

[Paradoxical thinking interventions: A paradigm for social change](#)

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What is paradoxical thinking?

Paradoxical thinking is the attempt to change held beliefs by providing message(s) consistent with the message recipient held beliefs but in an amplified, exaggerated or absurd manner.

Paradoxical thinking in practice:

Paradoxical thinking messages can range for *blatantly* exaggerated reflections of held beliefs, to *subtle* exaggerations or amplifications of held beliefs by extrapolating absurd conclusions from them. Here are two examples in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

- *Blatant approach:* Many Jewish-Israelis believe that the Palestinians want to annihilate them, a belief that stems from a siege mentality shared by the majority of Jewish-Israelis. In our research, one way in which we blatantly exaggerated this belief was by asking these individuals “Why do you think that the *real* and *only* goal the Palestinians have in mind is to annihilate us, a goal even transcending their basic needs such as food and health?”
- *Subtle approach:* Another wildly shared belief by Jewish-Israelis is that, in spite of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Israeli army is the most moral army in the world. In our research, we subtly exaggerated this belief by extrapolating from it an absurd conclusion, suggesting that indeed the Israeli army is the most moral army in the world, but perhaps it is *because* of the conflict. In other words, we suggested that Israelis cannot afford to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as its continuation helps maintain this belief.

Research findings:

- Jewish-Israelis who were exposed to paradoxical thinking messages reassessed their conflict-related beliefs, were open to alternative information, and showed more conciliatory attitudes with regards to the conflict and the Palestinians.
- These effects were long lasting, as they endured for one year. They were also more pronounced with the hawkish members of society, who tend to adhere more to an uncompromising and nonconciliatory ideology, and thus tend to be less persuaded by peace promoting messages.

Policy recommendations:

- Paradoxical thinking messages have to lead to a sense of identity threat in which the message recipients are forced to compare themselves and their held beliefs to other extreme or absurd beliefs, or to other individuals who might hold such beliefs.
- For the desired effect, the message has to surprise and do not lead to high levels of disagreement. Only then it will be thoroughly processed. Otherwise it might be rejected altogether, or be understood in the literal meaning, rather than as an absurd.
- After a single exposure to the paradoxical thinking messages it is likely that there will not be an immediate effect, as it seems that a single exposure is not sufficient for recipients to perceive the absurdity of the message.

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