

Dunning-Kruger Effect

Why Incompetent People Think They Are Competent

The Dunning-Kruger Effect is a cognitive bias in which relatively incompetent people tend to overestimate their own abilities and underestimate the competence of others. The popular scientific term goes back to a publication by David Dunning and Justin Kruger in 1999. Dunning and Kruger had noticed in previous studies that ignorance often leads to more self-confidence than the actual knowledge, when, for example, capturing texts, playing chess or driving a car and many others.

At Cornell University, the two scientists researched this effect in further experiments and came to the conclusion in 1999 that less competent persons

- tend to overestimate their own abilities;
- not recognize superior abilities in others;
- are unable to recognize the extent of their incompetence;
- not only increase their competence through education or practice, but also learn to better assess themselves and others.

Dunning and Kruger showed that poor performance goes hand in hand with greater self-overestimation than better performance. That means, that poor performers lack the very expertise needed to recognize how badly they are doing.

"If someone is incompetent, he cannot know that he is incompetent. [...] The skills you need to find the right solution are the skills you need to see a solution as right."

THE MAIN TAKE AWAY

The interesting thing with the Dunning-Kruger Effect is, that, we are all vulnerable to this delusion. The Dunning-Kruger Effect is not a question of ego blinding us to our weaknesses. People usually admit their deficits, once they spot them. People with a moderate amount of experience or expertise often have less confidence in their abilities. They know enough that there is a lot they don't know. When people are unskilled they can't see their own faults and when they are exceptionally competent, they don't see how unusual their abilities are.

So if the Dunning-Kruger Effect is actually invisible to those who are experiencing it, what can we do to find out how good we actually are at various things?

First, ask for feedback from other people and consider it, even if it is hard to hear. Second, and more importantly, keep on learning. The more knowledgeable we are, there is a smaller chance of invisible holes in our knowledge that we can fall into.

Our main takeaway should be: Don't believe that your experience and skills in one particular area can be easily transferred to another area. Be aware of this cognitive bias - don't overestimate yourself, because you are lacking **metacognition**. We often don't have the ability to step back and **examine ourselves objectively**. We need to constantly challenge ourselves to probe how we might possibly be wrong in certain areas. Seek experts and feedback from those who you can't trust and you know who are highly skilled in the area you are interested in. Always be open for constructive criticism and don't pretend you know something you don't. Always continue learning and try to grow as a person while still having this bias in mind.

Never get blinded by the Dunning-Kruger Effect. It's a lonely place on mount stupid. There is ALWAYS more to learn. There is ALWAYS more to do.

Please take some minutes and reflect on yourself: Did you notice the Dunning-Kruger Effect in your own life or in the lives of others in the past? Where are you on the Dunning-Kruger Wiggle? How might you want to approach things in the future?

Feel free to write down your notes and send them to us. We are equally open to any discussion on this topic you would like to initiate.



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