

The Big Dave Theory

A proposed new theory of bias within clients who have previously been ill-advised.

Abstract: The Big Dave Theory

The **Big Dave Theory** explores the cognitive biases that prevent clients from engaging with professional security solutions, particularly when these biases arise from prior negative experiences with uninformed security advice. Often sourced from family, friends, or colleagues, such informal recommendations tend to be ineffective, leading to the development of an overarching belief that professional security measures are unnecessary, overly complicated, burdensome or impersonal.

This theory identifies the security bias as a psychological barrier, driven by factors such as the availability heuristic, optimism bias, and status quo bias, which result in reluctance to further engage with other security professionals to adopt more effective, bespoke security strategies. It underscores the need for security professionals to recognise these biases and engage clients in educational efforts that highlight the value of tailored, minimally disruptive security solutions.

By integrating empathy, gradual implementation, and personalised security measures, professionals can overcome this bias and foster more positive, long-term relationships with clients, ultimately shifting their perspective on the importance and feasibility of professional security.

An introduction: The Big Dave Theory

The **Big Dave Theory** can be further developed by exploring the deeper psychological mechanisms and societal influences that reinforce the security bias, as well as potential strategies to mitigate its impact.

Background: Alex Bomberg has over 20 years of experience in international security with a professional interest ranging from counter espionage and cross-border intelligence operations through to physical security and Royalty protection. Alex is on a journey of exploration from being a practitioner towards academia, very much describing himself as a “pracademic”.

Alex Bomberg proposes the **Big Dave Theory**, having for many years witnessed clients who have been ill-advised. Many of these clients are “new money” or finding fame, and pick up along the way a “security advisor” or “bodyguard”, who whilst well-meaning is soon out of their depth, causing a bias within the individual that is often difficult to shift.

“Big Dave” is often introduced as someone who can help with security, sometimes informally.

Here's an expanded version of the theory:

1. The Role of Uninformed Security Advisors:

- The theory starts by acknowledging that many clients rely on informal sources of security advice, such as family, friends, or colleagues, due to their perceived trustworthiness and personal connection. These sources often provide security recommendations based on anecdotal experiences or hearsay, which may be outdated or misinformed. These individuals are habitually not formally educated in security and are uninformed as to the best practices. Likely very quickly out of their depth, despite being initially best placed, a trusted confidant, or having the ear of the client.
- Importantly, in addition to these advisors might not have the expertise, qualifications, or awareness to provide accurate and tailored security advice, these advisors may act selfishly, knowing that they have limited knowledge, not advise the client that they are out of their depth, or that other security professionals are needed, in order to protect their own position.
- When recommendations fail to prevent or mitigate security breaches (e.g., a break-in, identity theft, or data breach), clients may develop a general mistrust of the effectiveness of security services as a whole.
- Over time, clients may internalise the belief that professional security solutions are either unnecessary or disproportionately complex, leading to cognitive dissonance where they justify their reluctance to engage with professionals as a rational decision.

2. Cognitive Bias: Security as an Overestimated Burden:

- This bias can be understood through the lens of **status quo bias**—where people tend to prefer things to remain the same due to an inherent discomfort with change. Since clients have previously relied on informal security advice, any shift toward professional security solutions may be perceived as a disruption.
- A key cognitive component here is the **availability heuristic**—when clients recall negative outcomes tied to past security recommendations, they may overestimate the likelihood of future failures, thus undervaluing professional security services. The availability of negative stories (such as friends or family complaining about complicated security measures or costs) leads clients to dismiss alternatives that they perceive as equally burdensome or ineffective.
- **Optimism bias** is also relevant. Clients may have an inflated sense of their own ability to manage security risks or may believe that bad things are less likely to happen to them. This bias leads them to discount the necessity of professional intervention, even when they would benefit from it.

3. The Impact of Security Fatigue:

- Security measures, especially in the digital age, can be perceived as burdensome due to the sheer volume of potential threats. The overwhelming array of passwords, encryption methods, firewalls, and physical security systems can create a sense of fatigue. This fatigue is often compounded by informal advisors who oversimplify security, further reinforcing the idea that security services are cumbersome and inefficient.
- **Decision fatigue** can also play a role here. Clients, after repeatedly hearing that security is essential but experiencing frequent interruptions in their daily lives due to poor or ill-fitting security measures, may become weary of constantly addressing security issues. As a result, they may feel that taking the “easier” route of informal advice is more convenient, even if it's not as effective.

4. The Role of Perceived Cost and Inconvenience:

- One of the most significant deterrents to professional security engagement is the perception of **cost vs. benefit**. The Big Dave Theory posits that clients often fail to recognise the true value of bespoke security services, instead viewing them as overly expensive or inconvenient.
- Professional security, particularly tailored solutions, can appear as a luxury or something that “other people” need—often those who are perceived as more vulnerable or wealthier. This reinforces the belief that security services are unnecessary or out of reach for the average person.
- Security professionals must therefore focus not only on educating clients about the risks they face but also on demonstrating how customised security solutions can be both cost-effective and minimally disruptive to their everyday routines.

5. Mitigating Security Bias Through Education:

- The theory argues that security professionals need to acknowledge and address these biases head-on. Instead of simply presenting clients with a list of features and solutions, professionals should engage in **empathy-driven communication**. By understanding the client’s past negative experiences with security advice and acknowledging their emotional and cognitive biases, professionals can guide clients toward a more rational and informed decision.
- A key element of this education strategy is **risk assessment**. Professionals should not just sell a product or service but help clients understand the specific security risks they face and how tailored solutions can reduce these risks in a way that aligns with their lifestyle and preferences.
- Security experts can also introduce **step-by-step gradual implementation** of security measures. For example, they might suggest beginning with low-cost, easy-to-implement measures, like password management tools, and then gradually introducing more complex systems as the client becomes more comfortable.

6. Personalisation and Integration with Lifestyles:

- An essential part of overcoming the Big Dave Theory is the professional's ability to provide **personalised solutions**. Clients are more likely to engage with security systems that do not disrupt their daily lives. Security should be integrated into their existing routines, allowing them to feel as though they are gaining protection without major sacrifices in time, effort, or money.
- For instance, personalised systems that blend seamlessly with smart home technology or security features that require minimal maintenance and are easy to manage (e.g., automated software updates, user-friendly interfaces), can help break down the perception of security as an intrusive and burdensome service.

7. Behavioural Nudges and Trust-Building:

- Overcoming the security bias might also involve implementing **behavioural nudges**. By leveraging principles of behavioural economics, security professionals can gently encourage clients to make more informed decisions without overwhelming them. This could involve making security systems appear more approachable through simple, positive messaging (e.g., "secure your home with just a few clicks").
- Building **trust** is also crucial. Security providers need to build credibility with their clients by not only offering education but also by demonstrating a strong track record of success and reliability. Clients who trust their security provider will be more willing to accept professional solutions despite their prior experiences or biases.

8. The Long-Term Relationship:

- The Big Dave Theory suggests that client security behaviour evolves over time, and therefore, the relationship between a client and a security professional should not be transactional but long-term. Regular check-ins, ongoing education, and updates on the latest security threats can foster continuous engagement. Clients who feel supported and valued are less likely to revert to informal advice, which may have led them to form the original security bias.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the **Big Dave Theory** emphasises that understanding the psychological biases and cognitive dissonance that shape client attitudes toward security is essential for overcoming reluctance and promoting effective, professional security solutions. Through empathy, education, and personalised approaches, security professionals can reshape perceptions and demonstrate that security is not an inconvenient burden but an essential and protective element of modern life.

The Big Dave Theory: Publishing Notes

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A formal publication in a suitable journal of a refined theory will proceed once arguments have been considered.