

15.301/310, Managerial Psychology
Prof. Dan Ariely
Lecture 1: Why Research in Psychology?

Introduction to the class (see slides):

Why research in psychology? Don't we know this stuff by just being people? We see each other all day and we interact and interpret each other just fine. People know a lot, why do we need to do research? Perhaps other places, other countries, would be different, we don't know as much about other cultures, but ourselves?

Our intuition that we know a lot is very powerful.

But our knowledge of psychological situations can be divided into 4 categories (see slide), including a correct rejection (CR) and correct assumption.

We may believe something but it turns out it is not true, we may not believe the truth (a false assumption), or we may not believe something that is true.

For example, what if we think that people have no trouble with savings, that they manage their money well in general? We do not even think to look, because we assume everyone is reasonable. It could turn out to be a missed opportunity if this is not true.

Or what if we believe that people understand safe sex and the downsides of unprotected sex? Or what if we assume that they understand information given to them in a lecture format, but it turns out they don't get the information from a lecture (they need some other way)? Then our efforts have no effect.

We need to research to find out the answers.

Exercise:

Everyone is given a handout that has 20 boxes, each with several numbers in them. They are to find the ones in each box that add up to 10 exactly, and check a box underneath if they are successful. They are given a limited time to complete as many as they can. They are told they will receive 50 cents for each answer they find. People are told to do one of three things: 1. Turn in the handout, with solved boxes checked. 2. Turn in, on a separate sheet of paper, the number of boxes solved. 3. Before you begin, sign an honor code saying that you will not cheat, then turn in a separate sheet of paper giving the number of boxes you solved.

Video:

“Talking to the Dead.” Episode 1. *Penn & Teller: Bullshit!* Directed by Randall Moldave, Star Price, Tim Rogan, Scott Schafer. Showtime, 2004.