

Cognitive dissonance (social and cultural contexts of behavior)

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Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams" by Randy Pausch Cognitive Dissonance is a theory, developed by Leon Festinger. It suggests that humans are motivated by a desire to remain in a state of psychological balance. According to the theory, if there is an inconsistency between our beliefs and actions, we will probably experience an uncomfortable feeling, called cognitive dissonance. In other words, there is a desire for balance that drives us to eliminate the dissonance by either changing our attitudes or behaviors (Stevens). In that sense, Cognitive Dissonance theory is essentially a theory of behavior describing a motivational state that exists when an individual's cognitive elements are inconsistent with each other. It assumes that people try to achieve consistency and avoid dissonance which may be coped with by changing one's attitudes. Therefore, cognitive dissonance is an unpleasant psychological state, which is caused by an inconsistent relationship between beliefs and behaviors. The unpleasant feeling caused by the experience of cognitive dissonance leads people to reduce the dissonance by changing an attitude or behavior (Stevens).

On that basis, Professor Pausch is not actually in a state of cognitive dissonance as he states in lecture. As he gives his 'final words' to the audience, the sense of optimism, cheerfulness, and satisfaction can be easily felt in his words. While he recalls his childhood memories and dreams, almost no one from the audience can feel that Professor Pausch is actually giving his 'last words' due to his severe illness. This is evident, for example, when he ironically addresses the audience, saying "If I don't seem as depressed or morose as I should be, sorry to disappoint you." Also, his optimistic spirit is clearly reflected in his words when he declares, "I am in

really good shape. In fact, I am in better shape than most of you." Thus, through this sense of optimism and cheerfulness, he was able to reach a state of cognitive balance, not dissonance (" Cognitive Dissonance"). Essentially, a person experiences a motivational tension when he has cognitions among which there are one or more dissonant relationships. Individuals usually long for consistency within their own mind, and this is exactly the case with Professor Pausch.

In conclusion, it can be said that Professor Pausch was able to reduce cognitive dissonance, by being capable to reduce the dissonant cognition. Although the theory assumes that dissonance can be reduced, only the thought about taking action to do so is a given (" Cognitive Dissonance").

Bibliography

(" Cognitive Dissonance." 15 Nov. 2011. Pausch, Randy. " Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams."

Stevens, Mark . 11 Nov. 2000. 15 Nov. 2011.