LOCAL RATIONALITY

A person's understanding and interpretation of the context in which they work is influenced by several factors, including:

- Knowledge
- Perspective
- Perception
- Focus of attention
- Experience level
- Social norms
- Available resources

What is Local Rationality?

Local rationality refers to the fact that people make decisions and take actions that seem rational to them at the time based on their understanding and interpretation of the context. In other words, people do things that make sense to them at the time based on their focus of attention, their goals, and the resources they perceive to be available at that moment.

As part of fully understanding how the workplace system contributes to performance outcomes, work needs to be understood from the local perspectives of those doing the work. This includes consideration of the below factors that influence someone's understanding and interpretation of the context in which they work:
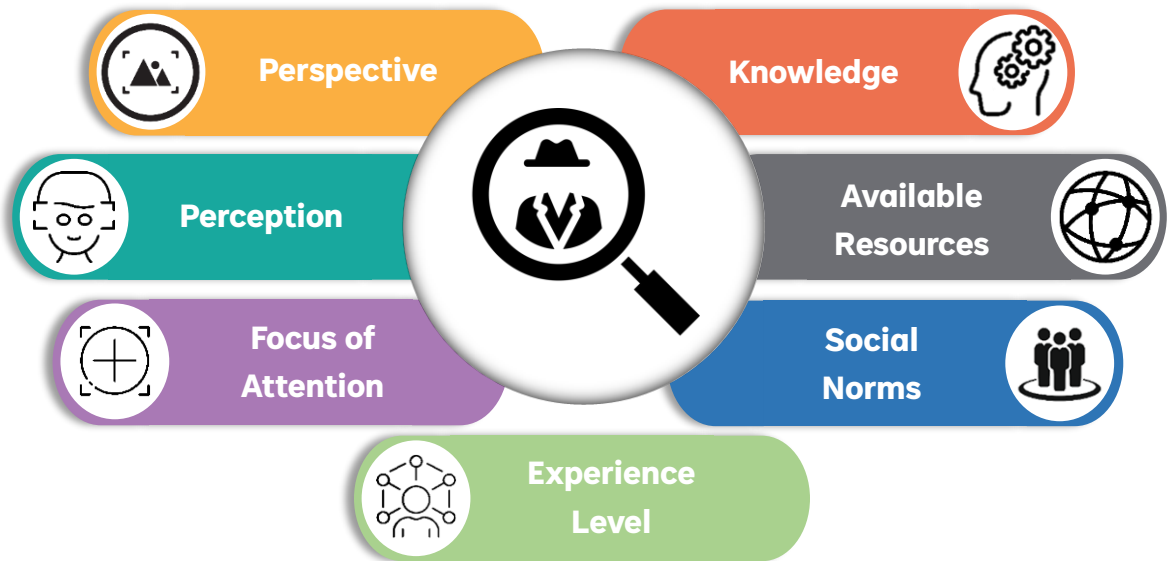
Considering Local Rationality

Workplaces should consider local rationality proactively and reactively:

Example - Considering Local Rationality Proactively:

Local Rationality is a critical factor in decision-making and should therefore be carefully considered in the design of decision-making processes. Workplaces should seek to ensure decision-making is as objective as possible in order to guard against potential biases and related threats. This includes ensuring decisions are informed by data and evidence, including subject matter expert opinions and diverse perspectives, and that a series of checks and balances are in place to ensure decisions are adequately tested prior to finalization. In high-risk workplaces these practices are especially sensitive to ensure decisions do not unintentionally lead to a greater risk of harm.

Example - Considering Local Rationality Reactively:

Local rationality is a critical factor to consider when determining the causal and contributing factors that led to an adverse event. This includes seeking to understand the individual perspectives of all parties involved in the event and how the actions taken likely made sense at that moment in time. This approach can support a better understanding of what contributed to the incident, and in turn, more robust corrective and preventive actions.

For more information on systems thinking and performance influencing factors see *Canadian Standard Association. (2022). Human and organizational factors for optimal pipeline performance (CSA Express Document No. 16:22).*

For more learning resources on Human and Organizational Factors and Safety Culture visit the *CER's Safety Culture Learning Portal.*

Reflective Questions:

(1) What controls exist within your organization to ensure decisions are not negatively impacted by potential biases and related threats?

(2) Does the incident investigation process in your organization seek to consider multiple alternative perspectives and their implications? Are staff and leaders trained to consider the local rationality of the individuals involved in an incident? If not, what improvements can be made to consider this?