

The third stage is coming together, with two elements: work-based relationships (showing the difference between a group and a collection of individuals) and working in groups (building a network of relationships and shifting focus to the group). A detailed list of leadership behaviors is required. Would this be “norming”? So far, we are following the pattern.

The fourth stage changes the linear pattern of the preceding stages. It is called “one step forward, two steps back.” Group members are faced with the question, Do I accept the role I will have to play in this group? Group members often resist cultural change, preferring to stick with their own culture. Previous courses of action are taken for granted. The group’s slipping back into conflict smacks of confrontation (Stage 2). The process stalls, the group splits into factions, and a leadership battle ensues. It becomes personal. To help group members deal with cultural change, leaders must help them develop competencies required to perform a job and the willingness to apply competencies within a particular context. Enlisting key managers’ support becomes a factor.

The fifth stage involves turning a group of people into a team, a “team” being a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose and approach for which they hold themselves personally accountable. The authors list indicators as a benchmark that the team has entered the behaving as one stage (or is this norming?). It includes agreement on a goal, shared and distributed leadership, and a strong leader. Team members need to be part of the decision-making process.

The sixth and last stage is facing the future, meaning managing yourself and developing leaders. It makes me think of “performing.” It includes listening, reflecting, taking initiative, reaching out to others, controlling anxiety, not taking criticism personally, building trust, and working to gain credibility and support.

The essential difference between the Sheard model of group development and the Tuckman model, at least as I see it, is that the Sheard model has added a new touch—namely one step forward, two steps back—whereas the Tuckman model offers forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Without one step forward, two steps back, the two models would appear very similar, but not quite the

same. That is why we have options, and options are good things to have!

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See also Business Groups; Conflict Handling Styles; High-Performing Teams; Norms Theory; Organizational Development; Work Team Effectiveness

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GROUP POLARIZATION AND THE RISKY SHIFT

Group polarization can be defined as an enhancement of group members’ preexisting tendencies accomplished through some form of group-induced communication or interaction. Group polarization is most likely to occur in groups in which the members initially hold tendencies that can be defined as leaning toward one or the other end of a continuum. In such cases, group interaction can lead individual

members and the group as a whole to move farther away from a middle-of-the-road position and toward a more extreme opinion or intention to act. The term *group polarization* also calls attention to the phenomenon that interacting with others in a group, or merely listening to members of a group interact, can lead individuals to become more committed to and sure of the correctness of their preferences, even as those preferences become more extreme. In this sense, the word *polarization* refers to the tendency to move toward one of the "poles" at either end of a continuum and to become more certain of the correctness of one's position. The fundamentals and importance of group polarization are discussed in the following sections.

Fundamentals

The concept of group polarization has an interesting history. It was first explored in the context of individual and group risk taking by James A. F. Stoner, a student at MIT's graduate school of management completing a master's thesis with his adviser, Donald G. Marquis, a well-known psychologist. While working on a term project in Warren Bennis's course on leadership, Stoner discovered that his own conviction that groups are more cautious than individuals was very widely shared (a "known fact") but did not seem to have been demonstrated experimentally.

To test the hypothesis about the cautiousness of groups, his study compared decisions involving risk by individuals deciding alone and then deciding as members of a group. To assess individual riskiness, he arranged for 91 management graduate students to answer a 12-item questionnaire in which they advised fictitious individuals how much risk to take in a variety of situations. About a week after completing the questionnaire as individuals, 78 of those students were assembled into six-person groups and reached consensus decisions on all 12 questionnaire items. The group decisions were quite different from the initial individual decisions, but the 13 control subjects who completed the same questionnaire again, also after about a week, showed essentially no change in their decisions.

The results were startling. Not only were the group decisions not more cautious, they were strongly more risky on the questionnaire as a whole. Within a few months that "risky shift" was replicated in a study

of male and female groups at a Colorado university. And soon a great many other studies replicated and explored aspects of the risky shift in a variety of experimental situations in a variety of countries and with a variety of types of individuals. The risky shift was reliable, robust, and easy to demonstrate in a classroom in 1 hour—a real gift to teachers dealing at that time with another "known fact"—the often voiced student and cultural attitude that "you can't predict human behavior." And it was counterintuitive—"Everyone *knew* groups were more cautious than individuals." But now they were being significantly more risky.

As easy as it was to demonstrate the risky shift in an experimental situation and to show in the classroom that human behavior could be predicted, there was one frequently overlooked anomaly among the 12 items in the original questionnaire. The 12th item involved a couple that was deciding whether or not to get married. They had been advised that a happy marriage was possible "but not certain." The MIT and Colorado male students did not demonstrate the risky shift but actually became significantly more cautious on that decision. But the female groups in Colorado actually shifted in the risky direction, and that shift was also statistically significant.

From Risky Shift to Group Polarization

A series of experiments explored hypotheses about why groups might become more risky. Marquis tested the possibility that there might be a "diffusion of responsibility" but found no support for that hypothesis. M. A. Wallach and his colleagues, on the other hand, did find considerable experimental support for that hypothesis.

However, the possibility of a cautious shift was a particularly compelling challenge to diffusion of responsibility as a general causal factor in risky shifts. Frode Nordhøy, a subject in the first risky shift experiment and another of Marquis's thesis students, demonstrated the possibility of more cautious shifts just a year after the first study. In 1967, Stoner demonstrated both risky and cautious shifts and the possibility that "widely held values" might predict the direction of the "shift": Values favoring risky courses of action would lead to risky shifts in group decisions and values favoring caution would lead to cautious shifts.

The existence of risky and cautious group shifts led to research that suggested the risk/caution aspect of group impacts on decision making were not unique but might be a subset of a larger phenomenon. This larger phenomenon would be a shift to more extreme opinions and decisions in a wide domain of opinions and preferred actions—what Serge Moscovici and Marisa Zavalonni called “group polarization”: Discussion typically strengthens the average inclination of group members. A considerable body of experiments has demonstrated such a process in many nations and under a wide variety of topics. Group polarization is now the widely accepted interpretation of the phenomenon originally hinted at in the original risky shift discovery.

Hypotheses About How and Why Group Polarization Occurs

Two current hypotheses about why group discussion among initially like-minded individuals tends to lead to greater polarization of those members’ initial tendencies involve the information provided in discussions and the social comparisons the discussants seem to make.

On the first hypothesis, information provided in discussions tends to favor initially preferred alternatives, leading to greater confidence in even more extreme positions. With the content of a group discussion being biased toward initially preferred alternatives, individuals in the group learn additional information that favors their own initial opinions, listen to their own reasons for holding the opinions they hold—thus becoming more confident of those opinions—and discover new ways to deal with facts or perspectives that would argue against or moderate their original position. They become even surer of the correctness of their initial opinion and are inclined to go even further in the direction in which they were originally headed, supported and encouraged by the rhetoric they are creating and sharing with the other like-minded members of their group.

The second hypothesis focuses on individuals’ desire to see themselves as different from others on some aspect of life: more “liberal” or “conservative,” more risky or cautious, more committed to a course of action, or more rejecting of that course of action. If group interaction leads them to discover they are not as different from others as they had

assumed, they can reestablish their desired distance from others by becoming a bit more extreme in their opinions or preferred course of action. For example in Stoner’s early work, individuals frequently thought they were being bold risk takers when they recommended a moderately risky final football play that would guarantee victory if successful but defeat if not successful rather than settling for a safe play that would guarantee a tie for their team. However, when group discussion revealed that their initial position was not as bold as they had thought, they often became advocates of an even bolder play . . . with even less chance of success. The emergent argument that “playing for a tie is for sissies” not infrequently yielded the selection of a play with almost no chance of success.

Importance

The tendency for discussion among like-minded individuals to enhance the initial tendencies of the discussants has been demonstrated in many situations. For example, group interactions have led to (a) increasing French students’ initially favorable attitudes toward the French president and their initially negative attitudes toward Americans, (b) increasing the prejudicial statements of initially prejudiced American high school students, (c) increasing the severity of initially guilty traffic accident judgments by Japanese students and increasing the amount of recommended damage awards among jurors initially inclined to award damages, and (d) increasing the willingness of U.K. discussants to discriminate against already disrespected immigrant groups. The phenomenon can also contribute to enhanced benevolence, such as increased concern for social justice and commitment to take positive actions among initially concerned Australians and decreased prejudice among initially less prejudiced individuals. And it can even occur when individuals are merely listening to discussions that are consistent with their initial preferences.

Increased extremity of opinions and increased intentions to act among initially like-minded individuals can occur on subjects where the actions will be healthy for relationships, organizations, and societies. However, the opposite can also be the case. When individuals separate themselves from a diversity of viewpoints and values and surround themselves with only those who hold similar

opinions and views of the world, they can become more and more convinced of opinions and actions that become progressively more extreme, leading to the dangers of “groupthink,” destructive investment actions rife with “moral hazard,” ill-advised business decisions such as Goldman Sachs’ decision to construct and sell to its clients securities that were designed by another client to become worthless, business strategies such as Enron’s manipulation of the California energy market, and U.S. foreign policy decisions such as the military invasion of Iraq.

Dealing With the Tendencies Toward Polarized Decisions and Actions

The theory of group polarization and the extensive research findings that led to and support the theory are calls for managers to recognize the dangers of insular, isolated, like-minded groups in organizations. The temptation to hire, promote, feel comfortable with, socialize with, and rely on like-minded individuals is a very strong one, and a very human tendency. But it carries with it significant dangers: not just the dangers of making extreme and thus frequently poor decisions—because of their extremity—but the added danger of becoming so sure of those extreme decisions that it is even harder to see and admit when those decisions are yielding progressively worse outcomes.

Too often, the focus on “managing diversity” is seen as addressing and finding ways to handle the complexities and difficulties that occur when nontypical individuals are being incorporated into organizational membership and processes. Beyond any legal or social justice arguments for the need for diversity in organizations, the group polarization perspective suggests that it is exactly those “nontypical” organizational members, with their frequently differing viewpoints, who may be the greatest bulwark against the dangers of groupthink and extreme decisions, perceptions, and actions that like-minded individuals can be so prone to.

In a similar vein, the group polarization phenomenon suggests the advantages of bringing a devil’s advocate—a voice of contrary opinions—systematically into managerial decision processes, just as John F. Kennedy is believed to have done, with considerable apparent success, during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

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See also Escalation of Commitment; Groupthink; Managerial Decision Biases; Managing Diversity; Social Cognitive Theory

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GROUP PUNCTUATED EQUILIBRIUM MODEL

The punctuated equilibrium model (PEM) of group development was first proposed by Connie Gersick in 1988. This model argues that instead of developing gradually over time as proposed by classic linear group development models, work groups progress through long periods of inertia punctuated by concentrated revolutionary periods of quantum change, hence the term “punctuated