



WHY IT'S GOOD, BUT HARD, TO CHANGE YOUR MIND

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WHY IT'S GOOD TO (SOMETIMES) CHANGE YOUR MIND

The psychology around changing your mind is fascinating. It turns out that it is one of the hardest things to do. Confirmation Bias highlights how we tend to seek out evidence that confirms our initial beliefs, and the Dunning-Kruger Effect explores how we tend to be unaware (and overconfident) of what we don't know. Combined, this makes changing your mind difficult.

However, there is a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. Researchers have recently been examining a concept called [the Hypercorrection Effect](#). This describes how when we are confident in our assumptions, when presented with correct and contradicting information, we are more likely to take notice.

Research can help remove our own biases that have been fogging up the glasses with which we view the world. In some cases, it allows us to see the world through different lenses altogether. It allows us to separate what we want to be true from what is actually true. As such, one of the primary responsibilities of research is to challenge our initial assumptions, not confirm them.

Scepticism is a foundational trait for being evidenced-informed, as it ensures we question things and dig deeper. Becoming evidence informed thrives on scepticism and the continuous pursuit of knowledge. Or, in simpler terms, we thrive when we dig deeper and question things.

Being aware of research findings allows us to make more informed decisions. By considering multiple perspectives and evidence, we can evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different arguments. Knowing about research findings therefore helps us to walk the tightrope that is balancing knowledge as well as being flexible, at the same time. As new research is always

being released, this gives us permission to change our mind about what we think we “know”.

WHY IT'S HARD TO CHANGE YOUR MIND: THE PROBLEM WITH THE MONTY HALL PROBLEM

The Monty Hall Problem is one of the most famous brain teasers. This brain teaser first appeared in 1975 in the *American Statistician* publication. It generally goes something like this:

“Suppose you’re on a game show, and you’re given the choice of three doors: Behind one door is a car; behind the others, goats. You pick a door, say No. 1, and the host, who knows what’s behind the doors, opens another door, say No. 3, which has a goat. He then says to you, “Do you want to pick door No. 2?” Is it to your advantage to switch your choice?”

It turns out that by switching you increase your chances of winning the car from $1/3$ to $2/3$. With a full breakdown and some fancy equations, [this article](#) provides a good overview. When a contestant first picks one of the three doors (with one door hiding a prize and two hiding goats), their odds of selecting the prize are 1 in 3. After the host discloses a goat behind one of the unchosen doors, the contestant is offered the choice to stick or switch. If they stick with their initial choice, the probability remains $1/3$. However, if they switch, the odds increase to $2/3$. This happens because the host’s action of revealing a goat changes the initial conditions, redistributing the probabilities. The remaining uncertainty is now concentrated on the other unchosen door, making switching the statistically superior strategy.

This is at first often rejected by those trying to figure out this brain teaser. Following the publication of the dilemma and the correct answer, almost 10,000 readers wrote to the magazine stating that they disagreed, including many highly qualified mathematicians. This persisted even after they have been presented with extensive workings and incontrovertible evidence. Don’t worry if you didn’t get the answer right, most people don’t. In fact, [a research study](#) on this found about only 12% of people decide to switch. So why do so many people struggle to grasp the solution, even when presented with the rationale of doing so? It is because it feels so

counterintuitive. Cold, cool, calm logic doesn't immediately trump instinct, emotion and gut feel.


This makes changing one's mind about something actually quite difficult. It is not enough just to read research. As human beings we are not as rational as we'd like to think we are. Our previous thoughts and decisions carry a lot of weight. Changing our minds means we have to admit we were wrong. And that may mean having to change our identity of how we see ourselves and the image we project publicly to others.

For example, let's say your identity and image are that you are a good person, because you help children improve their life chances by helping them do well at school. When presented with research that heavily suggests one of your favoured teaching strategies isn't beneficial, then not only does it require you to consider changing your practice, it also requires you to acknowledge that previous time and effort may have actually hindered student learning. Which is the very opposite of the person you want to be.

This provides direct conflict with the role you have assigned ourselves (i.e., a person who does good in the world by helping students). It is psychologically easier to refuse to believe the research than it is to change one's self-identity. As a result, shifting your opinion or view on something is a process (often done incrementally over time) and not a one-off event that can be done by someone sending you a single research paper to read.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

The reason that changing our minds is hard is because of a psychological phenomenon called Cognitive Dissonance. Cognitive Dissonance describes the tension we feel when we have two or more competing beliefs or ideas. We want consistency. We crave congruence. We strive for harmony. This dissonance when we read research that conflicts with our previously held beliefs is why we feel uncomfortable.



As a result, a number of thinking biases have emerged that help us try to deal with Cognitive Dissonance. They help us bury our heads in the sand, providing some short-term comfort, as opposed to facing up to the conflicting ideas head on.

The first of a whole host of biases that make changing our mind difficult is the Blindspot Bias. This states that we're good at recognising the biases that impact other people's judgements but fail to see the impact of bias on our own. This is in sync with the Myside Bias which describes how, when presented with someone else's argument, we are better at spotting weaknesses in their logic, but not in our own.

Another powerful bias is the Availability Heuristic. This describes how people base their decisions on information that they can easily recall. We may struggle to remember complex research theories, and instead find it easier to recall simpler (and often wrong) models of learning. As such, we are more likely to place more weight and significance on the latter.

FINAL THOUGHT

Cognitive Dissonance Theory offers a compelling lens through which we can better understand our complex human behaviours. It helps us comprehend why we sometimes act in ways that contradict our values or beliefs. By recognising and exploring these moments of dissonance, we can gain valuable insights into our decision-making processes.