

Understand Yourself Better

Workshop VII

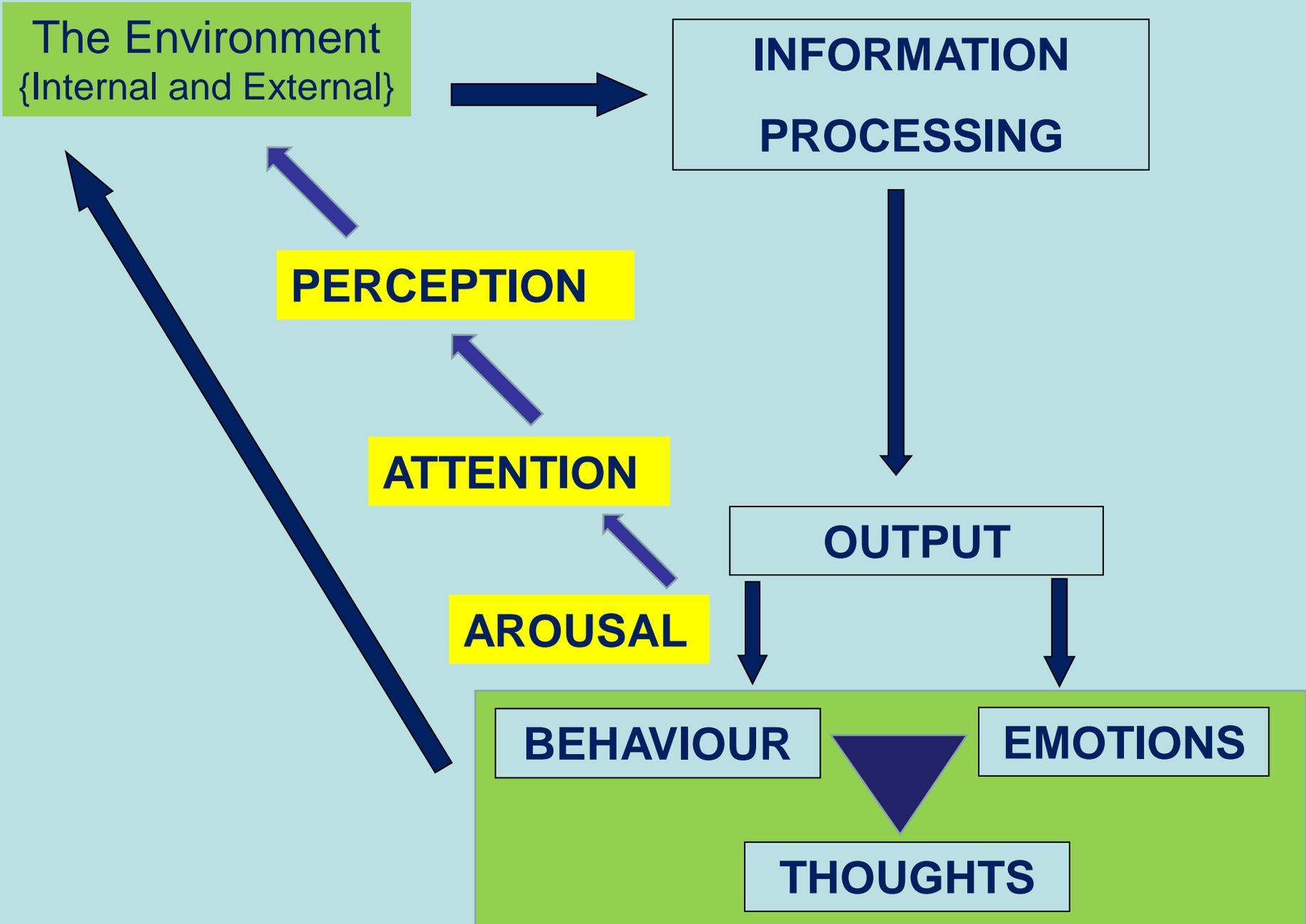
*Recognising and challenging
unhelpful thoughts*

Hey, trust a psychologist to complicate things!

I have “elaborated” one of the diagrams from the last presentation.

This shows that cognitions (thoughts) are also part of the output of information processing - these operate within our CBT triangle and contribute to the generation of new data.

So now we are in the realm of meta-cognitions – these are *our thoughts about our thoughts*, which can produce different emotional responses.



The Environment
{Internal and External}

INFORMATION
PROCESSING

PERCEPTION

ATTENTION

AROUSAL

OUTPUT

BEHAVIOUR

EMOTIONS

THOUGHTS

ATTENTIONAL BIAS - I

We cannot attend to all things around us equally.

There is just too much information to take in.

We cope with this by focusing our attention on parts of the whole.

In general, we will attend to those parts that are most important (salient) to us.

ATTENTIONAL BIAS - II

Attentional bias is driven by our underlying beliefs...

- If we believe that people are going to be critical of us....
- If we believe that people are going to trick us...
- If we believe we are incompetent...
- If we believe we are unlovable...
- If we believe only bad things will happen...
- If we believe the world is full of danger...

Thinking Biases – A Reminder

- Fortune telling
- Mind reading
- Jumping to conclusions

- Focusing on the negatives
- Ignoring the positives

- Taking it personally – I
- Taking it personally – II
- Tablets of stone
- Imagining the worst
- A single swallow does not a summer make
- Extreme labelling
- My mind's made up by the way that I feel
- Only two boxes

Name That Thinking Error! (I)

“Nothing ever goes right for me”

“He is a complete idiot”

“I should not have done that”

“I feel so anxious, something bad will surely happen”

“He only said that to be nice to me”

“The dinner party was a complete disaster because the soup was too watery”

“I am so useless”

“It is all my fault they did not have a nice time”

Name That Thinking Error!

“They will laugh at me”

“Everyone else is better than me”

“She thinks I am a fool”

“It will all go wrong”

“They should not do that”

“The traffic lights are always red when I’m in a hurry”

“Why does this always happen to me?”

“It is not fair!”

Am I Thinking in Unhelpful Ways?

Some points to consider...

- What am I feeling right now?
- Would someone else in this situation feel the same way? (*Emotional appropriateness*)
- Would they have these same feelings with this intensity? (*Emotional proportionality*)
- Am I understanding the situation in the right way? (*Am I seeing a rabbit when it could be a duck?*)

Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts - I

- Mentally step back from the situation which is producing a strong emotional reaction.
- Become an observer of your own thoughts and feelings.
- First reactions are not always the most accurate reactions (remember attentional biases!).
- Do you recognise any biases in your thinking?

Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts - II

- Am I looking at the whole picture or just a small part of it? (*Attentional bias*).
- Is there evidence to support my belief? [The *Perry Mason* approach. Wow, an ancient cultural reference – check it out!]
- Are there things that count against my belief? [Other explanations, missing data]
- What are the consequences of believing this is true? [Emotionally and behaviourally].
- Will modifying my belief lead to my feeling better? (This could mean believing it with less conviction, and feeling better could be the same emotion but with reduced intensity).
- What if it really is true – how could I cope with this?