

Is conformity to group norms a good or bad thing



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BUSI 3310 - Individual Assignment Topic 8 - Question 1 Is conformity to group norms a good or bad thing? Conformity is a type of social influence involving a change in belief or behavior in order to fit in with a group.

Conformity is inherent in our everyday lives and can occur when we are with others or when we are alone. For example, many of us follow social standards for eating when we are with a group and when we are alone.

Conformity occurs when individuals yield to group pressures or expectations, also called norms.

The text defines norms as the informal rules and shared expectations that groups establish to regulate the behavior of their members (McShane and Steen, p. 194). Norms develop as soon as teams form because people need to anticipate or predict how others will act. Norms also form as team members discover behaviors that help them function more effectively (McShane & Steen, 2009). Why do people conform? Social Identity Theory explains a person's self-concept in terms of the person's unique characteristics (personal identity) and membership in various social groups (social identity) (2009).

People are more likely to conform depending on how much value they place on the group they are in and how much it attributes to their self-concept. As a result we are motivated to improve the image and status of our own group in comparison with others. Some people have a greater need for social approval or a higher need for affiliation than others and are more likely to conform and to be a part of groups. Conforming to a group may make people feel better about their self and improve self-confidence.

Needless to say, nonconformists have a lower need for affiliation and are less likely to care what other people think. They generally have more self-confidence than those with a higher need of social approval. Group conformity is necessary for society to function. Many of society's most basic institutions - government, finance, transportation, education, and healthcare - would fall if people did not conform to their rules, regulations and standards set in place for the public to follow. One of the most important reasons for group conformity is for decision making purposes.

As noted earlier, norms form as team members discover behaviors that help them function more effectively, which leads to more effective decision making. Once teams have figured out a process that works well for them, team members will conform to the way the group comes to a decision. This saves a lot of time, effort and energy. This type of conformity is positive and gives structure to the group. Groupthink, on the other hand, is a more negative outcome of group conformity. Groupthink is defined as the tendency of highly cohesive groups to value consensus at the price of decision quality (2009).

There has been considerable experimentation on this topic which proves that people will time and time again give incorrect answers simply to fit in with a group. The Asch Experiment was a series of studies conducted in the 1950's that has shown how perfectly normal human beings can be pressured into unusual behavior by authority figures, or by the consensus of opinion around them. The overall findings of the experiment were as follows: one third (32%) of the participants who were placed in this situation went along and conformed with the majority.

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Over the 18 trials about 75% of participants conformed at least once and 25% of participant never conformed. After the interview the participants were interviewed, most said that they did not really believe their conforming answers, but had gone along with the group for fear of being ridiculed or thought "peculiar". A few of them said that they really did believe the group's answers were correct (Mcleod, 2008). This study concluded that people conform due to normative influence and informational influence.

Normative conformity occurs when individuals yield to group pressures because he or she wants to fit in with their group. Individuals who conform normatively are generally scared of being rejected by the group; they may comply by agreeing with the group despite their personal opinions.

Informational conformity occurs when a person lacks knowledge, therefore they look to their group(s) for guidance; or when a person is in an unclear situation and socially compares their behavior with the group (Home: Social Influence: Encyclopedia, 2009).

It is also interesting to see how group norms and conformity affect one's creativity. While many people, including myself, find collaborating with others and working in teams an effective approach to creativity, the truth is group norms can really impact the creative process. Since creativity is "thinking outside the box", it calls for nonconformity. A study conducted by Adarves-Yorno et al. (2006) demonstrates how group norms impact student's creativity. The study asked two groups of participants to create posters and gave each group a subtle norm about their groups.

One group was given the norm ' words' and the other ' images'. Afterwards when they judged each other's work, the participants linked creativity with following their prescribed group norm; the ' words' group rated posters with more words as more creative and the ' images' group rated posters with more images as more creative (Why Group Norms Kill Creativity , 2009). The group or norms, therefore, determined what its members considered to be creative. When individuals were not placed in groups the results were reversed.

This only solidifies the effect conformity to group norms have on the individual and their ability to think freely, innovate and be creative in work and life. You can see that we conform to group norms for our own needs and purposes; it is neither bad nor good. Overall, conformity to group norms can be seen as a positive or negative outcome depending on the situation at hand. Questions to consider: 1. Social identity theory states that individuals define themselves by their group affiliations.

What formal and/or informal groups do you identify with? 2. How can past experiences and values affect the formation of group norms? ? References Home: Social Influence: Encyclopedia. (2009, June 23). Retrieved November 1, 2011, from DamnMad: [http://www.damnmad.com/social_influence/encyclopedia.htm#Conformity? 1320328711](http://www.damnmad.com/social_influence/encyclopedia.htm#Conformity?1320328711) Why Group Norms Kill Creativity . (2009, June 8). Retrieved October 31, 2011, from PSYBLOG Understand your mind. : <http://www.spring.org.uk/2009/06/why-group-norms-kill-creativity.php> Mcleod,

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