Letterman or Leno: A Groupthink Analysis of Successive Decisions Made by NBC

Case Study

By analyzing two consecutive decisions made by the same group of executives at National Broadcasting Company (NBC) Neck (1996) explored the role leadership played in enhancing groupthink in the first case and mitigating it in the second. When Johnny Carson, the 30-year host of The Tonight Show (NBC’s flagship late-night television show), retired, the NBC executive group was faced with two decisions. Who would take over from Carson: Jay Leno or David Letterman? The second decision involved determining what to do with the late night star that didn’t take over the show.

In the first decision, all the antecedents of Janis’ groupthink model were present. The decision-making group, led by Bob Wright (President of NBC), was cohesive, insulated from outside opinion, homogeneous and under stress to make the right decision. Wright’s view was that Leno would be a better host and he actively voiced his opinion at the outset, “…NBC had established over 30 years an audience that expected certain things, and Jay Leno looked like the perfect successor to that, while David Letterman remained the ideal performer for the 12:30 show.” No one in the group challenged the leader’s view and NBC chose Leno over Letterman. This decision proved disastrous for NBC as Letterman accepted a contract with CBS for his Late Show and competed head to head with Leno’s show and won the competition in both ratings and advertising dollars.

The second decision was regarding what to do with Letterman since they chose Leno for the Tonight Show. In this case all the antecedents of groupthink were present except two: leader preference for a certain outcome and group insulation. Bob Wright maintained a neutral position and encouraged all the members to speak up and the presence of experts checked the insulation problem. This led to a thorough evaluation of a wide range of criteria and careful weighing of associated costs and risks. Analysis of the second decision yields information that proved that groupthink decision-making defects did not occur, despite the presence of some antecedents (Neck, 1996).

This study proves that leader behavior and the presence of experts are important factors in moderating and mitigating other existing antecedents and symptoms of Groupthink in team decision-making.

After reading the case study, we know there is no one-size-fits-all approach to mitigating groupthink, keeping in mind that there are no fixed attributes of a group or personalities that may be causing the phenomenon.

Using this case study, research how leadership can avoid the snares of groupthink by:

         being mindful of the antecedents and symptoms

         taking necessary precautions to bypass them

         recognizing the role leadership plays in **both** enhancing and alleviating them.

The requirements below must be met for your paper to be accepted and graded:

         Write between a 3-5 page paper using Microsoft Word in APA style.

         Use font size 12 and 1” margins.

         Include cover page and reference page.

         At least 80% of your paper must be original content/writing.

         No more than 20% of your content/information may come from references.

         Use two peer reviewed journal articles from EBSCO host to support your position, and defend your arguments. Non-credible and opinion based sources such as, Wikis, Yahoo Answers, eHow, blogs, etc. should not be used.

Cite all reference material (data, dates, graphs, quotes, paraphrased words, values, etc.) in the paper and list on a reference page in APA style.

References

Neck, C. P. (1996). Letterman or Leno: A groupthink analysis of successive decision made by the National Broadcasting Company (NBC). *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 11*(8). doi:10.1108/02683949610150024