

Factfulness: Ten reasons we are wrong about the world - and why things are better than you think

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Key takeaways

10 rules of thumb to be more factual in your worldview

1. The gap instinct - recognising when a story talks about a gap, and remembering this paints a picture of two separate groups. Most things / people exist in between two extremes
2. The negativity instinct - Information about bad events is much more likely to reach you. When things are getting better we often don't hear about them. Beware of 'rosy pasts'
3. The straight line instinct - Recognise your assumption that that a line will just continue straight. Many trends don't follow straight lines, but are S-bends, slides, humps or doubling lines.
4. The fear instinct - Recognise when frightening things get our attention. You should calculate the risks of things and don't worry unnecessarily about things like air travel and bear attacks. Don't make decisions when your scared
5. The size instinct - Recognising when a lonely number seems impressive. You should always try and compare big numbers, ideally you should look for comparisons. When given a long list of things to deal with deal with the big things first in line with the 80/20 rule
6. The generalisation instinct - Recognise when a category is used as an explanation. Generalisations are impossible to stop but you should look for differences within and across groups. Beware vivid examples, beware of the majority (51% and 99% are both majorities).
7. The destiny instinct - Many things (including people / cultures / religions & countries) appear to be constant just because change is happening slowly. Remember that even small, slow changes add up to big change. Slow change is still change. You should update your knowledge as much as possible.
8. The single perspective instinct - Recognise a single perspective can limit your imagination. Don't claim expertise beyond your field and be humble about what you do know. Beware of simple ideas and simple solutions, welcome complexity. No one problem or solution is going to solve everything
9. The blame instinct - Recognise when a scapegoat is being used. Blaming an individual often steals from other possible explanations. Look for causes not villains - if a plane crashes don't blame the pilot for falling asleep, ask why the pilot was tired. Also look for systems not heroes
10. The urgency instinct - Recognise when a decision feels urgent and remember that they very rarely are. Beware of any prediction about the future. They are all uncertain, and be wary of drastic action, ask what the side effects will be.