



Getting the Most out of Group Discussions

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How do we gather knowledge?

Tenacity

Statements presented repeatedly accepted as true

Rarely examined

Based on habit or superstition (e.g., advertising, political campaigns)



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How do we gather knowledge?

Common Sense

Based on past experiences and perceptions

Information accepted as truth because it “feels right”

- Experiences can be limited
- Bias

You meet a person who is short, slim, and likes to read poetry. Is this person an Ivy League Classics professor or a truck driver?

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How do we gather knowledge?

Authority

Simple because all we have to do is repeat and live what we are told

Can be useful in fields where we don't have much knowledge

Books, people, television, Internet



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How do we gather knowledge?

Rationalism

Good, but by itself, not enough

- Original assumptions must be correct
- Reasoning can be flawed

People are not always good at logical reasoning

- All dental hygienists are human: Some humans are female
 - Therefore, some dental hygienists are female
- All apples are fruits: Some fruits are oranges
 - Therefore, some apples are oranges

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How do we gather knowledge?

Empirical Method

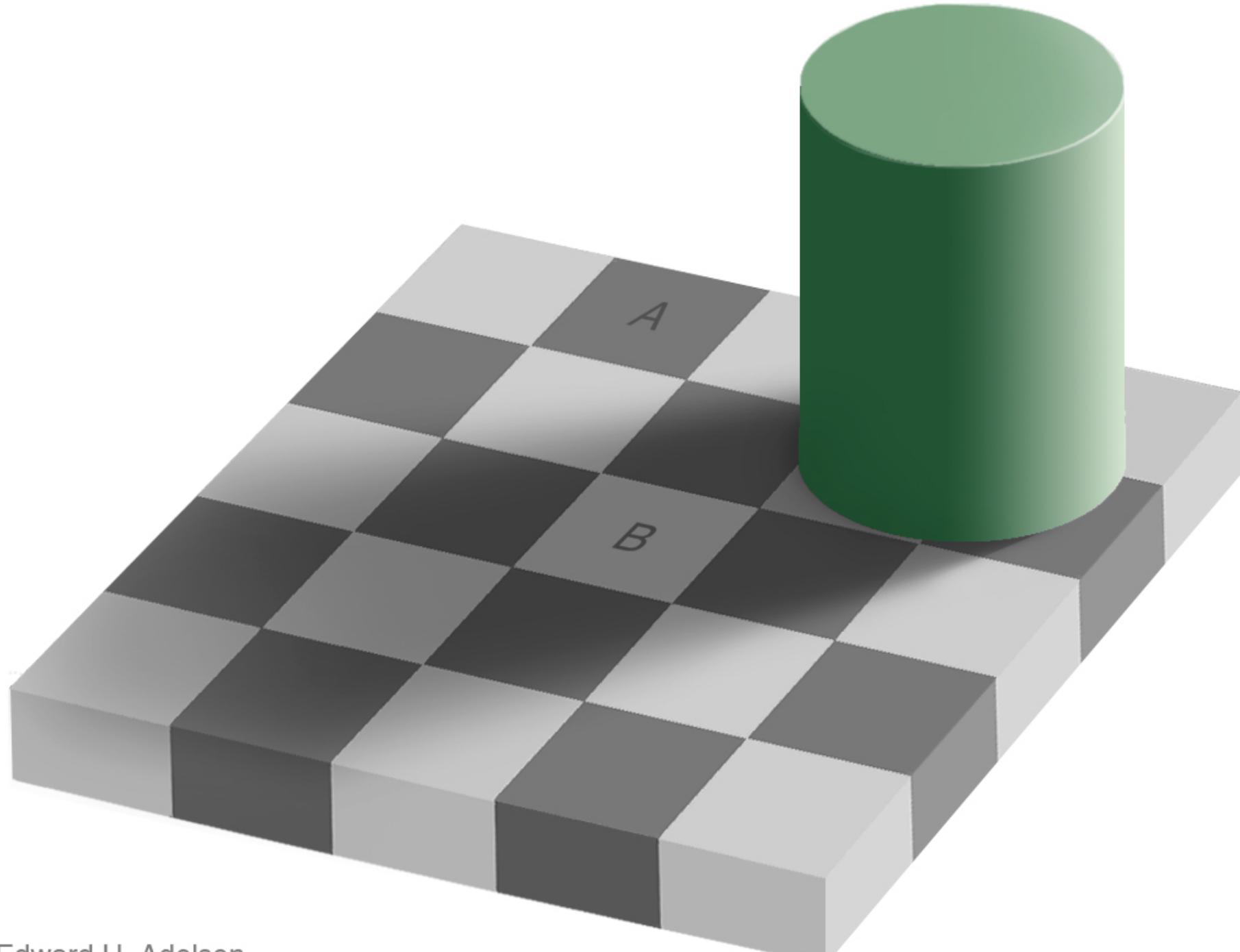
Good but by itself not enough

Much of the knowledge we gain in life is gained through direct observation



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Systematic ways to gather data

Surveys

Observations

Interviews



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What is the purpose of the Group Discussion?

Do you want a decision?

Do you want an agreement ?

Do you want to generate ideas?

Are you communicating something?

Are you raising awareness ?

Are you trying to influence ?

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What makes a group discussion effective?

Why don't some group discussions work?



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Things to avoid

Inserting yourself in the discussion

Lecturing

Using vague questions

Playing favourites

Answering your own questions



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Maximizing the Benefits of Group Discussions

Establish ground rules

Create an inclusive environment

Allow participants to introduce themselves

Be clear about expectations

Ensure that participants know that there are no “right” answers



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How to maximize the benefit of group discussions

Keep discussions constructive and positive

Set ground rules

Ensure that all participants have an opportunity to share ideas

Asking follow-up questions, and paraphrasing the comments for everyone to ponder. A combination of initiating and probing questions can be an effective approach to bring out participants' ideas further.



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How to maximize the benefit of group discussions

Asking the contributor for further clarification and/or elaboration.

Re-visiting past contributions and incorporating them into subsequent discussions.

Encouraging others to add their reactions or ideas to build on someone's comment.



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How to maximize the benefit of group discussions

Not being afraid to admit your own ignorance or confusion if you don't know something – invite others to provide resources, and use the opportunity to discuss with the group how one might go about researching the issue.

Discomfort and silence are ok, but balance with a clearly stated context and purpose.



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Group Dynamics

The way the group is set up can also play a role in how effective group discussion are

Things to consider:

Can participants contribute

Can participants relate to other participants

How many is too many/too few



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Group Dynamics

Power differentials

Conflict of interest



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Summary

Group discussions are a great way of gathering information

Understanding why we are choosing the group discussion can help to ensure that we are successful



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