



## MR-05 Schemata



### The Window with the Blue Glass

When Mara moved into the old house, she was immediately drawn to the small window at the top of the stairs. It was made of blue glass, not clear glass like the other windows, but deep, rich blue set in uneven wooden frames worn smooth by time. She stood before it and looked outside. The garden beyond was beautiful, quiet, and calm, wrapped in cool shades of blue. She felt peaceful there, and she returned to that window often. Over time, she came to think of the garden itself as a quiet, blue place.

One morning, a friend came to visit, and they climbed the stairs together. Her friend paused at the window. “This is unusual,” he said. “What is?” Mara asked. “The glass,” he said. “It changes the colour of everything.” Mara frowned and looked through the window again. The garden looked as it always had — blue, still, peaceful. “That’s just how the garden looks,” she said. Her friend shook his head gently. “Come outside,” he said.

They stepped into the garden, and Mara stopped. The garden was not blue. The leaves were green. The flowers were red and yellow. The earth was brown. Warm sunlight filled the space. She stood there, confused. “But...” she said. Her friend smiled. “The garden didn’t change,” he said. “You were looking at it through blue glass.”

Later, Mara returned to the top of the stairs and stood before the window again. She looked through it, and the garden was blue, just as before. But now she understood something she had not understood before. The blue was not in the garden. It was in the glass. She realised she had not been seeing the garden itself. She had been seeing it through something she had never noticed. She did not remove the window. It was still beautiful and still part of the house. But now, when she looked through it, she



remembered: this is not the garden. This is how the garden looks through this window. And sometimes, she chose to go outside instead.

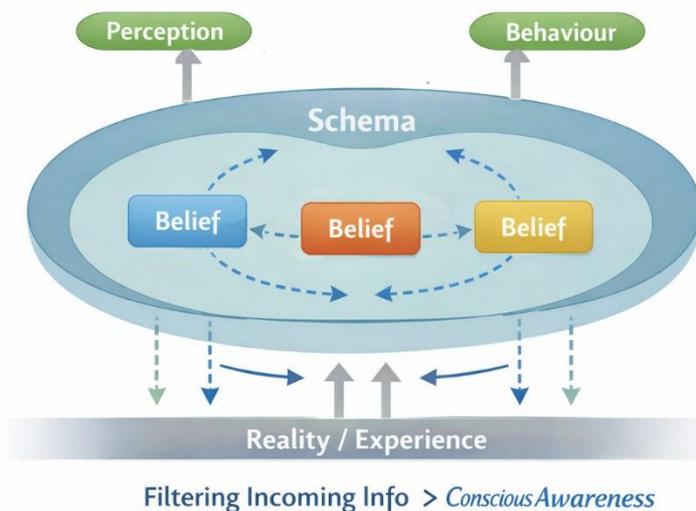
### Formal Description

Schemata are largely subconscious cognitive frameworks that organise beliefs, experiences, practices, language, and expectations into coherent structures that guide perception, interpretation, memory, and behaviour. They enable efficient sense-making by shaping what is noticed, how information is interpreted, and which responses feel appropriate. Schemata are dynamically assembled and revised over time through processes of assimilation and accommodation, yet once stabilised they exert strong resistance to change.

### Plain English Explanation

Schemata are the mental “background structures” that make the world feel familiar and intelligible. They are not single beliefs, but bundles of assumptions, habits, and expectations that operate quietly in the background. Because schemata work below conscious awareness, they often feel like *reality itself* rather than interpretations of it. This is why two people can look at the same situation and genuinely see different things.

Schemata are useful — they let us function without constantly analysing everything — but they also make it difficult to notice when our thinking has become outdated or distorted.



### Example 1 – Personal / Individual

A person raised in a highly competitive educational environment develops a schema in which worth is tied to achievement. Feedback is automatically interpreted as judgment, and rest feels undeserved. Individual beliefs may change, but the underlying schema continues to shape behaviour until it is consciously recognised.



### Example 2 – Professional / Organisational

An organisation operates with an unspoken schema that “efficiency matters more than care.” Even well-intentioned policies are interpreted through this lens, leading to decisions that prioritise speed over human impact, often without anyone explicitly endorsing that value.

### Provenance and Links

#### Conceptual and empirical foundations:

- **Philosophical origins:**  
Immanuel Kant’s introduction of schemata as mediating structures between perception and understanding.
- **Psychological development:**  
Frederic Bartlett’s schema theory, particularly his work on memory reconstruction and cultural influence (“War of the Ghosts”).
- **Cognitive psychology:**  
Work by Rumelhart and others demonstrating schemata as organising structures for knowledge and expectation.
- **Learning and change:**  
Piaget’s concepts of assimilation and accommodation explaining how schemata evolve and resist revision.
- **Clinical application:**  
Schema therapy (Young et al.) showing how maladaptive schemata shape emotion and behaviour and how awareness enables change.
- **Neuroscience:**  
Research on memory consolidation and sleep indicating that schemata are reorganised outside conscious awareness.

#### Links to other Knowledge Objects:

- Belief Formation
- Needs-Driven Belief
- Cognitive Dissonance
- Effort After Meaning
- Tropes

### Exercise: Making a Schema Visible

1. Identify a situation that reliably triggers a strong emotional response.
2. Write down the immediate interpretation you usually make.
3. Ask:
  - What assumptions must be true for this interpretation to make sense?
  - Where might those assumptions have come from?
4. Try to name the underlying schema in a short phrase (e.g. “*My value depends on approval*”).
5. Reflect on how this schema influences your choices.

The goal is not to change the schema yet, but simply to see it.