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Groupthink: The Dark Side of Team Cohesion

Authors : Farhad Eizakshiri

Abstract : The potential for groupthink to explain the issues contributing to deterioration of decision-making ability within the unitary team and so to cause poor outcomes attracted a great deal of attention from a variety of disciplines, including psychology, social and organizational studies, political science, and others. Yet what remains unclear is how and why the team members' strivings for unanimity and cohesion override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action. In this paper, the findings of a sequential explanatory mixed-methods research containing an experiment with thirty groups of three persons each and interviews with all experimental groups to investigate this issue is reported. The experiment sought to examine how individuals aggregate their views in order to reach a consensual group decision concerning the completion time of a task. The results indicated that groups made better estimates when they had no interaction between members in comparison with the situation that groups collectively agreed on time estimates. To understand the reasons, the qualitative data and informal observations collected during the task were analyzed through conversation analysis, thus leading to four reasons that caused teams to neglect divergent viewpoints and reduce the number of ideas being considered. Reasons found were the concurrence-seeking tendency, pressure on dissenters, self-censorship, and the illusion of invulnerability. It is suggested that understanding the dynamics behind the aforementioned reasons of groupthink will help project teams to avoid making premature group decisions by enhancing careful evaluation of available information and analysis of available decision alternatives and choices.

Keywords : groupthink, group decision, cohesiveness, project teams, mixed-methods research
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