What is Groupthink?

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Much organizational decision making is done in groups with various stakeholders providing varied perspectives, knowledge and skills to the effort. Nevertheless, group decision making is subject to a particular source of group bias called Group-think. Group-think is a faulty decision making pattern that occurs in groups that lead members of the group to overly focus on agreement and consensus. This in turn negatively impacts on the quality of their decision making.

Group-think usually occurs as a result of pressures to maintain harmony and cooperation within the group. This leads members of the group to avoid raising issues that goes against the majority perspective. When groups are subjected to group-think, members of the group form a collective to actively pursue options that most of the group agrees with. This can lead them to overlook relevant information regarding possible alternatives. In addition, members of the group can become committed to a particular course of action without adequately assessing its pros and cons.

This pattern of decision making can be dangerous as significant events such as the failed Bay of Pigs invasion and the Challenger shuttle disaster have been attributed to flawed decision making processes brought about by group-think. Organizations need to be aware of the potential of group-think within teams and implement measures to avoid associated problems. One measure can be to have a “devil’s advocate” within a group to critique the proposed course of action and ensure that all members have a clear understanding of relevant information before making decisions.