



What is?

Perspective Taking

Perspective taking is the ability to understand another person's viewpoint.

What does it consist of?

Perspective taking can be described as consisting of awareness of situational and individual circumstances and empathy for another person or group.

Individual and situational awareness involves recognising and taking account of the situation when things go wrong, rather than simply blaming the person or group involved. Furthermore, when things go well, acknowledgement of the role of ability and hard work is given.

Empathy can be described as involving feelings of concern for another person or group, understanding their situation and experiencing pleasure at their success. People often mistake empathy with 'agreeing' with the other person. However, being empathetic typically means you can understand and accept someone else's view without necessarily embracing it. So, while perspective taking is about stepping into another person's shoes, it is also about remaining objective and keeping one foot in your own.

Why is Perspective Taking important for organizations?

In modern organizations, traditional boundaries have been blurred and the need to work collaboratively is increasingly important. Understanding another's point of view and empathising with them is fundamental to collaborative working. If employees understand the viewpoint of other employees then they are more likely (and better able) to cooperate with them and help them out.

Where is it important?

This might be particularly important where detrimental organizational barriers are seen to exist between groups and yet cooperative working towards shared goals is required. Departments that are internal customers and suppliers to each other may be one example of this. The extent to which the internal customer is able to adopt the perspective of their internal supplier (and vice versa) is likely to effect how well they work together. It is essential that such groups cooperate to ensure the smooth flow of operations and to sort out any problems that arise, such as quality and other production issues.

For instance, in a glass-making factory, the Materials team supply the Decorating team with drinking glasses. If the Materials team supply glasses in a manner that makes them difficult to pick up and decorate, then the whole process will be slowed down. However, if Materials gain a greater understanding of what Decorators do then they are more likely to take on their perspective and rectify this problem.

A similar argument might be given for Customer Service Agents in a call centre. If they are better able to take the perspective of the customers that they talk to, then they are more likely to go out of their way to help them.

Perspective taking can also be applied to managerial development & leadership. For instance, if managers are able to understand organizational events and employee behaviour from a range of perspectives then they are likely to be more effective.

What makes people more likely to take another's perspective?

Greater interaction with the person/group

If employees interact with others outside of their own team during the course of their work (or at other events where they talk about their work) then they are more likely to learn the other's perspective. This is because employees will gain a better understanding of the circumstances under which others operate and work.

Greater understanding of the work environment

This might involve understanding how ones' own job relates to the bigger picture and understanding what other departments do. Employees who have broad knowledge like this are more likely to take the perspective of others within the organization.

Broad Ownership If employees feel greater ownership and accountability for a range of work aspects outside their immediate task boundaries (such as shop floor employees being concerned about customer satisfaction, on time delivery), then the more likely they are to adopt the perspective of other work groups. This is because they are more likely to feel that other department's problems are part of their own job rather than "someone else's concern".

Autonomy Having greater autonomy or control over the way they work is likely to have an indirect influence on perspective taking. It will enable employees to gain greater insight to and ownership of the overall processes within their organization. This is because they are more likely to focus beyond their immediate tasks.

General implications

The implications are that the degree to which employees take the perspective of others may be enhanced by organizational

intervention. This might be particularly important if interpersonal relations between employees or departments are poor. Enhancing perspective taking is most appropriate when the individuals involved have shared goals and tasks.

Good practice

Companies could ensure that:

1. Contact and interaction between work groups is encouraged and supported. This might be done through visiting schemes to other departments or joint problem solving activities.
2. Employees are given greater scope for control over their work and wider responsibilities. This is likely to encourage them to take on board the broader implications of their work.
3. Employees are trained and educated about their work environment, how their job fits in and how other departments work.

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