Beliefs
What are they, how are they formed, and how do we change them

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Sponsor

Traffic Safety Culture
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About the Center for Health and Safety Culture

We are an interdisciplinary center serving communities and organizations through research, training, and guidance to cultivate healthy and safe cultures.
Core Issues

Traffic Safety

Substance Misuse

Domestic Violence

Child Wellbeing
Quick Poll

Do you see your work to improve traffic safety as primarily about

a) changing behavior OR
b) changing beliefs

(Respond in the polling window.)
Traffic Safety Culture

“the shared belief system of a group of people, which influences road user behaviors and stakeholder actions that impact traffic safety”

Purpose of this Project

• Understand the processes and conditions that influence belief formation and change

• Provide guidance to traffic safety stakeholders in the design of effective strategies to change traffic safety culture
Agenda

• What are beliefs?
• How are beliefs formed?
• How are beliefs changed?
• Resources
• Questions
Why Beliefs?

Belief System
What are beliefs?

• Our minds function as “belief engines” that automatically seek meaning from our environments.
• Beliefs serve two functions: to understand the world (representational accuracy) and to influence how we feel (emotional control).
• Formed as propositions (statements): For example, the perception that “Everyone I know drives above the speed limit” could be distilled into the statement (belief) that “Most people speed.”
• Beliefs explain past behaviors and motivate future behaviors.
• Beliefs support higher-order cognitive functions such as decision-making and planning.
• Beliefs shared among a group of people support social functions such as establishing group identity (culture).
How are beliefs formed?

1. Perturbance: an unfamiliar, contradicting, or emotionally salient event.
2. Generate "proto-beliefs" (personal hypotheses)
3. Evaluate plausibility (accuracy, emotions, consistency).
4. Accept and integrate beliefs.
5. New beliefs determine future perturbances.
How are beliefs changed?

Locus of Control

Precursor Event (perturbation)

Self-Efficacy

Credibility

Vividness

Framing

Narratives
Key Take-Aways

• We may form a new belief when we perceive an event that we cannot explain.
  – These types of events tend to be unexpected
  – Our goal is to form a belief that accurately represents the event.

• We may form a belief because it makes us feel good
  – This can include forming a belief that removes an existing negative emotion.
  – Our goal is to regulate our emotions.
Resources

Written Documents

• Guidance for Traffic Safety Practitioners
• Summary Poster
• Final Report

[ Google MDT Traffic Safety Culture ]
Guidance Document

Assessment

• 11 Questions with supportive guidance
• Purpose
  – Motivate deeper understanding of strategies
  – Identify areas for improvement
  – Facilitate shared understanding
Assessment

1. How well does the strategy seek to change specific beliefs that are linked to specific behaviors?
2. How well does the strategy foster slow thinking?
3. How well does the strategy create cognitive dissonance (without shame)?
4. How well does the strategy grow perceived self-efficacy?
5. How is emotion used in the strategy?
Assessment

6. How does the strategy use a narrative?
7. How vivid is the strategy?
8. How credible is the source?
9. To what degree might the strategy evoke psychological reactance?
10. To what degree does the strategy grow misperceptions of normative beliefs or behaviors?
11. To what degree does the strategy stigmatize certain people?
Supportive Guidance

For each question:

• Background

• Why this matters

• Suggestions / Examples
Agenda

• What are beliefs?
• How are beliefs formed?
• How are beliefs changed?
• Resources
• Questions
Questions

Please enter any questions in the chat box.
Related Research

Current Projects

– Resources and Tools to Reduce Multi-Risk Driving Behaviors
– Resources and Tools to Improve Pedestrian Safety

[ Google MDT Traffic Safety Culture ]
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