Group development and decision-making

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Core ideas

Tuckman and Jensen describe group development as forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning.

The stages help explain why new groups may begin politely, experience conflict, agree norms, work effectively and then separate after the task.

Belbin's nine team roles describe useful behaviour patterns that can help a team balance ideas, relationships and task completion.

The nine roles are Resource Investigator, Teamworker, Co-ordinator, Plant, Monitor Evaluator, Specialist, Shaper, Implementer and Completer Finisher.

Groupthink is faulty decision-making where pressure for agreement reduces criticism, alternatives and attention to warning signs.

Forsyth's cognitive limitations and errors include sins of commission, sins of omission and sins of imprecision, all of which can distort group decisions.

Key terms

Forming: The early stage when group members orient themselves and learn the task.

Storming: The stage where conflict, role disagreement or resistance may appear.

Norming: The stage where shared expectations and working patterns become clearer.

Performing: The stage where the group works more effectively toward its goals.

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Adjourning: The stage where the group finishes its task and separates.

Belbin team role: A useful pattern of behaviour a person can contribute to a team.

Groupthink: Poor group decision-making caused by pressure for agreement and lack of challenge.

Sin of omission: A Forsyth error where a group overlooks useful or relevant information.

Further detail and evidence

Development: forming establishes orientation; storming involves disagreement over roles/goals; norming develops shared expectations; performing coordinates effective work; adjourning concerns completion/separation. Groups may revisit stages after membership or task changes.

Belbin ideas roles: Plant generates creative solutions; Monitor Evaluator critically weighs options; Specialist supplies deep expertise. Action roles: Shaper drives progress; Implementer turns plans into practical work; Completer Finisher checks errors and deadlines. People roles: Co-ordinator clarifies goals/delegates; Teamworker supports cooperation; Resource Investigator explores external opportunities. One person may perform several roles.

Groupthink features include illusions of invulnerability/morality, collective rationalisation, stereotypes of outsiders, direct pressure on dissent, self-censorship, apparent unanimity and mindguards filtering warnings. Prevention includes impartial leadership, independent views, external review, a devil's advocate and reconsidering the decision.

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Forsyth commission errors actively use faulty judgement: belief perseverance retains discredited beliefs; sunk-cost thinking continues because of past investment; extra-evidentiary bias lets material that should be excluded influence judgement; hindsight makes an outcome seem predictable after it occurs.

Omission errors leave relevant information out: base-rate neglect ignores background frequencies; fundamental attribution error overemphasises dispositions over situations; confirmation bias fails to seek disconfirming evidence. Imprecision errors use rough shortcuts: availability relies on easy recall; conjunction error rates a combined event above a component; representativeness uses similarity instead of sound probability.

Applying the ideas

A team defending a failing project because it has already spent money shows sunk-cost thinking. Suppressing doubts to maintain unity illustrates groupthink. Independent preliminary judgements, diverse roles and a second review can reduce these pressures without guaranteeing a perfect decision.

Evaluation and connections

Stage and role models organise team practice but can oversimplify fluid groups. Role questionnaires may reflect self-image. Explain a particular decision error and how a proposed safeguard addresses it; merely listing more meetings does not show how evidence quality improves.