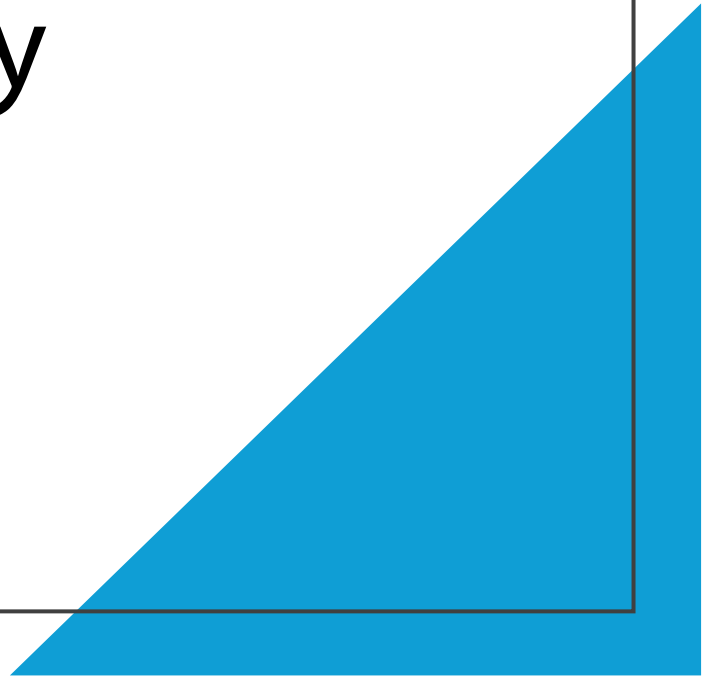


Enhancing Communication, Reducing Bias: Lessons from Social Psychology

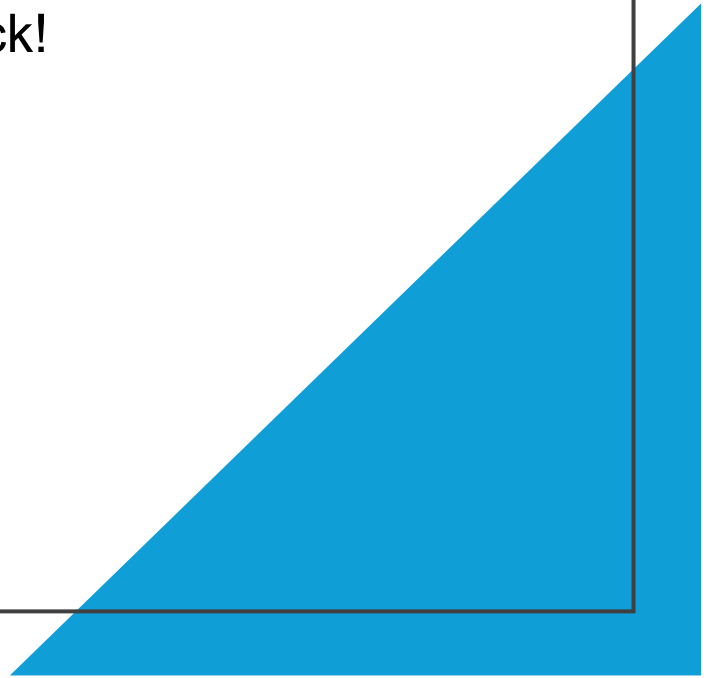
Brent Macdonald, PhD



- Dunning Kruger Effect: low competence in a specific area overestimate their own abilities because their lack of knowledge prevents them from recognizing their own incompetence

Conflict Requires People

- People are annoying
- People are stubborn
- People are stupid
- COVID gave us respite from other people...but now we're back!
- Sometimes, it IS the other person (relieving)
- Sometimes, though, it's YOU!
- People getting promoted upwards (incompetence floats)
- Communication can be uncomfortable
- Human change is embedded in discomfort



Is Honesty the Best Policy?



Delivery



Private v public
discussion/
affiliation and
polarization



Assume good
intentions v
conflict

Requires goal
cohesion

i.e., What is best for
the students on our
board? Sounds
simple, but isn't.

Difficult to agree on
school start/ end
times, for example



Identifying our own
biases and beliefs/
values

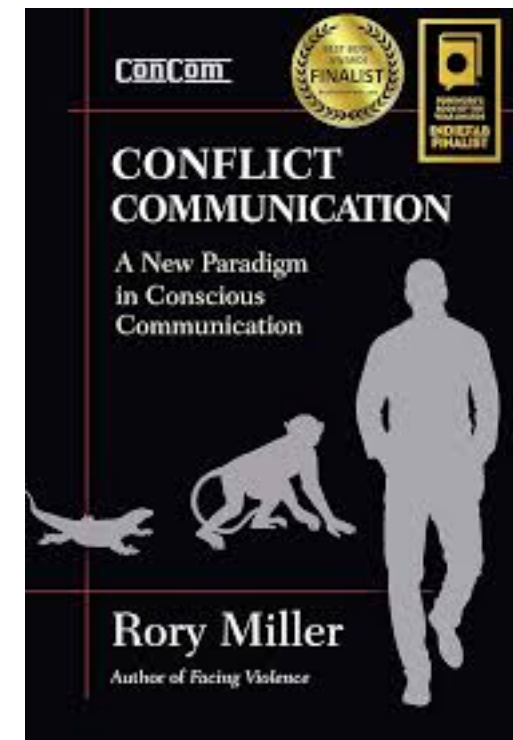
Do these
coalesce around
group/ larger
goals?



Fight/
Flight/
Freeze/
Please

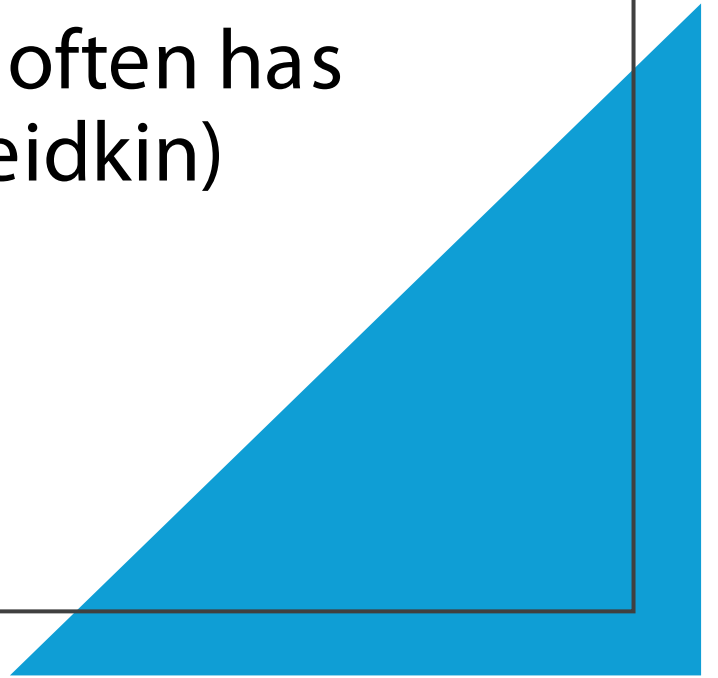
Rory Miller: Conflict Communication

- **Three Brains:**
 - **Lizard**
 - Amygdala – instinctive, powerful, ruthless, self-preservation overrides all
 - **Monkey**
 - Focus on status and social behaviour – what people think of you/ acceptance/ rejection
 - **Human**
 - Rational, but slow; has to process a Lot of information, which takes time
 - While the human brain is thinking, the Lizard and Monkey Brains take over the controls
- Sometimes you are at human brain, surrounded by lizards; sometimes YOU are the lizard surrounded by monkeys – or humans!



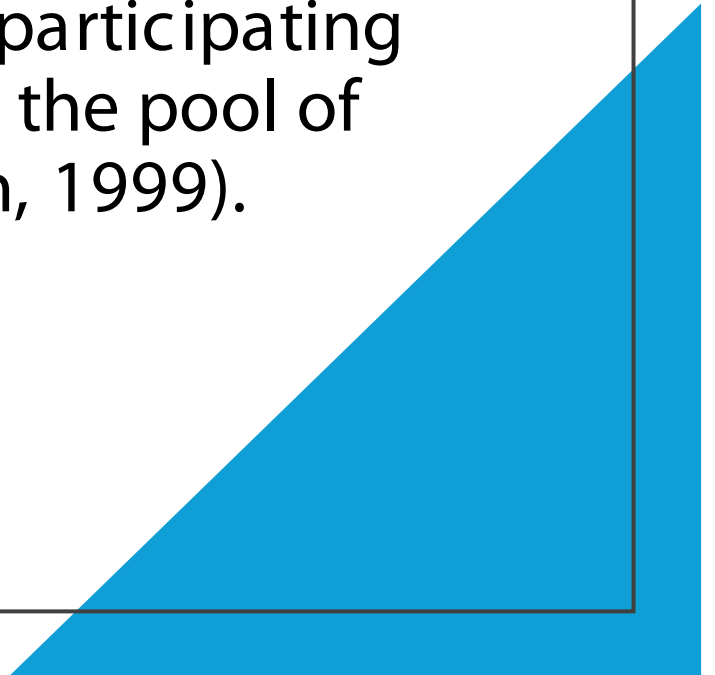
Group Influence on Individual Decisions

- Tendency to make more extreme decisions as an individual than as a group (Stoner, 1961)
- Discredited in 1999 – turns out, the group often has an “averaging” effect on the individual (Freidkin)



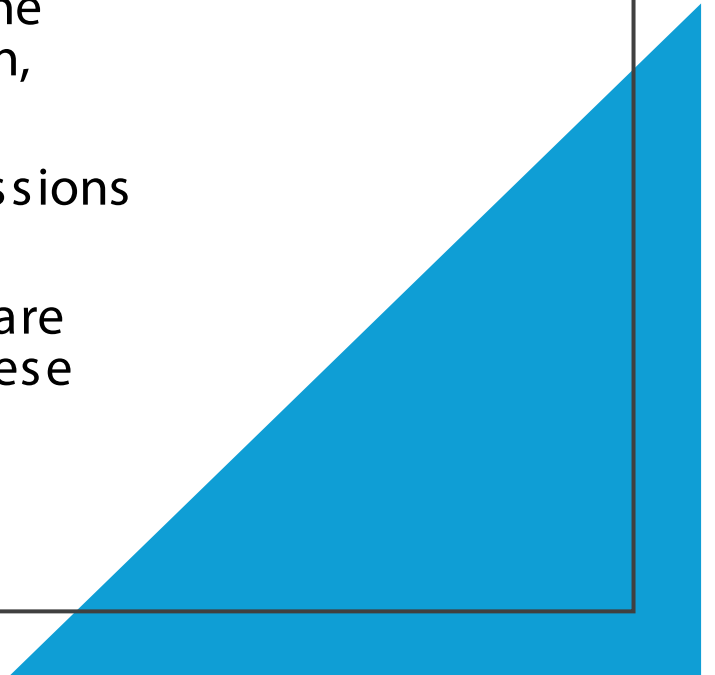
Persuasive Arguments Theory

- Persuasive arguments theory posits that group polarization occurs because of the content of the arguments that happen during discussions.
- This theory assumes that there is a group of arguments that can be applied to any issue and that the people participating in the discussion draw possible arguments from the pool of those that support their initial attitudes (Friedkin, 1999).



Social Comparison Theory

- Social comparison theory argues that people will enter a discussion espousing views less extreme than their true views because they fear being labeled deviant.
- When group discussion reveals that other people have similar but more extreme attitudes in the group, this shifts the position of individuals from suppressing to exposing their true values or even taking on the more extreme positions of others (Baron and Roper, 1976; Friedkin, 1999).
- All in all, this means that moderate positions are eroded by discussions and extreme positions are encouraged (Friedkin, 1999).
- This theory assumes that arguments on one extreme of the scale are more valued by the group than moderate or opposing views, as these arguments have higher visibility.

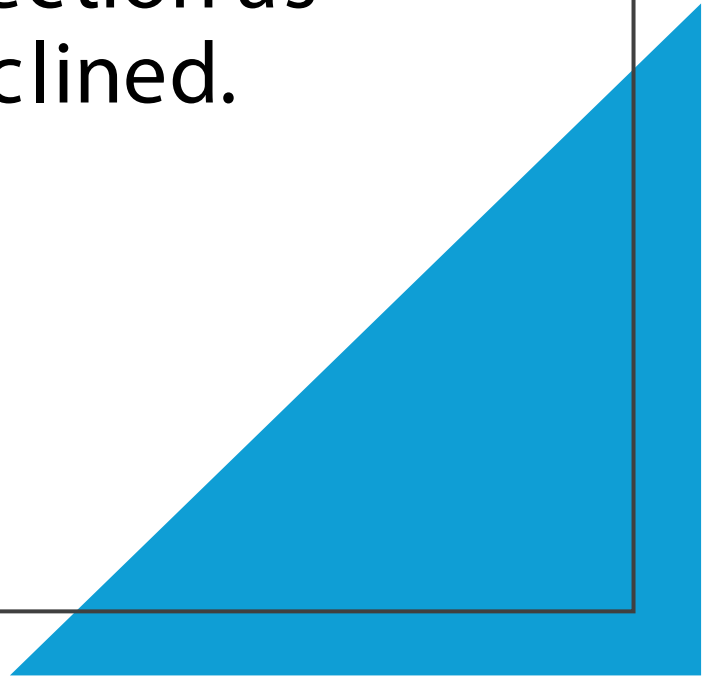


Self-Categorization Theory

- Self-categorization theory explains that group polarization happens on the basis of a person's conformity to an extreme norm or position of the group (Abrams, Wetherell, Cochrane, and Hogg, 1990).
- Groups choose among visible individual positions and gravitate toward a normative position.
- Proponents such as Turner and Reynolds (2011) of self-categorization theory believe that group members modify their attitudes to fit with a prototypical position to decrease the discrepancy between initial positions and implicit group norms (Friedkin, 1999).
- If everyone accepts a norm prior to discussion, social influence Friedkin, 1999 predicts that there is no choice shift.
- If there is no such preexisting norm, then self-categorization theory hypothesizes that the influence of a view depends on the interpersonal influences among group members; more powerful group members have greater influence (Friedkin, 1999).

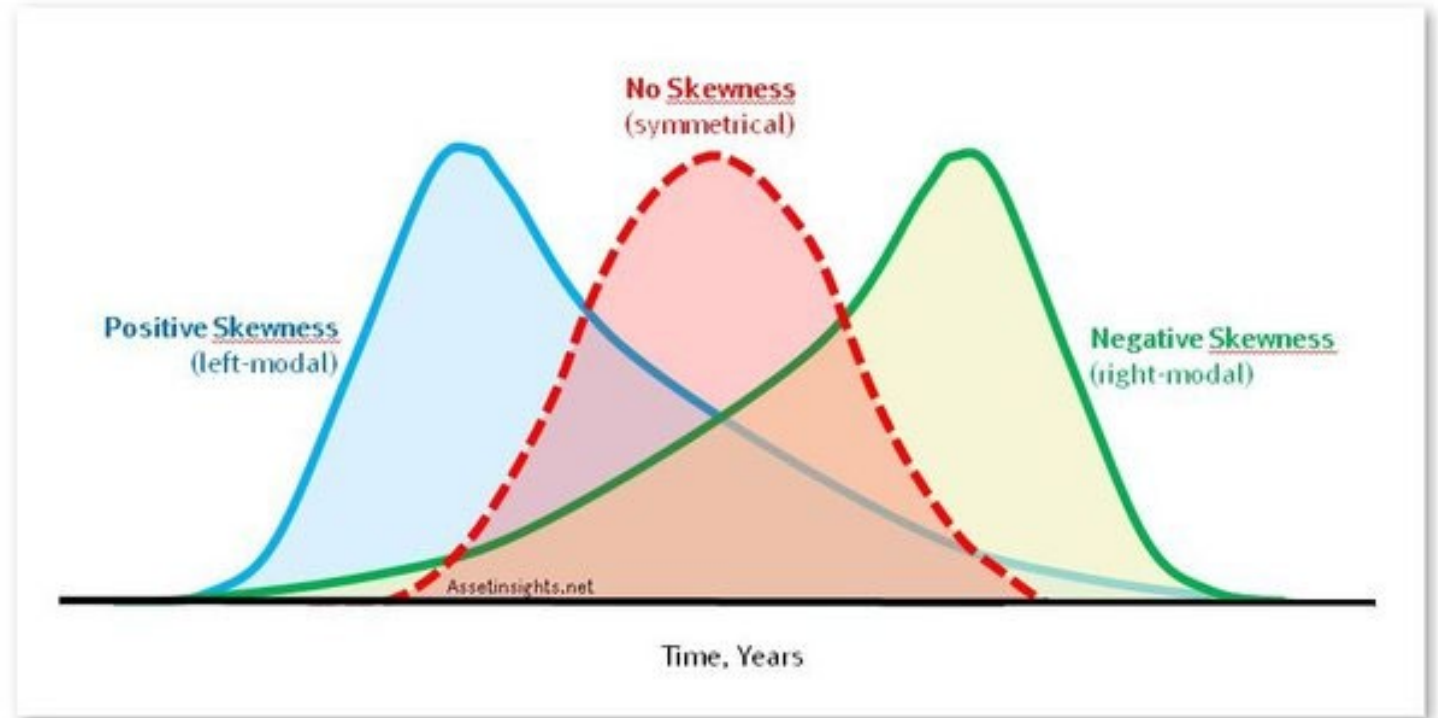
Group Polarization

When the choice shift is in the same direction as where the average initial attitude was inclined.



Setting Boundaries in a Polarized World

- Normal curve in 2025 is more of a double-skewed curve in social psychology related to:
 - Group polatization
 - Affective polarization
 - Intergroup polarization (Sask v. Montreal fans; Capital L Liberals and Coinservatives; republicans and Democrats)
 - Individual polarization



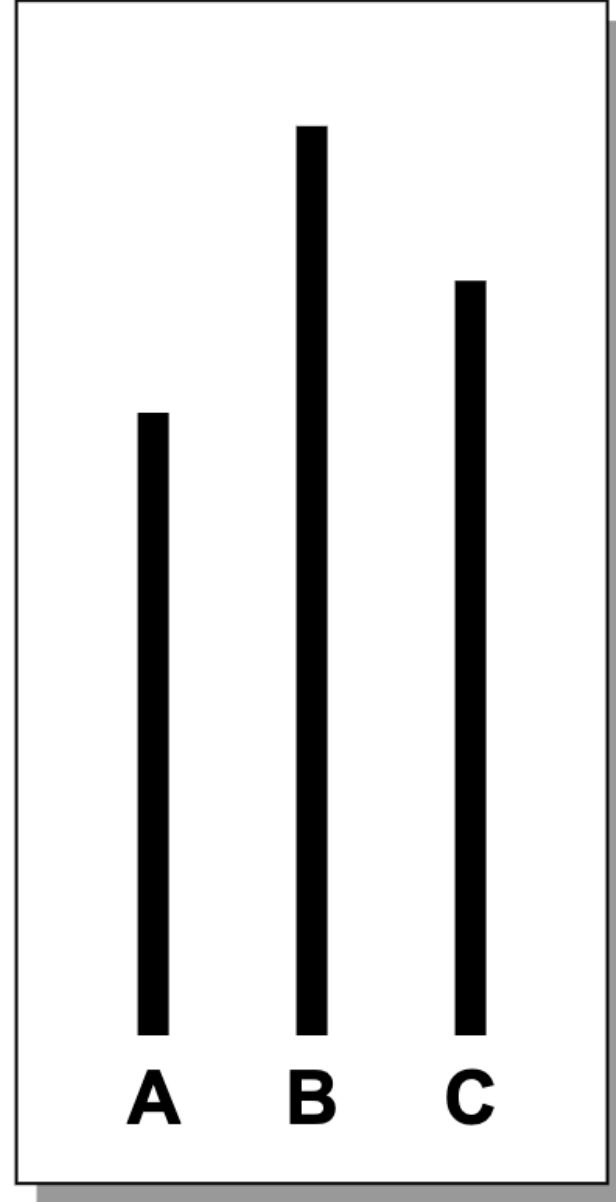
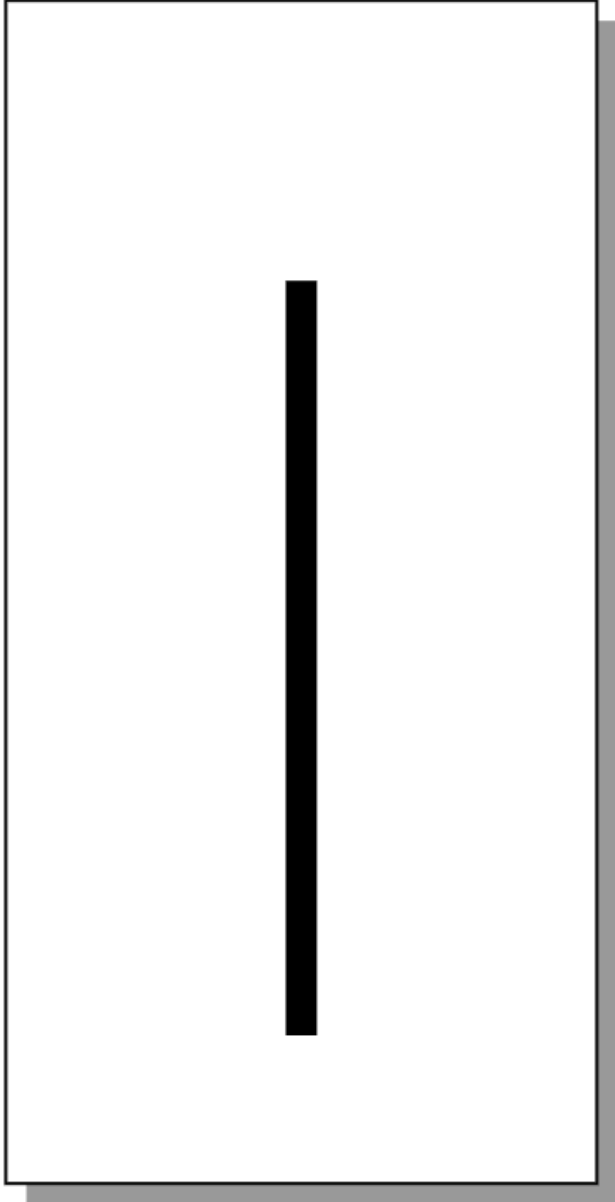
Outcomes of Polarization

- Positive outcomes: Polarization can lead to stronger commitment within groups and motivate individuals to take positive action on shared issues.
- Negative outcomes: It can also lead to poor decision-making in settings like corporate environments or online communities, as extreme views may overlook potential risks or downsides. It can also contribute to social and political division and conflict.



Persuasive Communication

- Persuasion and communication are central to psychological influence (and remember, “influence” is embedded in power structures, but can also be collaborative and consultative)
- A long and troubled history (conformity, compliance, bystander effect, diffusion of responsibility, etc.)
- “With great power comes great responsibility” (B. Parker, personal communication)



Asch's Conformity Study and Communication

- We can use persuasive communication effectively to:
 - Make our points
 - Hear the perspectives of others
 - Like all tools, can be used for good and evil!

“That’s what THEY say!”: False Consensus

- Tendency to overestimate the degree to which people agree with us
- Also, the degree to which people who disagree with us are kind of dumb😊
- We do this very frequently – makes us feel good/ confident/ builds out self-esteem
- Kids do this too, for the same reasons, but can lack the logic to challenge it
 - i.e. movie reviews, musical preferences
 - Perception of teachers/ school
 - Social perception of others
- Cures:
 - Active and engaged listening
 - Awareness of preconceived biases
 - Feeling comfortable to challenge the false consensus
 - “You may be right.”



How can Don Draper help us communicate?

Elaboration Likelihood Model

- Thoughts create persuasion
- Used in advertising/marketing (and if it can be used effectively in a multi-billion dollar industry, perhaps it could be used by psychologists too!)
- Think about advertisements you enjoy and those that drive you nuts – and those you ignore – what are the differences?
- Consumer overconfidence – “I am immune to marketing”

Routes of Persuasion

- Central – quality of information, perceived status, logic, DEPTH of knowledge
- Peripheral- quantity of information, volume of information, appeals to emotion



Central

Peripheral



One-Way/ Two-Way Communication

- Why are we trying to communicate?
- To whom are we communicating?
 - Power differentials
 - Possible anxiety
 - Possible projection (“How did YOU feel about parents/ peers” – remembering, teachers tend to be people who did well in the educational world – including the “hidden curriculum” – not all parents did)
- Timeliness of communication
- Think about this in context of communicating with parents, fellow professionals, and kids

One-Way Communication

- One-Way from sender to receiver
 - Best for information dissemination
 - Convenient
 - Written is effective (email, newsletters, agendas, & social media,)
 - More thoughtful (hopefully!)
 - Time to reflect
 - Leaves a trail (+/-)
- Cautions – inconsistencies can lead to frustrations and more conflictual 2-way communication (which is what we are trying to avoid)

Two-Way Communication

- Two-Way Communication
 - Interactive (but often difficult to coordinate)
 - Best for sharing of information
 - Face-to-face or phone
 - Can enhance communication by allowing interaction/ Q&A; can also lead to increased conflict or frustration – resulting in more peripheral routes of persuasion)

Types of Heuristics

Availability

- Involves making decisions based upon how easy it is to bring something to mind. When you are trying to make a decision, you might quickly remember a number of relevant examples.
- Since these are more readily available in your memory, you will likely judge these outcomes as being more common or frequently occurring.
 - For example, imagine you are planning to fly somewhere on vacation. As you are preparing for your trip, you might start to think of a number of recent airline accidents. You might feel like air travel is too dangerous and decide to travel by car instead. Because those examples of air disasters came to mind so easily, the availability heuristic leads you to think that plane crashes are more common than they really are.

Familiarity

- The familiarity heuristic refers to how people tend to have more favorable opinions of things, people, or places they've experienced before as opposed to new ones. In fact, given two options, people may choose something they're more familiar with even if the new option provides more benefits.

Types of Heuristics

Representativeness

- Making a decision by comparing the present situation to the most representative mental prototype. When you are trying to decide if someone is trustworthy, you might compare aspects of the individual to other mental examples you hold.
 - A soft-spoken older woman might remind you of your grandmother, so you might immediately assume she is kind, gentle, and trustworthy. However, this is an example of a heuristic bias, as you can't know someone trustworthy based on their age alone.

Affect

- Making choices that are influenced by an individual's emotions at that moment. For example, research has shown that people are more likely to see decisions as having benefits and lower risks when in a positive mood.
- Negative emotions, on the other hand, lead people to focus on the potential downsides of a decision rather than the possible benefits.

Types of Heuristics

Anchoring

- Tendency to be overly influenced by the first bit of information we hear or learn. This can make it more difficult to consider other factors and lead to poor choices.
 - How much are you are willing to pay for something, causing you to jump at the first offer without shopping around for a better deal.

Scarcity

- Viewing things that are scarce or less available to us as inherently more valuable.
 - Marketers often use the scarcity heuristic to influence people to buy certain products.

Trial & Error

- Using a number of different strategies to solve something until they find what works.
 - People use trial and error when playing video games, finding the fastest driving route to work, or learning to ride a bike (or any new skill)

Social Media

Sunstein's (2001) "online informational cocoons"

- Social media contributes to increased polarization either by amplifying and escalating social processes that would also occur offline or in ways enabled by their design, making the platforms also prone to manipulation.
- Social media encourages group polarization in that it enables homophily — the tendency to engage with similar people, creating groups where certain beliefs become dominant
- Discursive argumentation (Mercier and Sperber, 2011) — the use of reasoning by individuals and groups as a means of advancing their agenda.

Online Informational Cocoons

- Social antecedents (diverse viewpoints and external triggers such as partisan media)
- Cognitive and social arguments (social comparison and social identity theory as well as persuasive argument theory)
- Social effects (opinion radicalization and misinformation)
- Design affordances (such as content sharing and the feeding and prioritization of information)

(Iandoll, Primmario, and Zollo, 2021)



Cognitive Errors in Communication

- **All-or-Nothing Thinking**: Viewing things in black and white, with no room for nuance.
 - *Always/ never*
- **Overgeneralization**: Taking a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
 - *X did this, so they'll always do that*
- **Mental Filter**: Focusing on the negative details while filtering out all positive ones.
 - *X had a bad idea, so they are incapable of good decisions*
- **Mind Reading**: Assuming you know what others are thinking and feeling, often negatively.
 - *X believes in a Liberal, so X must be "woke"*
- **Catastrophizing (Magnification and Minimization)**: Magnifying the negative and minimizing the positive aspects of a situation.
 - *X's decision led to a negative consequence, that will always be the case when X is involved (denies possibility of evolution/ growth)*

Cognitive Errors in Communication

- **Personalization**: Believing you are responsible for events that are not entirely within your control.
 - *X was involved, so it must have been their fault it went poorly OR X was involved so any success was despite their involvement*
- **Should Statements**: Using "should," "must," or "ought to" to create pressure and self-criticism.
 - *X should be more agreeable*
- **Disqualifying Positives**: Diminishing or ignoring positive attributes
 - *X has never done anything right*
- **Emotional Reasoning**: Mistaking emotional intensity as factual validity
 - *I feel strongly about topic Y, so I must be right*
- **Fortune Telling**: Predicting negative outcomes without any real evidence.
 - *X is involved, so we know that THAT will likely go!*



**DIVERSE
VIEWPOINTS**



**DEVIL'S
ADVOCATE**



**OPEN
DISCUSSION**



**SEEK OUTSIDE
OPINIONS**

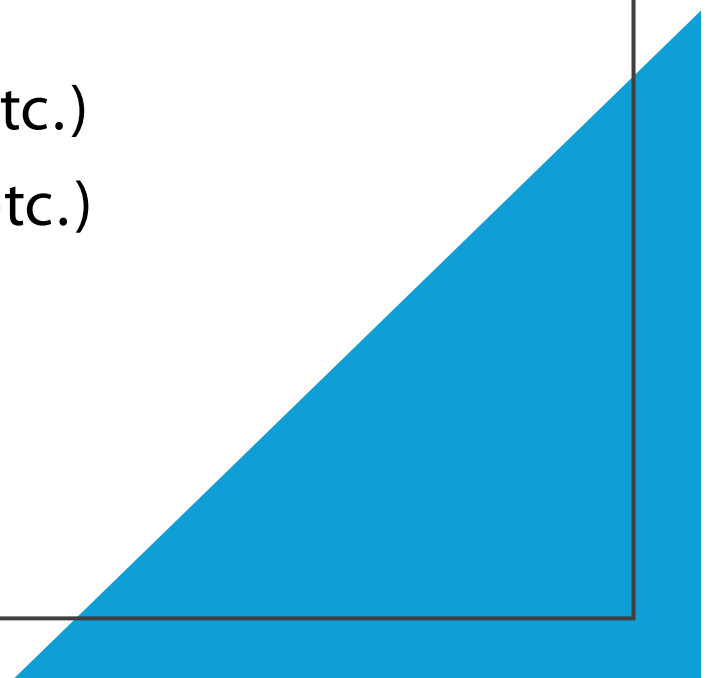


**BRAINSTORM
INDIVIDUALLY**



**REMOVE TIME
PRESSURE**

Antidotes

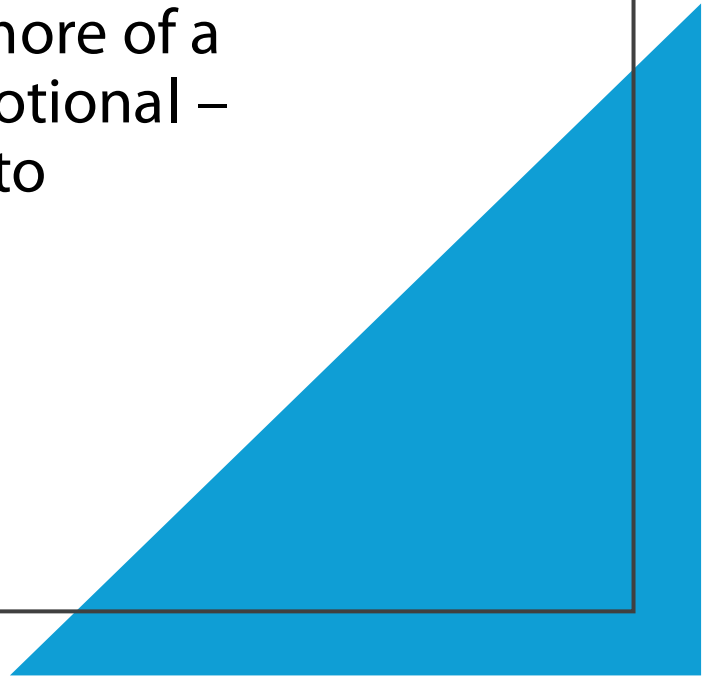
- Be curious (avoid “WHY,” Lean into “What makes you think/ feel X”
 - Calling as I see it is focused on how YOU see it; how might others see it?
 - Avoid absolutes (always, never, totally, completely, etc.)
 - Look for situational cues (mood – yours and theirs, etc.)
 - Challenge negativity without blame/ judgement
 - “You may be right” (and “I could be wrong”)
 - Replacing “But” with “And”
- 

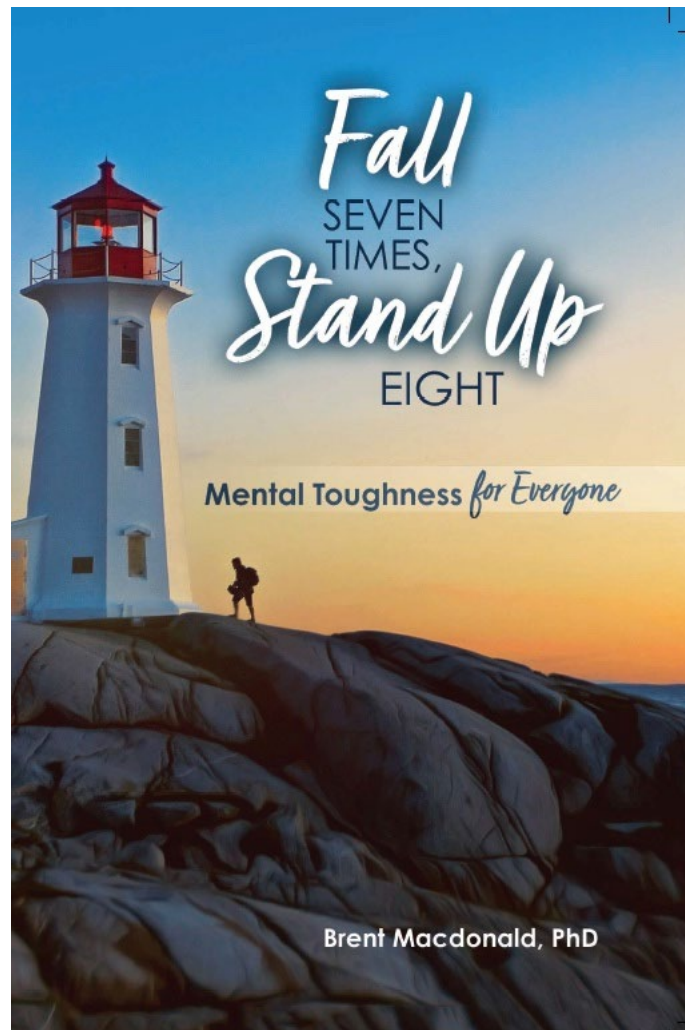
Asking Questions

- What goes right here?
 - What goes wrong?
 - What would help you do better?
 - What makes you stay here?
 - What don't we talk about here
-
- Always keep the tone and quality of communication – including questions – focused on curiosity and problem-solving from a non-judgmental perspective (What if the other person is right?)

Alignment (not always Agreement)

- Polarization implies agreement, even if there may not be any actual agreement
- Alignment is broader and more of a cognitive process, less emotional – therefore less susceptible to polarization





Order Direct:

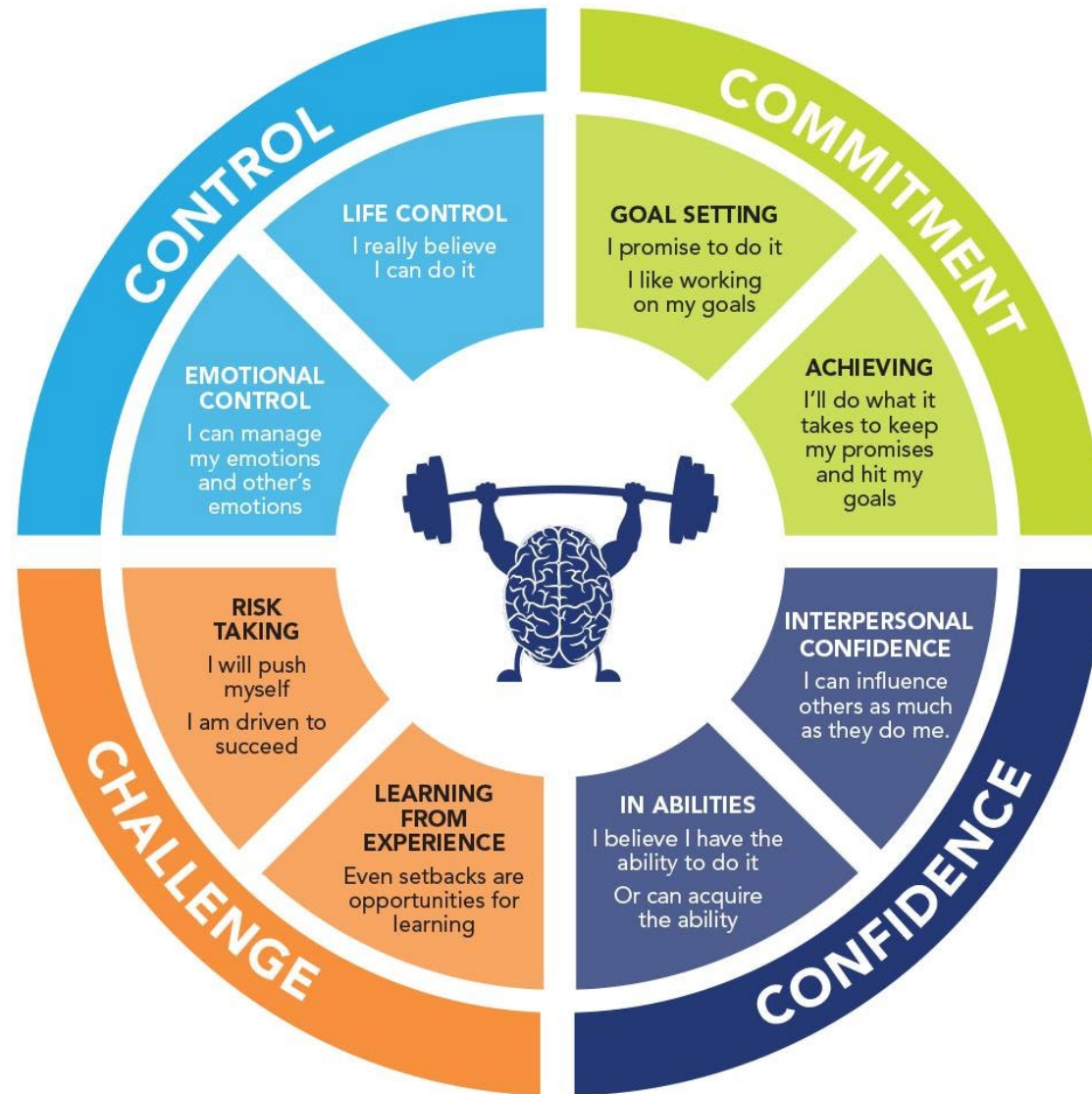
brent@complexlearners.com



What is Mental Toughness?



“A personality trait which determines in large part how people deal with challenge, stressors, opportunity and pressure... irrespective of prevailing circumstances.”



	Drowning	Struggling	Surviving	Thriving
Life Control	I have no control over my life	Things keep happening to me	I am in enough control to succeed	I can do this
Emotional Control	My emotions rule my actions	My emotions often take over	I can maintain poise when stressed	I manage my emotions and make good decisions
Goal Orientation	I have lost sight of my goals	It's hard to keep focused on my goals	I keep my goals in sight	I have a clear purpose in my life
Achievement Orientation	I can't seem to make any effort	Making an effort is a struggle	I can make enough effort to get by	I am happy to make the effort
Risk Orientation	I see nothing but the problems	Problems overwhelm me	I can see opportunity and the threats	I see plenty of solutions – and opportunity
Learning Orientation	I can't see a way out of my situation	I keep repeating mistakes	I think about what happens	Nothing is a disaster, I am always learning
Confidence in Abilities	I don't have the ability to cope	I am not sure I am able to deal with things	I have just enough ability to get by	I use every ounce of my ability
Interpersonal Confidence	I have no impact on others – I don't exist	I often can't get others to pay attention to me	I can get by dealing with people	I can influence others as much as they do me

MT IS:	MT IS NOT:
Being aware of our emotions / Vulnerability	Wanting to be the best/ Being self-critical without proposing possible changes
Asking for help	Thinking we are always right
Wanting to do well	Wanting to prove yourself
Talking with others when feeling down	Putting on a brave face ("Sucking it up")
Making mistakes	Being perfect
Learning from our mistakes/ Accepting responsibility	Blaming others when things don't go our way
Accepting and being true to ourselves	Being what you think others want you to be
Being curious and asking questions	Pretending to be confident
Wanting to help others	Focusing only on yourself
Being open to learning	Being a bit of a know-it-all
Being a good listener	Being loud – the most important voice in the room
Being open to feedback	Arguing with feedback
Taking risks	Playing it safe
Using your MT to advance those around you	Falling into the Dark Triad (Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychoticism)

