CHAPTER 6
The Nature of Fundamentalism

It's often safer to be in chains than be free - Franz Kafka

Almost always it is the fear of being ourselves that brings us to the mirror - Antonio Porchia

The Branch Davidian

It was a quiet Sunday morning in Mount Carmel at the Branch Davidian Ranch on 28 February 1993. People went about their routines: breakfast, showers, prayers and devotional meetings. Like most days at the ranch things were dictated by the leader, David Koresh. The Branch Davidians were a schism from a sect called the Davidians. The sect grew out of a prophecy by Florence Houteff in 1959 about the imminent return of Christ. Following the failure of the prophecy the sect grew stronger under the influence of cognitive dissonance and she groomed Vernon Howell, later known as David Koresh, as her chosen successor. In 1984 a meeting led to a division of the group with Howell leading one faction, calling themselves the Davidian Branch Davidians, and George Roden leading the competing faction. After this split, George Roden ran Howell and his followers off Mt Carmel. Howell and his group relocated to Palestine, Texas.

On the morning of 28 February a commotion in the camp was raised by a phone call from David's brother-in-law, a postal carrier who had just been asked directions to the ranch by a media person. Koresh immediately told Rodriguez, an agent of the United States Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) who thought he was under cover, that he knew about the approaching raid. Rodriguez immediately left the compound. Koresh then asked the male members to get arms and take up defensive positions about the compound whilst the females were to wait in their rooms. Koresh was going to wait and see what the intentions were of the ATF before he went any further.

Theoretically, the ATF were out to execute a search warrant but had the compound under surveillance for many months prior to the raid. The affidavit of the ATF warrants a search under suspicion of dozens of illegal firearms and the operation of a methamphetamine lab. Davidian, Paul Fatta was a federal firearms licensed dealer (FFL) and the Davidians operated a retail gun business called the Mag Bag.

The ATF agents arrived disguised in cattle trucks, and what followed was an initial gunfight leaving four agents and six Davidians dead. A ceasefire was reached mid-morning. As a result of the fatalities the FBI took control of the situation. Then ensued a siege that lasted for 51 days. Soon, rumours spread that children were being abused by Koresh and that a Jonestown mass suicide was planned. An assault was finally made on 19 April 1993, involving tanks, gas, demolition machinery, armoured vehicles and heavy weapons. The assault left 76 dead

This was not the first gunfight in the history of the sect. In 1987 George Roden, the leader of the other Davidian faction, dug up the casket of one Anna Hughes from the Davidian cemetery and had challenged Howell to a resurrection contest to prove who was the rightful heir to the leadership. Instead, Howell informed the authorities and attempted to access the chapel at Mt Carmel only to find Roden armed with an Uzi. Later Roden was admitted to a mental hospital after killing a follower with an axe for challenging his claims to be the messiah.

During the siege a number of experts in apocalypticism and fundamentalism in religious groups attempted to persuade the FBI that the siege tactics being used by government agents would only create cognitive dissonance within the Davidians and excite their belief that they were a part of Biblical 'end-of-times' scenario with cosmic significance.

Figure 14. The Burning Compound of the Branch Davidian Ranch

The Branch Davidian story is an extreme example of the fruits of fundamentalism. The trajectory of fundamentalism has the potential for all dimensions of extremism including psychopathology justified by demonisation of the opposite.

Many examples of various levels of fundamentalism abound within orthodox and unorthodox religious groups in Australia. The case of Agape Ministries in Adelaide in 2010 is an example closer to home.

On 21 May 2010, ninety heavily-armed police swooped on twelve properties owned by the Agape Ministries sect in Adelaide. The leader of the sect Rocco Leo - known to his congregation as 'Brother

Rock', went into hiding. Former members said that Leo was behind a fraud involving millions of dollars donated by sect members. Fifteen illegal firearms and extendable batons were found in the raids as well as tens of thousands of rounds of ammunition. A core group of about 60 believed the cult leaders would use their money to buy a Pacific Ocean island to build a Christian colony. The Agape Ministries believed the world would end in 2012, and has attracted several hundred people to its 'House of God' at Oakden, in Adelaide's northeast. Yet another quest for perfection and Utopia.

Figure 15. Doomsday Cult in South Australia

HIDING: Rocco Leo and girlfriend Mari Antoinette Veneziano

Members brainwashed on world conspiracy

CULT members – including children as young as five – were ordered to watch chilling right-wing conspiracy theory videos urging opposition to a supposed secret plan by shadowy elites to impose a single world government, a former cult member claims.

The videos point to a host of so-called conspiracies, including the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Centre, the torpedoing of the *Lusitania* in World War I and the bombing of Pearl Harbour as being orchestrated by sinister wealthy powerbrokers intent on taking control of the world.

The American-made videos – including *Endgame* and *Wake Up Call* – were also shown to the congregation with the warning from church leaders that "this is what will happen when the government imposes martial law".

The videos – with graphic images including enslavement, war dead, starvation and bombings – each run for 2½ hours, urging viewers not to trust authority figures, including politicians, and constantly refer to secret plans by a network of the rich and powerful to create a New World Order.

This would see the end of individual freedom, a single world government and constant Big Brother-style surveillance to quell any protests.

Topics covered include the secretive Bilderberg Group, Trilateral Commission, Council on Foreign Relations, North American Union, the Rockefeller/Rothschild families, Freemasonry, September 11, war profiteering, the "phony War on Terrorism", the impending Big Brother Surveillance Society, civil liberties, microchipping and media control.

Wake Up Call tells viewers to "put everything you think you know temporarily on hold and open up to the possibility you may have been systematically deceived and lied to your entire life".

BRAD CROUCH

Sociopsychological Characteristics of Fundamentalism

It is important to note that the telling of these stories is in no way intended to link the pathological aspects of utopianism to the ideology of zero harm but rather illustrates the propensity for extremism in all absolutist fundamentalist ideologies. The point of these stories is to illustrate the *mentalitie* of fundamentalism. The idea of *mentalities* comes from the French Annales School of History and refers to the history of attitudes, mindsets and dispositions. It denotes the sociopsychological and cultural nature of history, particularly the distribution of power through cultural mechanisms and relationships.

The common characteristics of these fundamentalist stories are:

*   Indoctrination

*   Fear of doubt

*   Absolute conformism

*   Belief in absolutes

*   Religious-like commitment

*   Binary opposition thinking

*   Demonising the enemy

*   Psycho-pathology

*   Absolute righteousness

*   The creating of a new language and discourse

*   Dominance of authoritarian personalities

*   Justified exclusion

*   Cognitive dissonance and,

*   Preoccupation with transcendence

The concept of fundamentalism is not selected lightly in application to the ideology of zero harm. A more in-depth discussion of fundamentalism follows. However, first let me demonstrate my experience of fundamentalism first hand.

Venturing for Victory

In 1973 I was selected to go on a basketball tour of the Philippines and Hong Kong. This was no ordinary tour; this was a mechanism for evangelical outreach. The tour was part of an evangelical enterprise called Venture for Victory (VV). VV had been in operation for many years, supported by a range of Christian evangelical denominations with the same mission as a Billy Graham crusade. The primary role of VV is not to play basketball but to convert people to Christianity. Basketball is the drawcard but the purpose was evangelisation and conversion to Jesus Christ.

It was my first time overseas and an awakening to the world. You will see in the photos in figure 15 and 16 a much younger (and skinnier) Rob. Figure 16 shows me in the centre of the photo playing the guitar at half time and some sense of the crowd that attended. As basketball is followed religiously in the Philippines this was the perfect mechanism to gather a crowd. In some

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instances whole villages and communities came to see us play. Crowds of up to 15,000 people gathered about rough courts to watch the visitors play, hear the evangelical appeal at half time, and after the game sign up for a course in the Christian faith. I can still remember the songs we sung in Tagalog, the native language - 'Jesus is the way to the Father's house'.

In Figure 16, the person closest to the camera is Paul Newman who played for the Philadelphia 96ers, and on the other end were two American college players who were brought into the team to bolster up our ability to win games. We played and defeated many first division and professional teams on the tour. The VV team was coached by an Australian Olympian and the team came from all over Australia. You can see in front the Director of Campaigners for Christ giving the Christian message. The Director, Bruce, and my father were lifetime friends and colleagues in evangelical endeavour.

Figure 16. Half Time Evangelicalism

So, my experience with fundamentalism is not some removed, non-lived academic exercise. I understand the trajectory of fundamentalist certainty. On the VV tour I had some amazing experiences and we all took some high risks. It was the time of the Marcos military regime and of an evening it was martial law, the streets patrolled by the army and police. On the last evening before we flew home we took a risky drive through the back streets of Manila by taxi because our bus was delayed. We believed we were kept safe because of prayer and local Christians who knew how to bypass the military. On one occasion I remember people struggling with an extremist at a game and wrestling a gun off him.

I was billeted in the homes of people with chooks in the kitchen and fighting roosters out back, who assured me I was safe and showed me their guns to prove it. This was also the first time I saw an active volcano and was shocked by its rumblings. I never was able to bring myself to eat 'baloot', half incubated bantam eggs, to enable the replication of chewing gum, a cultural influence

of American occupation during World War II. In retrospect, I had made some significant risk trade-offs, but these were considered insignificant when put beside the urgency and commitment to evangelical belief. The commitment of people to 'mission' and missionary work is not illogical but profoundly spiritual, risk trade-offs being common 'for the sake of the gospel'. All of the risks associated with missionary work is undertaken 'for the love of God'.

In figure 17 you can see the team lined up on a cracked bitumen court for our second game of the day (Rob is closest to camera on the right). We had already played one village team in four quarters and thought we had finished when the Mayor of the town came out and informed us that that was not the real team but the 'curtain raiser' team. We then played on for four more quarters with more half-time songs and Christian messages. The tour was of the Philippines and Hong Kong and we never lost a game. There were also thousands of 'converts' made on the tour.

Figure 17. Game Number Two with Fresh Team

So I can tell you all about the trajectory of absolute certainty and fundamentalism, because I have experienced it and, thankfully, escaped from it. Fundamentalism is an ideology that seeks total control and dehumanises the very nature of what it is to be human. There is no freedom or love in fundamentalism. There is no tolerance or faith in absolutism. There is no openness, learning or listening in fundamentalism. Any ideology that promotes absolute control, absolute certainty and perfectionism is a dehumanising ideology.

For the Love of Zero

Understanding the Mind of Fundamentalism

It is common in the media to dismiss fundamentalists as 'crazies' and idiots. Such an approach insulates us from taking the mindset of the fundamentalist seriously. The discussion of this chapter reviews the common characteristics of fundamentalism in an attempt to better understand the *mentalitie* (whole disposition) of zero harm as religious ideology. This discussion is important for a number of reasons:

• To understand why such emotion is invested in both sides of the debate

• To understand the issues associated with the psychology of conversion

• To understand the appeal of zero harm ideology

The work of Marty and Appleby in the Fundamentalism Project in 1991, sponsored by the American Academy of the Arts and Sciences is a foundational source to begin an understanding of fundamentalism. The discussion that follows builds on the work of Marty and Appleby and work undertaken in my PhD. Comments and examples that illustrate the fundamentalism of zero harm ideology have been highlighted in italics and indented.

Key Characteristics of Fundamentalism

The following provides an outline of the key characteristics of fundamentalist knowledge and practice:

1. Extremism, whilst not objectified in individuals or institutions, is a precondition for breaking away. Extremism is seen as an ideal typical impulse characteristic of the separatist or sectarian spirit. This is not understood by fundamentalists as separatism but as refusing fellowship with unbelievers, as not being yoked with unrighteousness, or as not communing with darkness. The degree of extremism varies, depending on the religious tradition that dominates the group. Separatism can occur in thinking as well as in practice and is strengthened by secrecy and cognitive dissonance, which will be discussed further at the end of this article.

   The idea of breaking away is evident in the advertisement at Figure 4. Here we observe the logical progression of a religious-like commitment to an ideology. In this advertisement all references to safety,, risk and learning are omitted. This is evidence of separation from the orthodox language of risk to a new paradigm of total zero harm ideology.

2. Religious idealism is a central characteristic, for the transcendent realm of the divine is made normative for religious community. The power of the group to solidify the resolve and conviction of the fundamentalist is critical, and also plays a critical role in cognitive dissonance. Religious idealism alone provides an irreducible basis for communal and personal identity which is perceptible in the way fundamentalists respond by a habit of mind. The fundamentalist believes that only an identity founded on "the fundamentals" can remain free from erosion and corruption, impenetrable and immune to substantial change and aloof from the vicissitudes of history and reason.

So much of zero harm language is about an ideal, belief, trust, hope and aspiration. All of these expressions are transcendent. The sentiments expressed in Quote 10 in Chapter 2 shows how the language of Nirvana and Heaven assimilates with the ideology of 'zero' and associated absolutes. Once the ideal of 'zero' is locked in place it then becomes the new fundamental and must not be questioned.

3. Identity is understood as ontological, as rooted in the very nature of being in relationship with an absolute (God or other) and therefore beyond the reach of human temporal and spatial considerations and the relativising force of history. For example, 'born-again Christians' understand their life to be a participation in "a new creation", having "put on Christ" by the "renewing of the mind", and they enjoy the benefits of a new status as "righteous servants of the Lord". The fundamentalist understanding of such Bible passages, tempered by separatism, leads to exclusivism.

   The idea of zero harm has now become rooted in the very nature of risk discourse. Many consulting organisations know that they must use zero harm language or they will not get work. The logic of zero harm also extends beyond the spatial and rational considerations fundamental to the limitations of what it means to be human. In many ways zero harm ideology has developed its own literature, marketing and separatism from safety orthodoxy. The idea of 'putting on' and 'putting off' is similar to the nature of silences to be discussed later in this book. There is a sense of exclusivism to the zero harm ideology identified against those who don't believe it.

4. Revealed truth is depicted as a unified, knowable and undifferentiated whole. This is affirmed by identity and the social group.

   The idea of 'revealed truth' is apparent in zero harm ideology. The ideology is considered complete and unquestionable and endorsed by 'club-like' membership.

5. An intentionally scandalous disposition is espoused. The fundamentalist does not expect the outsider to understand the trans-rational claims of "the believer" because those beliefs are considered to be a stumbling block. These are however affirmed and understood within the group. Indeed, the "average person", according to the group and its mentality cannot discern or understand the things of God. In this sense it is rational to not even discuss beliefs with those who cannot understand, so a silence of articulation quickly develops and conversation about the truth is saved for the initiated.

   The nature of silence is most important for the fundamentalist. First, because their opponents are silent on things that they think matter, e.g. zero harm. Silence on zero harm for the fundamentalist is the key indicator that the opponent is a 'non-believer'. Second, the fundamentalist then develops their own form of silence despite the fact that silence for them is an indicator of non-belief. The zero harm fundamentalist, once a believer, doesn't need to discuss risk, uncertainty, accidents, human fallibility or 'safety'. The language of the zero harm believer is absolute.

6. There is opposition to historical consciousness, especially if it is interpreted and translated by modernists into foundational principles of relativism. This partly assists the fundamentalist to maintain immunity from absorption of relativist ideas. Fundamentalists reject the notion that belief and practice are historically conditioned and contingent. Were fundamentalists to concede that the human mind conditions and limits the truth of revelation, their truth claims would stand for nothing and they would be susceptible to tests of relative adequacy and foreign criteria of evaluation.

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The zero harm believer is committed to absolutes and the idea of relative truth is anathema. Once the absolute is believed any idea of contradiction to the absolute is no longer interpreted as reason to disbelieve the absolute. Separation from accepted orthodoxy and the language of minimisation is also avoided.

7. Whether rhetorical or actual, an extremism exists that serves as a litmus test to separate true believers from outsiders. This is evident in a vocabulary of belief and a stereotyping of non-believers.

The idea of separation is important to the fundamentalist and having a zero harm language and discourse becomes the measure of this separation.

8. There is a claim to privileged access to absolute truth and an associated rejection of all other forms of knowledge, with the insistence that the fundamentalist is correct. The primacy of truth is crucial to fundamentalists. They see their existence as a bulwark against error and theological compromise.

The actions of indoctrination and exclusion are important for the zero harm fundamentalist. Other forms of knowledge no matter how well researched or academic are counted for nought against the truth of zero harm. In zero harm organisations the mantra and ideology must not be questioned. Those who do question or disagree with the mantra must leave.

9. The understanding of an either/or identity of elect and reprobate allows the fundamentalist to divide the world into kingdoms or provinces of darkness and light. This is coupled with an intense personalism. Individuals feel they have known God, not through priestly intermediaries but directly. This gives a feeling of certainty for what God wants for them and the world. This guidance is often gained from reading sacred writings for advice, resulting in an extreme form of a magical approach in thinking. Thus, whilst intensely individualistic, this guidance results in high absolutist moral expression.

Those who follow zero harm are those in the light, and those who are in darkness are yet to 'see the light'. The identity of binary opposites creates this either/or thinking and demarcation.

10. A position of no compromise with other doctrines or practices is adopted along with an insistence on the purity and integrity of their doctrine.

The following is a quote from an email to me from Tom (pseudonym)

I have obviously not yet read your book, however the outline to your book resonates with many things I have been reading of late including Weick, Kahneman, Snowden, Taleb, Geller, Schwartz etc. The more I read, the closer the answer appears to get to the outline of your book. However, unfortunately, the further it gets from the direction the company I work for is moving. For example, zero harm has reached cult-like status with our CEO as the high-priest of the cult. Anyone who does not absolutely hold to the belief of zero harm has become an outcast and misfit. Absolute faith in the risk-matrix is another one. Dumbing down is rife...

This email is similar to many I receive. The absolute of zero harm must inevitably lead to absolute intolerance of the human condition and of humans. 'Zero tolerance' and zero harm are partners in an ethic of non-learning, under-reporting and no compromise. It is a contradiction to demand 'zero' and then expect open reporting. It is fuzzy logic to demand 'zero' and then expect people to be motivated to take risks and be accepted if they make mistakes.

11. The repudiation of secular scientific notions of progress and gradual historical evolution allows fundamentalists to reject humanistic notions of science and any form of relativist argument.

Even though the ethic of minimisation as a humanising ethic abounds in the research literature in many fields of endeavour this is of no consequence to the zero harm ideology. The religious nature of the 'zero' absolute rejects the scientific sense of psychology, education, motivation, learning and anthropology when it comes to the nature of humans. There can be no tolerance in 'zero'.

12. Dramatic eschatology shapes their identity. Scenarios of the apocalypse are invoked to justify various programs. Fundamentalism is basically messianic and apocalyptic.

The idea of being other worldly is foundational for 'zero'. It is set as an ideal that must be life denying if it is to be achieved. One of the fundamentals of 'zero' is fear and the apocalypse is any harm. The mantra of 'zero' is used to justify any range of dehumanising initiatives as long as 'zero' is the goal. 'zero' saves from the apocalypse of harm.

13. A consciousness of a particular historical moment is matched to sacred writings with an extraordinary interpretation of time and space.

One of the interesting things about zero harm is that no one seems to know where it originated. It seems to have no history, yet the ideology and discourse of 'zero' has only been around in industry for approximately 10 years.

14. Fundamentalists name, dramatise and even mythologise their enemies. Dualistic readings of sacred writings allow renderings of a meta-history which provides fundamentalists with a cosmic enemy. They tend to think in polarities. This gives activities an apocalyptic urgency and fosters a crisis mentality, which helps to justify missionary zeal and extremism. Belief in a real Satan assists in locating a cosmic conspiracy by the enemy and all non-believers are perceived to be accomplices, either consciously or unconsciously, in the work of Satan. However, fundamentalists are often more afraid of people who claim the same religion but who deviate from the true belief than they are of pagans or atheists, because such behaviour casts greater doubt on their own convictions. One of the most visible qualities of fundamentalism is its tendency to split into quarrelling sub-units who contend with each other over minor theological issues.

The culture of zero harm organisations is characterised by confusion. This is because so few people actually believe in the ideology. The mantra of 'zero' tends to be that of CEOs, not people 'on the tools'. This leads to a range of expressions of zero harm that are qualified by other words that water down the extremism of the 'zero' absolute. It then becomes a 'journey to zero harm' or a way of thinking. This allows for dozens of different interpretations of the discourse and the reduction of it as an absolute. Regardless of the interpretation, those who deny 'zero' are 'demonised' as non-believers.

15. An orientation of contrast against other cultures is evident. The identification and elaboration of the enemy is often the initial step in the rhetoric of negation. Fundamentalists need to name and locate the enemy, an urge which is evident in anti-other-group-as enemy polemics.

The language of developing a 'zero harm culture' is popular amongst the proponents of zero harm but it is never defined. It mostly identifies itself by its language rather than any particularly different behaviours in other risk-conscious organisations that are silent on the language of 'zero'.

16. Fundamentalists set boundaries, protect the group from contamination and preserve its purity. This is done through the maintenance of gatekeeping language and processes of indoctrination.

    Once zero harm ideology is in place there then commences a range of indoctrination initiatives including 'zero harm policy', 'zero harm training', 'zero harm leadership development' and so on. Soon enough a range of orthodox language about risk has been substituted for the 'spin' of zero harm. The aim is to have people speak the language without definition or sense and creating a barrier to analysis. In the end the language becomes the gatekeeper for those in and out of the fold.

17. Turning the nation around is the goal of the fundamentalist. Fundamentalists yearn for a theocratic state. This is evident in extreme reconstructionist language.

    There is nothing more bothersome to the religious fundamentalist than those who don't believe. The fundamentalist once indoctrinated cannot understand why anyone would oppose the 'zero' ideology. Rather than a theocratic state, the zero harm fundamentalist yearns for an absolute state, a state where all risk is engineered out of human activity. For example: Zero Harm Mould (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3aGwlHaShI, Accessed 3 August 2012.)

18. A totalitarian impulse is evident in the mobilisation and organisation against the enemy. Fundamentalists seek to replace existing structures with a comprehensive system and are dogmatic about it.

    Zero has no room for tolerance or messages of harm minimisation. Armed with the mantra that 'all accidents are preventable' it mobilises against the enemy and is dogmatic about it.

19. Fundamentalists are selectively traditional and selectively modern. They carefully select, from the plethora of doctrines, practices and interpretations that are available in their religious tradition, those that suit their subculture.

    The idea of selectivity is important to the zero harm fundamentalist. 'zero' only applies to selected aspects of work, not the whole work environment. This fundamental contradiction they find easy to accommodate. zero harm doesn't apply to mental health, psychological health, social health or a host of other modes of risk that are difficult to control.

20. They employ ideological weapons against a hostile world. The ideology of 'naive realism' is the fundamentalists weapon against the world.

    The arguments of binary opposition and simplistic realism are the weapons of the zero harm camp. The idea of systems and human complexity as 'wicked problems' in safety and risk management is essentially ignored by the zero harm position.

21. Charismatic and authoritarian male leadership is idealised. Fundamentalists repudiate traditional religious leadership, institutionalised religion and the scholarship associated with it.

    The absolute nature of 'zero' and intolerance seem to lend themselves to masculinist cultures where the model of Fit In or Fuck Off (FIFO) dominates. 'zero' lends itself most to authoritarianism.

22. Fundamentalists are institution builders with a comprehensive plan for society. These independent agencies become the organisational replacement for ineffective denominational affiliation.

    The overarching and totalist nature of 'zero' lends itself to the idea of kingdom building.

23. A rationalistic assertion of the truth which comes about by the objectification of revelation. There is a curious and perhaps awkward imitation of the perceived empiricism of the enemy (secular rationality). Even though fundamentalism has a religious basis, in its anxiety to secure credibility in an empirical position it tends to rob religion of mystery, imagination, mysticism, complexity, ambiguity and situational character.

The mysterious nature of the human unconscious and decision making are totally omitted from the zero harm discourse. The idea that all of risk and safety management as rational is essential for this position regardless of the fact that very little decision making comes from rationalist origins.

24. Role conflict is prominent in fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is essentially a psycho-religious state therefore, it cannot be solely explained sociologically. This is why an understanding of cognitive dissonance is critical in developing an understanding of the fundamentalist mindset.

The semantic, dialogical and language gymnastics associated with espoused zero harm culture are a good demonstration of how cognitive dissonance works. It is because zero harm is accepted as a psycho-religious belief that it is difficult to explain as just a fad or motto.

The claim that zero harm is a fundamentalism is supported by the evidence in this book and correlation between these accepted 24 characteristics of fundamentalism and the experience of those who clash with the ideology of zero harm.

The quasi-religious nature of fundamentalism, however, seems to make little difference to behaviour in the real world. Zero harm is a set of words to espouse but there are no indicators that it drives any different behaviours in contrast to organisations who don't adopt such an ideology. In other words, it is a form of cultural schizophrenia that allows a bi-polar approach to human development and learning, and rhetoric about risk. It is able to maintain its many contradictions through the mechanism of cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance theory is concerned with situations which confront groups holding strong convictions with clear and undeniable disproof of those convictions. The theory maintains that even when groups are confronted with falsifying evidence they seem to respond with increased evangelistic fervour.

There is some evidence to suggest that advertisements for motor-cars are read most frequently, not in the days and weeks prior to a purchase when a decision is being made, but in the days which follow the purchase. The advertisements do not seem so much to influence the decision itself as to confirm the decision which has in fact been made. It is after the commitment that one is plagued by the most serious misgivings. Many friends and neighbours offer congratulations and express their admiration for the new vehicle, so confirming us in our wisdom and judgement. Others, however, express reservation or even surprise. It appears that there may be certain problems about this particular make of which we had not been aware, or that a certain different style is gaining ground and the purchase we have made is likely to become quickly out of date. At this point two or more of our cognitions, or items of our knowledge, or views which we hold believing them to be true, seem to be in conflict.

(1) I am a sensible person whose practical judgement and "common sense" can always be relied upon. (2) I have made a decision which could be considered hasty and even foolish. These propositions jar upon one, setting up an uncomfortable feeling of attention, embarrassment or discord. The dissonance is cognitive in the sense that it has to do with the coherence of our knowledge, and the dissonance is experienced as being disagreeable because the items which constitute our universe of knowledge, the world of beliefs, attitudes, opinions and so on which form the known world of any individual, are integrated into a system. This is the dynamic of cognitive dissonance at work. Attempts will be made to alleviate the feeling of self-criticism and discomfort caused by the appearance of the conflicting beliefs. These may be described as techniques for the reduction of cognitive dissonance. In certain circumstances, reading advertisements seems to be one such technique. Fundamentalists seem particularly vulnerable to cognitive dissonance, since if they take their religious commitment seriously they are likely to experience tension within their world of alleged knowledge.

Festinger, Riechken and Schachter's work *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World* was the first attempt to describe the dynamic of cognitive dissonance. Although the authors were aware of a lack of detailed empirical evidence needed to demonstrate their theory, they proposed five conditions which seem necessary for dissonance to occur.

1. A belief must be held with deep conviction and it must have some relevance to action, that is, to what the believer does or how he behaves.

2. The person holding the belief must have committed himself to it; that is, for the sake of his belief, he must have taken some important action that is difficult to undo.

3. The belief must be sufficiently specific and sufficiently concerned with the real world so that events may unequivocally refute the belief.

4. Such undeniable disconfirmatory evidence must occur and must be recognised by the individual holding the belief.

5. The individual believer must have social support.

The cycle of cognitive dissonance is explained diagrammatically at Figure 18.

In addition to these circumstances there are three kinds of cognitive dissonance: dissonance that occurs within the belief system itself, conflict between a system of belief and an alternative system, and reduction of belief owing to criticism by significant parts of society that hold those beliefs as trivial, irrelevant and expressions of immaturity.

The stress associated with cognitive dissonance in fundamentalist organisations is dealt with by individuals in the provision of psychological consistency rather than logical consistency. Most argument for the establishment of a separatist group is structured in this way.

Situations of shock or dissonance are opportunities for learning situations. If the conflict takes a fairly moderate form, in which it is perceived to be a challenge, then cognitive dissonance may stimulate new discoveries and may inaugurate a realignment of the whole system in a more realistic and coherent way. Most people find it extremely difficult to give up trying to solve a puzzle once a certain amount of time, energy and prestige has been committed to its resolution. The explanation for this stubborn refusal to give in lies deeper than the mere curiosity about the answer. What we want is to get it right, and our persistence in struggling with the puzzle may be thought of as a form of dissonance-avoidance by anticipation.

Figure 18. The Cognitive Dissonance Cycle

For the Love of Zero
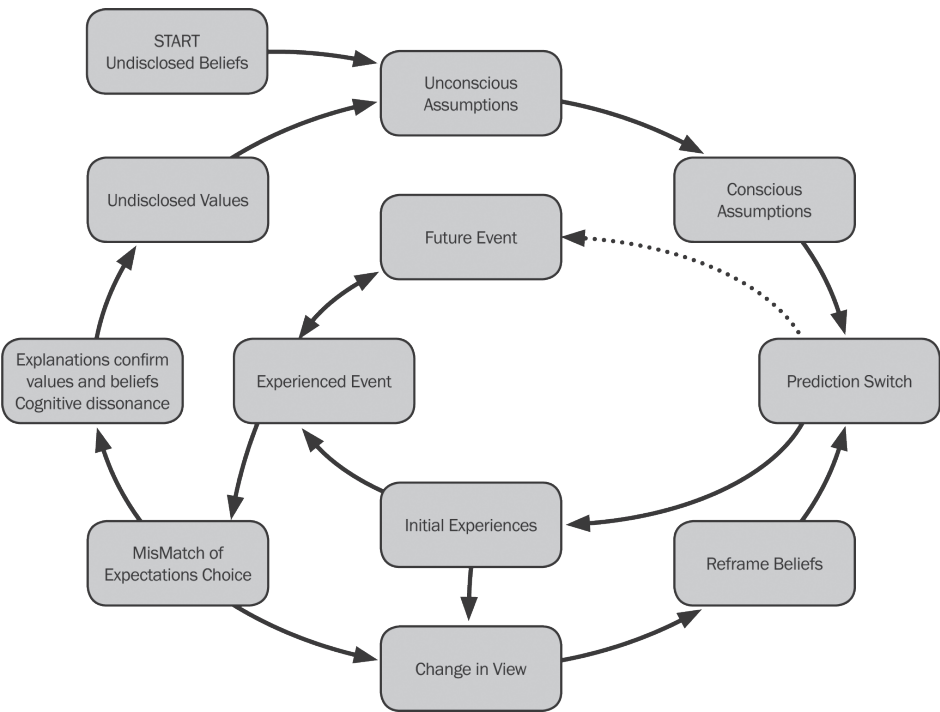
Understanding Cognitive Bias and the Unconscious

Much of our decision making comes from the unconscious and subconscious. This is how we are able to do so many things on automatic. We all know about the power of our unconscious; we surprise ourselves regularly with things we do and decisions we make. Consciousness is what we lose when we go to sleep and regain when we wake up and become aware of our surroundings.

What Happens When I am Unconscious?

Every year now, because of a family history of bowel and oesophagus cancer, I have a minor investigation with cameras at both ends. The procedure is nothing really as we have now become so sophisticated with the skills of anaesthesia. The tough part is the days of preparation prior to such a procedure.

The anaesthetist walks in, has a chat, then inserts a catheter in the wrist and leaves. Then the surgeon comes in, has a chat and wheels you into theatre. As you lay back and chat in full consciousness the nurse shuffles something about and the anaesthetist comes over for another chat and begins to hook up the catheter. I begin to think of that pleasant feeling of slowly waking with a nurse offering a drink and a sandwich. The anaesthetist comments about a sensation in the arm and next thing I know 40 minutes later I am awake and conscious in a bed with no recollection of any of the last 40 minutes. What happened in that 40 minutes, in that state of suspended unconsciousness? I don't remember dreaming; it all seems blank. What a wonderful technology, and such a long way from cutting, leeching and primitive medicine of 100 years ago. I fall asleep each night and wake up to my consciousness in the morning.

We have much to learn about human consciousness, unconsciousness and subconsciousness. The truth is, the unconscious brain activity of humans makes sense, its just that not many study or understand it. The constant labelling of others as stupid, irresponsible and irrational is often a reflection that the person making the comment has next to no idea about the way human unconscious and subconscious decisions affect what humans do.

Married to a Synesthete

My wife is a mother, grandmother and musician. She has been playing the piano for about 48 years and has been teaching piano for 40 years. Helen has an excellent ear for music and is skilled in musicianship. I was never taught music formally and even though I have written musicals and composed many songs, I do not understand the complexities of music like she does. Helen is also a nature and outdoors person. She loves bush walking and comes from a family of naturalists. Her father Dudley was famous in South Australia for being one of its first naturalists and environmentalists. Dudley was a tree nurseryman for over 40 years. Helen connects with nature, colour and sound at a far more advanced state than I. Her moods are conditioned by the wind, temperature and environment.

It was not until recently that I discovered my wife was a synesthete. Helen automatically attaches colours and images to sound. This is called synesthesia and it happens unconsciously. Synesthesia is a neurological condition in which stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway leads to automatic, involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway. Sometimes artists and musicians show this subconscious and unconscious capability. It is certainly not a form of knowledge that many share, myself included.

Many of our unconscious values and beliefs are arational. The arational is neither rational or irrational but non-rational. Much of our arational processing resides in the unconscious. The reality is that current research and knowledge about human unconsciousness is significant. We know a great deal about the workings of the unconscious (Bargh). This is why knowledge of language, priming and framing of 'zero' have been emphasised in this book. Knowing how to influence the unconscious is a critical aspect to making sense of risk and understanding the dangers of 'zero' ideology and discourse.

One of the things that makes humans fallible is bias. Over the years we have all accumulated many filters that affect the way we make decisions, perceive reality and understand the world. If you do a search on Wikipedia for 'list of cognitive biases' you will find hundreds of different ways humans filter their world. There is no objectivity. Rather, all humans are the make up of their history, heredity, gene pool, social history, sociopsychological influences, parenting, culture, personality and a range of other influences that comprise the nature of fallible humanity.

When we look at the long list of cognitive biases we see why we differ from others in our perceptions in even the most simple things. How amusing is it to have those restaurant discussions about the 'correct way' to hang a toilet roll or the order of procedures in making tea or coffee.

Figure 19. The Great Toilet Roll Debate
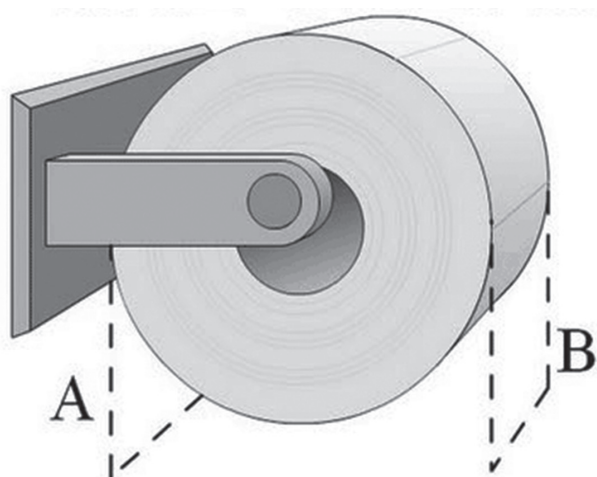
If we are biased in such minor things it's amazing that we learn to cooperate and collaborate with others in much more major things. Well indeed we don't, as the many wars and atrocities of the day demonstrate.

Biases also come from various processes that are sometimes difficult to observe. These include mental shortcuts (heuristics), unconscious and subconscious machinations of the mind and its limited processing capacity, emotional, spiritual and moral motivations and a host of social and religious influences.

For the purposes of this book I will only explore one fascinating cognitive bias known as the 'sunk cost effect'. The sunk cost effect is when people invest something significant about themselves such as their ego, money or reputation into something, making it more difficult to admit a mistake or poor judgement. The more we invest in a commitment the harder it is to escape or withdraw from it.

Billy Graham and the Sunk Cost Effect

In May 1959 the American evangelist Billy Graham led a crusade in Australia "to bring Australians closer to God". During that visit he and his associates preached to at least 3.5 million people who attended meetings all over Australia, with more than 142,000 people making "decisions for Christ". On the final day of the crusade, May 10, a total of 150,000 attended the meeting, greater crowds than attended the grand final of the Victorian Football League. Even though the major meetings were in Sydney, all other capitals and many regional centres were covered by his associates, with Graham conducting the last night of several major city campaigns.

Graham had exceptional evangelistic exposure to the Australian public as well as significant impact on the life and theology of evangelical churches, through practices such as the use of women as trained counsellors at his meetings, the admission of women to the "men only" stand at the Melbourne Cricket Ground for the first time, and Graham's willingness to hold silent on some issues of church dogma. The elevation of the role of women was a watershed for many churches and attracted strong condemnation from extremist fundamentalists.

In 1968 Graham returned to Australia for another crusade series at the invitation of the Archbishop of Sydney, the Very Rev. Marcus Loane. Despite the bitterly cold conditions attendances increased by 30,000 on the 1959 visit. It would be difficult to overestimate the enormous impact of this event. Many meetings in succession exceeded 60,000 people, and there were significant traffic jams, extra buses and police services required, wide press reports and solid TV coverage. Each rally was broadcast by radio to at least four states and 137 towns by landline. The total cost of the crusade, $220,000, was met before it was over. During the course of Graham's visit, the local churches visited one million homes and distributed 1.5 million leaflets in the Sydney area. (Graham returned to Australia again in 1979 but the response was markedly down compared with his first two visits).

Graham's main message was that of repentance and conversion. This was always sought within the context of preaching on contemporary topics such as the breakdown of traditional Christian values in modern society and the rejection of the Bible and biblical values. He blamed the divorce rate and deterioration of society in general on career women who did not stay at home. He condemned sex outside of marriage and blamed the general permissiveness in society on the breakdown of the home and traditional family. The former Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, was quoted by Graham as an advocate of traditional Christian family values.

On special "youth nights" Graham spoke on the problem of hippies, problems of youth and television. He called lust and materialism the gods of the age. On Thursday 25th April, Mr Graham spoke to over 57,000 people at the Sydney Showground about the threat of nuclear holocaust and communism. All these issues in Graham's preaching served as 'signs of the times' for the second coming of Christ, which was the topic of his sermon on the seventh night of the crusade. The point of evangelical preaching on the second coming of Christ is to be found ready and converted at that approaching moment.

The year after Graham's visit church attendances in Australia increased by 7%.

The success of Billy Graham is unparalleled in Australian history and occurred at a time when the census revealed that 89% of Australians claimed to be Christian. Christian Today Australia comments:

At the Melbourne Cricket Ground in 1959, Reverend Graham drew in 143,000 people. In the final day 150,000 people attended the Sydney Showground and Cricket Ground to hear Billy Graham preach.

More than 130,000 people (almost 2% of the Australia population at that time) made a commitment to Christ. Historian Stuart Piggin used the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures to show a drop in alcohol consumption, extra-marital births and crime statistics during that time.

Today the converts who made a commitment to Christ in 1959 are found within the ranks of the clergy and church leadership; with the most well known being Sydney Anglican Archbishop Peter Jensen, and his brother, Dean Phillip Jensen.

Other well known converts include Graeme Pearson, the former chairman of MYOB and current chairman of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association who wrote that after the Billy Graham Crusader, he made a decision to follow Jesus Christ which has impacted on his family, business and community life.

Robert B. Coles, former Coles Myer Director spoke of his experience when at the age of 24, he attended the Crusade and after hearing a second appeal from Dr. Graham about making a commitment to Christ; he ran down to the front where he was counselled and prayed a prayer of commitment to Christ, to which he described as the most important decision in his life.

(The Effect of Billy Graham Crusades in 1959 Still Being Felt Today - http://au.christiantoday.com/article/the-effect-of-billy-graham-crusades-in-1959-still-being-felt-today/2838.htm accessed September 2012).

One of the techniques employed by Billy Graham and evangelicals in general is the 'public confession of faith'. This involves people getting up out of their chair and walking to the front of the meeting and 'making a stand' through an open confession of faith in Jesus Christ. This is prominent, visible and audible. Making such a commitment and further commitments to follow is a major 'sunk cost' for anyone. Commitments range through support groups, church attendance and meetings. A major strategy of the Billy Graham meeting is that once someone walked to the front of the meeting and made a public confession, they signed up to a course of study, were assigned a mentor and were linked to a local church. Once these have been put in place it is very hard for someone to turn around and say 'I made a mistake' and give it away.

Car salespeople try to get some kind of commitment even if they can't get a signature, knowing that that phone number or pamphlet taken is a wedge to work on toward further commitment. Caldini (2009) seems best at explaining how commitment and the 'sunk cost effect' work. The sunk cost effect and cognitive dissonance both work on the power of consistency. Even if the commitment is small and builds to larger commitments, it is hard to recant and escape the embarrassment of inconsistency. The important thing is to get the right trajectory first, then lead to deeper commitment. This is how salespeople 'get you in', often using binary opposition thinking and language. Billy Graham was a master at binary opposition language, leading to no other choice than a commitment to Christ.

Caldini documents how the Chinese were so successful at drawing out collaboration during the Korean War (pp. 61ff). Often commitment starts with something quite trivial and then once a trajectory is engaged then that trivial thing allows a much stronger building point. The trick is to extract a small commitment to what seems like a harmless concept and thereby begin to manipulate a person's self image. Once you are able to get a person's self image where you want it, you can then find 'collaborators', 'converts' and 'customers'. The key is getting the first 'harmless concession'.

Amway discovered that there is something magical about getting someone to sign or write down a commitment. In a sense the written commitment, though trivial, becomes quite powerful later on. This has been used by sales people to leverage further commitment. Often loyalty and inconsistency are leveraged off small and trivial commitments as is demonstrated by the many experiments of Caldini and many other social psychologists (Abelson, 2004) recount.

The Psychology of Conversion

Commitment to a fundamentalist quasi-religious ideology triggers the beginning of 'sunk cost'. Once the investment of ego and commitment has been made, no amount of logical rational argument or evidence will sway the person committed to their cult, belief or value. The documented events of the Jonestown mass suicide or the Heaven's Gate Suicide illustrate the power of 'sunk cost' and cognitive dissonance.

There are many psychic forces at work in the psychology of conversion. Conversion is neither a rational or irrational process but, again, an arational one. Christians attribute conversion to the Christian notion of 'grace'. Some Christians believe grace is the mysterious choice of God to 'save' someone. Evangelical fundamentalists believe that salvation (conversion) is the choice of the person who elects to be saved by God. In conversion, a person 'repents', that is, turns in direct opposite direction by acknowledging their 'sinfulness' and desire to become a disciple of Christ.

Conversion begins with acknowledgement and recognition. People are brought to a stage of 'readiness' through a range of factors. Some people are 'converted' because of relational pressures and the need to belong to a certain group. Furthermore, it is also important not to be disconnected from a group that one finds attractive. This is how peer pressure or 'group think' works. The power of belonging, of being acknowledged and recognised, is critical if one is to be converted. Sometimes the need to belong is accompanied by a deep physical and moral need. Sometimes unresolved suffering is the cause for conversion.

Auto-imitation also deserves mention as a cause of conversion. Auto-imitation involves sympathetic and sometimes trivial acts that signify a change in trajectory, a sign that a new journey is about to begin. Auto-imitation is often accompanied by feelings of dissatisfaction, loss of meaning and purpose, disappointment or feelings of emptiness. Sometimes this is described by those looking for converts as 'searching'. Auto-imitation is often detected by people who are keen to convert others and is somewhat like the state of 'readiness' a salesperson identifies in a customer. Experienced people in the conversion business recognise the psychological signs of readiness.

Conversion in the Bible is designated by the Greek word *metanoia*, and designates an 'awakening' or 'regeneration' to a new way of seeing things. In the New Testament St Paul's conversion is most dramatic. As an official persecutor of Christians on behalf of the Hebrews he has a vision 'on the road to Damascus', rejects his crusade and becomes one with the people whom he persecuted. St Paul then goes on to become the most prominent evangelist in the New Testament record, writing letters and making missionary journeys and planting Christian churches from Rome to Jerusalem.

Kleespies (1932, p. 24) identified eight motives or forces impelling someone to conversion:

1. Fear (of hell or consequences such as death or punishment)

2. Other self regarding motives such as approval of others or a desire to meet dead relatives

3. Altruistic motives, do good to the world, influence others to be good

4. Following out of moral idealism

5. Remorse and conviction for a previous wrongdoing, (purging)

6. Response to the rational logic of an argument or teaching

7. Example and imitation

8. Urging and social pleasure

The moment of conversion is sometimes accompanied by overwhelming emotion. But there is no recipe, and some are converted gradually over time. In some sense one is not converted but is always being converted. The idea of sliding backwards is also common to evangelical conversion and so one is expected to cultivate and 'work on' faith.

How does one get converted to, or escape from, the ideology of 'zero'? Whatever the reason, the conversion to a quasi-religious ideology usually commences in a small trivial commitment. The arguments at Quote 9 in Chapter 2 are typical of commitments not to harm others, not to set fatalities as goals etc. By the time one commits to advertising for 'zero harm managers' and deleting the words safety and risk from language and maintaining the delusion that 'all accidents are preventable', one is then fully committed to the 'zero' ideology.

The Escape from Fundamentalism

The escape from fundamentalism is an escape to learning and an escape from fear. The attraction of positive goals in learning then becomes the motivation to learn rather than the aversion of outcomes through fear of uncertainty.

The quest for learning begins with the ability to question and doubt. Conversion in and out of faith is always stressed under the pressure of cognitive dissonance. So the key to helping someone escape from the tyranny of 'zero' is to present the evidence, show the contradictions, appeal to person-centredness, focus on learning and motivation, highlight the nature of goal setting and argue for non-perfection absolutes in making sense of risk.

One thing we do know about fundamentalism and its ideology is that rational argument, regulation, patronising dismissal and superiority don't work. All of these measures simply drive the fundamentalist into a more deeply entrenched position (through cognitive dissonance) than before. The more the fundamentalist is pushed into battle with evil and Satan, the more extreme become the resultant position and actions that can be sanctioned and 'make sense'. It is counter-intuitive to think that regulation, rigidity in policing, zero tolerance and rational argument could do more damage than good.

The key to gaining a better understanding of the issue is surely in developing relationship with the fundamentalist and taking a longitudinal approach to resolving the issue. Unfortunately organisations spend an extraordinary amount of money on physical (engineering) solutions and development of barriers to the fruits of fundamentalism rather than addressing root causes in belief. In some cases it

is evident that this short term approach simply stimulates further the creativity of the fundamentalist mind to new solutions and responses to commitment to the zero harm ideology.

Much more work and energy needs to be applied to the psychosocioreligious nature of zero harm ideology. The kind of research required to fully evaluate the insidious nature of zero harm ideology is yet to be undertaken.

Workshop Questions

1. Have you observed the common characteristics of fundamentalism in 'zero' ideology?

2. Give examples of how the zero harm rhetoric sounds evangelical in appeal.

3. Explore the Sociopsychogological Characteristics of Fundamentalism as listed and see if many are apparent in your organisation.

4. Raise the discussion of the toilet paper rolling direction at work and see what develops.

5. Research a cult either in the newspaper or on the Internet and document the key characteristics of fundamentalism against their activities. Then compare this to the activities and language of zero harm ideology and see what you discover.

Transition

Can you imagine a conversation about risk without the word 'zero'? If we eliminate the word 'zero' from our discourse will the world end? Could it be that we can't take a leap in learning because the discourse of 'zero' blinds us from seeing a landing?

There are many companies that maintain safety, security and risk records that are as good if not better than 'zero' organisations and yet don't speak the language of zero harm discourse. 'Zero' is not only non-motivational, it drives subcultures of scepticism, cynicism and pessimism in organisations. These powerful subcultures subversively erode the credibility of 'zero'.

It is possible to have strategies in making sense of risk that don't need the discourse or ideology of 'zero'. This next section provides solutions, examples and sensemaking that demonstrate that risk makes sense without 'zero'.