The damaging, hidden Power of Groupthink: Elevate critical thinking toward excellence in advocacy

Naomi White
Professor of Instruction | School of Social Work
November 14, 2019
2019 NASW OH Conference
Groupthink

2 + 2 = 5
Groupthink I | In-Group Bias

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jw2Y3dU7Mc  2:13
What is Groupthink?

Social Psychologist | Irving L. Janis | 1972

• Psychological phenomenon-
  ▪ consensus within the group supersedes individual members personal beliefs
  ▪ group members will then adopt the opinion of the rest of the group
  ▪ group members opposing the decision or overriding opinion of the group, remain silent (*keep the peace rather than disrupt the group consensus*).
Janis Aha moments
Social Psychologist | Irving L. Janis | 1972

Psychological phenomenon

An examination of the decision making processes of groups- the need for members to reach unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action (Kaba, Wishart, Fraser, Coderre, & McLaughlin, 2016).
Groupthink- “A mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action” (Irving, 1972, p.9).

“Preserve group harmony test to every decision they face” (Irving, 1989, p. 60).
https://video.nationalgeographic.com/wild/how-human-are-you/00000144-78d9-d3b1-a1ee-79dd586d0000

National Geographic | How Human are you? | Groupthink | 2:52
“Concurrence-seeking group members move toward converging opinions about the adoption of a certain course of action in a given decision situation.”

Hart, 1991, p.257

WHEN ALL THINK ALIKE, THEN NO ONE IS THINKING

-WALTER LIPPMAN-
What is Groupthink? Symptoms of Group Think

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWEvJciU0Zc | 2:54
8 Symptoms of Groupthink

Overconfidence
overestimation in the group’s abilities

- Illusion of invulnerability
- Belief in Inherent Morality of the Group

Tunnel vision members use to view the problem

- Collective Rationalization
- Out-group Stereotypes
8 Symptoms of Groupthink cont’d

Strong conformity pressure

- Self-Censorship
- Illusion of Unanimity
- Direct pressure on dissenters
- Self-Appointed Mind guards
8 Symptoms of Groupthink cont’d

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBw0ased8Sw

https://vimeo.com/200029841 3:02
Impact of Symptoms on whole person
Groupthink | Group Influence

People change their behavior or attitudes to match those of the group they identify with or seek to belong to. Group members often prematurely seek consensus, influencing decisions and actions.

https://www.overcominghateportal.org/group-think.html
Groupthink | Group Polarization

- The original attitudes of individuals become exaggerated when shared by others.
- Group members can fuel each other’s sense of superiority, dislike for adversaries and outrage at any perceived threat.
- In extreme cases, this exaggerated polarization can lead to group frenzy and mob behavior.

https://www.overcominghateportal.org/group-think.html
Identification with a group makes individuals unduly subject to being influenced by the biases, loyalties, and values of the group.

https://www.overcominghateportal.org/group-think.html
Group Think- Understanding & Overcoming Hate

Group Projection

- Each “side” projects traits onto the groups that it sees as allies or foes. Two polarized sides call each other biased and extreme.
- Each may truly believe that the other is being unreasonable. Semantics can blur the line.

https://www.overcominghateportal.org/group-think.html
Implications for Professional Helpers
Hmm...
Critical thinking
Definition | Critical thinking

Thinking critically depends upon

- an open mind,
- reasoning,
- logic,
- questioning of assumptions,
- data,
- information, and
- evidence.

In order to engage in critical thinking, a person must value evidence and facts rather than opinions or beliefs.
Why critical thinking?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3pomejCwPY
Advocacy
Definition | Advocacy

The social work profession was founded in social change. Throughout the profession’s history, social workers have sought to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources and opportunities that allow them to meet their basic needs. NASW upholds this challenge by advocating for the association to members of Congress and regulatory agencies that so often hold the authority to influence policy.

NASW has developed a policy agenda, which asserts the association’s advocacy priorities for the legislative cycle. NASW’s policy agenda is consistent with the NASW policies in Social Work Speaks, which is developed by members of the association at Delegate Assembly.

NASW website: https://www.socialworkers.org/Advocacy
Global Definition of the Social Work Profession

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.”

International Federation of Social Work

**NASW Ohio Core Values & Mission Statement**

**Service | Social Justice | Dignity and Worth of People | Importance of Human Relationships | Integrity | Competence**

**Mission Statement**

The mission of NASW Ohio Chapter is to strengthen, support, and unify the social work profession, to promote the development of social work standards and practice, and to **advocate** for social policies that advance social justice and diversity.
1. To solve specific problems through concrete changes in public policies and program

2. To strengthen and empower civil society

3. To promote and consolidate democracy

http://europeanadvocacy.org/why-engage-in-advocacy/
Bridge | Critical thinking | Decisions | Advocacy
Bridge | Critical thinking | Decisions | Advocacy

https://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/glossary/ethics 1:34
Groupthink Influences...

How can I, the professional helper, elevate critical thinking toward excellence in advocacy when I am unwilling to step away from the group and remember to think, even when I like the group?
What can we do?
10th man theory | World War Z

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcNK7M2eCI4 | 3:09
5 Ways to Prevent Groupthink

- **Plan for it.** Be proactive and ready to address it when it surfaces or feels like it might surface.

- **Seek feedback.** Reach out to those who will be impacted by decisions and obtain their feedback. Seek out the subtle issues (no matter how small) and address them openly.

- **Encourage debate.** True commitment from everyone on the team is only created through healthy debate (or conflict).

- **Leverage diversity of thought.** Tapping into different thinking styles and personalities ensures a more holistic view of how others think and feel about a topic. It also creates a safe place to discuss issues and concerns.

- **Recognize data bias.** Instead of relying on data as facts, acknowledge that data and statistics might be biased, such as insiders handpicking data to reassure leaders about decisions already made.

*Ferguson Values, 2018*
Prevent Groupthink

Vigilant problem solving
(Kelman, Sanders, & Pandit, 2016)

- Advisors **bring** diverse knowledge & opinions
- Leaders **seeks** dissenting views
- Critically **examines** costs & risks of choices
- **Willing** to revise an initial view in response to deliberation
Groupthink - Definition, Causes and Ways to Prevent It

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWoH2J8sLP8  5:48
Groupthink & Project Performance: The Influence of Personal Traits & Interpersonal Ties
Riccobono, Bruccoleri, & Grobler, 2016

Board Groupthink
Coles, Daniel, Naveen, 2014

The Enron board: The Perils of Groupthink
O’Connor, 2003

“Tell It Like It is”: Decision Making, Groupthink, and Decisiveness among U.S. Federal Subcabinet Executives
Kelman, Sanders, & Pandit, 2017

Groupthink of Irving Janis
Janis, 1991
(The Challenger Launch)
Refuting Groupthink

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKH5ITx6AAK
3:09


We elevate social work
With intentionality... We think... I think and I don’t stop