Groupthink as Communication Process, not Outcome

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Abstract

A bias of groupthink research is that it primarily examines group decisions that are viewed as catastrophic failures, such as the Bay of Pigs fiasco. An alternative approach focuses on groupthink as a faulty communication process rather than defining it by negative outcomes. Taking such an approach, this paper briefly explores some potential examples of decisions that may have involved groupthink communication processes but either had ambiguous outcomes or succeeded in accomplishing their goals. The analysis suggests the need to explore the communication processes that result in groupthink while recognizing that the outcomes may be negative, ambiguous, or even positive.

Keywords: group communication, groupthink, decision making

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El Pensamiento de Grupo Como un Proceso de la Comunicación, no un Resultado

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Resumen

Un sesgo de la investigación en pensamiento de grupo, es que principalmente examina las decisiones de un grupo vistas como fallos catastróficos, como el caso del fiasco de la bahía de cochinos. Una aproximación alternativa se centra en acercarse al pensamiento de grupo como un proceso defectuoso más que por sus resultados negativos. Cogiendo esto como una perspectiva, este artículo explora brevemente algunos ejemplos potenciales de decisiones que, proviniendo de procesos de pensamiento de grupo, han tenido resultados ambiguos o, incluso, han tenido éxito en conseguir sus objetivos. El análisis sugiere la necesidad de explorar procesos de comunicación dados en procesos de pensamiento de grupo, reconociendo sus objetivos como negativos, ambíguos o, incluso, positivos.

Palabras clave: comunicación en grupo, pensamiento de grupo, toma de decisiones

Greek1 and Greek2 were two fraternities at a large university. They were alike in history, tradition, status, and size. Both participate in the annual process of recruiting and selecting new members. When the university adopted a policy strictly forbidding hazing, both insisted that it was their right to initiate recruits in the traditions of their order and that the university was simply anti-Greek. Both secretly continued their hazing rituals for several years and suffered no consequences. There was little difference between what the two did. Then one year a recruit in Greek1 became violently ill during the drinking ritual and was taken by ambulance to the local hospital. As a result, Greek1 was investigated for hazing and suspended from campus recruiting for two years. In Greek2 the recruits illegally drank similar amounts, but no one got ill enough to go to the hospital. As a result, there was no investigation and no suspension.

Viewing these hypothetical scenarios through the typical groupthink framework, researchers would conclude that the decision-making process at Greek1 illustrated groupthink. Members of Greek1 exhibited most of the characteristics of groupthink including high cohesiveness, illusion of invulnerability, collective rationalizing, failure to consider consequences, and a variety of other problems (Street, 1997). While it seems appropriate to conclude that Greek1 demonstrated groupthink, it is equally appropriate to say that groupthink occurred in Greek2 since they used the same decision-making characteristics and enacted the same inappropriate behaviors. Yet it is unlikely that Greek2 would ever be examined for groupthink processes because there was no negative outcome. The outcome differences were not indicative of better decision making in Greek2. The outcome differences were probably a matter of luck.

Typically, groupthink is considered a possibility only when the outcomes are disastrous in line with the tradition of the early work by Janis (1972). The defining characteristic of most groupthink research is that it results "in extremely defective decision-making performance by the group" (Turner & Pratkanis, 1998, p. 106) or more pointedly one might conclude that "groupthink is the primary cause of fiasco in the modern world" (Peterson et al., 1998, p. 273). Even one of the scholars who clearly states that groupthink does not always result in bad decisions then proceeds to focus on typical negative outcome when she analyzes the Bay of Pigs military fiasco (Flippen, 1999). The focus of most research on groupthink then is to find

examples of poor decision-making outcomes and work backwards to find evidence of groupthink processes in a retrospective sense-making process (Fuller & Aldag, 1998). Other scholars attempt to create groupthink processes, such as high cohesion, in a lab to produce negative outcomes. However, few experimental studies document "the hallmark of groupthink: the low quality, defective decisions" (Turner & Pratkanis, 1998, p. 110). Overall, research has generally failed to consider that the communication processes that characterize groupthink can result in disastrous, ambiguous, or even positive outcomes. Exploring these possibilities seems warranted given that organizational decisions, effective or ineffective, can be the result of almost random processes (e.g. garbage can model, Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972) and there is evidence that suggests that groupthink processes are not strongly associated with ineffective decisions (Peterson et al., 1998).

This manuscript explores the notion that groupthink should be defined more by the communication process rather than by the outcome. After briefly reviewing the characteristics of groupthink, it examines two examples, Operation Desert Storm and the enactment of teamwork at ISE (Barker, 1993), that illustrate characteristics of groupthink even though the outcomes may not be considered negative. Then, it briefly examines the practices of terrorist groups to demonstrate that the outcomes related to groupthink process may be evaluated as positive, negative, or ambiguous depending on the perspective taken.

The Groupthink Model

Since extensive reviews of groupthink exist elsewhere (e.g., Esser, 1998; Street, 1997), what follows is a brief summary of major conceptual components. The ground-breaking work on groupthink conducted by Janis (1971, 1972, 1982) identifies the major characteristics of groupthink. Groupthink involves high cohesiveness and concurrence-seeking that interferes with critical thinking. It results in a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment. In selecting his examples of groupthink, Janis (1982) selected ones that exhibited seven major defects in decision-making: 1) Discussions were limited to few alternative courses of action; 2) Groups did not survey the objectives to be fulfilled or the values implicit in the choices; 3) Groups failed to reexamine the initially-preferred

action for non-obvious risks or drawbacks; 4) Groups failed to consider possible benefits of alternatives initially rejected by the majority; 5) Groups made little or no attempt to consult experts; 6) Groups demonstrated selection bias by attending to information supportive of their views and disregarding that which did not; and 7) Groups spent little time deliberating about their decision and had no contingency plans for unforeseen obstacles.

Street (1997) presents a comprehensive model of groupthink that included much of the research conducted beyond Janis's initial work. Antecedent conditions include cohesiveness—a necessary but insufficient condition; structural faults, such as group isolation; and a proactive situational context, such as stress from an external threat. These antecedent conditions lead to concurrence-seeking tendencies. The resulting symptoms include an overestimation of the group, such as an illusion of invulnerability and a sense of group morality; close-mindedness, including collective rationalization and stereotyping of outgroup members; and pressure toward uniformity, such as self-censorship and an illusion of unanimity. Decision-making defects include incomplete survey of alternatives, objectives, or information, a failure to examine preferred or rejected choices, and a failure to have a contingency plan.

A variety of research has confirmed many of these characteristics although the results typically only support parts of the groupthink model. For example, in initial experimental studies in the laboratory, Courtright (1978) found evidence of the importance of the presence or absence of disagreement in discriminating between non-groupthink and groupthink groups. In additional experimental studies, Cline (1990) developed a method for observing and analyzing the illusion of unanimity in groups. She followed this up with a case study using the Watergate break-in and cover-up transcripts to demonstrate the importance of the same construct (Cline, 1994). Flippen (1999) explored the personal goals for participating in the group as part of the antecedent conditions for groupthink processes.

The mixed findings on groupthink variables can perhaps be explained by the lack of research questioning the final box in Street's (1997) model which is labeled "poor decision outcomes." Most groupthink scholarship, including the work of Janis, attributes ill-fated decision to poor decision-making processes like groupthink and positive outcomes to sound or rational decision-making processes (Choi & Kim, 1999). Most of the typical

groupthink examples are consistent with this notion. Many of these poor outcomes are the result of faulty decision making in high profile political decisions and the research consists largely of retrospective case studies (with the exception of a few laboratory studies). Some of the more frequently mentioned examples come from the initial work of Janis (1982) such as the Bay of Pigs, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and the Cuban missile crisis. Janis (1982) and Cline (1994) discuss the Watergate break-in and subsequent cover-up as groupthink. Although some scholars have argued that the Challenger disaster was the result of faulty decision-making other than groupthink (Hirokawa, Gouran, & Martz, 1988), it and the Columbia disasters are often mentioned as groupthink examples—primarily because the outcomes were disastrous. During discussions of groupthink in college classrooms, undergraduates frequently add cult examples such as David Koresh and the Branch Davidians in Texas as examples of groupthink marked by disastrous outcomes.

Although disastrous outcomes draw attention to possible groupthink, it seems likely that groupthink processes occur far more frequently than the few examples that are reported in the media. Some disastrous outcomes likely receive little attention due to how uneventful they are, such as when small business owners enact groupthink and go out of business as a result. There is also evidence that groupthink processes do not necessarily lead to negative outcomes. In exploring decisions in a business setting, Choi and Kim (1999) found that groupthink factors had both positive and negative relationships to performance after a crisis, but other factors such as use of internal and external resources and the quality of implementation were more significant predictors of the outcomes. Similarly, in a reanalysis of historical cases Janis used, Kramer (1998) did not find strong relationships between various components in the model and claims of groupthink. Thus, it seems likely that many groups use a groupthink process, but the outcomes are positive or at least ambiguous enough that no discussion of the faulty decision-making process ever occurs. To examine this premise, two examples, one from the headlines and one from a research article illustrate the possibility of a groupthink process followed by either positive or ambiguous outcomes.

Groupthink as "Successful" in Operation Desert Storm

By most criteria, Operation Desert Storm, the first war in Iraq in 1991, under President George Bush Sr. was a success. The American people supported the effort and supported the troops during the war, with few exceptions. The stated goal of the military operation was accomplished; the Iraqi troops of Saddam Hussein were driven out of Kuwait in a military rout (Excerpts from briefing by Schwarzkopf in Saudi Arabia, 1991, 1B).   President Bush achieved his highest approval ratings from the American people in the months after the war, although that approval did not last until the next election cycle. Despite the success of this endeavor, there is evidence to suggest that the decision makers succumbed to groupthink processes.

The evidence of groupthink by the decision-makers involved in Operation Desert Storm is fairly limited, but makes a rather compelling case. After the Iraqi troops had been routed from Kuwait, the decision was made to suspend their pursuit into Iraq and not to remove Saddam Hussein from office. Published reports regarding this decision suggest pressure toward uniformity—particularly in the form of the illusion of unanimity. General Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of the allied troops in Desert Storm reported the following conversation with Colin Power regarding when to end the war:

> "So here's what I propose," I said. "I want the Air Force to keep bombing those convoys backed up at the Euphrates where the bridges are blown. I want to continue the ground attack tomorrow, drive to the sea, and totally destroy everything in our path. That's the way I wrote the plan for Desert Storm, and in one more day we'll be done." I paused: "Do you realize if we stop tomorrow night, the ground campaign will have lasted five days? How does that sound to you: the 'Five-Day War'?" (Schwarzkopf & Petre, 1992, p. 471)

A short period of time later, Powell called Schwarzkopf and told him they wanted to end the war at 9:00 P.M. instead of waiting for the next day. Schwarzkopf responded "I don't have any problem with it" (Schwarzkopf & Petre, 1992, p. 470). While Schwarzkopf offers a number of reasons for his sudden change of heart, additional sources suggest that he did indeed have a problem with discontinuing the pursuit of the Iraqi troops. In a national

television interview approximately four weeks after the ceasefire, Schwarzkopf stated:

> Frankly, my recommendation had been, you know, to continue to march. I mean, we had them in a rout and could have continued to wreak great destruction on them. We could have completely closed the doors and made it in fact a battle of annihilation. . . .There were obviously a lot of people who escaped who wouldn't have escaped if the decision hadn't been made to stop where we were at that time. (as cited in Record, 1993, p. 125).

After publicly stating his disagreement with the decision to end the war, Schwarzkopf quickly recanted a few days later after being criticized for his remarks by President Bush:

> Schwarzkopf said he had apologized for his "poor choice of words" in questioning Bush's judgment about calling a cease-fire. . . .Schwarzkopf said in a brief meeting with reporters: "I agreed 100 percent with the decision. I thought it was a correct decision then, and I think it's a correct decision now." (Schwarzkopf Apologizes: Bush Accepts, 1991, 1A)

Based on his private memoirs and television interview, Schwarzkopf clearly had a problem with ending the war as soon as it was ended. By saying that he had "no problem with it" when he spoke to Colin Powell and by stating he was 100 percent in agreement with the decision later, he supported an appearance of unanimity. Schwarzkopf appeared to have been pressured to state agreement with the group decision when he did not in fact agree at all. The fact that he was pressured to publicly support the decision four weeks after the decision was made provides strong evidence of pressure for unanimity within the decision-making group. There may have been others who privately disagreed with the decision, but remained silent due to the pressure from above to conform. This suggests that other characteristics of groupthink may also have been present as well.

It is true that in retrospect, some pundits have argued that the decision not to chase down the Iraqi troops and remove Saddam Hussein from authority at that time was a bad decision. It can even be argued that it had disastrous effects both on the Iraqi minorities who were brutally attacked by Hussein's

regime after the war and on the United States embroiled in the second war in Iraq beginning in 2003. Nonetheless, it certainly was not the opinion at the time that either the war or the decision to stop after liberating Kuwait was a mistake.

Interestingly, claims that the decision makers in this successful campaign practiced groupthink have not been heard, although such claims are frequently heard in the cases of failed military interventions such as the Bay of Pigs or the Vietnam War. Despite evidence of groupthink at the decision-making level, Operation Desert Storm is rarely, if ever, mentioned as a possible example of groupthink. This omission appears to be due to the bias of starting with disastrous outcomes and looking back for evidence of groupthink rather than examining group processes first and then considering that groupthink processes may dramatically increase the probability of negative outcomes, but may still result in positive outcomes in some instances despite faulty decision making.

Groupthink and Ambiguous Outcomes in Concertive Control

A second published example suggests that groupthink processes can lead to ambiguous outcomes. In his article, Barker (1993) describes the process by which an organization changed from a hierarchical management philosophy to one based on teamwork. On the basis of his analysis, he concludes that the team members eventually developed a system of concertive control in which they monitored each other and imposed more stringent regulations on themselves than management did prior to the change in philosophy. Barker's analysis is valuable, but he does not examine whether the teams in his study participated in groupthink processes. Perhaps this omission is due to outcomes being rather ambiguous depending on how the assessment of success is conceptualized for the organization and the group.

Although it is not possible on the basis of the article's content to determine whether all the characteristics of groupthink were evident in this group, as Moorhead, Neck, and West (1998) suggest in their analysis, there seems to be strong evidence in Barker's article of a number of characteristics of groupthink, including high cohesion, poor decision-making norms, and strong leadership by senior team members. Further analysis reveals that there is evidence of some of the antecedent conditions, concurrence-seeking,

groupthink symptoms, and decision-making defects. An assessment of whether the decisions were poor depends on who defines success.

Barker (1993) provides ample evidence of the antecedent conditions for groupthink. There was strong group cohesiveness as team members supported each other. Structural faults existed; the team was insulated from other teams and over time accepted a homogenous set of values. The situational context provided stress as evidenced by external threats due to downturns in product demand resulting in layoffs and from the need to meet production deadlines or lose jobs. This stress led to a strong demand for concurrence seeking in the form of consensus decision making.

Symptoms of groupthink were less obvious than the antecedent conditions, but they certainly existed. There was obvious pressure toward uniformity. Group members who had conflicts with demands to meet production goals had to negotiate alternative times to provide apparently unpaid overtime. There was an illusion of unanimity as a number of members privately voiced discontent with the team but practiced self-censorship by accepting the decisions of the team without protest. Close-mindedness and mind guard were apparent when the old timers of the group met to decide the fate of a newcomer who was not buying into their values sufficiently.

Decision-making defects were also apparent. Perhaps the strongest evidence of this was the team's decision to place an attendance board in the break room. The team placed a board listing who was late and absent each day in full view of all team members and anyone else who happened to visit the room. Had management ever suggested such a policy, the team members would undoubtedly have protested it and worked to change this embarrassing and inappropriate treatment. That they adopted it themselves suggests that the team did a less than thorough examination of their objectives and of alternatives. There is little evidence that they examined the positive and negative effects of this preferred choice.

Despite meeting the major characteristics of groupthink, the decision outcomes were quite ambiguous. It is easy to argue that the team was largely successful. They continued to meet productivity and quality standards. However, team morale was low and the concertive control that resulted from the decision-making process was more confining and oppressive than the management and bureaucratic control that existed prior to the change to

teamwork. Given the bias toward beginning with disastrous outcomes in looking for groupthink, it is not surprising that situations with ambiguous decision outcomes like this are rarely examined from a groupthink perspective. On careful analysis, these teams appeared to exhibit groupthink processes, but without the obvious disastrous outcomes typically assumed necessary.

Terrorist Groups "Succeed" Using Groupthink

With the limited access to decision making within terrorist groups, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive analysis of their groupthink characteristics. Nonetheless, there is sufficient evidence of the antecedent conditions, concurrence seeking, symptoms of groupthink, and decision-making defects. The assessment of whether decisions resulted in poor outcomes depends on the perspective taken. Rather than discussing terrorist groups in general, this analysis focuses on the processes apparent in the Al Qaeda terrorist group that led to the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Towers and other targets.

Antecedent conditions of groupthink were apparent in the Al Qaeda leadership. According to the 9/11 Commission Report (2004), Al Qaeda leadership consisted of a tight-knit group of individuals who were insulated from most of modern civilization. This group resided in remote areas of Afghanistan, surrounded by like-minded individuals—most of whom were trained and indoctrinated by Osama Bin Ladin. The Commission reports that Bin Ladin hand picked the individuals who would carry out the attacks—individuals who were the most rabid and committed of extremists.

Interestingly according to the 9/11 Commission Report, there was not consensus at the leadership level as to whether or not Al Qaeda should carry out the attacks against the United States. Bin Ladin believed the mission was of fundamental importance while others believed that Al Qaeda needed to either attack Jews or finish the ongoing war in Afghanistan. It is apparent that this dissent was ignored by the Al Qaeda leadership, suggesting that groupthink processes may have been at play. While we do not have the details available to make a definitive case that this group engaged in groupthink, there is some evidence to support this contention. First, as previously mentioned, the group was highly isolated. Second, the group

believed that it held the moral high ground. At one point Bin Ladin claimed that the United States was the worst civilization in the history of the world and that the U.S. would continue to be the enemy until it became an Islamic State (9/11 Commission, 2004). These and similar statements by members of the Al Qaeda leadership suggest that the group was close-minded. Specifically the members rationalized violence against civilian targets by stereotyping U.S. citizens within a narrow cultural identity.

Not only does it seem likely that the Al Qaeda central leadership group used groupthink processes, it is also likely that the cell groups that carried out the actual attacks were engaged in groupthink. Specifically, evidence suggests that the antecedent conditions for groupthink existed in these cells. These cell groups were insulated, living in secret within the United States for some time, with very little contact with even the larger Al Qaeda network. The primary contact was with Mohamed Atta, the tactical leader of the operation (9/11 Commission Report, 2004). The groups were homogeneous in values, representing a militant sect of Islam. They were also largely homogeneous in ethnic background, comprised primarily of radical Islamic Arabs.

In addition to antecedent conditions, many of the symptoms of groupthink were also apparent. Group members overestimated the group: They saw it as impossible to fail with Allah on their side and they believed in the morality of their actions calling it a jihad, a holy war. Close-mindedness was evident in the way that the group stereotyped and demonized outgroup members (primarily the United States) and collectively rationalized attacking non-military personnel because the jihad was against the entire culture, not just the leadership or military. Without additional insider information, it is difficult to determine the degree of pressure toward uniformity present in the group although the existence of training camps suggests that indoctrination and pressure to uniformity were present. Clearly there was uniformity as individuals enacted the same actions, but whether this was due to pressure on dissenters, self-censorship, mind guards, or an illusion of unanimity is unclear. It appears that there was unanimity.

Certainly from a Western perspective, Al Qaeda decision makers exhibited decision-making defects. Westerners would no doubt argue that the terrorists failed to consider alternatives that would influence the United States in a more positive manner and failed to consider if killing innocent

people was consistent with their objectives. The terrorists failed to consider the possible negative consequences of their decision to attack. In the process of continuing to demonize an entire culture, they selected information that kept their anger toward the United States peaked.

Although it is relatively easy to make the argument that Al Qaeda used groupthink processes, it is more difficult to determine whether their decision resulted in poor outcomes since meanings assigned to the 9-11 events diverge significantly across cultures (Dougherty, Mobley, & Smith, 2010). From the terrorists' perspective, their actions were highly successful. Unlike the previous attempt at bombing the World Trade Towers, this time the terrorists completely destroyed their primary target and caused serious damage to the Pentagon. The exact target of the fourth plane may never be known. The attacks were the most disruptive terrorist events in history costing thousands of lives, billions of dollars in damaged and destroyed property, and billions of dollars in lost economic activity and increased security efforts. For example, the cost of national security in the form of defense, homeland security, and international affairs rose by almost 200 billion dollars between fiscal years 2001 and 2004 (9/11 Commission, 2004). The fear of further attacks continues to cost billions of dollars and disrupts activities throughout the world. In addition to the fiscal costs of the attack, the emotional and personal toll taken on the American people is even larger and cannot be assessed in any dollar terms. Although our Western perspective may have difficulty seeing these as positive outcomes, these were largely the goals of the decision makers of the operation.

It is also possible to view the outcomes negatively, even from the terrorists' perspective. In much the same way that the attacks on Pearl Harbor awakened "the sleeping giant," the United States, which ultimately led to the demise of the Japanese empire, the September 11 attacks unleashed a fury against Al Qaeda that continues to this day and eventually led to the death of its leader Osama bin Laden. Their base of operation in Afghanistan was disrupted and although they continue to operate, it is not possible to determine how effective they are in comparison to their strength prior to the attacks. Since it is impossible to predict the final outcome at this time, it is possible that the outcome will be ambiguous with the Al Qaeda decision makers having gained significant short-term outcomes, but decreased the likelihood of achieving their long-term goals.

In sum, the decision makers of Al Qaeda appear to have exhibited most of the groupthink processes. Whether these resulted in poor decision outcomes depends largely on the perspective taken in evaluating the outcomes. The groupthink processes led to significant short-term accomplishments from the group's perspective, although their success in achieving long-term goals is unclear.

Discussion

One of the biases that has prevailed in the groupthink literature is an assumption that because groupthink is an ineffective decision-making process, it necessarily results in negative or disastrous outcomes. This bias is evident in the way that nearly all typical examples of groupthink begin with negative, even catastrophic outcomes, whether it was the Bay of Pigs, the Vietnam War, or the Challenger and Columbia explosions, and then work back to retrospectively examine the faulty decision-making processes. Like the original work by Janis (1972), such retrospective case studies of negative outcomes are the predominant examples of groupthink.

Although it is likely that using groupthink decision processes increase the chances of poor decisions and negative outcomes and likewise, that using critical thinking decision-making processes increase the probability of good quality decisions and positive outcomes, these increased probabilities do not automatically lead to the corresponding outcomes. For example, the same groupthink processes that led to the Challenger disaster probably occurred on the July 1985 space shuttle flight on which the o-rings came dangerously close to failing due to cold temperatures, but did not fail (Hirokawa et al., 1988). The difference in outcomes was not related to differences in decision-making processes but almost random, unpredictable factors.

By examining other decision-making groups that seem to fit the groupthink decision-making model, this analysis suggests that while groupthink always involves poor decision-making processes, it can lead to negative outcomes, ambiguous outcomes, or even successful outcomes. This is consistent with the findings that groupthink processes have inconsistent relationships to outcomes and that other factors like implementation and use of resources or even luck may be more important factors (Choi & Kim, 1999; Peterson et al., 1998). Of course, an important consideration is that the

evaluation of the outcome depends on whose perception of success is accepted. The historical examples of Operation Desert Storm and the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, as well as an analysis of decision making by the team members in Barker's (1993) article, suggest that groups can fall prey to groupthink processes, make decisions that are poor at least from some perspectives, and still largely achieve their goals. This suggests a need to further consider the groupthink model.

A focus on groupthink processes instead of outcomes would open up the field of research significantly and at the same time address the limitations of previous research based on retrospective and historic accounts of decision making or studies conducted in laboratory settings. So, for example, instead of examining situations where disastrous outcomes have already occurred, researchers could focus on research settings where groupthink is likely to occur. In such settings researchers could explore whether cohesion based on personal attractiveness or based on task pride and commitment has differential impact on group outcomes (McCauley, 1998) or whether the political goals or self-interests of leaders are more significant factors in producing the negative outcome (Kramer, 1998). A wide range of community groups from environmental groups, to animal rights groups, to religious organizations seem to be fertile grounds for observing groupthink processes in action. It would also seem that the more extreme the group is in its beliefs, the more likely groupthink processes would occur regardless of the outcomes.

A focus on the groupthink processes instead of the outcomes will place the study of groupthink more squarely on communication processes and group dynamics instead of primarily on sociological or psychological variables. It is through communication and group dynamics that group members insulate themselves and develop homogenous values. It is through communication and group dynamics that group members create real or imagined external threats and stereotype outgroup members. It is through communication and group dynamics that group members create a sense of group morality and invulnerability.

Given that it is through communication and group dynamics that groupthink processes occur, it is not surprising that solutions to groupthink involve communication as well. Janis (1982) recommends a number of ways of avoiding groupthink, although he sees dangers in each of them. He

recommends assigning a critical evaluator or a devil's advocate. The leader should remain impartial, not stating preferences, at least initially. Separate groups should discuss issues to see if both come to the same conclusion. Group members should discuss decisions with people outside the group for feedback. Outside experts should be consulted. Group members should survey the environment and construct alternative scenarios to consider. A second meeting should be held to reconsider decisions. Each of these involves an effort at changing the group dynamics and communication to avoid groupthink processes. However, research needs to examine how to effectively use each in practice. For example, it would be easy to assign a devil's advocate but then simply treat that input as token critical thinking with the result being no actual change in decision-making. Conversely, the group can value the devil's advocate so strongly that the group becomes paralyzed and unable to take action for fear of groupthink.

Groupthink processes lead to decisions that are not based on the type of rational, logical decision making that is expected, although rarely achieved, in groups (e.g., Dewey, 1910). Most of the primary examples of groupthink suggest that these failures in decision-making processes lead to negative and disastrous outcomes. The present analysis suggests that groupthink processes are ineffective. As such they increase the probability of negative outcomes, but groupthink can also lead to ambiguous or positive outcomes. Examining the communication processes involved rather than focusing on the negative outcomes will increase the understanding of effective and ineffective decision making.

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