

**Worksheet instructions:** make notes on your worksheet for the tutorial activities, and attach this worksheet to your journal entry this week as an 'artifact' (evidence) of your learning and for your records. Download the PDF and edit the this form in a PDF editor (e.g., Acrobat Reader, PDFreader etc.) - work that is edited in a web browser may not save properly!

## Activity: Groupthink

**Learning outcome:** Teams to be aware of the groupthink phenomenon, what groupthink symptoms look like, and strategies to avoid groupthink applied to their EWB Challenge team and beyond.

**Activity Summary:** Facilitated table-based and shareback class discussions about what groupthink is, what the symptoms are, and how to avoid groupthink.

### What are the symptoms of groupthink?

- 1. Highly cohesive groups often make bad decisions because of 'groupthink':**  
 Conforming to or going along with norms can restrict or increase a group's output. The more conformity the greater the cohesiveness or unity in the group. In fact, the more cohesive the group, the greater the chance of groupthink occurring. But, conformity to norms can also affect the quality of decision-making within groups. Social psychologist Irving Janis has argued that highly cohesive groups often make bad decisions because of 'groupthink'!

<b>WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF GROUPTHINK?</b> Adapted with permission from Eunson (1987)		<b>Seen this before? (Y/N)</b>
<b>1. Illusion of Invulnerability</b>	The group believes it is invulnerable, which leads to excessive optimism and risk-taking.	
<b>2. Belief In inherent morality</b>	Group members believe that their decisions are inherently moral, brushing away thoughts of unethical behaviour by saying: 'How could we do anything wrong?'	
<b>3. Rationalisation</b>	Group members rationalise away warnings or threats.	
<b>4. Stereotyping</b>	Opponents of the group are stereotyped as being too evil, stupid or weak to take seriously.	
<b>5. Self-censorship</b>	Group members with doubts censor themselves to preserve the appearance of	

	consent.	
<b>6. Direct pressure</b>	Anyone foolhardy enough to question the status quo within the group has direct pressure applied to conform.	
<b>7. Mind-guards</b>	Just as bodyguards protect us from physical harm, so some people set themselves up as mind-guards or censors or gate-keepers in order to prevent challenging or threatening information available outside the group from appearing before the group.	
<b>8. Illusion of unanimity</b>	Because silence is interpreted as consent, there is an illusion of unanimity.	

How have you come across any of the symptoms before? It could be from school, family, part-time work, sports etc. Note down your thoughts and experiences below:

2. **Groupthink in team discussions:**

Work individually to match each groupthink symptom (1-8) to a statement (A-H) below that you might hear in a team discussion:

#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 nellys 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?"

Now discuss with your team your responses - did you make the same matches? Have you come across statements like this before or in your team already?

## How do we avoid groupthink?

### 3. Reducing Groupthink' team action plan:

With the 'Ways of Reducing Groupthink' below, identify with and in your team which actions you should be taking and how.

WAYS OF REDUCING GROUPTHINK		Our team action
<b>1. Insist on alternatives, generate contingency plans</b>	Don't be trapped into thinking that there's only one solution: insist that multiple solutions be proposed for problems and discussed. Always have a Plan B, and preferably, a Plan C and Plan D.	
<b>2. Appoint a devil's advocate</b>	<p>Conflict in teams is not always a bad thing - some dissent can stimulate the consideration of more options. A devil's advocate is someone empowered by the group to always present a critical, worst-case-scenario view - without the group thinking any the worse of that person.</p> <p>But, team leaders must establish an environment that protects the alternative viewpoints and team members from backlash. Role needs to be rotated. One of the classic approaches to minimise groupthink bias.</p>	
<b>3. Use the 'Six Thinking Hats' approach</b>	The solution space must be explored widely early, and not narrowed down too quickly. Apply the 'Six Thinking Hats' approach to facilitate divergent thinking.	
<b>4. Establish multiple sub-groups to work on same problem</b>	Sub-groups to explore opposing alternatives will likely develop different approaches - presenting these back to the main group for discussion will be useful for generating ideas, identifying flaws, produce more insights.	
<b>5. Leader to refrain from stating opinion too early</b>	Create an atmosphere of open inquiry and impartiality: the group leader should not share their personal opinions on the decision/outcome to encourage team members to openly air their opinions e.g., allowing each member to share information in turn so all voices are heard.	
<b>6. Leader to be absent from some meetings</b>	Leaders may 'freeze up' creativity by consciously or unconsciously creating	

	norms of group conformity.	
<b>7. Eliminate competition with other groups</b>	Break down 'us-them' mentality, by facilitating groups to work together, exchanging ideas, personnel etc. between groups.	
<b>8. Limit team size but with diversity and heterogeneity</b>	<p>Limit the typical team size to less than 10 with clear boundaries for involvement, too large a team can lead to consensus for the wrong reasons.</p> <p>Invite external and different perspectives (including experts) at various stages to break the cosy dynamics - or statics - of the group by introducing people who are from different backgrounds, opinions, problem-solving styles - to challenge the consensus and expose the blind spots of an over-homogeneous group.</p>	
<b>9. Focus on group, not individual, success</b>	<p>Group members often don't share information or views that differ from the team's position because they believe they won't personally benefit from speaking up, that their reputations will suffer, may be punished, not rewarded.</p> <p>Teams and leader to focus on group, not individual success - and reward if the group succeeds. Team members are more likely to share information when they feel that they have everything to gain from a correct <i>group</i> decision.</p>	
<b>10. Facilitate anonymous 'ideas' board</b>	Officially sanction space, either physically or online, for an 'ideas' board - team members can anonymously post ideas for all to consider.	

More actions that we can take for our team to avoid groupthink:

1.
2.
3.

