadership positions within the company and the best candidates for management training. The 360-degree feedback program helped reduce turnover among project managers from 12 percent down to only 2 percent.

- **Identifying training and selection requirements at Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company.** To meet growing competition, Northwestern Mutual Life (NML) restructured its offices, which required them to identify many new managers. The company used a 360-degree feedback program to assess the potential of individual agents to be promoted to these new managerial positions. Also, by systematically noting shortcomings, they use this information to identify the most-needed forms of management training. NML’s 360-degree feedback program has made the task of selecting and training managers more effective than ever.

As these examples show, 360-degree feedback can be a very successful tool to help meet a wide variety of organizational objectives. For this reason, it continues to be very popular and may be expected to remain in widespread use in the future.

This program has helped improve productivity dramatically at Diamond International. Compared to before the OB Mod program began, output improved 16.5 percent, quality-related errors dropped 40 percent, grievances decreased 72 percent, and time lost due to accidents was lowered by 43.7 percent. The result of all of this has been over $1 million in gross financial benefits from the company—and a much happier workforce. Needless to say, this has been a very simple and effective organizational behavior management program. Although not all such programs are equally successful, evidence suggests that they are generally quite beneficial. For example, highly successful OB Mod programs have been used at such companies as General Electric, Weyerhauser, and General Mills.

**Discipline: Eliminating Undesirable Organizational Behaviors**

Just as organizations systematically use rewards to encourage desirable behavior, they also use punishment to discourage undesirable behavior. Problems such as absenteeism, lateness, theft, and substance abuse cost companies vast sums of money, situations many companies attempt to manage by using discipline—the systematic administration of punishment.
By administering an unpleasant outcome (e.g., suspension without pay) in response to an undesirable behavior (e.g., excessive tardiness), companies seek to minimize that behavior. In one form or another, using discipline is a relatively common practice. Survey research has shown, in fact, that 83 percent of companies use some form of discipline, or at least the threat of discipline, in response to undesirable behaviors. But, as you might imagine, disciplinary actions taken in organizations vary greatly. At one extreme, they may be very formal, such as written warnings that become part of the employee’s permanent record. At the other extreme, they may be informal and low-key, such as friendly reminders and off-the-record discussions between supervisors and their problem subordinates.

In a survey, nursing supervisors were asked to list the disciplinary actions they most used and to rank them with respect to their severity. The results, summarized in Figure 3.20, reveals that a broad range of disciplinary measures are used, ranging from very lenient to very harsh. Although this represents the responses of a limited sample, we suspect that these results are fairly typical of what would be found across a wide variety of jobs.

**Disciplinary Practices In Organizations.** One very common practice involves using punishment progressively—that is, starting mildly, and then increasing in severity with each successive infraction. This is the idea behind progressive discipline—the practice of basing punishment on the frequency and severity of the infraction.

Let’s consider an example of how progressive discipline might work for a common problem such as chronic absenteeism or tardiness. First, the supervisor may give the employee an informal oral warning. Then, if the problem persists, there would be an official meeting with the supervisor, during which time a formal warning would be issued. The next offense would result in a formal written warning that becomes part of the employee’s personnel record. Subsequent offenses would lead to suspension without pay. And finally, if all this failed, the employee would be terminated. In the case of more serious offenses—such as gambling, for example—some of the preliminary steps would be dropped, and a formal written warning would be given. For the most serious offenses, such as stealing or intentionally damaging company property, officials would move immediately to the most severe step, immediate dismissal.

Companies with the most effective disciplinary programs tend to make the contingencies clear, such as by publicizing punishment rules in the company handbook. When this is done, employees know exactly what kind of behaviors the company will not tolerate, often minimizing the need to actually use discipline at all.

**FIGURE 3.20**

**A Continuum of Disciplinary Measures**

Ranked from mildest to most severe, these are the most commonly used disciplinary tactics used by nursing supervisors.

*Source: Based on findings reported by Trahan & Steiner, 1994; see Note 76.*
It probably comes as no surprise to you that supervisors do not always punish all inappropriate behaviors they encounter. A key reason for this is that supervisors may feel constrained by limitations imposed by labor unions or by their own lack of formal authority. Also, in the absence of a clear company policy about how to use discipline, individuals may fear strong negative emotional reactions from the punished individual, if not also revenge and retaliation. As a result, many supervisors may turn the other way and simply do nothing when employees behave inappropriately. Although doing nothing may be easy in the long run, ignoring chronic problems is a way of informally approving of them, leading to increasingly serious problems in the future.

With this in mind, companies with the best disciplinary programs make it a practice to take immediate action. At Honda of America, for example, human resource specialist Tim Garrett notes that the company pays very close attention to all infractions of the rules, including ones “that other companies wouldn’t think of paying attention to,” adding, “If there’s a problem, we’ll pay attention to it right away.”

**Keys To Using Punishment Effectively.** Obviously, it isn’t easy to know exactly when and how to administer punishment, and how it can be done in a way that is considered fair and reasonable. Fortunately, research and theory have pointed to some effective principles that may be followed to maximize the effectiveness of discipline in organizations. We summarize these in Table 3.6. If, after going through this list, you are thinking that it is truly difficult to properly administer rewards and punishments in organizations, you have reached the same conclusion as experts in the field of organizational behavior and many practicing managers. Indeed, one of the key skills that make some managers so effective is their ability to influence others by properly administerizing rewards and punishments.

**TABLE 3.6 Tips for Using Discipline Effectively**

Disciplining employees is not as easy as it looks. It can be full of pitfalls, and most people don’t know how to do it appropriately. The suggestions on this list represent some useful guidelines to follow in making your own disciplinary efforts as effective as possible. When reviewing these suggestions, be sure to think about the explanations for each one and how the suggestion is illustrated by the example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Example: Bob is Often Late to Work, so the Manager Should . . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deliver punishment immediately after</td>
<td>The less time that passes between the occurrence of an undesirable behavior</td>
<td>Talk to him about it immediately after he arrives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the undesirable response occurs.</td>
<td>and the administration of a negative consequence, the more strongly people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>will make the connection between them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give moderate levels of punishment—</td>
<td>If the consequences for performing an undesirable action are not very severe,</td>
<td>Avoid being too lenient (e.g., by rolling his or her eyes) or too harsh (e.g., firing Bob if he is only a minute or two late).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nothing too high or too low.</td>
<td>then it is unlikely to operate as a punishment. If they are too severe,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>people are likely to protest.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punish the undesirable behavior,</td>
<td>Punishment should be impersonal in nature and focus on an individual’s</td>
<td>Refrain from calling Bob “lazy” but explain the problems that result (e.g., customers cannot reach him) when he is not at his desk on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not the person.</td>
<td>actions rather than his or her personality.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use punishment consistently across</td>
<td>If you sometimes fail to punish a wrongdoing, you may send the message that</td>
<td>“Write up” Bob each and every time he is late.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occasions.</td>
<td>you sometimes can get away with breaking the rules.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punish everyone equally for the same</td>
<td>If some people are punished while others are not, you will be accused of</td>
<td>“Write up” all employees whenever they are late, just as is done with Bob.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>infraction.</td>
<td>favoritism and will be considered unfair.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearly communicate the reasons for the</td>
<td>Making clear exactly what behaviors lead to what disciplinary actions makes</td>
<td>Explain to Bob that his punishment is “nothing personal” but is based on his lateness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>punishment given.</td>
<td>punishment more effective.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not follow punishment with</td>
<td>Sometimes people attempt to minimize the pain of punishment by doing</td>
<td>Resist the temptation to let Bob go home early (with pay) to “think about the problem.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noncontingent rewards.</td>
<td>something nice to make up for it. This may make everyone feel better, but it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reinforces the undesirable behavior.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary and Review of Learning Objectives

1. **Distinguish between the concepts of social perception and social identity.**
   Social perception is the process through which people select, organize, and interpret the information around them as it pertains to other people. According to social identity theory, the way we perceive others and ourselves is based on both our own unique characteristics (known as personal identity) and our membership in various groups (known as social identity).

2. **Explain how the attribution process works and describe the various sources of bias in social perception.**
   The process of attribution involves judging the underlying reasons for people’s behavior. Some of our judgments are based on inferences made on the basis of observing others’ behavior. These judgments, known as correspondent inferences, are often inaccurate. Our search for explanations about the causes of others’ behavior leads us to make either judgments of internal causality (the individual is responsible for his own actions) or external causality (someone or something else is responsible). Kelley’s theory of causal attribution explains that such judgments will be based on three types of information: consensus (whether others act in a similar manner), consistency (whether the individual previously acted this way in the same situation), and distinctiveness (whether this person acted similarly in different situations).
   Several types of systematic errors, known as perceptual biases, limit the accuracy of social perception. These include: the fundamental attribution error (the tendency to attribute others’ actions to internal causes), the halo effect (the tendency to perceive others in either consistently positive or negative terms), the similar-to-me effect (the tendency to perceive similar others in a favorable light), first-impression error (the tendency for initial impressions to guide subsequent ones), and selective perception (the tendency for people to focus on only certain aspects of the environment). Perceptual inaccuracies also result from the tendency for people to rely on the use of stereotypes (the judgments of others based on the categories to which they belong).
   Perceptual biases can result in self-fulfilling prophecies (the tendency for someone’s expectations about another to cause that individual to behave in a manner consistent with those expectations). These can be positive in nature, such as when expecting someone’s performance to be good actually makes it so (known as the Pygmalion effect). They also can be negative, such as when someone’s performance is bad because it was expected to be bad (known as the Golem effect).

3. **Understand how the process of social perception operates in the context of performance appraisals, employment interviews, and the cultivation of corporate images.**
   Biased judgments about others sometimes occur during the process of performance appraisal. In this context, people judge as superior those individuals whose performance matches their expectations, and those whose good performance is attributed to internal sources and whose poor performance is attributed to external sources. People are generally interested in getting others to perceive them favorably, and their efforts in this regard are referred to as impression management. This process is particularly important in employment interviews, although it sometimes interferes with the accuracy of information presented about individuals or companies. An organization’s overall impression on people, its corporate image, is a determinant of its ability to attract qualified job applicants.

4. **Define learning and describe the two types most applicable to OB: operant conditioning and observational learning.**
   Learning refers to relative permanent changes in behavior occurring as a result of experience. In organizations, learning generally takes the form of operant conditioning and observational learning. In operant conditioning, individuals learn to behave certain ways based on the consequences of those actions. Stimuli that increase the probability of the behaviors preceding it are known as reinforcers.
Reinforcement may be either positive, if it is based on the presentation of a desirable outcome, or negative, if it is based on the withdrawal of an unwanted outcome. The probability of certain responses can be decreased if an unpleasant outcome results (punishment), or if a pleasant outcome is withdrawn (extinction). Observational learning involves learning by modeling the behavior of others. By paying attention to and rehearsing the behavior of others, we can learn vicariously, that is, through the model’s experiences.

5. **Describe how principles of learning are involved in organizational training and innovative reward systems.**

Learning is directly involved in efforts to teach people to acquire new job skills, the process known as training. Training is most effective when people can actively participate in the learning process, repeat the desired behaviors, receive feedback on their performance, and learn under conditions closely resembling those found on the job. Today, companies are experimenting with innovative reward systems that include skill-based pay (i.e., paying people for the various skills they have demonstrated on the job) and team-based rewards (i.e., paying people for their contributions to team performance).

6. **Compare the way organizations use reward in organizational behavior management programs and how they can use punishment most effectively when administering discipline.**

Organizational behavior management is a systematic attempt to apply principles of reinforcement to the workplace so as to improve organizational functioning. Reinforcing desired behaviors can improve organizational functioning greatly. In contrast to applications of reinforcement, discipline is the systematic application of punishments to minimize undesirable organizational behaviors. The effects of discipline are most effective when punishment is applied immediately after the undesirable activity, moderately severe, focused on the activity rather than the individual, applied consistently over time, and for all employees, clearly explained and communicated, and not weakened by the use of inadvertent rewards.

---

**Points to Ponder**

**Questions for Review**

1. What is social perception and how is it applicable to the field of OB?
2. How do people come to make judgments about what others are like (known as the attribution process)?
3. In what ways is the attribution process biased, and what can be done about it?
4. How do operant conditioning and observational learning operate in the workplace?
5. What are the fundamental principles of learning and how are they involved in organizations?
6. What should be done to ensure that efforts to punish employees are as effective as possible?

**Experiential Questions**

1. Think of a time when you made judgments about a new workmate as you got to know him or her. In what ways were these judgments biased? As you got to know this person better, did you change your mind? What lesson can you learn about reaching judgments about people prematurely?
2. As a manager, it’s important not to judge employees based on your expectations. If you do, the Pygmalion effect or the Golem effect may occur. Think back at a situation on the job or at school in which either you or your supervisor/teacher had expectations that led to one of these self-fulfilling prophecies. Exactly what happened? How was everyone involved affected, both positively and negatively? What could have been done to avoid this problem?
3. Think about any work-related training programs in which you may have been involved. In what ways were these efforts successful? What might have been done to make them even more effective?
Questions to Analyze

1. The attribution process is inherently inaccurate and subject to bias. In view of this, what chance do you think managers have of making accurate assessments of their subordinates’ job performance? What could be done to combat these limitations, thereby making these important assessments more accurate?

2. E-learning is very popular today. What specific advice would you give anyone launching a corporate e-learning program who wants to make it as effective as possible? Do you think e-learning can ever be as effective as in-person training? In what ways might it be even more effective than in-person training?

3. Overall, do you think that managers will be able to more effectively change their subordinates’ performance by using reward or by using punishment? However you answer, what specific steps would you take to make these efforts most effective? Explain your recommendations.

Experiencing OB

Individual Exercise

Identifying Occupational Stereotypes

Although we usually reserve our concern over stereotypes to those about women and members of racial and ethnic minorities, the simple truth is that people can hold stereotypes toward members of just about any group. And, in organizations, people are likely to hold stereotypes based on a variable whose importance cannot be downplayed—the occupational groups to which they belong. What we expect of people, and the way we treat them, is likely to be affected by stereotypes about their professions. This exercise will help you better understand this phenomenon.

Directions

Using the following scale, rate each of the following occupational groups with respect to how much of each characteristic people in these groups tend to show.

1 = not at all
2 = a slight amount
3 = a moderate amount
4 = a great amount
5 = an extreme amount

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accountants</th>
<th>Professors</th>
<th>Lawyers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>interesting</td>
<td>generous</td>
<td>interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>generous</td>
<td>intelligent</td>
<td>generous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intelligent</td>
<td>conservative</td>
<td>intelligent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conservative</td>
<td>shy</td>
<td>conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shy</td>
<td>ambitious</td>
<td>shy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ambitious</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>ambitious</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Clergy | Physicians | Plumbers |
|___        | interesting | interesting |
| interesting | generous   | generous |
| generous   | intelligent | intelligent |
| intelligent | conservative | conservative |
| conservative | shy     | shy |
| shy         | ambitious  | ambitious |

Questions for Discussion

1. Did your ratings of the various groups differ? If so, which were perceived most positively and which were perceived most negatively?
2. On what characteristics, if any, did you find no differences with respect to the various groups? What do you think this means?

3. To what extent did your ratings agree with those of others? In other words, was there general agreement about the stereotypical nature of people in various occupational groups?

4. To what extent were your responses based on specific people you know? How did knowledge, or lack of knowledge, of members of the various occupational groups influence your ratings?

5. Do you believe that by becoming aware of these stereotypes you will perpetuate them in the future, or refrain from behaving in accord with them? Explain.

Group Exercise

Role Play: Conducting a Disciplinary Interview

Knowing how to discipline employees who behave inappropriately is an important managerial skill. The trick is to change the bad behavior into good behavior permanently, getting people to accept their mistakes and understand how to correct them. As you might imagine, this is often far more difficult than it sounds. After all, people are generally reluctant to admit their errors, and may have developed bad work habits that must be overcome. In addition, they tend to resist being chastised and don’t like listening to criticism. With this in mind, disciplining others represents quite a challenge for managers, making it a skill worth developing.

Directions

1. Select four students from the class and divide them into two pairs. One person from each pair should read only the role sheet for Andy F., machine operator, and the other person from each pair should read only the role sheet for Barry B., his supervisor. Send both pairs outside the room until called upon.

2. Members of the class will serve as observers and should read both role sheets.

3. Call in the first pair of role players and ask them to spend about 10–15 minutes playing their roles—that is, acting as they would if they were the characters about whom they just read in the role sheets. They should feel free to assume any additional facts not described in these sheets.

4. Members of the class should observe the role play, taking careful notes. The class should not get involved in what the actors are saying, but pay close attention to it.

5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 with the second pair of role players.

Role Sheets

Andy F., Machine Operator

You have worked at Acme Manufacturing for six years now and have had a good record. Because you do your job so well, you sometimes take liberties and horse around with your buddies. For example, one Friday afternoon you were caught dancing around the shop floor when a good song came on the radio. Barry B., your supervisor, called you on the carpet for leaving your station. You think he has it in for you and is trying to run you off the job. Although you were acting silly, you are convinced that it doesn’t matter since you were getting your job done. Now, he has called you in to see him to discuss the situation.

Barry B., Supervisor

After several years of experience in other shops, you were hired by Acme Manufacturing to be its new shop supervisor, a job you’ve had for only four months. Things have gone well during that time, but you’ve been having trouble with one machine operator, Andy F.
Andy seems to do an acceptable job, but is not giving it his all. Part of the problem is that he goofs around a lot. You have spoken to him about this informally a few times on the floor, but to no avail. One Friday afternoon you caught him away from his station, dancing around the shop floor. Not only wasn’t he doing his own job, but he was distracting the others. You have just called Andy in to see you to discuss the situation.

Questions for Discussion

1. Did the supervisor, Barry B., define the problem in a nonthreatening way?
2. Did each party listen to the other, or did they shut them out, merely explaining their own sides of the story?
3. Did Barry B. suggest specific things that Andy F. could do to improve? Were the specific punishments associated with future bad acts spelled out explicitly?
4. Were the discussions impersonal in nature, or did the parties focus on each other’s personalities?
5. Considering all these questions, which supervisor would you say did a better job of administering discipline? What could be done to improve the way each supervisor conducted the disciplinary meeting?

Practicing OB

Managing People Who Are Goofing Off

Employees at a corporate call center have not been spending enough time at their cubicles answering phones, as required. Instead, they’ve been walking throughout the facility, talking to each other about personal matters. In other words, they’re socializing and goofing off instead of working. Important calls have gone unanswered and customer service problems have arisen as a result.

1. What types of attributions would you be prone to make about these employees, and how would these be related to the performance evaluations you give them?
2. What types of errors would you be prone to make while making these judgments, and what might you do to overcome them so that you can make more accurate judgments?
3. How might you use training, innovative reward systems, organizational behavior management programs, and discipline to address the problem?

Smiling Might Not Be Such a Safe Way to Treat Safeway Customers

Any training course on the essentials of customer service will advise you always to smile at customers and to make eye contact with them. In fact, it seems so commonsensical as to not need repeating. Little would you imagine, therefore, that doing precisely this actually would cause problems for some supermarket clerks! Nonetheless, this is precisely what happened to a dozen female employees at a Safeway supermarket in Martinez, California. The women claimed that their eye contact and smiles elicited unwanted attention from some male shoppers who mistook these friendly gestures as acts of flirting. Some clerks even had to resort to hiding in the store to escape customers who were hungry for services that weren’t for sale. A produce clerk at one northern California store was even followed to her car and propositioned by a supermarket shopper who got the wrong idea.

The root of the problem, argue the twelve clerks who filed grievances with the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, is Safeway’s “Superior Service” policy, which explicitly requires them to smile at customers and to maintain three seconds of eye contact with each one. It also expects clerks to anticipate customer’s needs, to help them find items for which they’re looking, and to call them by name if paying by check or credit card.

This policy was in place for five years before Safeway officials started enforcing it by using undercover shoppers to spot violators, who were sent letters warning them of the negative evaluations and disciplinary measures (even firing!) that could result from failing to comply. Soon
thereafter, the incidents of customer harassment began. The union is seeking a modified policy that gives workers some discretion in the matter, allowing them to choose whether or not to maintain eye contact or to refuse to carry a customer’s bags to his car at night.

From its headquarters in Pleasanton, California, Safeway officials acknowledged that although some customers get out of hand, this is not the result of their policy. They add that not one of the store’s employees, currently about 200,000, ever has been fired for failing to be friendly. However, 100 have been sent to a daylong remedial training class on friendliness, what they call “Smile School.” This, says Safeway spokesperson Debra Lambert, “is not about discipline. It’s about treating customers well and training employees to do that.” Think about this when you complain about that surly clerk who doesn’t even look up to acknowledge you the next time you’re in your local supermarket looking for laundry detergent.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. How, specifically, is the process of attribution illustrated in this case?
2. What do you suppose is being done to help train people to be friendlier toward customers?
   
   In other words, what would you imagine goes on in Safeway’s “Smile School”?
3. Describe what you believe might be the progressive discipline steps outlined in the warning letter sent to unfriendly Safeway clerks.