



My perspective on perspectives.

A brief insight into a challenging process.

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A while back I was asked to deliver a presentation for a client to a small team within their organisation. I had worked with this client for quite some time, so there were a few familiar faces, but this team was relatively new, in which case the majority of attendees were complete strangers to me. So, they knew nothing about me except what they had read or heard from others, and similarly, I knew nothing of them. I didn't know what motivated them to attend, what level of interest they had or what benefit the presentation would bring to them. But anyway, before I started the presentation, I took a moment to observe the room noting the different interactions that were taking place while everyone waited. During this time, the thing that occurred to me was that I was about to make a 'first impression' on many of these people. That is, I was about to not only present on this certain topic, but I was also about to present me. But what was truly fascinating was that this first impression would be the start of their perceptions of me. So, as I stood there preparing for the subconscious judgement that was to come, I realised that no matter what I deliver, each person will come away with a different perspective from this very same first impression.

Perspectives are a special skill that we as humans have inbuilt within us. They happen unconsciously and are individual to each of us. The way I see it (and this is just my perspective) is that our 'perspectives' are a unique way that we as individuals filter and interpret information (or 'data') based upon our own experiences and expectations. Which means that two people are unlikely to experience and interpret the same sensations, situations or motivations in the same way. That said, I think that your perspective can never truly be right or wrong. Much like a person's first impression, it is an individual interpretation.

It's commonly thought that our perspectives become our reality. Douglas Adams (legendary author of *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*) suggests that "everything you see or hear or experience in any way at all is specific to you. You create a universe by perceiving it, so everything in the universe you perceive is specific to you". The way I interpret this is that in any situation, my perspective is not going to be the same as your perspective. Therefore, our realities will never be aligned. There is, however, a chance that we may share similar perspectives, but our views or vantage points differ slightly. What we see and process, will alter depending on the variables and data that we are sensitive to and biased towards.

The act of "perceiving" is defined largely as the means of identifying, sorting and arranging unconscious data into something that is meaningful and understandable to the perceiver ("the perception process"). So, our perspectives become a by-product of our dealings with unconscious data and its translation into 'useful' outcomes. Which means that these perspectives are an integral part in what becomes our reality.

When we perceive, what we are really doing is translating unconscious data (based upon our own past experiences, values, attitude, beliefs and motivations) into something we can comprehend. We see things through lenses that have specific filters just for us, which alters the situation or event from its unconscious source, into something that we can subconsciously and consciously digest. Observing situations without judgment can allow you to become more aware of the unconscious data differently. Being more sensitive to the unconscious data allows you to see things in detail from multiple perspectives.

Acknowledging that we don't see everything, and that there are a number of things happening behind the scenes that contribute to the decision or judgement drawn, will enable us to harness flexibility and an open mind, removing any pre-determined misconceptions, ultimately leading us to improve our sensitivity to the unconscious data. Being able to take that step back in the moment, acknowledging your own perspectives and reality, and observe the situation without any further judgement, I think, is the first major hurdle in the understanding the complexities of the perception process.

To see things from multiple perspectives does require a special ability. There are so many variables that alter our view of a situation, and we are constantly drawn back to our own personal experiences and motivations. But to be able to master the art of seeing things from multiple perspectives is an invaluable skill – and yes, most certainly easier said than done!

The perception process requires us to let go of our own expectations, judgments and biases, and be open to seeing and understanding things in new ways. It forces us to look deep into our own selves and challenge our own opinions, as well as retraining our cognitive thought to pay attention to what's important within that moment, and more importantly, what to ignore, without any judgement. What's fascinating to me is that this form of non-judgemental observation, whereby it's not just about what we see, but how we see them, has the potential to change our own perspectives – if we allow ourselves to. Once we can achieve this, different data will naturally start to present themselves assisting us in making relevant and informed decisions based upon these observations.

To start understanding the perception process, we need to be aware of how others think and communicate, but most importantly, that it is different to our communication style. We need to mindfully observe the situation, removing our own personal opinions, assumptions, and biases and adopt thinking from different points of view. This may not seem like a natural or lateral way of thinking

and may in fact require us to challenge our own opinions and assumptions.

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Adopting empathy as a communication tool can assist in finding different perspectives, however empathy shouldn't be confused with perspectives. Whilst empathy is a vital skill used within the perception process, it is the ability to understand the emotions and feeling of others. Perspectives, on the other hand is the ability to understand their way of thinking. While the perception process is unique to our own selves, engaging in empathetic communication can provides us with the ability to understand a situation from another person's (or multiple peoples) point of view.

Another vital key step in the perception process is how we project ourselves to others. That is, how others interpret the way we communicate within a situation, and whether our intentions are accurately met. We are, in essence, our own PR managers. What I mean is that we are responsible for creating our own image and reinforcing that image by the way we project ourselves. Our projections will alter someone's perception of us, and inevitably create their own perspective.

Being aware that the perception process is complicated and challenging, but not impossible to understand will enrich your ability to communicate with others. It will allow you to explore the gaps in communication and develop your own intuitive thought. This introduces the concept of intuition and its contribution to forming perspectives.

As perceptions become people's reality, if you project yourself wholeheartedly and do your first impressions right, other people will see your perspective, meaning they'll see, but more importantly understand, you for what you are.

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About Alison Fox

Alison has worked across a diverse range of customer centric organisations, with a strong focus on customer engagement, organisational development and design. During her career, she has worked across a variety of creative and corporate organizational development assignments in both public and private sectors, focusing on frontline management, business management and leadership.

Alison's background in design and management has enabled her to lead teams of researchers, designers and operators to develop new stakeholder engagement processes across government organisations. Providing seamless customer interactions, communication strategies and staff processes, she collaborates with organisations to deliver concise information based on customer and stakeholder requirements.

About Phacelift

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