

EN_77054244 Criticism of A Theory

People strive for internal consistency in daily life, including their personal relationships. This phenomenon was described by Austrian psychologist Fritz Heider in the balance theory. It contains the idea that people are motivated to achieve harmony in their interpersonal relationships and tend to create triads. These triads are balanced when the relationships are all in the same direction or if two relationships are negative and one is positive. Although the theory provides many advantages to psychology, it has a few limitations. Before all, it oversimplifies and generalises complex human attitudes. The theory suggests that there are only two correct models to maintain balance, however, it also depends on the cultural differences, context, and the quality or durability of the relationships. This is why it caught my eye and made me sceptically contemplate its usefulness.

First, cultural background influences the forming and maintenance of relationships. Culture shapes beliefs and values, which lay the foundation for future decision-making. Social norms dictate how to behave in a particular situation, what to prioritise and most importantly, how to communicate with others. It is thought that there are two types of cultures: individualistic and collectivistic. The first one represents Western areas, where people favour independence and autonomy, fostering a sense of self primarily separate from others. The Eastern regions tend to be more collectivistic and interdependent, meaning that they strive to be part of a group. Their sense of self is inseparably connected with others. The differences in upbringing and the environment have implications for balance theory. Because individuals from collectivistic societies are strongly related to others, they might feel a stronger need to maintain balance in their interpersonal relationships. It is because of the emphasised dependency and greatly valued respect for others. In contrast, countries with individualistic tendencies will enhance their autonomy, including unique personal values, which may contradict with balance theory. They will not conform to maintain balance and might be more cautious about external factors. Thus, the tendency to maintain balance could be seen as culturally specific, influenced by the differing values placed on interdependence versus autonomy.

Another concept related to maintaining desired stability which must be recognised is the context of relationships. The specific environment determines the character of the interaction. For example, the work environment requires formal and impersonal communication, while in the family it is expected to be warm and open. As a result, people might prioritize task-oriented goals and professional efficiency, which leads to less motivation to create deep, personal balance with colleagues. Alternatively, family members have an interest in each other's well-being, and they tend to experience a stronger drive to create balance in their relationships. This contrast suggests that wanting to create balance may look different depending on the context.

Quality and durability of the relationship are the important factors to consider. Close, long-term relationships may foster a stronger motivation to maintain harmony, as these relationships often provide significant emotional and social support. In contrast, relationships that are shorter-term or less significant may not create as much drive for balance, as the investment in these relationships is lower.

Lastly, behaviours and attitudes can be changed. Although maintaining balanced relationships might be satisfactory, there is always a chance for transformation. The concept of persuasion implies active and conscious changes with a specific message. Persuasive communication can make changes in two ways. According to the elaboration likelihood model, there are central and peripheral routes. The first one is used when people are motivated to process given information. Then strong and long-lasting opinions are created. In other situations, the peripheral route is used. Attitudes made this way are weaker and can be easily changed. This means that attitudes within a triadic relationship can be influenced by the strength of persuasive messages rather than a simple desire to maintain balance. For instance, a person might shift from a positive to a negative stance within a triad if persuaded strongly enough, disrupting the initial balance.