

Risk Part One

Subjective Risk

Risk Taking Behaviour

All human beings have an internal need and desire to take risks. Humans experience this appetite for risk-taking in three areas; physical risks, emotional risks and cognitive risks. The sum of these needs could be described as an individual's 'target level of risk'. If we sense risk over our target, we back off. On the other hand, if we're under stimulated, we seek out risk.

Definition of Risk

It is a risk when there is a chance of an adverse outcome. The two variables in this definition are chance and outcome. Chance or probably can vary from very low to very high (the highest being 1:1 or one incident for every one attempt). The other variable is outcome; or how bad or costly the consequences will be.

Subjective Risk

Every person's judgement about how likely an incident will be (the chance) or how bad the consequences might be (the outcome) is different. Our belief about how likely an event is, or how severe the penalties might be is informed by many factors, but mostly our lived experience. As an example, we all know a common crash type is the rear-end crash. If you've never had this type of crash, you probably underestimate the risk associated with this event. It's outside of your lived experience.

Problem

Because of our highly subjective concept of driving risks, combined with our individual risk taking needs (our target) it doesn't really help drivers to give well-meaning advice like "Drive carefully" or "Take it easy". Most drivers think they already drive carefully. We are all different however, and some drivers do welcome subjective messages like, "Drive carefully darling".

Solution

One dangerous solution is to crash. This immediately re-calibrates a driver's belief about the chance of an event. Because nobody really wants to experience a crash this is a bad, perhaps fatal way to learn.

Choose

The only meaningful solution is to decide to drive more carefully today, than you did yesterday. You need to lower your personal target level of acceptable risk. This can be tough because you'll find yourself driving more carefully than you think or feel you need to.

Redefine Failure

If you actively look for mistakes in your own driving, rather than wait for a ticket or near-miss, you'll start to gauge risks more accurately because you'll notice how many errors you do make (increasing the chances of an event). Together, choosing to lower your risk, and looking for your own driving mistakes will produce an increased safety motivation that could make all the difference in the world.

