Diverse Perspectives on the Groupthink Theory – A Literary Review

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This article provides a summary of research related to the groupthink theory. The review includes case studies, experimental studies, literature reviews, example applications, and proposed modifications to the groupthink theory. Groupthink has been applied to a broad spectrum of group settings and is seen as a major factor in many poor decisions. Despite close to 40 years of the existence of the groupthink theory, experimental studies are limited with only a few of the model's 24 variables adequately tested. Testing limitations, and their mixed experimental results, lead to a wide diversity of perspectives regarding the model. Some conclude groupthink is no better than a myth, while others believe it is a brilliant construct. One recommendation is to address the ambiguity of the model; implementing previously proposed modifications (identified in this article) would achieve this objective. A further recommendation is to increase focus on testing groupthink prevention steps.

Groupthink, a term describing a group where "loyalty requires each member to avoid raising controversial issues" (Janis, 1982, p. 12), ironically is controversial in itself with "very little consensus among researchers on the validity of the *groupthink* model" (Park, 2000, p. 873). Despite the controversy, since it was first published over three decades ago the *groupthink* theory has been widely accepted (Mitchell & Eckstein, 2009, p. 164) and the *groupthink* phenomenon has been found to occur in a far wider range of group settings than originally envisioned (Baron, 2005, p. 219). This article summarizes the *groupthink* concept and provides an overview of the diversity of views regarding *groupthink's* validity. Janis (1972, 1982) and over sixty scholarly peer-reviewed articles provide the basis of this literary review. Identification of the scholarly articles resulted from three approaches: (a) searching for articles in the EBSCO and ABI databases using the term *groupthink,* (b) identifying key articles featured in a collection of literature reviews published in recognition of the term's 25th anniversary (Turner & Pratkanis, 1998b), and (c) through article reference lists. This review identifies key *groupthink* case studies and experiments, and then follows with the various arguments for and against the *groupthink* concept. It reviews example applications, identifies proposed modifications to the *groupthink* concepts, and then concludes with recommendations.

The Groupthink Theory

Janis (1982) stated, "groups bring out the worst as well as the best" (p. 3) in terms of decision-making. Janis (1972) developed the *groupthink* theory based on assessment of some of the worst decisions or "fiascos" (p. 1). These fiascos include the Bay of Pigs, the Pearl Harbor attack, the North Korea escalation, and the Vietnam escalation. Janis tested the theory against two decisions where *groupthink* was absent (the Marshall plan and the Cuban missile crisis).

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2010) defined *groupthink* as "a pattern of thought characterized by self-deception, forced manufacture of consent, and conformity to group values and ethics." However, for the purposes of this article, a scholarly definition is used. Janis (1982) defined *groupthink* as "a mode of thinking people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members striving for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action" (p. 9). Janis modeled *groupthink* as certain *antecedent conditions*, which lead to concurrence seeking (or groupthink tendency), which results in *observable consequences,* yielding a low probability of a successful outcome.

Janis (1982) defined these variables using examples, as listed below. Note that shorthand labels provided by Janis are shown to help distinguish between the variables (these labels are shown in parentheses following the variable name). Janis indicated there are three types of *antecedent conditions: cohesion* of the group (A), *organizational structural faults* (B1), and *situational factors* (B2). For *organizational structural faults,* Janis provided four examples: insulation of the group (B1-1), lack of impartial leadership (B1-2), lack of methodical procedure group norms (B1-3), and homogeneity of group members (B1-4). Example *situational factors* include high stress from external threats (B2-1) and temporary low self-esteem (B2-2) induced by recent failures, excessive difficulties, or moral dilemmas.

For *observable consequences,* Janis (1982) included two categories: *symptoms of groupthink* (C) and *symptoms of defective decision-making* (D). For *symptoms of groupthink,* Janis listed eight symptoms grouped into three types:

- Type I, overestimation of the group, including
  1) illusion of invulnerability (C-1), and,
  2) belief in group's inherent morality (C-2);
- Type II, closed mindedness, including
  3) collective rationalization (C-3), and,
  4) stereotypes of out-groups (C-4);
- Type III, pressure toward uniformity, including
  5) self censorship (C-5),
  6) illusion unanimity (C-6),

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7) direct pressure on dissenters (C-7), and,
8) self-appointed mind guards (C-8).

Janis (1982) provided seven *symptoms of defective decision-making,* including: incomplete survey of alternatives (D-1), incomplete survey of objectives (D-2), failure to examine risks (D-3), failure to reappraise rejected alternatives (D-4), poor information search (D-5), selective bias in processing information (D-6), and failure to work out a contingency plan (D-7).

Identification of *groupthink* frequently only occurs after the occurrence of a problem or a fiasco. "The paradox of *groupthink* is that unanimous decisions may be seen to be a display of resoluteness, when, in fact, they result from defense avoidance on the part of the individual members of the decision group" (Rosenthal & 't Hart, 1991, p. 361). Janis (1982) provided observable symptoms, allowing identification of the risk of *groupthink* and the opportunity to prevent.

Perhaps more important to identifying symptoms, Janis (1982) also provided nine recommendations designed to prevent *groupthink* from occurring (pp. 262-271). A summary of these *prevention recommendations* follows:

1. Each member should be a critical evaluator of the group's course of action; an open climate of giving and accepting criticism should be encouraged by the leader.
2. Leaders should be impartial and refrain from stating personal preferences at the outset of group discussion; they should limit themselves initially to fostering open inquiry.
3. Establish multiple groups with different leaders to work the question in parallel.
4. Split groups into subgroups to assess feasibility and effectiveness of proposals.
5. Each member of the group should privately discuss current issues and options with trusted associates outside the group and report reactions.
6. From time to time, bring in outside experts to challenge the views of the core members.
7. There should be one or more devil's advocates during every group meeting.
8. In conflict situations, extra time should be devoted to interpreting warning signals from rivals and to constructing alternative scenarios of their intentions.
9. Reconsider the decision in second chance meetings before going public.

The Janis (1982) *groupthink* model includes various elements—namely, the *antecedent conditions* [*cohesion* (A), *structural faults* (B1), and *situational factors* (B2)], *symptoms of groupthink* (C), *symptoms of defective decision-making,* (D) and *prevention recommendations* (not labeled by Janis). The articles summarized in this review provide a scholarly contribution to understanding, improving, and/or applying at least one of the elements of the *groupthink* model.

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Scholarly Studies

The following sections provide a summary of over 60 scholarly articles written on *groupthink* since Janis (1972). Tables 1, 2, and 3 summarize case studies. Tables 4 and 5 summarize experimental studies. Subsequent sections cover *groupthink* literature reviews, applications, and modifications.

Case Studies

A diverse variety and growing number of case studies have applied the *groupthink* theory. Tables 1, 2, and 3 summarize 17 case studies covering different types of decisions for various types of groups. Some of the cases review political and military decisions similar to cases Janis (1972, 1982) evaluated, such as the Son Tay prisoner rescue attempt (Amidon, 2005). The breadth of application continues to expand. Case studies have been completed on organization decisions, such as the baseball umpire decision to strike in 1999 (Koerber & Neck, 2003), and have also assessed organization strategy (Eaton, 2001) and Worldcom's fraudulent behavior (Scharff, 2005). Each of the case studies reviewed found evidence of *groupthink*.

Table 1
Case Studies based on Groupthink (Multiple Elements) - one or Two Decision Cases

Author (date)	Case	Methodology	Elements Reviewed	Results
Koerber & Neck (2003)	1999 baseball umpire strike	Review of periodicals.	B1, C (3 of 8) & D (6 of 7) & Whyte 1998 model	*Groupthink* and Whyte conditions prevalent. Indicated *groupthink* can be applicable to larger groups (McCauley, 1998).
Yetiv (2003)	Gulf Crisis ('90-'91, Kuwait)	Not described, quotes various sources (high-level review).	All elements	Evidence of *groupthink* but positive outcome. Weak arguments.
Kramer (1998)	Bay of Pigs, Vietnam decisions	Review of declassified documents	Various elements	Evidence of political implications, not necessarily *groupthink.*
Hensley & Griffin (1986)	Kent State University gymnasium controversy	Review of minutes of Kent State meetings, interviews, & news articles.	A, B1, B2, C, & D	Significant evidence of *groupthink*. Recommended revising board selection process.

Note. A=Cohesion, B1= Structural faults (1 to 4), B2=Situation context (1 to 2c), C=*Groupthink* symptoms (1 to 8), D=Defective decision-making symptoms (1 to 7).

Most of the studies used an approach similar to that used by Janis (1972, 1982). However, Esser and Lindoerfer (1989) used a more rigorous content analysis, using

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quantitative coding to count the various positive and negative accounts of *groupthink*. Tetlock, Peterson, McGuire, Chang, and Feld (1992) used GDQS (Group dynamics Q Sort) and LISREL.

The case studies in Table 3 apply only a subset of the Janis (1982) groupthink model, the groupthink symptoms. For example, Ahlstrom and Wang (2009) completed a study using the groupthink model to assess France's defeat by Germany in 1940. They essentially limited their assessment to only the groupthink symptoms and did not address other elements of the groupthink theory. Nevertheless, based on redundant sources (which they used to ensure validity), Ahlstrom and Wang conclude groupthink "contributed significantly" to failures of the French to prepare for Germany's attack (p. 173).

Table 2
Case Studies based on Multiple Decisions

Author (date)	Case	Methodology	Elements Reviewed	Results
Schafer & Crichlow (2002)	33 international decisions	Review of multiple data sources and expert assessment	B1 (& other factors)	Supports importance of B1 factors.
Choi & Kim (1999)	30 "crises" in organizations	Survey team members	A, C & D	Results indicated partial support. Included other factors, weakens validity as *groupthink* test.
Tetlock et al. (1992)	10 Decisions (Janis cases)	Content analysis. GDQS[a] & LISREL	*Groupthink* concept	GDQS results supported Janis work, LISREL less so. B1 & B2-1 predictive.
Moorhead et al. (1991)	Challenger accident	Review of accident report.	A, B1, & C (8 of 8)	Evidence of all factors. Recommended time and leadership style be added to model.
Esser & Lindoedfer (1989)	Challenger Accident	Review of incident report using coding.	Attempted to do all, but data limited.	Found twice as many positive *groupthink* instances than negative.
Herek et al. (1987)	19 interna-tional crises	Review of bibliographic sources. Expert reviews.	D (7 of 7)	Demonstrated low quality process correlates with negative outcomes.

Note. A=Cohesion, B1= Structural faults (1 to 4), B2=Situation context (1 to 2c), C=*Groupthink* symptoms (1 to 8), D=Defective decision-making symptoms (1 to 7).
[a]GDQS=Group Dynamics Q Sort.

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Table 3
Case Studies based on Groupthink Symptoms, One or Two Decisions

Author (date)	Case	Methodology	Elements Reviewed	Results
Ahlstrom & Wang (2009)	France's 1940 WWII defeat	Detailed document review with rigorous redundancy check for validity.	C (8 of 8)	Found evidence of all symptoms. Concluded *groupthink* was key factor in defeat.
Amidon (2005)	Son Tay Rescure attempt	Documents not referenced (high-level review).	C (8 of 8)	Evidence of all eight symptoms.
Green et al. (2005)	1994 F-16 & C-130 crash	Not described, quoted various reports (high-level review).	C (8 of 8)	Evidence of all eight symptoms. No "remedies" in place.
Dimitroff et al. (2005)	Challenger & Columbia accidents	Review of accident report.	C (5 of 8)	Symptoms were present in both cases.
Scharff (2005)	Worldcom Fraud	Approach & references not documented (high-level review).	C (7 of 8)	Concluded *groupthink* "helps explain some issues & fraudulent activities."
Maier (2002)	Challenger accident	Review of accident report.	C (2 of 8)	Two conditions not *groupthink*, therefore "not *groupthink*."
Eaton (2001)	BA and Marks & Spencer strategy	Content analysis of press releases.	C (8 of 8)	Evidence of *groupthink* in all eight areas.
Smith (1984)	Iran Hostage Crisis	Document review (high-level review).	C (8 of 8)	Evidence of all symptoms, *groupthink* a contributor to poor decision.

Note. A=Cohesion, B1= Structural faults (1 to 4), B2=Situation context (1 to 2c), C=*Groupthink* symptoms (1 to 8), D=Defective decision-making symptoms (1 to 7).

Experimental Studies

There are fifteen studies identified as experiments on *groupthink* elements. The typical study selects subjects (often students) and puts them in groups of three to six. The groups then complete some kind of decision task, usually in 20 to 40 minutes. Questionnaires are completed initially and/or after the decision task. In addition to an assessment of the outcome of the decision task, video or audio tapes of the decision meeting are analyzed. In ten of the 15 cases, a limited number of variables or elements

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(a subset of the model) are tested (Table 4). The remaining studies attempt to test essentially the full *groupthink* model (Table 5).

Table 4
Experimental Studies Assessing a Subset of the Groupthink model

Author (date)	Elements / Assumptions[a]	Methodology / Design	Results	Other Comments
Erdem (2003)	*Groupthink* (as concept) & trust relationship.	142 participants in 28 teams from 7 firms. Surveys.	Having high degree of trust increases risk of *groupthink*.	Surveys limited, questions not tied to elements.
Ahlfinger & Esser (2001)	B1-2 (promotional leadership), C, D.	459 students, 16 groups. Black bear & *groupthink* index.	Partial support for B1-2, influenced 4 of 15 elements of C+D, statistically significant.	Built on Callaway (1985). Identified *groupthink* index reliability issue.
Hodson & Sorrentino (1997)	A, B1-3	201 students, 68 groups (ad hoc). Typical approach[b].	A (as defined) irrelevant. B1-3 supported.	Found uncertainty analysis plays role.
Bernthal & Insko (1993)	A (task & social emotional), C	138 students, 46 groups (ad hoc), decision exercise, created conflict.	High social emotional cohesion related to *groupthink* but not high task.	Results supported narrowing definition of cohesion.
Callaway (1985)	B1-2 (dominance), B1-3,	120 students, 28 groups, typical approach[b].	Dominant members improved decision making. Procedures affect limited.	Other variables tested.
Leana (1985)	A, B1-2 (directive, participative), Causal ordering.	208 students, 52 groups (15 week history), typical approach[b] (20 min sessions).	Directive leaders provided support for B1.2. Cohesion results did not support A.	Procedures (B1.3) "controlled", but no mention of norms previously established.
Callaway (1984)	A & B1-3	128 students, 32 groups (ad hoc), Typical approach[b], with two exercises.	Support for A	Characterized *groupthink* as lack of disagreement.
Fodor & Smith (1982)	A & B1-3 (leader power), D1	200 students, 40 groups (ad hoc). Typical approach[b].	No decision quality relationship to A. Low power leader improved group participation.	Decision quality measured by D1 related traits.
Courtright (1978)	A & B1-3	96 students. Typical approach[b] (25 min session).	Results not significant.	Stated Janis defined "a probabilistic relationship"
Flowers (1977)	A & B1-3 (leader openness).	160 participants, 40 groups. Typical approach[b] (30 min sessions).	Results support B1-3, but not A.	Cohesion only through acquaintances

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Note. A=Cohesion; B1= Structural faults (1 to 4); B2=Situation context (1 to 2c); C=*Groupthink* symptoms (1 to 8); D=Defective decision-making symptoms (1 to 7).
[a]Based on variable model unless noted. [b]Typical approach: Decision exercise, questionnaires, taped sessions.

Well-tested variables. There are three variables in groupthink that have had a significant number of experiments: cohesion (A), insulation (B1-3), and impartial leadership (B1-2). Generally, tests of impartial leadership have consistently supported the groupthink model. As shown in Table 4, lower-power leaders (Fodor & Smith, 1982), open-leaders (Flowers, 1977), and non-directive leaders (Leana, 1985) have all been shown to facilitate option generation and discussion (measures that demonstrate the absence of groupthink). Research has found that insulation reduces decision quality (Moorhead & Montanari, 1986).

Table 5
Experimental Studies Assessing Multiple Elements of the Groupthink Model

Author (date)	Elements / Assumptions[a]	Methodology / Design	Results	Other Comments
Park (2000)	A, B1, B2, C, D (24 variables). Causal ordering.	256 students, 64 groups (ad hoc). Role play, video, Questionnaires.	Partial support: 10 of 24 variables. (4 of 8 A, 4 of 8 C, 4 of 7 D). Indicated "partial mediators."	Developed questionnaire covering all 24 variables.
Hogg & Hains (1998)	A, B, C, D	472 students, 118 groups. Typical approach[b]. Half groups were friends.	Friendship negatively related to group identification.	Provided basis for better defining cohesion.
Kroon et al. (1992)	A, B, C, D, as well as accountability	171 students, 44 groups. Typical approach[b].	Experiment inconclusive regarding accountability. Found gender may have impact.	Demonstrated difficulty of testing *groupthink*.
Turner et al. (1992)	A, B, C (5 of 8), D (7 of 7)	180 students, 60 groups, Typical approach[b] times two.	Support for *groupthink*, including A, when linked to social identity and high threat.	Rigorous assess-ment. Defined where applicable.
Moorhead & Montanari (1986)	A, B (2 of 8), C (7 of 8), D (4 of 7). Combined 11 elements to 5. Causal ordering.	197 subjects. 45 teams (3 mth relationships). Typical approach[b].	Supported A, B, C & D. Strongest support found for insulation.	Combining elements makes comparison to other studies difficult.

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Note. A=Cohesion, B1= Structural faults (1 to 4), B2=Situation context (1 to 2c), C=*Groupthink* symptoms (1 to 8), D=Defective decision-making symptoms (1 to 7).
[a]Based on variable model unless noted. [b]Typical approach = Decision exercise, questionnaires, taped sessions.

The last area, group cohesion, has had mixed results and has frequently not been found to be associated with groupthink. One reason for the mixed results is there are varying approaches to operationalizing cohesion (Hogg & Hains, 1998, p. 325), as Janis did not provide the aspects of cohesion considered. As such, experimenters have tested cohesion from a diversity of perspectives. For example, Bernthal and Insko (1993) evaluated cohesion from a social emotional perspective, whereas Hogg and Hains (1998) evaluated a friendship basis. Different still, Tetlock et al. (1992) defined cohesion as well-defined and shared goals.

Test of the full model. Table 5 lists five studies attempting to test a large portion of the model. Park (2000) conducted the most ambitious investigation, attempting to assess all 24 variables of the *groupthink* model (p. 873). The test assumed a sequential relationship among the elements of the model and measured the relative contribution of the various elements (p. 875). Sixty-four four-person teams completed a 50-minute decision-making exercise designed to simulate a "complex non-routine dilemma" (p. 875). As noted, there was "no real consequence" of the group's decision-making (p. 885). The study provides only partial support of Janis' model (p. 883), with predictions "confirmed in only two of twenty-three cases" (p. 873).

Other issues. The issue of operationalizing the *groupthink* theory goes beyond cohesion, as most *groupthink* variables are not well defined. According to Moorhead and Montanari (1986), of the 24 variables, "group cohesiveness was the only variable of which a published measure was available" (p. 402). Experimenters have, therefore, had to develop measures and frequently have chosen unique approaches; no consensus exists on how to operationalize antecedents and how to measure the other variables (Esser, 1998, p. 325). The lack of standardization makes it difficult to compare or combine study results.

In addition to these issues, there is difficultly orchestrating the kind of cohesive group dynamics Janis' (1982) model described. For example, many studies (see Tables 4 and 5) have used ad hoc groups. Ad hoc groups have limited cohesion amongst the group members (Park, 2000, p. 885).

Lastly, despite almost 40 years of existence, the Janis model (1982) has many elements with only limited experimental testing. As shown in Table 5, cohesion (A) and impartial leadership (B1-3) have had a reasonable number of tests. However, the remaining 21 variables have had limited testing. As such, testing of the model is at best inconclusive (Ahlfinger & Esser, 2001, p. 32).

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Various Perspectives – For and Against

Table 6 summarizes two literary reviews of the *groupthink* model. These reviews provide a reasonably balanced view of the state of scholarly thinking at the time. Esser (1998) indicated that case studies have confirmed the model, but both reviews noted the lack of experimental validation of the model. The lack of conclusive evidence, either for or against, has led to a diversity of perspectives.

Despite the diversity of perspectives and the limited empirical support, the *groupthink* concept continues to see broad application. As can be seen on Table 7, *groupthink* has been applied to juries (Mitchell & Eckstein, 2009) and hockey teams (Rovio, Eskola, Kozub, Duda, & Lintunen, 2009). Ko (2005) described how Chinese culture affects *groupthink*. Shmidt, Zopalaski and Toole (2005) assessed the interface between strength of relationships and *groupthink*. Klein and Stern (2009) drew an interesting parallel between *groupthink* and academia.

Table 6
Groupthink Literature Reviews Articles

Author (date)	Articles Covered	Summary
Esser (1998)	Janis (1972, 1982). 16 case studies, 11 laboratory studies.	10 confirmed *groupthink* cases. 5 confirmed "vigilant" cases. Group cohesion not supported (when viewed as mutual attraction). Too few laboratory studies to be conclusive regarding total model, and variables operationalized in a wide variety of ways. Structural faults (B1) generally predictive.
Park (1990)	16 empirical studies, 7 experimental, 9 qualitative.	Limited number of variables tested, 4 of 8 *groupthink* symptoms (C), even less of others. Found studies often using poor "modes of measurement" – provided recommended approach.

Note. A=Cohesion, B1= Structural faults (1 to 4), B2=Situation context (1 to 2c), C=*Groupthink* symptoms (1 to 8), D=Defective decision-making symptoms (1 to 7).

Those For

During groupthink's 25th year, several articles were written regarding the status of the groupthink model. The following articles provide support for the model in addition to Esser's (1998) literature review. Paulus (1998) stated that the "model represents a brilliant construction founded in part on the existing group dynamics literature" (p. 371). Raven (1998) "hope[d] the work by Janis and his followers [would] sensitize policy makers and other decision groups about what they might do to counter the effects of groupthink" (p. 360). Raven further stated, "by and large, the basic principles of groupthink theory have still held strong" (p. 359). More recently, Packer (2009) added, "Longstanding psychological explanations refer to groupthink" (p. 546).

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Those Against

The groupthink model also has its critics. Baron (2005) stated that after many years of investigation, evidence "has largely failed to support the formulation's more ambitious and controversial predictions" (p. 219). Henningsen, Henningsen, Eden, and Cruz (2006) added, "Questions can be raised as to the utility of using groupthink theory for research" (p. 62). Fuller and Aldag (1998) argued, ''in our view, groupthink is a compelling myth. Like other myths, it tells of things that never were but always are. . . . How did we come to so widely and gladly accept it in the absence of compelling evidence?'' (p. 177).

One reason some of these authors are against the groupthink model is they advocate replacing the model. For example, Aldag and Fuller (1993) proposed a comprehensive group problem solving approach. Fuller and Aldag (1998) would like researchers to "shake off the limiting characteristics of the groupthink model" (p. 181). Henningsen et al. (2006) argued groupthink is two processes, a compliance process and a reinforcing process (p. 39).

Other Applications

Despite the diversity of perspectives and the limited empirical support, the groupthink concept continues to see broad application. As can be seen on Table 7, groupthink has been applied to juries (Mitchell & Eckstein, 2009) and hockey teams (Rovio, Eskola, Kozub, Duda, & Lintunen, 2009). Ko (2005) describes how Chinese culture affects groupthink. Shmidt, Zopalaski and Toole (2005) have assessed the interface between strength of relationships and groupthink. Klein and Stern (2009) draw an interesting parallel between groupthink and academia.

Table 7
Applications of Groupthink

Author (date)	Application Area	Elements	Application	Other
Broad Application				
Mitchell & Eckstein (2009)	Jury decision making	A, B1, B2, C	Qualitative assessment based on scholarly literature, including two case studies on jury decisions (Neck 1992, Schafer 1996).	Concludes juries have risk of *groupthink*, recommends mitigation steps.
Rovio (2009)	Ice Hockey Team Performance	A and *group-think* concept	Correlated cohesion / *groupthink* with team performance.	Did not refer to remedies, recommended limiting cohesion.

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Klein & Stern (2009)	Academia (wider group)	A, B1, C	Theoretical	Academia breeding form of *groupthink*.
Ko (2005)	Implications of Chinese cultureon *groupthink*	C (8 of 8)	Qualitative assessment, Hong Kong focus group. 5 factor questionnaire.	View of "status" in high social status groups increases *groupthink* risk.
Shmidt, et al. (2005)	Relative to LMX	All with focus on C.	Empirical study using LMX & bipolar group-think questionnaire (Rosander et al. 1989)	In-group members engaging in omni-potent (Janis-type) *groupthink*.
Use of General Concept				
Karpowitz & Raphael (2009)	Civic Groups	General concept	Enclave deliberation (innovative civic forum) reduces *groupthink*.	Result is group sees diverse perspectives.
Maharaj (2007, 2008)	Board member characteristics	General concept	Theoretical; argues for individual board member assessment including *groupthink* characteristics.	Prevent *groupthink* by adjusting board selection.
Solomon (2006)	Group deliberation	General concept	Theoretical. Use of "crowd" approach to prevent *groupthink*	"Group deliberation useless unless structured".

Note. A=Cohesion, B1= Structural faults (1 to 4), B2=Situation context (1 to 2c), C=*Groupthink* symptoms (1 to 8) D=Defective decision-making symptoms (1 to 7).

Many additional articles reference the *groupthink* concept; Table 7 shows a few examples. An interesting example is Maharaj's (2007, 2008) application of *groupthink* to board member roles. Maharaj suggested one characteristic of board members is whether or not they possess *groupthink* tendencies, indicating that board members who engage in discussion, ask probing questions, and take an independent view do not have *groupthink* tendencies. Maharaj advocated for board member selection and annual performance appraisals to include an assessment of *groupthink* tendencies.

Modifications of Groupthink

A wide array of modifications has been proposed for the *groupthink* model, as summarized in Table 8. Of these ten proposals, three appear constructive and operational, and five address cohesion. The next two sections summarize these proposals. The remaining three articles, Chapman (2006), Flippen (1999), and Neck and Moorhead (1995), propose incorporating additional variables into the *groupthink* model.

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Constructive Proposals

The initial section of Table 8 lists three constructive and sufficiently defined proposals, ready for application and testing. 't Hart's (1998) article characterized various types of decisions and made a case that groupthink should only be applied to "problem solving" decisions and not other types of decisions (such as those driven by political factors). 't Hart, as well as Mohamed and Weibe (1996), advocated for adding accountability to the list of prevention steps. Rosander, Stiwne and Granstrom (1998) developed a tool for assessing groupthink tendencies.

Mohamed and Weibe (1996) advocated that groupthink is a process model. They make the argument that many of the experimental tests have failed because the researchers are assuming a causal order variance model. Other articles also support this process approach; for example, Courtright (1978) stated that Janis specifies "a probabilistic relationship" versus the causal order assumed by many (see Tables 4 & 5).

It appears the assumption that groupthink is a causal ordering variance model resulted from a Janis (1982) figure that implies a causal order. However, Janis stated, "even when some symptoms are absent, others may be so pronounced that we can expect all the unfortunate consequences" (p. 175). This statement supports a process versus variance approach.

Table 8
Proposed Groupthink Model Improvements

Author (date)	Area of Improvement	Proposed Improvement	Comments
Constructive and Operational Proposals			
't Hart (1998)	Specify when *groupthink* applicable	Limit *groupthink* to "problem solving" decision (e.g., where logic can trump politics).	Proposed adding accountability as prevention step.
Rosander et al. (1998)	Need to describe variations in *groupthink*.	Proposed bipolar *groupthink*, omnipotent (Janis type), and depressive. Developed tool for assessing.	Questionnaire is tool to assess risk of *groupthink* in organization. Study applied to six organizations.
Mohamed & Weibe (1996)	How to achieve more conclusive results from empirical investigations.	*Groupthink* should be tested as a process versus a variance model. Theorizes accountability will mitigate *groupthink* risk.	Recommended improvements in research approach by operationalizing construct and not using ad hoc groups.

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Options for Addressing Cohesion			
Baron (2005)	Improve antecedent conditions.	Proposed ubiquity model replaces social identification with efficacy.	Discussed theoretically. Needs to be mapped.
McCauley (1998)	*Groupthink* likely in large groups. Criticism of ideas threat to group.	Replace cohesion with desire to maintain "friendly relations."	Discussed theoretically. Needs to be mapped. Larger group observation can be tested.
Turner & Pratkanis (1998a)	Theorized result of protecting collective identity instead of cohesion.	Include SIM (social identity maintenance) in model (consistent with particularistic interpretation of *groupthink*).	Discussed theoretically. Referenced prior cases as evidence. Needs to be mapped.
Whyte (1998)	Issues with cohesion may be due to collective efficacy.	Replace cohesion with collective efficacy and three related factors.	Uses prior cases as evidence. Proposed revised model, allows for testing.
McCauley (1989)	Compliance as factor.	Distinguish between internalization (cohesion) and compliance when testing.	Discussed theoretically. Needs to be mapped.
Other Proposals			
Chapman (2006)	Role of Anxiety.	Incorporate defense modes.	Mapped defense modes to symptoms.
Flippen (1999)	Incorporate motivational aspects.	Combine with self-regulatory model of motivation.	Discussed theoretically. Needs to be mapped.
Neck & Moorhead (1995)	Better match research results.	Include time pressures, leadership, & procedures.	Used Bay of Pigs to illustrate model.

Note. Needs to be mapped = theoretical basis needs to be mapped into *groupthink* model such that it can be tested.

Options for Addressing Cohesion

As mentioned earlier, experimental results are mixed regarding cohesion; therefore, several model adjustments have been proposed to address the cohesion issue. Baron (2005) proposed replacing social identification (a type of cohesion) with efficacy; Whyte (1998) offered a related proposal. Turner and Pratkanis (1998a) proposed incorporating a social identity maintenance model. Others suggested narrowing the definition of cohesion; for example, McCauley (1998) advocated for defining cohesion as "friendly relations." McCauley (1989) also argued to distinguish internalization from compliance testing.

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Conclusion

Janis (1972, 1982) defined the *groupthink* model to describe a potential downside that groups face where conformity pressure can lead to defective decision-making. Janis specified symptoms of *groupthink* and steps groups can take to prevent *groupthink*. Researchers have completed many case studies where *groupthink* appears to factor into poor decisions. It appears *groupthink* occurs across a wide spectrum of groups. Experimental results, however, are limited and at best give mixed results. A key question is whether *groupthink* is a myth (Fuller & Aldag, 1998) or whether improved experimental approaches will validate the model.

Mohamed and Wiebe (1996) advocated, "the nature of the theory is still unclear. This ambiguity represents a major barrier to theory testing" (p.417). Addressing this ambiguity appears to be a reasonable step. A common framework is key to moving toward experimentally validating the *groupthink* model. Therefore, the first recommendation is defining the theory based on the research to date; this would allow testing of the theory. The second recommendation is to address *groupthink* by answering the following questions: Is it a process model, as suggested by Mohamed & Wiebe (1996)? Is it a risk mitigation approach (Mitchell & Eckstein, 2009, p. 164)? What are the best instruments to measure the variables?

Turner and Pratkanis (1998c) indicated that Janis was interested in the practical significance of research (p. 104). In this vein, testing Janis' (1982) recommended steps to prevent *groupthink* should also be a priority. The scarcity of research in this area is "startling" (Neck & Moorehead, 1995, p. 538).

About the Author

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