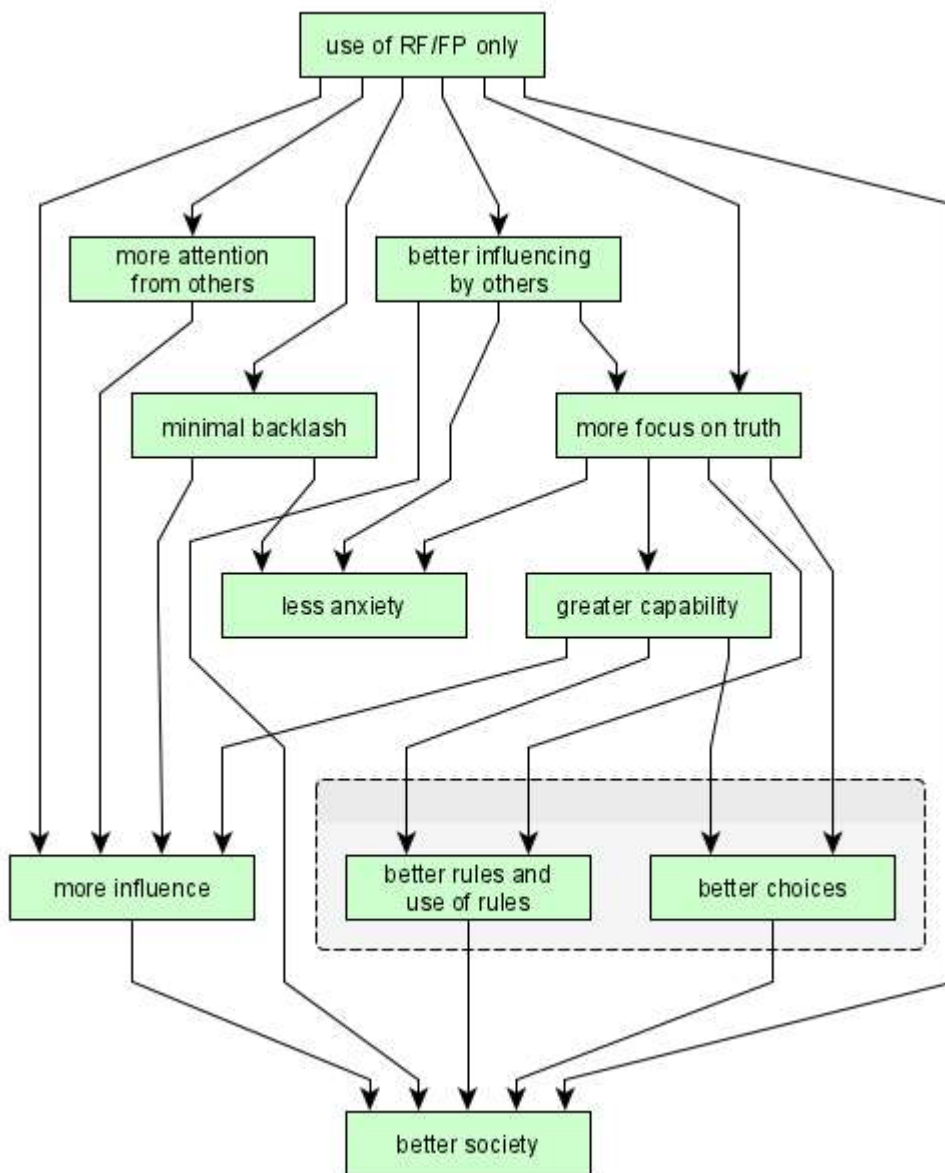


Chapter 4: Why RF/FP

This chapter explains why using reason and fairness, with fair use of power as a last resort, is better than using tricks, abusing power, or relying purely on rules.

Summary of reasons

The explanation is not a single line of reasoning but a network of effects from using reason and fairness. These are summarized in this diagram:



More attention from others

People prefer informative material that is useful and easy to process. If the material is loaded with tricks and other attempts at manipulation then it is hard to process because it requires concentrated critical analysis. If it is unnecessarily antagonizing then it requires an effort to stay calm or provokes negative feelings. Consequently, people will often stop listening to this material if they can, especially if they disagree with its general direction. If you get a reputation for being nasty and unreliable then you will get less attention because many people ignore you.

Conversely, material that is free of manipulation and antagonism gets more attention. If you have a reputation for this kind of material then you are more likely to get attention each time you have something to say.

Minimal backlash

A backlash against tricks and power arises when:

- the person being persuaded realizes they have been tricked or bullied, sometimes after a delay;
- they feel surprise, anger, or resentment; and
- they revise their views in response to the revelation, often taking use of tricks or power as a sign that the persuader is promoting a bad idea.

Another type of backlash is against being given instructions in a situation where a suggestion or recommendation would have been appropriate.

As this chapter is explaining, reason and fairness are the best choice for people promoting good ideas so if someone chooses tricks or power then it suggests they know reason and fairness will not support their position. Their idea is bad. Another possibility is that they think they are trying to influence people who are selfish and not listening to reason, which is a hostile stance that can provoke a backlash.

The consequences of a backlash for influence are serious:

- Loss of persuasive effect as arguments are discounted.
- Loss of trust in the influencer, who may be seen as a selfish manipulator.
- Loss of relationships.
- Loss of future influence.
- Discrediting of the cause promoted, undermining others who argue for the same position, even if they do so reasonably and the cause is correct (e.g. arguing for sustainability).
- Provoking similar behaviour (e.g. ridicule in return for ridicule, shaming in return for shaming, tricks in return for tricks).

A backlash is more likely when:

- The trick or use of power is easy to spot.
- The problem is an abuse of power rather than fair use of power.
- The person to be influenced is tricked or pressed with power repeatedly, giving them more opportunities to realize what is happening.
- There are multiple victims of the trickery or power, giving more opportunities for someone to realize what has been done.
- Victims can confer so that when one notices the manipulation they warn the others.
- There is plenty of time for victims to think and the stakes are high.
- The influencer already has a reputation for tricks and bullying.
- Reason and fairness are highly respected among those involved.

A skilled manipulator using a carefully developed trick or web of power tactics can effectively avoid or suppress a backlash but still risks discovery and negative consequences.

The risk of backlash argues strongly for avoiding tricks and abuses of power. Instead, it is safer to use reason and fairness, with fair use of power as a last resort, especially when a backlash would be likely.

Better influencing by others

People tend to use the same influencing tactics others are using. For example, if you initiate tricks in a debate then others on both sides are more likely to use them. This may be the result of a human tendency to reflect behaviours of people around us.

However, there may be a more specific mechanism too. If you use tricks and power then people are more likely to think you are selfish and not listening to reason. Consequently, they are likely to try more desperate tactics, including lies and abuses of power, especially if they think they have little legitimate power. They still feel moral because they believe they are fighting a bad person and that this noble end justifies their means.

Conversely, if you use only reason and fairness then others are less likely to think they face a selfish manipulator who cannot be reasoned with. They are more likely to use reason and fairness in response.

My personal experience discussing controversial topics is that most people quickly become rude and manipulative and that consistent reason and fairness only occasionally tames this. It is as if the negative pattern is already set by the topic and context. Years of angry spats and group conflict cannot be overcome in a few minutes.

Nevertheless, if you use reason and fairness exclusively, block or ignore tricks without escalating, and respond constructively to new information then there is a chance of useful discussion.

More focus on truth

Many persuasive efforts push bad ideas. This is obvious from the number of contested issues where at least one side must be wrong. The people making that misdirected effort are often unaware that what they are promoting is:

- factually incorrect; or
- a course of action that is not as good as another that has been proposed, or could easily be devised, or is already being followed.

It is crucial to avoid promoting bad ideas. When we do, it is usually by accident.

Helpful and unhelpful mental activities

Spending more of our time using reason and fairness helps us reach good ideas and avoid bad ones. *Influencing* with reason and fairness involves using reason and fairness so it also helps us reach good ideas and avoid bad ones. Influencing with reason and fairness is, in effect, cooperative thinking that:

- uses reason to seek the truth; and
- combines reason with fairness to arrive at good courses of action.

It involves collecting and considering evidence, using logic, sharing thinking through careful explanation and listening, and being open to discoveries that may lead to unexpected conclusions.

Consequently, influencing and getting to good ideas are largely the same mental activity. This reduces the risk of people collectively accepting bad ideas.

In contrast, fair use of power does not involve trying to reach good conclusions (though it only counts as fair if the conclusions are good). Similarly, abuse of power does not involve trying to reach good conclusions. Relying solely on rules also does not involve trying to reach good conclusions – only trying to reach compliant conclusions.

Tricks are worse still. At best the trickster might analyse the evidence to understand the truth they need to subvert. Even if they do this, tricks involve twisting thinking unhelpfully. This is worse than useless. Not only might others be deceived by tricks but the trickster too can become detached from reality – tricked by their own tricks.

E.g. One trick is to exaggerate our hardship to justify getting compensation, receiving extra help, or making a low contribution. This involves describing how badly affected by something we have been, detailing the hardships, and how upset we have been. In building this story we tell ourselves what a terrible life we are having and make it feel worse. We might even avoid actions that would reduce our hardship. This means our deception may involve making our lives worse than necessary.

We should tackle hardship calmly and determinedly, minimizing negative consequences and psychological distress. Trying to influence using deception can undermine that with no guarantee of worthwhile material gains.

Influencers and advocates

Behind this lies a fundamental difference in objectives between influencers and advocates.

An influencer seeks good conclusions in ways that bring others along so there is enough agreement for determined action. If a discovery leads to conclusions that are not what the influencer initially expected then these are welcomed. An influencer is as eager to find flaws in his or her own thinking as in the thinking of others.

In contrast, an advocate pursues the interests of one party throughout and may have a conclusion in mind from the start. The advocate wants to find flaws in the other side's thinking but not his or her own. If awkward evidence emerges the advocate tries to avoid, suppress, or attack it.

An influencer is more likely to reach a correct conclusion or good course of action than an advocate.

A crucial limitation of reason and fairness

Reason and fairness are less useful for advocates promoting bad ideas. Although some points might be made using reason and fairness, or using pseudo-scientific fake evidence, overall, reason and fairness are more likely to debunk bad ideas than support them.

Greater capability

Over time people gain important advantages from using reason consistently and, especially, from using reason and fairness to influence people.

People who use sound reasoning are likely to be closer to the truth and better at reaching it than others. It helps to know the true situation and how the world really works. They may have superior ways to gain information, insights into problems, and solutions to problems. They may gain advantage from gadgets, software, recipes, and documents, among other things.

Similarly, using fairness gives great practical advantages. It involves working to understand the interests of stakeholders, which improves ability to suggest courses of action that will be agreeable to everyone who must cooperate. And if you suggest good insights or powerful courses of action that reflect the interests of stakeholders then they are more likely to agree.

The ability to develop and put forward better, more agreeable solutions brings legitimate power.

That power is useful in negotiations. For example, a country with technologically advanced manufacturing and weapons has an advantage when negotiating with less capable countries. On a smaller scale, the skills of a sound reasoner are needed by many organizations and people. A person who is skilled at suggesting effective methods of analysis and research, understanding systems and events, suggesting good courses of action, and explaining all this clearly will usually be in demand.

People with legitimate power are also attractive allies. That gives powerful people more power still but it need not be used to exploit others. On the contrary, people with legitimate power who rely on reason and fairness are attractive to low power people because they can feel safe from exploitation. They know they will get a fair deal even if they cannot push for more.

The habits of observing details, keeping evidence, and deducing its significance can make strong reasoners dangerous to people who try to cheat. Their cheating is more likely to be noticed and they are more likely to be stopped or punished.

In summary, people who use reason and fairness are more likely to have the truth or a good plan in mind at the start of a discussion and to think of something closer to the truth or a better plan during it. They are more likely to be materially well off, powerful, and popular.

Less anxiety

Relying on reason and fairness reduces anxiety. The risk of a backlash is reduced, others behave in a more reasonable and less threatening and tricky way, and we can spend more time solving real problems and less dealing with difficult people. This is particularly welcome with the people closest to us, such as family members and work colleagues.

Reason and fairness are respected in Western societies. They are considered ethical. If you make a mistake trying to use them for influence it is usually enough to apologize. All you need to focus on is thinking clearly and correctly. A good quality analysis might be long but it will be orderly and logical, so easier to learn and recall.

In contrast, tricks and abuse of power are not respected or considered ethical and they carry important risks, leading to anxiety. This is true even though these tactics are often used.

Our anxiety might be moral. We might worry that we will do something immoral or get caught doing it. My personal wish to avoid behaving immorally is enough, on its own, to make me use only RF/FP. Much of the advice in the famous book 'How to win friends and influence people' (Carnegie 1936) seems to me underhand. Today there is a vast literature on persuasion in advertising, sales, business, and life generally that recommends strategies, sometimes with results from scientific tests of their effects. Almost all assumes the reader is happy to do whatever works, regardless of honesty. This is not helpful.

Alternatively, our worry might be more pragmatic, based on the repercussions of being caught using tricks or abusing power. The risks in using tricks and abusing power include:

Promoting bad ideas: If we use tricks, power, or rules alone then we are more likely to lead people to accept something incorrect or a poor course of action.

Easy come, easy go: People persuaded to accept an idea without good reasons may change their minds as easily.

Struggling to maintain our own lies: When we are dishonest we have to keep track of lies we have told to avoid getting caught. This can be hard, anxious work.

Struggling to maintain leverage: When we gain compliance by power (fairly or with power abused), we often have to maintain the leverage to stop people going back. This can be hard work and require vigilance.

Getting caught: If tricks or abuses of power are noticed then this can cause a backlash, as discussed earlier.

Punishments: Some acts may lead to punishment under the law or disciplinary action.

These risks are more likely now than in the past. Today many people have read books or seen videos explaining debating tricks, bias, and conspiracies. It is hard to use a trick without someone recognizing it and even being able to name it. When 'How to win friends and influence people' was first published (Carnegie, 1936) the tricks it suggested, such as getting people to think an idea of yours was really one of theirs, were less well known than they are now. Carnegie's advice is especially dangerous today.

More influence

People using reason and fairness, with fair use of power as a last resort, tend to have more influence, other things being equal. They are more likely to be suggesting things that are correct and desirable, and to have good reasons. They are also more likely to get attention and less likely to suffer a backlash. Conversations with them are more likely to progress towards good conclusions and less likely to become angry clashes.

Limitations of evidence of effectiveness

Ideally, the question 'what works?' would be answered by scientific test results. Unfortunately, although there are many experiments that show the effects of tactics, they are rarely relevant or helpful. Many studies show that at least some people are persuaded by tricks. For example, scientific tests have shown that if you say something is scarce then some people will see it as more valuable and want it more.

However, this research usually leaves crucial questions unanswered:

- How many people are persuaded by the trick?
- How many people feel tricked and resent it?
- How do people view those who tricked them?
- What happens if you try to trick people the same way repeatedly?
- What happens if people discuss their experience with each other? Do people who feel tricked alert others?
- How many people are less cooperative on other matters after being tricked?

In contrast to the many studies showing that tricks used once are sometimes effective in getting what you want, there are almost no studies looking at what

happens longer term. One exception to this is a paper by Wong and Howard (2018) that reports two experiments using repeated simulated negotiations. In one study the subjects were university students in Hong Kong and in the other they were UK professionals with some negotiation experience. In both studies people who realized they had been tricked in a round of negotiation were more reluctant to negotiate with the trickster later and, when they did, were more demanding. The tricksters tended to view what they had done as ethical while their victims usually did not. This one study is a tiny window onto something that, sadly, has been neglected by psychologists up to now.

Without a large body of research on these points we must rely on personal observations and understanding of human nature. For example, I know I often notice people trying to trick me and that leads me to resist their trick and view them less favourably. Since I do this, it is probably true that at least some other people react badly to attempted persuasive tricks and I strongly suspect some of those people are those whose respect I most want. The following analysis takes this approach.

The amount of influence activity

The impact of influencing activity depends partly on the number of points made, with more usually being better. To compare the impact of influence methods we need to consider equal amounts of material delivered.

Comparison at sentence level

Assuming for a moment that we are pushing for the right conclusion, what is the impact of a single sentence directing others towards that correct conclusion? How should the different influence tactics perform?

To illustrate the issues, consider the problem faced in 2021 of encouraging people to get vaccinated against the SARS-CoV-2 virus (which causes COVID-19) using one of the vaccines approved for use in the UK at that time. Acceptance of the vaccines by citizens was high in the UK and vaccination was beneficial (all things considered) for individuals. And yet, some people were reluctant despite having no medical reason for caution (e.g. previous allergic reactions, pregnant).

A single sentence using reason to encourage vaccination might be:

'The vaccine does not contain any living virus so you cannot get the disease from the vaccine.'

On its own this sentence does not cover all concerns but it helps by being true and relevant. Fear of getting the disease did cause some hesitancy. The sentence lacks a reference to more information and more could be said to substantiate the fact that the vaccines contain no living virus. However, the sentence is still an effective part of a larger body of information so we can consider it helpful in context.

Sound reasoning with evidence where appropriate is highly convincing. Most people use and accept logic and rationality (just not all the time). If they understand the argument they will usually be moved even if they do not show it. Sound reasoning is

more than a social convention. It works in the real world with systems you can't charm or plead with. It is correct and that is why it is convincing.

Single sentences using various tricks include:

Argument by authority: 'The Queen has had the vaccine so you should too.'

Confident assertion: 'People should not refuse the vaccine because having it is the right thing to do.'

Exaggeration: 'People who refuse the vaccine are, in effect, murdering old people.'

Rights language: 'People have a right to mix freely with others and that can only happen if everyone has the vaccine.'

Some of these hint at a reason for vaccination. The fact that other people have been vaccinated is relevant if not convincing. Some people will die because some others are unvaccinated. Mixing freely will be safer with more people vaccinated. However, these statements will leave most vaccine-hesitant listeners feeling tricked and pressured, undermining their effect and causing a reaction against vaccination and the speaker.

There is logic behind negative reactions to tricks. Influence using reason and fairness is only advantageous for good ideas so using anything else suggests a bad idea is being promoted.

Single sentences using power fairly include:

'If you are vaccinated then you will be permitted to do some things earlier as the lockdown reduces.'

'If you are vaccinated then you will be given a free commemorative mug.'

These tactics openly provide a rational reason to get vaccinated. However, some vaccine-hesitant people may be upset at the thought of being disadvantaged for refusing a vaccination even though this would be fair discrimination. The cause of vaccination is slightly undermined by offering the gift of a commemorative mug.

Single sentences abusing power include:

Shaming: 'You are making a fool of yourself over this; of course the vaccine is safe.'

Ridicule: 'Don't tell me you're an anti-vaxxer! Oh good grief.'

Smearing: 'So you are saying you are happy for people to die of the disease.'

These tactics offer incentives for vaccination by threatening more of the same treatment if the person continues to resist. However, even more than with fair use of power, these tactics create resentment, reactance, and undermine the cause of vaccination. Reason and fairness should be enough to promote a good idea; anything else suggests that a bad idea is being promoted.

In summary, the effect of pure reason is positive but the effect of other tactics is mixed at best.

When sustained

When different types of influencing activity are sustained, what happens? The results are predictable from the impact of individual sentences. Again, imagine that a person (e.g. family member, close friend) needs to be convinced that vaccination is a better course of action for them than not being vaccinated.

If reason and fairness alone are sustained, patiently covering the main issues, then we can expect:

- Some disputes over facts and conclusions, but resolved eventually by checking through reliable sources (e.g. online journal articles, official statistics).
- Some reactions against being given the information but moderate because of the respectful, honest, patient, rational approach taken.
- Accumulating impact of the information provided as it gradually covers the concerns.
- No backlash or loss of credibility.
- A lasting impact.

In contrast, if the persuader uses tricks, or just one trick, very skilfully then we might expect:

- A seemingly smooth progress towards accepting vaccination.
- Possible successful persuasion.
- But with a risk of discovery, backlash, and loss of credibility either before vaccination or later.

Alternatively, if tricks and abuse of power are used repeatedly in the more typical way we might expect:

- A bad tempered, messy argument.
- No accumulation of impact; instead the persuader tries various tactics hoping that the next one will be effective or that pressing harder will break down resistance.
- The person being argued with dithers but increasingly reacts against being bullied and tricked, then becomes more determined to refuse vaccination.

In public campaigns

Large campaigns usually compete with one or more other campaigns.

Almost all large-scale public campaigns or movements (e.g. for some kind of social justice, environmental protection, economic reform, vaccination programme) try to use reason and fairness to some extent. However, they differ in the extent to which they also use tricks and abuse power. What effect should we expect from using some tricks or abusing power?

At one extreme, groups that use terrorist violence almost never get what they want because governments know they must not encourage terrorist tactics. They avoid concessions – even changes they otherwise would have made.

Further down the scale, groups whose demonstrations are violent or inconvenient to many people hurt their own cause.

E.g. During 2019 and 2020, Extinction Rebellion probably thought (at first) that they were making progress but their disruption angered most ordinary people and associated sustainability with inconvenience and disruption – the opposite of what would have helped.

E.g. Also during 2020, the 'Black Lives Matter' organization held repeated protests that often turned violent. This associated black people with angry violence – again the opposite of helpful.

At the other end of the scale, campaigns that try hard to use only reason and fairness (usually government campaigns and scientific groups) can find that even tiny failures of reasoning or small deceptions are identified by opponents and claimed as evidence of wider dishonesty. Perhaps the expected standard of behaviour is higher when the stakes are high or the people have high authority. Nevertheless, it must be frustrating to be criticized harshly for one tiny tweak of evidence when your opponents are lying outrageously every day.

Sadly, tricks can be quite effective in delaying the effect of reason and fairness. Just the appearance of controversy is enough to cause delays. If the issues are complex and not understood easily then onlookers cannot easily tell when the controversy is concocted.

Some of the most effective tricks exploit the psychology of their honest victims:

- Accusing an honest, reasonable person of being biased, domineering, arrogant, conceited, or patronising will often cause them to pause, worried that the accusation is partly true. The word 'patronising' is particularly sneaky because it can be used whenever someone acts kindly.
- The tactic of angrily asserting that someone cannot speak on a subject because they are not from the right demographic group works because its victims usually do not agree with the tactic and do not use it in return.
- Similarly, the tactic of calling for someone to be removed from a role for saying something 'offensive' gives more advantage because victims typically dislike the tactic and do not use it in return. It works better when the victim apologizes (often with nothing to apologize for) hoping that attackers will be mollified. Instead, apologies trigger more extreme demands.

An 'arms race' sometimes unfolds as each side responds to the other's new tactics. Unfair tactics often stop working when an effective counter is devised. In later chapters, this book details how to respond to a variety of unfair tactics.

E.g. In the UK's 2021 vaccination programme against SARS-CoV-2 the government and health authorities relied heavily on data and scientific studies. After some issues early in the pandemic, data became much more accurate and

reliable. The Office for National Statistics began providing good information too. There were data from the vaccine trials and more from studies as the vaccines were administered. Many millions of leaflets were given to citizens, there were videos and websites, and frequent briefings on television. All these were heavily factual.

In the UK, opponents of the vaccines largely failed to reduce public willingness, especially with older people. They pointed to risks the vaccination trials did not specifically cover, such as risks in the longer term and concerning unborn or un-conceived children, but many vaccines have been used safely in the past and provided reassurance that such dangers were remote.

Fears that the vaccines contained animal products not acceptable under some religions were met with truthful reassurances that they did not. Fears that the vaccine could give you the disease were tackled by explaining that the vaccine did not contain any living virus and so could not give you the disease.

When it was claimed that the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine had not been tested with people over 65 years old there was already plenty of evidence of a relevant immune response, the UK was already using the vaccine, and soon there was evidence that these people had been protected from the disease. When it was claimed that the longer delay between doses had not been tested there was, again, experience from other vaccines and from the trials that provided relevant evidence and later results showed the choice was wise. When it was claimed that the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine caused blood clots this was initially countered with data showing the level of clots was slightly lower than would be expected with unvaccinated people and similar to the level following other vaccines. Later it was recognized that a rare form of blood clot was very occasionally being caused by the vaccine and the risk assessment was modified. New guidance was issued and alternative vaccines were made available to young people.

Nevertheless, not everyone was convinced. Some resistance stemmed from conspiracy theories in which the government and all its agencies, scientists, and doctors were said to be operating a misinformation campaign so thorough that no so-called 'data' could be trusted. Reason could not reach these conspiracy theorists.

The amount of thinking

The advantage for reason and fairness also depends on the amount of effective thinking done. This can be broken down as follows:

- **The amount of preparatory work done by the influencer:** More effort to research facts, develop lines of reasoning, and refine their presentation usually gives more influence. When no time is spent on research and thought then all methods of influence have little or no impact but as preparation increases the advantage of reason and fairness over other methods of influence increases.
- **Amount of expertise possessed by the influencer:** Similarly, the advantage of reason and fairness also increases as more expertise is available. The expert

can make more points that are correct and relevant, including countering more claims that are incorrect or irrelevant.

- **The time available for influence:** Spending more time on the discussion also gives reason and fairness more advantage. More information can be exchanged and there is more time for people to take in that information and consider it.
- **The cognitive abilities of the people to be influenced:** If the people to be influenced can process more information correctly in the time available then, again, the advantage of reason and fairness is greater.

To illustrate how the advantage of reason and fairness grows with mental effort applied, suppose a person is undecided as to whether to get vaccinated and two people are trying to influence them. One influencer favours vaccination but the other does not.

Suppose that neither influencer has done any research but the anti-vaxxer says:

'The vaccination can give you the disease.'

Preparing this (incorrect) claim took no research. The other influencer, who also has no idea if the vaccine can give you the disease, says in response:

'That sounds unlikely. I know of no evidence that the vaccine can give you the disease.'

Although this response is weak it does not have to be strong because the initial attack offered no supporting evidence or argument. This is a stalemate.

Now suppose that the anti-vaxxer does a little research and says:

'Did you know that the first vaccinations involved taking material from small-pox pustules and putting it into a person's arm? Doesn't sound very safe does it! Vaccinations can give you the disease.'

The extra research makes the argument seem more plausible. However, having done about an equal amount of research the other influencer says:

'That was a long time ago and not the method used today. The modern vaccine contains nothing living and therefore cannot give you the disease.'

The more research done by each side the more the swing in favour of the person who is correct. However, where there is an imbalance tricks can work (for a while). If the anti-vaxxer had used the small-pox pustules argument against someone with no knowledge of modern vaccines at all then it might well have had an effect.

An expert might also expect more influence because others have more confidence in an expert's claims. However, this is an unreliable effect compared to simply being able to make a better argument.

Sometimes the person who is correct has expertise others do not fully appreciate. This reduces the advantage of greater expertise to an extent that depends on the topic.

E.g. In mathematics there are huge differences in skill between people, with a few being experts, and we know it. Almost everyone in the UK has had extensive

lessons in mathematics at school (at least) and we know our limitations. We have tried and failed to solve problems and sat examinations where we could not answer questions a teacher answered easily. If an expert explains some mathematics then non-experts do not argue.

The same cannot be said for some other areas where sound reasoning is hard.

E.g. An expert evolutionary biologist knows a lot about fossils, geology, carbon dating, DNA analysis, species classification, adaptation mechanisms, and so on – much more than most people who think the Bible accurately describes the origins of the earth and life on it. There are examinations testing knowledge of the facts and theories of the origins of species but most people have not taken those examinations (even in the UK). Not everyone knows their own limitations.

Debates between evolutionary biologists and young-earth Creationists go nowhere partly because the Creationists do not understand the gulf in knowledge between them and a real expert. They will raise objections that were reasonable when Charles Darwin first proposed his theory but have since been dealt with by further evidence, typically from DNA analysis.

Real differences in expertise are often overlooked in fields like economics and management. Even examinations in these subjects do not always teach people their limitations. The examinations often test knowledge of incorrect theories or have no right answers. In some cases education implants a system of ideas that is well articulated and self-consistent but still wrong. People absorb or develop ideas that are poor, perhaps even illogical, and even learn arguments to defend those ideas from criticism. Popular misconceptions abound.

In a typical committee discussion of economics or management there may be nobody present whose reasoning is strong and whose proposals for action would have a good chance of working well. Even if such a person is present, they may be alone or in a small minority, and the strength of their thinking may be unrecognized. Clueless participants are sometimes offended by the suggestion that some people truly are more worthy of attention in the discussion than others.

The truth is also favoured by longer discussions in which participants are more willing to think and learn. This allows time for looking carefully at many types of evidence. It may involve considering many factors from the perspectives of many stakeholders. This is hard mental work that many people cannot do, would rather avoid, and cannot find time for, even when it is their job.

Often one person or a small team makes a big effort on a problem and documents their results for consideration by others who are unwilling to make the far smaller effort to read and understand the work. Arguments may rage between participants about a document many have not read. Consequently, progress stops due to time pressure, laziness, and inability.

As further evidence of the common problem of lazy listeners and readers, in an analysis of comments under YouTube videos (Leitch 2016) I found that arguments between people tended to consist mostly of insults. However, commenters would occasionally try to win with a single argument that tried (and failed) to reduce a complex issue to a single point. For example, they might write:

- 'Abortion is murder and murder is wrong.'
- 'Meat is murder.'
- 'If Palestinians put down their weapons there would be peace; if Israelis put down their weapons they would be massacred.'

Even if you agree with any of these sentiments you should also realize they are at least debatable and, more importantly, there is more to the issues.

Selfishness

The more selfish the people to be influenced the less the impact of reason and fairness. They will want what they want, not just what is fair. However, it is often possible to show, using reason, that the course of action selfishly pursued is not the best for them and that another course of action would be better even from their selfish point of view. This uses the logic of enlightened self-interest and can work if they will listen. Otherwise, power (fair or abused) is needed to impose a fair outcome.

When manipulators win

Despite their inherent weaknesses, tricks and abuses of power still win some arguments. This is possible when the tricksters:

- are better prepared and more knowledgeable;
- get much more speaking time/attention;
- form a large majority (because of 'social proof' and voting); or
- have an easier burden of proof (e.g. they only have to show that the other side's argument is not completely convincing).

Better choices

With more focus on truth, greater capability to propose good explanations and courses of action, and higher quality discussions the chances of reaching good conclusions are improved. This applies very generally but is particularly with the people closest to us.

Better rules and use of rules

Improved conclusions include decisions that create new rules or apply existing rules. The rules can be better because they are simpler, clearer, easier to apply correctly, require less discretion, or perhaps give better outcomes.

Rules *alone* are not an adequate basis for many decisions. Problems arise when:

- the task is to develop new rules or revise existing rules that were flawed from the start or have become less appropriate over time;

- it is not entirely clear how to apply a rule;
- using the rule requires weighing factors fairly; or
- two or more rules appear applicable but conflict.

In these situations it is better to use fairness and examine the impacts on all concerned than look for other rules that might decide the matter. Persistently turning to fairness helps guide the set of rules towards fairness. Persistently ignoring fairness and just trying to find other rules may lead to rule sets that veer away from fairness as interpretations evolve and unintended consequences develop.

Justifications using only rules can be remote from the underlying issues of fairness and fact, and lead us to lose track of the true situation and interests involved. Fairness and reason are forgotten and confusion may arise.

The costs and benefits of using rules depend heavily on the quality of those rules. For example, the laws of cricket are mostly well written, easy to interpret, and work well in practice. However, other rules are not so well drafted. The following sections illustrate the scope for improved rules by examining flaws of some existing rules.

Statutory rules

In contrast to the laws of cricket, some laws in UK statutes are difficult to interpret. They are ambiguous, vague, and hard to relate to real situations.

E.g. Section 18 of the Public Order Act 1986 (amended) says: 'A person who uses threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, or displays any written material which is threatening, abusive or insulting, is guilty of an offence if (a) he intends thereby to stir up racial hatred, or (b) having regard to all the circumstances racial hatred is likely to be stirred up thereby.' What does 'abusive' mean? What does 'insulting' mean? No explanations are given, which is a fundamental weakness because these terms are often so subjective. In contrast, the term 'racial hatred' is defined (and includes things that are not race).

A further issue with this rule is that people struggle to interpret it. Suppose two demographic groups are in a largely peaceful but long-running conflict. A person in Group A insults a person in Group B. Some others in Group A are inflamed to hatred of Group B by the insults. Many people think this is the only hatred covered by this law, but what if the insult inflames some people in Group B to hatred of Group A? Surely that is covered too.

Politicians sometimes agree late amendments as compromises and these are sometimes poorly integrated with the rest of the text. Politicians also, on occasions, leave difficult issues to courts (i.e. judges) in the future.

Human rights

Arguments based on rights, even human rights, are often tricks rather than genuine references to legislation. Almost any behaviour can be framed as a right with a little imagination. What about the right to smoke whenever and wherever a person wishes to? What about the right for a person to do what they wish with their own

waste? Or a person's right to speak freely, saying anything they wish to anyone in any situation?

But even genuine attempts to use rights tend to be disappointingly unhelpful. The lists of human rights are usually agreed by international committees so reaching agreement requires even more compromises than for national laws. Some litigation based on human rights has been obstructive rather than helpful.

One technical issue with these lists is that the rights are not accompanied by complementary responsibilities. The rights are typically framed as benefits that governments are supposed to provide to citizens without citizens having to do anything to earn or deserve them. Responsibilities would be on citizens to behave well so that governments have a reasonable chance of delivering on the rights.

Perhaps the politicians considered pairing rights with responsibilities but realized the responsibilities sounded less appealing and would be much harder to draft and agree. As a result, the opportunity to set down helpful responsibilities for citizens has been missed.

Another problem is vagueness.

E.g. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) has 30 articles and they all sound great. However, they often rely on words open to a wide range of interpretations. For example, here is Article 22:

'Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.'

What exactly does that mean? For some it means that, if you live in an advanced and relatively wealthy society, then you are entitled to just about anything you want from your government.

Perhaps to avoid giving citizens this kind of blank cheque other statements of human rights have lists of exceptions.

E.g. The European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe 1950) is a much more detailed list of rules. (It should not be confused with the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which is a different document from a different organization.) Here is article 8:

'1. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.

2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.'

The exceptions seem comprehensive.

Human rights can also conflict with each other.

E.g. Protocol 1, Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights gives parents the right to a religiously consistent education – empowering zealots to require schools to indoctrinate their children. This conflicts with article 9 of the main convention, which provides freedom of thought.

Yet another technical problem with rights is that they almost never consider quantitative differences that make some behaviours better than others. They rarely value actions being more efficient, quicker, easier, cheaper, less painful, or safer.

E.g. In the UK it is not illegal to have a tattoo. In that sense you have a right to get a tattoo. You might also think it is essential for your dignity and the development of your personality, making it a human right under the UN's declaration. Citizens have a right to tattoo themselves as much as they like, even across the neck or face, but is it a good idea?

Tattoos are expensive and they hurt. They can take a long time to get done and lead to infections. They are also permanent. A picture, person's name, symbol, or slogan that you loved when you got the tattoo might be regretted later. Tattoos that looked fine on young skin can become ugly grey blobs on older, wrinkled skin. Why would a person choose to do something expensive, painful, time consuming, ugly in old age, and potentially a premature commitment? Reasons might include a desire to fit into a group and a desire to be more interesting. In short, the motive often comes from insecurity.

A wise person who thinks these issues through will realize a tattoo is a bad way to become more interesting and build friendships. A visible tattoo has the further drawback of signalling impulsivity and insecurity to other people, such as employers and customers. Imagine a nurse with a neck tattoo. What does that say about the nurse's attitude to pain and infection? Imagine a teacher with a neck tattoo. What does that say about the teacher's commitment to the long-term thinking that underlies education?

Religious rules

Applying rules derived from religions also falls into this category. If your religion forbids you from picking up sticks on a Sunday then following that rule is an alternative to considering the impact on all concerned of you picking up sticks on a Sunday.

Religious reasoning based on holy texts is one of the least reliable forms of reasoning from rules because:

- the individual statements are often unclear, being abstract and/or expressed in archaic language;
- the books are often large and contain many apparently contradictory passages, so the conclusion reached often depends on which passages are chosen; and
- religious reasoners do not always apply logic effectively, are overly tolerant of the ambiguity, often ignore the risk of cherry-picking passages, and may even think

their interpretation is reliable because it is guided by a supernatural or extra-terrestrial being.

Better society

Society benefits from reduced conflict and the improved conclusions from more rational discussions. RF/FP also encourages good qualities in people.

Reason and fair use of power both influence people through their mental strengths. Either the person being influenced joins us in being reasoned and fair or reacts rationally to the rewards or punishments they face.

In contrast, using tricks or abusing power exploits mental weaknesses. It promotes a culture that disrespects reason, thoughtfulness, truth, and fairness and accepts mistakes, mental laziness, and irrationality as inevitable and perhaps even lovable and good. In the long run this cultural impact may be the most serious harm.

The character and quality of discussions are important to societies. Societies are undermined when people try to cause change using tricks and abuses of power. Examples can be seen daily in news media. We see politicians making speeches that combine tricks with insults to their opponents. We see journalists twisting facts and smearing people they do not like. We see 'activists' physically disrupting the lives of ordinary people, blocking legally sanctioned work, rioting, physically attacking their opponents and the police, and destroying property. We see terrorists (activists who think violence will work) killing and destroying. These people usually think this behaviour will advance their cause and so is virtuous.

Similarly, we see comments posted on social media that are insulting, aggressive, poorly informed, poorly thought out, and unhelpful. Instead of being down-voted and gradually extinguished by social media software, these incendiary comments gain most votes (for and against), most responses, most clicks, and most commercial interest. A productive, constructive conversation between well-informed people gets almost no attention in comparison.

Abuse of power often takes the form of media storms about innocent statements (perhaps made years ago) used to remove people from influential roles. Voting is often driven by allegiances rather than deliberation.

None of this helps. The damage almost certainly continues in private though it is harder to know the details. My personal experience is that in the workplace there are continual struggles that are partly between competing interests and partly between competing ideas. These struggles are often conducted with little attention to reason or fairness. Sales and marketing functions will often use tricks and abuse power to make sales.

I have no idea how most families try to persuade each other to behave better but hope it is not like television soap operas. Perhaps it is, and that is why fights break out at home, including physical fights leading to death.

Because of all this the wrong conclusions are reached too often, there is strife and harm during the persuasion process, and reason and fairness themselves are undermined.

If, instead, we influence through reason and fairness, with fair use of power as a last resort, and avoid other methods then we can guide society in a more positive direction. More often the right conclusions will be reached and with less upset and damage along the way.

This starts with the people we contact day to day. We can influence more effectively and set a good example.

Personal reflections

RF/FP is my choice because my sense of morality stops me doing anything else. Fortunately, it also works well. The advice later in this book tackles some desperately frustrating, even frightening, situations where the opposites of reason and fairness so often take control. If you have ever felt thwarted by crazy stubbornness, or bullied or tricked into a bad situation, then you might find some useful ideas here – ideas for dealing with people who are unreasonable and unfair, responding to common tricks in a positive, reasoned, fair, yet still effective way.

You may find it liberating and simplifying to just stick to logic and fairness and not be stopped by tricks designed to make you back off, desist criticism, or hold back good ideas.