

Chapter 14: Group Think

- Groupthink: a way of deliberating that group members use when their desire for unanimity overrides their motivation to assess all plans of action
 - o Sometimes groups "fall into" the trap of groupthink because they want all members of the group to agree more than they want to find the best solution or make the best decision
- Groupthink is associated with small group communication
 - o groupthink affects decision making, information sharing, role definition, education, socializing and relating to systems outside the group unit
 - o problem-solving groups and task-oriented groups are most susceptible
- Classic examples of Groupthink
 - o The U.S. Navy's lack of preparation at Pearl Harbor
 - o The Bay of Pigs invasion
 - o The Vietnam War
 - o Watergate
- Assumptions of Groupthink
 - o Conditions in groups promote high cohesiveness
 - cohesiveness is the extent to which group members are willing to work together
 - cohesion comes from a group's attitudes, values, and patterns of behavior
 - cohesion is easy to recognize but hard to define
- Group problem solving is primarily a unified process
 - o people don't like to disrupt the decision-making process
 - o group members want to get along
 - o affiliative restraints (members holding back their input rather than facing possible rejection) threaten the problem-solving process
 - o because group members fear rejection, they will attach greater importance to preserving the group than to the issue at hand
- Groups and group decision making are complex
 - o small groups need to understand the available options and be able to distinguish among these available options
 - o understanding the task at hand and the people involved is important
 - o the presence of other people affects us and knowing that these other people may be judging our contributions promotes task accomplishment

- o group demographics play an important role in the dynamics of the group (hierarchy)
- Antecedent conditions of Groupthink
 - o High cohesiveness of the decision-making group
 - cohesiveness is desirable but dangerous
 - cohesion may lead to intense pressure to conform to group standards and often does lead to group members conforming with one another (think of a clone)
 - conformity is the primary route that leads to groupthink
 - cohesion does not automatically lead to groupthink, BUT it makes a group more vulnerable to groupthink when it is at the forefront of group decision-making
- Specific structural characteristics of the environment surrounding the group affect the decision-making process
 - o insulation/isolation
 - o lack of impartial leadership
 - o failure to establish clear decision-making procedures can lead to faulty decision making
- Stressful internal and external characteristics placed on certain group members may increase the potential for groupthink to occur
 - o issues and events inside and outside the group can cause people to break down
 - o the pressure to find a solution also causes group members to seek moral support from other members
- Symptoms of Groupthink
 - o Janis identifies three categories of systems of groupthink that can be present before groups make final decisions or come to a consensus about an issue.
 - Overestimation of the group
 - Closed-mindedness of the group
 - Pressures towards uniformity in the group
- Overestimation of the Group
 - o “the erroneous belief that the group is more than it actually is” (more powerful, more effective, etc)
 - o Two symptoms associated with this are:
 - Illusion of invulnerability- the group believes it can overcome “any obstacle”
 - Inherent morality- the group members are thoughtful, “good” people, so their decisions will be good as well
- Closed-mindedness of the Group

- o “the willingness of the group to ignore differences in people and (outside) warnings about poor group decisions”
- o Two symptoms associated with this are:
 - Out-group Stereotypes- groups hold adversarial stereotypes about non-members and think that group decisions cannot be overruled or sabotaged
 - Collective Rationalization- the group ignores warnings that would cause others to reconsider decisions made
- Pressures towards Uniformity
 - o “Going along to get along”
 - o Four symptoms associated with this are:
 - Self-censorship- minimizing personal doubts or counterarguments
 - Illusion of unanimity- all members are in complete agreement
 - Self-appointed mindguards- those who protect the group from adverse (outside) info
 - Pressures on dissenters- individuals who express contrary views are “encouraged” to comply with the group
- Groupthink: It’s in more places than you think
 - o Janis may focus on politics in his examples, but groupthink is applicable to many contexts
 - Cults
 - Student Organizations
 - Families
 - ...even Personal decisions
 - o So, how can we prevent groupthink?...
- Ways to prevent Groupthink
 - o Looking at the different objectives group members want to achieve
 - o Developing those objectives
 - o Exploring the entire range of objectives
 - o Analyzing each objective on its own
 - o Having a contingency plan
- Hart also offers four general recommendations for groups
 - o Groups should establish standards for oversight and control (the devil’s advocate of the group)