

# Group Decision Making

## The Importance of Accountability

**Tetlock (1985)** found that people use an **acceptability heuristic**: they do the minimum necessary to satisfy those to whom they are accountable. When participants were asked to predict a person's answers to items they had not answered based on a questionnaire, they were more accurate and less confident if they were told they would have to **justify their views later**. Tetlock argues that decision makers are considered as 'politicians' responsible for their 'constituents'.

Davis has argued that investigations in to group decision making have not been sensitive enough to **group size**. Though many investigate small groups of around 5, there are arguably some potential differences between large and small groups. However, studies have shown that 9 person juries tend to produce similar verdicts as 6 person juries (although the fact that they are experts and the cases may have been easily determinable could counter this)

## Criticism

Do many hands make light work? Are two heads better than one? Or do too many cooks spoil the broth?

The Greater London Council is an example where a group of people has been substituted for a single, responsible person (mayor). Group decision making in this case was distrusted.

Obvious examples include studies of conformity, Asch's studies using the different sized lines (where groups of 3 or more elicited conformity to the wrong answer) and Sherif's use of the autokinetic effect.

There is a difference between decision-making in **intellective tasks** (tasks that have a clear right, wrong answer and are based on facts) and in **judgemental tasks** (tasks that involve value laded judgements such as social justice). People are more likely to conform in the latter.

**Risk Seeking Behaviour**  
The first symptom of GroupThink arguably leads to overly risky behaviour. Is this the case?

**GroupThink**  
**Janis (1982)** defines groupthink as "a **deterioration** of mental efficiency, reality testing and moral judgement that results from in-group pressures"

**Demonstrability** (When the right answer has been identified, the answer is clearly apparent and logical.

**High Demonstrability=Successful Groups?**  
Shaw (1932) noted that groups are better at error checking, thought stimulation and bias cancellation than individuals.

**Lorge & Solomon (1955)** noted that groups should do better as the p(successfully solving problem) is larger when there are more people.

**Low Demonstrability is Reality** (e.g. should interest rates be lower?) **Sniezek (1989)** asked groups of five to estimate campus bookstore sales for the next month. Groups that selected a representative to make estimations were most accurate but that representative became more erroneous the more he/she moved toward the group mean. No interaction was the least successful. Clearly '**putting heads together**' is the best solution

**Restle & Davis (1962)** argue that this is because the cognitive resources used for interaction are required for coming up with ideas and so there is a payoff.

**Brainstorming & Group Size Effects:**  
Brainstorming in groups requires alternatives to be suggested **without** them being criticised. Every idea is written down. **Hill (1982)** found that fewer ideas were generated by groups than individuals.

**Bib Latane et al. (1977)** Social Loafing.

## Straw Polls/Agenda Setting

**Straw Polls** Davis (1992) studied six person mock juries and found that in instances where there was a split in the group (NNNGGG or GGGNNN) the person in bold would be most likely to change their view. This relates to Asch's work on conformity.

**HOWEVER** is this **accountability or arousal?** Zajonc (1965) and Triplett (1800's) noted that people doing easier tasks operate best when slightly aroused (according to Yerkes-Dodson) and so presence of audience may facilitate better decision making.

**Agenda Setting:** **Levine et al. (1977)** found that they were able to structure the agenda of an airplane club to influence successfully the final purchase decisions they made. Davis (1992) found that the mere sequence of charges read out in a court case using a small jury influenced the final decision, with the middle charge being more likely to be convicted if charges are read in order of seriousness.

**Choice Shifts (Stoner, 1961)** It was noted that people advocate greater risk after discussion – **risky shifts**. **Stoner** studied this by informing people that terminally ill person can have risky surgery. They were asked to state the p(operation success) if they were to advise the patient to take the risky surgery. They then discussed in groups. The **risky shift** was measured by subtracting the pretest scores from the group scores. However, it was also noted that initially cautious groups become more cautious in groups – **cautious shift**.

**Group Polarisation (Myers et al., 1975)** Found that high prejudiced students became more so when asked to discuss the issues in groups whereas non-prejudiced students became less prejudiced. When both groups were asked to discuss the issues (e.g. chauvinists & feminists) the **gap widened** (hence, polarisation).

The most famous example is from the Bay of Pigs fiasco, in which the presidential cabinet of JFK recommended an ill-conceived invasion of Cuba.

According to Janis, there are eight common symptoms: 1) **Illusion of Invulnerability** shared by all/most group members, leads to overoptimism and risk taking. 2) Collective efforts to **discount warnings** 3) Unquestioned belief in group's **inherent morality** 4) Stereotyped view of **adversaries as evil** ("All I know is that he is evil" GWB) 5) Pressure **against minority view** 6) Shared **illusion of unanimity** 7) Self-censorship of deviations from consensus 8) Self-appointed "**mindguards**" who guard from challenging information.

Janis recommends explicitly encouraging dissent and criticism. Group leaders should also refrain from stating opinion at outset. **Japanese companies** do this by allowing the lowest-ranking member to speak, followed by the next lowest-ranking member etc. so that no member feels threatened to conform to higher members.

It would also be useful to set up **other groups** and officially appoint **devils advocates**. All of these measures attempt to combat **the enemy of conformity**.