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Groupthink

When groups develop a cohesive, internally consistent set of rules and norms, they are sometimes more concerned about not disrupting the group’s harmony than making the best decision. “Groupthink” is the term given to the pressure that highly cohesive groups exert on their members for uniform and acceptable decisions, and it actually reduces their capacity to make effective decisions.

The concept of groupthink was proposed as an attempt to explain certain ineffective decisions made by US government officials. Members of very cohesive groups have more faith in the group than in any different idea that any one of the group members might have. This results in suspending individual ideas to conform to the group.

The warning signals of groupthink are:

Symptom	Description
Illusion of invincibility	Ignoring obvious danger signals, being overly optimistic and taking extreme risks.
Collective rationalization	Discrediting or ignoring warning signals that are contrary to the groupthink
Unquestioned morality	Believing that the group’s position is always ethical and others are inherently evil
Excessive negative stereotyping	Viewing the opposite side as being too negative to warrant serious considerations.
Strong pressure to conform	Discouraging the expression of dissenting opinions under the threat of expulsion
Self-censorship of dissenting ideas	Withholding dissenting ideas and counter arguments, keeping them to oneself
Illusion of unanimity	Sharing the false belief that everyone in the group agree with the judgment
Self appointed mind guards	Protecting the group from negative, threatening information.



TenStep Supplemental Paper

Though the complete riddance of groupthink is impossible, managers must try to minimize it. The existence of the group is also endangered by groupthink - too many failures and the suppression of ideas will lead to defections in the group.