

Cognitive Dissonance:

The cognitive dissonance theory was one of the most influential theories in social psychology first proposed by **Leon Festinger** in his book ***A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*** in 1957.

Cognitive Dissonance is the inconsistency between one's thoughts and behaviours which will lead to an uncomfortable psychological or emotional tension (cognitive dissonance) among individuals/groups.

Resolution of Dissonance:

Festinger explained that there were different ways in which individuals or groups resolved cognitive dissonance to best suit their situations like:

- Change one's thoughts
- Change one's behaviour to match one's thoughts
- Add a thought to justify the behaviour
- Trivialise the inconsistency between thoughts and behaviour.

Examples:

1. Let's take the example of X- a 25-year-old-graduate (unemployed) who has newly started supporting a political party. He follows the political party as he believes in their promises of providing better job opportunities and development for youngsters in the country if they came to power. His party wins the elections. Despite five years of governance by his party, no significant changes occur in the employment sector and X is still unemployed. As the next elections approach, the political party members request his support. In such a situation, what would X do?
 - **X can change his thought about the situation-** He looks at his neighbours B and C, who are also graduates. They have started a chai shop and samosa shop respectively, in their street. X concludes that though not in a conventional sense, jobs were created after his party came into power, changing his opinion about the situation, and reducing the inconsistency in his belief. He will still vote for the same political party with a change in his perspective.
 - **X can change his behaviour towards the situation-** He understands and accepts that the promises made by the political party he supported were false and decides not to trust them anymore. Thus, he changes his behaviour and attitude towards the situation and does not vote for the political party already in power, which had deceived him with promises of better job opportunities and development.
 - **X can add a thought-** He analyses the activities of his government. Though the party failed to provide job opportunities to youngsters, there was infrastructural development. He resolves the cognitive inconsistency between his thoughts and behaviour by adding a thought that rationalises his support of the political party. He will still vote for the same party.
 - **X can trivialise the inconsistency-** He compares the state of his country after his party came into power with economically poorer neighbouring countries where the unemployment is relatively higher. In trivialising the faults in his political party's governance, the tension created due to the inconsistency between his thoughts and behaviour is negated. He will thus continue voting for the same political party.
2. Another example is where Badrunissa married Hamza considering him to be loving, caring and a respect giving boy. However, after marriage, Hamza turns out to be classic abuser, who batters her every night and says sorry in the morning. In such a situation, what would Badrunissa do?

- **She can change her thought about the situation:** She can consider this domestic violence to be a sign of his love and thus, accept it. She will keep accepting his abuse and continue to love him.
 - **She can change her behaviour towards the situation:** Being a victim of domestic violence, she can recognise the abusing nature of her husband and complaint about him to the police station and even file for divorce. Doing so, she will resolve her dissonance.
 - **She can add a thought:** She analyses other activities of her husband and found out that love of her husband is also evident from the Gold or the city flat which Hamza bought for her only. By adding a thought, she will resolve the dissonance and accept the abuse.
 - **She can trivialise the inconsistency:** She can compare her situation with the neighbours where this domestic abuse is also witnessed. Even there is relatively much intense domestic abuse practised on a daily basis. So, in trivialising the faults in her husband, the tension created due to the inconsistency between his thoughts and behaviour is negated.
3. Thousands of aspirants come to Delhi for UPSC preparation from every nook and corner of the country. They come from rural as well as regional centres to metropolitan city like Delhi. Influenced by metropolis culture, some do get addicted to smoking. They have this **thought** in mind that smoking is quite injurious to health but still the **behaviour** of smoking continues. In such situation, how to resolve the cognitive dissonance?
- **He can change his thought:** By saying that, not only smoking but frequent smoking is injurious to health. And he can definitely say this that, "I'm not a regular smoker". Saying so, he can convince himself and resolve his dissonance.
 - **He can change his behaviour:** Going by the danger advertisement on the cigarette pack and keep his goal in front of him, he can quit smoking and focus only on preparation, the purpose behind his coming to Delhi.
 - **He can add a thought:** He can say that smoking boosts my stamina and ultimately my preparation. So, smoking is a catalyst in my preparation and not the hurdle. By adding this thought, he can definitely resolve his dissonance.
 - **He can trivialise the inconsistency:** He can go to a place where aspirants usually gather for having smoke with a cup of tea. There he can compare himself with others, and can say that it's not only him who is smoking. So, by trivialising the inconsistency, he can resolve the dissonance.