

Unit 3.1 Mental Technology, Part I

OVERVIEW

Scientists who study the human brain have identified four basic processes that appear to govern most of our interactions with the world around us. First, we *perceive* a situation. Second, we *associate* that situation with others that may have happened in our past in order to identify any similarities. Third, we *evaluate* those associations and any other available information to help us predict the effect of our response to this new situation. And, fourth, we *decide* how to react based on our interpretation of these likely consequences.

In other words, our decisions are based largely on our perceptions and interpretations of the past. That isn't necessarily bad in itself. However, Norbert Wiener, founding father of the computer, coined a term for these thinking machines that is appropriate for humans as well: "garbage in, garbage out." That is, when you put misinformation into a computer, the answers you get are likely to be wrong. In the same way, human decisions that are based on incorrect perceptions and misinterpretations are likely to be wrong as well.

There's a brighter side to the story, though. Richard Gregory, one of the world's foremost experts in how the mind works, offers a definition of intelligence that is worth remembering. "Intelligence," he says, is simply "the art of guessing correctly. Anything we can do to improve our guesswork makes us more intelligent." Bottom line: improve our perceptions and interpretations of the world around us, and we will make better decisions—in life, at work, and in personal relationships.

UNIT QUESTIONS / EXERCISES

1. Think of a situation in which you reacted quickly—and negatively—to something that someone said. Later, as you reflected on the situation, how did your perception and interpretation of the situation change? Share your answers with your coach and/or the group.

2. How can our past experiences create problems with perceptions and interpretations, especially in stressful or emotionally laden situations? Discuss your answers with your coach and/or the group.

3. Think about how this applies to your work relationship at John L. Scott. How do misperceptions and misinterpretations affect your relationships at work? How do they affect overall organizational performance? Discuss with the groups ways in which you might change these misperceptions or misinterpretations.
