Groupthink Theory Application Discussion

Name

Western Connecticut State University

Groupthink Theory explains how in certain group settings, in order to avoid conflict and stay in agreement with other group members, people will not make suggestions that consider alternate plans than what the group has established and will not "rock the boat." This theory looks at the downsides of groups being too cohesive. The Groupthink Theory can be applied to a project team I was assigned to in my Management class during the Spring 2016 semester. For the semester I was in "Team Four" which consisted of a total of five students, four others and me. Our assignment was to create a PowerPoint presentation on one of the chapters in our textbook, to meet with our professor twice before we presented, and update her through the making of our presentation. Our group went along with the assumptions that the Groupthink Theory states. In "Team Four" there was high cohesiveness and we solved problems as a group (Eckstein, 2016). My group was made up of one of my good accounting friends, Grant, a woman named Lexi who I had been assigned with on two other group projects (in Managerial Accounting and Operations and Management Systems), Lexi had her really good friend Steve, and our fifth member was the kindest, most soft spoken woman named Vivien. Overall, we got along great. When problems or differences of opinions arose in the beginning, our group would talk and then go with what the majority of people wanted. After the first few weeks there were no differences of opinions being voiced and this supports the Groupthink Theory that group members will keep their conflicting views to themselves so as to stay in harmony with the group. Towards the middle of the semester my professor added another component to the assignment, one group member had to become the Devil's Advocate. This person was responsible for voicing alternate opinions that went against the majority forcing the group to consider other options

(Eckstein, 2016). Grant became the Devil's Advocate in "Team Four." Having a Devil's

Advocate and a lack of antecedent conditions prevented our group from experiencing

groupthink for the majority of the project. Grant's role took away from the high cohesion

in the group, this allowed all group members to be more comfortable with voicing

opinions that differed from the one the majority was having at a specific time. Also,

because our group was not highly insulated from outside influences, since it was required

to meet with our professor and communicate with her throughout the whole process, we

were not as susceptible to groupthink (Eckstein, 2016). This lack of groupthink, due to a

lack of antecedent conditions, is supported by the results found in the article by Breitsohl,

Wilcox-Jones and Harris, "Our findings of cohesiveness, insulation and stress (but not

directive leadership) as significant antecedents of groupthink support the theory's utility

in an online environment" (p. 19) They too confirmed that having high cohesiveness,

insulation and stress put a group at risk of experiencing groupthink. The ways "Team

Four" was able to prevent groupthink from being established was being required to have

oversight, to have a group member be assigned the role of Devil's Advocate and we were

able to balance consensus and majority rule (Eckstein, 2016). Overall, the Groupthink

Theory has a narrow scope, is heuristic, has utility and stands the test of time (Eckstein,

2016). This theory has been applied to specific group types and has caused a large

amount of subsequent research studies. Since most people will be on a large amount of

different teams throughout their life, whether that is sports teams, work teams, or

decision-making teams, the Groupthink Theory can help explain the causes, symptoms

and how to prevent groupthink. This theory helps groups be as effective as possible.

Weaknesses of the Groupthink Theory include a lack of testability and validity. Due to

the artificial nature of testing done in labs, truly understanding the symptoms of

groupthink is not possible (Eckstein, 2016).

References

Breitsohl, J., Wilcox-Jones, J. P., & Harris, I. (2015, August). Groupthink 2.0: An empirical analysis of customers' conformity-seeking in online communities. *Journal of Customer Behaviour J. Cust. Behav., 14*(2), 87-106. doi:10.1362/147539215x14373846805662

Eckstein, J. (2016, June 2). *Groupthink Theory*. [PowerPoint slides].