Leader's Guide To The CRM Video

GROUPTHINK

Revised Edition

25 minutes, color

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INTRODUCTION

No area of organizational life is more subject to scrutiny than group decision making – or more vulnerable to failure. A deluge of articles, books, even entire management courses assault us daily with a kaleidoscope of procedures and stratagems all promising to somehow indemnify the success of group decisions. Unfortunately, such attempts often fail because they overlook essential truth – decision making remains a very human process and, as such, is subject to human error.

CRM's **GROUPTHINK** has been the best-selling decision making training video for two decades precisely because it effectively addresses the underlying psychological factors that can make or break a successful decision. Now, CRM is proud to introduce **GROUPTHINK, Revised Edition** featuring an updated, thought-provoking analysis of the complexity of modern decision making.

Utilizing examples that reinforce in a compelling way the importance of group decisions, the video breaks new ground by probing in depth the group interactions that led to the decision to launch the ill-fated *Challenger*, as well as other modern decisions. Like the original, it is highlighted by an exclusive interview with famed psychologist Dr. Irving Janis, who first coined the term, and includes a detailed analysis of the eight symptoms of *groupthink.*

With remarkable footage from the award-winning ABC-TV Movie, **Challenger**, based upon the Rogers Commission investigation into the space shuttle accident, **GROUPTHINK, Revised Edition** answers many questions about how each of us can spot defective group decisions, as well as offering strategies for countering such decisions. At the same time, it will provoke thoughtful discussion in any group or organization and prompt a new awareness of our mutual responsibility to confront one another, to reason and to make decisions, together.

Kirby Timmons, Creative Director for CRM FILMS

SYNOPSIS

As a number of NASA project managers and contractors are convened to discuss a shuttle launch delay, we are reminded of the importance of group decisions particularly light of the growing complexity of our goals and technology. When the shuttle is question is revealed as the *Challenger* on that fateful day in January, 1986, the point is forcefully bought home.

Our Host introduces the concept of *groupthink*, by which group members' desire for agreement somehow overrides their ability to realistically appraise alternative courses of action. This concept, first proposed by Dr. Irving Janis in the early 70's, is explained more fully by Dr. Janis himself, as he stresses the importance of "group cohesiveness" in a number of settings – sports, family, business. More recently, the growing complexity of organizational life has created additional pressures, as we see people in stressful business settings.

In order to more fully understand the origin of *groupthink*, we now see without narration or commentary footage (courtesy of Hearst Entertainment, all rights reserved ®) detailing the private meetings between NASA engineers and key contractors leading up to the decision to launch *Challenger*. During these meetings, several key elements are apparent – contractor engineers are concerned about how low temperatures might affect the seals between the SRB (solid rocket booster) joints, NASA representatives are unwilling to further delay their already overdue shuttle launch schedule, and contractor senior managers are apparently fearful of jeopardizing their contractor status with NASA. The sequence ends with the decision to launch despite the weather conditions and the doubts of the engineers.

After the sequence, we are introduced to Dr. James K. Esser, Professor, Department of Psychology at Lamar University, who was among the first researchers to analyze the *Challenger* incident in relation to *groupthink*.

By replaying selected interactions from the previous NASA meetings, Dr. Esser now explains each of the eight symptoms of *groupthink* and how, together, they could have indicated the presence of faulty decision making:

One senior NASA engineer reiterates the contract specifications for the solid rocket boosters while another reminds everyone that even in the event of the failure of the primary *o-ring*, a secondary back-up system exists. Together, these statements are examples of what is called an *illusion of invulnerability*, a feeling that the group is somehow immune from failure.

Group members may also succumb to the *belief in the inherent morality of the group*, as when the contractor engineer explains his recommendation not to launch by saying that it is "away from goodness," only to be rebutted by a senior NASA executive who proclaims loftily that "goodness" is what all of them want. *Rationalization* is illustrated as one engineer reminds another of the many successful flights the shuttle has already achieved.

The next symptom is a curious phenomenon in which group members engage in stereotyping of out-groups as a by-product of group loyalty. This is shown by the development of a *we vs. them* mentality by NASA in regards to the news media for harassment of NASA by the media over launch delays. If group members are afraid or unwilling to express their own doubts about group action, they may also engage in *self-censorship* as depicted when a NASA official asks, "Does anyone in the loop have a different position?" – no one speaks up though each later would testify to extreme doubts about the launch.

But what about those situations where someone does speak out? In such cases, *direct pressure* may be applied by the group on dissenter, illustrated as one NASA official demands sarcastically, "My god, … when do you want me to launch? Next April?"

Another symptom of *groupthink* my be the presence of what are called *mindguards*, self-proclaimed protectors of the group from dissenting thoughts and ideas. An example is the

contractor's memo that was never forwarded to NASA decision-makers. The final symptom occurs when group members achieve an illusion of unanimity, illustrated in the *Challenger* example as the group reverses itself and recommends going ahead with the proposed launch.

In addition to the *Challenger* incident, such modern events as the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Bay of Pigs are interpreted in light of groupthink. Despite such catastrophes, however, the video shows that groups are not pre-ordained to develop *groupthink*. A reflection on Kennedy's handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis details point by point how leaders can initiate group interactions in ways that can foster a positive decision making climate.

BACKGROUND

It was back in 1971 that psychologist Irving L. Janis first hypothesized about something he called *groupthink*, which he credited with being a potentially important influence upon group decision making.

Janis could hardly have imagined the effect his modest theory would have on the world beyond his Yale University laboratory. The concept helped to transform a then-fledgling offshoot of social psychology called *group dynamics* into what today could rightly be considered the bedrock of management science. Yet ironically the concept of *groupthink* today continues to be popularly misunderstood as some bizarre and rare aberration of the human mind, something associated with Orwellian horror fiction, or worse, horror fact such as Nazism or the Guyana Tragedy.

Groupthink is not nearly so simple. Or, for that matter, rare – consider that if as part of your job you meet regularly in groups, then you are potentially affected by *groupthink* on an ongoing basis. And, while it can lead to horrors that are all too real, *groupthink*, not unlike heart disease, is a silent disease, doing its devastation in quiet, subdued day-to-day routine. Its results need not always be a highly-public fiasco, still its effects can be nightmares enough for most organizations – lost productivity, reduced morale and motivation, and growing inability to reach even routine decisions successfully.

So it seems an appropriate time to review what we know about this psychological phenomenon called *groupthink* that is often blamed for organizational dysfunction but little understood.

Group Cohesiveness

Janis began logically enough, tracing back from what he considered the classic decision-making fiascoes of modern history – Pearl Harbor, the Bay of Pigs invasion, Truman's crossing of the 38th parallel leading to the start of the Korean War. He was looking for a common thread, some single element that could lead reasonable, even accomplished, group decision makers to embark upon what in retrospect were clearly hopeless courses of action.

What struck Janis repeatedly was the inability of the groups in question to see beyond their own narrow focus, to rationally consider alternatives, and to foresee how their course of action would seriously threaten – and in some cases destroy – the groups' very goals and principles. Also striking in each case, was the extreme stated desire among group members to "please one another," to be perceived as *team players*, and to retain their membership in the group.

"What's at work is one of the most primitive needs that we all have," according to psychologist Dan Goldman, "the need to feel that we belong to a secure family, that we have a place in the world, that we have a home, that we have people who love us, who will care for us. And that need is so basic that we'll do everything to protect that sense of belonging.

Put another way in a recent PBS special, it's what Bill Moyers called the *public mind* – described as "the shared reality that we create … that is as susceptible to self-deception as we are individually … the sum total of the things we won't look at.

Janis termed this new phenomenon *groupthink*, and defined it as "a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in –group, when the members' striving for unanimity overrides their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action."

New Factors

Janis later (in 1977 and again in 1982) expanded on his theory by pointing out a number of other factors that, combined with cohesiveness, could help foster *groupthink* – a highly – insulated group with restrained access to outside feedback; a stressful decision –making context such as that brought on by budgetary restraints, external pressure, or a history of recent setbacks.

Janis might well have been reciting the litany of modern organizational life – isolation, stress and budget dilemmas.   Little wonder that, through the years, countless other researchers have identified and documented continuing examples of decision-making fiascoes affected by *groupthink* – the cover-up of the Watergate burglary of democratic headquarters, the decision by the Reagan administration to exchange arms for hostages in the Iran-Contra Affair, even the decision to launch the ill-fated *Challenger* despite serious design and weather concerns.

Symptoms Of Groupthink

Janis was able to identify eight symptoms that, if present, could give groups and organization an early warning that *groupthink* may indeed be present. He and other researchers have repeatedly shown that the more of these symptoms present in any decision –making group, the higher the probability that the group will develop *groupthink* and, therefore, the more likely the group will arrive at a decision that will be unsuccessful, possibly even catastrophic.

Symptom #1: Illusion of Invulnerability

A feeling of power and authority is important to any decision –making group. It gives group members confidence that they will be able to carry through on any decisions reached. However, if they come to believe that any decision they reach will, therefore, be successful, then they have become prey to an *illusion of invulnerability.* Janis showed that military decision makers had this illusion in opting not to more heavily fortify Pearl Harbor prior to the disastrous attack by the Japanese leading to U.S. entry into World War II.

President Nixon and his advisors apparently were unconcerned that a third-rate burglary could adversely affect the Presidency itself. Several administrations later, Reagan's advisors succumbed to this same illusion in believing, by giving arms to a terrorist nation in violation of Congress in exchange for aid backing revolutionary forces in central America, also in violation of Congress, that their administration would not be criticized. In one of the ironic twists that the characteristic of *groupthink*, this *illusion of invulnerability* can become largely responsible for actually increasing the vulnerability of the group.

Symptom #2: Belief in the Inherent Morality of the Group

All of us, whether a part of decision-making groups or not, need to believe in the rightness of our actions. In the extreme, this has lead to exhortations that "God is on our side," or the cloaking of jingoistic activities in the flag itself. Such claims fulfill an important function – they relieve us of responsibility for justifying decisions according to rational procedures. We do this, it appears, as a way to protect our self-esteem – something it has been shown we will go to great lengths to defend…

An example: in 1977, trustees at Kent State University finalized a decision to enlarge the school's gymnasium onto an area where, seven years previously students and Ohio National Guardsmen clashed on May 4, 1970, leaving four students dead. Now, a new protest arose – this time in opposition to the proposed building site.

Despite growing protest by student groups, the trustees refuse to reconsider their decision, insisting that they had a moral obligation to represent the student majority against what they repeatedly characterize as a radical minority – incorrectly as it turned out. When both the student body and faculty went to court to stop construction, the trustees' self-esteem dictated that they modify their position – they now declared themselves as representing "the state of Ohio."

Symptom #3: Rationalization

In finalizing any decision process, it is normal and natural to downplay the drawbacks of a chosen course. The problem in a group arises when legitimate objections exist, but they are completely overshadowed by the perceived negative reaction to anyone voicing those objections

to the group. Key engineers in the *Challenger* decision ultimately withdrew their objections to the ill-fated launch, not because of any correction in the admittedly problematic o-rings, but rather because they rationalized the perceived risk of catastrophic launch failure as only "possible," while the risk of censure and ostracism for continuing to speak out against the launch became a virtual certainty.

In the decision to go forward with the arms-for-hostages ploy that ultimately led to the Iran-Contra scandal, it was rationalized by key decision makers that, since the transfer was being funneled through the Israelis, culpability for the illegal actions could be avoided altogether by the Reagan administration in the event of disclosure. Not only was this a false rationalization, it deflected attention from even a cursory consideration of the effects on the administration of the public outcry that disclosure would certainly bring.

Symptom #4: Stereotypes of Out-Groups

President Truman and his advisors fell victim to the temptation to falsely characterize enemy groups in 1950 with the decision to cross the 38th parallel, a line drawn by the Chinese communists as a "line in the sand" between North and South Korea. The decision was made despite repeated warnings from Communist China that to do so would be tantamount to a declaration of war by the U.S. upon China. How could Truman and his advisors have so seriously misinterpreted the Chinese warnings? Largely, the decision was based upon a false stereotype of the Chinese Communists as weak and dominated by Russia who, it was believed, did not want war. The stereotype proved false, and the Korean "police action" became a resounding failure as the Chinese attacked with massive force.

Of course, group decisions are not always made in the face of a known adversary. The *Challenger* decision, for instance, was made in peacetime by perhaps the most revered public agency in our nation's history. Nevertheless, the *we* feeling engendered by *groupthink* often generates a corresponding *they* feeling towards out-groups. For NASA, the media became an out-group who, in NASA's view, was constantly criticizing them for each launch postponement. According to Malcolm McConnell in *CHALLENGER: A Major Malfunction*, "the pressure to launch was so intense that authorities routinely dismissed potentially lethal hazards as acceptable risks, reducing such bureaucratic safeguards as the flight readiness review to a meaningless exercise."

Simply put, for NASA, the media became 'the enemy." A strong argument could be waged that the media showed bad judgement in its continual harassment of NASA, just as a corresponding argument could be made that NASA "should be immune from such petty anxieties and pressures," according to David Ignatius, in THE WASHINGTON POST. The simple truth is that, as a result of such *us against them* thinking, *any* group can quickly become less receptive to even valid criticism from legitimate outside sources, leading to further isolation of the group.

Symptom #5: Self-Censorship

As one of the principles upon which our country was founded, the ability to express oneself without censorship has always been highly prized individually. It has also been considered a healthy safeguard against group coercion in our worklives. But the fact is that the most common form of censorship is that which we commit upon ourselves under the guise of group loyalty, team spirit, or adherence to *company policy.*

Glen White, Assistant Professor of Organizational Behavior at the University of Toronto, recounts Deputy National Security Advisor William McFarlane's admission that he erred in "not having the guts to stand up and tell the President" his true doubts about the Iran-Contra plan. Why? According to McFarlane, "if I'd done that, Bill Casey, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, and Cap Weinberger would have said I was some kind of commie, you know."

The decision to send a band of Cuban exiles into the Bay of Pigs by President John F. Kennedy and his advisors has been ranked as the greatest foreign policy fiasco of the Kennedy administration. "The day after the Bay of Pigs, JFK said, How could I have been so stupid? And the answer is, They let him." says Goldman. "they wanted it to be true. They suppressed all their doubts, they censored themselves, they did all the things that would make the operative belief seem like the truth."

Symptom #6: Direct Pressure

Pressure upon group members can surface in many forms. The net effect is the same: group members are conditioned to keep dissident views to themselves. More, they are conditioned *not* to believe such dissident views themselves, because to do so puts them at odds with the group. In Watergate, Janis himself reported that "Nixon time and again let everyone in the group know which policy he favored, and he did not encourage open inquiry." After several engineers had made their initial recommendation to postpone the *Challenger* launch, the Rogers Commission report identifies several instances of group members responding with *direct pressure* on the engineers to alter their views, statement such as "I'm appalled that they could arrive at the recommendation…", and "At that rate, it could be spring before the shuttle would fly."

Whatever their intention, such statements make it clear that dissent or argument against the group's presumed agreement is somehow counter to the group's interests, even that it is an act of disloyalty. The leader or other group member may resort to sarcasm or ridicule of dissenting arguments. Often such ridicule will have as its basis an outlandish projection of what taking the dissent seriously could mean. Subtley, then, a dangerous shift takes place – towards a discussion of *unwanted outcomes* about which group members can easily agree, and away from the merits of the dissent itself.

Symptom #7: Mindguards

A *bodyguard* is someone charged with the protection of another's physical well-being. In *groupthink*, a corollary entity may surface to protect us from disturbing thoughts and ideas – a *mindguard*. Interestingly, such *mindguards* are typically self-appointed, and perform their function not within the group itself, but rather far from the confines of group discussion. Data, facts, and opinions which might bear directly upon the group are deliberately kept out of the group's purview. Generally this is done with a variety of justifiable intentions – the time factor, a regular member will "summarize" for the group, not pertinent, and saddest of all perhaps, "the group has already made up its mind."

Symptom #8: Illusion of Unanimity

Finally, all the rationalizations and psychological pressures have their effect – the group coalesces around a decision. Drawbacks are downplayed, the "inevitability" of the final course is reinforced. And doubting group members may even feel that they have adequately put their own fears to rest. More likely, it is simply the sense of relief that the moral struggle has come to an end.

"Any time you have a shared lie, a vital lie in a group," says Dr. Goldman, "it survives because everyone is playing the game. A lie needs both someone who speaks it and someone who's willing to believe it. The listener is part of the lie."

In a study of Watergate in relation to *groupthink*, Clark McCauley of Bryn Mawr points out in that disastrous incident, "the group remained unanimous in supporting the cover-up effort over a period of months during which evidence accumulated that too many people knew too much for the cover-up to succeed."

For members who may have inadequately expressed their misgivings, there is a final irony – in the aftermath of a decision-making catastrophe of the order of a *Challenger*, such members often experience deep moral remorse about their actions, or lack of them. The lesson is that moral dilemmas don't "disappear" because we stop paying attention to them, but rather may haunt group members for considerable time afterwards.

Avoiding the Effects of Groupthink

Bill Moyers pointed out in *THE PUBLIC MIND*, "Failure to look a the fearsome truth and the unwillingness to acknowledge the facts have been costly to our country. We've paid that cost in human life and mutual trust … Decisive moments in our recent past, unforgettable moments, reveal those pressures that drive people to deny the truth and distort reality." Moyers adds, "Reality is fearsome, but experience tells us more fearsome yet is evading it."

In contrast to the destructive forces of *groupthink*, researchers have discovered a number of positive strategies and techniques that can be employed in groups to reduce the chances of lapsing into *groupthink* and to help ensure a rational, well-balanced survey of all available

alternatives. As might be expected, the strategies relate primarily to the behavior of the leader or manager, who can pose questions or initiate group discussion in ways that can significantly impact the future course of decision making.

- **Open Climate**

It has been found that the leader should practice what is called an *open-leadership style* – free discussion, non-judgmental attitudes, and acceptance of divergent thinking, as opposed to *closed-leadership style* characterized by tightly-controlled discussion, highly-defensive posturing, and lack of tolerance of divergent thinking in favor of convergent thinking.

- **Avoid the Isolation of the Group**

"More specifically," says Whyte, "decision makers should be encouraged to frame a decision problem in a variety of ways in order to investigate the stability of preferences." To do this, it may be highly valuable to bring in outsiders to provide critical reaction to the group's assumptions. In this way, the group is prevented from isolation with limited data and few choices.

- **Assign Members the Role of Critical Evaluator**

Third, the leader or group facilitator should assign each group member the role of *critical evaluator*, giving them the power to assail sacred cows and uncontested group assumptions. By questioning even areas in which a particular group member may not have special expertise, the group is forced to re-examine their own assumptions and rationalizations.

- **Avoid Being Too Directive**

Perhaps the most important single step a leader can take is to remove themselves from the leadership role itself by avoiding being too directive. The leader can deliberately be absent from one or more key meetings or allow other group members to facilitate a meeting in their presence. In this way, they can ensure that they will not exert undue influence upon group members.

Also, says Whyte, "Decision makers should be instructed not to evaluate decision problems in terms of gains or losses from a neutral reference point. Instead, they should be taught to formulate a decision problem in terms of final states or assets, as business students are, encouraged to do."

SUGGESTED TRAINING DESIGNS

The training Designs outlined on the following pages will suggest ways to derive maximum benefit from **GROUPTHINK – Revised Edition**. In selecting a Training Design, be sure to consider the nature of your training group, its size, the amount of time available, as well as your overall training goals. Then choose the design that best meets the needs of your group. Feel free to customize a Training Design of your own utilizing whatever Discussion Questions or Exercises you fell are appropriate.

TRAINING OBJECTIVES

After viewing **GROUPTHINK, Revised Edition** and participating in the Training Designs in this Leader's Guide, viewers should be able to:

- Realize that *groupthink* – the striving for agreement leading to faulty decision making – can occur in any group, no matter how small or how worthy their intentions.

- Understand the significance of *groupthink* in the group decision making process and how it can subvert the success of group goals and objectives.

- Recognize the eight symptoms of *groupthink* and that, when more of them are present, it is more likely the group will make an unsuccessful decision.

- Apply the four key strategies for avoiding *groupthink* – promoting an open climate, avoiding the isolation of the group, making each member a *critical evaluator*, and allowing true consensus without undue influence from the leader.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1.) Who has the primary responsibility in a group decision, the leader or the followers?

2.) What kinds of decisions lead themselves to a consensus decision? What kind of decisions lend themselves to a command decision by the manager or other leader? Why?

3.) Have you ever been party to a group decision that went awry? Were you in favor of the ultimate decision or an out-spoken critic?

4.) Who sets the climate or tone at group meeting in most organizations? In yours? Can the climate of a meeting affect how decisions are made? How?

5.) When an individual speaks out against the group consensus in your organization, what is the probable out-com? Will the individual be rewarded or censured?

6.) John F. Kennedy was presented with a number of choices by group members in his handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis. When time came to choose one of them, he is reported to have said to the other group members, "Whichever plan I choose, the ones whose plans are not taken are the lucky ones." What do you think he meant?

7.) Is there a high value placed in your work group on being a team player? How does this affect your ability to speak out when you feel the group is headed toward a wrong course of action?

8.) Group members sometimes withhold speaking out against a group decision in order to save face, and to perpetuate group cohesiveness. However, when a group decision goes awry, what usually happens to group cohesiveness?

TRAINING DESIGN #1 (2 hours, 45 minutes)

1.) Introduce the Workshop briefly and engage participants in a group discussion on the following: What are the advantages of making decisions by ourselves, that is, without consulting others? List them on a flipchart or whiteboard (clarity of goal, singularity of purpose, lack of need to please others, etc.). (10 minutes)

2.) Now, engage in a similar discussion on the following: What are the advantages of making decisions in teams or groups? List them (additional insights, balanced viewpoint, multiplicity of data, etc.), and compare the two types of decision making. (15 minutes)

3.) Have the participants identify a number of decision-making fiascoes drawn either from history (Iran-Contra, Watergate, Vietnam, etc.) or from personal or work-related experiences. For each fiasco, have the participants identify whether the faulty decision falls in the *individual decision* or *group decision* category. Note and discuss any trends or patterns. (20 minutes)

4.) Lead discussion on the following. "As our goals become more complex, the need for a group decision in order to ensure a successful decision becomes greater/less." (15 minutes)

5.) Show the video GROUPTHINK, Revised Edition. (25 minutes)

6.) Have the participants complete Exercise A or B. (25 minutes)

7.) Choose a situation from #3, or from the video, and select four participants to engage in a role-play. Assign Participant A the role of a group member who disagrees strongly with the selected decision. The remaining three Participants B, C, & D, are to respond by showing their disapproval of Participant A's dissent. Conduct the role-play. (20 minutes)

8.) After the role-play, discuss with all participants the following: a.) what pressures did the three group members apply to the dissident? b.) how did this modify how Participant A expressed his or her views? c.) does anyone feel that they could legitimately overcome such *direct pressure* when it is consistently and rigidly applied? (15 minutes)

9.) Have the participants summarize what they have learned about individual and group decision-making. What are the benefits to be gained from involving others in the decision making process? What are the areas of concern to watch out for? (10 minutes)

TRAINING DESIGN #2 (2 hours, 25 minutes)

1.) Introduce the Workshop briefly and explain to the participants that conflict and heated debate are generally regarded as negative aspects of organizational decision making. Have the participants reflect upon their own organization, then ask for the following: Are conflict, heated discussion, and stressful interaction characteristic of decision making in your organization or work group? In what ways? Are participants comfortable or uncomfortable with this? Have the participants keep a record of their answers for later discussion. (15 minutes)

2.) Ask participants to identify any recent group decisions made by the organization, or a work group of which they were a part, that may have resulted in a less-than-successful outcome, whether or not they involved conflict or heated debate. List several on a flipchart. (10 minutes)

3.) Choose one decision from #2, and lead a discussion on the following questions: Were there any factors present that might have hinted at the ultimately unsuccessful result? List a number of such factors on a flipchart for later discussion. Note whether or not any of the factors involve conflict or heated argument. (15 minutes)

4.) Shoe the video **GROUPTHINK, Revised Edition**. (25 minutes)

5.) Discuss as a group one or more of the Discussion Starters. (15 minutes)

6.) Have the participants complete Exercise A or B. (25 minutes)

7.) Review with the participants the strategies utilized by Kennedy to avoid *groupthink* in the Cuban Missile Crisis. With those in mind, refer to the decision-making situations identified in #2, and apply the following questions. (20 minutes)

a.) In what ways could an open climate of discussion be fostered in your work group?

b.) In order to avoid isolation, what outside sources of input might be available to your work group? Peers? Consultants?

c.) In your organization, would it be possible to assign the role of *critical evaluator* to every member? How might you modify this requirement to meet the situation in your organization?

d.) How might the leader of your work group avoid being too directive? By absenting themselves from some meetings? By allowing others to "chair" meetings while they merely listen? Other methods?

e.)And finally, if one follows all of these guidelines, will a reasoned, successful outcome be virtually guaranteed? Why or why not?

8.) Explain to the participants that conflict and heated debate as discussed in #1 are, in fact, not characteristic symptoms of *groupthink*, which is characterized rather by silent assent, presumed accord, and a façade of solidarity. (5 minutes)

9.) Finally, referring to the participants' answers to the question posed in #1, ask them the following: Knowing what you know about the ultimate effects of *groupthink*, do you find conflict and heated debate, uncomfortable as they sometimes can be, preferable to the risk of engaging in *groupthink*? Allow participants to discuss at length. (15 minutes).

"UNPLUGGING" GROUPTHINK – **WORKSHEET 1 (Exercise A)**

Groupthink gains much of its power from the individual interactions that lead to it. But we can "unplug" that power by learning to analyze our own individual statements and actions, and those of others, to determine if they may be "short circuiting" group goals and promoting *groupthink*. On the left below are the **Eight Symptoms** of *groupthink*, on the right are eight statements similar to ones that you might make in a group decision-making situation. "Rewire" the circuit by drawing a line from each statement to the Symptom it most accurately represents. You may want to review any of the Symptoms you were unable to match.

#1 – ILLUSION OF INVULNERABILITY ●   ● A – "We all know we wouldn't release anything that isn't 100% effective, right?"

#2 – BELIEF IN GROUP MORALITY ●   ● B – "I'm not going to call for a vote because I think we're more or less in agreement here…"

#3 – RATIONALIZATION ●   ● C – "I had a few objections, but since everybody else seems committed, in the interests of time, I won't bother bringing them up."

#4 – SHARED STEREOTYPES ●   ● D – "Our marketing strategy has worked for us time and time again – odds are, it'll work again."

#5 – SELF-CENSORSHIP ●   ● E – "Those doomsayers in legal all have an axe to grind. Why let a bunch of nervous nellies determine our marketing strategy?"

#6 – DIRECT PRESSURE ●   ● F – "Hey, if we don't release soon, they are gonna be cutbacks, even here at this table! So, are you on-board, or not?"

#7 – MINDGUARDS ●   ● G – "What have we got to worry about? This new product is another winner!"

#8 – ILLUSION OF UNANIMITY ●   ● H – "No need for you to be at the meeting; I'll summarize your concerns for the board, ok?"

MANAGING WITH STYLE – **WORKSHEET II (Exercise B)**

The leader's style can have a lot to do with how group decision making is conducted and, therefore, whether there is a likelihood that groupthink can gain a foothold or not. In the box below, list ten characteristics, both positive and negative of a leader or manager in your organization. As an option you may use this exercise to evaluate your own leadership style. When completed, put a ✓ in the ❍ by the left of those attributes that are **open**, such as "allows free discussion," "has non-judgmental attitude," or "loves to brainstorm." Put a ✓ in the ❑ to the right of those attributes that are **closed**, such as "tightly controls discussion," "defends his/her ideas vigorously," or "seeks group agreement on issues."

Attributes of _____'s Leadership Style ✐

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SCORING: Total up the number of ✔'s on the left and give ten (10) points for each, but give minus ten (-10) points for each ✔ on the right. Add, or subtract, to reach your final score. Note that neither a completely *open-*nor *closed-leadership style* is ideal. A score of **–40 to –100** indicates a highly *closed-leadership style* which may inhibit all but the most aggressive group members from expressing their true feelings. A score of **–20 to –40** indicates a moderately *closed-leadership style* which may be conducive to rapid decision making, by may leave the group susceptible to the effects of *groupthink*. A score of **+40 to +100** indicates highly *open-leadership style* which maybe ineffective because without direction from the leader, the group may be unable to reach decisions at all. An ideal score would be **+20 to +40** indicating a moderately *open-leadership style* which may be effective in reducing the effects of *groupthink*.

EXERCISE A—"UNPLUGGING" GROUPTHINK (25 MINUTES)

1.) Make copies of **Worksheet I** on page 15 and distribute to participants.

2.) Review the symptoms of *groupthink* with the participants, and then explain that this exercise is designed to help us learn to spot statements made by ourselves or other group members that might forewarn us that *groupthink* is potentially present.

3.) Have each of the participants match the information on **Worksheet I** with the listed symptoms of *groupthink* they most accurately represent. (Answers 1-G, 2-A, 3-D, 4-E, 5-C, 6-F, 7-H, and 8-B).

4.) If the participants were unable to match most of the statements, you may want to review the symptoms of *groupthink* with them.

5.) On a separate piece of paper, have the participants identify statements they have made in relation to a decision-making situation and match them to a particular symptom of *groupthink* which they most resemble.

EXERCISE B—MANAGING WITH STYLE (25 MINUTES)

1.) Make copies of **Worksheet II** on page 16 and distribute to the participants.

2.) Ask them to list ten attributes of a leader or manager in their organization. List both what you feel are "good" and "bad" attributes as well as those you may consider neutral. As an option, if participants are from a single organization or department, you may direct them to evaluate the same the same leader or a manger. Or, if desired, they may use this exercise to evaluate their own leadership style or that or their own manager.

3.) When completed, have the participants put a checkmark in the circle by the left of those attributes that characterize an *open-leadership style*, that is free discussion, non-judgmental attitudes, and acceptance of divergent thinking. Have them put a checkmark in the box to the right by those attributes that characterize a *closed-leadership style*, that is tightly-controlled discussion, highly-defensive posturing, and lack of tolerance of divergent thinking in favor of consensus.

4.) Total up the number of checkmarks on the left and give ten (10) points for each, but give minus ten (-10) points for each checkmark on the right. Add, or subtract, to reach your final score. Note that neither a completely *open-* nor *closed-leadership style* is ideal. A score of **–40 to –100** indicates a highly *closed-leadership style* which may inhibit all but the most aggressive group members from expressing their true feelings. A score of **–20 to –40** indicates a moderately *closed-leadership style* which may be conducive to rapid decision making, but may leave the group susceptible to the effects of *groupthink*. A score of **+40 to +100** indicates a highly *open-leadership style*, which may be ineffective, because without direction from the leader, the group may be unable to reach decisions at all. An ideal score would be **+20 to +40**

indicating a moderately *open-leadership style*, which may be effective in reducing the effects of *groupthink*.

SUMMARY

Irving Janis could never have foretold the wide-ranging scrutiny to which his groupthink concept would have been subjected. However, in two decades, few theories – in any discipline – have held up nearly as well. Sadly, with all the verification and quantification of groupthink, groups of all kinds continue to suffer its disastrous effects.

During the English Reformation, English law stipulated that "silence brings consent," that by not speaking out, we indicate our agreement with the group at large. Sir Thomas More relied upon this principle in his opposition to Henry VIII in his endeavor to dispose of the Queen Katherine and wed Anne Boleyn. The strategy failed, and More was beheaded for his silent stand.

Today, we live in a different kind of "reformation" – of individual and organizational values brought on by a blistering technology and social upheaval. Perhaps it is time to put away the "silence brings consent" rule that still pervades much of our organizational thinking. If groups and group leaders assumed, not that silence brings consent, but rather that it indicates disagreement with proposed group action, one can't help but wonder whether the Bay of Pigs, the Korean War, Pearl Harbor, and *Challenger* catastrophes – and similar catastrophes possibly waiting to befall us – couldn't be avoided.

By revising the rules of organizational decision making to reflect the pervasive realities of our complex world, maybe unlike Sir Thomas, we can avoid losing our own heads in ill-advised group decisions. ❑

COMPANION VIDEOS FROM CRM

THE ABILENE PARADOX

Organizations can be detailed from their goals when group members simply agree with each other, instead of voicing their reservations or objections. Their reluctance to speak up is actually dangerous decision making. This video shows how to spot false consensus and teaches strategies for avoiding this common paradox.

GROUP TYRANNY AND THE GUNSMOKE PHENOMENON

Using the analogy of the brave town marshal who stands alone against an angry lynch mob, Professor Jerry Harvey dispels the myth that Group Tyranny, or peer pressure, is an inexorable part of our personal and organizational lives. Training Designs help participants (1) review the

facts of Group Tyranny, (2) identify and reinforce freeing behaviors, (3) stress honesty in voicing opinions, and (4) underscore the positive contributions they can make in the workplace.

GROUP PRODUCTIVITY

Participants learn the three phases of group development: Orientation, Power Distribution and Tasking, and Team Production and Feedback. Each phase is explored from two viewpoints: work issues and personal issues. Training Designs help group members (1) explore their reactions to events in the film, (2) define the group development model and, (3) apply the model to their own group activities. ❏

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

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Hohler, Robert T., *I TOUCH THE FUTURE: The Story Of Christa McAuliffe,* Thorndike Press, 1986, Maine.

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Lewis, Richard S., *CHALLENGER: THE FINAL VOYAGE*, Columbia University Press, 1988, New York.

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Tetlock, Philip E., *IDENTIFYING VICTIMS OF GROUPTHINK FROM PUBLIC STATEMENTS OF DECISION MAKERS*, Journal of Personality And Social Psychology, 1979, Vol. 37.

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