

Challenging Beliefs Productively: The Power of Confidence Scales and Real Reasons

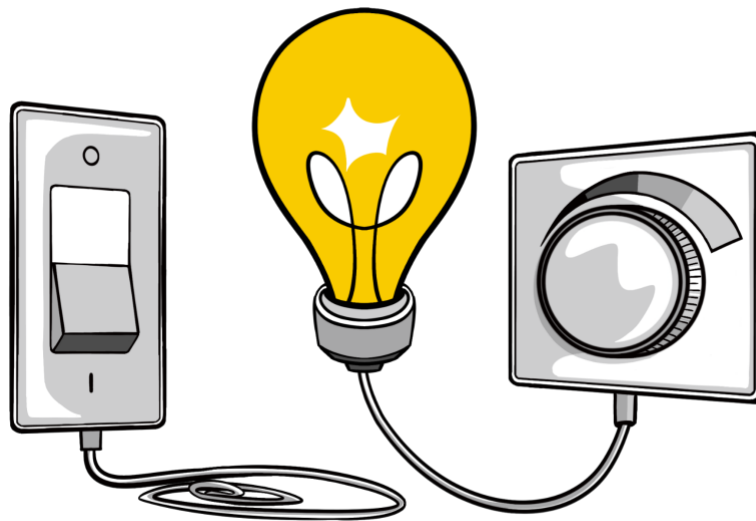
Two powerful skills that will vastly improve your interactions on difficult topics.

In an era where conversations about politics, religion, and other sensitive topics can quickly become contentious, people are desperate for ways to engage productively. Imagine having two simple tools in your pocket to navigate these difficult discussions with confidence and clarity. Employing the two skills covered here—implementing a Confidence Scale and conducting a Real Reason Check—will make a profound difference in your interactions. By learning and implementing these skills, you can transform challenging conversations into opportunities for meaningful dialogue and real shifts in perspective.

What are Confidence Scales and Real Reasons?

Confidence scales are tools that can be used to quantify a person's level of certainty in the truth of their claims. Rather than viewing beliefs in binary terms (true or false), confidence scales allow for a spectrum of positions.

Reasons, on the other hand, are the supporting arguments, evidence, or psychosocial motivations that contribute to a person's confidence in a claim. A "real reason" is one that genuinely and quantifiably impacts a person's feeling of confidence, as opposed to reasons that are offered but do not actually affect that same feeling of certainty toward their belief.



Confidence in the truth of a claim is viewed on a spectrum and not in binary terms.

It's crucial to recognize the relationship between a person's confidence level and the quality of their own reasons, as this understanding can have far-reaching implications. Individuals who are highly confident in their beliefs may be more likely to act upon them, regardless of whether their beliefs are well-founded.

This overconfidence can lead to behaviors and decisions that impact not only their own lives but also those of others around them.

By working simple confidence scales and real reason checks into our engagements, we can help people critically examine the foundations of their strongly held beliefs. And they can do the same for us. This process can also temper extreme confidence levels that aren't supported by strong reasons, leading to more thoughtful and epistemically humble actions. Conversely, these tools can serve to reinforce well-founded confidence, encouraging positive, evidence-based behaviors. Ultimately, examining the confidence-reason relationship of the claims we make can contribute to more responsible decision-making, regardless of who you are or what you believe.

How to Use Confidence Scales and Identify Real Reasons

Mastering the use of confidence scales and identifying real reasons requires a structured approach. The following steps provide a framework for effectively employing these techniques in dialogue, allowing for deeper exploration of beliefs and their underlying foundations.

Introduce the Confidence Scale After Hearing a Clear Claim:

Present a scale, typically ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 represents complete disbelief, 50 indicates uncertainty, and 100 signifies absolute certainty.

Akira: I believe the recent election was stolen. <they work together to obtain Akira's definitions>

Zainab: On a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 means you're certain it wasn't stolen and 100 means you're absolutely sure it was, where would you place your confidence?

Clarify the Meaning of Numbered Positions:

Ensure both parties understand what the numbers represent to avoid misinterpretation.

Akira: I'd say I'm at 90.

Zainab: So you're quite confident, but not absolutely certain. Is that about right?

Akira: Yep. Exactly.

Identify Main Reasons:

Ask for the main reasons supporting their level of confidence.

Zainab: What would you say is your main reason for being at 90 on that scale?

Akira: Well, there were statistical anomalies in the vote counts that don't make sense.

Conduct a Real Reason Check:

Present a hypothetical (without supplying your own reasons) where their reason was shown to be invalidated to see if it truly affects their confidence.

Zainab: If it was proven—to your satisfaction—that those statistical anomalies had a legitimate explanation, how would that impact your confidence level, if any?

Akira: Hmm... I guess it would drop significantly, maybe to around a 6 or 7 out of 10.

Steelman the Argument:

Restate their position in the strongest possible form to ensure understanding.

Zainab: So, if I understand correctly, you're saying unexplained statistical anomalies in the vote count strongly suggest the election wasn't conducted fairly, which is why you're quite confident it was stolen. Would you say that is an accurate summary? If I'm off on that please let me know.

Why Use Confidence Scales and Real Reason Checks?

Employing confidence scales and real reason checks during discussions about beliefs can transform how we approach, understand, and challenge differing viewpoints. These tools encourage a more efficient and nuanced exploration of all kinds of beliefs, moving beyond simple agreement or disagreement to genuine reflections on the quality of our own reasoning.

Confidence scales provide a non-threatening and useful framework for people to **critically reflect** on their stated levels of certainty with regards to the truth of their claims. This activity can reveal faults in the quality of our reasoning. Confidence scales foster more productive dialogue by acknowledging that beliefs exist in degrees rather than rigid absolutes, which in turn provides psychological safety.

Real reason checks help identify the core factors influencing a person's beliefs and actions by gauging their impact on stated confidence levels. This process can reveal inconsistencies in reasoning, and in turn, a clearer re-assessment of one's feeling of confidence toward the truth of their claim.



Our feeling of confidence is impacted by the weight of our reasons.

The Relationship Between Confidence and Real Reasons

The interplay between confidence levels and real reasons is complex and revealing. Often, there's a direct correlation between the strength (or weight) of real reasons and the level of confidence. However, this isn't always the case, so exploring this relationship collaboratively can lead to insightful discoveries.

Example 1: High Confidence, Light Reasons

Yuki: I'm 100% certain that ghosts exist. <defines "ghosts">

Rashid: What's your main reason for this belief?

Yuki: I saw a great documentary about haunted houses that showed images and even a video of ghosts.

Rashid: I see. <repeats back to confirm both their understanding> If that documentary was proven fabricated, to the point where you really accepted it, would it affect your confidence in any way?

Yuki: <reflective pause> Nah, not really, I'd still be just as sure ghosts are real without that documentary.

Rashid: Okay. Is there something else that might support that degree of confidence for thinking ghosts are real?

Yuki: Oh, definitely. I had an experience that was definitely a factor. About five years ago I was...<explains new reason>

In this case, high confidence doesn't align with the strength of the stated reason, suggesting there might be other stated or unstated reasons influencing Yuki's belief that ghosts are real. Notice also the efficiencies gained by *not* offering alternative explanations against Yuki's reasons provided, while instead remaining collaborative, curious, and focused.

Example 2: Moderate Confidence, Heavy Reasons

Dimitri: I'm about 70% confident that climate change is primarily caused by human activities.

Amara: What's your main reason for this level of confidence?

Dimitri: Numerous peer-reviewed scientific studies support this conclusion.

Amara: If these studies were found to have significant flaws, how would it affect your confidence?

Dimitri: It would definitely lower my confidence, probably to around 30 or 40%.

Amara: Thanks. Sounds like flawed studies are a factor here. <Dimitri agrees> It could be neat to explore what constitutes a flaw to you, regardless of where we each might stand on this claim. If you're willing to explore that a bit deeper. <Dimitri enthusiastically agrees> What would you say a "flaw" is or looks like?

Dimitri: Ooh. Good question. Let's see... Well, you can always tell there's a flaw in something when...

Here, Dimitri's confidence level aligns well with the strength of his reasons, demonstrating a more balanced and evidence-based approach to belief. The civil nature of the exchange is also likely to keep reactance low and Dimitri engaged throughout his conversation with Amara, as the discussion is far from over.

Conclusion

Confidence scales and real reason checks are powerful tools for understanding and exploring beliefs, with implications that extend beyond the conversations in which they're used. By quantifying confidence and identifying the true pillars of belief, we can engage in more meaningful discussions that reveal the potential consequences of strongly held views. These techniques encourage intellectual

honesty and promote self-reflection, while highlighting how high confidence levels can lead to real-world actions and decisions.

By examining the relationship between confidence and reasons, we can help others and ourselves make more informed choices, potentially moderating extreme views or reinforcing well-founded ones. This process when repeated contributes to more responsible decision-making in society, fostering a reflective approach to both personal and collective choices. Ultimately, these easy to grasp tools enhance our critical thinking skills overall, promote open-minded understanding of diverse perspectives, align our confidence with the quality of our reasoning, and encourage thoughtful consideration of how our beliefs impact others in the world around us.

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