# The Concept of Groupthink

The public phrase “two heads are better than one” has been challenged about decision-making. Groupthink is a term that was first created by Irving Janis in 1972 and provides explanations of the nature in which decisions made through groups are prone to errors that eventually result to undesirable or even disastrous outcomes (Aldag, & Fuller, 1993). Groupthink occurs when the wish for group consensus take priority over people’s common sense to present their alternatives or critique a position. When this happens, the possibility of making a right decision is limited. It is normal when one is confronted with an issue, and a solution must be sort, the first thing one does is to gather his mates and try coming up with the solution to the problem. Nonetheless, what has happened in most situations is the complete opposite. Instead of getting the perfect solution, more problems are created.

There are several case studies that show the adverse effects of groupthink. An article by Esser, & Lindoerfer (1989) on two accidents involving NASA, unfortunate accidents happened that could have been avoided if groupthink was not used. On January 28, 1986, a space shuttle disaster occurred when it exploded 73 seconds after launching into the sky, and seven members died in that space ship. A similar incident took place in the year 2003 and also took the lives of seven other men. Unfortunately, it was realized that these tragedies could have been avoided if groupthink methodology was avoided and every opinion on the matter was raised. Their research shows that the team underestimated the damage during the launch of the Columbia shuttle (Esser, & Lindoerfer, 1989). The organization’s middle managers in the Mission Evaluation Room (where the engineering issues are resolved) are quite hesitant to raise issues of importance.

Another historical incident that was due to groupthink is the Bay of Pigs invasion plans. In this case, the participants gave in to group pressure even when their previous policy was not working (Kramer, 1998). Mr. Kennedy who was the president back then did his final act through decisions made by the selected committee. He felt the pressure of agreeing with the rest of the group members which is the case in most groupthink decisions. After the saddening outcome, President Kennedy revealed that if the press had shared what they knew before the plan was executed; the catastrophe in Cuba could have been avoided (Dunne, 2011). This actual outcome illustrates the negatives that accompany most group decisions. In spite of groupthink being associated with adverse outcomes, this does not mean that teamwork should be avoided. It only becomes inebriating when groupthink sets in.

In conclusion, groupthink can undermine the value of a group and even cost people their lives as in the historical cases discussed above. There are certain situations in life that call for the use of groups. These can be beneficial when communication between each member is neutral, and no one feels more superior to the other when it comes to giving suggestions over an issue. A noble leader knows when to take a step back so as not to influence the decisions of his group and this allows his group to explore all the ideas and perspectives.

## References

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