**Assignment 1:3 Definitions – Cognitive Dissonance**

The objective of this assignment is to explain a technical term to readers whom are foreign to the subject. The term “cognitive dissonance” will be explained through a parenthetical definition, a sentence definition, and expanded definitions (Visual, example, negation, & required conditions).

**What is Cognitive Dissonance?**

Cognitive dissonance refers to the mental state of stress that occurs when two conflicting ideas has occurred (Festinger., 1962). The conflicting two ideas, one existing before another, have to be contrasted by each other when creating stress (the discomfort or mental disorientation of knowing you are out of character or the norms, which is cognitive dissonance).

**What happens once Cognitive Dissonance occurs?**

Once two conflicting ideas clash, the individual will take action to relieve the stress (Stone, Wiegand, Cooper, and Aronson., 1997). Figure 1 is a visual chart that represents phases people go through when they experience cognitive dissonance.



Figure 1: Cognitive Dissonance Chart (PreMedHQ., 2016)

Looking at Figure 1, the red boxes indicate an instance when a personal belief is contrasted by an action. This is followed up by the blue box, causing stress, or anxiety within a person due to the inconsistency of belief and action. The green boxes indicate the person’s action to relieve the stress, thus lowering or dissolving the stress in the blue box at the end.

There are three possible courses of action an individual takes to seek relief or to rationalize. Change in belief (acceptance), change in action (retribution), and change in action perception (rationalization) (Stone et al., 1997).

**Example:**

Sam helps out the homeless and he believes that he is a good person. He believes good people always help the homeless out. One day he walks past a homeless person in desperate need of help, Sam had ignored the homeless person’s cry for help and had decided to walk away from the scene. He noticed his action and is stressed out because he believes that he is no longer a good person, his actions had trumped his core belief that he is a good person, therefore he has to help out all homeless people. After a brief moment he rationalized with himself that he was merely too busy that day and that didn’t notice the homeless person (change in action perception). Sam now believes that the incident was a one-time occurrence and is still in fact a good person.

With groups, cognitive dissonance may arise due to conflicts between individuality and group ideologies (McKimmie., 2015). Being a part of a group may influence a person to think a certain way, much like school or religion. A person may believe in religious ethics and follow practices, but the person may also choose to disregard some ethics and practices, as it does not suit the personal core beliefs that may cause cognitive dissonance. However, individuality should be treated as a complementary trait to group cognitive dissonance, as individual ideas may influence the group as well.

Cognitive dissonance should not be confused with a state of stress with two ideas that are competing with each other. For example, deciding what to eat for dinner between pizza and a hamburger. In order for a stress condition to be called “cognitive dissonance” one idea or belief must be present and stronger than the other, which is then broken or tainted by the new idea or belief.

References

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McKimmie, B.M. (2015). Cognitive Dissonance in Groups. *Social & Personality Psychology Compass. 9*(4). 202-212. doi:10.1111/spc3.12167

Pre Med HQ. (2016). [Graph illustration of possible outcomes of cognitive dissonance]. *PreMedHQ Illustration of Cognitive*Dissonance. Retreived from https://www.premedhq.com/cognitive-dissonance-theory

Stone, J., Wiegand, A., Cooper, J., & Aronson, E. (1997). When exemplification fails: Hypocrisy and the motive for self-integrity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *72*(1), 54-65. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.72.1.54.