

Enhancing Decision Making in Your Work Teams

Golchehreh Sohrab, Ph.D.

Faculty of Business and IT

University of Ontario Institute of Technology

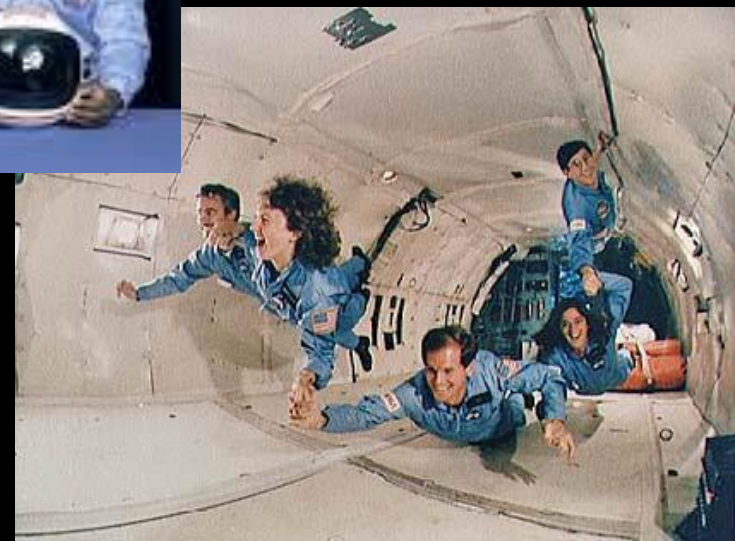


Do Groups Make Better Decisions Than Individuals?

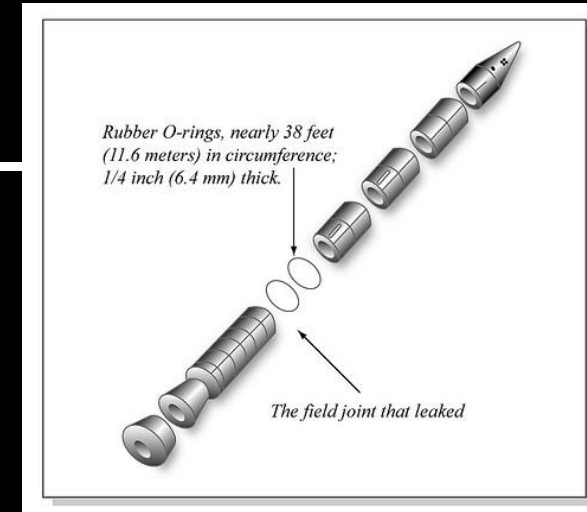




Space Shuttle *Challenger*
January 28, 1986







- A special commission was formed to investigate the disaster
- NASA's organizational culture and decision-making processes were identified as key contributing factors



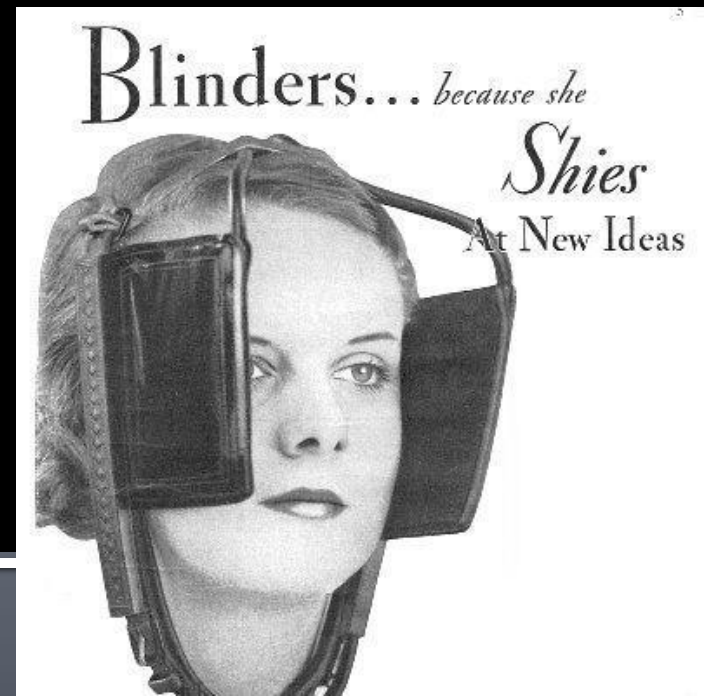
How Do You Know?



Agenda

1. Common Decision Making Pitfalls
 - Managerial Solutions for Improving Team Decision-Making Processes
2. Information Processing in Teams
 - Managerial Solutions for Enhancing Information Processing

Decision Making Pitfalls



Groupthink

- Consensus becomes paramount
- **Desire for unanimity** overrides the motivation to realistically appraise **alternative courses of action** (Janis, 1982)
- A combination of *several biases* happening in the team
 - Conformity
 - Censoring
 - Censoring other team members
 - Self-censoring
 - Invulnerability
 - Failing to reach outside team boundaries to gather information

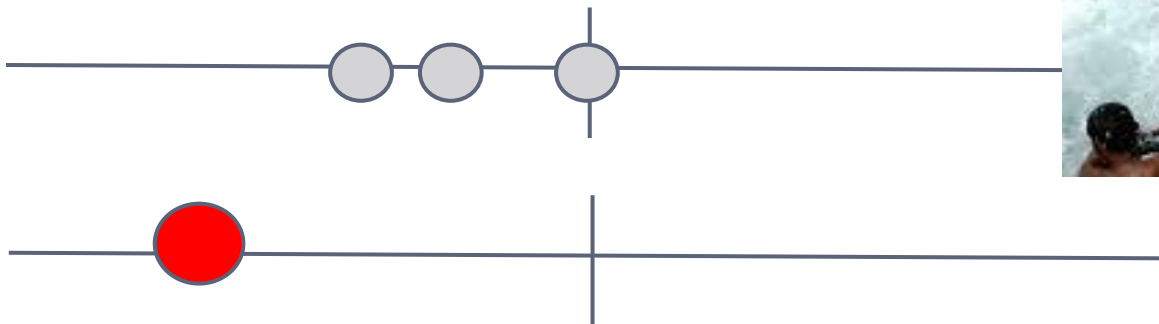
Abilene Paradox

- Avoidance of Conflict
- Pluralistic ignorance
 - Everyone assumes that others are behind this idea
 - **Assuming** the **desires of others** + **conflict avoidance**



Polarization: Risky Shift or Cautious Shift

- The tendency for group discussion to **intensify** group opinion
 - Producing **more extreme judgment**
- Cognitive distortion via team discussion
- Internalization of the shift



Escalation of Commitment

- Supporting a losing course of action
 - Throwing good money after bad money
 - Sunk cost



Disaster at Mount Everest

10-11 May 1996

- Two expedition teams caught in snow storm
 - Losing 2 Team Leaders and 3 Team Members
- Heavy cost of training (\$65,000 + Months of training and preparation)
- Violated the turnaround-time rule (2pm)



*"I've put too much of myself
into this mountain to quit
now, without giving it
everything I've got"*

Doug Hansen

Table Discussion

- We will watch a short clips from the 12 Angry Men film
- After watching the clip, please spend a few minutes to discuss the decision making dynamic observed in this group.

Managerial Solutions

Watch for Signs of
Conformity and **Self-Censoring**

Conformity

Involves shaping choices due to **perceived pressure** from the group or group members

Table Discussion



Are there any **subtle behaviors** that tip you off to a conformity situation?

What might lead a group member to conform?

What Might Lead a Group Member to Conform?

- Status perceptions
- Fear (of conflict, retribution, etc.)
- Perceived lack of knowledge (deference)
- Others?

Solutions?

- Injecting **tension and conflict**
 - Encourage team to consider...
 - **What could go wrong**
 - Other alternatives
 - Disconfirming evidence
 - Assign a person to play Devil's Advocate
 - Rotate this role
- Other solutions?

Injecting Constructive Conflict

- **Task Conflict:** What we are going to do -- inverted U with performance
- **Process Conflict:** How we are going to do it – inverted U with performance
- **Relationship Conflict:** Personality based conflict --negative slope with performance
 - Personality clash
 - Various reasons (lack of trust or respect, long periods of task/process conflict)
 - Need to deal with immediately

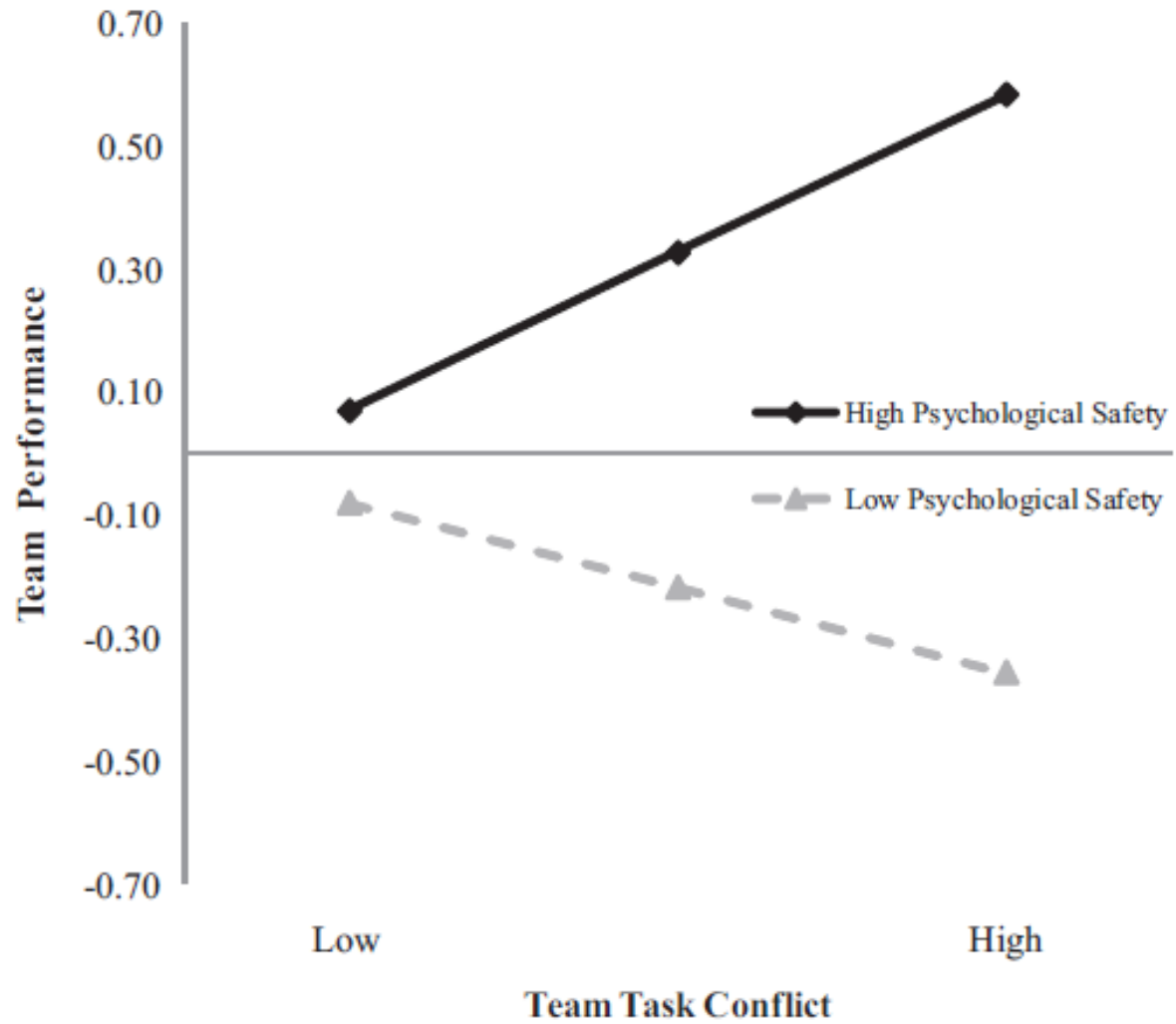
Steps to Take



How can you
manage
relationship conflict
in your group?

Increase Psychological Safety

- **Psychological Safety:** Team members' perceptions of consequences for taking interpersonal risk in the team
 - Can I provide input and ideas without fear of reprisal or blame
- High psychological safety climate facilitates the performance benefits of task conflict
 - Team members won't take task disagreement personally



Bradley, Postlethwaite, Klotz, Hamdani, & Brown (2012)

How Can You Create a Psychologically Safe Environment in Your Teams?

Managerial Solutions

Avoid Escalation of Commitment

1. Use impartial and reasonably informed judges
 - Disconnected from the outcome
2. Make sure that people's emotions are not involved
3. Reduce feelings of guilt and shame about the sunk cost

Managerial Solutions

1. Watch for Signs of Conformity and Self-Censoring
2. Inject Tension and Constructive Conflict
3. Increase Psychological Safety

Information Processing in Teams

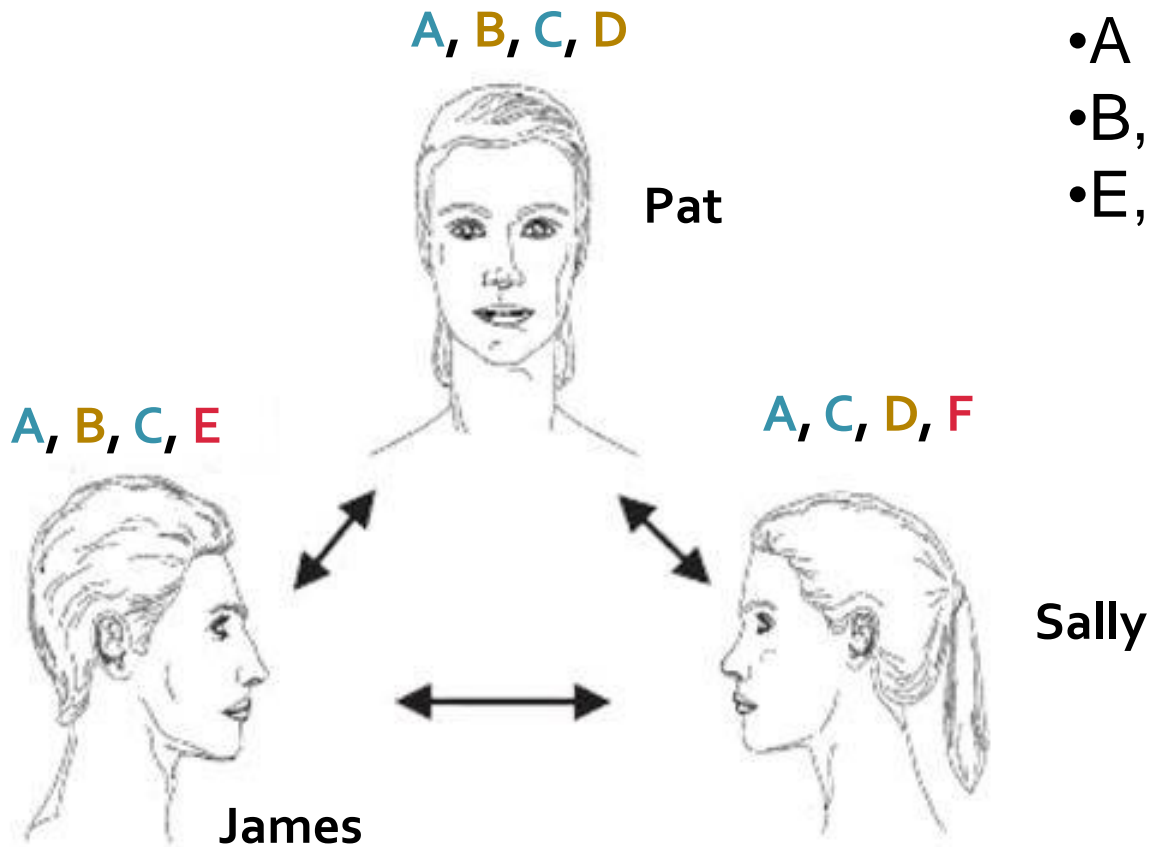


Son Tay Operation



- Son Tay Operation
 - November 21, 1970
 - 56 soldiers landed in the Son Tay prisoner-of-war camp
 - Free 61 American prisoners of war reported to be held at the camp
- Mission failed due to relocation of all prisoners before the raid
- Before the operation information arose that suggested that perhaps the prisoners were no longer at the camp!

Information Dependence Problem



- A ,C: Fully Shared
- B, D: Partially Shared
- E, F: Unshared

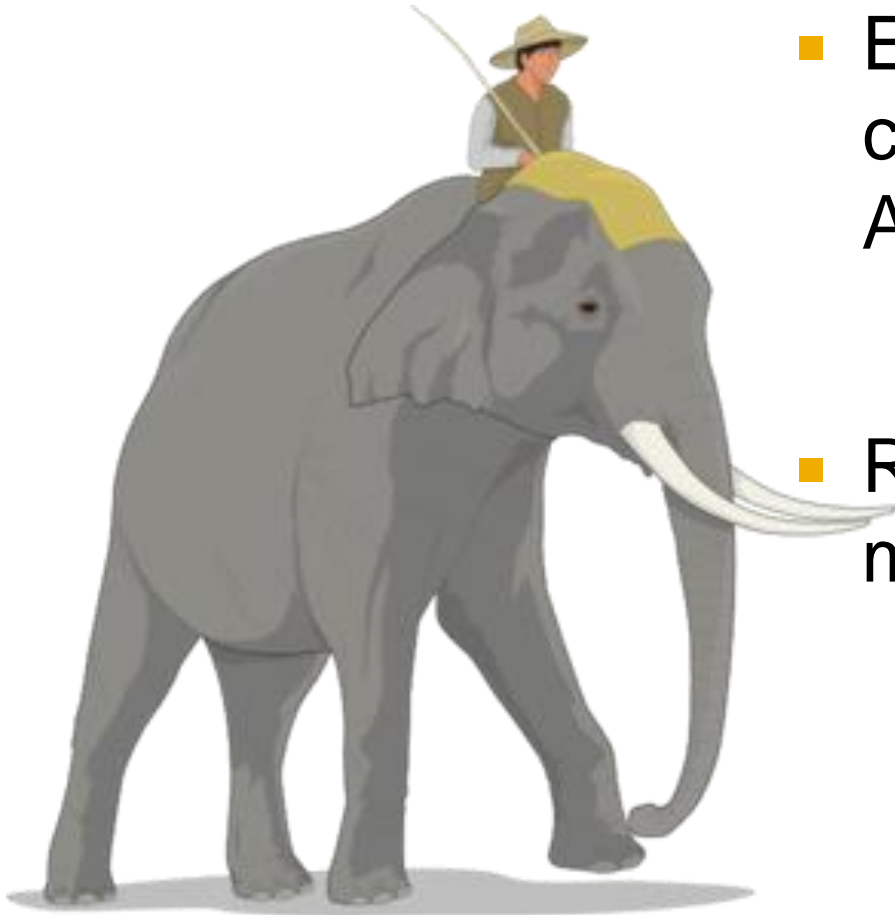
Information Dependence Problem

- Teams consistently fail to exchange and discuss unshared information
 - Common information *mentioned* and *repeated* more than unique information
- Explanations?
 - Social validation and mutual enhancement
 - Premature preference/solution discussion
 - Advocacy behavior

Confirmation Bias

The Elephant and the Rider

Metaphor



- Elephant: The sub-conscious mind; Automatic System
- Rider: The conscious mind; reasoning

Patterns of Team Information Processing



TIME

Symbol	Definition
G	Information phase
H	Solution phase
X	Confirmation phase
U	Mixed solution and information phase
N	Mixed solution and confirmation phase
K	Mixed confirmation and information phase

Table Discussion



How can you make sure that critical information is revealed and discussed in your team?

Watch for Signs of Uneven Communication

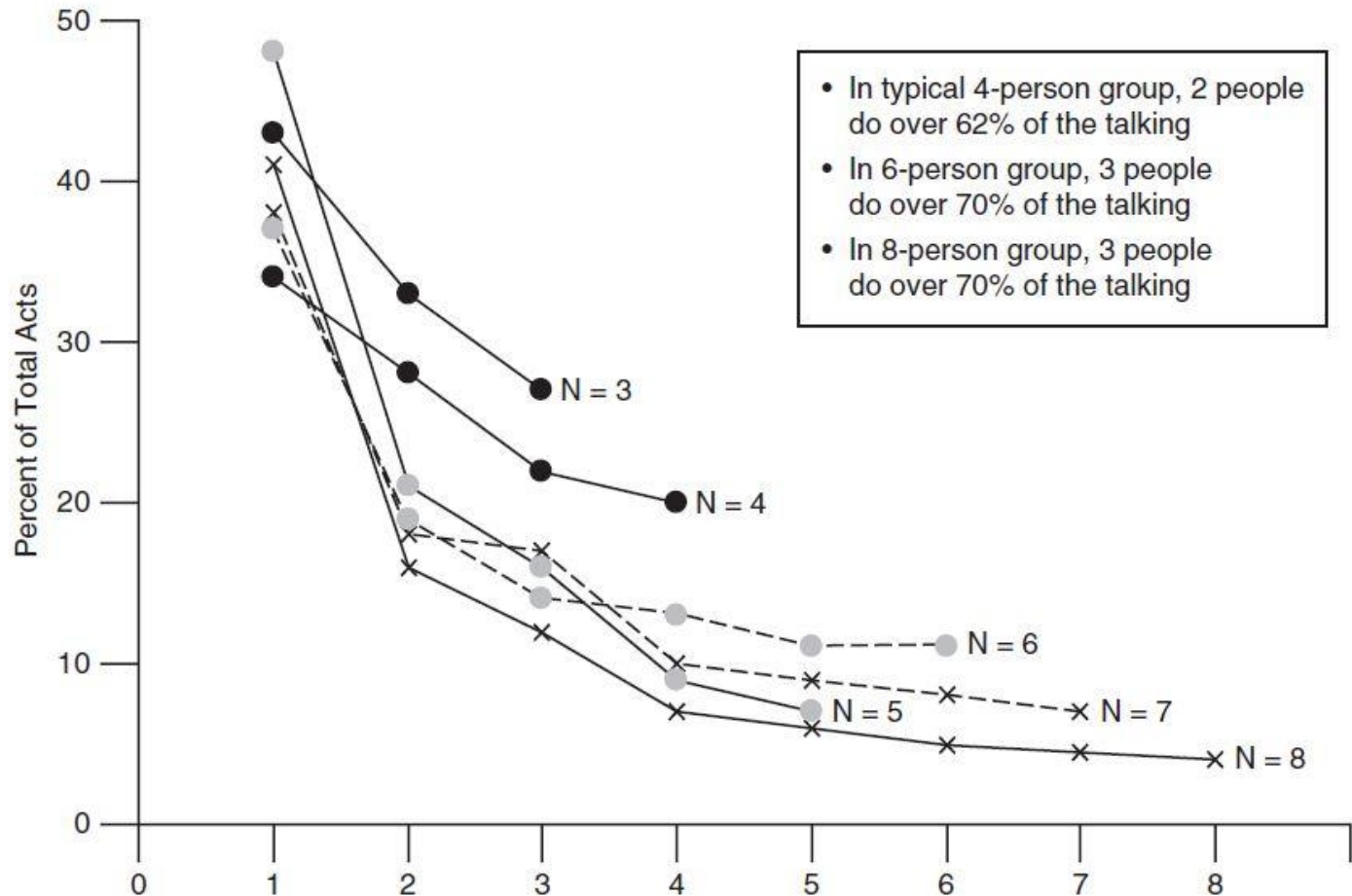


EXHIBIT 6-2 Distribution of Participation as a Function of Group Size

Source: Shaw, M. E. (1981). *Group dynamics: The psychology of small group behavior* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Managerial Solutions: Enhancing Information Processing

1. No straw polls!
2. Avoid premature **solution/preference discussion**
 - Spend enough time to discuss information early on
 - Postpone solution/preference discussion
3. Be cognizant of **solution/preference negotiation patterns**
 - Break the cycle by asking follow-up questions
4. Making sure that **everyone contributes**
 - Don't take for granted that you all have the same information
 - Foster a psychologically safe team environment

Do Groups Make Better Decisions Than Individuals?



Special Thanks to ...



- سرکار خانم مهرو مهدوی (انجمن بین المللی مدیران ایرانی)
- جناب آقای علیرضا یادگاری (بنیاد ملی نخبگان)
- سرکار خانم پروین خاکسار (موسسه عالی آموزش و پژوهش مدیریت و برنامه ریزی)

Thank *You* for Your Attention!