

Group Conformity
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As the province is a group entity, it is important to have an understanding of group dynamics and how they can impede the ability and willingness of a group to think critically of itself, to look outside itself for help or assist, and to act in ways that might jeopardize the homeostasis or status quo.

The acknowledgment of group conformity, obedience, and protection dates back at least to the 17th century, including the philosopher Thomas Hobbes, all the way to the present, including best selling author Malcolm Gladwell. Studies such as the Stanford prison experiment and the Milgram experiment show how people engage in unhealthy behaviors and social situations, adapting to their roles and protecting the group above all else. Psychologists Solomon Asch, Irving Goffman and, more recently, Phillip Zimbardo have conducted experiments and studies demonstrating how group identification and pressure can become so dominant in a cohesive group that it can override realistic appraisal of alternative courses of thought and action.

Dr. Irvin Yalom described group cohesiveness as the resultant of all the forces acting on all members to remain in the group – or the attractiveness of a group for its members. It is the effective sharing of one's inner worlds and the acceptance by others in the group as paramount importance. Provided one adheres to the group's procedural norms, the group will accept an individual regardless of his or her life experiences, transgressions, or social failings. Yalom states that group membership, acceptance, and approval are of the utmost importance in the individuals' developmental sequence. Many social scientists support Yalom's assertion that individuals rely not only on group identification for approval and acceptance but also for continual validation of our important value systems.

Groupthink is a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people, in which the desire for harmony or conformity in the group results in incorrect or deviant decision-making. Group members try to minimize internal conflict, protect secrets, and reach a consensus in decision-making without critical evaluation of alternative ideas or viewpoints. Loyalty to the group requires that its members avoid raising controversial issues or alternative solutions. The dysfunctional group dynamic can produce an illusion of invulnerability or an inflated certainty that the right decision has been made. Primary socially negative costs of group protection and elitism can be seen in the loss of individual creativity, uniqueness, independent thinking, and the lack of willingness to go outside of the group regardless of the situation, moral obligation, or duty to do so.

Groups that exhibit rigid uniformity oftentimes include an exclusive internal policymaking group, creating the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by dependent acceptance and group protection, which can result in irrational and dehumanizing actions directed against others. Over-estimations of the group can include the belief in its exclusivity over power and morality, and the unquestioned belief in the morality of the group, causing

members to ignore specific actions and potential consequences of members in the group. Close-mindedness can also occur, and group members can rationalize and minimize warnings that might challenge the group's assumptions, and they may stereotype, demean, or retaliate against those who attempt to oppose the group.

A pressure toward uniformity and protection can dominate, and a censorship of ideas that deviate from the apparent group consensus can occur. Under these conditions, group members are hesitant to look outside of the group for help, support, or expertise, often times to their detriment. Silence from individual group members is most times viewed as an agreement and acknowledgment of the greater good of the group. Direct and indirect pressure can be placed on any members who question the group or the actions of any individual member, as they can be seen as disloyal or a traitor.

Structural faults within these groups include an insulation of the group, a lack of impartial leadership, a lack of norms requiring methodological procedures, and a homogeneity in members' ideology. Only with an open, honest, objective, and multi-disciplinary approach can groups effectively monitor and ensure healthy decision-making. Group members, especially those in positions of leadership, need to be willing to look outside of the group and seek out individuals and organizations with expertise, abilities, and ideas; even when they differ from or challenge historical protocol, functioning, and beliefs.

As described in the recommendations section, for the province to replace a closed and protected culture with an open and healthy culture, it will need to challenge group conformity and groupthink, look outside itself for help, and risk changing some traditional practices to ensure the protection and safety of all those served or affected by the province.