

## **Chapter 14: Groups**

### The Nature and Purpose of Group Living

#### Social Facilitation

- Initial Research
- Resolving the Contradictions
- Mere Presence or Evaluation Apprehension?
- Current Perspectives
- Practical Applications

#### Deindividuation and the Psychology of Mobs

- Emergent Properties of Groups
- Deindividuation and the Group Mind
- Self-Awareness and Individuation

#### Group Decision Making

- Groupthink
- Group Decisions: Risky or Conservative?
- Group Polarization
- Polarization in Modern Life

## **Groups**

The presences of people affect your behavior and thinking processes. Working in a group may or may not facilitate better decisions or solutions.

When groups have a problem that has a well-defined answer or a factual answer, (like the horse problem in Chapter 8) or techniques to drive a UPS truck to expedite deliveries, groups are more likely to arrive at the solution than the average individual ([page 555](#)).

### **Horse problem**

A man bought a horse for \$60 and sold it for \$70. Then he bought the same horse for \$80 and sold it again for \$90.

- Write down how much money was made in both transactions combined.

### **UPS deliveries**

Set up your delivery routes so that you minimize the number of left hand turns

## **Groups: Groupthink**

Among peer groups and informal settings in which social harmony is important, the costs of an incorrect decision aren't as disastrous as those made by government and large corporations ([page 556](#)).

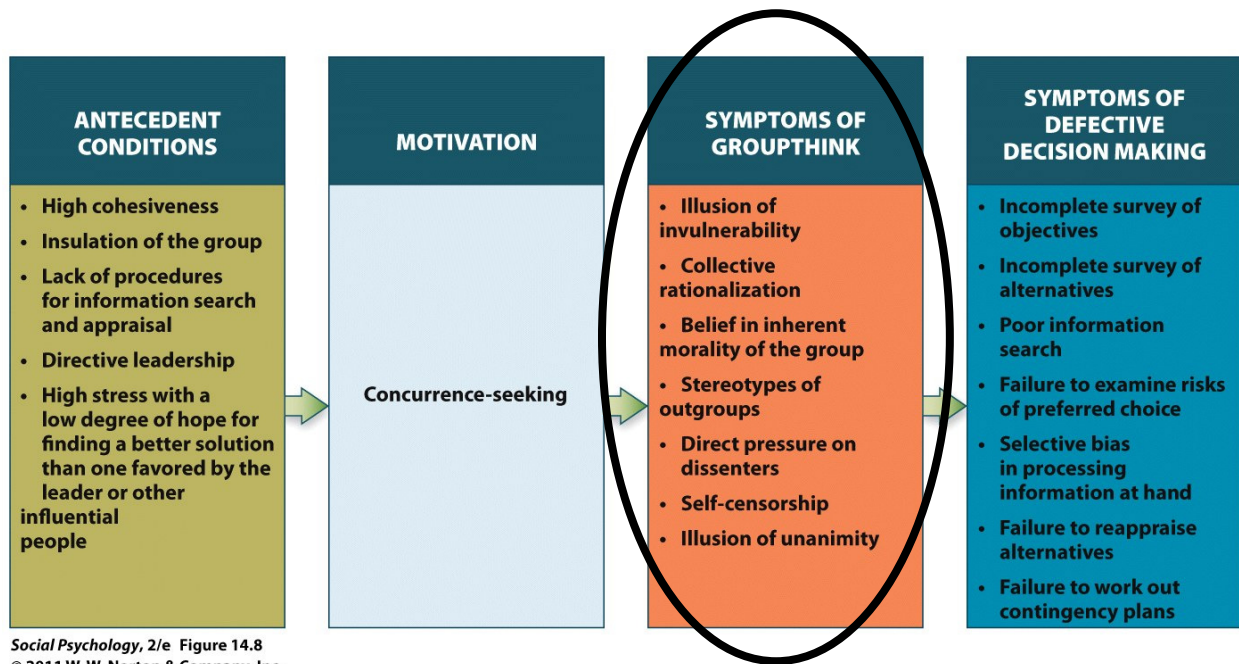
Irving Janis examined decisions made by government officials that led to bad decisions such as the following:

- The Bay of Pigs Invasion of Cuba to overthrow the Castro regime.
- The Johnson Administration to escalate the war in Vietnam.
- The conclusion by the U.S. naval high command to prevent the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.
- The launching of the space shuttle Challenger in 1986.

Janis says that groupthink occurred in these decisions.

Groupthink is a kind of faulty thinking on the part of highly cohesive groups in which the critical scrutiny that should be devoted to the issues at hand is subverted by social pressures to reach consensus.

## Symptoms and Sources of Groupthink



Group decisions that experience groupthink tend to engage in shallow examination of information (such as relying on stereotypes, “common knowledge”, or superficial characteristics of an argument), a narrow consideration of alternatives, a sense of invulnerability and moral superiority (page 556).

Groups that engage in groupthink tend to have a strong leader, ignores alternative points of view, and discourages dissenting ideas. Good group decision-making involves the opposite processes.

## **Reducing Groupthink**

To minimize the tendency for subordinates to self-censor themselves in group discussions, it is important for the leader or decision-maker to state their preference after everyone else has spoken. If the leader gives their preference first, it may prevent a healthy discussion of alternatives and opinions.

Have the membership of the group change so that there will be different opinions and points of view.

Appoint one person to become the “devil’s advocate”. Their job is to point out all the weaknesses of the group’s proposed course of action.

All of these are important to reduce bad decision making in groups. These take time. It is psychologically uncomfortable. If your goal is good policy, then it is worth it.

## Group Polarization

Group polarization is the tendency for group decisions to be more extreme than those made by individuals. Whatever the individuals are leaning on a topic, group discussion tends to make them lean further in that direction.

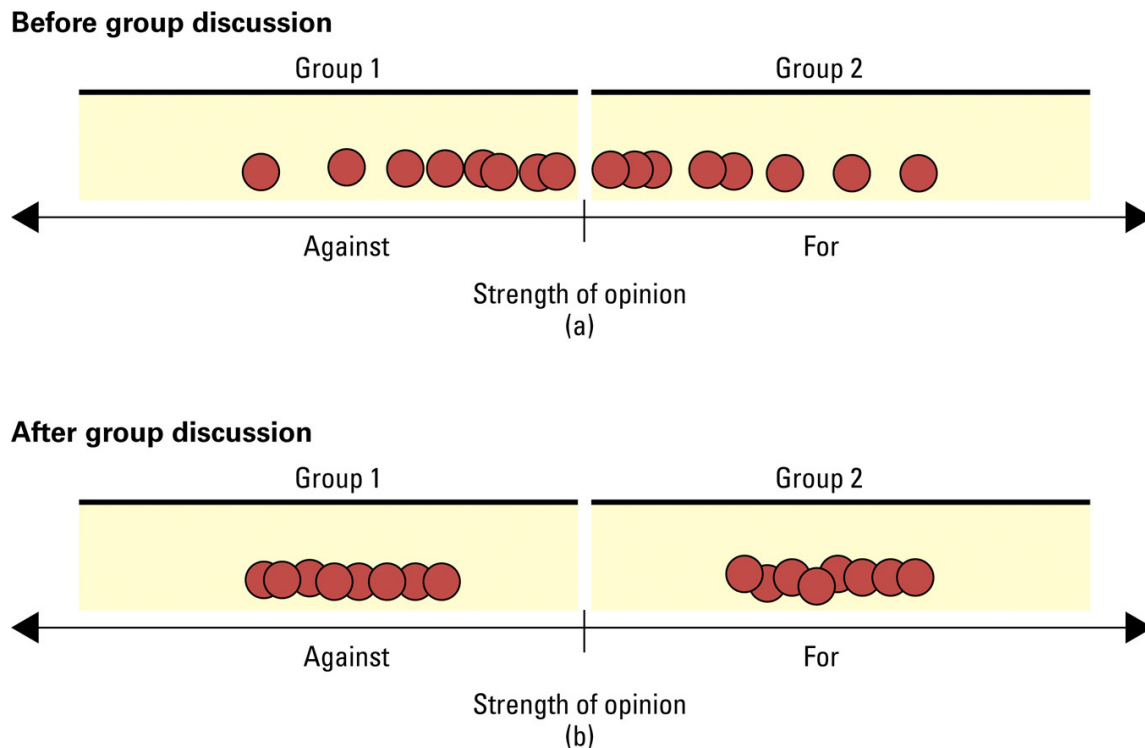


Image source: Psychology, Gray

## Explaining Group Polarization

- The “persuasive argument” account
  - Groups, rather than individually expose themselves to more arguments for their course of action than against. This strengthens and emboldens our positions.
- The social comparison interpretation
  - In order to determine if our beliefs are “correct” we measure or compare ourselves to the social environment. In addition, we tend to believe we are “better than average” or “more correct” than others, which brings the polarization.

With the internet, we tend to selectively expose ourselves to information that is consistent with our prior beliefs. We seek information consistent with our beliefs (the confirmation bias), and can lead us to become more extreme in our views. We tend not to expose ourselves to information inconsistent with our beliefs.