

Team Decision Making

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Team Decision Making

- Two heads are better than one
- Vs.
- Too many cooks spoil the broth

Being a group member changes the decision making process and its outcomes

There are two main groups of possible reasons:

1. Affective

- Related with the need to feel good as a team member - one of the main aspects may be a strong group coherence which can result in increased conformity (example of a consequence - groupthink)

2. Cognitive

- Related with information processing and its important limitations (example of a consequence - inferior results of team brainstorming)

Group polarization

- Opinions and attitudes of team members tend to become more polarized after group discussion in comparison to their level prior to discussion
(Brauer, Judd, Gliner, 2006; Myers, 1982)
- Two elements are necessary for it to occur:
 - group members need to at least slightly favor one of the options
 - group members need to have a discussion

Reasons for group polarization (and other phenomena)

- Cognitive - discussion elicits arguments which make the preferred option seem even „more right” - each group member is exposed to new arguments that strengthen his/her convictions (Van Swol, 2009)
- Affective - group members develop social identity and being a member of a group with strong opinions may help reach that goal

Groupthink symptoms (phenomenon first described by Janis)

- Illusion of invulnerability
- Rationalizing warnings that might challenge the group's assumptions.
- Unquestioned belief in the morality of the group
- Stereotyping those who are opposed to the group as evil or stupid.
- Direct pressure to conform placed on any member who questions the group
- Self censorship of ideas that deviate from the apparent group consensus.
- Illusions of unanimity among group members
- Self-appointed mind guards

Groupthink was described on political decision consequences (in hindsight 😊).
Modern example - Icelandic banks and the financial crisis.

If these elements occur during your team decision making process, be careful.

Common information effect during team discussion

- Teams put too large emphasis and spend too much time discussing shared information.
- At the same time unique information is omitted in the discussion and does not have a real influence on the final decision.

Common information effect - several reasons

- Discussing shared information evokes more positive emotions
- Team members are seen as more trustworthy and also more competent when they share what others agree with or what others already know
- There is a bias in information perception - shared information is seen as more credible and relevant

Research on communication and group creativity

Research that focused on brainstorming showed several important results. Conclusions were not particularly optimistic:

- There was little evidence that groups can be more creative than individuals (Paulus, Brown, Ortega, 1999)
- Some scholars emphasized the idea that groupwork may in fact hinder creativity (Wojciszke, 2008)

Why work in group then?

- There are other crucial aspects - satisfaction, learning, willingness to implement ideas

Why can group communication hinder creativity?

There are motivational reasons:

- Group members tend to share information that they all possess and not share unique information (Stasser, Birchmeier, 2003)
- Group members may engage in social loafing
- Group members may have a tendency to hide opinions that are not held by the group majority

There are technical reasons:

- Only one person can speak at a time and this may distract thinking as well as make people forget their ideas

Functional Group Communication Theory

- Tries to explain in what way communication is related to the quality of decisions made by groups.
- Is focused on both the process and its outcome
- Strongly influenced both theoretical and practical field
- Major scholars involved in its creation - Dennis Gouran and Randy Hirokawa
- Main assumption - group decision making effectiveness is determined by the level to which communication behaviors fulfill requirements for successful task completion (they are called *functional requisites*)

Functional Group Communication Theory - Functional requisites

If the group is to make an effective decision it has to:

- Understand what type of an answer should be developed when analyzing the issue under consideration.
- Find out what the characteristics of an acceptable answer are(What criteria should a desired choice satisfy?).
- Develop a set of alternatives among which an acceptable answer is presumed to exist. It means that the group should create a broad range of possible answers/alternatives/solutions to the issue that is considered.
- Put each plausible alternative under a critical examination in terms of accepted criteria that constitute answer requirements. This requires skills, knowledge, and a sense of objectivity from group members.
- Select the best alternative after comparing them against each other.

Functional Group Communication - How communication influences decision making

- Communication can influence decision making in three ways:
 - It can play a promotive role when it allows the group to successfully accomplish functional requisites.
 - It can play a disruptive role when it creates obstacles which prevent the group from satisfying functional requisites.
 - It can play a counteractive role when it neutralizes a communicative act that has a disruptive influence.

Main assumption: groups that better fulfill functional requisites of effective decision making will make better decisions.

Sources and recommended readings

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- Lehrer, J. (2012, January 30th). Groupthink. The brainstorming myth. *The New Yorker*. Available at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/01/30/groupthink>