

THIS ONE THING IS UNDERMINING YOUR COMPANY'S STRATEGY, CULTURE AND ENGAGEMENT

It lurks within the minds of everybody from boardroom to break room. It is keeping us stuck, slow-walking strategic outcomes, and sidelining the culture.

GRAND RAPIDS, MI, UNITED STATES, April 20, 2018 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Peter Cathcart Wason](#), described "confirmation bias" as the human propensity toward interpreting new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs or theories. In essence, we reject any reality or information that contradicts our conscious or subconscious beliefs. When reality is incontrovertible, confirmation bias can result in a state of cognitive dissonance, the other side of which is entrenched denial.



It's stealthy. It is at the core of change-resistance, failed negotiations, departmental infighting, and overall unresolved conflict. Confirmation bias is an insidious destroyer of strategic progress, employee engagement and cultural transformation. It lurks within the minds of everybody from boardroom to break room. Failure to challenge it is keeping us stuck, slow-walking strategic outcomes, and sidelining the culture.

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Linda F. Williams, MSW

How Corporate Culture Fuels the Monster

In an oppressive corporate culture in which the team is fearful of speaking up, or in which feedback is routinely met with negative consequences, leadership easily mistakes silence for approval. It takes one individual with this leadership style to destroy the culture within an entire mission area or department. Once this invisible gag-order is set, it takes more time than the C-Suite has, to root it out. Once that damage is done, employee trust is out of the window and it all becomes a breeding ground for a disastrous phenomenon called “group think.”

CASE IN POINT

Groupthink, in its most extreme form, was part of the “perfect storm” leading up to the Challenger Disaster. In that case, more than one individual caved to NASA pressure. There were a few courageous Thiokol engineers who withstood the pressure. Only one decision-maker, Roger Boisjoly, refused to sign approval for the launch. He said it was the best decision he ever

made in his life.

My previous article, [Groupthink and the Challenger Disaster: 5 Actionable Steps to Sound Strategic Management Outcomes](#), details a chronology of events the night before the launch. Relevant to this discussion, here is a bit of background.

For years prior to launch, Thiokol knew of a weakness in the O-rings but kept putting it off due to the expense of fixing it. They made a management decision to ignore a well documented 99% failure rate of the O-ring in temperatures under 50 degrees. Contradictory information from their engineers was met with resistance and being labeled a troublemakers.

•The “Trouble Makers”

As a result of multiple pleas to Thiokol management to redesign the O-rings, Roger Boisjoly was labeled a troublemaker. Right up to the night before, Boisjoly fought to reschedule the Challenger launch. He was told, “This is a management decision” as Thiokol caved to NASA pressure to sign papers allowing the launch. Boisjoly was the only protestor that did not relent and sign the approval.

•Don’t be Duped by an Illusion

Thiokol’s culture appeared to be resistant to input from the very individuals who were hands-on with producing the parts. Those who did have courage to take issue with matters, were ignored. Leadership’s ignoring feedback, over time, results in abject silence. Employees eventually decide it’s not worth the effort. Why try? Don’t ever believe the illusion of silence.

Many know of the loss of Astronauts Ellison Onizuka, Christa McAuliffe, Gregory Jarvis, Judith Resnik, Michael J. Smith, Francis "Dick" Scobee, and Ronald McNair. Some of Thiokol’s engineers did not fair well either. One of them took his own life as a direct result of this avoidable fiasco.

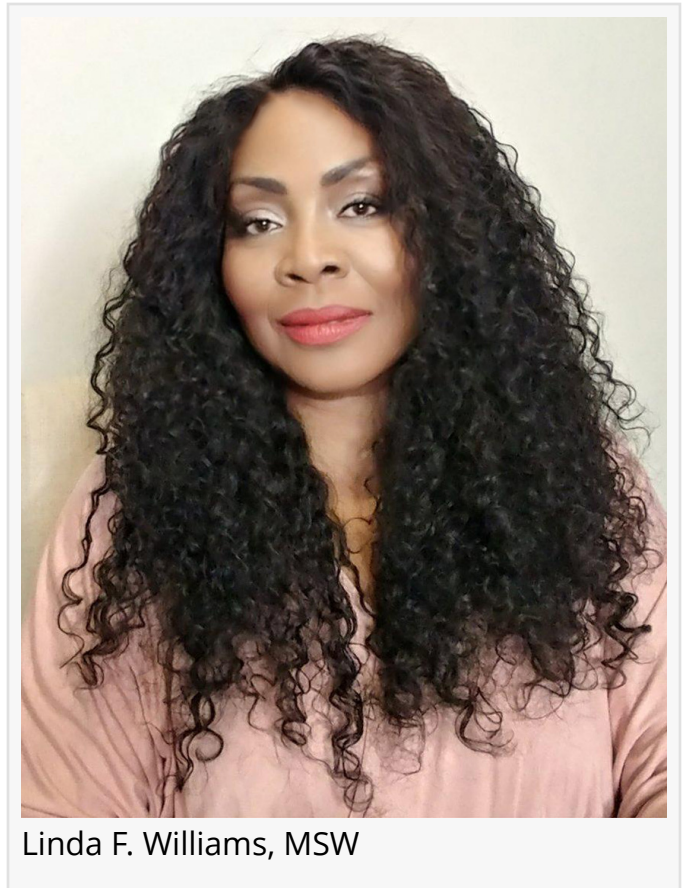
COMBATING CONFIRMATION BIAS AND ITS GROUPTHINK SIDEKICK

Two questions leadership must ask whenever tempted to ignore feedback are: 1) What am I not seeing; and 2) What else might be true?

What Am I Not Seeing?

It’s what we don’t see that has us running rogue. Remember, if you don’t see it, you are in no position to judge what you aren’t seeing. That’s where diversity of perspective and input are quite powerful. Done right, it works like a charm. Done wrongly, chaos. Leveraging feedback requires leaders not to be dismissive of opposing perspectives. It’s our responsibilities as leaders to consider all plausible explanations of a challenge and to ensure that we consider all available information in making corporate decisions.

What Else Might Be True



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Considering all the feedback received, ask yourself what alternative truths may exist outside of your own perspective. This takes deliberate focus. What am I missing? Given all other considered perspectives, what is true and what is false regarding the foundation of my initial understanding of the matter? Considering all of that; act accordingly.

TWO MORE THINGS

1. Close the feedback loop. Be transparent with others about your reasoning. This is especially important for feedback on which you chose not to act. Tell the feedback providers why their suggestion was not used. Failure to close this loop is what breeds distrust. Remember, an information chasm accelerates the rumor mill.

2. In closing the feedback loop, consider asking others for solutions to the challenge. It is understood that not all C-Suite decisions can or should be shared. There are some, however, that can be shared and your teams are the ones to ask. Sometimes they come up with some pretty crafty solutions. At the core of employee satisfaction and engagement is finding their jobs meaningful. Answer that need by including them in planning and implementation.

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