

Week 4: Cognitive Dissonance Activity

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Announcement

Activity 1. Cognitive Dissonance Activity (~20 mins)

Introduction:

“First, we are going to have a small-group discussion about university funding. We will reflect on last week’s lecture on persuasion and think about the best way to convince people.”

Procedures:

- Distribute “ASSU Initiative Survey”.
- Let students rate and rank the importance of the following initiatives: *Diversity, Mental Health & Wellbeing, Energy & Environment, and Sexual Assault*.
 - Briefly highlight on each initiative, pointing out that every single issue DOES actually matter to campus life.
- Create small groups based on the ranking (e.g., “who thought XX is the most important initiative?”); tell students that we’d like to have evenly distributed number of people in each group (3~4 per group) as much as possible.
 - Note: To make groups evenly distributed, some might have to go to their second choice group. That is ok – later in the class you can ask if those who weren’t in their first choice group had less dissonance...
- Let students move their seats and gather in groups [this will be there research proposal group later].

- Let the group discuss about and come up with one reason 1) why the initiative of their choice needs the most funding, and 2) why the issue is important to them.
- Distribute “Follow-up Survey”, and let students fill it out (only the questions for the initiative of their choice).
- Convene the groups and have discussion.

- Play Phil Zimbardo’s video on Cognitive Dissonance (5 mins) [Optional]
- What is cognitive dissonance?

- *Potential discussion points*
 - How did completing “Follow-Up Survey” make you feel? Why?
 - What were the conflicting thoughts?
 - Did your answers to “Follow-Up Survey” change the way you feel or think about your initial opinion about the issue?
 - Did you feel discomfort or “dissonance”? Why or why not?

- What do you think will make you feel less “dissonance” that has been created?
 - *IF* they weren’t in first choice group was there less dissonance? Why or why not?
- How can it be alleviated?
 - Changing behavior.
 - Justifying behavior by changing the conflicting cognition.
 - Justifying behavior by adding new cognitions.
 - (From NPR article) Affirming one’s self (boosting one’s self-confidence).

Activity 2. Using Cognitive Dissonance to Persuade (15 - 20 mins)

Introduction:

“Now that we learned about how cognitive dissonance is created and “experienced” how it feels, we’d like to think further about how we can use it to persuade people. While cognitive dissonance could make one feel discomfort about one’s conflicting thoughts and actions, it can be a powerful tool for attitudinal or behavioral change when used cleverly.”

Procedures:

- Ask each group to choose from the following list of behaviors they would like to target: *a person who doesn’t exercise; a person who doesn’t recycle; a person who procrastinates; a person who doesn’t vote; persuading the dean for getting more funding.*
- Ask the groups to think and discuss about the following points in a group:
 - How would you go about creating dissonance in the person?
 - How would you expect the person to react to your tactics? How do you want them to feel?
 - How might the person react to your tactics, other than changing their behavior?
- Reconvene and share & discuss.
 - ** Note: be sure to reconvene and discuss, otherwise their insights will be lost. Consider asking each group to report back on their best strategy or other interesting point their group raised.