

# The Executive Perspective

## PERCEPTION LAG™

### A Workplace Reality Leaders Need to Understand

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May 9, 2026



## What Is Perception Lag™?

**P**erception Lag™ is the delay between who an employee has become professionally and how they continue to be perceived within the workplace.

In simple terms:

Someone may have grown, evolved, improved, healed, developed leadership capability, or increased performance — but the organisation is still responding to an older version of them.

Perception Lag™ can impact:

- promotions,
- leadership opportunities,
- visibility,
- trust,
- compensation,
- succession planning,
- and career progression.



## How Perception Lag™ Shows Up At Work

**P**erception Lag™ often appears through statements like:

- “I’m not sure they’re ready.”
- “They’re great operationally, but...”
- “I still remember when...”
- “Do they have executive presence?”
- “What if that happens again?”
- “They’ve improved, but I still have concerns.”

Sometimes these concerns are spoken openly.

Often, they are discussed privately in leadership rooms the employee never enters.



## What Creates Perception Lag™?

**P**erception Lag™ can stem from:

*A Past Mistake* - One visible mistake can shape perception long after performance has improved.

*A Difficult Period* - Stress, burnout, confidence struggles, or personal challenges may continue to influence how someone is viewed.

*A Mental Health Break* - Employees may return stronger and more capable, but leaders may unconsciously continue viewing them through a “risk” lens.

*Early Career Labels* - Employees are often categorised early:

- “Quiet”
- “Not strategic”
- “Emotional”
- “Reliable but not leadership”
- “Still developing”

These labels can become difficult to shake — even after growth.



The Leadership

Risk

**T**he danger is not that leaders assess performance.

The danger is when:

Historical perception becomes permanent identity.

When organisations fail to update how they see people:

- talent is overlooked,
- high performers disengage,
- leadership pipelines weaken,
- trust erodes,
- and progression becomes inequitable.

Questions

Managers Should

Ask Themselves

**B**efore making assumptions about an employee, ask:

- Am I evaluating who this person is now, or who they were before?
- Have I updated my perception based on recent evidence?
- Am I allowing one moment to outweigh consistent growth?
- Have I clearly communicated concerns, or are assumptions being made silently?
- Would I view this behaviour differently in someone else?
- Have I created space for this employee to redefine themselves?

**Have I created space for this employee to redefine themselves?**

Signs An Employee

May Be Experiencing

Perception Lag™

- Consistently high performance without progression
- Being overlooked despite capability
- Receiving vague feedback instead of actionable feedback
- Being trusted with work but not leadership
- Feeling “stuck” despite growth
- Difficulty changing internal reputation
- Repeatedly needing to “prove themselves”



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## The Organisational Impact

**U**nchecked Perception Lag™ can contribute to:

- burnout,
- attrition,
- disengagement,
- underrepresentation in leadership,
- low morale,
- and loss of high-potential talent.

Employees who feel permanently defined by past versions of themselves often stop believing growth will be recognised.

## Breaking Perception Lag™

**O**rganisations reduce Perception Lag™ by:

- creating feedback cultures rooted in growth,
- reassessing talent with current evidence,
- separating past events from present capability,
- allowing employees to redefine themselves,
- and actively challenging unconscious leadership narratives.

Growth should be measurable.

Evolution should be recognised.

People should not remain professionally trapped in outdated perceptions.

## Final Thought

**P**eople are allowed to grow.  
Strong leadership is not just about evaluating performance.  
It is also about recognising transformation.

The question is not:  
“Who were they?”

The question is:  
“Who are they now?”

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*Perception Lag™ is a workplace psychology and leadership concept developed by MB Oshomuvwe through her work in executive coaching, leadership development, and organisational transformation at [The Melanin Executive](#).*

