

# Analyze the cognitive dissonance essay

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Cognitive dissonance is an incompatibility between two or more attitudes or between a behavior and attitude.

It is an uncomfortable feeling caused by holding conflicting ideas simultaneously. In a state of dissonance, people may feel surprise, dread, guilt, anger, or embarrassment. People are biased to think of their choices as correct, despite any contrary evidence. This bias gives dissonance theory its predictive power, shedding light on otherwise puzzling irrational and destructive behavior. They do this by changing their attitudes, beliefs, and actions. Dissonance is also reduced by justifying, blaming, and denying. The theory of cognitive dissonance proposes that people have a motivational drive to reduce dissonance

Example of Cognitive Dissonance  
SMOKING  
Smoking is often postulated as an example of cognitive dissonance because it is widely accepted that cigarettes can cause lung cancer, yet virtually everyone wants to live a long and healthy life.

In terms of the theory, the desire to live a long life is dissonant with the activity of doing something that will most likely shorten one's life. The tension produced by these contradictory ideas can be reduced by quitting smoking, denying the evidence of lung cancer, or justifying one's smoking. For example, smokers could rationalize their behavior by concluding that only a few smokers become ill, that it only happens to very heavy smokers, or that if smoking does not kill them, something else will. While chemical addiction may operate in addition to cognitive dissonance for existing smokers, new smokers may exhibit a simpler case of the latter. The most famous case in the early study of cognitive dissonance was described by Leon Festinger and others in the book *When Prophecy Fails*. This book gave

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an inside account of the increasing belief which sometimes follows the failure of a cult's prophecy. The believers met at a pre-determined place and time, believing they alone would survive the Earth's destruction.

The appointed time came and passed without incident. They faced acute cognitive dissonance: had they been the victim of a hoax? Had they donated their worldly possessions in vain? Most members chose to believe something less dissonant: the aliens had given earth a second chance, and the group was now empowered to spread the word: earth-spoiling must stop. The group dramatically increased their proselytism despite the failed prophecy.

Theory and Research Important research generated by the theory has been concerned with the consequences of exposure to information inconsistent with a prior belief, what happens after individuals act in ways that are inconsistent with their prior attitudes, what happens after individuals make decisions, and the effects of effort expenditure. Based on the experiments Cognitive Dissonance can be classified into 4 categories: 1) Insufficient Justification - Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) In Festinger and Carlsmith's classic 1959 experiment, students were asked to spend an hour on boring and tedious tasks (e. . , turning pegs a quarter turn, over and over again).

The tasks were designed to generate a strong, negative attitude. Once the subjects had done this, the experimenters asked some of them to do a simple favor. They were asked to talk to another subject and persuade them that the tasks were interesting and engaging. Some participants were paid \$20 (inflation adjusted to 2010, this equates to \$150) for this favor, another group was paid \$1 (or \$7. 50 in " 2010 dollars"), and a control group was not asked to perform the favor. When asked to rate the boring tasks at the

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conclusion of the study (not in the presence of the other "subject"), those in the \$1 group rated them more positively than those in the \$20 and control groups. This was explained by Festinger and Carlsmith as evidence for cognitive dissonance.

The researchers theorized that people experienced dissonance between the conflicting cognitions, "I told someone that the task was interesting", and "I actually found it boring." When paid only \$1, students were forced to internalize the attitude they were induced to express, because they had no other justification. Those in the \$20 condition, however, had an obvious external justification for their behavior, and thus experienced less dissonance.

2) Insufficient Deterrence/Punishment - Aronson and Carlsmith (1963) This experiment examined self-justification in children. In this experiment, children were left in a room with a variety of toys, including a highly desirable toy steam-shovel (or other toy). Upon leaving the room, the experimenter told half the children that there would be a severe punishment if they played with that particular toy and told the other half that there would be a mild punishment. All the children in the study refrained from playing with the toy.

Later, when the children were told that they could freely play with whatever toy they wanted, the ones in the mild punishment condition were less likely to play with the toy, even though the threat had been removed. The children who were only mildly threatened had to justify to themselves why they did not play with the toy. The degree of punishment by itself was not strong enough, so the children had to convince themselves that the toy was not worth playing with in order to resolve their dissonance.

3) Justifying Difficult

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Decisions (Post decisional Dissonance) - Brehm (1956) Brehm (1956) looked into the consequences of making a choice in post-decision dissonance. Participants in Brehm's experiment rated several objects on desirability (Brehm 1956). The experimenters manipulated the level of dissonance by having participants choose between two objects either close or distant in rated desirability. After participants chose an object and read dissonant or consonant information about the two objects, they had to re-rate the objects.

Results showed that participants re-ranked the chosen object as more desirable and disregarded the negative information. When dissonance was high (objects closely rated), participants had to justify their choice of object more than those who had to choose between objects not closely rated by re-evaluating the object as more desirable than their initial impression. 4)

Justification of Effort - Aronson and Mills (1959) Dissonance is aroused whenever individuals voluntarily engage in an unpleasant activity to achieve some desired goal. Dissonance can be reduced by exaggerating the desirability of the goal. Aronson and Mills investigated dissonance using an effort justification paradigm. Female participants, who were joining a discussion group, were accepted into the group (control condition), had to go through a mild initiation or had to go through a severe initiation. When the participants were later asked to rate the discussion and the group members, those who went through severe initiation rated both categories much higher than both the control and mild initiation groups.

Because the female participants had to justify the effort and humiliation they experienced to enter the group, they rated the group as more attractive than the other conditions. Cognitive Dissonance - Driving the Escalation of  
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Commitment One of the factors that drive the escalation of commitment is cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is a state of tension that occurs whenever a person simultaneously holds conflicting ideas or beliefs. Because holding two conflicting ideas or beliefs creates an unpleasant tension, people are naturally motivated to reduce it. Dissonance reducing behaviour is ego-defensive; by reducing dissonance, a person gets to maintain their positive self-image; an image that depicts them as a good or smart person. Cognitive dissonance often produces behaviour that is apparently irrational; although, to the person, it may seem very sensible. Understanding and leveraging cognitive dissonance is a powerful tool for designing customer or employee experiences that positively influence a person's thinking and behaviour and drive the escalation of commitment: \* Justification and Filtering.

Following a decision, especially either a difficult one or one that involves a significant amount of time, effort, or money, customers almost always experience dissonance. Did they do the right thing? The chosen alternative is seldom entirely positive, and the rejected alternatives including the “do nothing alternative” are seldom totally negative. After a significant decision, customers typically seek reinforcement that their decisions were good ones by seeking information that is reassuring. If at all possible, they try to convince themselves and others that it was a logical and reasonable thing to do. They avoid thinking about either the negative aspects of the choice they've made or the positive aspects of the un-chosen alternatives. In designing customer or employee experiences, it is important to arm customers with the story they'll tell themselves and others. In many cases, it

makes sense to continue marketing after the sale in a way that provides people with the ammunition they need to justify the decision they've made.

\*Responsibility: Dissonance effects are greatest when (1) people feel personally responsible for their actions and (2) their actions have serious consequences. If there is a significant amount of external reinforcement or incentives, we may not "own" the decision. For example, offering rewards to individuals for performing even the most pleasant activities decreases the intrinsic value of those activities and reduces the individual's responsibility for having done it. This is why "incentive programs" not only don't build permanent behavior, but may undermine it in some cases. \* Consistency and Escalation: In the absence of strong conflicting signals, dissonance reduction will reinforce actions consistent with earlier commitments and behavior. In addition, once a small commitment is made, it sets the stage for ever-increasing commitments. The behavior needs to be justified, so attitudes are changed; this change in attitudes influences future decisions and behavior.

When customers commit themselves in a small way, the likelihood they will commit themselves further in that direction is increased. This process of using small commitments to encourage people to accede to larger commitments has been dubbed the "foot in the door" technique. It is effective because having done the smaller favor sets up pressures toward agreeing to do the larger favor; in effect, it provides justification in advance for complying with the large requests. Irrevocability and Inevitability: Two of the most important characteristics that effect cognitive dissonance are the relative irrevocability and inevitability of the decision. Irrevocable decisions always increase not only the dissonance but the motivation to reduce it. Once

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we've committed ourselves to an irrevocable course of action, it's in our best interests to justify the decision we made and avoid conflicting information. In addition, research shows that a person's dissonance is reduced with choices they see as inevitable.

In summary, designing influential experiences requires an understanding of cognitive dissonance and, in particular, how cognitive dissonance drives the escalation of commitment. Cognitive dissonance in the workplace Each employee arrives with a set of values, attitudes, and expectations. These include both the work to be done and the organization. The individual confronts the possible dichotomy between expectations--- about the job, the coworkers, the boss, and the organization in general---and reality. He experiences cognitive dissonance A person who can handle one situation well but not another tends to experience discomfort from cognitive dissonance. Ex-A person might be exceptionally good at interpersonal skills but struggle with finance. There are several ways in which an exemplary employee can fall victim to discrimination in the workplace.

The employee is hired by an unprejudiced manager and does well in that manager's department for many years. Then the employee gets a new boss who does not know anything about the employee's past performance. He is suddenly considered as yet another "average employee". The employee does experience cognitive dissonance. There is also a feeling of dissonance when a good employee is laid off because of reasons beyond his control, like when a company is downsizing, and his role is no longer required. Prejudice is also a form of cognitive dissonance because people who hold bigoted views often must deal with evidence that does not match with their views.

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Majority of men still have a problem associating women with finance though some of the top financial positions are held by women.

A smart person with a boring job (a fairly typical job) suffers from cognitive dissonance. If there is no choice but to continue the job, due to money needs or a harsh labour market, more dissonance rises. One situation in which cognitive dissonance can occur is when a person changes roles such as when a factory worker gets promoted to foreperson. The behavior required in this new role including giving orders, instead of receiving may be at odds with the opinions and values that the individual held as a low-level worker. The resulting cognitive dissonance generally results in an individual's opinions coming in line with the other supervisors. Another situation that can create cognitive dissonance is when a person completes a course of conduct that does not end up being worth the sacrifice and perseverance that the conduct required. Ex-A person who gets his dream job and then realizes that his success is not worth the sacrifice of his health, sleep, or time for family or other social endeavors.

Mergers and acquisitions are very stressful to the employees especially to the employees of the acquired firm. They feel threatened that they might lose their jobs, status or influence. Depending on the group of employees, different coping choices seem more likely. Top managers avoid cognitive dissonance by leaving the company. The employees reduce cognitive dissonance by changing their beliefs and attitudes or by simply resisting and denying changes. Akerlof and Dickens model Akerlof and Dickens (1982) developed a model of a hazardous industry labour market where workers and firms know the true odds of accident, but workers are prone to

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experience cognitive dissonance reaction. Because of cognitive dissonance, knowing the odds imposes psychic costs of fear and under certain conditions, it will be efficient to suppress fear and choose an alternate set of beliefs more compatible with preferences, e.

. , the odds of accident are lower. The main point of the model was to show that when people form such cognitive dissonance reactions, government intervention such as safety legislation, where workers must purchase safety legislations, may be needed to restore Pareto optimality. WAYS TO REDUCE COGNITIVE DISSONANCE Dissonance will be resolved in one of three basic ways: Change beliefs: Perhaps the simplest way to resolve dissonance between actions and beliefs is simply to change your beliefs. You could, of course, just decide that cheating is o. k. This would take care of any dissonance.

However, if the belief is fundamental and important to you such a course of action is unlikely. Moreover, our basic beliefs and attitudes are pretty stable, and people don't just go around changing basic beliefs/attitudes/opinions all the time, since we rely a lot on our world view in predicting events and organizing our thoughts. Therefore, though this is the simplest option for resolving dissonance it's probably not the most common. Change actions: A second option would be to make sure that you never do this action again. Lord knows that guilt and anxiety can be motivators for changing behavior. So, you may say to yourself that you will never cheat on a test again, and this may aid in resolving the dissonance. However, aversive conditioning (i.

e. , guilt/anxiety) can often be a pretty poor way of learning, especially if you can train yourself not to feel these things. Plus, you may really benefit in some way from the action that's inconsistent with your beliefs. So, the trick would be to get rid of this feeling without changing your beliefs or your actions, and this leads us to the third, and probably most common, method of resolution. Change perception of action: A third and more complex method of resolution is to change the way you view/remember/perceive your action. In more colloquial terms, you would "rationalize" your actions. For example, you might decide that the test you cheated on was for a dumb class that you didn't need anyway.

Or you may say to yourself that everyone cheats so why not you? In other words, you think about your action in a different manner or context so that it no longer appears to be inconsistent with your beliefs. If you reflect on this series of mental gymnastics for a moment you will probably recognize why cognitive dissonance has come to be so popular. If you're like me, you notice such post-hoc re conceptualizations (rationalizations) of behavior on the part of others all the time, though it's not so common to see it in one's self. HOW CAN A MANAGER/ORGANIZATION HELP REDUCE COGNITIVE DISSONANCE The manager or an organization can help and reduce an employee's cognitive dissonance in the following manner: 1. The work in a knowledge industry is very demanding, physically as well as mentally. One has to be alert and put in long hours of work. Thus preventing dissonance is extremely important in projects where people work under heavystress.

It was noted by Festinger that people avoid information that is likely to cause dissonance. People tend to hang out with others of "their kind". If an <https://assignbuster.com/analyze-the-cognitive-dissonance-essay/>

individual does not have an opportunity to mix with other of his kind, he gets alienation in the organization pretty soon and is on the way out. Thus it is an extremely useful practice to organize something like a “ Birds of a Feather” event. Such events organized based on professional and extra curricular interest’s builds camaraderie amongst the group. . Often, people tend to overlook their small time unethical behavior during the course of work.

Such might not amount to seriousness of bribery or fraud, but, nevertheless creates a bad culture in the company from an ethics standpoint. Specifically, in case of an IT company, the HR observed that some of their employees were submitting bills that were incorrect or fake. Implementing a check for every bill submitted would result in a colossal waste of time for the organization and delay in servicing employee’s reimbursement. Thus to create dissonance, the HR team went on a campaign to create awareness. The campaign not only created awareness but, also dissonance in the minds of the employees who were submitting false claims. Thus, they used cognitive dissonance effectively as a deterrent. 3.

When an individual does not share the same drive to act as the rest of the group yet group norms coerce compliance with group action, cognitive dissonance occurs. It creates a negative drive state that must be resolved. An emotionally intelligent team has the ability to become aware of this tension and help the member resolve the dissonance in the way that builds, or at least does not deplete, trust or sense of belonging. . A good orientation program can include a carefully-selected buddy who should preferably have some commonality with the new employee to help the new employee adjust

and assimilate into the new environment. 5. High rewards accompanying high dissonance tend to reduce the tension inherent in the dissonance.

6. To make reviews an effective tool for improving performance, we need to understand and apply some basic principles of psychology. People are internally driven to do the best that they can be based on their perception and understanding of what is expected. These expectations reside in the subconscious mind and are influenced by what the person has experienced. The subconscious cannot deal in abstract concepts. So reviews need to focus on specific, concrete actions and behaviors that influence either positive or negative performance. While measuring key factors associated with performance is absolutely essential to running a business, focusing on numbers is a fruitless activity when it comes to improving individual performance.

7. Another way to overcome cognitive dissonance is for the manager to ask rather than tell. Have the employees evaluate their own performance. The manager asks questions to clarify what is being said. Hence, it will help the employee think about his/her performance, yet at the same time, he/she will feel that the manager is not judging or evaluating him/her. 8. The same principle applies when setting goals.

When employees develop their own objectives, cognitive dissonance disappears. If a manager says “ Here are your goals for the year”, the employee immediately thinks “ How can anyone be expected to do all that”. Instead of going to work on the goal, the subconscious focuses on the path of least resistance which is rationalization, blame, or indifference. Whether its

performance evaluation, development plans, or objectives, it's still the manager's prerogative to decide if they are adequate. Not only does this leverage the way the mind works, it's a much easier and less stressful way to manage. The responsibility for managing performance is placed where it belongs — on the employee. The manager is no longer the driver, but the coach.

Cognitive dissonance appears in virtually all evaluations and decisions and is the central mechanism by which we experience new differences in the world. Thus, it is extremely important for an individual as well as an organization to put efforts to resolve it.