9.4: The Downside to Teams

Learning Objectives

- Explain Group Think.
- Explain Risky Shift Phenomenon.
- Describe Team Conflict.
- Discuss Social Loaing.
- Describe and explain the negative aspects of teams and how to prevent them from happening.

Not only are there different types of groups and teams, there are also different types of outcomes and challenges that groups can encounter. In this section, we will look at some of the negative challenges to teams. In this section, you will learn about the downside to teams and ways to prevent them from happening.

Groupthink

Irving Janis (1983) brought attention to the idea of “Groupthink.” Janis, I. (1983). *Groupthink: Psychological studies of policy decisions and fiascoes.* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin. Irving described groupthink as a group’s inclination to defer critical thinking and accept solutions without much consideration. Groups that encounter groupthink misjudge their own resources, find supporting evidence, and evade analyzing opposing ideas. Groupthink usually occurs when a crisis is discovered. Think back to an organization that you were involved with and how the crisis was dealt with. Was it handled in a responsible and ethical manner? Why or why not?
Take a few minutes to complete the crisis knowledge index. Compare your answers with others in your class. How can identifying a crisis help you prevent groupthink? How can identifying a crisis allow for groupthink to happen?

Crisis Knowledge Scale

Instructions: Below are several descriptions dealing with the extent to which you are now aware of the crisis that occurred. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to your perceptions about your knowledge of the crisis:

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<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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1. _____ I know the details of the crisis.
2. _____ I do not feel knowledgeable about the crisis that occurred.
3. _____ The details of the crisis that occurred are very clear to me.
4. _____ I do not know enough about the crisis that occurred.
5. _____ I do not comprehend the details of the crisis that occurred.
6. _____ My knowledge of the crisis that occurred is limited.
7. _____ I completely understand the details of the crisis that occurred.
8. _____ I feel knowledgeable about the details of the crisis that occurred.
9. _____ I comprehend the details of the crisis that occurred.
10. _____ The details of the crisis that occurred are not clear to me.

Recode = 2, 4, 5, and 10. Add all items together.


Janis noted that groupthink as "a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when members' striving for unanimity overrides their motivation to realistically appraise alternative course of action." Janis, I. (1983). Groupthink: Psychological studies of policy decisions and fiascoes. (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, pg. 9. Groupthink happens quite often. Think about a group meeting that you have been involved with. Perhaps, one person in the group will offer a suggestion and/or idea, then everyone in the group agrees with it without thinking about the negative or positive consequences of the idea. People do this all the time because the person who offered the idea might be a highly powerful member, others don’t want to disagree, or there is not a huge stake in the decision. At times people will not offer resisting ideas or be a devil’s advocate on an idea because there may be consequences or the person is fearful of what others may think. Groupthink can cause frustration to individuals who feel that their voices are not heard and their time was not valued. Hence, it is important to provide opportunities for all group members to speak so that groupthink does not occur.
Risky Shift

Groupthink is not the only thing that happens in groups. Sometimes groups will make “risky” or precarious decisions. Isenberg, D. J. (1986). Group polarization: A critical review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 50*(6): 1141–1151. This results in what is known as risky shift. The result that happens when individuals are more likely to make riskier group decisions than individual decisions. Isenberg found that individuals are more likely to make riskier group decisions than individual decisions. For instance, in a group discussion, there are members that may advocate for an extreme position more than they would in other circumstances, because they are part of a group. Daniel Isenberg illustrated that risky shift has occurred in jury decision making processes. Isenberg, D. J. (1986). Group polarization: A critical review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 50*(6): 1141–1151. Mock jury members were more likely to choose punitive damages that varied significantly from individual juror members. The findings revealed that when individuals would support a low award, group discussion would influence the juror to a more compassionate result. At the same time, if the juror wanted a harsh penalty, after group discussion, the juror would be more likely to give a harsher punishment. Risky shift maintains that a group’s decision tends to be more risky than the individual group member’s decision before the group convened. Risky shift is an important concept, because it not only illustrates how one group member cannot affect the entire group, but also how it impacts the individual’s own decision. Thus, communication between and among group members cannot be overstated.

Team Conflict

Conflict is the discord among group members. This can be primary or secondary. is inevitable and will most likely occur in groups and teams. Roy Berko, Andrew Wolvin, and Darlyn Wolvin categorized two types of tensions that group will encounter: primary and secondary. Berko, R., Wolvin, A., & Wolvin, D. (2012). Communicating: A social and career focus (12th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson. The first is primary tension, which happens initially when groups are formed. The second is called secondary tension, which happens after group has been developed. In other words, primary tensions are ones that often happen before the group meets and secondary tensions often happen after the group meets.

Primary Tension


- A fear that the each member in the group will not have similar tasks and responsibilities.
- An uncertainty about the topic of the meeting and the possibility for uncomfortable topics.
- The topic is uneasy and/or distressing.
- The task might involve written or speaking skills and they do not feel competent in those skills.
- They have communication apprehension, which means they are nervous about communicating in that context.
- They meeting will cause more work or work that is beyond their capabilities.
- They do not feel properly prepared.
- Previous negative group experiences.
- Negative working relationship with the team leader.
• Time constraints
• Other personal issues that might interfere with their involvement with the group.

As you can see, each of these tensions can make work conditions rather uncomfortable. Think about a group meeting that you had to prepare for, did you have any of these primary tensions? How did you react to them?

Secondary Tensions


• **Procedural** tensions originate from group members’ perceptions that the group is not productive. Group members believe that the agenda is ineffective and/or that the team leader is not adhering to the agenda.

• **Equity** tensions happen when group members do not feel equal. They may feel that certain things are not fair, such as work load and/or responsibility. On the other hand, equity issues may stem from feel that there are more controlling members that dominate and their opinions are worth more than others.

• **Affective** tensions happen when team members do not like each other. Team members will find it more difficult to communicate. There may be huge rivalry and competitiveness in the group.

• **Substantive** happen when there are legitimate concerns about the task. Conflict here can turn into problem solving moments, creativity, increased information sharing, and provide a better perspective of the opposition. Substantive conflict is beneficial because everyone gets a different perspective of the same topic. It can result in a better outcome because all voices are heard.

Social Loafing

Another downside to teams is social loafing. This happens when certain group members do not put forth as much effort in the group compared to when they are working independently. Karau, S. J., & Williams, K. D. (1993). Social loafing: A meta-analytic review and theoretical integration. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65, 681–706. Social loafing happens when certain group members do not put forth as much effort in the group compared to when they are working independently. Sometimes groups are not productive because group members do not fully contribute. Sometimes you will get the best work when group members work by themselves because they don’t have to report or communicate with anyone else. Think about a group that you were involved in, did someone “ride your coat tails” or became a “free-rider”? Take a few minutes to complete Note 9.18 "Workplace Input Scale" on Workplace Input Scale. Do you think you engage in social loafing? Why or why not?

There is research that discusses how social loafing can be avoided. Dan Rothwell argued that social loafing can be prevented by collaboration, content, and choice. Rothwell, J. D. (2012). In the company of others: An introduction to communication (4th ed.). New York, NY: Oxford. He noted that competitive situations will not get group members motivated and motivation can impede social loafing. First, collaboration is the key to get everyone involved. If everyone feels like they are special and are given meaningful tasks, then they are more likely to contribute. Second, content provides each group member with their importance to the task. People are more likely to contribute if they are informed with the knowledge about their task and other group members are informed about that group members contribution.
Third, choice is helpful for social loafing because it provides group members to pick the task that they are better apt or skilled to complete.

**Workplace Input Scale**

Instructions: This survey includes a number of statements about how you may feel about your current working condition. You will probably find that you agree with some of the statements and disagree with others, to varying extents. Please indicate your reaction to each of the statements by marking your opinion to the left of each statement according to the following scale:

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1. _____I have no input at work at all.
2. _____Nobody cares about what I say at work.
3. _____People at work do not listen to my input at all.
4. _____When I have a good idea at work, it’s like I’m talking to a wall.
5. _____People always listen to my suggestions at work.
6. _____No one wants to hear my ideas at work.
7. _____My co-workers pay attention to my input.
8. _____People in my workplace always heed my suggestions.
9. _____People take my ideas seriously at work.
10. _____I have no problem having my ideas heard at work.
11. _____I have a lot of input on the job.
12. _____My input plays an important part on my job.
13. _____People listen to what I have to say at work.
14. _____No one pays attention to my ideas at work.
15. _____Nobody listens to my suggestions at work.
16. _____People care about my ideas at work.
17. _____When I have a good idea at work, people listen.
18. _____No one takes my ideas seriously at work.
19. _____No one in my workplace heeds my suggestions.
20. _____I have a problem getting my ideas heard at work.

Recode: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 14, 15, 18, 19, & 20

Key Takeaways

• Groupthink occurs when there is a crisis and none of the group members stop to analyze the pros and cons of the solution.

• Conflict occurs in teams. There are two types of tensions: primary and secondary. Primary occurs before the meeting starts and secondary occurs after the meeting begins.

• Risky shift occurs when group members are more likely to make a riskier decision as a group rather than individually.

• Social loafing happens when group members do not work as hard in a group context compared to when they work by themselves.

Exercises

1. Think of a time when you’ve been in a group, what are the advantages and disadvantages with working in a group?

2. Apply the different downsides to teamwork to one of your group experiences. If you had the ability to change it, what could you have done or do differently to prevent these downsides?

3. Complete the Workplace Input Scale. Based on the results from your analysis of your group experience(s), what areas do you think you could improve upon? Why do you think your other group members communicate to you in the way he or she does?