CHAPTER
**ONE**

# Assumptions, Perceptions, and Feelings

## How They Influence Performance



Developing new skills sometimes requires changing our attitudes and cognitive beliefs about ourselves, others, and the world. We need an evidence-based model for this developmental process. *Cognitive restructuring*, one of the newest approaches to changing behavior, is based on a framework developed by Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck. The basic goal is to identify internal monologues that are related to stressful events, to evaluate this self-talk for its rationality and influence on behavior, and then to produce new self-talk to modify the original cognition and the undesired behavioral pattern.

In order to set the stage for cognitive restructuring, we need a model describing our behavior when we are confronted with stress. How we react to stressful events can be described in a series of behavioral proceedings that is referred to as the ABC chain. It begins with the trigger event (A). How the event is perceived, which is a function of the person's core beliefs and assumptions, forms the (B) of the chain. The (C) part is the response: behavioral, physiological, and psychological. Through the process of perception, largely based on previous assumptions, we label events in a positive or negative way, and this labeling in turn gives rise to emotional and behavioral reactions. Our perceptual labeling may be accurate, or it may be inaccurate, inappropriate, or irrational. When the latter happens, we put ourselves into a state of stress. The cognitive restructuring technique

focuses on changing our assumptions, perceptions, and feelings (APFs). Let's look at a short example.

Joe an engineer reports to John a senior project engineer and is called into John's office.

John immediately jumped to the problem: "The damn circuit failed for the tenth time. Joe, we have to fix the problem, or we'll have a severe overrun." As John paced around the room, constantly looking at the test documents and slamming them on his desk, Joe could only think, "This is awful. John is accusing me of fouling up. I only did what the design people told me to do. He is really mad at me. There go my stomach cramps again. What am I going to say?" He stood immobilized with anxiety and fear, until John demanded of him, "Joe, what are we going to do? We need answers. We need action—and promptly!" Finally Joe stammered, "I'll do my best. I'll go back to the lab and see what I can do."

John is a reactive type who lets his emotions show when under stress. In this instance, John was angry at the design, not at Joe, who did not explore what John was angry about. In a quick reaction, Joe misperceived the situation and subjected it to negative distortion. He evaluated John's emotional reaction as directed at him rather than at the situation. Further, he allowed his negative emotional reaction to overwhelm him and prevent engaging in dialogue with John to examine and solve the problem. Finally, he left to avoid further emotional damage.

Criticism from a tyrannical boss can be perceived differently by different people. Joe had been taught that perfection is the sole goal in life. He perceives his boss's criticism as an unconditional putdown of him personally, not his behavior. As a result, he suffers anxiety and fear of failure whenever he has to interact with his boss. Eventually he may avoid his boss—a perceived solution that only compounds the problematic situation. A vicious cycle of the boss's anger and Joe's terror flights develops. Cognitive restructuring would help Joe deal with his difficulties.

Cognitive restructuring would take this scenario and

- Demonstrate that Joe's reaction did not fit the reality. He had an irrational or distorted view of the interchange.
- Demonstrate that if he continues to allow false perceptions and beliefs to shape his present and future behavior in a negative way, he will set himself up for failure.

- Help Joe change his thinking (his cognition) and abandon his irrational beliefs.
- Help Joe develop a more rational appraisal of such situations and generate alternative interpretations.

The critical factors in this case are Joe's APFs. They will form the foundation for understanding and modifying his ABC chain of reactions. The next sections will elucidate these concepts.

## THE BASIS OF OUR ASSUMPTIONS, PERCEPTIONS, AND FEELINGS

As we pass through life, we build up an assumptive system of what is, what should be, and what ought to be. These assumptions, highly charged by emotional events and our upbringing, come from encounters that we take for granted. We all have assumptions based on our beliefs, values, and attitudes, though the range and depth of them vary from person to person. Because these assumptions and beliefs in part determine our needs structure, becoming conscious of them can help us modify these underlying elements and lead to change.

Perception is what we process through the five senses or how we interpret these sensations through intuition. Given that there are different ways of processing a situation, there is tremendous latitude in what we perceive. There are general laws of perception, but individuals create their own spin in a given situation. Cognitive restructuring makes us acutely aware of the role of our perceptions in determining our behavior. By modifying our perceptions, we alter our emotional state and our reactive behavior.

Feelings—pain, pleasure, hate, love, disdain, grief, hope, joy, disgust, and so on—are our evaluative reactions to a situation. Our emotional state is critically linked to our immediate perceptions. For example, love can change our perception of another's thoughtless action into acceptance, or hate can intensify our perception of the same act into a deliberate affront or worse. Assumptions, perceptions, and feelings interact, each influencing the other. Deeply rooted assumptions can distort our perceptions such that they reinforce the old assumptions. By opening up our perceptual field with "floodlight" vision rather than "spotlight" vision, we have the opportunity to alter these assumptions. The emotional tone can reinforce or alter either assumptions or perceptions. Assumptions can set the stage

for a positive or a negative emotional state. A current perception that triggers a previous negative or positive image can affect our emotional state.

Practitioners in the field of cognitive restructuring have identified three core activities that are necessary to bring about behavioral change:

1. Identification of the thoughts, beliefs, and values that cause negative affect and behavior. This is a systematic attempt to bring to the surface automatic, and sometimes dangerous, thoughts so that we can recognize them.
2. Evaluation of these thoughts, beliefs, and values in an attempt to judge their validity.
3. Shifting of any irrational or untenable beliefs to a more rational basis. The anxiety level is reduced by repeated attempts at mastering the irrational belief.

Cognitive restructuring takes into account self-talk, all our internal scripts, of a positive or a negative nature, that promote or deter our purpose. We all talk to ourselves. In this ongoing process, we may build up scripts that are so negative that they interfere with our well-being and performance.

In order to diagnose your self-talk, take into consideration the following particulars:

- Self-concept: the degree of your self-worth and any corresponding negative thoughts about the outcome
- Self-instructions: corrective scripts that promote new behavior
- Self-reinforcement: changes of approach, even in moderate degrees, that you reinforce with positive self-talk

Cognitive restructuring can be used to modify most elements of management style. It can be directed at these elements:

- Modifying psychological type for a given situation
- Strengthening and changing motive patterns
- Developing positive power and influencing skills
- Overcoming barriers to effective conflict resolution

- Managing stress
- Coping with organizational culture

## HOW WE KNOW WHAT WE KNOW

When Robin flew in to Phoenix to work with Todd, who had recently transferred into her district from another sales territory, she thought it would probably just be a typical pleasant day of visiting customers and writing orders. But it did not turn out that way. Even though she had heard great things about Todd, he was withdrawn and dull, did not seem to pick up on opportunities, and had not drawn up a logical call list so that they could use their time well. Her questions to him elicited little response; Robin started to wonder whether the other district manager had "dumped" Todd on her. She found herself criticizing everything about him, his clothes, his need for a haircut, his sloppy briefcase, his way of greeting buyers he was meeting for the first time.

Robin started to feel anxious; how would she ever make her numbers with this dullard in such a key territory? Would she have to start a termination process—if so, how soon? She hated this kind of conflict; that was why she was so careful in the way she hired reps. Her team always came in first in the company in sales because she hand-picked them and nurtured their efforts. Todd had an attitude she did not like and one that, moreover, would surely keep him from making his goals. As they walked in to make their last call of the day, Robin wondered what she was going to do with this guy. He just did not seem to have "it."

When we encounter a particular situation, our reaction to it is like the process of taking a snapshot. We scan the environment, decide what we want to focus on, and take the picture. The specific settings (lens, focus, and speed) influence the type of photo we get. Depending on the type of lens (wide-angle or telephoto), for example, breadth may be sacrificed for detail or vice versa. In addition, we highlight certain aspects at the expense of others and may distort or lose some parts of the scene as we reduce three dimensions to two. Details may be lost or blurred if we haven't used the right settings; filters could further influence the image we get of the scene we are trying to capture.

As managers (and as human beings), we process information and conceptualize events and people in much the same way. Our mindset at the time determines

whether we focus on the broad, the narrow, or selected portions of what we see, hear, and observe. The first images of events and people give us data that we evaluate as being positive, neutral, or negative. It has been estimated that we evaluate 95 percent of our perceptions as positive or negative rather than neutral. In the example of Robin and Todd, Robin had decided very early on that the experience of working together was negative. Those perceptions will color her working and personal relationship with Todd from that point forward.

The ability to be aware of our assumptions, perceptions, and feelings and to change the way we view situations and people (and our reactions to them) is essential to the Integrated Management Style Model. The capacity to shift thinking empowers managers to make the best use of the building blocks of management style, to alter our behavior, and to affect others' behavior. In this chapter, we will look first at how assumptions, perceptions, and feelings operate as part of management style, then discuss cognitive restructuring as a method to change the way we view ourselves, our coworkers, and our organizations.

## ASSUMPTIONS: WHAT WE TAKE FOR GRANTED

Throughout our lives, we build up assumptions about what is and what ought to be. In broadest terms, assumptions include all the beliefs, values, and attitudes that we hold. Almost all our assumptions are based on our own or others' past perceptions and experiences. These assumptions, highly charged by emotional events and our upbringing, vary in range and depth. We have assumptions about people's motivations: they are lazy and need to be prodded into action, or they are driven by a sense of competency. We have assumptions about ourselves: I am an honest person, or I am a person who has integrity. We have assumptions about causality: spare the rod and spoil the child, or high levels of stress leads to high performance. Because they play such a major role in determining our needs, assumptions must be made conscious if we are to modify our behavior as managers.

Some assumptions are neutral. For example, I assume that the sun will rise and set every day. Because this a natural occurrence, my assumption will be right and taken for granted until the day it doesn't. My assumption that no one can create programming code that is as elegant and efficient as mine is not neutral; it is charged with beliefs and values that affect the way I manage the programmers who report to me. My assumption about myself and about the work to be done

is fraught with imperatives of shoulds and oughts that control my perceptions of the world and people around me. It does not necessarily reflect objective reality, only my uncontested beliefs about how I should behave.

We may clearly articulate some assumptions, whereas others may be based on fact or doctrine that we profess. Others, nested in the unconscious, may only be vaguely articulated in our awareness. Both overt and unconscious assumptions can drive our actions, but when assumptions are unconscious, they can lead to a host of problems, especially for managers who are also confronting the assumptions of those they manage. In fact, assumptions underlie all the building blocks of management style. They profoundly affect how we perceive the world, handle conflict, address our needs, use power, manage stress, and prioritize our values.

There are three basic elements in assumptions: beliefs, values, and attitudes. Beliefs, the most basic of assumptions, are the relationships that we assume exist between certain facts and outcomes: $E = mc^2$, the earth revolves around the sun, disease is caused by bacteria and viruses, all men are created equal, the whole is equal to the sum of its parts, and so on. Taken together, our beliefs make up our basic underlying understanding of ourselves and our environment. Beliefs are founded on past and present experience and on knowledge that has been given the stamp of approval by authorities. The electron microscope, for example, allows us to see the bacteria and viruses that we heard or read about in print. Some beliefs are based on untested assumptions that can be dysfunctional—for example, that traditional IQ predicts performance in a job, that women are the weaker sex.

Values are based on assumptions, but unlike simple beliefs, they are evaluative. Values are assumptions about what is or what ought to be that express a preference in a positive or negative way. Examples of values would include "Experience is desirable," "People ought to be honest," "People should be free," and so on. (Chapter Six is devoted to the explication and discussion of values.)

Attitudes, which are based on beliefs or values, are both more complex and more general. For example, some people hold the attitude that training is a waste of time and that businesses should spend more resources on assessing existing capabilities for jobs. This attitude can be thought of as an assumption based on the belief that behavior derives completely from innate abilities. In that view, training is a negative drain on resources. The implications of this attitude, however, are more far-reaching and "loaded" than either the belief or value on which it is based. The assumption discards all evidence that says that there are

some aspects of behavior that we can change. Some may be innate, but a large number are based on acquiring skills. Training in these areas is productive for both the individual and the organization. Unchallenged assumptions and values close out opportunities for growth and potential, especially when dealing with underprivileged and disenfranchised groups.

Everyone who manages is well aware of the importance of assumptions, but it is obviously not necessary (or possible) to be aware of all of everyone else's assumptions to understand them better. It is, however, crucial to sense which assumptions are salient and important in a given situation. By "salient," we mean the extent to which the person is preoccupied with that assumption, such as, "I ought to be the most technically competent person in my group." By "important," we mean the extent to which an assumption is central to other assumptions or beliefs. For example, the assumption, "I am a good manager and ought to be viewed by others as being good," is a central assumption. If this assumption is called into question, it is apt to lead to concerns about a number of other assumptions as well, such as, "I ought to be a strong leader" or "I ought to have influence within the company." Important or highly charged assumptions are usually those that are most closely related to a person's self-concept.

Because they are so much a part of us, we are often not aware of our assumptions, while at other times we recognize them clearly and specifically. The more aware we are of the assumptions we make, the better we can understand what is going on inside us. Similarly, the more we can identify other people's important assumptions, the more we will be able to understand them from their own points of view. Seeking out another's assumptions often helps us become more aware of our own, just as understanding our own helps us see others' more clearly. The central skill here is being able to recognize and accept (if not approve of) the differences between our own assumptions and those of others. For example, the following list of ten common assumptions about work and motivation is not exhaustive, but it illustrates the assumptions that drive our behavior and our relationships at work:

- Individual self-interest fosters economic growth and harmony.
- Competition brings out the best in people and groups.
- Meritocracy is the only standard for rewards in society.
- Collaboration leads to managing by committee.

- An individual is measured by his wealth.
- An individual is measured by her personal achievements.
- Teamwork leads to greater productivity.
- People need to be told, shown, and trained in proper work habits.
- People need a sense that they are respected as capable of assuming responsibility.
- People depend and expect direction from above; they do not want to think for themselves.

If you take a moment to examine these assumptions and the beliefs, values, and attitudes they engender, it's not hard to see the behavior they encourage. How well, for instance, would a matrix organization work in a corporation which assumed that competition brings out the best in people, that individuals are measured by their achievements, *and* that teamwork leads to greater productivity?

## PERCEPTION: HOW WE INTERPRET EXPERIENCE

The process by which we take in information through our five senses and make meaning of it is all part of perception. In the earlier example, when Robin came to work with Todd, she was taking in information about his appearance, his attitude, his behavior, his sales performance, and his intelligence. She put that all data together and came up with the perception that Todd was not what she'd been promised and perhaps didn't even belong on her staff.

In psychological types, a sensing person bases her perceptions on what she considers facts and details in the situation. An intuitive type of person can arrive at a perception without being aware of the concrete basis for it. Intuitive types can make leaps from the past or present to future possibilities. There are many other factors in our interpretations of situations and experiences as well. Given the many different ways of processing a situation, perception can vary just as widely from individual to individual. Scientific research on attitudes and beliefs makes us acutely aware of the role of our own perceptions in determining our behavior in a situation. By modifying our perceptions, we can alter our emotional state and our reactive behavior. Robin had a set of perceptions of Todd based on assumptions that equated casual dress and appearance with incompetence. The feeling tone was decidedly negative. If Robin could neutralize her perception and

readjust her assumptions about Todd, it might be possible for the two of them to develop a more congenial and productive relationship. Cognitive restructuring is the technique for effecting this neutralizing change process.

To understand perception, it's important to realize that

- We structure our perceptions to fit our wishes, biases, needs, and expectations. When I am hungry, I focus my attention on food and drink. The steak at seven o'clock appears more satisfying than it would right after lunch.
- Emotions may influence the perceptual process, either intensifying it or interfering with it. When I am angry with a subordinate, any shortcomings I see will confirm my negative appraisal.
- We are unaware that we are distorting reality because our defenses are at work. When I project blame onto another person, it may be that I feel guilty in the situation but cannot face up to it.
- Inner factors (memory, emotion, wishes, cultural background, and psychological type) carry more weight than external factors (immediate perceptions, logical input from others). If I have been taught that minorities are less than competent, I will override perceptions where this is not confirmed.
- Previous experience with positive or negative reinforcement in similar situations generates strong biases that influence the current perception. If I have been punished for bringing up problems in the past, I will overlook and deny problems that arise in the present.
- Life experiences and traditions in our culture can influence how we process information, particularly when we interact with others from a different culture. If I have been taught to maintain a respectable distance from another person when we're in conversation (in North American culture a foot and a half or greater), I may be put off when a South American stands much closer to me when we talk. I may retreat and focus on maintaining the appropriate distance, and lose sight of what is being said.
- The human brain is systematic and selective in the way it organizes the information it receives into a perceptual whole, what German psychologists of the 1920s

and 1930s called a "gestalt" (or pattern of awareness) that is based on all sensory inputs that we take in when we are awake. We are constantly combining new information with previous assumptions and perceptions in an attempt to create a consistent and coherent pattern that makes sense to us. Each thought must fit within that pattern even if it is illogical or false. Consequently, perception becomes our own construction of what constitutes reality.

- Other major factors affect perception, including regional variation, climate, population density, population variety, nationality or ethnic background and allegiance, religious beliefs, educational level, emotional maturity or immaturity, social class, professional background, and gender. A person from New York may turn off a client from Augusta, Georgia, by his accent, and vice versa.

### Seeing Situations in New Ways: Functional Perception

Perception plays a profound role in our organizational life: how we deal with conflict, handle gender differences, develop strategic plans for the future, implement procedures for daily operations, handle stress, motivate others, and use power. The most practical approach to dealing with the multitude of perceptions that inevitably exist in organizations is to develop "functional perception," a way of looking at how our perceptions mesh with others'. The process for developing functional perception follows these ten steps:

1. Understand your motives, beliefs, and assumptions about the world around you. Then try to understand the motives, beliefs, and assumptions of others.
2. Construct situations where hypotheses, perceptions, and concerns can be aired, tested, and confirmed or discarded.
3. Create a climate of openness for others to discuss the "undiscussable." Generate valid information, avoid premature attribution, and focus on behavior.
4. Listen to your intuitions, which are guides to your inner assumptions, beliefs, and feelings. Go beyond the surface or obvious interpretation of your assumptions. Some assumptions are layered deep in the unconscious.

5. Seek feedback from others on their assumptions, perceptions, and feelings about the situation. Give feedback to others on your response to their perspectives.
6. Take responsibility for your assumptions, perceptions, and feelings. Put your statements in the "I think," "I feel," "I believe" format.
7. Through reading, listening, and observation, broaden your perspective in regard to people, things, and events. Use literature, art, politics, behavior, humanities, philosophy, ethics, and science as your springboard to a new level of awareness.
8. Accept the anxiety that accompanies uncertainty. We can help others in making emotion acceptable, but must remember to separate people from the problem.
9. Do not turn the situation into a win-lose proposition. Comparing assumptions, perceptions, and feelings is not a contest or game. It is serious business, and the goal is a wise solution.
10. Recognize that as we learn, we broaden our perspectives by making appropriate perceptual, conceptual, and philosophical shifts in our worldview.

As an example of a situation where functional perception could have made a difference, consider this scenario. When John Fraser, who was president of the elementary and high school division of Jason Publications, hired Carol Mack as sales director for his division, she came highly recommended from a rival publisher in New York. John had held Carol's job for ten years before being promoted to senior vice president of operations. His colleagues, Dick Enders (president), Mike Collins (CFO), and Mason Stuart (VP of the college division) had agreed to recruit a female for the director of sales position. Carol seemed to be the best on paper and in the interviews.

After six months on the job, Carol wondered whether John was holding on to the reins of the sales side of the elementary–high school division too much. It was natural for a period of learning to take place under John's guidance, but it appeared to her that he did not trust her ability to go it alone.

John repeatedly voiced concerns about Carol to the senior management team. He thought she was too aggressive, didn't fit in with the Jason management style, and didn't relate well to the all-male field sales staff. John told the group that the

"the jury is still out on her." But he never told Carol any of this; she felt as though she was living in a vacuum when it came to feedback.

Were John's perceptions functional, or were old scripts and assumptions driving his view of Carol? If he had followed the ten steps of functional perception, John could have avoided what ultimately did happen—the dismissal of a motivated and productive person. Carol's dismissal resulted in a lawsuit against Jason Publications, considerable financial damages, and a loss of reputation for John.

1. What were Carol's needs and motivations? Did John understand her assumptions and beliefs about the sales director's job? How did those perceptions match his own?
2. Was Carol too aggressive? Did her style fit with Jason Publications? What was the problem with the field representatives? John needed more data than his crude perceptions about Carol.
3. John needed to discuss his perceptions with Carol in an open fashion so that both could air their perceptions and assumptions. He needed to make it possible to focus on behavior rather than on personality or hidden preconceptions.
4. What were John's underlying assumptions about women in management? Did he have preconceived attitudes and beliefs that blocked his functional perception of the situation?
5. John needed to seek information from Carol's subordinates and Jason's customers in addition to the views of the field reps.
6. John should own up to his assumptions, perceptions, and feelings and not look to reinforcement from the "in-group."
7. John might try reading about the role of women in management, as well as case histories and books in this area to broaden his perspective.
8. What anxieties were underlying John's perceptions? Did Carol threaten him in some way? Did she violate his set of assumptions about how women were supposed to behave? How was Carol as a person separate from the problem John perceived?
9. John set up a win-lose situation where he was going to amass all the evidence in favor of getting rid of Carol. A win-win approach would have salvaged both Carol's and his career at Jason Publications.

10. John might have used this situation with Carol as a learning experience to profoundly change his worldview.

## Checking Our Awareness of Perceptions

Perhaps the most important ingredient in functional perception is awareness of the factors that affect our response to people and situations. The key to that awareness is understanding the relatively stable set of perceptions that make up your own self-concept because, quite simply, you can't understand other people until you understand yourself. By analyzing the perceptions that make up self-concept (what is unique about us, what distinguishes us from others, what makes us similar), we not only gain a fuller and more accurate sense of ourselves but also sharpen our ability to understand others. The following inventory is a useful way to ask the questions that will help you better understand your own self-concept.

### *Uniqueness*

What makes you different from others? For example, you might think about how you're different from your boss—are you more interested in facts and details or in the big picture? What about your boss? Do you like working alone or in a team? What does your boss prefer?

### *Image of Others*

What yardstick(s) do you use to evaluate others? For example, do you judge people by qualities such as dependability and honesty, or by other qualities? Do you judge quickly or hold off? What puts you off about other people (for example, a confrontational approach)? What draws you to other people? What do other people do that makes you uncomfortable?

### *Image of Self*

What do you like best about yourself? What do you like least about yourself? For example, are you well-organized? Good at follow-through? Do you tolerate ambiguity well?

### *Past Experiences*

What are the most important past experiences that made an impression on you? When have you felt most effective at work? For instance, have you developed any new systems? What about that project made it a valuable learning experience? In what settings (for example, task forces) have you felt least successful?

*Mood*

What are your mood states? Are you consistent and stable or likely to fluctuate? How do these mood states affect your perceptions? For instance, when do you become anxious and cranky? Do you have any tendencies toward depression or anxiety? What triggers those states? How do you control them? In what situations (at work and home) do you feel most comfortable and calm?

*Life Experience and Learning*

What are the important things you have learned in the past five years? How do they affect your assumptions about life? For example, what have you learned about whether a relatively structured or unstructured environment works best for you? What has been most useful in learning to deal with uncertainty? How have the things you've learned helped you find a more suitable career path?

*Values*

What values do you cherish? What possession—tangible or intangible—would you surrender last? List your five most important values concerning your personal and work life (for example, family security, health, responsibility, freedom, respect, and so on).

*Familiarity, Comfort Zone*

In what area of activity are you most familiar and secure? For example, do you like to work completely autonomously, or would you rather have a clear set of expectations, objectives, and means to carry out your work?

*Uncertainty, Discomfort Zone*

In what area of activity do you feel insecure and anxious? For example, are you stressed when you have too many tasks to accomplish at the same time? When boundaries are unclear? When you have to face interpersonal conflict?

*Wants*

What one thing would you most want to do? For example, travel internationally? Study art? Become a writer?

*Emotions*

How do you handle your emotions? Are you more open or closed? Do you express your emotions freely or try to modulate them? What happens to your emotions

under stress? What effect does the way you handle emotions have on your life at work and at home?

*Focus*

What activity do you give most of your attention to? For instance, do you give equal weight to job and to family? Are you able to focus on each one when you're in that situation?

*Motivation*

What needs drive you in life? For example, are you driven by the need for personal achievement? Wealth? Freedom? Autonomy? Control?

*Completion of the Incomplete*

Do you communicate the whole story? How do you communicate? For example, are you direct? Concise? Has anyone told you that you sometimes don't give all the information that is needed?

*Simplification Versus Complication*

Do you look to simple or complex explanations of people, events, and things? For example, do you enjoy detail and difficult puzzles? Or do you like to find the "common denominator"?

## FEELINGS: HOW WE REACT TO OUR PERCEPTIONS

Feelings, the third important component of the way that we process situations, people, and events, are our emotional reactions to our immediate perceptions. Perceptions elicit emotional responses, which become part of the "script" that determines how we will deal with a particular situation and other situations that elicit similar responses. Current feelings are based in previous experiences that we learned to see as positive or negative. We all bring our feelings to work with us, much as we might not like to admit it. For managers, understanding the ranges of feelings that are apt to surface in the workplace and knowing how to respond are essential not only to shifting our own management style but also to creating a higher quality of life for everyone around us.

Our earliest emotional response, anxiety, develops out of situations where we are afraid of being deprived of food and water or comfort. Unlike fear, which is a

reaction to a specific danger, anxiety is an unspecified, vague feeling of uncertainty and helplessness in the face of a perceived threat. Guilt is another feeling that develops early in our lives as the product of the "shoulds" and "oughts" that are scripted for us by the adults in our lives. We feel guilty when we perceive that we have violated some moral or legal standard as defined by figures of authority. It is important to make a distinction between guilt and shame. Shame occurs when we do not live up to what we ideally should be. Thus, a person may be guilty of a crime but ashamed of self. Or a person may be guilty—and know it—of violating the rules of the Security and Exchange Commission but not be ashamed of it. That person may in fact be proud of getting around what he or she perceives as restrictive regulations.

Anxiety, guilt, and shame have positive and negative outcomes. Prolonged "untamed" anxiety leads to emotional and behavioral paralysis as the person unconsciously withdraws from situations that trigger that feeling. Sustained guilt turns an individual into a compulsive worrier or a repressed antisocial. Excessive shame forces us to restrict our actions so as not be revealed as worthless. On the positive side, anxiety can alert us to dangers or challenges that must be overcome. When we have successfully navigated through those dangers, we gain a sense of self-mastery. Dealing effectively with guilt refines our sense of responsibility and commitments to others. Controlling our feelings of shame makes us more aware of our actions toward others.

As we grow up, our feelings become more differentiated into pleasure, pain, hate, love, disdain, grief, hope, joy, disgust, and so on. As we continue to develop, we learn to identify which feelings are attached to our perceptions. If we are punished when a red card is placed in front of us, we will feel apprehension when we see red in the future. We are taught basic assumptions about what is right and wrong or acceptable. In this sense, our emotional state is critically linked to our immediate perceptions, and our future perceptions are linked to these "scripts" about our behavior. Our feelings result from meeting the expectations of our scripted assumptions.

For example, we are taught that individual competitiveness is a worthy goal. As we go through life, we will perceive that we have won or not won the game, the sale, the desired person, or the promotion. A variety of feelings will be attached to perceptions of failure—anger at the situation, shame for not performing, incompetence, or rage at ourselves. The particular feeling depends

upon our previous conditioning and the distinctive combination of assumptions, perceptions, and feelings.

Feelings often come in pairs, where one is positive and the other negative (for example, love and hate, disgust and delight, ambiguity and clarity, panic and control). Although we tend to think that negative feelings should be avoided, there are times when they are justified. For example, you may feel indignation when someone violates your trust. The challenge is how you handle your indignation. Do you take a defensive position and repress your indignation? Do you lash back at the person with rage? Do you become depressed over the incident? None of these responses will help resolve the conflict. When we move from feeling indignation in that moment toward constructive confrontation with the other person, we are more proactive and reduce stress. (See Chapter Eight for specific strategies for handling interpersonal conflicts.)

## ASSUMPTIONS, PERCEPTIONS, AND FEELINGS AT WORK: A CASE STUDY

Before Tom's recent promotion to section manager in a digital processing lab, he was a technical contributor in another section of the department. Tom was raised to be self-reliant, strong, and extremely competitive. He prided himself on his ability to solve technical problems with the greatest competence. He held these basic assumptions about life and work:

- I must stand alone.
- Individuality is the highest virtue in the world.
- I must fight any intrusion.
- I will be perceived as weak if I accept help.
- I should push people away when they crowd me.

In his new position, Tom was put in charge of a group investigating technological transfer within the department that was composed of colleagues from other sections and subordinates from his section. He decided that he would make a list of the technologies that could be used in the department and present it to the group. When people questioned how he came up with the list, he became angry

and resentful about what he perceived as criticism and withdrew from active participation.

Tom's perceptual filters looked at his group's questions as intrusion and aroused negative feelings. Working as a collaborator threatened his core assumptions about his self-worth. Like most autonomous people, he needed unrestricted freedom of choice, action, and expression. When he encountered this stressful situation, his reaction was to fight. Tom's assumptions conditioned him to perceive active problem solving as a personal threat rather than as a challenge for the group to solve.

Tom does not have to remain stuck in this destructive cycle with his assumptions, perceptions, and feelings. He can instead choose to

- Examine his basic assumptions.
- Accept his negative feelings as the result of these assumptions.
- Recognize that his perceptions and feelings are based on his core assumptions.
- Move toward restructuring his assumptions and changing his mind through cognitive restructuring.

## CHANGING YOUR MIND CHANGES EVERYTHING

Becoming aware of our assumptions, perceptions, and feelings is the first step in cognitive restructuring, a behavioral method we can use to change how we perceive and judge the world. The advantage of cognitive restructuring is that it fully accounts not just for behavior (which has been a common way of trying to change management style) but also for thoughts and perceptions.

### The Key: How We Talk to Ourselves

One of the basic concepts of cognitive restructuring is "self-talk"—all the ways we talk to ourselves in positive or negative ways. Talking to ourselves builds up scripts for action that may be so negative that they interfere with our well-being and performance. To recognize and correct the effects of self-talk in a given situation, three elements have to be taken into consideration:

*Your self-concept: your sense of self-worth and any corresponding negative thoughts about it that may influence your perception of the situation*. If your

self-concept is dominated by low self-esteem, unwarranted guilt and shame will set you up for failure.

*Your instructions to yourself: corrective scripts that promote new behavior*. If, for example, you have a coworker who unexpectedly explodes when asked about work-related problems, you may feel angry or anxious and vow to avoid that person at all costs. The inevitable result is that small problems escalate until they reach crisis proportions. You could change your self-talk so that you tell yourself, "She feels powerless under these circumstances. She is caught off guard, and her defense is to explode out of frustration. My job is to not react, let her run down, and move on to problem solving. Maybe I can identify the circumstances that trigger the explosions and avoid them by giving her a memo outlining our problems. I will try this when the next problem arises."

*Your reinforcements to yourself: changes in approach, even in moderate ones, that you can reinforce with positive self-talk*. If you decided, for example, to give your coworker a memo before meetings so that she can be prepared, you notice that she still explodes, but because you remain calm and in control, the outburst subsides, and she moves into working on the problem. At this point, you reinforce yourself by silently congratulating yourself for taking this stance. You pat yourself on the back and say progress has been made. You didn't change your coworker, but you shifted your behavior and now find that your relationship with her is moving steadily in the right direction. You also feel a lot less stress, and work will go more smoothly.

### The Basics of Changing Your Thinking

In cognitive restructuring, three core activities are necessary for change. First, the thoughts, beliefs, and values that cause negative feelings and behavior must be identified. We must systematically bring to the surface automatic (and sometimes negative or dangerous) thoughts so that we can recognize them. Second, those thoughts, beliefs, and values must be evaluated for their validity. And, finally, irrational or untenable beliefs must be countered and shifted to a more rational basis.

### *Step One: Identify What You're Thinking*

The first task in cognitive restructuring is "thought catching." In thought catching, we become aware of automatic thoughts, images, and accompanying feelings that we have when we are stressed and that we perceive as positive or negative. For example, negative automatic thoughts might include

I will be punished for not being perfect.

I will not be able to cope with my boss.

The future is bleak and uncertain.

There is nothing I can do to control myself.

I am doomed to failure. Life has no meaning.

There is no one I can turn to.

I will be blamed for any failure.

### *Step Two: Evaluate the Impact of Thoughts*

The second step is determining the consequences of the thought and whether it causes negative feelings. If you think the future is bleak and uncertain, you may very well feel despair and futility. To change these thoughts to more positive formulations, cognitive restructuring would demonstrate that

- This reaction may not fit the reality. We may have had an irrational or distorted view of the situation.
- Continuing to hold these perceptions and beliefs will affect our present and future behavior, probably in a negative way. We will set ourselves up for failure.

### *Step Three: Cope with and Counter Negative Thoughts*

Once we have identified the thought and evaluated the impact on our feelings and behavior, we can employ positive coping mechanisms and a technique called countering to change the way we handle the distressing situation.

## USING COPING MECHANISMS

With coping mechanisms, we learn to change distress into challenge and face problems in a calm, rational fashion. They help us abandon irrational beliefs and generate new alternatives. With countering, we develop thoughts that can be used to go against a firmly held negative belief or assumption.

For example, Jackson works for a boss who is a micromanager. Whenever there is a problem, Jackson's boss, Rich, comes in and wants to take over the project. Then Jackson gets anxious and depressed and says to himself over and over, "The situation is futile. There is no way to cope with Rich. Every day is doomsday at work." The presence of such thoughts is not the problem; it's that the negative thoughts produce negative feelings and poor coping behaviors. A vicious cycle develops that feeds on itself if it is not interrupted. Cognitive restructuring in this case might look something like this:

| Thought | Evaluation of Thought | Coping Mechanism |
|---|---|---|
| The situation is futile. | This can only lead into despair. | Recognize that Rich is a difficult person. He feels the same frustrations and helplessness as the rest of us. |
| There is no way to cope with Rich. | My coworker Sharon seems to be able to deal with Rich, so I can do the same. | Follow the procedures for dealing with difficult people (see Chapter Seven). |
| Every day is doomsday at work. | It will be doomsday if I continue to think this way. | I must look at work and life as a challenge. |

Sarah held these beliefs about her role as staff coordinator and her boss, Hank: "Hank is the boss. I must be doing something wrong if he needles me. My role is to obey authority without questioning. We are all helpless when faced with a superior force. The boss does the problem solving, not me."

| Thought | Evaluation of Thought | Coping Mechanism |
|---|---|---|
| My role is to obey authority without questioning. | This makes me a dependent, subservient person. | Authority has its limitations. There are no imperatives to follow. I can question, offer opinions, and still be loyal. |
| We are all helpless when faced with a superior force. | There are countless examples of the Davids and Goliaths in the world. I can look at people who overcome superior forces, e.g., Gandhi. | I can practice role playing with my husband. He can be the boss, and I can learn to be positively assertive. |
| The boss does the problem solving, not me. | No one wins team games alone. Problem solving is a collaborative process. | Follow the procedures for collaborative conflict resolution. |

Sarah used positive self-talk (a type of countering) when she was in difficult situations. She learned that life can be unfair and that people can be difficult, so she developed a strategy based on challenge and mastery. When Hank started needling her, she said to herself, "Well, here he goes again, same old Hank. I don't know whether he realizes what he is doing. But regardless, I can't control him, and I don't want to. I will be in charge of myself and try to work out a solution to the problem. I am not helpless and powerless. I am in control." Sarah has applied cognitive restructuring techniques to change her perceptions and reactions to a chronic situation.

## COUNTERING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND BELIEFS

Like coping mechanisms, countering helps replace negative thoughts and beliefs with new assumptions and perceptions that can help change behavior. The advantage of countering is that it is a structured process for getting at the thinking that so often drives unproductive behavior. In the usual practice of cognitive

restructuring, countering is used to erase noxious, irrational thoughts, but as we will see in subsequent chapters, it can be applied as well to restructuring our needs, power bases, conflict styles, and ways of managing stress.

The theory behind countering is that when you repeatedly counter a negative thought, belief, or assumption, you weaken it and build up an effective charge that reduces its potency. For example, I might have an irrational belief that everyone must love me. It can be countered by: "Baloney! Fat chance in hell! Really, there are many people who are incapable of showing respect, affection, or compassion for others. When I encounter them, I must take this into consideration." The more counters you muster against an assumption or belief, the more likely you will succeed in reducing its power.

There are least three types of counters: alternative interpretations, coping statements, and protective beliefs counters.

### Alternative Interpretations

These counters are designed to give us new ways to think about a situation, attitude, or person. For example, Murray, a stockbroker, believes that he must succeed in everything that he undertakes. It seems that everything in his life—family, the schools he attended, and his competitive work environment—have reinforced his high need for achievement. He is regularly anxious, tense, and depressed. If he were to develop an alternative interpretation of success, he might say to himself, "I have only so much energy to expend. If I squander it on many endeavors, I will be mediocre in all, so I'd better focus on what I really want to do." Or he could say, "My family was a stress-ridden bunch of workaholics who never enjoyed life and were miserable for it. I should not follow their imperative." Or, "Those high-priced schools had a set of values that bred competitiveness and lack of compassion. After all, look at the products of the British public schools!" These alternative interpretations could decrease Murray's achievement need to a manageable level, away from the driven frenzy for success.

Matthew, a middle manager, believes that if he is not in total control, all will be lost. This belief strengthens his need to dominate his subordinates, his wife, his friends, and his children. Matthew could reevaluate that assumption by developing some alternative interpretations. He could ask himself, "Now, Matthew, what would happen if you delegated the authority to Jim on the next project?"

"Well, he could fail, and my boss would come down on me."

"Do you really believe that Jim will fail and your boss would blame you? After all, Jim has followed your orders faithfully in the past. Don't you owe him the respect to prove his competence to you and himself?"

"Well, I could try out a small project with him and see what happens."

Matthew can repeat this kind of internal dialogue with all the catastrophes that he imagines would happen with his wife, his children, and his friends, and even work out a worst-case scenario. If he repeatedly does this, his fear of catastrophe and need to dominate will diminish.

### Coping Statements

The rationale behind the use of coping statements is that they help us anticipate problems (which we fear or dread) and devise ways of dealing with them. Coping statements are especially effective in countering negative self-fulfilling prophecies. For example, Sally believes that she can't confront Elizabeth (her boss) on the overruns on a key project. She frets, "She'll blame me, and I'll suffer." So Sally does *not* tell Elizabeth, and the accounting system reveals the overruns at the end of the quarter. Elizabeth angrily asks Sally why she withheld the information. Sally feels guilty and depressed—another case of the negative self-fulfilling prophecy.

Instead, Sally could construct a script of coping statements so that she can deal with the situation and reach a wise solution. For example, instead of thinking, "I can't face Elizabeth. She is a lethal weapon and will explode when she hears the bad news. It will be kill-the-messenger time. I feel depressed. Maybe it will go away," she can try a positive coping message: "There are three reasons why the project is overrun: (1) the client added scope to the work, (2) some estimates for parts were off, and (3) Nick, a programmer, had a heart attack. These seem to be plausible reasons why we are overrun. I know this may be difficult for me to convey to Elizabeth, but I will rehearse this five times and go in and discuss this with her."

After practicing her coping routine, Sally enters Elizabeth's office: "Elizabeth, I want to update you on the project. We have encountered three significant problems, and I want your advice on how we should handle the projected overrun."

Elizabeth replies, "I'm glad you came to me before the quarter was up. Maybe we can do something about it." After the problem-solving session, Sally should give herself some positive reinforcement: "Boy, that was easy. I'm going to try this every time I have these negative thoughts."

### Protective Belief Counters

Protective beliefs are cherished assumptions that serve as security blankets. They act as magical thoughts that maintain a strong defensive armor against change. If I don't ride herd on my subordinates, says a manager, they will goof off. The assumption behind this belief is the old saying, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." It is also tied to a need to dominate and be aggressive. The belief is so strong that the manager feels that if he gives it up, something will go wrong.

Protective beliefs arise because we want to maintain personal power. Putting down another person elevates us. Protective beliefs can also arise from one's social support system. If a group believes strongly in a protective belief, it is hard to stand up without fear of being ostracized. The protective belief bonds us to the group.

Protective beliefs also persist because we may feel that something disastrous will happen if we change our beliefs. In this case, the protective belief wards off unwanted anxiety. For example, someone might say, "I've been very successful in using the old purchasing system. If I try to learn the new one, I will fail. I will stick to what I know." This protective belief reduces anxiety in the short run but is self-defeating for long-run competence.

For example, Agnes, the head of the publications department in a large financial firm, needed to address her protective beliefs when she found that she was disturbed by her company's move to upgrade its hardware and software. First, she uncovered her beliefs:

1. The old word processor worked quite well. Why fix what is not broken?
2. I am an expert with twenty years of experience. What do those young, wet-behind-the-ears kids know about my job?
3. My boss has praised me in the past, and he will stand by me.
4. If we change to the new system, my subordinates will think I am giving in.
5. Giving up power in any area is always dangerous.

Protective beliefs can actually be useful in helping us gain access to underlying concerns. Then we can use counters to break down the concerns. Agnes thought about what anticipated disasters those beliefs might be protecting her against:

1. I may show my incompetence if I try the new system.
2. I am getting old, and I may be slipping.

3. Maybe I am uncertain about my relationship with my boss.
4. I cannot lose control over my subordinates.
5. This is a political environment. Anyone who shows weakness will be swallowed up.

Agnes used the following counters to combat her protective beliefs:

1. I can attend the training sessions as a student. They are risk-free environments because mistakes are part of the learning process.
2. Age equals wisdom. I can use my experience with the previous system to help integrate the new one. I can act as a consultant when problems arise.
3. I will set up progress meetings with my boss to discuss the new system. He will be grateful for my positive attitude.
4. I will discuss the new system with my subordinates to get their perceptions and feelings. This will maintain my stature as a caring, receptive boss.
5. Everyone else is in the same boat—naive and anxious. My positive attitude can lend support to others. This can lead to positive bonds and break down destructive competition.

## SHIFTING YOUR PERCEPTIONS AS A MANAGER

Most of our beliefs, attitudes, and values are positive, constructive, and reality based, but some are based on distorted perceptions that may develop into harmful life themes. Our day-to-day perceptions may be guided by negative and/or traumatic experiences or poor role models; we organize what we perceive today in the light of the past. For example, you may think, "I am helpless. My strategy to resolve this discomforting feeling is to attach myself to people who can help me." If this is a persistent pattern, you become a dependent person. Or you may think, "Errors are bad; I must not err. I must be constantly alert to cues that may disrupt my drive for perfection." Or, "People are potential adversaries. I organize my perceptions to be on guard against signs of competition from others. I have to be a wary person." Or, "I could be stepped on. I develop resistance strategies to cope with this perception of the world. I am uncooperative even when it is in my best interest to be a team player."

All these patterns of behavior based on previous assumptions are maladaptive if they become habitual ways of organizing our current perceptions as managers. Similarly, it's important to recognize that all manner of behaviors that we may not like in other people—egocentricity, competitiveness, exhibitionism—may be adaptive in certain situations but grossly maladaptive in others. We only have other people's behavior to indicate what is going on within them, because it's uncommon for them to reveal their thoughts, feelings, and wishes. Behavior is what we want to change, however, and in order for that to happen, their perceptions of a given type of experience must first shift.

The key to perceptual shifting in the workplace is the manager's own perceptions. It starts with identifying any perceptions that have a negative effect on interpersonal relationships. For example, you might hold the belief that your boss is like someone else you know (a big brother, your mother, a teacher) who once caused you psychological harm. That past event influences your immediate perception, leading to negative feelings and judgments about your boss.

Usually an unfavorable pattern is not corrected until the faulty perception is changed and a more realistic, less damaging pattern replaces it. In other words, if earlier perceptions of an authority figure are affecting your relationship with your boss, you will have to shift your perceptions in order to remove the negative emotion you're feeling and replace it with more neutral and productive perceptions.

The centerpiece of making these perceptual shifts is completing a three-column worksheet that is divided up as follows:

*Column 1:* List every thought or belief or assumption that causes negative effects in a particular situation. "Driving in traffic is making me crazy. I can't concentrate on anything else."

*Column 2:* Think of the personal negative consequences of the belief. Try to look at past experience as a guide. "When I have these thoughts I become angry, distracted, and all keyed by the time I reach work. It is not good for me."

*Column 3:* Record the best argument against (that is, the counter for) the belief. Ideally, this argument will be emotionally persuasive as well as rationally sound. "No one can make me mad or stressed. I am doing this to myself. I can gain control by listening to my favorite radio station. I can use this time to go over my day's schedule in my head. I can prepare my day before I get to the office."

Plan to spend five to ten minutes a day meditating on critical past incidents that disprove the irrational belief and make sure you fill in worksheet for all those perceptions that need to be shifted because they are no longer serving you.

## COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING AND THE ELEMENTS OF MANAGEMENT STYLE

The three steps of cognitive restructuring can be especially useful to modify most elements of management style. Let's look at each one individually.

### Modifying Psychological Type

As an innate part of us, psychological type is not an element we want to reconstruct over the long haul. But sometimes we need to adjust to meet the requirements of the people and the task at hand. A person with a thinking (T) orientation may have to develop the opposite pole, feeling (F), in order to assess the impact of his or her judgments. The logical, analytical, and impersonal manner of the thinking type sometimes leaves out the human side of the equation. For example, such a person's thinking might need to shift as follows:

| Assumption/ Belief | Evaluation | Counter for Shifting Perception |
|---|---|---|
| The logic of the decision should always dictate action. | Sometimes what appears to logical can be countered with other viewpoints. | My logic needs to be reinforced or countered by others' perceptions and concerns in the situation. |
| One must disregard personal feelings at all costs. | This can lead to negative impacts on others. | I must always ask, ''Who is affected by this decision? In what way? Is there an alternative?'' |
| Individual values do not count in making a decision. | Discarding personal values leads to a lack of diversity. | I must respect personal values. Only then can we reach a productive consensus on a problem. |

### Strengthening and Changing Motives and Needs

Our motives and needs can either be powerful forces in the service of performance or saboteurs if we let them get in the way. Cognitive restructuring can be useful in helping us identify negative needs patterns and change them for the better. For instance, Malcolm was a hard-driving, aggressive investment banker who at times alienated his staff and his partners. His high need for achievement, together with his aggressiveness, dominated his managerial style. After a series of key employees left the firm, Malcolm decided he needed to modify his approach to people. He started by looking at the basic assumptions behind his achievement and aggressive drives, then outlined his assumptions, evaluated them, and developed counters.

| Assumption/ Belief | Evaluation | Counter for Shifting Perception |
|---|---|---|
| My personal goals supersede all others. | This has gotten me in trouble in the past. People see me as self-centered and aloof. | I can still fulfill my personal goals by coordinating my efforts with others in a win-win strategy. |
| I personally have to do the job. | I have been accused of not being a team player. Even my boss thinks this gets in the way of effective performance. | The firm is a team. I may be the leader one day, but someone else can take the lead. Our goals are interrelated. |
| I must prove I am the best. | This assumption has created enemies for me. | I need colleagues and loyal subordinates, not competitors and enemies. |

### Developing Positive Power and Influence Skills

The effective use of power is a learned skill and has little to do with innate factors. Sometimes our assumptions about power get in the way of using positive influence skills. Marsha was a shy lead programmer in an educational software company, who had difficulty in leading her group. It appeared that she had faulty assumptions about power that blocked her effectiveness. Three of her major assumptions are listed as follows.

| Assumption/ Belief | Evaluation | Counter for Shifting Perception |
|---|---|---|
| I am very low in dominance. I cannot be a powerful person. | Power is a learned skill. | Power is not dominance; it is influencing others through my behavior. |
| I need to be the expert at all times. | This power base has limited use. Being the expert too often turns people off. | I can use my expert power when asked for. It is like a battery charge—use when needed. |
| All power corrupts. | Some power is corrupting. Power when used positively gets things done. | I need to look at what is needed to get the job done. I can influence people without hurting them. When this happens, I am effective. |

### Practicing Effective Conflict Resolution

The way that we approach conflict management is based on our assumptions about what causes it and how it should be dealt with. Cognitive restructuring can be particularly useful in bringing those assumptions to the surface and countering them.

| Assumption/ Belief | Evaluation | Counter for Shifting Perception |
|---|---|---|
| Conflict must be avoided at all costs. | In the long run the issue will get more serious. | Conflict is natural and can be solved by following the correct procedures. |
| Conflict is a contest of wills. | Conflict will degenerate into warring factions. | Conflict is not a contest. It is directing energies toward a solution. |
| Personalities determine how conflict is solved. | Interjecting personality attacks only exacerbates the problem. | You can separate the people from the problem. Focus on perceptions, concerns, and mutual options for gain. |

### Managing the Irrational Beliefs Behind Stress

Stress can be caused by our irrational thoughts about the way things should be. These irrational thoughts or beliefs can lead to internal stress that causes us misery. Sheldon, a bright but harried marketing manager, had the following irrational thoughts that needed to be restructured.

| Assumption/ Belief | Evaluation | Counter for Shifting Perception |
|---|---|---|
| My self-worth is tied to my achievements. | Failure will bring on depression and/or guilt. | There is more to me than my material achievements. These will change as time goes on. I must look to other avenues for self-worth. |
| There is a perfect and best way to do a job. | This leads to an obsessive search for the perfect way. I can be frustrated and discard one approach after another. | Some home runs go five hundred feet, and others just make it over the fence. A home run is a home run. |
| There are wicked people out in the world who must be punished. | This can lead to paranoid thoughts. I will constantly be on the lookout for these people, leaving little time for anything else. | For every wicked person, there are one hundred good people. I should concentrate on being good and rewarding others for their goodness. |

### Coping with Organizational Culture

There are times when we face organizational changes that our beliefs can get in the way of coping with the impending events. Jessica's company was in the throes of a merger, and she uncovered four beliefs that were paralyzing her daily work patterns.

| Assumption/ Belief | Evaluation | Counter for Shifting Perception |
|---|---|---|
| The new merger will change the company. | This may happen, but the outcome is not decided. | I cannot control the macro culture. The more I focus on what I cannot change, the more futile it becomes. |
| The changes will have a negative impact on my group. | This thought could be a negative self-fulfilling prophecy. | I have control over myself and the micro environment I work in. |
| My current or new boss will prove to be difficult. | He may be under stress or living with uncertainty as I am. | I can manage my boss by understanding his goals, needs, and style. |
| The uncertainty will be stressful. | Uncertainty can be managed. | I can cope by practicing stress management and relaxation techniques. |

## CONCLUSION

The key to understanding how we view the world is the APF model of assumptions, perceptions, and feelings. By focusing on these elements, we can isolate and eliminate faulty views about ourselves and others. This model allows us to cognitively restructure our management style and control stress. We will be using the model throughout the book in the appropriate chapters.