

04 - Measuring Attitudes

Measuring Attitudes

© SPMM Course For example, in smokers, discrepancy between cognitions ('smoking is injurious') and behaviour (repeated smoking) may influence behaviour leading to a cut down, or alternatively, may alter the cognitions ('there is too little evidence available to link smoking to poor health').

1-Dollar 20-Dollar experiment: All subjects in an experiment were asked to do a very boring repetitive task for 30 minutes. The first group was a control group; the second group (called 1dollar group) was paid \$1 to say that the task was fun and interesting, the third group (called 20dollar group) was paid \$20 to say that the task was fun and interesting. All participants were asked to rate how enjoyable they had found the task. Contrary to popular belief, the group, which was paid more, did not appreciate the boring task. As they obtained a good incentive, they did not develop a dissonance. They lied about its usefulness but in fact they did not change their belief about the boring nature of this task. In contrast, the lowly paid group did experience a cognitive dissonance between the two facts - 'This task is boring' and 'I am doing this task without much incentive', hence they changed their initial attitude towards the task and, in fact, started liking the task. This highlights the processes relating to counter-attitudinal behaviours. How to reduce dissonance? Apart from modifying attitudes or behaviours, one can have selective exposure to information to avoid or prevent dissonance; to reduce a dissonance one can make a commitment after which primary attitudes get stronger e.g. after betting on a horse, the belief that the horse will win strengthens! Other methods are

1. Removal or denial of the dissonant cognition
2. Trivialising the dissonant cognition
3. Adding a new consonant cognition to counterbalance the dissonance

Self-perception theory: According to Bem, self-report of attitude after a behaviour is usually an inference of one's own behaviour and context. Dissonance cannot explain this adequately. In the 1 dollar/20 dollar experiment, the 20 dollar group made situational attribution ('I did it for money, it was boring') while 1 dollar group made dispositional attribution ('There is not much incentive, but I really liked it'). Hence, while cognitive dissonance explains both counter-attitudinal behaviour and attitude-attitude discrepancy; self-perception applies better when attitude congruent behaviour occurs, but it cannot explain attitude-attitude discrepancy. Measuring Attitudes Attitudes are largely subjective and so cannot be measured directly. Attitude measures usually rely on self-report, assume that the same statement has the same meaning for all respondents and