

Course work on group think - thinking or conforming?

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



1. What are the primary drivers of groupthink?

Groupthink is driven by pressures placed on a cohesive team that is seeking conformity. This phenomenon typically plays out when the group's desire for unanimity wins out over its need for a critical and objective discussion and appraisal of a particular challenge or goal (Janis).

Groupthink tends to be prevalent in teams that are dominated by a central figure, someone by whom others are intimidated or who has a strong reputation within the overall organization. Other drivers may come into play when teams operate in an environment where there is an unswerving belief in the organization's core values, values that may be seen as unassailable or that members are fearful of challenging (Janis). Such groups tend to feel that they are invulnerable, that their decisions and consequent actions cannot fail.

In other circumstances, groupthink may arise from a fervent belief in the organization's culture when it is based on an underlying belief that the group has a "mission" to accomplish, something that is implicitly sacrosanct. In other teams, groupthink may be driven by an organizational culture that favors conflict avoidance. Individuals with viewpoints outside the group's mainstream can also contribute to groupthink. Groups may respond to such external pressure by tightening its circle and becoming even more fervent about reaching and maintaining "consensus."

2. When inside an organization is group thinking most likely to arise?

Groupthink is most likely to arise when highly cohesive groups face a great deal of stress or pressure. In such an environment, people are not apt to introduce or argue on behalf of many of the risks associated with a plan when it appears to have the support of the majority. In one historical example, the joint committee that planned the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba was dominated by the CIA, which had a vested interest in seeing the invasion take place. Key players within the administration, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were cowed into silence by the CIA's influence within the group (Janis).

With groupthink firmly in place, the committee failed to consider alternatives, ultimately reducing the matter to a basic decision of whether or not to invade. With the CIA championing the invasion plan and at the same time assessing its risks and viability, the plan proceeded without a serious discussion of its possible weaknesses. The group decided on invasion as the result of an enforced consensus, arising from without a serious discussion consensus in place, the plan went forward though its essential weaknesses remained. Of course, the invasion ended in disaster (Janis).

3. What can be done inside an organization or team to foster candid dialogue among members?

Groups should establish a more open atmosphere in which participants are encouraged to contribute free of inhibiting factors that lead to groupthink. This would

include creating a more informal setting aimed at mitigating negative associations participants might have with past meetings. In situations where a dominant individual threatens the free exchange of ideas, a neutral “moderator,” someone with no particular vested interest in the issues, could be used to facilitate a more productive meeting. Another solution might be to arrange meetings among “equals,” in which individuals from similar ranks of an organization participate, thus circumventing the likelihood that a higher-ranking individual may intimidate or dominate others.

It is essential that organizations establish an atmosphere of trust and acceptance in the exchange of opinions if critical mistakes are to be avoided. Building a positive expectation among participants is a matter of experience, as Hastie and Dawes explain: “If an outcome made us happy in the past, then we are likely to predict it will make us happy in the future and prefer to repeat the course of action that led to good outcomes in the past,” (Hastie and Dawes, 210). If positive impressions can be established within a group based on projects where issues and problems had been openly, critically discussed, those positive feelings will further an atmosphere of openness that defeats groupthink.

Works Cited

“Groupthink – Thinking or Conforming?” Organizational Decision Making.

Lesson 8.

Hastie, Reid, and Dawes, Robyn M. Rational Choice in an Uncertain World:

The Psychology of

Judgment and Decision-Making. London, UK: Sage Publications. 2010.