



Moral Foundations Theory: Help in Overcoming Resistance

Linda Rising

linda@lindarising.org

www.lindarising.org

[@RisingLinda](#)

How do we deal with resistance now?





It's all about data 😊!

- **We usually believe opponents are missing facts so all we need to do is supply the missing information.**
- **We bombard opponents and can't understand why they are still resistant.**
- **The problem must be with THEM!**

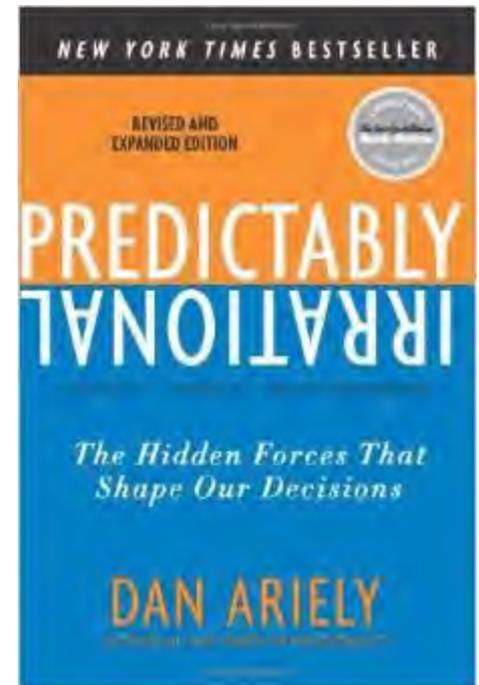
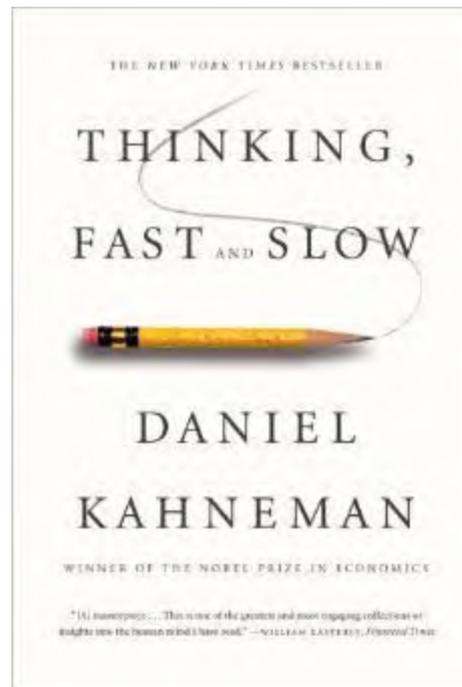


Why don't THOSE PEOPLE listen to reason?

- **We weren't designed to listen to reason.**
- **Ask people moral questions, time their responses and scan their brains. Their answers and brain activation patterns indicate that they reach conclusions quickly and produce reasons later to justify what they've decided.**
- **Is it wrong to have sex with a dead chicken? How about with your sister? If your dog dies, why not eat it?**
- **Most subjects in experiments agree these things are wrong. But none can explain why.**
- **Reason isn't like a judge or teacher, impartially weighing evidence or guiding us to wisdom. It's like a lawyer or press secretary, justifying our acts and judgments to others.**

Behavioral economics

**Kahneman
& Tversky
changed
the way
we think
about
thinking.**





Confirmation Bias

- In the early 1960s, Peter Wason's research showed that after people have formed an hypothesis they focus on evidence that fits their pre-existing views.
- Wason called this the “confirmation bias.”
- Two groups asked to read a paper.
- Bias can increase polarization.



AND the Backfire Effect

- When you argue using facts and evidence, people simply reject or discount the information...
- AND cling more firmly to their views
- Brendan Nyhan & Jason Reifler called this “the backfire effect”
- Correcting people **INCREASES** erroneous beliefs ☹!
- Weapons of mass destruction ☹!



Cognitive Dissonance

- Leon Festinger & J. Merrill Carlsmith showed we are extremely uncomfortable holding contradictory beliefs. We just can't do it!
- Results immediately rejected by behaviorists -- cognitive dissonance at work 😊!
- Contradictory “evidence” causes severe cognitive discomfort!



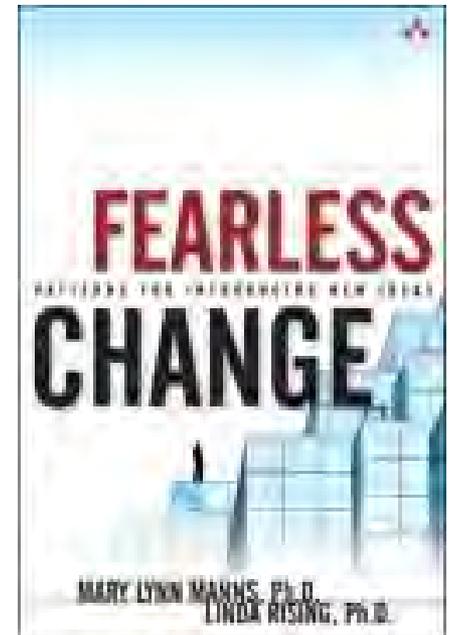
Cynics vs Skeptics

- **Skeptics are useful. Every group, every team, every meeting should have one.**
- **Edward de Bono's *Six Thinking Hats*, wear the black hat**
- **Cynics are negative for the sake of being negative, not to be helpful, typically focused on low-level interests, not the greater good**

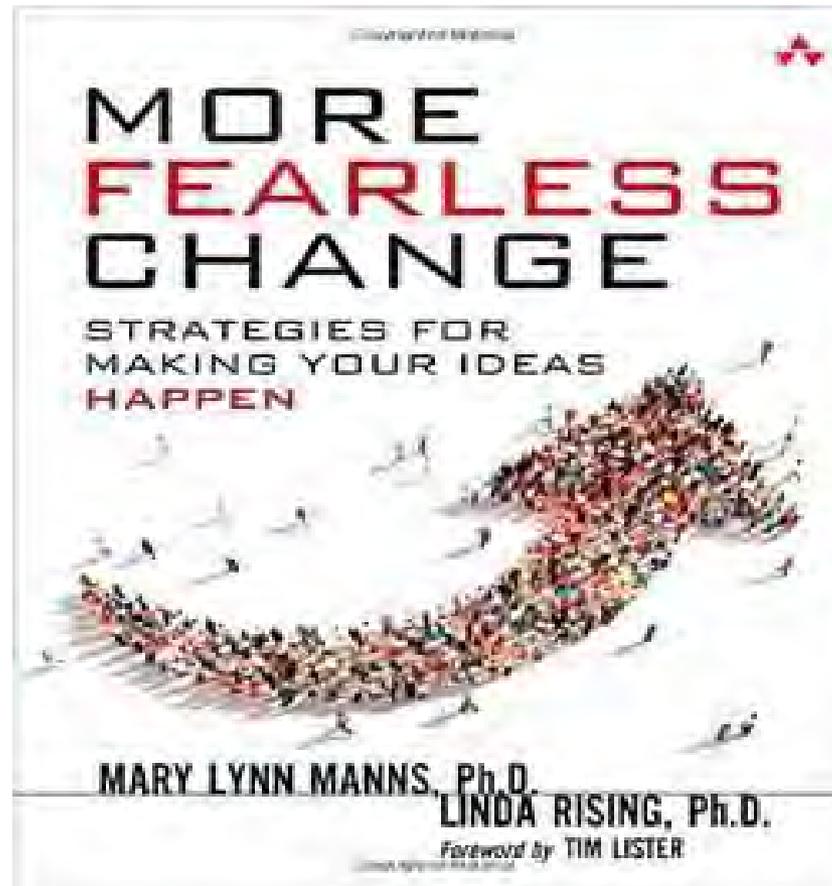
Fearless Change

Patterns based on

- Social psychology
- Influence strategies
- Evolutionary biology



Now out 😊!





Fear Less

- Pattern from *Fearless Change*
- Listen with the intent to understand, not the intent to reply
– Stephen Covey



You need a nice, clear, rational argument

- **Not because it's convincing! (Remember, we're not rational decision-makers)**
- **But we're good at explaining after-the-fact why we made a decision (our narrative – rationalization), so...**
- **Provide resistors a logical argument to use in their explanation to others and to themselves.**
- **Not just benefits: include costs, downsides, flaws in your thinking, unknowns and unknown unknowns**



Personal Touch

- Pattern from *Fearless Change*
- Everyone is asking, “What’s in it for me?”
- You must address a genuine user need. Data does not equal empathy. Jeff Patton



Different people react to new ideas differently

This is new so it's cool!

(Innovators--2.5%)

It's interesting, but I want to learn more.

(Early Adopter--13.5%)

I want to know what other people think.

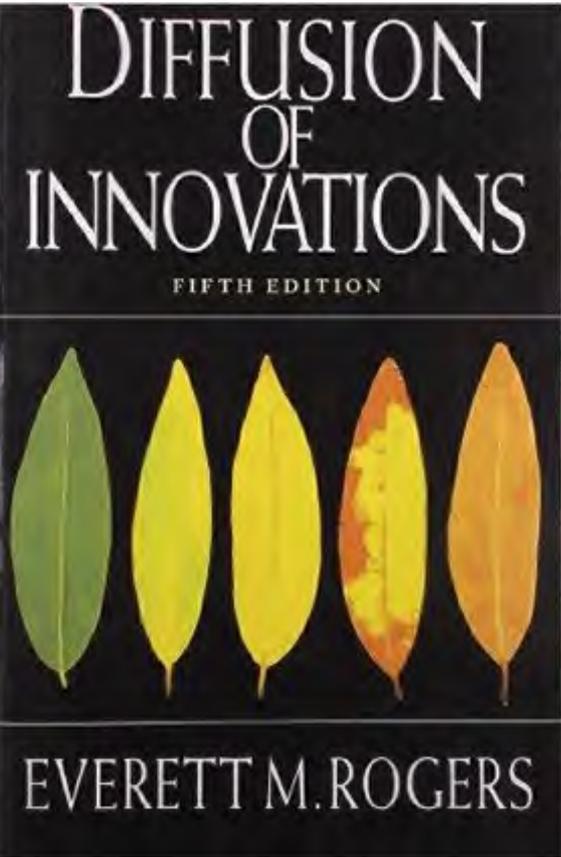
(Early Majority--34%)

If I have to. I guess.

(Late Majority--34%)

We've always done it this way.

(Laggards--16%)





Innovators

(2.5%) are risk takers who have the resources and desire to try new things, even if they fail

Early Adopters

(13.5%) are selective about which technologies they start using. They are considered the "one to check in with" for new information and reduce others' uncertainty about a new technology by adopting it.

Early Majority

(34%) take their time before adopting a new idea. They are willing to embrace a new technology as long as they understand how it fits with their lives.

Late Majority

(34%) adopt in reaction to peer pressure, emerging norms, or economic necessity. Most of the uncertainty around an idea must be resolved before they adopt.

Laggards

(16%) are traditional and make decisions based on past experience. They are often economically unable to take risks on new ideas.

Bryce Ryan & Neal Gross (1943)



Work with what is

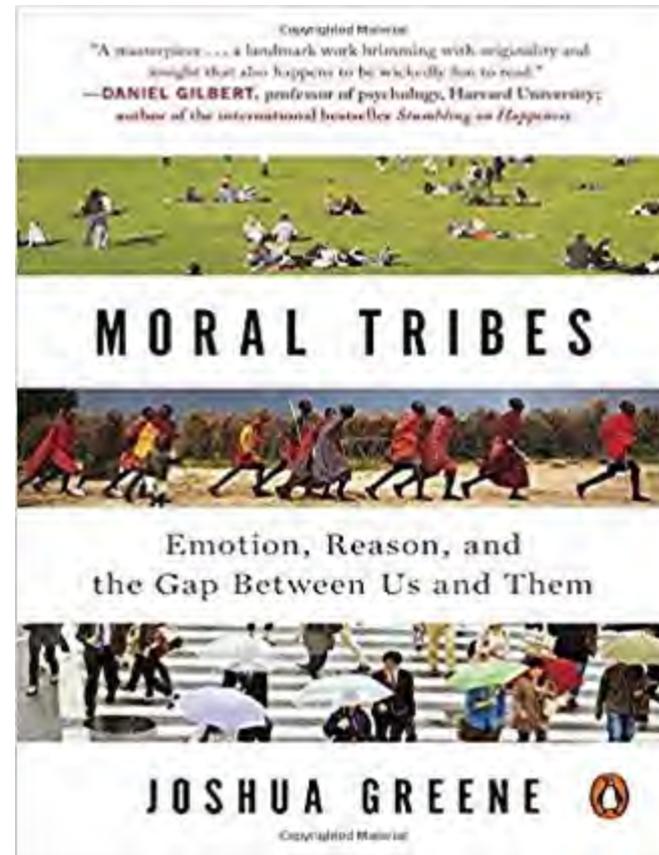
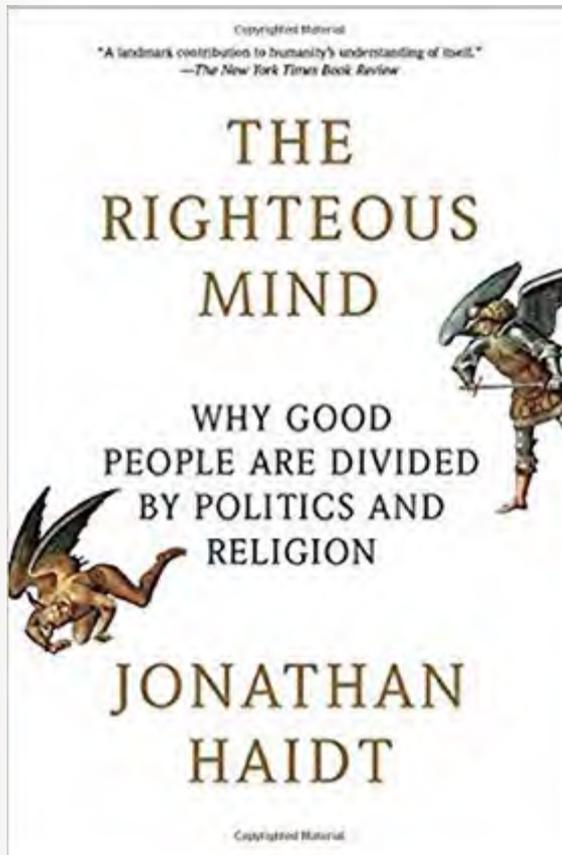
- **You can't fix it – so use it to your advantage!**
- **Responses seem to be hardwired. Why?**
- **Don't rush to encounter resistance. Let the natural force of evolution work for you.**
- **Most people are smart, care, want to do their best.**
- **Accept that the people in your organization will never all be in the same place at the same time.**



Listen, Listen, Listen

- **Silence is good, short responses are good**
- **Maximal body language: nod, make eye contact, use open posture**
- **Research shows that questions to promote discovery and insight show you are working with the speaker**
- **Sometimes this is sufficient! I have listened people into agreeing with me 😊!**

Two excellent references





Moral Foundations Theory

- **6 foundations to moral beliefs**
- **Care/Harm (being harmed)**
- **Fairness/Cheating (treated fairly)**
- **Loyalty/Betrayal (loyal to their group)**
- **Authority/Subversion (playing by the rules)**
- **Sanctity/Degradation (sullyng sacred physical/spiritual things)**
- **Liberty/Oppression (losing freedom)**



It's all about politics

- **Liberals favor Care/Harm & Fairness/Cheating**
- **Libertarians favor Liberty (surprise!)**
- **Conservatives favor the other three**
- **To persuade people, focus on what THEY value, not what you value (good advice in any setting)**
- **Follow the sacredness. Think about the moral foundations. See which carry the most weight for a particular individual.**
- **To really open your mind, open your heart first.**



Research on increased military spending

- **1: We should take pride in our military, which unifies us both at home and abroad.**
- **2: In the military, the poor and disadvantaged can achieve equal standing by ensuring they have a reliable salary and a future apart from the challenges of poverty and inequality.**
- **Conservatives influenced by either message because this is an issue they support**
- **But Liberals more likely to be influenced by 2.**



We are reluctant to use this technique

- **Research shows both sides equally reluctant to use moral arguments to appeal to the “other side,” even when incentives are used.**
- **This speaks to the power of confirmation bias and cognitive dissonance.**
- **It’s as though we not only want others to agree with our position on a topic but also agree with our values.**



How to use MFT

Argument with an uncle who insists Boy Scouts should exclude openly gay people from being scout leaders. “For thousands of years, society has been built on one man, one woman,” he says. “It seems like a dangerous and unnatural social experiment to start having role models teaching kids it’s OK to be gay.”

Wrong response: No, it hasn’t! The concept of heterosexual, one-man, one-woman marriage is actually really new. Haven’t you read the Bible? Dudes had tons of wives back then! It’s like you conservatives conveniently ignore all this history to fight gay rights.



Base your argument on your listener's values

I think you're definitely right that there's a long-standing, wonderful tradition of one-man, one-woman relations. I totally respect how much you care about that institution — I do, too! I think my main reason for allowing gay people to be scout leaders is I have gay friends who were Boy Scouts growing up, and who seriously treasure the lessons they learned during that time. They have the same ideals as you and I do, love our country for the same reasons. They just want the chance to give back to an organization that helped shape who they are, that taught them all sorts of invaluable life skills.



Try your own experiment

- **Imagine a conversation with someone who disagrees with you**
- **Craft the outline of two arguments: one for a liberal (Care and/or Fairness) and one for a conservative (Loyalty, Authority (playing by the rules), and/or Sanctity)**
- **Work in silence for 3 minutes**



When to stop discussion

- **The key question: Is there something I can prove or demonstrate that would make you stop believing in <whatever>?**
- **If the honest answer is “No,” there’s no point in continuing the discussion.**
- **Don’t waste time and energy on the topic.**
- **Move on to something else.**
- **Ask yourself this question to test your own confirmation bias.**



The Righteous Mind – Jonathan Haidt

To get along better, we should all be less self-righteous. We should recognize that nearly all of us are good people, and that our conflicts arise from our belonging to different cultural groups with different moral institutions. We're very good at seeing through our opponents' moral rationalizations, but we need to get better at seeing our own. We should try to understand one another and be more open to compromise.



Summary

- **Patterns and techniques are not Band-aids. The best approach is holistic – a collection of strategies that work together.**
- **People and organizations are complex systems. Any small change changes everything.**
- **It's easy to be discouraged. Keep trying small experiments and learning from them.**
- **The most effective strategies are primitive: food, movement, touch, empathy, listening, giving, sharing. Others are human after all 😊!**



Thanks for listening!

Be more open to learning and changing your own mind. The only way past your biases is by working with others.