

REDUCING WORKPLACE BIAS: GROUPTHINK

SHORT DESCRIPTION

WHAT:

The groupthink bias refers to the fact that the tendency to seek uniformity within a group becomes an influence that stifles free thinking and mutes individual creativity, and expression.

PROBLEM:

The groupthink bias can stifle creativity and the purpose of group intelligence by elevating uniformity above creativity. This can defeat the whole purpose of having a collective of individuals trying to solve a problem.

SOLUTION:

The lesson and the meditation that accompanies it, will increase your awareness of groupthink, minimize group pressure and encourage independent thinking.



Groupthink is the tendency for a team of people to converge on a common pattern of agreement.

While this tendency towards agreement and resolution can be productive it can also influence the process of collaboration and rob it of its most useful attributes, like creativity, discussion and variety.

The process of any group can be influenced by a number of things: the instruction of the group, the leadership of the group and the perceived influence and authority of individuals within the group.

In order to foster individuality, creativity, divergent thinking and productive exploration, the ideal group sets the expectations, rules and realities that allow for most productive teamwork.

THESE INCLUDE...

1. An expectation that everyone within the group will be authentic and respectful
2. The understanding and commitment that any view will be respected, encouraged and considered.
3. An understanding that divergent views don't necessarily mean disagreements
4. That creative discussion involves considering a range of possibilities
5. A belief that productive discussion of different viewpoints is more valuable than collective agreement.

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When these above five characteristics are genuinely incorporated into the team ethos and practice, groupthink and the assumed drive to conformity will be minimized if not eliminated altogether. This is key as pressure to conform can lead to poor decisions and missed opportunities if not disasters.

For example, the CIA has often been blamed for not taking the threats of Osama bin Laden seriously because they had no experts in Islamic tradition to accurately interpret bin Laden's messages and threats. This leads to another valuable consideration in creating a team....

DIVERSITY

The problem under consideration in a group likely effects many different departments and individuals whose experience may very well be relevant to an effective discussion. This is critical in organizations where you're not just looking for compliance from your employees but more importantly are seeking active engagement.



Groupthink is the tendency of group members to prematurely coalesce towards a consensus without a full discussion or consideration of all the various possible solutions. The group as a whole has an influence on each individual member, often inhibiting them, consciously or otherwise, to agree with each other.

This often occurs because there is a misguided desire for group harmony or conformity, which then results in a dysfunctional decision-making process and even an irrational outcome. Because group members attempt to minimize conflict, they deliberate without suitably critical evaluation of alternative views and by actively suppressing dissenting viewpoints.

We all have heard or experienced, the *authority bias*, in which the CEO's views aren't questioned or challenged either for fear of alienating him or her, or on the suspicion that the decision has effectively been made, so there's no real point in further discussion, especially if it can cause dissension, or even personal criticism.

This then raises the importance of effective intragroup communication. Any effective and authentic communication depends on creating the right environment. Whether in a group or between two people, an effective communication environment is one in which all participants feel it is safe to express any views without fear of retribution, unfounded criticism, ridicule or abuse.

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If the communication environment is not safe in these ways, then you could be assured that the motivation to be forthright will be severely damaged. Indeed, in an environment where such trust and respect are not prevalent, the motivating force behind any communication will be an assessment of the consequences of speaking out about anything.

The effective communication environment is not just the function of the leader or most senior member of the group, it applies to all members of the group. The leader may be the most amenable person, willing to fairly listen to any comments with respect but if there's just one other member who can't do that, then the group culture is damaged, possibly very severely.



We need people to point out groupthink - We need people to point out stale, old, dumb thinking - and we sometimes need to do that when it's considered dangerous, strange, or, by some, offensive. And we should be, all of us, trying to protect that. It's really important.

– Jon Lovett

In addition to the environment, there are some people who just aren't very comfortable expressing different or unconventional views. The social dynamic of the group can be overwhelming and they just can't bring themselves to challenge the status quo or popular view. Such people might not be a good group member and one might look for other ways for them to communicate their ideas.

Other inhibitors to an effective and authentic group culture can also include political correctness. Political correctness is an antidote to an effective group dynamic as it once again poisons the opportunity for frank and honest dialog.

Needless to say Groupthink can be very damaging to any organization, leading to poor and even irrational decisions that are made to satisfy egos or bow to disruptive influences. It is critical, therefore, that any organizational group address these issues and aim to create a group ethic of authenticity, respect, trust and lack of fear.



Leaders can get stuck in groupthink because they're really not listening, or they're listening only to what they want to listen to, or they actually think they're so right that they're not interested in listening. And that leads to a lot of suboptimal solutions in the world.

– Jacqueline Novogratz

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Has your participation in a group ever been truly authentic, with all members being trusting, respectful?

Has your participation in a group been marked by personal agendas, egos, and vested interests?

Have you ever felt pushed to go along with the group in the name of solidarity?

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Demands for solidarity can quickly turn into demands for groupthink, making it difficult to express nuance.

– Rozane Gay

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MEDITATION

Relax and allow your mind to open to experience and to possibility. As you drift deeper, let memories of your participation in groups, gradually infuse your consciousness.

Demands for solidarity can quickly turn into demands for groupthink, making it difficult to express nuance. Demands for solidarity can quickly turn into demands for groupthink, making it difficult to express nuance.

A great team is one that has solidarity through authenticity. A great team is driven by respect, trust and honesty. When leaders want to impose their decisions on a group, they are missing out on potentially critical input. When leaders want to impose their decisions on a group, they might be getting their way but they are also alienating the team members. Imposing a decision on a group isn't leadership, it's a dictatorship.

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Trust, respect and honesty are the keys to authentic living. Trust, respect and honesty are the keys to effective communication. Trust, respect and honesty are the keys to an effective team and brilliant decision-making.

Group think is dangerous and can lead to damaging decisions. Groupthink makes a group obsolete. If you have a team with groupthink, think about dissolving the group. People need to point out groupthink. People need to point out stale, old, dumb thinking. People need to point out groupthink even when such honesty is considered dangerous, strange, or even offensive.

All of us should be trying to protect against groupthink. It's really important. Trust, respect and honesty are the keys to authentic living. Trust, respect and honesty are the keys to effective communication. Trust, respect and honesty are the keys to an effective team and brilliant decision-making. Groupthink discourages critical thinking and deep analysis .

A team meeting isn't a party where everyone needs to get along and have a good time. An effective team meeting can be difficult when it is based on trust, honesty, respect and authenticity but those qualities will make any difficulty amazing productive. Great decisions aren't made by like-minded people, they're made by individuals encouraged to be trusting, respectful, courageous and honest.

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