

The Lecture Contains:

- ☰ What is cognitive dissonance?
- ☰ Testing whether cognitive dissonance can be unpleasant
- ☰ Significance of Elliot and Devine's (1994) experiment
- ☰ Three ways of dissonance reduction
- ☰ How dissonance reduction is a way to attitude change
- ☰ Attitude change through dissonance produced by 'forced compliance'
- ☰ 'Less-Leads-to-More' effect
- ☰ 'Less-Leads-to-More' effect: A research example

What is cognitive dissonance?

- Leon Festinger (1957) defined cognitive dissonance as an unpleasant state resulting from a condition where the attitudes that we hold about a social object or the attitude and the behaviour that are associated with a social object are inconsistent or at loggerheads with each other. For example, I may express publically that I have a favourable attitude towards the people of lower socio-economic group but when it comes to working on a project with that person, I may not be inclined to work with him despite his good skills at that work. Let us see with the help of an experiment how cognitive dissonance can be unpleasant.

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Testing whether cognitive dissonance can be unpleasant

Elliot and Devine (1994) conducted an experiment to understand the impact of cognitive dissonance on the unpleasant state of the person. He planned the experiment by invoking dissonance through asking students to write an essay in favour of a hike in tuition fee for the university students, which in general was disliked by students. The experimenters hypothesized that participants who expressed their feelings immediately after writing a counter-attitudinal essay will experience maximum dissonance and unpleasant mood than those who get an opportunity to express their attitude (after writing the essay) before expressing their current feelings. Following were the experimental and the control groups :

- **Experimental group** : The participants were told to first write the essay, then to share their feeling and, and then finally to express their attitude towards the hike in tuition fee
- **Control group 1** : The sequence of tasks for the participants was : essay – attitude – feelings
- **Control group 2** : The sequence of tasks for the participants was : feelings – essay – attitude
- **Control group 3** : The participants were simply asked to write an essay was in accordance with their attitude towards the fee hike.

RESULTS :

- Ratings of participants' discomfort in different groups: experimental group > control group 1 = control group 3 > control group 2
- Control group 1 showed maximum shift among participants towards a favourable attitude towards the fee hike

Significance of Elliot and Devine's (1994) experiment

- Results clearly indicated that cognitive dissonance produces unpleasant feelings as the participants of the control group felt after writing the counter-attitudinal essay. Other groups did not experience as much unpleasant feelings as the control group as control group 1 got the time to change their attitude before expressing their feelings, control group 2 did not experience a dissonance as its participants had to write a pro-attitudinal essay and control group 3 didn't have an opportunity to express their feelings after writing the counter-attitudinal essay.
- The fact that control group 1 showed maximum shift towards a favourable attitude towards the fee hike indicates that attitude-discrepant behaviour motivates the person to change his/her attitude.

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Three ways of dissonance reduction :

- Attitude or behaviour change
- Adding consonant information
- Trivialization: downplaying the salience of inconsistencies

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How dissonance reduction is a way to attitude change

- As reflected in the experimental study by Elliot and Devine (1994), cognitive dissonance produced unpleasant feelings as the participants of the control group felt after writing the counter-attitudinal essay. But, they didn't get an opportunity to express whether their attitude was favourable or unfavourable about the fee hike. On the contrary, the participants of the control group 1 who got an opportunity to think over their attitude towards the fee hike, they not only showed a tendency to change their attitude but their feelings (that they had to express after reporting their attitude) also were not as unpleasant as those of the control group.

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Attitude change through dissonance produced by 'forced compliance'

- Forced compliance is a situation when one is forced to say or do things contrary to his/her actual view. For example, this may happen many a time with a very close friend or a person highly admired by us. It may be difficult to dislike their proposals.
- During forced compliance, we are often not able to change our behaviour (of saying or doing things as per the proposal of the other person) and therefore, the unpleasant state of dissonance is reduced by changing our attitude.
- Let us now try to understand how the perceived reasons for engaging in an attitude-discrepant behaviour may influence the attitude change.

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'Less-Leads-to-More' effect

- Strong reasons to engage in attitude-discrepant behaviour -> weak dissonance -> attitude change is relatively small
- Weak reasons to engage in attitude-discrepant behaviour -> strong dissonance -> attitude change is relatively large

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'Less-Leads-to-More' effect: A research example

- Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) assigned two different rewards (\$1 and \$20) for the participants in their study who were instructed to express an attitude-discrepant behaviour of telling a friend about a boring task (of placing spools on a tray and then dumping them out) to a quite interesting.
- These experimenter found out that the participants rewarded with \$1 finally reported significantly higher liking for the task in comparison with those who were given the reward of \$20.

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