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A Study of Groupthink in Project Teams

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

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John A. Reaves

MAIS, George Mason University, 1995

BS, Radford University, 1989

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

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Abstract

Project teams advance a common goal by working together on projects that require a diverse set of skills and are difficult for 1 person to complete. In this study, there was an exploration of the antecedents to groupthink in project teams from the perspectives of project managers. Many companies use project managers to complete critical objectives; avoiding groupthink is crucial to their success. The purpose of this research was to understand why project teams are susceptible to groupthink and what precautions managers can take to avoid it. The conceptual framework utilized in this study was Janis' concept of groupthink, which is reaching consensus without adequate examination of ideas. The study was a qualitative, phenomenological design involving semistructured phone and face-to-face interviews with 16 project managers from a variety of industries with at least 10 years of experience and who hold a project management professional designation. The main research question was: how does groupthink occur and how can project managers mitigate the adverse consequences of groupthink? Data analysis consisted of open sentence analysis and axial coding of patterns in the data using NVivo 11. The key research finding was that project managers with more experience are better at mitigating groupthink. Project managers expressed that groupthink can lead project teams to advance flawed decisions that may cost people their jobs or result in loss of life. This study may affect positive social change by preventing flawed decisions that could adversely impact society. Future researchers should explore possible ways that project managers can develop strategies that can identify and prevent groupthink from occurring.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to all project managers around the world: skilled leaders who often go unrecognized and unappreciated for the critical contributions they make to society, their employers, and the teams they manage. I also dedicate this research study to the best family that one could ask for. Thank you, Denise, Francis, Kayla, and Micah for allowing me to complete important research to aid project managers in recognizing groupthink and in doing all they can to avoid allowing groupthink to prevent projects from accomplishing their intended goals.

Acknowledgements

My PhD journey was filled with numerous twists and turns that I believe were necessary to complete this final product. This document would not have been possible without the divine spirit that exists on high. First, I thank my loving wife, Denise, for her unwavering support, even in times when I did not deserve it. Second, thanks to my wonderful kids, Francis, Kayla, and Micah, for offering words of encouragement and laughter when I needed it. To my mother, Frances Reaves, for inspiring me to think out of the box and to keep running until the race is finished. Thanks to my in-laws, Lois and Ray Goodall, for their support and guidance. Thank you to Walden University for allowing me to take this journey and for not pulling the rug from under my feet when I needed to take breaks. Thank you to Dr. Lolas, my dissertation chair who shepherded me through the dissertation process, for providing a wonderful example of what it means to help others accomplish their academic goal, and to Dr. Stottlemyer, my original dissertation chair, for believing in my research when others did not. Special thanks to Dr. Schechter for his insights into the research. Thank you to Dr. Korrapati, who served as my advisor and professor for several courses at Walden University, for telling me that as long as I finish the program, it does not matter when it occurs. A special thanks to the employers and situations that I experienced that led me to conduct research on groupthink in project teams.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Problem solving and decision-making often require the help of other people. Teamwork is effective for complex endeavors that would be extremely difficult for an individual to accomplish, such as sending an astronaut to the moon or passing a federal law to increase the minimum wage. Brennan and Enns (2015) asserted that "it is well documented that two or more individuals can outperform one" (p. 1076). Brennan and Enns (2015) based their findings on collaborative cognition, in which a group relies on contributions from each group member to reach the best results. Schulze and Newell (2016) surmised that group decision-making requires careful deliberation and is most advantageous when participants generate answers from a list of choices without prejudice. Sometimes, the use of more than one person can be a hindrance when a decision requires minimal discussion or the input of others is not necessary or preferable. Wright and Meadows (2012) characterized this as *bounded rationality*, whereby individuals make reasonable decisions based on the information they have available. The outcome of the decision may require the individual to revisit the decision or engage others to help with the decision-making process.

Most people experience being part of a team at some point in their lives, be it at work, school, church, or in their neighborhood-d. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) identified three types of teams: "a team that recommends things, a team that is assigned a task or project, and a team that makes or does things" (p. 162). The goal of a team is to work together to achieve a common objective (Little, 2011; Mach & Baruch, 2015). The focus of this study was to examine groupthink in project teams.

Project teams deliver outcomes based on critically evaluated ideas that foster measurable results. When a project team must solve a problem of material significance, the group may advance ideas without examining or encouraging discourse to avoid conflict (Hassan, 2013). Individuals in most vocations use the term *project team* to refer to a group of people brought together by a common objective to deliver the results desired by an organization (Kähkönen, Keinänen, & Naaranoja, 2013; Ofori, 2013). The Project Management Book of Knowledge (PMBOK, 2017) defined a project team as an "assembly of individuals who worked with the project manager to achieve the defined requirements of the project" (p. 35). Hällgren (2010) characterized this mode of thinking as *groupthink.*

Groupthink is a term first used by Irving Janis in 1972. It occurs when the "pursuit of agreement among team members becomes so dominant that it overrides any realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action" (Janis, 1972, p. 9). Janis (1972) identified eight symptoms that can lead to groupthink (see Table 1). For instance, a group may suffer from self-censorship if group members minimize their doubts to avoid deviating from what appears to be group consensus.

Table 1

Janis' Eight Symptoms of Groupthink

Name	Description
Illusion of invulnerability	Group members create excessive optimism and encourage taking extreme risks
Inherent morality of the group	Group ignores ethical and moral consequences of their decision
Collective rationalization	Rationalization discounts warning signs or other information that may lead the group to reconsider their decision
Stereotyping of out-groups	Extreme cynicism by in-group members negates the capabilities and competence of the opposing group
Self-censorship	Avoidance of one's opinion to minimize deviation from group consensus
Shared illusion of unanimity	Group members who remain silent agree
Pressure to conform	Group members pressure dissenters by making it clear that divergent views are not welcome
Mindguards	A group member acts as an information filter to control the decision-making process toward a specific and limited number of alternatives

Note. Source: Irving Janis, 1982, p. 174-175.

The purpose of this research was to understand why project teams are susceptible to groupthink and what precautions might prevent teams from derailing good decision-making, according to the perspectives of project managers. Project managers were the focal point of this study because they are accountable for completing project objectives on time, within scope, and on budget (PMBOK, 2017). Chapter 1 of this dissertation includes an overview of groupthink from a theoretical perspective, the problem statement and its associated elements, a description of the research approach, and the resources and tools I employed in the study.

Background of the Study

Rose (2011) stated that groupthink occurred in various political, academic, and business circles for over 40 years. Groupthink may occur depending on the conditions and influences of group decision-making processes, which may lead to unfavorable outcomes. Hassan (2013) believed symptoms of groupthink can occur in any group trying to reach a compromise on an issue. Groupthink usually occurs in groups with limited time and a considerable amount of pressure to make good and rational decisions (Rose, 2011). Janis (1982) stated that the pressure for mutual agreement among group members prevents the members from realistically evaluating and considering other alternatives. Due to a desire to maintain consensus, groups eventually engage in hasty and irrational thinking; decisions affected and swayed by groupthink are less likely to foster a positive outcome (Bénabou, 2013; Russell, Hawthorne, & Buchak, 2015). For example, the 1986 Challenger and 2003 Columbia tragedies may have been avoided if the project teams had not succumb to internal pressures and heightened levels of acceptable risk (Dimitroff,

Schmidt, & Bond, 2005). Similarly, reports of child abuse to university officials did not stop situations like the 2011 Penn State child abuse scandal. Geddes (2012) demonstrated that Penn State university officials developed strong norms about not reporting the abuse and encouraged blind loyalty to the group by dissuading conflict and divergent views. The child abuse continued, which resulted in more victims and the dismantling of an organization.

An important aspect of successful group dynamics is how team members communicate with one another. Kramer and Dougherty (2013) found that groupthink, as a communication process, has some positive effects on project teams, particularly when initially building group cohesion. However, teams should avoid groupthink as an outcome (Kramer & Dougherty, 2013). Pratkanis and Turner (2013) emphasized that groupthink is not always involved when a team makes a bad decision. Teams make bad decisions because of poor leadership, inexperienced team members, or unrealistic expectations of the project sponsors and stakeholders (Du, Swaen, Lindgreen, & Sen, 2013). Teams also make bad decisions when rushed or when there are few consequences tied to the outcome.

Project teams are vulnerable to groupthink because of their temporary nature. Project teams often have limited time to create controls to minimize stereotyping, apathy, and mindless risk-taking (Hassan, 2013). For example, Lahm (2014) cited the rollout of Healthcare.gov; the government commissioned a project team to complete the website by the fall of 2013, but they did not have enough time to complete it without errors. The project team had one year to complete the rollout, but most experienced information

technology (IT) professionals knew this was not enough time to rollout one of the most complex websites on the Internet (Benoit, 2014). Lahm (2014) questioned the Obama administration, particularly Kathleen Sibelius, the Secretary of Health and Human Services at the time of this rollout, as to whether they would complete the website on time and without errors. Secretary Sibelius continued to state that the website would be ready to receive customers. The results were delays, numerous website glitches, and crashes that made the website unusable at certain times. The Heathcare.gov project team, as well as numerous government officials, knew the site would not be ready but continued to mislead the public until it was no longer possible to make excuses (Lahm, 2014).

In this study, I examined the variables that influence project managers to continue down a path that will not accomplish the project objective. The project manager for Healthcare.gov, for example, was aware of the issues that impeded the project from succeeding and should have informed the Secretary of Human Health Services of the issues. If the project manager informed Secretary Sibelius, but she chose not to respond, then what other options were available to the project manager? Does the project manager inform the President of the United States (Secretary Sibelius' manager) or does the project manager document what occurred and hope for the best? This is an example of how the inaction of both the project manager and Secretary Sibelius promoted groupthink. Baron (2005) argued that groupthink occurs when the stakes are high and the outcome of the decision has a high level of impact.

An example of groupthink in action was the 1986 Space Shuttle Challenger launch. Pratkanis and Turner (2013) stated that the managers of that project knew there were mechanical and electrical problems that could impede the proper functioning of the shuttle. Nevertheless, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) approved the launch of the shuttle, which killed seven astronauts and a teacher. The question remains whether the astronauts and teacher knew of the problems. If they knew, would they have proceeded with the flight? Groupthink corrupted the decision-making process before the Challenger launched.

Groupthink was the main factor behind numerous mishaps that resulted in loss of life, such as the 1961 military invasion of Cuba (the Bay of Pigs), the 1996 Mount Everest tragedy, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq (Burnette, Pollack, & Forsyth 2011; Hällgren, 2010; Ntayi, Byabashaja, Eyaa, Ngoma, & Muliira, 2010). Groupthink frequently results from decisions intended to save time and money or avoid a scandal that would damage reputations (Sims & Sauser, 2013), such as the 2008 United States financial recession and the 2011 Penn State child sex abuse scandal (Sunstein & Hastie, 2015). Sims and Sauser (2013) asserted, “Part of the problem with groupthink is once in motion, it generates its own fuel” (p. 79). Bénabou (2013) emphasized that groupthink can permeate groups regardless of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or gender.

Undetected, groupthink can wreak havoc on any group in which two or more persons deliberate and then minimize potential problems with their selected decision. In this study, I identified ways to recognize and prevent groupthink, which could improve project team decision-making and lead to more positive project outcomes. Groupthink is

likely to occur in a social context, because public policies and governmental responses during disasters and emergencies are products of events that require collaborative decision-making. Knowing how groupthink works and manifests itself may influence project teams to make better decisions.

The significance of this study is that the findings demonstrate how groupthink occurs and how to mitigate its effects in organizations that employ project teams to achieve business objectives. Project teams are temporary structures within organizations that disperse once a task is complete (PMBOK, 2017). Project teams contend with internal influences, such as project team members, the project manager, external team members, functional managers of the project team members, project sponsors, and stakeholders (PMBOK, 2017). Project managers who understand the relationships between their own emotional intelligence and leadership style, effective performance, and how groupthink occurs can use this information to achieve the desired project results (Ben- Hur, Kinley, & Jonsen, 2012). A well-formed and well-managed team decreases the chances of groupthink. Project teams that achieve consensus without engaging in critical analysis often succumb to groupthink (Hassan, 2013). Decisions that result in groupthink may lead to unfavorable outcomes.

Problem Statement

Many companies use project teams to accomplish critical objectives. The general problem is that many teams do not accomplish their intended goals. Groupthink may be the root cause of this problem (Shore, 2008). Bloch, Blumberg, and Laartz (2012) conducted a study of 5,400 projects, and the total overrun costs were $66 billion. This

was due to unmet goals and numerous extensions of the project delivery dates. Hardy-Vallee (2012) asserted, “financials are not the only consequence of projects not achieving its objective” (p. 1). Packer (2009) cited groupthink as a key failure of the project team and reason for loss of life in the Columbia space shuttle disaster. Bénabou (2013) emphasized that failure to accomplish project goals leads to negative consequences, such as high costs for taxpayers and businesses or even loss of life, and groupthink may be the primary reason why the projects did not accomplish their objectives.

It is important to understand the causes of groupthink to avoid these negative outcomes. The specific research problem that I addressed in this study was that it was not known how project managers identify the antecedents that enable groupthink to occur in project teams to prevent adverse consequences. Specifically, I identified what project managers think about how groupthink happens, why it is a problem, and why project teams may not effectively employ solutions designed to alleviate it. A project manager’s primary responsibility is to lead the project to completion. It was not known how project managers’ knowledge, based on experiences of groupthink in project settings, helps them avoid this common problem (Hällgren, 2010). Riordan and Riordan (2013) stated, “Groupthink is only recognized after a group has made a disastrous decision and future research of groupthink should focus on how it happens” (p. 82). In this qualitative phenomenological study, I investigated groupthink in temporary project teams from the perspective of project managers. Cleary, Horsfall, and Hayter (2014) asserted, “qualitative research demands a rigorous method, experienced and well-trained researchers and appropriate software to analyze and process the complex data collected,

with the collected information deriving from mostly interviews" (p. 711). My primary data source was interviews. Numerous studies on groupthink explored the theoretical perspective of this problem, but little past research focused specifically on groupthink in project teams (Hällgren, 2010; Hassan, 2013). Project managers are critical sources of data for the study, because they make sure the proper resources are available to project teams and ensure groups produce expected results in a timely, cost-effective manner (Meredith, Mantel, & Shafer, 2017). I interviewed project managers to discover trends in ways they identified, addressed, and prevented adverse consequences of groupthink from occurring in project teams.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to contribute to the understanding of how groupthink occurs in project teams and to offer approaches to prevent adverse consequences based on the perspectives of project managers. In this study, I examined the occurrence of groupthink in a traditional (face-to-face) project setting, which is the most relevant setting for groupthink because it fosters the most interactions among project team members (Hällgren, 2010). I interviewed a sample of 16 certified project management professionals (PMPs) from various occupational disciplines (e.g., banking, consulting, health care, and government services) using open-ended questions to investigate the participants' experiences and perspectives of groupthink in project teams. To ensure a diverse set of project managers from these industries, I selected no more than five persons from the same industry and one person per company to complete the questionnaire. To further narrow the sample and address potential

saturation of individuals, I assigned each questionnaire a number using the RAND feature in Excel. This collation in Excel used the participants' first names. I then pulled the questionnaires out of the box and used the questionnaires with the highest numbers for the study. I sent a thank you email to individuals not chosen to participate in the study.

The focus of the study was on project managers' experiences of groupthink. PMBOK (2017) cited project managers as the people responsible for ensuring that project teams efficiently accomplish objectives. Serrador and Turner (2015) defined *project efficiency* as "meeting the project time, scope, and budget goals" (p. 30). Project managers need specific leadership skills to determine how groups work at both macro and micro levels (Akpan, 2015). Project managers are in the best position to identify groupthink due to their roles and levels of influence over the project team. Increased understanding of how groupthink occurs may help project managers lead teams through strategies to mitigate the occurrence of groupthink and improve the chances of arriving at decisions that achieve desired results. "Although groupthink does not assure the failure of a decision, its presence increases the chances of low quality, including unethical, decision-making in an organization" (Riordan & Riordan, 2013, p. 1). The findings of this research illustrated the origins of groupthink in project teams and improved understanding of how project managers work to prevent groupthink. The sources of groupthink may be unique to each project team. The research contributed to project managers' knowledge about groupthink, its origins and consequences, how other managers approach this problem, and ways project teams may avoid financial, social, and potentially lethal consequences.

Research Questions

The general research question is as follows: How does groupthink occur and how can project managers mitigate the adverse consequences of groupthink? The study included specific research questions to examine the lived experiences of project managers. The following are the specific research questions that guided this study:

RQ1. What are the experiences of project managers in project teams that result in groupthink?

RQ2. What antecedents do project managers identify in project teams during their experiences of groupthink?

RQ3. What outcomes do project managers experience after groupthink surfaces in a project team?

RQ4. What actions do project managers think might prevent the onset of groupthink?

Conceptual Framework

Groupthink can occur in virtually any situation that involves a group. Janis (1982) argued that for groupthink to occur, group members need to feel a strong impulse to avoid disrupting group unity and the positive feelings that unity creates. Group members often suppress objections to minimize conflict (Pratkanis & Turner, 2013). Janis (1982) suggested eight symptoms of groupthink: an illusion of invulnerability, inherent morality of the group, collective rationalization, stereotyping of out-groups, self-censorship, shared illusion of unanimity, pressure to conform, and mindguards (see Table 1).

Hällgren (2010) emphasized that groupthink may occur without all eight symptoms. Shore (2008) asserted that the result of these symptoms of groupthink is defective decision-making. Shore (2008) identified eight cognitive biases (available data, conservatism, escalation of commitment, groupthink, illusion of control, overconfidence, selective perception, and sunk cost) that provide additional context for the systematic biases that result in the failure of many projects. Rose (2011) argued that group cohesiveness is not necessary for groupthink to emerge. Groups with a shared vision or a strong desire to complete a task may succumb to groupthink (Haji-Kazemi, Andersen, & Krane, 2013). Baron (2005) produced a ubiquity model indicating that other conditions, such as social identification, self-efficacy, and relevant norms, could also induce groupthink.

Teams that experience groupthink may not know it is a problem until it is too late to address it. Groupthink refers to the interactions that happen among group members and how these interactions affect the group's results (Bartsch, Ebers, & Maurer, 2013). Burnette et al. (2011) stated that "task cohesion takes the place of relational cohesion as the necessary precondition for decisional dysfunction when coupled with directive leadership and provocative context" (p. 30). Packer (2009) asserted that once groupthink becomes part of the psyche of the group, the results tend to be disastrous. Groups experiencing groupthink are usually not aware of its implications until after the results, such as limiting choices or ignoring possible setbacks, occur.

Hällgren (2010) and Burnette et al. (2011) referenced the 1996 Mount Everest tragedy as an example of groupthink in which eight people (including two leaders)

perished because of poor decision-making; they stayed committed to the goal of climbing Mount Everest even when deteriorating weather conditions warranted suspending the expedition. Burnette et al. (2011) surmised, "the climbers proceeded, under the direction of the leader, to continue beyond the turn-around time, this decision was triggered by groupthink" (p. 31). Alternatively, groupthink can foster a subset of ethical principles (trust, trustworthiness, and cooperativeness) that may lead a group to a competitive advantage. Examples include teams in competitive activities (e.g., sports and debate) or a group that requires coordination to perform (e.g., choral groups and military platoons).

Nature of the Study

The focus of this qualitative research was to understand how groupthink occurs within a project team. Qualitative researchers focus on complex phenomena to understand the experiences of others (Gelling, 2015). Qualitative research emphasizes the use of observation and interviews to capture participants' voices. The research value of qualitative studies is based on the participants' responses to the research questions (Atkinson, 2015). To set the groundwork for a qualitative study, a review of related literature is important. Cleary et al. (2014) asserted that the literature review includes a description of theoretical perspectives on what past researchers completed on the subject, clarifies the research question, and provides context for how to research the question. My goal was to understand project managers' opinions of how groupthink occurs and how to prevent it from resulting in adverse consequences. A qualitative design was appropriate to gather data regarding project managers' perspectives. Qualitative studies offer

perspectives on issues and provide narratives that reflect the researcher's ability to document the resulting phenomenon (Gelling, 2015; Pathak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013).

Quantitative research is the gathering of data that are measurable and represented by numerical values. Quantitative methods are not appropriate for this study, because it did not focus on determining the relationship between variables that are measured quantitatively (Watson, 2015). Researchers using quantitative methodologies address research questions that require statistical analysis, which is not applicable to the research questions of the present study. The goal of a quantitative study is to test a set of hypotheses using data collected from closed-ended questions to verify existing theories; thus, the quantitative method was not appropriate for the study (Hoe & Hoare, 2012).

A qualitative method was suitable for this study because perceptions and lived experiences of project managers are not specifically quantifiable. Moustakas (1994) posited that research should focus on the wholeness of experience and search for the essence of experiences. This research was different from other project management studies because it focused specifically on understanding project managers' perspectives of how groupthink occurs based on their experiences of groupthink on a project. Moustakas (1994) described this research design, which focuses on a person's perception of the meaning of an event, as phenomenological.

Researchers using phenomenological methods seek to understand the experiences of individuals to make sense of a phenomenon by obtaining comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon in a natural state (Gullick & West, 2012; Khan, 2014). Phenomenological researchers explore participants' perspectives and understanding of a

phenomenon (Hays & Wood, 2011). A phenomenological research design was appropriate for this study because participants (project managers) shared their experiences and provided insights related to groupthink in a project setting. I made generalizations about the phenomenon from an insider's perspective after collecting data from multiple project managers (Brooks & Normore, 2015). Moustakas (1994) asserted that a phenomenological design permits the researcher to draw from personal experiences to gain a better understanding of others' experiences. I observed multiple perspectives of the same phenomenon to generalize about how the world appears to others.

I used the interpretive phenomenological method to analyze, receive, and synthesize participants' experiences. The study included data regarding experiences of project managers to determine how groupthink occurs in a project team. Interpretive phenomenology is a core methodology that requires the researcher to integrate his or her ideas into those of the subjects (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013). This integration is germane to the research due to my extensive project management experience and strong desire to ensure total transparency during the research process. The phenomenological method was appropriate because the study explored the lived experiences and perceptions of project managers. I examined participants' experiences in detail to fully understand the phenomenon and generate new information (Tuohy et al., 2013). Lived experiences may reveal instances when groupthink enabled a positive outcome for the project team, which also informed the outcome of this research.

Other designs, such as case studies, grounded theory, and narrative research, were less appropriate for this study. A case study was not ideal because the study focused on

only one source of data: project manager interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Grounded theory is another form of qualitative research that researchers use to develop a theory or model based on systematically gathered, empirically grounded, and inductively analyzed data (Urquhart, Lehmann, & Myers, 2010). Grounded theory was not suitable for the study, because it relies on existing data to develop a theory. Narrative research design uses qualitative data presented in a storied and chronological form to investigate a particular phenomenon (Wiles, Crow, & Pain, 2011). The present study did not involve investigation of stories; therefore, a narrative research design was not appropriate.

I recruited participants for this study using purposive, convenience sampling. The logic and power of purposive sampling lie in its ability to select information-rich cases for study. Elo et al. (2014) described *purposive sampling* as the process in which a researcher explicitly selects people within a population to conduct a study. Knotters and Brus (2013) noted that information-rich cases are those from which researchers can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the study. Participants selected purposively are more likely to participate, which enhances the richness of the data.

Qualitative research normally involves small sample sizes. Dworkin (2012) recommended the size of a qualitative sample range be from 1 to 25 participants. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) stated that there were no specific rules for sample size. Rather, sampling depends on the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what could be useful, what may have credibility, and what the researcher can accomplish with available time and resources. The phenomenological approach accommodates sample sizes from 5 to 25

or more participants. Patton (2015) asserted that for phenomenological studies, if data reaches saturation prior to assessing ten people, then the number of subjects could be fewer. For this study, the target sample size was 18 participants. These 18 participants were certified PMPs from various occupational disciplines such as banking, consulting, health care, and government services.

The inclusion criteria for this study included the following: (a) the project manager must have at least 10 years of experience working in project teams; and (b) the project manager must have experience with groupthink in a project team. I provided a general definition of groupthink to all participants to ensure their experiences were reflective of the definition. I used tools such as LinkedIn and Walden's Research Pool to engage potential participants. The next step was to contact potential participants to verify whether they met the inclusion criteria. If the potential participants were willing to participate in the study, I screened them via telephone. After I determined the participants' eligibility for the study, I scheduled telephone interviews.

All qualitative data came from semi-structured interviews. I conducted semi-structured interviews based upon an interview guide that included open-ended questions to allow participants to express their experiences of groupthink as a factor that kept them from achieving the intended goals of a project. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. After the interviews were complete, I transcribed all data from the audio-recorded interviews and then categorized the information to identify any patterns in concepts the participants expressed. I organized data into logical categories that summarized the experiences and perspectives of project managers about how groupthink

occurred and affected their project teams' outcomes. I used NVivo 11 software when conducting the data analysis.

Definitions

The following section includes the operational definitions of the terms in the study.

Groupthink. "A mode of thinking in which the quest for agreement among members becomes so dominant that it overrides any realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action" (Janis, 1982, p. 9).

Overestimation of group. "Exaggerated commitment of the group" (Burnette et al., 2011, p. 35).

Project management. Project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet project requirements (PMBOK, 2017).

Project management body of knowledge. "An inclusive term that describes the sum of knowledge within the profession of project management" (PMBOK, 2017, p. 1).

Project manager. A person responsible for integrating all aspects of the projects and managing the personnel (project team) to deliver results based on customer specifications (PMBOK, 2017).

Project team. The assembly of individuals with different skills and abilities to achieve the goal of the project (Jetu & Riedl, 2012; PMBOK, 2017).

Rogue groups. Actions by a group with intent to cause damages to its targeted beneficiary (Dnes, 2013).

Received wisdom. "The set of beliefs and standards that people have come to accept as true in a given organization" (Sims & Sauser, 2013, p. 76).

System biases. "Common distortions in the human decision-making process. They reflect a particular point of view that may be contrary to rational thought" (Shore, 2008, p. 7).

Stakeholders. Members of the project team and all interested entities that are internal to the organization (PMBOK, 2017).

Task cohesion. Building team cohesion based on a shared task (e.g., a mountain expedition) as opposed to interpersonal interaction (Burnette et al., 2011).

Assumptions

There were many assumptions that I addressed to manage expectations in this study. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) described assumptions in a research study as factors that are out of the control of the researcher and that contribute to the existence of the research problem. For instance, I assumed that participants answers to the interview questions were truthful (Maxwell, 2012). Other potential assumptions of the study include the following: (a) participants accurately described their experiences in project management, negative or positive, for data analysis of common themes; and (b) occurrences of groupthink are the leading cause of bad decisions and failed or missed opportunities to achieve desired results in a project. The goal of the research was to develop a list of criteria that lead to groupthink so that project teams may avoid them in the future.

Scope and Delimitations

Groupthink continued to evolve as a topic of study after its introduction in 1972. It stemmed from studies of political calamities of the late 1960s and 1970s. Groupthink's present application appears in research on financial collapse, failed mountain climbing expeditions, education fraud, racial inequality, and terrorism. In many of these cases, groups made decisions with little information, homogeneous group composition, and minimum decision-making processes to guide them. Despite an exhaustive review of past literature on groupthink, there is little information about how groupthink occurs and how to mitigate its effects in a project team setting (Bénabou, 2013; Pratkanis & Turner, 2013; Sims & Sauser, 2013). There is little information regarding instances in which groupthink leads to a successful outcome (Rose, 2011). The focus of this research was on project managers' experiences of groupthink and what they do to mitigate it. I also discerned instances of groupthink that resulted in a positive outcome and noted whether it is probable for project managers to apply groupthink to foster positive outcomes.

The study adds to the present understanding of groupthink by providing context regarding the reason why project teams are susceptible to groupthink and the strategies project managers employ to avoid adverse consequences. The transferability of the study depends on the evaluation criteria for participants. Project managers were the population of the study. The evaluation criteria may be relevant to any context involving the management of project teams from a project manager's perspective.

The delimitation of the study was the selection of a qualitative phenomenological study to record the perceptions of project managers. The study added to the growing body

of research on the importance of perceptions as a mediating factor in determining the nature of project management outcomes. The study was perceptual and included a retrospective element that assumed respondents' memories were clear. All participants were project managers with different backgrounds in managing people. They reflected upon their experience of managing people in a project team. The data were generalizable to all studies of project management. To the extent their retrospective evaluations match with current studies, project managers may validate past findings concerning groupthink and ways to mitigate its effects.

Limitations

Limitations exist in every study, some of which are out of the researcher's control. Adequately addressed limitations do not reduce a study's value (Bernard & Bernard, 2012; Beskow, Grady, Iltis, Sadler, & Wilfond, 2009). Every aspect of a research study has limitations (Simon & Goes, 2011).

The first limitation of the study was that the population was not representative of the total population of project managers in the United States. Another limitation is that the study included only private and public-sector project managers from selected organizations. Purposive sampling excluded some qualified and experienced PMPs. The final limitation was the convenience sampling method, which targeted participants from conveniently available cases, associations, or organizations (Young & Temple, 2014).

Member checking helped maintain credibility. Member checking was the process of allowing participants to verify the accuracy of interview transcripts developed from each of the interviews (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). I shared

the insights and conclusions developed from the data analysis and sought participants' feedback throughout the data collection and analysis process, especially to ensure transcripts were accurate. The project managers who participated in the interviews validated the study's findings. I had a responsibility to represent the multiple realities revealed by project managers regarding their experiences and perceptions of groupthink in a credible manner. A study that is credible is also dependable (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

Transferability correlates to external validity through which researchers may generalize conclusions to other contexts (Munhall, 2012; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Transferability is the ability to transfer a study's findings to another population that is different from the one the researcher used in the original study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). If the study is transferable, the findings may be relevant to other groups of project managers working in other fields or industries (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). Participation in this study was voluntary, and no organizational leaders or project managers knew who else decided to participate. I explained that participants could leave the study at any point without penalty in the informed consent application.

Significance of the Study

Project teams contend with internal and external influences that may affect decision-making and the outcome of projects. Project teams work within defined start and end dates (PMBOK, 2017). For example, if a project team is creating new software that could eliminate hundreds of jobs, there may be team members who know people who would experience negative effects of a successful outcome of the project. There could

also be team members with financial incentives that are dependent on completing the project. These stakeholders weigh on the project team members' psyches and can influence the outcome of the project. Haslam et al. (2006) stated that the amount of intellectual and work capital expended to create project teams warrants research to better understand the role that groupthink may play in preventing teams from accomplishing goals.

Not all decisions made by groups that result in a negative outcome are the result of groupthink. However, the conditions for groupthink can happen in any group with considerable pressure to perform well (Hällgren, 2010; Harter, 2012). There is limited research on what causes groupthink; current literature focuses on the symptoms of groupthink (Redding, 2012; Sims & Sauser, 2013). Whyte (1998) argued that the premise of groupthink is flawed because of the methodology researchers use to gather information and the general risks associated with group decision-making. The premise of the present study was that organizations and managers need a better understanding of how groupthink occurs within project teams before developing new strategies to avoid it (Harter, 2012; Pratkanis & Turner, 2013). The findings of this study may help project managers and organizational leaders further develop the concept of groupthink in terms of its symptoms and causes. The results of the study may help project managers identify groupthink when it stops their team from achieving its goal.

Significance to Practice

The findings of the study may play a critical role in business practices, because many project teams do not complete the objectives of their projects. The function of a

project manager is important to the success of projects in organizations; they lead people to generate successful project results (Müller & Martinsuo, 2015). Project managers are different from other managers because their primary objective is to lead the project team to complete the project objectives (PMBOK, 2017). Several factors contribute to a project not meeting its objectives, including cost overruns, defects, unrealistic deadlines, incompetent project team members, and stakeholder interference (PMBOK, 2017). There are a variety of approaches to address these issues, such as utilization of a scope change management process, hiring competent project team members, and escalating issues to senior leadership (Shore, 2008). Project managers use these approaches to mitigate groupthink, but project teams are still very vulnerable to it. In this study, I examined why groupthink occurs on project teams through interviews with project managers.

Significance to Social Change

The primary purpose of social change in research is to improve the conditions of people who may feel influenced by the results of a study (Du et al., 2013). Another objective of social change was to permanently replace negative patterns with approaches that generate optimal outcomes (Hielscher, Pies, & Valentinov, 2012). As more organizations use project teams to accomplish business objectives, researchers must place more emphasis on understanding why so many projects fail to meet objectives. Project team members do not feel comfortable asking hard questions or going against the wishes of the project team due to fear of retaliation (Bénabou, 2013). Charles (2013) highlighted internal conflicts and dissention that can lead a group to prioritize loyalty over reason to maintain cohesion.

This qualitative phenomenological study may contribute to social change by illustrating how groupthink occurs in a project team and how teams can avoid it by changing patterns of group interaction. When a project team must unanimously agree on a decision as a group, a member of the team should play *devil's advocate* to ensure they properly examine decisions (Riordan & Riordan, 2013). Team members are often afraid to disagree due to fear of retribution or retaliation. Building in a control, such as a team score card that requires final decisions meet several agreed upon criteria, may help teams avoid isolating members with different opinions. If the project sponsor or other stakeholders expect a particular outcome, problems such as *scope creep, product defects,* and *rework* may arise because of the groups' desire to acquiesce to the project sponsor's expectations. Creating criteria and sharing them with stakeholders before the project starts may prevent this issue. This approach is structurally different from the ways most project teams engage with one another.

In this study, I explored the decision-making processes that project teams use to reach consensus and how the use of these processes may result in better decision-making. I explored many of the recommendations presented by past researchers to eliminate the adverse consequences of groupthink. Daspit, Tillman, Boyd, and Mckee (2013) stated that reaching consensus does not mean that everyone agrees on a decision or that teams that are less susceptible to groupthink promote an environment in which individual members of the group feel encouraged to contribute their expertise. Ben-Hur et al. (2012) asserted that it is "saying what needs to be said without the concern of retaliatory actions from team members" that helps avoid groupthink (p. 717). Shore (2008) stated that

project teams must fulfill their intended purpose, but many teams miss some goals and others fail to complete any goals at all. Groupthink may be one of reasons project teams fail to meet intended objectives.

Ascertaining causes of groupthink in project teams was an objective of this research. Project managers can take precautions to minimize the adverse effects of groupthink to help their team members and organizations make better decisions and avoid making poor decisions (Duan-Barnett, Wangelin, & Lamm, 2012). This research may also promote social change by highlighting why project managers must become *whistleblowers* when their project team is overcome by behaviors that foster negative aspects of groupthink. Howard (2011) highlighted the subprime mortgage crisis as an example of a system full of bad actors who promoted behaviors that fostered groupthink, such as the illusion of unanimity and self-censorship. There were whistleblowers who reported fraudulent behaviors by leaders in the subprime mortgage industry, but financial regulators and industry lawyers silenced them and ignored horrible mortgage practices until the economy nearly collapsed in 2008. Millions of United States citizens lost their jobs and houses because of reckless subprime lenders practices (Howard, 2011).

Summary and Transition

The goal of most project teams is to complete a project on time, within budget, and with minimum defects. Organizations collocate project teams to quickly build rapport to improve the chance of successful completion of project work. Groupthink tends to flourish in situations in which a team feels pressure to make decisions without critically weighing alternatives or allowing team members with divergent views to make the case

for their recommendations (Geddes, 2012). Groupthink frequently results in adverse consequences for the team. The notion of groupthink emerged from Janis' (1972) desire to understand faulty decision-making in highly cohesive groups. Janis (1972) found that group pressure leads to the deterioration of "mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment" (p. 9). Rose (2011) examined over 50 studies on groupthink, and only a few provided an explanation for its causes. Janis (1982) suggested that cohesion was a primary antecedent of groupthink. Sims and Sauser (2013) stated that *received wisdom* is a variable that contributes to groupthink. Bénabou (2013) found that unethical behaviors of decision-makers influenced groupthink, particularly in companies that promoted a culture of deception. For example, Enron deceived its employees and customers by encouraging them to invest in the company's stock while it was rapidly deteriorating.

Groupthink may sometimes be positive for a project team. Riccobono, Bruccoleri, and Größler (2015) argued, "group discussions focusing on shared information enhance members' confidence and commitment to the group's decision and action that in turn improve group performance" (as cited in Sniezek, 1992, p. 125). Another example of positive groupthink is when employees become part of the project team according to what they can contribute to fulfill the objectives of a project (PMBOK, 2017). Group members must collaborate to achieve a set goal; after they complete the project, all members return to their assigned roles and responsibilities as employees of the organization (PMBOK, 2017). The effectiveness of the project team depends on the individual expertise of each team members and their ability to reach consensus through critical evaluation of ideas (Ben-Hur et al., 2012). Groupthink can help a newly formed

project team build a sense of belonging and foster the sharing of ideas to reach a consensus. It is only when the team chooses to avoid offending one another and strikes down other team members' views that groupthink becomes a problem.

The present research explored how groupthink occurs within project teams and what project managers do to identify and address it before it influences the team's decision-making process. PMBOK (2017) stated that the purpose of a project team is "to support the project manager in performing the work of the project to achieve its objectives" (p. 556). Through an examination of related literature, I assessed whether the structure of project teams carry features of groupthink, how these features emerge, and what project managers can do to avoid these features. I also examined why groupthink tends to cause negative decision-making in project teams. I collected data from selected project managers, organized the data into logical groupings, identified trends, and constructed interpretive narratives from the data to capture the complexity of groupthink.

Chapter 2 includes theoretical perspectives and previous research findings regarding groupthink in project teams. The literature review provides an overview of the origin of groupthink, its general features, and the context for research on groupthink in temporary organizations. Chapter 2 includes an examination of groupthink and its relationship to focus groups and cohesion, and it concludes with an analysis of groupthink in dysfunctional teams regarding its influences on project team decision-making. The literature in Chapter 2 supports interpretation, analysis, and synthesis of findings after data collection.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this research, I studied what antecedents enable groupthink to occur in project teams from the perspectives of project managers. Specifically, I identified how groupthink happens, why it may be a problem, and why project teams may fail to effectively employ solutions to alleviate it (Peterson, 2012). I also identified whether it is possible to avoid groupthink and what project managers and team members can do to limit its adverse influence (Peterson, 2012).

The literature review consists of the following elements: (a) an overview of groupthink; (b) groupthink theory; (c) groupthink and temporary organizations; (d) groupthink and focus groups; (e) groupthink and cohesion; (f) groupthink and dysfunctional teams; (g) groupthink, conflict, and team performance; and (h) groupthink, decision-making, and project teams. This chapter also includes the internal and external conditions that project teams must overcome to prevent groupthink from influencing decision-making and, ultimately, the outcome of the project.

Groupthink is a prevalent phenomenon, but not all bad decisions constitute groupthink. In this research, I explored why groupthink is so difficult to stop after it begins. Groups may experience groupthink if they ignore possible roadblocks in their decision-making process and fail to develop contingency plans for potential obstacles. The present research may help project managers, team members, and stakeholders employ new and better strategies to avoid groupthink.

PMBOK (2017) described project teams as lifelines companies use to accomplish goals. Project teams are quickly replacing traditional work groups in which team

members with similar skills report to the same functional manager to perform tasks. Project teams occur in almost any type of organization. Jetu and Riedl (2012) defined a *project team* as an assembly of individuals with different skills and abilities to achieve the goal of the project. Project teams are temporary in nature and tend to form in existing organizational structures (Daspit et al., 2013). Many companies use project teams to accomplish important organizational goals (Akpan, 2015). Project teams are prevalent in engineering (Jarvenpaa & Keating, 2012), manufacturing (Leseure, 2015), and construction (Kwofie, Alhassan, Botchway, & Afranie, 2015; Ling & Tran, 2012). Project teams exist in almost every industry to solve business problems or produce something of worth for the companies they serve. The Economist Intelligence Unit (2009) stated, "80 percent of global executives believed having project management as a core competency helped them remain competitive during the recession" (p. 1). Many companies utilize project teams to accomplish organizational goals, but many of these teams do not accomplish objectives. Vrhovec, Hovelja, Vavpotič, and Krisper (2015) reported that 60% of project teams in the 2013 Standish Report did not accomplish their objective. PMBOK (2017) cited expanded scope, cost overruns, inexperienced team members, and external influences (e.g., regulation changes or executive sponsors who pressure the team) as reasons why project teams fail to accomplish objectives. Groupthink is another variant that inhibits successful objective completion.

Literature Search Strategy

Groupthink research existed in numerous disciplines and academic discussions since its introduction by Irving Janis in 1972. Janis (1972, 1982) referred to a mode of

thinking in which the pursuit of agreement or consensus among individual team members disregards alternative courses of action to maintain decorum within the group. Janis (1972) focused on governmental fiascos such as the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Bay of Pigs invasion, and the escalation of the Korean War. Janis' (1972, 1982) research led many theorists to adopt this concept to explain what led test subjects to faulty decisions or what antecedents contributed to occurrences of groupthink in other scenarios. Rose (2011) conducted research on several articles, case studies, experimental studies, and literature reviews of groupthink theory, and concluded that most of the studies provided a definition of groupthink, but few studies tested the theory.

To gather useful information for this literature review, I limited the search to peer-reviewed sources published since 2010 with a digital object identifier (DOI) number. I accessed ProQuest Central, Walden's Thoreau Multiple Search Database (primarily EBSCO databases), various books, and three dissertations. The information provided an adequate foundation to complete the research (see Table 2). I utilized databases and book sources to perform a keyword search for terminology including *dysfunctional teams, collective denial and willful blindness, decision-making, group coercion, cohesion, group conflict self-management, group stability, groupthink, group thinking, leadership, methodology, overestimation of group, organizational structures, project management, project team, received wisdom, system biases, social change, stakeholders, task cohesion, team,* and *team performance.*

I added terms including *retribution* or *retaliation* to the list, but I did not locate any relevant sources. I found a few sources on *rogue groups,* an alternative key word.

Rogue groups damage their targeted beneficiary (e.g., terrorist or hate groups) (Dnes, 2013). In a project setting, members do not have to be part of a rogue group to cause damage. For instance, a project team can contain a subset of persons considered to be *rogue* who damage the project. Damages to the project team might include missing a deadline or requiring a rewrite of a software application because the developer did not follow the requirements and the person performing the testing did not catch any mistakes. How the project manager deals with this subset within the group can influence the outcome of the project. Based on the literature review, these studies are relevant to the present research because they present pragmatic examinations of group processes or potential solutions to groupthink. The onset of groupthink generally begins with a subset of a group exhibiting rogue behaviors that influence the project team (Caya, 2015).

Table 2

Literature Research for Groupthink: Resource Results

Terminology	ProQuest	Thoreau Multiple Database
Groupthink	564	282
Decision-making	440	115
Self-management	293	0
Collective denial & willful blindness	0	0
Group stability	100	0
Leadership	12	0
Methodology	243	12
Overestimation of group	7	0
System biases	234	0
Social change	440	0
Stakeholder	143	1
Task cohesion	67	0
Team performance	250	4
Team cohesion	194	3
Organizational structure	257	0
Project management	257	1
Group thinking	321	10
Dysfunctional team	45	0
Coercion groups	31	31
Group conflict	270	1
Project teams	229	2
Group stability	100	0
Rouge groups	4	0

Conceptual Foundations

There are numerous definitions of groupthink. Riordan and Riordan (2013) described groupthink as an occurrence when group members do not want to disrupt group unity and the positive feelings unity creates. Group members often limit their search for possible solutions and restrict discussion of alternatives to maintain this unity. For example, if an organization commissions a project team to build new software for a 2000-person customer service department, the team collects requirements for the software and begins to build the product. During the testing phase, the project team member might discover a defect that causes the software to dysfunction when more than twenty people use the application. The problem delays the project by 3 weeks. Prior to project team members reporting the issue, the project sponsor commends the team on their work and promises a 20% bonus if they complete the work ahead of schedule. The project team member proceeds to report the issue to the project manager and the project manager shares this information with the team. The team members engage in a *collective rationalization* that the defect does not warrant a fix because no one will use the software in groups of more than 10 people at a time. The project team proceeds with the software release to the users two weeks ahead of schedule. One day after the software release, it malfunctions and the customer deems it unusable.

In this example, the issue was that the project team and leadership were all aware of the time needed to produce software that would function without glitches. Lahm (2014) and the Healthcare.gov leadership team admitted that it generally takes at least 2 years to build, test, and rollout software of that complexity. Nevertheless, the project

team and its leadership team focused on the deadlines set by the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the President of the United States who felt pressure from Congress and public opinion to complete the rollout in an unrealistic timeframe. Based on the tenets of groupthink, the project team exhibited illusions of invulnerability by being extremely optimistic and taking a risk despite knowing they would not be able complete the Heathcare.gov project without significant problems. Groupthink is the intent to deceive or ignore signs of duress due to internal or external pressures to acquiesce with the majority even when the majority's actions may have irreparable consequences.

Literature Review

There are several approaches to determine if groupthink occurred within a group. The standard is Janis' (1982) symptoms of groupthink that include an illusion of invulnerability, the inherent morality of the group, collective rationalism, the stereotyping of out-groups, self-censorship, a shared illusion of unanimity, pressure to conform, and mindguards. Hällgren (2010) emphasized that groupthink may occur even without all eight symptoms. For example, Salomon Brothers, a Wall Street financial firm eventually acquired by Citigroup, submitted illegal bids during treasury auctions. Garbade and Ingber (2005) defined *treasury auctions* as ways to "minimize the cost of financing the national debt by promoting broad, competitive bidding and liquid secondary trading" (p. 1). Senior management condoned submitting such bids, hence engaging in groupthink by ignoring the ethical and moral consequences of their decision (Riordan & Riordan, 2013). Employees may condone such practices if they are unaware of the consequences. If a

person employed by Salomon Brothers had no formal financial education in treasury bonds or securities trading, they might assume that these practices were perfectly legal.

Groupthink may occur in any group, particularly those that limit group discussions and ignore divergent views of group members. Hassan (2013) asserted that groupthink infiltrates groups that practice self-censorship and rationalizing to preclude team members from considering alternatives. Ferraris and Carveth (2003) and Shore (2008) asserted that the result of the conditions and symptoms of groupthink is defective decision-making, which explains why so many projects are not successful.

There is consensus about the symptoms of groupthink, but many theorists question Janis' (1972) assertion that cohesiveness is an antecedent to groupthink; group cohesiveness may not be a requirement (Burnette et al., 2011). Riordan and Riordan (2013) suggested that "unethical behavior and the demand for ethical business decisions" might cause groupthink and that project teams must exercise professional skepticism (p. 2). This practice can be challenging when project team members feel pressure from other team members to either acquiesce to the majority of the group or face isolation.

Groups often consciously or unconsciously make unethical decisions; however, groupthink does not necessarily lead to unethical decisions. Sims and Sauser (2013) described groupthink as a pursuit of consensus among group members that is so dominant that individuals defer their right to critically evaluate decisions in exchange for agreement, even if the decision is unethical and leads to a negative outcome. An example is the 1986 launch of the Challenger space shuttle. Most of the decision-makers understood the implications of the decision to launch, but proceeded despite the risks.

Pratkanis and Turner (2013) cited the ethics of culture at NASA and the blatant disregard for divergent views for how the onset of groupthink enabled the Challenger disaster. The cause of the Challenger disaster was the failure of the O-ring on the shuttle's right solid rocket booster at lift-off. The O-ring was a new design that NASA had not tested in low temperatures. Staff reported this issue, along with the budgetary and scheduling constraints, to NASA's leadership. If the leadership had taken these concerns seriously, they might have avoided the Challenger disaster (Dimitroff et al., 2005). Hall (2016) attributed the Challenger disaster to NASA's normalization of deviant actions, such as NASA's leadership being fully aware of a lack of testing O-rings in cold temperatures.

Another example of groupthink in action is when a coach, trainer, or physician sends an injured athlete back onto the field with full knowledge that the injury may have long-term implications for the athlete. Coaches may succumb to the pressures of fans and sponsors, and value winning the game over the health of the athlete. Harvey (2014) reviewed data from college football players who committed suicide while still in college; the data showed that repeated concussions and the deterioration of brain tissue were key factors in the suicides of college football players. Colón, Smith, and Fucillo (2016) performed a study on athletes who suffered concussions to better understand why these athletes continue to play despite injuries. Colón et al. (2016) suggested that there might be a connection between social and interpersonal situations that does not lead to safer behavior modifications. Athletes want to play despite injury because of the perception they may disappoint teammates, like groupthink collective rationalization that discounts warning signs that may lead a group to reconsider decisions (Janis, 1982).

Project teams may be susceptible to groupthink because they are temporary groups brought together to accomplish a goal. Temporary teams tend to acquiesce when faced with difficult decisions to achieve a favorable outcome more quickly. It may be difficult for a project team to critically evaluate decisions because of the rush to complete the goal and the potential for remuneration with successful completion. Groupthink is not the only reason project teams fail. Team members may struggle due to incompatible expertise, a limited budget, or aggressive timelines (Shore, 2008). The following literature review highlights the techniques researchers employed to identify groupthink and its role in project teams' decision-making processes.

Groupthink Overview

Groupthink is a term that researchers use in many disciplines. Janis (1982) established the concept of groupthink to explain why highly cohesive groups under pressure make decisions that prevent successful completion of a task. Janis (1982) highlighted several tragedies in which United States government officials contributed to disasters, including the Bay of Pigs, the Watergate cover-up, Pearl Harbor, and the Korean War. Janis (1982) provided eight symptoms of groupthink (see Table 1) and a list of recommendations to prevent it. Rose (2011) completed a general analysis of groupthink and asserted there are two schools of thought. The first consists of those who believe that groupthink is nothing but a myth, and the second consists of those who believe it is a brilliant construct (Rose, 2011).

Some components of groupthink may improve group decision-making. For example, a project team assigned to build a fence may consist of an engineer, artist, and

accountant. If the team has two days to complete the project, they might assign tasks to each person based on their expertise/title. The artist draws the dimensions of the fence, the accountant determines what it will cost, and the engineer constructs the fence. Groupthink occurs if the group comes to consensus without considering other alternatives. In this example, the group *stereotyped* and rationalized their decisions based on assumptions of a person's skills based on their professional title (artist, accountant, engineer) without a competency review and alignment of team members. Further study is warranted to test the validity of Janis' (1982) recommendations for preventing groupthink. The present research explored the feasibility of detecting groupthink in project teams before it occurs and identifying antecedents that may be present.

Groupthink Theory

Groupthink occurs when a group comes to consensus without objectively weighing all actions despite information that may change the opinion of the group. Hassan (2013) connected groupthink to theories in social psychology, organizational theory, group decision-making sciences, and management fields. Generally, groups engage in groupthink when they believe it is more advantageous to agree with the majority than to weigh all options before deciding. Groups experiencing groupthink are usually unaware of its implications, such as limiting choices or ignoring possible setbacks, until after the results occur. Hassan (2013) believed that research into the phenomenon of groupthink is valuable to understand how group processes influence decision-making, particularly managers' decisions. Hassan (2013) suggested that groupthink is a phenomenon that occurs when the desire for group consensus overrides

people's logical desire to present alternatives, critique a position, or express an unpopular opinion. Sometimes, the desire for group cohesion effectively drives out good decision-making and problem solving. For example, many American firms discounted the economic potential of Africa because of its history of famine and poverty. Meanwhile, countries like China and England partnered with Africa and built a solid foundation for economic empowerment to reap the benefits of this investment (Grimm & Hackenesch, 2016).

Literature on groupthink theory focuses on the outcome of decisions, not on how the group made the decision. Riordan and Riordan (2013) provided a comprehensive analysis of groupthink literature following Janis' (1972, 1982) work. Riordan and Riordan (2013) argued that, to mitigate groupthink, companies must foster ethical thinking, issue checklists to diagnose groupthink, and employ strategies to keep groupthink from surfacing within a group. The following questions may help assess whether groupthink is likely in a group. Does the leader discourage open communication? Are team members reluctant to communicate relevant information? Do members criticize others who raise questions concerning a selected solution? When new information is contrary to a decision, do members engage in rationalization of the group's earlier decision?

The quality of group decisions begins with each member's individual behaviors. What must individuals do to guard against groupthink? Riordan and Riordan (2013) noted that individual group members must take the lead to exercise strategies to prevent the onset of groupthink in professional organizations. They must participate in group

discussions, speak up, and expect others to be prepared; this will ensure that members of the group investigate problems using a structured approach (Riordan & Riordan, 2013).

Saultz, Murphy, and Aronson (2016) researched the ways educators can learn from the Atlanta cheating scandal. The Atlanta Public School System seemed to be improving its test scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), a test from the United States Department of Education; however, investigators discovered that 178 teachers and principals fraudulently manipulated the test results to receive accolades and bonuses. The fraud was widely known, but it took almost 13 years to expose the abuse. The primary reasons educators cited for not coming forward were fear of retaliation and the use of *mindguards* to protect Atlanta public school leaders and other teachers engaged in the fraudulent practices. Groupthink was present in this example; educators shielded other educators who abused the rules from adverse information.

Groupthink and Temporary Organizations

There is little literature regarding temporary organizations and groupthink. Hällgren (2010) examined how a temporary organization's structure may foster groupthink, which is why I chose to study groupthink in temporary project teams. Studies of faulty group processes are imperative, because temporary organizations are increasingly common. Hällgren (2010) used Janis' (1982) eight symptoms of groupthink model to analyze the Mount Everest disaster of 1996, and concluded that three of eight features of groupthink existed in the Mount Everest events. Groups must pay more attention to group dynamics, in general, and groupthink, in particular.

The current study only addressed the relationship between temporary organizations and groupthink, but groupthink is not only present in temporary organizations. Some of Janis' (1982) features emerged in permanent organizations. Hällgren (2010) did not answer the question of whether temporary organizations are more likely than permanent organizations to develop groupthink. Therefore, one possibility for further research is to investigate the similarities and differences in groupthink in temporary and permanent organizations. Further research may identify instances in which groupthink leads to positive outcomes. My research focused on project teams to better understand whether the team can reverse the adverse effects of groupthink before they impede the team from accomplishing its objective.

Groupthink and Focus Groups

The purpose of a focus group is to represent a diverse population and engage in a guided discussion before making a decision. Boateng (2012) hypothesized that groupthink may influence data obtained by focus group discussion sessions because data showed that two focus group discussions significantly departed from data gleaned from one-on-one qualitative interviews. This difference indicated that focus group discussion sessions are not free from the impact of groupthink. The juxtaposition of focus group discussion sessions and groupthink provides greater context for face-to-face versus virtual project settings.

Boateng (2012) noted that in post-focus group discussions, a brief survey interview may capture participants' overall views on the subject/theme discussed. This type of follow-up survey offers respondents another opportunity to express views they

could not express in the earlier discussion or to clarify points they expressed. The process of member checking through follow-up surveys can positively influence the quality of data. The disadvantage of focus group discussions is that the group may influence some participants to remain in the group's orientation even after the focus group is complete.

Groupthink and Cohesion

Cohesion occurs within a group when individuals share a mutual interest and bond because of group interaction. Janis (1982) cited group cohesion as a major antecedent for groupthink within a group. Group members override any realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action to avoid confrontation with the leader or other group members (Riordan & Riordan, 2013). Golkar (2013) connected groupthink to social psychology, organizational theory, group decision-making sciences, and management fields. Golkar (2013) posited that groupthink is a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people when the desire for harmony or conformity in the group results in incorrect or deviant decision-making. Golkar (2013) also examined the fundamentals and concepts of groupthink practices and its structural effects on decision-making, particularly, of managers.

Group members work to minimize conflict and reach a consensus without considering multiple sides or critically evaluating issues. This is common within political parties. Rigard (2016) asserted that media and political pundits assumed that the Democratic candidate for President, Hillary Clinton, would win the 2016 Presidential election. She received a similar elevation in the 2008 United States election, and both candidacies ended in defeat. Donald Trump, the Republican candidate, reached out to

segments of the population that felt disenfranchised, which propelled him to win the election. Clinton's campaign team's refusal to reach out to alternative groups played a significant role in her defeat. Her campaign team rationalized warning signs (e.g., a lack of emotional commitment from supporters, the anger of voters in states such as Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ohio). Rose (2011) asserted, a variable of groupthink is the *illusion of unanimity*. Its features involve actions like those of Clinton's campaign that assumed that everyone held the same opinion and interpreting silence as agreement with the verbalized opinions of other team members.

Groupthink provides an explanation for defective decision-making. Golkar (2013) explained that groupthink occurs when the desire for group consensus overrides common-sense desire to present alternatives; group cohesion effectively drives out good decision-making and problem solving. Kaymak (2011) explained that cohesion is an important organizational phenomenon that affects the amount of organizational citizenship behavior displayed in work groups. Kaymak (2011) examined prior research that found an inverse relationship between group cohesion and absenteeism. Ultimately, the problem for managers is the inability to nurture cohesion in a work group. Kaymak (2011) developed theoretical arguments that linked several individual- and group-level antecedents to group cohesion. Individuals with high levels of collective self-esteem are more likely to feel high social integration, satisfaction, and commitment to the group task. Using the work of Janis (1972), Kaymak (2011) showed that social groups play a large role in defining group identity and asserted that organizations can create conditions that favorably impact the formation of cohesive groups.

Group discrimination exists in a variety of forms. Read and Klarner (2012) examined how groupthink applies pressure to group members by suggesting left-handed individuals are a visible minority from a group diversity and design perspective. Like Kaymak (2011), Read and Klarner (2012) asserted that groupthink is a distinct outcome of group functioning. The group applies pressure to any member that deviates from the group position. Related to groupthink, greater group diversity leads to higher decision quality. Read and Klarner (2012) suggested that groups could mitigate pressures of conformity involved in groupthink by mixing groups with left-handed participants.

In an organizational research review of seven meta-analyses conducted to investigate the relationship between group cohesion and performance, Castaño, Watts, and Tekleab (2013) identified a significant correlation between social and task cohesion and group performance. While the cohesion-performance relationship varied according to group setting, for example between sports and business settings, Castaño et al. (2013) found no significant variation based on other previously examined moderators, including group size, study design, team tenure, level of measurement, and performance measurement. Castaño et al. (2013) recommended measuring both cohesion and performance at the group level, and provided a counterpoint to groupthink models by illustrating how group cohesion may maximize performance and productivity. Castaño et al. (2013) presented practical and theoretical measurements of team performance.

Picazo, Gamero, Zornoza, and Peiro (2014) tested the relationship between interpersonal and task cohesion and satisfaction with being on a team. Picazo et al. (2014) argued that task cohesion emerged more than interpersonal cohesion because the project

team focused on achieving tasks, not developing interpersonal relationships with one another. These results are relevant to the present research because temporary teams tend to focus on tasks rather than interpersonal relationships because of the time it takes to foster relationships between team members (Castaño et al., 2013).

Groupthink literature indicated that there might be a direct connection between cohesion and shared leadership. Daspit et al. (2013) employed structural equation modeling to examine the relationship between cross-functional team (CFT) success and internal factors, including internal team environment, shared leadership, and cohesion. CFTs support functional diversity by grouping individuals from different areas together to achieve a specific goal. Daspit et al. (2013) divided undergraduate students into teams and asked participants to work competitively on a complex task that required functional area expertise, such as engineering, finance, technology, marketing, or sales. Daspit et al. (2013) found that shared leadership and cohesion correlated with team effectiveness, but shared leadership did not directly influence cohesion in CFTs. Furthermore, functional diversity did not contribute to group cohesion. They limited the study to CFTs, teams that are presumably less susceptible to groupthink, but its implications may be relevant to managers seeking to improve teams' effectiveness by creating a clear purpose and environment in which individual members feel encouraged to contribute their expertise.

Task cohesion may be a variant of groupthink. Similar to Daspit et al. (2013), Hirunyawipada, Paswan, and Blankson (2015) argued that team task cohesion reflects the correlation between individuals' commitment and social competency and the characteristics of successful product ideas. Hirunyawipada et al. (2015) found that

interrelationships among team members did not contribute to group cohesion or to development of successful product ideas. Hirunyawipada et al. (2015) applied structural equation modeling to analyze questionnaires from 195 new product development practitioners to measure task cohesion, product ideas, newness and usefulness to customers, social competency, and organizational commitment. Hirunyawipada et al. (2015) recommended that project managers prioritize employees' commitment to the team's ideation tasks and the firm's development goals. Castaño et al. (2013) found no noticeable differences between task and social cohesion. Hirunyawipada et al. (2015) reported strong cohesion within the team. A common theme to these studies is that business environments that foster novelty and innovation for a competitive edge minimize the risk of groupthink. In such environments, organizations reward team members for applying their expertise toward accomplishing organizational goals.

There may be a link between group cohesion and task performance. Quintane, Pattison, Robins, and Mol (2013) highlighted the distinction between short- and long-term stability of social networks, and Castaño et al. (2013) reported delineation between tasks and social cohesion. Wise (2014) sought to determine if an inversely curvilinear relationship existed between group cohesion and team performance. Wise (2014) investigated whether group cohesion reaches a point of diminishing returns, and argued that groupthink is a potential negative outcome of too much group cohesion. Wise (2014) used social network analysis (SNA), the study of the patterns of relation among individuals, to examine structural cohesiveness among teams of travel agents, and indicated that both high- and low-performing teams shared a similar network topology.

Low-performing groups exhibited structural deficiencies, and the relationship between group cohesion and team performance was inversely curvilinear. These findings support the argument that group cohesion may not enhance performance (Wise, 2014).

Based on experiences in a large group setting of a psychoanalytic psychiatric hospital, Charles (2013) investigated the phenomenon of *coercive force*, which leads a group to develop strategies to alleviate sources of anxiety. This includes productive changes that may undermine the task or function. Charles (2013) juxtaposed the individual decision-making that typifies private practice with the group consensus required to maintain a group in an in-patient setting. Charles (2013) highlighted the internal conflicts and dissent that lead a group to prioritize loyalty over reason to maintain cohesion, and suggested that by identifying and engaging with group tensions that lead to anxiety, organizations may overcome the limiting impact of coercive force and encourage adaptability to change. Charles (2013) concluded that the findings were transferable to business and academic settings, and presented a useful theorization of group processes that informed why groupthink develops and how to mitigate it.

Project teams make numerous time-sensitive decisions that require consensus from the team. For example, if a developer on a project team completed building software and sent it to the quality assurance (QA) team who found a defect, the QA team could either send the software back or ignore the issue and send the software to the customer. If the QA team sent the software back to the developer, it would delay the schedule and the company would face a fine. The project manager might decide to forgo fixing the defect and send the software to the customer to meet the customer’s delivery date deadline.

Maor (2012) argued that many people are overconfident in their intuitions, which is similar to the *illusion of invulnerability* in Janis' eight symptoms of groupthink. Group members often reassure themselves about obvious dangers and become overly optimistic or willing to take extraordinary risks (Janis, 1982). Maor (2012) examined the effects of positive and negative events and the effects of overestimation and accurate estimation of information. Maor (2012) demonstrated that the most salient antecedent of groupthink is high cohesiveness, and suggested future research focus on a context other than policy makers. Attention to psychological, cultural, historical, geographical, and technological content promotes in-depth knowledge of groupthink in project teams.

Group cohesion and the need to conform are symptoms of groupthink. Howard (2011) used the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis and other corporate scandals as case studies (e.g., Enron, Anderson Consulting, Lehman Brothers) to illustrate that cohesion and lack of diversity may cultivate groupthink. Howard (2011) asserted that the demographics of corporate boards promote groupthink by limiting representation outside the corporation, and claimed that board members often feel pressure to conform to key stakeholders and colleagues. These pressures can influence how board members represent the company. Howard (2011) emphasized that cohesion is a factor in some corporate boards succumbing to groupthink, but suggested it has more to do with the composition of the board and the nomination or appointment process. This assertion is like Read and Klarner's (2012) proposition that greater diversity leads to higher decision quality. Howard (2011) suggested that board members can avoid groupthink by requiring a

significant composition of the board be from outside of the company and by limiting the percentage of votes a person can lodge towards a candidate.

Psychological safety is a term that recently resurfaced after its introduction by Schein and Bennis (1965); it is an important variant of successful group performance (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Psychological safety is the act of creating an environment that fosters learning and eliminates obstacles that team members may perceive as threats (Hirak, Peng, Carmeli, & Schaubroeck, 2012). Hirak et al. (2012) asserted that groups fostering psychological safety might promote better group performance. Edmondson, Higgins, Singer, and Weiner (2016) illustrated differences in psychological safety based on work type, hierarchical status, and leadership effectiveness. Psychological safety plays a vital role in developing employees and cultivating a learning organization. Edmondson et al. (2016) suggested that future research seek to understand how to create psychological safety for employees with little or no status in an organization. Psychological safety is the antithesis of groupthink, but it can encourage this behavior by developing cohesive teams that foster antecedents of groupthink (Janis, 1982).

Groupthink and Dysfunctional Teams

Dnes (2013) examined rogue groups that engage in *antisocial* or secretive behaviors which are at odds with the values of a larger organization or community. Dnes (2013) drew from the fields of sociology, behavioral psychology, and institutional economics (specifically, incentive theory) to argue that rogue groups are ethically problematic and destructive in most business settings. Rogue group members share idiosyncratic skills that members can harness as the organization's human capital to

undermine the group's illicit activities. Dnes (2013) developed a game theory model to measure the reliability and degree of commitment of an individual to a group. Dnes (2013) wanted to uncover whistleblowing regimes, and fill a gap in the literature on dissenting groups within an organization. Dnes (2013) identified a type of group dynamic that complicates an analysis of groupthink. Rogue groups incentivize the development of group-related human capital, including creative thinking, but loyalty remains paramount to the group's secrecy and survival.

Teams typically prioritize personnel and process changes over structural changes, such as reward structures and role specialization. Johnson, Hollenbeck, DeRue, Barnes, and Jundt (2013) presented strategies to improve performance of self-managed teams. Johnson et al. (2013) highlighted the advantages of group autonomy, including the capability to quickly modify task strategies and address performance deficiencies. They examined changes enacted by self-managed groups to distinguish between functional change (that supports the team's task goals) and dysfunctional change (which may result in poorer performance). Johnson et al. (2013) enlisted self-managed and structurally misaligned teams of undergraduate students (a total of 312 participants) to complete assigned tasks. Teams had the option to make personnel, process, or structural changes to improve their performance. Most teams cited process issues and made dysfunctional changes that hindered performance. Teams that elected to make *structural* changes, however, excelled at future task performance. Johnson et al. (2013) highlighted a potential weakness of self-managed teams and a common symptom of groupthink; a team may be incapable of identifying a structural misalignment and performance may only

improve following an upper-level management intervention. Upper management influences affect teams, and may negatively influence the overall team's decision.

Santos and Passos (2013) conducted an empirical investigation to define dysfunctional processes in project teams. They surveyed 92 teams (414 individuals) in a management simulation to identify team mental model (TMM) similarity, the cognitive representations that members of a team share based on their collective tasks and operational environment. Santos and Passos (2013) sought to determine if aligning TMMs would diminish dysfunctional processes, such as relationship conflicts, and revealed that relationship conflicts decreased when groups aligned task-TMMs. Similar to Quintane et al. (2013), Santos and Passos (2013) reviewed intragroup dynamics as they changed over time. Research on groupthink highlights cases and causes of group discord that may be antithetical to groupthink but are also disruptive to group performance.

Groupthink, Conflict, and Team Performance

Aubé and Rousseau (2014) surveyed 381 members and 101 immediate supervisors of a Canadian public safety organization to build a four-dimensional model of counterproductive behaviors in team settings. The four identified counterproductive behaviors are as follows:

1. Parasitism: instances in which individuals let others perform their work on their behalf.
2. Interpersonal aggression: teammate humiliation, disregard, or gossip.

3. Boastfulness: team members who overemphasize their personal accomplishments by minimizing colleagues' contributions or claiming personal credit for the team's success.
4. Misuse of resources: team members inappropriately use material and equipment provided to the group (Aubé & Rousseau, 2014, p. 201).

Aubé and Rousseau (2014) found that all of these behaviors restrict collaboration between members and negatively impact team performance. They recommended managers intervene to reduce counterproductive behaviors. Aubé and Rousseau (2014) noted the omission of a discussion of how consensus thinking may negatively impact performance, and attributed poor group performance to individuals' bad behaviors.

In a counterpoint to Aubé and Rousseau's (2014) findings, Bradley, Anderson, Baur, and Klotz (2015) addressed the inevitability of conflict in teamwork and examined factors that may lead conflict to positively impact group performance. Bradley et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis and identified three perspectives for understanding moderators of the relationship between conflict and performance. The first is *task complexity,* specifically task importance. Bradley et al. (2015) found that teams engaged in high-stakes tasks can use conflict to improve performance, particularly financial performance. Second, Bradley et al. (2015) examined *information processing* and revealed that task conflict may lead to cognitive overload or inspire team members to improve performance. The final perspective is *expressions of conflict*. Bradley et al. (2015) found that open discussions improved team performance by increasing conflict expression directness, which supports the benefits of constructive controversy. Conflict

may remedy groupthink. Bradley et al. (2015) revealed gaps in literature on team communication and performance that narrowed the present study's scope.

Organizations use teams to achieve task goals or social objectives that are difficult or impossible for individuals. Hinsz (2015) researched teams and technology, strengths and weaknesses, and tradeoffs in cognitive task performance. Hinsz (2015) used socio-organizational psychology to advocate for the benefits of task-performing teams, and stated that this is especially true of knowledge-oriented and cognitive tasks. Teams offer important benefits for reliable task performance, including information pooling, error correction, meta-knowledge (awareness of levels of knowledge due to increased redundancy), and information sharing. Teams also have weaknesses, including slow responses due to inefficient interactions among team members, coordination losses, and team member misalignment (Hinsz, 2015). Team tradeoff of participation versus de-individuation is especially relevant to groupthink; a team reduces its tendency to internally question team actions if it follows an established course of action. Consensus thinking may slow or derail information processing within the group (Hinsz, 2015).

Boughzala and de Vreede (2015) created a collaborative maturity model (Col-MM) to qualitatively evaluate the quality of organizational or team collaboration. The experiment involved a focus group of 15 French chief knowledge officers (CKOs) from companies ranging from 500 to 200,000 employees in the automotive, software, audiovisual, civil engineering, and telecommunications sectors. After two years of monthly three-hour long meetings, Boughzala and de Vreede (2015) concluded:

1. CKOs perceived collaboration relies on *individuals' goodwill*, particularly regarding resource sharing and knowledge management.
2. Teams falsely inflate perceptions of their collaborative maturity.
3. Experimental manipulations to intra-team dynamics did not resolve all issues pertaining to insufficient responsibility and authority.

The results of this research are applicable to the present study because teams often incorrectly assume that their collaborative dynamics are satisfactory, or even optimal, when they are not. Groups foster an *illusion of unanimity* to assume all group members hold the same position and that group member silence is confirmation of agreement.

Groupthink, Decision-making, and Project Teams

The antithesis of groupthink in project teams is collective intelligence, whereby members of a group work together to solve organizational problems. Matzler, Strobl, and Bailom (2016) endorsed Surowiecki's (2005) argument that groups outperform individuals when a diversity of opinions, independence, decentralization, and aggregation exist. Matzler et al. (2016) argued that individuals must feel empowered and encouraged to contribute knowledge, and superiors or colleagues should not overly influence individual opinions. Matzler et al. (2016) advocated for managerial intervention to develop group intelligence based on informed conjecture rather than existing theoretical or empirical studies. Matzler et al. (2016) presented a solution for mitigating potential causes of groupthink (e.g., conformity, trend-following) and recommended creating cognitive diversity, promoting independence, accessing decentralized knowledge, and

effectively aggregating knowledge to stimulate collective intelligence. Matzler et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of team intellectual capital.

A critical component of group dynamics is interaction with other project teams, investors, management, and stakeholders. Interaction requires the trust of all other members to act on the behalf of the team and the initiative to make decisions for the team. Such external activities can enhance a project team's performance depending on the project members' *group attachment ethos* (Matzler et al., 2016). A member with high group attachment anxiety may thrive in executing external tasks; a member with high group attachment avoidance may be a liability in similar situations. Group attachment theory can predict the probability of a team member's potential success or failure in performing external tasks. Trust is necessary for this dynamic and must involve credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Matzler et al., 2016).

In groupthink, individuals' goals change to reflect the desire to conform to the group. Bendoly, Croson, Goncalves, and Schultz (2010) reviewed bodies of knowledge for operations management researchers interested in behavioral operations, and noted theoretical constructs and empirical phenomena from fields within psychology and operations management. Bendoly et al. (2010) provided a theoretical aspect of groupthink in project teams: groupthink causes a shift in what individuals want to achieve within the project team. Bendoly et al. (2010) introduced the Abilene Paradox (i.e., group members take actions in contradiction to what they really want to do). Groupthink and the Abilene Paradox influence poor group decisions. With the Abilene Paradox, individuals' goals do

not change, but participants' decisions reflect the group's decisions. Bendoly et al. (2010) noted that future researchers should create practice-oriented models that lack groupthink.

Shared experience and a common ethos further influence intra-team communication by enhancing open communication in the early phases of a project. Buvik and Rolfsen (2015) conducted a case study of the construction industry and found that prior ties influenced development of trust within project teams because they disrupted central team processes that were critical to the early phases of construction projects. Each team member was familiar with each other's preferences, which created a natural delineation of roles and expectations. Prior ties made it easy to develop a shared climate of trust. As project teams assemble and begin to perform project work, team-building exercises or social outings may help establish trust. To aid in managing groupthink, overall productivity and project duration serve as quantitative metrics for future work (Buvik & Rolfsen, 2015). The metrics provide an added buffer to critically examine ideas to avoid succumbing to groupthink.

Groupthink is a theory that impacts many types of teams, particularly those brought together by a shared interest or task (Riordan & Riordan, 2013). One such team is an executive team. Ben-Hur et al. (2012) applied a systemic approach to understanding the challenges facing executive teams when making good decisions and presented a simple framework to address these challenges. Ben-Hur et al. (2012) questioned the common individual-based approach to examining decision-making and highlighted interpersonal processes that can be solutions to groupthink. Ben-Hur et al. (2012) asserted that solutions that focus on helping decision-making teams understand their decision-

making practices, politics, and biases ultimately improve decision-making processes.

Teamwork is often stressful and elicits both positive and negative emotions. Stephens and Carmeli (2016) analyzed technological product development teams that constructively communicated negative emotions, and whether doing so optimized knowledge creation and improved project outcomes. Constructively communicating negative emotions enhances a team's capacity to access crucial knowledge from each team member and integrate that knowledge to improve project performance outcomes and project budget adherence. Stephen and Carmeli (2016) did not objectively analyze project performance, but utilized project team leaders' assessments. Utilizing more qualitative, observational methods may better determine whether emotional communicability is predictive of optimized knowledge creation and exchange. Honest workplace relationships create a safer, more comfortable environment to optimize creativity and time management (Stephen & Carmeli, 2016).

Summary and Conclusions

Groupthink influences most teams: permanent, temporary, unstructured, and structured (Hassan, 2013). Hällgren (2010) suggested that researchers "investigate the similarities and differences in regards to groupthink in the aforementioned type of organizations" (p. 107). The literature review in this chapter provided a synopsis of groupthink as a theory and how to apply it in numerous settings. Janis (1982) based his groupthink proposition on a series of case studies that were not empirical in nature and focused on groupthink after it occurred, rather than while it was happening (Rose, 2011). Hassan (2013) asserted that Janis' (1982) research primarily focused on a "single

decision executed by a group in which groupthink did or did not occur" (p. 226). An underlying theme among theorists regarding groupthink is that once it occurs within a group, it may be difficult to overcome (Burnette et al., 2011; Castaño et al., 2013; Hirunyawipada et al., 2015; Quintane et al., 2013; Riordan & Riordan, 2013). For example, mountain climbing is a popular and expensive pastime for nature enthusiast despite the dangers of injury or death. The fatality rate of mountain climbing overall is low, averaging 21 deaths per year (American Alpine Club, 2016). If climbers take necessary precautions, mountain climbing can be a great experience. Similarly, working on a project team can be a rewarding experience if group members take necessary precautions to mitigate groupthink.

Cohesion is a major theme in Janis' (1982) research on groupthink. "The more amiability and esprit de corps among members of an in-group of policy-makers, the greater the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by groupthink" (Janis, 1982, p. 245). Many studies supported the idea that cohesion relates to the presence of groupthink, but none validated it as an antecedent (Bass, 1991; Park, 1990; Rose, 2011; Whyte, 1998). Recognizing groupthink improves decision-making within a group (Janis, 1982). Previous researchers discussed what happens because of groupthink, rather than how it happens in the first place. The present study explored whether researchers can study groupthink while it is occurring.

Riordan and Riordan (2013) recommended avoiding groupthink by encouraging teams to brainstorm and employ a devil's advocate, which might avoid situations like the Healthcare.gov debacle or Challenger disaster. When leaders and groups have limited

alternatives, they forgo engaging others outside of the group (Riccobono et al., 2015). Project teams are temporary, and the rapid onset of groupthink makes avoidance measures less effective. The present research investigated how groupthink begins within project teams, why it causes negative outcomes, and how groups might avoid it.

Chapter 3 synthesizes the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 as a reference point for collected data. Chapter 3 includes an examination of why I chose a qualitative research approach for this research and the appropriateness of the phenomenological design. The chapter also presents the research problem, selection process of participants, method of data collection, and implications of the research method so that other researchers can replicate this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand how groupthink occurs in project teams and how project managers can mitigate its adverse effects. Project managers were the ideal population for this research because they are responsible for leading project teams and achieving results (PMBOK, 2017). Project managers interact with stakeholders and interested entities that are internal or external to the project team who may significantly influence the project manager or team to take actions that are not commensurate with the scope of the project. This scenario may lead to a project team derailing the project from its intended outcome.

To achieve the purpose of this study, I conducted phenomenological research by investigating the occurrence of groupthink for managers who worked on a project setting with primarily face-to-face interactions. I did not consider project managers who managed virtual projects; this could be a topic for future study. Groupthink exists in most industries. Interviews with project managers provided data regarding experiences of groupthink. I collected data by interviewing participants, which involved asking participants questions about professional project management practices, feelings, motives, and behaviors they believe contribute to the onset of groupthink. I interviewed 16 certified PMPs from various occupational disciplines (i.e., banking, consulting, health care, and government services) and asked open-ended questions to investigate the participants' experiences with groupthink in a project team.

I focused on project managers with a PMP certification. PMPs are responsible for meeting what PMBOK (2017) referred to as triple constraints: *time*, *quality*, and *budget*

of a project. Project managers require specific leadership skills to manage groups work at macro- and micro-levels (Akpan, 2015; Grebosz, 2013). PMPs are likely to understand how groupthink occurs and how to mitigate its effects to achieve project results.

Chapter 3 includes details of the methodology, the purpose of the research questions, and the rationale for choosing a phenomenological research design. In a phenomenological study, a researcher attempts to understand perceptions and perspectives of a situation (Cilesiz, 2011). A phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study due to my professional project management experiences with groupthink in a project setting and my desire to gain a better understanding of the experiences of other project managers. By understanding other project managers' experiences of groupthink, I generalized about groupthink in a project setting. This chapter also includes a discussion of my role as a researcher and the instrument for collecting and analyzing data. Details of the methodology include participant selection, instrumentation, and data collection. The details of the data analysis include trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

RQ1. What are the experiences of project managers in project teams that result in groupthink?

RQ2. What antecedents do project managers identify in project teams during their experiences of groupthink?

RQ3. What outcomes do project managers experience after groupthink surfaces in a project team?

RQ4. What actions do project manager think might prevent the onset of groupthink?

I explored project managers experiences of groupthink. The research tradition for this study was a qualitative phenomenological design. Qualitative studies focus on answering questions about the complex nature of a phenomena to understand it from the perspective of the participants (Gelling, 2015). The research value of qualitative studies relies on inductive analysis and the personal voices of participants (Atkinson, 2015). My intent was to understand how groupthink occurs and how to prevent it from resulting in adverse consequences based on PMPs' experiences. Therefore, a qualitative design was appropriate. A phenomenological design was appropriate for the research due to the reliance on participants' points of view. Qualitative studies offer perspectives on issues and provide narratives that reflect the researcher's ability to document the resulting phenomena (Gelling, 2015; Pathak et al., 2013).

The central questions in phenomenological research include: (a) what are the lived experiences of a group around a specific phenomenon; and (b) what are the meanings, structures, and essences of the lived experience of a specific phenomenon by the individuals experiencing the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Watson (2015) argued that quantitative methods are only appropriate for studies that focus on determining the relationship between variables measured quantitatively. Quantitative methodologies address research questions that require representation of large samples, standardized instruments, and deductive analysis to develop generalizations that contribute to theory (Hoe & Hoare, 2012). Therefore, a quantitative approach was not ideal for this research.

A qualitative research methodology was suitable for this study because the perceptions and lived experiences of project managers are not quantifiable. I used qualitative methods to elicit the lived experience of project managers to develop an understanding of individuals' perceptions. Moustakas (1994) posited that research should focus on the wholeness of experience and search for the essence of experiences. The present research is different from other project management studies because I focused on how groupthink occurs from the perspectives of project managers.

The research design for this study was phenomenological. This method provided an understanding of themes (Moustakas, 1994). In phenomenological studies, researchers seek to understand the experiences of individuals to make sense of a phenomenon by obtaining comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon in a natural state (Gullick & West, 2012; Khan, 2014). Tuohy et al. (2013) asserted that phenomenological designs complement research problems that are unstructured with limited past research.

A phenomenological research design was appropriate for this study because participants shared their experiences and insights regarding groupthink in a project setting. Brooks and Normore (2015) emphasized that phenomenological researchers consider multiple perspectives of the same phenomenon. I generalized about the phenomenon from an insider's perspective. The phenomenological design relied on personal experiences of the phenomenon to gain a better understanding of the experiences of others. My goal was to observe multiple perspectives of the same phenomenon to generalize about how the world appears to others. Phenomenological research is, at its core, a systematic attempt to gain a better understanding of the experiences of others

(Cilesiz, 2011). Researchers who use phenomenology examine limitations of the truth without judging or placing one person's truth over another's (Sokolowski, 2000).

The phenomenological method provided the structure and technique to disperse, receive, and analyze the experiences of project managers to determine how groupthink occurs in a project team. I examined participants' experiences to gather new information about groupthink, which formed the full essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The data gathered in the study revealed the experiences of project managers regarding groupthink and how they mitigate its effects. Therefore, a research method in which researchers examine human experiences as they relate to a phenomenon and the meanings it generates was the most appropriate (Salmon, 2012).

Other designs, such as ethnography, case study, grounded theory, and narrative research were not appropriate for this study. Ethnography is the study of an entire culture with a focus on the group's everyday behaviors (Patton, 2015). Ethnographic researchers become immersed in the culture as an active participant and record extensive field notes. Ethnography shares some common data collection techniques with phenomenology (e.g., observing participants, interviews), but the focus is on the *behaviors* rather than the *experiences* of the participants. Ethnography also requires prolonged engagement with a culture that can take months or even years to complete. The data gathered for this research was readily attainable from participants.

A case study is the intensive study of a specific individual or specific context (Maxwell, 2012). The present study focused on only one source of data, project manager interviews (Tuohy et al., 2013). It was important to focus solely on project manager

interviews because of their specific roles in group projects. PMBOK (2017) stated, “The project manager is the person that is assigned by the performing to lead the team members and their interrelationships for projects” (p. 555).

Researchers use grounded theory to develop a model from empirically grounded data they systematically gather and inductively analyze. Urquhart et al. (2010) described grounded theory as another form of qualitative research; it raises a generative question that guides the research. A narrative research design presents qualitative data in a storied and chronological form to investigate a phenomenon (Wiles et al., 2011). The problem and research questions of this study did not involve the investigation of stories or grounded data; therefore, grounded and narrative research designs were not appropriate.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative researchers believe that a researcher must interpret what he or she deems critical for understanding any social phenomenon. The researcher is an instrument that collects data by reviewing documents, observing behaviors, and interviewing participants (Collins & Cooper, 2014). Groenewald (2004) asserted, “A good research undertaking starts with the selection of the topic, problem, or area of interest as well as the paradigm” (p. 6). Researchers using phenomenological designs examine people’s perceptions, perspectives, and understandings regarding a particular situation (Tuohy et al., 2013).

I was the main data collector, interviewer, and analyst of the data for this study. I exercised controls to restrict personal influences and biases in pursuit of objectivity (Hays & Wood, 2011). I limited interviews to subjects with whom I had limited contact with to

minimize any interaction outside of the formal interview interaction. By maintaining objectivity, researchers can illustrate the significance, organization, and spirit of the experience of a person regarding a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Avoiding personal bias in research and analysis was difficult, because I experienced groupthink as a project manager in a project team. Nevertheless, I adhered to the role of phenomenological researcher with a commitment to understand how the world appears to others to maximize objectivity (Tuohy et al., 2013). Pannucci and Wilkins (2010) defined bias as "any tendency which prevents unprejudiced consideration of a question" (p. 619). To avoid bias, I acknowledged expectations I had about the possible outcome of the study, and avoided hasty generalizations aligned with personal views. I used a data collection protocol for interviews to avoid any leading or irrelevant questions.

Phenomenology is a philosophical stance as well as an approach to qualitative methodology. Phenomenology stresses individuals' unique perceptions of the world, which the researcher treats as truth that determines that individual's behavior (Patton, 2015). The role of the phenomenological researcher is to synthesize these experiences to make generalizations about what something is like from an insider's perspective (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Employing the tenets of phenomenological research provided an insider view of the research participants' experiences.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

A phenomenological, qualitative approach was appropriate for the research because participants shared their experiences and provided insights on what they

experienced related to groupthink in a project setting. Patton (2015) stated that "a phenomenological study…is one that focused on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience" (p. 104).

I interviewed a sample of 16 certified PMPs from various occupational disciplines and asked several open-ended questions. I used the data to illustrate the workings of groupthink as it relates to project efficiency. Each PMP had at least 10 years of experience and managed projects in a traditional face-to-face setting. The project managers received an invitation to participate in this study via LinkedIn and Walden University Participant Pool. To validate the PMP certification, I checked each PMP's surname against the Project Management Institute's (PMI) online PMP registry.

This research adhered to all Human Research Protection requirements. I obtained certification from the National Institute of Health (NIH), the recommended entity by Walden University for obtaining this training. Community partners did not participate in this research and non-public records were not necessary. The data was confidential, contained several identifiers, and was only known by me. Other than with my dissertation chair and committee members, I will not share the personal information from participants with others. I included this verbiage in the authorization form each participant signed prior to starting the interviews.

Most experienced project managers have a PMP certification with at least 5 years of professional experience. I used LinkedIn profile details to verify participants' credentials, and viewed each person's profile to ensure it met the 10-year professional qualification requirement of the research. Prior to conducting any verifications, each

participant signed an informed consent form. The form summarized the study, the participants' needs, credentials each participant must possess, and explained that I would use all interviews solely for this research study. I provided a gift card for $20.00 to all participants as a gesture to show appreciation for the participant taking time out to engage in the interview. The participants received the gift card after the interview.

I collected data through structured interviews. After I compiled the data, I analyzed interview content and organized data into common themes. The final report consisted of a general description of groupthink as understood by research participants who experienced it first-hand. I drew conclusions about groupthink in a project setting by assessing how it influenced project team decision-making and contributed to project efficiency. The data provided insight into how groupthink occurs and whether managers can prevent it.

Instrumentation

The research included semi-structured interviews as the primary instrument. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Measurement instruments provided the foundation for data gathering (Sokolowski, 2000). The goal was to interview each participant face-to-face, but participants elected to complete phone interviews because it was convenient from them. I adhered to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) standards. The Health and Human Services (2017) website included the following key protocols: (a) ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of all e-PHI so they can create, receive, maintain, or transmit; and (b) identify

and protect against reasonable anticipated threats to the security or integrity of the information.

Interviews are the quintessential method of phenomenological research. Interviews enabled me to gain another person's perspective (Patton, 2015). Cilesiz (2011) asserted, "The success of a phenomenological study must combine a phenomenological philosophical background, phenomenological data collection and analysis, and a well-defined concept of the experience" (p. 493). I ensured that all participants answered the same questions. I adhered to Walden's dissertation standards by obtaining formal written authorization from all participants prior to commencing interviews and offered an abstract of the research findings after the study was complete.

Content validity is the extent to which a measurement instrument is a representative sample of the domain being measured; the goal is to eliminate other possible explanations for the results (Lewis, 2015). I interviewed project managers and asked questions that reflected the content domain (i.e., project management) in appropriate proportions. For purposes of validity, I shared preliminary results with each participant and confirmed findings accurately reported their experiences of groupthink.

Noble and Smith (2015) defined reliability as "the consistency of the analytical procedure, including accounting for personal and research method biases that may have influenced the findings" (p. 34). I took several precautions to increase the reliability of the instrument in the study. First, I standardized each interview and replicated questions consistently for all participants. Second, I avoided direct contact with participants until I completed all interviews and analyses. Third, I sought differences and similarities

between participants' accounts to ensure representation of different perspectives. I also documented every step to ensure other researchers can replicate the study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The purpose of conducting this phenomenological research was to understand project managers' experiences of groupthink in project teams. I used a phenomenological research design to work with participants to create new information. The recruitment process for participants began with the creation of criteria for all participants in the study. Each project manager possessed a PMP certification and had at least 10 years of experience managing projects. I recruited participants through LinkedIn and Walden University Participant Pool. To validate the PMP certification, I checked each PM's surname against the PMI online PMP registry and the PM's LinkedIn profile. I viewed each profile to ensure participants met the 10-year professional qualification requirement; all participants fulfilled this requirement. Prior to verifications, each participant signed an informed consent form that summarized the study, participants' needs, and credentials and explained that all interviews will be solely for this research study.

Leedy and Ormrod (2016) asserted that interviews yield facts, feelings, motivations, and explanations for why participants feel the way they feel about a topic (e.g., groupthink). I interviewed 16 certified PMP from various occupational disciplines. I allotted two months to gather data from the 16 participants, and conducted interviews based on the availability of participants. The data collection period included coding all interviews. I recorded the interviews using 1-800 Free Conference Call, with which I recorded conversations and transcribes the data into a Microsoft Word document. I typed

all notes from the interviews and presented them to each participant. To avoid misrepresentation of the data, each participant validated the information from the interview to ensure it represented what they intended to share with me. I compiled the data to illustrate the workings of groupthink as it relates to project efficiency.

I collected data through semi-structured interviews, then analyzed and organized the data into common themes. The final report included a general description of groupthink via through participants who experienced it first-hand. I delineated data by analyzing its significance and separated irrelevant information in the interview into small segments. I grouped the segments into categories that reflected aspects of groupthink experienced by the participants, identified ways each participant experienced groupthink, and synthesized information to formulate a description of groupthink as project managers experienced it. I assessed how groupthink influenced project team decision-making and determined whether groupthink leads to unsuccessful project outcomes.

Data Analysis

Patton (2015) explained that data analysis for qualitative research is complex and time-consuming. I listened to all audio recordings to compare them with notes and transcriptions. To mitigate erroneous interpretation of the data, I conducted this review after each interview. I kept a detailed journal of all activities to avoid biases. I addressed discrepancies by reaching out to the interviewees for confirmation. I coded the data from the interviews using NVivo 11 qualitative analysis software to collect, review, analyze, and synthesize data. NVivo was the main tool to organize the data.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

For qualitative studies, upholding trustworthiness is important to ensure the truth, neutrality, and consistency of the results of the study. Trustworthiness refers to the way in which the qualitative study upholds credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in the data and results (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Elo et al. (2014) concluded, "It is important to scrutinize the trustworthiness of every phase of the analysis process, including the preparation, organization, and reporting of results" (p. 1). Only the participants can assess the credibility of the research. Participants received a copy of transcribed notes and audio of the interview via a password-protected email.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a form of internal validity that increases the credibility and validity of the results through convergence of information from various sources (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Patton (2015) asserted that inconsistencies in the data when using triangulation may identify other variables that the researcher should consider during analysis as an opportunity to uncover deeper meaning in the data. I used data triangulation to examine interview data from different participants. Each participant possessed a PMP and had at least 10 years of experience, but the industry in which the participant had the experience differed. This information may point to a pattern that may be useful for understanding how groupthink emerges and whether there are similarities in outcomes experienced by participants from different industries.

Transferability

Transferability, or external validity, in qualitative studies refers to the ability to transfer findings to another population that is not the same as the one explored in a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Munhall, 2012). Transferability depends on the level of systematic and exhaustive description in the final writing of conclusions and insights (Cope, 2014). To achieve transferability, I gathered in-depth and detailed explanations and discussions of the central research phenomenon. I asked participants for descriptive data and direct answers, and maintained the original form of all interview data to prevent distortion (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this way, the findings from this study may be relevant in other studies in different settings.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency of data across respondents and within a particular participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Consistency of data means that if researchers repeat the study in a similar context or with similar subject matter, the conclusions will be the same (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used an audit to ensure dependability (Cope, 2014). An audit trail refers to any tangible material that proves the accuracy and dependability of the data after it replicates via a similar analysis (Cope, 2014). An audit trail may serve as a second opinion on the process and products of a study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). I provided details about the methods, context, and participants of the study to assist future researchers in repeating the study and assessing the extent to which I adopted appropriate research practices.

Confirmability

Cope (2014) referred to confirmability as the researcher's ability to demonstrate the data represents the subjects studied. I used reflexivity to improve confirmability of the study. I kept a reflective diary to track my thoughts and take notes of personal history, interests, and how these variables may influence personal theoretical perspectives that could impact data collection and analysis (Houghton et al., 2013). The diary demonstrates confirmability by describing how I reached conclusions and interpretations (Cope, 2014).

Ethical Procedures

In any research, the researcher must obtain permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study. The IRB reviews the procedures to determine the acceptability of the methodology in relation to institutional commitment, relevant laws, and professional and academic standards for conduct and practice (Beskow et al., 2009). I maintained participants' confidentiality and safety, ensured security of the data, and explained the voluntary nature of participation in the study. The IRB process addresses informed consent, confidentiality, and the withdrawal process. IRB review ensured the research plan made provisions to protect the rights of individuals who participated in the study. I created and submitted a proposal to the required entity within Walden University for IRB approval. After receiving IRB approval, I began recruitment of participants. To ensure I adhered to the IRB's rules, I recruited the number of participants agreed upon by the IRB. I submitted the final participants list to the IRB along with all pertinent documents.

Informed Consent Process

The informed consent form contained information on the rights of the participants, risks associated with the study, and possible benefits involved in participating in the study. There were minimal risks to the participants. There were no direct benefits of the study to each respondent, and each participant received a copy of the informed consent form before participating. I interviewed only those who agreed with the content of the form and met the selection criteria.

Data Security

I took precautions to maximize security, and kept all data for the study secured and safe. I stored data in an electronic cabinet that only I can access with a password that has 23 characters with a mix of letters, numbers, and special characters. I kept all physical data (e.g., informed consent forms, printed transcripts, interview protocol, notes, and audiotapes) in a fire-protected safe in my home office. I will keep all data in its original form in the safe for 5 years. After the 5-year period, I will cross-shred files, burn the physical data, and wipe all electronic data from the electronic file cabinet.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

Each participant participated in the study on a voluntary basis. I did not coerce participants or pay them to complete this study. Participants did not have to continue with the study against their will. Any participant who wished to terminate their participation in the study did so without any prior notice, even at the middle or end of the interview process. Upon expressing the intent to withdraw from the study, the participant received their informed consent form and I deleted all data pertinent to the participant.

Summary

Groenewald (2004) described phenomenological research as a qualitative method that researchers use "to gain a better understanding of how the world appears to others and the researcher cannot be separated from its assumptions" (p. 7). This chapter included details of this groupthink study, and highlighted the appropriateness of the research methodology, purpose, and design. The chapter included details of data collection, recruitment processes, and the permissions I obtained from the IRB. Chapter 3 revisited the research problem and concluded with a discussion of the four criteria needed to develop trust in the research process: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Cope, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to contribute to the understanding of how groupthink occurs in project teams and to offer approaches to prevent adverse consequences based on the perspectives of project managers. In this research, I examined the occurrence of groupthink in a traditional (face-to-face) project setting, which was the most relevant setting for groupthink because it fosters the most interactions among project team members (Hällgren, 2010). I interviewed a sample of 16 certified PMPs with at least 10 years of experience from various occupational disciplines (e.g., banking, consulting, health care, and government services) using open-ended questions to investigate the participants' experiences and perspectives of groupthink in project teams. The original goal was to interview 20 PMP's, but I decided to lower the number to 18 after completing 10 interviews. The similarity of the data had run its course and I collected enough data for another researcher to replicate the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

One week after completing 18 interviews, two of the participants requested that I discard their information because they thought the data would not remain anonymous and expressed concern about their employers. I explained that their names, titles, and personal information would not be public, and provided a transcript that confirmed this information. I immediately honored the requests by deleting both participants' recordings, transcripts, and notes from all electronic sources (computer, flash drive, and cloud service). This brought the number of completed interviews to 16. I addressed the following research questions in this qualitative study:

RQ1. What are the experiences of project managers in project teams that result in groupthink?

RQ2. What antecedents do project managers identify in project teams during their experiences of groupthink?

RQ3. What outcomes do project managers experience after groupthink surfaces in a project team?

RQ4. What actions do project managers think might prevent the onset of groupthink?

This chapter includes the results of the research study. The chapter begins with the research setting of the participants, reflective of the wealth of experiences of participants and willingness to provide their insights on the research topic. The next section provides demographic details of the participants and the process of selection. The chapter also includes the data collected from this research. This chapter includes a discussion of the approach I used to analyze the data and the codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the data collection process. The chapter concludes with the study results.

Research Setting

Phenomenological researchers attempt to understand people's perceptions of a situation (Sohn et al., 2016). This mode of research was ideal for the current study because of my experience with groupthink. I wanted to gain a better understanding of the experiences of other project managers with groupthink in a project team.

Interviews were the sole sources of data. The average interview was 30 minutes long, and I conducted them over the phone. Each participant had the option of a video or phone interview; all participants chose phone interviews due to convenience. After Walden's IRB approved the study 07-12-17-0096441, I contacted a total of 28 persons via LinkedIn based on their LinkedIn profile that indicated they had at least 10 years of experience, worked in financial services, technology, consulting, government services, or insurance, and was an active PMP. This designation is an industry-wide recognized certification awarded by the PMI.

After I verified each PMP's certification via the registry site, I sent a message via LinkedIn to the 28 individuals to ask them to consider participating in my research. Out of the 28 messages, 23 replied indicating they would like to receive additional information on the study. I responded to each person by asking them to send me their personal email addresses so that I could send the consent form that provided a description of the study, participant requirements, and information regarding the $20 Amazon gift card for participating in the study. I sent this email via my Walden University email address and received 20 of the 23 consent forms from participants. I conducted all subsequent communication with each participant via Walden University email to satisfy the requirements of the IRB. In addition, the Office of Research Ethics and Compliance approved the use of individuals via the Walden Participants pool for this research. Unfortunately, I identified no participants through this site.

Each participant provided a date and time at which they could participate in an interview. I sent a formal email with an 800-conference call number for each participant

to complete the interview. Appendix A is an example of the email sent to each participant after they sent back their consent form. The conference call technology used FreeConferenceCall.com, which includes a record feature with the capability to record each call and restrict any unwanted persons from joining the phone call. Prior to each phone call, I informed each participant that I would record the call to successfully create a transcription of the interview. I asked each participant the same questions and kept a personal journal that contains the feedback received from each participant. After the interviews were complete, I transcribed the conversations, checked the document against my notes, and promptly sent it to each participant. I also sent an Amazon gift card to the participants immediately after the interviews. Prior to their interviews, three participants declined the Amazon gift card. Figure 1 is a summary of this process.

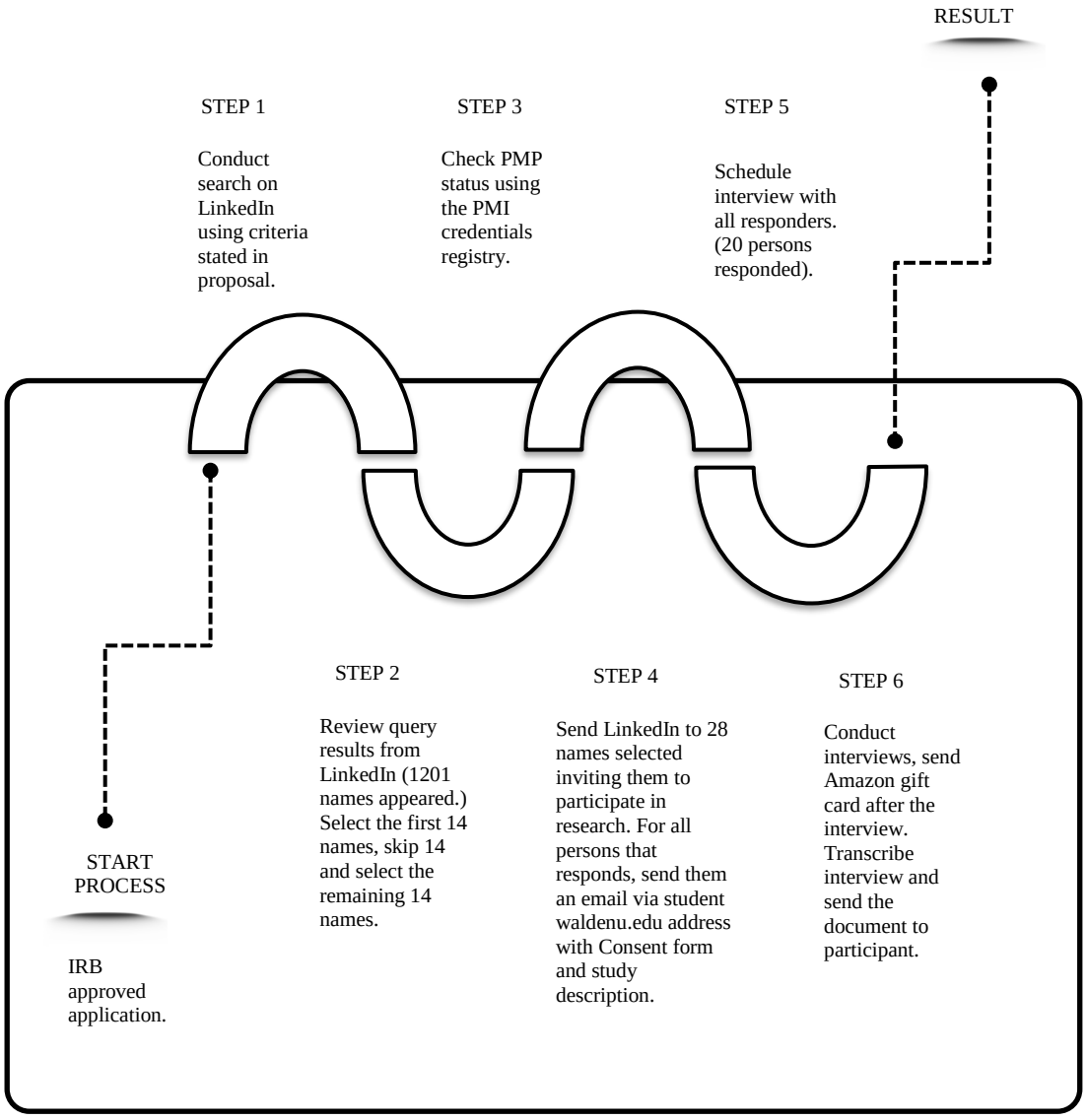

Figure 1. Summary of process to solicit participants and to complete interview.

Demographics

The study included 16 total participants. The criteria to select participants included: (a) must be a PMP, and (b) must have at least 10 years of experience managing projects. Participants' race, religion, creed, or other identifiers were not necessary for this

research. To ensure the protection of the participants, I modified company names. Nevertheless, from the interviews and review of each participant's LinkedIn profile, I compiled information to illustrate the balance, deep knowledgebase, and expertise of the participants. Of the 16 participants, 12 had master's degrees, two had bachelor's degrees, one had a PhD, and one had no degree beyond a high school diploma. All the participants had over 10 years of experiences. Eight of them stated they were in the project management profession for over 20 years. The 16 participants included nine men and seven women. Table 3 is a summary of the data.

Table 3

Demographic Summary of Participants

Name	Sex	Degree	Industry
1296	F	Masters	Government
2378	M	Masters	Government
2708	M	Masters	Technology
2734	M	None	Consulting
3480	F	Bachelors	Health Care
3520	M	Masters	Health Care
4693	F	Masters	Consulting
5039	M	PhD	Consulting
5619	M	Masters	Consulting
6352	M	Masters	Financial Services
7965	F	Masters	Consulting
8461	F	Masters	Consulting
8463	M	Masters	Financial Services
8625	M	Masters	Technology
9637	F	Bachelors	Consulting
9803	F	Masters	Health Care

Data Collection

I collected data in the form of interviews from 16 participants and assigned each participant a number based on the RAND feature in Excel. For the purposes of transcription, I gave each participant a different number from the RAND feature between 1,001 and 1,016. Assignment was based on the order each participant completed their interview. The participant's number for transcription was different from the number in the report of findings of the research. The intent was to ensure all participants' identities remain confidential.

Each participant called a 1-800 conference number or provided their phone number, so I would call them. I recorded all interviews. When calling participants on the number they provided, I recorded the call using RecordiaPro software. Thirteen of the participants chose the free 1-800 conference number and three provided their phone number for the interview. Prior to each phone call, the participant received an email providing them with the credentials necessary to complete the conference call and remind them I would record the conference call.

I began each interview with an icebreaker question: What path did you take to become a project manager? Project managers generally do not enter the profession by graduating from undergraduate or graduate school with the same path as a teacher, engineer, or nurse. The participants validated this assertion in the data. Most of them became project managers by working on a project and eventually deciding to get a project management certification (PMP). The other interview questions were as follows; participants could combine answers to the questions:

1. Can you share some general information such as what a part of the country are you in, and how long have you worked as a project manager?
2. Please provide general project specifications such as the scope of the project, how many persons were on the project team, roles of key project team members and whether or not the project was time sensitive?
3. What was your experience with groupthink in a project team?
4. What was the outcome of the project once groupthink surfaced in the project team?

5. Can you think of anything that could have been done to avert the project team from experiencing groupthink?

The participants moved through each question with ease. A few of the participants (8463, 6352, 5619) needed a refresher of the definition of groupthink in a project setting. The remaining participants addressed the questions and provided insightful examples of their experiences with groupthink in a project team. After each interview, the participant received a $20.00 Amazon gift card as stated on the consent form. All participants received the Amazon gift card except for participants 4693, 5039, and 8463, who indicated they did not want to receive the gift card. On average, each interview lasted 30 minutes; two interviews (8461 and 6352) lasted nearly 50 minutes.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological research depends on interviews with a highly crafted sample of participants (Gelling, 2015). I transcribed each in Microsoft Word and sent it by email to the participant in the interview. The average time to complete transcription was two hours for ten pages of transcribed data. The Microsoft Word document did not contain the participant's name. It used the assigned number based on when the participant completed the interview. I cross-referenced this number with the RAND number created in Excel. Each participant had a week to respond to ensure they did not have concerns with the transcript. Two participants received their transcripts and asked me to delete their data because they worried their employer would admonish them for participating in this research. I removed both participants' information from my computer and did not use it

in the analysis. The number of completed interviews was 18, but after the withdrawal of two participants, the number of participant data available for analysis was 16.

The data analysis consisted of two stages of analytical coding: open (i.e., reading the data several times to create labels for the unraveling of the data) and axial (i.e., creating relationships among the codes) (Conlon et al., 2017). I imported the 16 transcripts into NVivo 11 software for qualitative data analysis coding. The first review was a read-through of the entire set of responses to develop preliminary coding categories to answer the four research questions. Open coding uses line-by-line and sentence analysis. I generated primary, first-level categories based on the research questions and the answers from informants in the transcripts. This yielded six primary categories: project examples, project management challenges, groupthink examples, general experience with groupthink, project management career paths, and groupthink prevention strategies. I read each transcript a second time, and coded the data to generate second, third, and fourth level codes under the six, first-level primary categories. The coding produced 101 codes in total. I grouped the coded data according to similarities. Table 4 is a list of all first-level codes. It includes the names of the categories, a basic description, how many of the participants referenced the terms, and how many times the terms surfaced in all the interviews. Appendix B is a list of all 101 codes.

Table 4

Primary First Level Categories

Name	Description	Source	Reference
General Experience with Groupthink	A project manager's overall experience with groupthink	13	33
Groupthink Examples	Illustration of groupthink experienced by project managers	14	30
Groupthink Prevention Strategies	Methods used by project managers to prevent groupthink	12	42
Project Examples	Discussion of projects or aspects of projects experienced by interviewee that are not groupthink examples	4	9
Project Management Career Paths	The path that interviewee took to become a project manager	16	20
Project Management Challenges	Issues or problems experienced by project managers when managing projects.	7	14

I used axial coding to assign and link the categories and subcategories of codes according to their properties and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I decontextualized the data to allow for the development of patterns and sequences. I used inductive and deductive thinking to draw causal relationships between the categories of coded data to explain the phenomena, and identified emergent patterns leading to the occurrence of groupthink experienced by project managers. Thirteen themes developed in

total: four themes for RQ1, three themes for RQ2, two themes for RQ3, and four themes for RQ4.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Noble and Smith (2015) defined validity as "the precision in which the findings accurately reflects the data" (p. 34). I maintained credibility by assigning sending a copy of the transcript to the participant for review. I am the only person who knows which number I assigned to which participant, so all data remained confidential. I achieved triangulation through the requirement to only use PMPs with at least 10 years of experience (see Table 3). All participants' PMP statuses were valid according to the PMP registry.

Transferability

A good mixed of PMPs from various industries and almost an equal number of men and women participated in this research. Each participant provided detailed accounts of their experiences with groupthink in a project team. The findings from this study may be helpful to avoid groupthink in various project teams. The results may also be useful for leaders who provide support to project managers when they are managing a project.

Dependability

Each participant answered the same interview questions. I made every effort to keep the flow of the conversation consistent in every interview, but each participant could answer the question however he or she felt was appropriate. During the coding process, I compared data using codes and memos. I also used personal notes taken during every

interview to help with the transcription and subsequent coding. This approach ensured that I transcribed and properly coded all the comments the participants made.

Confirmability

Phenomenology stresses the individual's unique perception of the world, which is treated as truth that determines that individual's behavior (Patton, 2015). To manage personal biases, such as my understanding of groupthink in project teams versus the participants' understandings, I only made clarifying statements to the participant during interviews if they sought additional information or their answer was incoherent. For example, when I asked participant 8463 if they were familiar with groupthink, the participant stated yes, but asked for a general summary of groupthink. The summary I provided to participant 8463 was as follows:

> In order for groupthink to happen, group members often choose not to explore alternatives to the decision-making process, either because it's easier for them not to go with the flow, or because they want to be perceived as troublemakers, and then they lose status within a group. This was the same blurb that I used for others who asked for similar information. (Interviewer)

Study Results

I imported 16 interview transcripts into NVivo 11 for coding, and conducted open coding on all transcripts to develop answers to the four research questions. The research questions were as follows:

> RQ1. What are the experiences of project managers in project teams that result in groupthink?

RQ2. What antecedents do project managers identify in project teams during their experiences of groupthink?

RQ3. What outcomes do project managers experience after groupthink surfaces in a project team?

RQ4. What actions do project managers think might prevent the onset of groupthink?

An iterative process took place between the open coding and the development of codes, which resulted in a final four-level coding scheme for this research. The coding produced 101 (non-unique) codes. I analyzed the codes using axial coding to relate those that were similar to develop themes, and developed 13 themes to answer the four research questions. Table 5 summarizes the 13 themes within the research questions.

Table 5

Research Questions Aligned to Themes

Research question	Themes
RQ1. What are the experiences of project managers in project teams that result in groupthink?	a) Dysfunctional Teams are Problematic b) Consensus is Detrimental c) Success Depends on Team Performance d) Identifying and Avoiding Groupthink
RQ2. What antecedents do project managers identify in project teams during their experiences of groupthink?	a) Cost of Poor Communication b) Dark Side of Team Dynamics c) Immature Organizations and Work Environments d) Consensus is Detrimental
RQ3. What outcomes do project managers experience after groupthink surfaces in a project team?	a) Project Failure Affects Employment b) Impact of Groupthink on Project Outcomes
RQ4. What actions do project managers think might prevent the onset of groupthink?	a) Preventing Groupthink in Project Management Teams b) From Silent to Vocal Team Members c) Project Management Tactics d) Company Strategies to Combat Groupthink

Research Question 1

What are the experiences of project managers in project teams that result in groupthink? Four themes emerged from the responses provided by participants. The first was that dysfunctional teams are problematic. Dysfunctional project management may

cause internal dissention and failed communication and force team members to negatively influence participation through their knowledge or power. The following were the interview responses that fell under this category.

> I think part of the influence in groupthink gets down to who's on the project team and what influence they have. Oftentimes, you mix up people in a group that have real key knowledge and people that have a lot of authority or power, and when you mix those two together oftentimes the people that have that real key knowledge don't necessarily contribute, they go along with the group. One, for career preservation and maybe not wanting to make waves. I think the composition of the group that's together, whether it's a project team or even sponsors, groupthink happens with sponsors, the key team members, what does that composition look like, what do you bring together. The other way probably to do it is break it into smaller chunks. Oftentimes, the size of the group discussion can make a difference. You get a bigger group and you probably either have a big fight or you're going to have consensus. There's not a lot of middle ground. (ID 2378)

> Yes, the project is a little old, but I think it should work for your example. My first formal project management job was for a regional bank that was selecting the best applications to keep from the merged company it purchased. The goal was to keep the good stuff and get rid of the bad stuff. I was brought in to create the list and present it to leadership. It was not my responsibility to make the decision or to perform the integration. My project team consisted of a few business analysts

and three developers. We met daily to capture all of the software from the merged company. We were given a list to start with but had to validate each item on the list, which took us three months. Once the list was compiled, we made our recommendations. Herein lies the problem, the recommendations were not based on the functionality of the software and the potential value it could bring to the combined company. There was no requirement document or any other guide created to justify our recommendations. The selected was based on purely the preference of the project team and basically who screamed the loudest. Once the list was created, it was presented to leadership. Several of the persons who were from the old company voiced their concerned around software being eliminated without a proper replacement or justification for eliminating the software. After a free-for-all meeting with leadership, we were told to go back and revise our list to include software from the merged company. I asked the team to create a requirement document that would list out all applications, its function, which company it belonged to and general specifications that would help leadership to make an informed decision. The project team decided to forgo producing this document and just add the application that the merged leadership made noise about. (ID 2708)

I can't think of a specific situation, but you know, some of the groupthink I had experience with as project management. Project management usually around my acquisition and merger-type projects where I was dealing with two different groups within- identical groups but there was in the acquired company and one

was in the company that was being acquired rather and the groupthink was around uncertainty and what's going to happen. And I noticed that if you allow some of the individuals within those groups to kind of have the influence, they tend to kind of get people riled up, they get the rumor mill started and then people start thinking that they're going to be negatively impacted, so there's no- without confirmation. (ID 2734)

Yes, and I've seen in coworkers of mine that it happened to. It can get to a solution that either the IT guys don't believe, or the business guys get a solution from the IT side that they didn't ask for. And I've seen it in the company that I worked in New York, I was typically brought in by my director to solve the issue between the IT department and two of the large business departments, because they had a situation exactly like that, where they constantly do not agree on things, and they couldn't communicate with each other. And it was basically because the IT department just had the attitude of the business doesn't know what they really want. So, they created something, what they wanted to provide to the business area, and when they got it to the business side, they said, "Well, that's not what they asked for," so they didn't use it. (ID 5039)

Don't do groupthink tend to be, "Okay, we have this goal in mind, based on your current workload and a work-life balance, how much of your time do you think it's going to take?" Then you lay out the tasks and you lay out the duration and you lay out the dependencies and you lay out the ability and all of a sudden you have a project plan that works within the environment. So in general, groupthink

> in my opinion occurs when you just don't- it's top-down driven and its date-driven and you don't spend a lot of time listening to feedback. (ID 6352)

Participant 8626 stated, "I think there's probably another aspect too it's that you're hoping it's not just you that misses your date, that some other person may miss their date which gets you off the hook. I've seen that a lot." Other participants explained,

> So, go to groupthink. So, what I've learned about groupthink in my years of experience is that, depending on who's in the room and especially the authority or their personal leadership style, it lends to groupthink because they either don't want to state their opinion against a boss's opinion, that might be stronger, against what they know other people have said that they wanted even though that may or may not be what they think is right. (ID 9637)

> Frankly, I think I experience groupthink every day but would appreciate a refresher course on what is project groupthink. Ten years ago, I was working for a relatively small (30 people) IT firm and was assigned to generate new business for the company. I was assigned to also generate new business from our largest customer. When I arrived on site, the customer complained they were not satisfied with the services we provided and was looking to find a new vendor in a year or so. When I provided this information back to my manager, she indicated that I needed to make up a story to address the issues and find a way to sell new services to the customer, even if I had to over promise. After a few months of building a relationship with the customer, they conceded and asked my company to install a new phone system throughout the company. My company had no

> experience with telephony but thought it would be simple. I conveyed my concerns to my managers and was told that if I did not see though the implementation, I would have to look for another job. I told my manager that I would prefer to assign it to another person to mitigate compromising my relationship with the customer. My manager agreed, and a new person was assigned, but I was the "engagement manager" for the project. In other words when the project ran into problems, I would run interference with the customer. It was not one month when the customer and the project manager began to bicker about the progress made on the project. The customer thought we could complete the project in a few weeks (which we agreed to) and was opposed to taking some time out to find a PM with telephony experience. The project manager got frustrated with the project and quit. Meanwhile the customer was frustrated that we did not appear to know what we were doing. I convinced the customer to allow me to subcontract the work out and after a few heated conversations, the customer obliged and the project was successfully completed. My boss on the other hand was furious with me because the customer would not pay us for the work completed. (ID 9803)

The second theme within RQ1 was that consensus is detrimental. Project management team members often move towards consensus by taking orders without speaking up due to fear of losing their job, influence or the control of a leader, or completing a project that meets a deadline but adds no value to the organization. The following interview responses captured these thoughts. Participant 1296 stated, "Yes, I

spend a great deal of time trying to convince management to do things a different way and instead of receiving encouragement for my divergent views, I end up feeling like an outsider." Another participant explained,

> Or retribution from their manager, because the other team member may go back to their manager and say, "We can make the date, but Harry's not going to make it". Then that manager escalates to the other person's manager and they get in the hot seat. I think part of the influence in groupthink gets down to who's on the project team and what influence they have. Oftentimes you mix up people in a group that have real key knowledge and people that have a lot of authority or power, and when you mix those two together oftentimes the people that have that real key knowledge don't necessarily contribute, they go along with the group. One, for career preservation and maybe not wanting to make waves. I think the composition of the group that's together, whether it's a project team or even sponsors, groupthink happens with sponsors, the key team members, what does that composition look like, what do you bring together. The other way probably to do it is break it into smaller chunks. Oftentimes the size of the group discussion can make a difference. You get a bigger group and you probably either have a big fight or you're going to have consensus. There's not a lot of middle ground. (ID 2378)

> I can't think of a specific situation, but you know, some of the groupthink I had experience with as project management. Project management usually around my acquisition and merger-type projects where I was dealing with two different

groups within- identical groups but there was in the acquired company and one was in the company that was being acquired rather and the groupthink was around uncertainty and what's going to happen. And I noticed that if you allow some of the individuals within those groups to kind of have the influence, they tend to kind of get people riled up, they get the rumor mill started and then people start thinking that they're going to be negatively impacted, so there's no- without confirmation. (ID 2734)

Okay, where that occurred, and that's why my early statement is that I don't fit in the management of managed project area. When your senior manager doesn't understand the role of a benefit of not going into those groupthink situations, but they don't see it like that, where they try to use their senior authority or whatever to steer you in a direction what they believe should happen and not what should happen in the best interest of the project. So, one of the systems that I was part of, we went on those discussions, and one of the meetings, we had a manager that just attended the meeting, and I do not know why she attended, but basically the reason was she wanted to control what the solution of the project was, because somebody spoke to her, and they wanted to manipulate me. (ID 5039)

So it's a global company and the company's name is DXB FMEF, the company I worked for. They were replacing a client server based, old programming on some old Microsoft servers with a DB2, RPG AS400 project and when I came on board they basically said, "Okay, this is going to be three to six months and you're going to handle the execution phase." And when I got there everybody agreed

with that fact because the CEO of the division, the CEO of the National division, the CEO of both global and local divisions; the CIO of both divisions said it has to be done. Nobody ever spent any time looking at- it had to get done. So it was interesting. (ID 6352)

Yes. Correct. I agree. So, to that point, you really -- you know, if you go back to the groupthink, then if you are just being told, and you're just an order-taker, then most likely you're not going to have critical thinking, or critical, credible challenge on what's being discovered, or processed, or done, because that's not valued within the business or the organization. Oh, yes. So, the team that really owned the thought and the vision behind what we were doing, they all have the same background. They're all lawyers, they're all subject matter experts, and they're very -- I'm going to -- this might offend you, but I hope it won't, but I believe that there's a certain type of person that's a business analyst, and a certain type of person that's a project manager. (ID 7965)

Too bad, this has to be done by January. So, we don't have time for the analysis or the planning or the requirements gathering or the testing. Go execute, and go get it done. And you shave off your project scope to get it done by the time allotted. And a lot of times, there's rework. And it's that—Okay, so my shifts in being a project manager over the last – in the X project and then at a Power Company has been into the change management space. And I felt kind of frustration with project management where I would be tapped to go implement something that somebody came up with, some business leader bought something,

> and then they wanted me to go implement it. And there were projects that were on time on budget, but didn't contribute anything. They created frustrating. They created more workaround. They created just more effort, and complicated people's lives. So, I wanted to sort of get into a different thing to say, "How can we make these projects not just be implemented on Monday, and the helpdesk knows nothing about it, and the people know nothing, or they go to training, and then they put the binder on the shelf, and everything goes back to the way it was." So, when I did a little bit of research on groupthink in preparation of this, there's not a lot out there. (ID 8461)

The third theme within RQ_1 was that success depends on team performance. High performing teams are successful, more innovative, and stay clear of groupthink. The interviews that fell under this caption include the following responses:

> Right. You've got to have, whenever you have a group that you're collaborating with, with different perspectives, you got to find the commonality of what are the key points of interest that can build the consensus to move things forward, always. It's very disruptive but everyone sees it as the best way out, the best way to success, the best path. And so, I was part of a team, that we created what's now become the number one cardiovascular database reference in the world. It's owned by the American World of Heart. That was disruptive. That was before evidence based medicine, in the guideline. You know, we had to prove that we needed the guideline, for them to be accepted by the masses. I was part of a Green Beret team. I've got to work with some really fabulous people, on that side of the

fence before coming to the payer side and that came, yes, we did fabulous Kino old world primary care projects, that I'm very proud to reference. (ID 3480)

And John, I would say this. I would say one unique aspect to my career is I've had the good fortune of doing a lot of things that were disruptive and, you know, that was a very disruptive clinical trial design. Right now, I'm in the midst with our plan in a very disruptive solution. Very disruptive and very uncomfortable for our corporation, our parent company, our plan, the regulators and the providers alike. (ID 6352)

And being on a high performing team can be enjoyable, and the more you enjoy it, the higher performing you are. And that being on a project that sucking wind is miserable, is a miserable experience, and nobody wants that. So, my goal is to make the team high performing. And a high performing team will deliver better results. And I think that the groupthink is maybe a symptom of a team that's not high performing. (ID 8461)

Alright, but when I get them in a room together to actualize that right answer suddenly there's a debate on what is the right answer and which direction we should go. So as a facilitator, as a strategy leader, my job is to recognize that groupthink and identify the players who are driving that groupthink and partner with them or come up with strategies to minimize their causation to the problem or to the challenge. I wouldn't call it a problem but to the challenge. And so that takes some psychology techniques. That takes some stakeholder management techniques. That takes some coaxing right so and some coaching right. And I play

> all those…I play all those roles. I even sometimes put on different leadership styles to test the response that will give me what I'm looking for or which is more of a group player, one that respects others' opinions and not bring to bear their leverage of title and consequence right so. (ID 8625)

The final theme for RQ1 was identifying and avoiding groupthink. Veteran project managers gain skills and the expertise over time to identify and avoid groupthink. The interviews under this theme included the following responses. Participant 3480 explained, "Bad thing that thing because that basically means, you just reallocate your present style to adapt." Another participant stated,

> I think that's a good question. I mean, if you systematically go through and have that check list, I'm just saying in my experience, I'm not sure that everyone or we, have or ultimately do go through a validation process but come to that visual, something consensus, they should say a consensus. I mean, one really should be and I guess that you know, what are the risk factors that are involved? What's the return on investments? You know, all your consulting kind of indicators as to whether a project is viable or what you're thinking, sounds something that actually can work and how you define that work. As I said here, "Do you have enough resources? Are the actual solutions fitting the objectives of this strategic objective of the company that you working with or trying to assist?" So, I mean, it probably is formal or should be a little bit more formal indicators, that one should have before you sort of say, "Okay, we've got the green light to move forward." I'm just not sure in my experience in reality that people will always go

through that kind of checkpoints just to make sure that the consensus is not just for the sake of consensus or everyone just let it seems like it was a logical path to go to, whether they actually validate it. Now, maybe that makes me a bad consultant or maybe not. (ID 4693)

Figure 2 provides a summary of research question 1 responses. Each research question section concludes with a figure that shows how each participant contributed to the research questions.

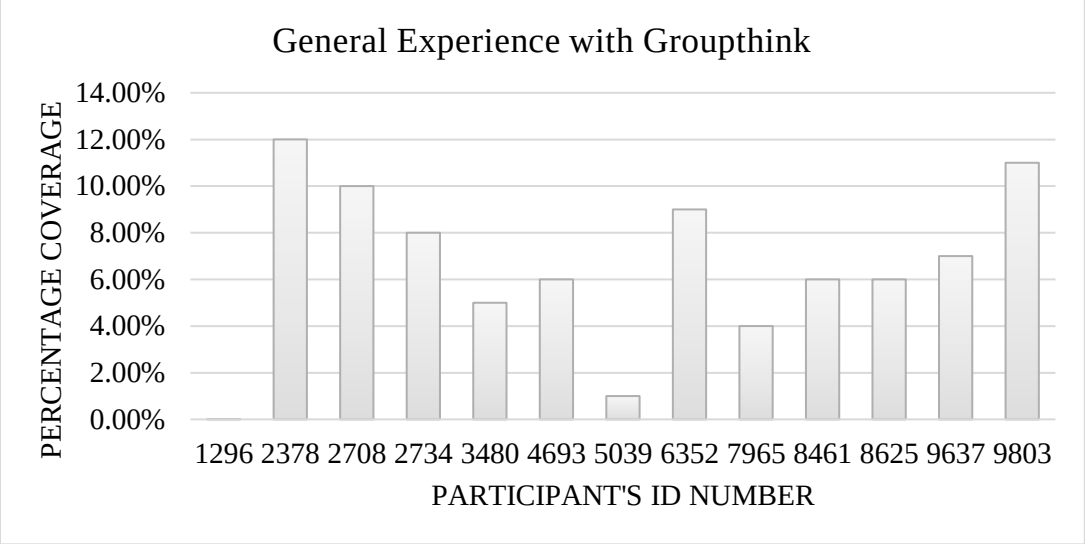

Figure 2. Summary of RQ1 and the percentage coverage each participant input towards the question.

Research Question 2

What antecedents do project managers identify in project teams during their experience with groupthink? The first of the four themes that emerged regarding RQ2

was the cost of communication. Ineffective communication in project management teams results in members who do not have a voice on project management teams. Team members may not participate in decision-making or share ideas. The following examples relate to project team experiences during the onset of groupthink.

> The fact that management wanted to create a new department using an existing template opposed to doing some due diligence before creating a new customer service department. In the end, this rush to get to the finish line cost $5m to fix and a key customer that endorse the product in the US, decided to take its business to another competitor. (ID 1296)

> Yes, the project is a little old, but I think it should work for your example. My first formal project management job was for a regional bank that was selecting the best applications to keep from the merged company it purchased. The goal was to keep the good stuff and get rid of the bad stuff. I was brought in to create the list and present to leadership. It was not my responsibility to make the decision or to perform the integration. My project team consisted of a few business analysts and three developers. We met daily to capture all of the software from the merged company. We were given a list to start with but had to validate each item on the list, which took us three months. Once the list was compiled, we made our recommendations. Herein lies the problem, the recommendations were not based on the functionality of the software and the potential value it could bring to the combined company. There was no requirement document or any other guide created to justify our recommendations. The selected was based on purely the

preference of the project team and basically who screamed the loudest. Once the list was created, it was presented to leadership. Several of the persons who were from the old company voiced their concerned around software being eliminated without a proper replacement or justification for eliminating the software. After a free for all meeting with leadership, we were told to go back and revise our list to include software from the merged company. I asked the team to create a requirement documents that would list out all applications, its function, which company it belongs to and general specifications that would help leadership to make an informed decision. The project team decided to forgo the producing this document and just add the application that the merged leadership made noise about. (ID 2708)

Most of my projects did complete. I'll give you one example of one I was working on, it was a document management project there, I was the seventh project manager they had on that project, so I came into quite a very unsettled project. Some of the project managers they had on the project before actually requested that they get off of it. I think you were associated with one or more there that was similar. Some of the reasons it got into the situation it was in was the project sponsor was pretty demanding and had some unrealistic expectations of time frames and deliverables and just what she expected certain individuals to do, which a little bit exceeded what should have been in a project. The vendors were sort of giving her some misinformation as well and she was relying on that. My role, at least from my viewpoint at that time, was to try to bring some order to

the whole sponsorship and how the vendors were being dealt with. Overall, and I know you're looking for the failed project, but I felt like it took me about a year to get that project back on track, and I was there almost until the last task was completed, but because I was a contractor I was rolling off contracts, and I was waiting for the next one to show up. That's what I consider a failed project that was salvaged. Projects get into trouble for many reasons. One of the big ones I always find is the sponsors have unrealistic expectations. The vendors tell them it's going to take six months and in reality it's going to take two years to implement. That's always a very sore point for a project manager trying to bring truth to the project. Nobody wants to hear the truth. (ID 3520)

Well, I am not sure where to start but basically, I have been in numerous situation where I experience pressure from both the project team and the project sponsor to complete a project even when it was severely under duress. What I mean by this is I was the project manager on a project that was already a year late, millions of dollars over budget and no one seemed to be in a rush to address the issues to get the project back on track. The project was implementing a new Customer Relationship Management application so that we could adequately communicate with customers, vendors and fellow employees. The issue was that the project sponsor wanted to use the software of a friend and the project team wanted to build their own solution. I was brought in to bridge the gap and help both sides to come to a happy medium. In the end, both side were mad at me because I stated that base on the information, the project needed to be halted and started a new.

There were no project documents such as an initiation or business case. In other words, entities were simply trying to bring their solution to market without any formal requirements. When I asked about completing requirements, no one felt as if requirements were important, at least not written ones. After spending three months on the project without any traction, I went to my manager and received a transfer. The transfer was denied because my manager thought I could help fix the problem. How I personally succumbed to groupthink was that I sided with the CIO and basically rammed through the solution they proposed. While the team was extremely frustrated and fought me every step of the way, the project was completed eight months later with numerous rework and defects. Three months later, I was fired because the CIO blamed me for the defects. Never mind that I fought to get the project halted, I was still the escape got. What I should have done is insisted that I get off of the project opposed to siding with the CIO and succumbing to being led down a road that cause my ultimate demise. I should have first demanded that I be put off of the project. Seriously, the main thing I did not do is document my concerns and present these concerns to my manager so that they could have presented the concerns to other leaders in the organization. Yes, I voiced my concerns several times, but I did not document my concerns and recommendations. The biggest thing I could have done is created requirements. (ID 5619)

You’re right and the artifacts, for example the documentation of the as is state, ensuring that due diligence is done on the as is state to really get a clear picture of

> what the project is about, oftentimes I think people jump right to the solution before they take a look at the as is state and developing the plan and clearly planning the objectives. The front end of the PMI process is really important, and that's where groupthink decisions can go wrong. Most companies don't keep good records of previous projects and of previous systems. It was on somebody's laptop or it wasn't in any service knowledge database or on any project management database. I think when consultants come in they're good at helping design the future state not knowing anything else it might connect to, but they don't necessarily capture the as is state well. (ID 2378)

The second theme was the dark side of team dynamics. This involves the negative aspects of teams that produce groupthink. The following interview responses highlighted this issue:

> Well, I am not sure where to start but basically, I have been in numerous situation where I experience pressure from both the project team and the project sponsor to complete a project even when it was severely under duress. What I mean by this is I was the project manager on a project that was already a year late, millions of dollars over budget and no one seemed to be in a rush to address the issues to get the project back on track. The project was implementing a new Customer Relationship Management application so that we could adequately communicate with customers, vendors and fellow employees. The issue was that the project sponsor wanted to use the software of a friend and the project team wanted to build their own solution. I was brought in to bridge the gap and help both sides to

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So, we know that we're not going to make the deadlines that the execs have said: "You will have this done by --" we've got a milestone looming right now that is for September 30th. We know we're not going to make it. So, the way that we've approached it is through statistics, and showing what amount of time is taken in each step of the process in order to remediate this population. And, unless you

really focus on the areas that are the bottlenecks, you're not going to be successful. (ID 7965)

This may get into your future questions about how you combat it but effectively what I try to do when I walk into a meeting and says, "Yes, we can get this done and we can get this done," and I ask, "Okay, what are the tasks and how is this going to get done?" and he's like, "Well that's why you're here." So what was funny was, I would walk along and I would meet with all the C level executives and they said, "Yes, we can support you. These are the key team members you're going to work with. Go talk to them and get this done." We'd talk to those team members, typically directors or heads of maybe 10 or 15 person organizations. Finance, operations, compliance, risk and they would agree- I'll ask, "Who do we need to get this done in three to six months?" Here are the tasks, here are the people, here's what we're going to do. So even talking individually, everybody said we could get it done and then you get everybody together and they all say it can get done. So, I put together a plan, got everybody to agree to it, began to execute it and realized none of this stuff is actually aligning, none of it is getting any realistic timelines. Maybe you said it was going to take a week or two and you're only 25% done in those two weeks, which means you underestimated it by a factor of four. So I then had to take basically what looked like a green project across the board and turn it into yellow and then red. (ID 6352)

Or you're loaded up with key SME's who have competing priorities. Or in my case, I got pulled in – this is like three months before we were supposed to

deploy, because somebody had realized that the program as a whole, every project had its own little silo. And they had not considered enterprise reports, so the reporting piece was going to bust. And so, we had to go, we had to, again, form this like mad-team, and get everybody prepared. So, I went, and we had teams of people that had been Business Objects users, and they love Business Objects, and they had customized it and loved it, and polished it, and they knew all the ins and outs, and they knew all the little quirks, and they love their Business Objects. And it was going to be suddenly boom, the flip was going to get swished, and they're going to have the Microsoft SQL stuff. And they were not down with that. The best I could do really was just sort of brace for impact, and say, "Gee, it sucks to be you, but guess what, welcome to the new world." When I started digging, I found out that they had had before this merger, 10 years ago, somebody had tried to replace Business Objects with something else. And they went to implement, and this contingent of people – these power users, sort of folded their arms on their chest, and said, "Uh-uh." And it failed, and they went – within like a week, they ripped that up, and they went back to their old way of doing it. So, the SME's had successfully put the kibosh on the project. They had successfully sabotaged it. So, they had a history, and they knew that they'd done it once and they could do it again. And so, they were like, "We're not going to do it, we're just going to wait for it to fail," because that would be in their favor, because then you have to say, "We need to fall back and do our disaster recovery, and go back to our old way of doing it." And in this case, the older data would be stale, it was

> going to break. There was no way that we could use the Business Objects. So, I had a series of workshops, and of course, they weren't really well attended at first. And I took notes, and by gosh – I couldn't find them for this call. But I couldn't believe it. Their notes were, "It's not going to work." And I'm like, "Why isn't it going to work?" And they're going, "Because it's different." (ID 8461)

Immature organizations and work environment was the third theme. If not monitored, immature organizations can foster harmful work environments and a culture that breeds groupthink. The following interview responses fell under this theme:

> The last company I worked for had a very immature project methodology. So you had asked me what are some of the things I could have done, one of the things and as people told me as I was leaving, they said, "1012, you did it without actually formally doing it but that's training people in the value of project management," and what have you. I don't think people, until we went through a couple of times, you know, they're like, "Well 1012's just asking for stuff because that's what project managers do and they want all this documentation." (ID 6352)

> And so, one of the lessons learned was you need to have business resources involved, engaged. So, this was a contractor. And they were trying to kind of, I guess, go with the budget route, and they put – the project suite for this merger – I said 13, but it's more like – they had them in different buckets, but overall, probably more than 20 projects. And they didn't have – it's a utility. They didn't have experience. Like Bank of America, they do it over and over and over again. They have the resources on hand. Everybody has experience. They know what

> they've done in the past, and they've built up to the types of mergers that they did. This company didn't. They had to go out and outsource just hundreds of people. And this project manager just within over his head, I'm sure, he was losing sleep, I'm sure. I'm sure it had to suck, and it was probably a big relief when they said, "Sorry, don't come back tomorrow." But that was it, he just was out of a job. (ID 8461)

The fourth theme within RQ_2 was that consensus is detrimental. This theme also occurred in RQ_1 and the section below is the same as the previous section. Project management team members often move towards consensus by taking orders without speaking up due to fear of losing their job, influence or control of a leader, or completing a project that meets a deadline but adds no value to the organization. The following interview responses captured these thoughts. Participant 1296 stated, "Yes, I spend a great deal of time trying to convince management to do things a different way and instead of receiving encouragement for my divergent view, I end up feeling like an outsider." Another participant explained,

> Or retribution from their manager, because the other team member may go back to their manager and say, "We can make the date, but Harry's not going to make it". Then that manager escalates to the other person's manager and they get in the hot seat. I think part of the influence in groupthink gets down to who's on the project team and what influence they have. Oftentimes you mix up people in a group that have real key knowledge and people that have a lot of authority or power, and when you mix those two together oftentimes the people that have that

real key knowledge don't necessarily contribute, they go along with the group. One, for career preservation and maybe not wanting to make waves. I think the composition of the group that's together, whether it's a project team or even sponsors, groupthink happens with sponsors, the key team members, what does that composition look like, what do you bring together. The other way probably to do it is break it into smaller chunks. Oftentimes the size of the group discussion can make a difference. You get a bigger group and you probably either have a big fight or you're going to have consensus. There's not a lot of middle ground. (ID 2378)

I succumbed to groupthink because I did not follow my own instincts and get the necessary support I needed from my manager and his superiors. I knew what to do but I could not drive the team to a favorable outcome. Yes, I take responsibility for my naivety but not sure what would have happened if I successfully convinced the team to complete a requirements document. I have to admit, was afraid for my job and did not want to let down my project team. Even though they ran over me. This was my first project and perhaps I should not have been assigned to it. In the end, no one was fired, and the project team did complete what was asked of them to complete. (ID 2708)

I can't think of a specific situation but you know, some of the groupthink I had with experience as project management. Project management usually around my acquisition and merger-type projects where I was dealing with two different groups within- identical groups but there was in the acquired company and one

was in the company that was being acquired rather and the groupthink was around uncertainty and what's going to happen. And I noticed that if you allow some of the individuals within those groups to kind of have the influence, they tend to kind of get people riled up, they get the rumor mill started and then people start thinking that they're going to be negatively impacted, so there's no- without confirmation. (ID 2734)

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So it's a global company and the company's name is DXB FMEF, the company I worked for. They were replacing a client server, old programming on old Microsoft servers with a DB2, RPG AS400 project and when I came on board they basically said, "Okay, this is going to be 3 to 6 months and you're going to handle the execution phase." And when I got there everybody agreed with that fact because the CEO of the division, the CEO of the National division, the CEO

> of both global and local divisions; the CIO of both divisions said it has to be done. Nobody ever spent any time looking at- it had to get done. So it was interesting. (ID 6352)
>
> Yes. Correct. I agree. So, to that point, you really -- you know, if you go back to the groupthink, then if you are just being told, and you're just an order-taker, then most likely you're not going to have critical thinking, or a critical, credible challenge on what's being discovered, or processed, or done, because that's not valued within the business or the organization. Oh, yes. So, the team that really owned the thought and the vision behind what we were doing, they all have the same background. They're all lawyers, they're all subject matter experts, and they're very -- I'm going to -- this might offend you, but I hope it won't, but I believe that there's a certain type of person that's a business analyst, and a certain type of person that's a project manager. (ID 7965)

Figure 3 shows the antecedents to groupthink as they emerged in response to RQ2.

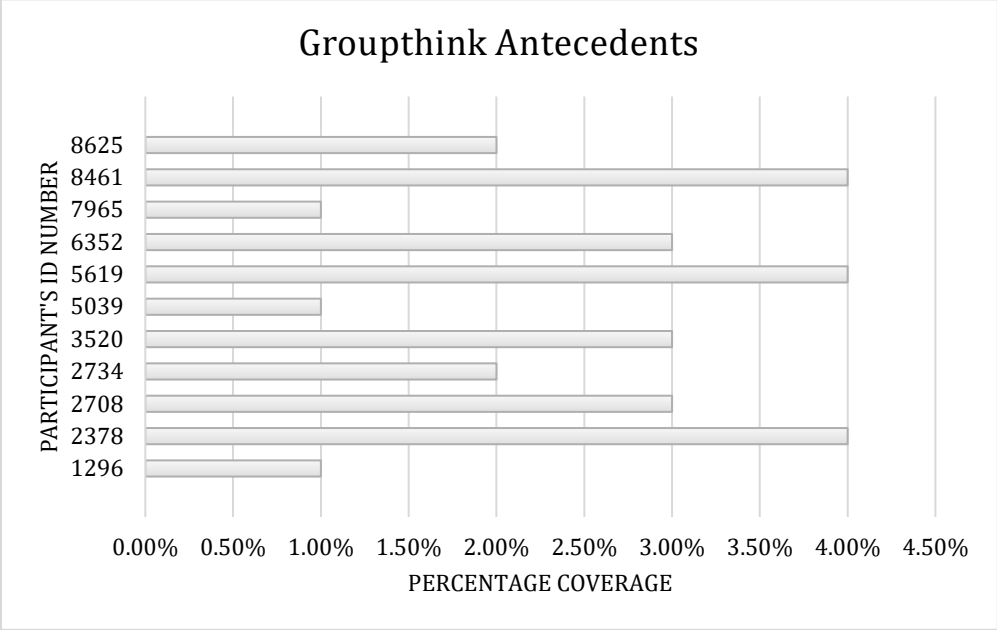

Figure 3. Summary of RQ2 and the percentage coverage each participant input towards the question.

Research Question 3

What outcomes do project managers experience after groupthink surfaces in a project teams? The interview data revealed two themes in response to RQ3. The first theme was that project failure affects employment. Unsuccessful or failed projects may lead to job terminations, reassignments, demotions, and resignations of project managers, contractors, and company staff. The following interview responses revealed this information.

> The fact that management wanted to create a new department using an existing template as opposed to doing some due diligence before creating a new customer service department. In the end, this rush to get to the finish line cost $5m to fix

and a key customer that endorsed the product in the US, decided to take its business to another competitor. (ID 1296)

We went back and submitted the list to leadership and additional applications were identified. This is when one of the leaders asked my boss to reassign the project to a PM that could get the job done. What happened to me is that I was reassigned to another project and the new project manager insisted the team produce the requirements document that I originally recommended to the team. (ID 2708)

Well, I am not sure where to start but basically, I have been in numerous situations where I experience pressure from both the project team and the project sponsor to complete a project even when it was severely under duress. What I mean by this is I was the project manager on a project that was already a year late, millions of dollars over budget and no one seemed to be in a rush to address the issues to get the project back on track. The project was implementing a new Customer Relationship Management application so that we could adequately communicate with customers, vendors and fellow employees. The issue was that the project sponsor wanted to use the software of a friend and the project team wanted to build their own solution. I was brought in to bridge the gap and help both sides to come to a happy medium. In the end, both sides were mad at me because I stated that based on the information, the project needed to be halted and started anew. There were no project documents such as an initiation or business case. In other words, entities were simply trying to bring their solution to market

without any formal requirements. When I asked about completing requirements, no one felt as if requirements were important, at least not written ones. After spending 3 months on the project without any traction, I went to my manager and received a transfer. The transfer was denied because my manager thought I could help fix the problem. How I personally succumbed to groupthink was that I sided with the CIO and basically rammed through the solution they proposed. While the team was extremely frustrated and fought me every step of the way, the project was completed 8 months later with numerous rework and defects. Three months later, I was fired because the CIO blamed me for the defects. Never mind that I fought to get the project halted, I was still the scapegoat. What I should have done is insisted that I get off of the project as opposed to siding with the CIO and succumbing to being led down a road that caused my ultimate demise. (ID 5619)

And so, one of the lessons learned was you need to have business resources involved, engaged. So, this was a contractor. And they were trying to kind of, I guess, go with the budget route, and they put – the project suite for the this merger – I said 13, but it's more like – they had them in different buckets, but overall, probably more than 20 projects. And they didn't have – it's a utility. They didn't have experience. Like Bank of America, they do it over and over and over again. They have the resources on hand. Everybody has experience. They know what they've done in the past, and they've built up to the types of mergers that they did. This company didn't. They had to go out and outsource just hundreds of people. And this project manager just was in over his head, I'm sure, he was losing sleep,

I'm sure. I'm sure it had to suck, and it was probably a big relief when they said, "Sorry, don't come back tomorrow." But that was it, he just was out of a job. He was fired. (ID 8461)

The outcome of that situation was we actually put and implemented software, put it in, we have limited access to the two project people, and then software never got used. The project got- It was scrapped. (ID 8463)

Okay, heads rolled but not the leader's head. So the contractors yes, were let go and the SOW was terminated. Director level, employees either were let go in totality or demoted…well demoted, that's the not the right term. They were moved to other departments. (ID 8625)

Ten years ago, I was working for a relatively small (30 people) IT firm and was assigned to generate new business for the company. I was assigned to also generate new business from our largest customer. When I arrived on site, the customer complained they were not satisfied with the services we provided and was looking to find a new vendor in a year or so. When I provided this information back to my manager, she indicated that I needed to make up a story to address the issues and find a way to sell new services to the customer, even if I had to over promise. After a few months of building a relationship with the customer, they conceded and asked my company to install a new phone system throughout the company. My company had no experience with telephony but thought it would be simple. I conveyed my concerns to my managers and was told that if I did not see though the implementation, I would have to look for another

> job. I told my manager that I would prefer to assign it to another person to mitigate compromising my relationship with the customer. My manager agreed and a new person was assigned, but I was the "engagement manager" for the project. In other words when the project ran into problems, I would run interference with the customer. It was not one month when the customer and the project manager began to bicker about the progress made on the project. The customer thought we could complete the project in a few weeks (which we agreed to) and was opposed to taking some time out to find a PM with telephony experience. The project manager got frustrated with the project and quit. Meanwhile the customer was frustrated that we did not appear to know what we were doing. I convinced the customer to allow me to subcontract the work out and after a few heated conversations, the customer obliged, and the project was successfully completed. My boss on the other hand was furious with me because the customer would not pay us for the work completed. (ID 9803)

The second theme was the impact of groupthink on project outcomes. Groupthink negatively and positively impacts project outcomes. The following interview responses captured this theme:

> Not enough. So, you think about that. Now, why was that? Why was it that sense of urgency? The company was at risk if they didn't get expanded labeling, they didn't have the additional revenue. They needed the revenue to mandate between 1 year and over a bridge of years where another product was coming out of development. This was an aging product, losing you the revenue on the bell-

shaped curve. We had to increase in width, we had to heighten the bell, we had to widen the bell. (ID 3480)

Where that occurred, and that's why my early statement is that I don't fit in the management of managed project area. When your senior doesn't understand the role of a benefit of not going into those groupthink situations, but they don't see it like that, where they try to use their senior authority or whatever to steer you in a direction what they believe should happen and not what should happen in the best interest of the project. So, one of the systems that I was part of, we went on those discussions, and one of the meetings, we had a manager that just attended the meeting, and I do not know why she attended, but basically the reason was she wanted to control what the solution of the project was, because somebody spoke to her, and they wanted to manipulate me. (ID 5039)

Absolutely. So what I will tell you is that the way you described groupthink from the existing companies that in my opinion work well and in my company that doesn't work well and if I have to look at the ones that fall under the groupthink concept, they tend to be structured around top-down personalities. They tend to be structured around A type personalities. So one of the nice things about bouncing around from company to company and staying on the vendor side and doing project management practice and then managing other project managers and then running operational stuff, is that you get the ability when you walk into a company to figure out is this a top-down company? Is this a bottom-up company? Is this a collaborative company? (ID 6352)

> I made it such -- I mean, I started out so contentious, and I realized that I wasn't going to win. So, what I did was: I did exactly what they said they were going to do, but they couldn't execute. So, I was successful in helping the business map out their processes, their existing processes and their interim processes, until this group could have an execution arm to actually make things happen in the target state. But, I basically washed my hands of the target state where I thought I was going to be meeting the target state. And it was, like, you know, I see I was not going to win this. I see that's it a no-win for me. But, I have to help the business win something out of this, and that was to get them into compliance on a particular topic. So, I was able to successfully do that for five out of the eight businesses. So, I felt pretty good. (ID 7965)

Figure 4 shows the outcomes of groupthink, as the responses to RQ3 demonstrate.

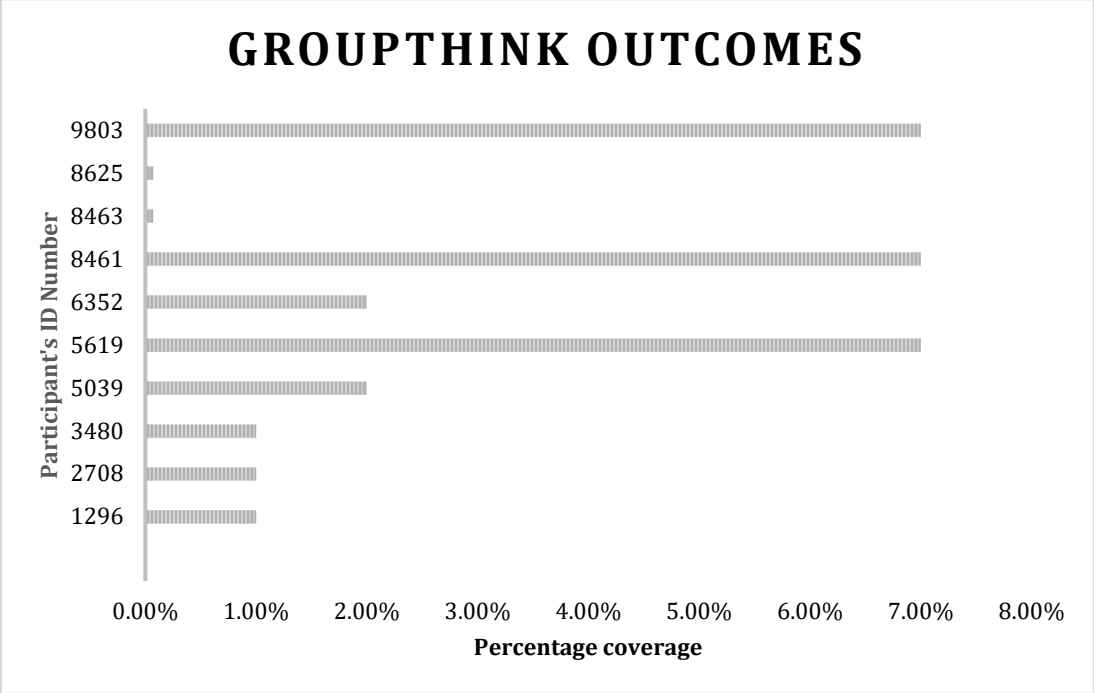

Figure 4. Summary of RQ3 and the percentage coverage each participant input towards the question.

Research Question 4

What actions do project managers think might prevent the onset of groupthink? The following theme emerged for this research question: preventing groupthink in project management teams. Factors that build cohesive teams that communicate, innovate, and take action are crucial to avoiding groupthink. Interview responses that aligned with this theme include:

> I think the composition of the group that's together, whether it's a project team or even sponsors, groupthink happens with sponsors, the key team members, what does that composition look like, what do you bring together. The other way

probably to do it is break it into smaller chunks. Oftentimes the size of the group discussion can make a difference. You get a bigger group and you probably either have a big fight or you're going to have consensus. There's not a lot of middle ground. (ID 2378)

No, that you're- you listen to two of the most senior stakeholders, executive-wise, they agreed with you and you made a- I never make unilateral decisions, that's never good. Never. I learned that early in life, you don't do that. You've got to have other leader buy-in support, that has your back but it may mean that sometimes you still have a higher Oracle-type of decision-making structure to your project even though you prefer to have everyone as equal way in-voiced. (ID 3480)

I mean, challenges might just ask the question but I'm just thinking, I mean, I'm quite a vocal kind of person. So, if I don't agree with something or I do feel that I tend to try and look at all of the angles and sometimes I will say, "I'm gonna play devil's advocate to this particular conversation or group meeting" and say, "Well, what happens if you think of it this way?" (ID 4693)

So basically, when we started discussing the plan that I worked from, everybody agreed what needs to be done, because it was small little work in their working area, but it wasn't in the best interest of the company and all the other companies. So, when I managed that project, we started discussing what is the best and how can we solve this huge pressure twice a year of getting it implemented. And the process just went in a direction where the company does not want to change at all,

but realistically we have to. So, by using that, I got into the habit of playing devil's advocate in those discussions just to steer discussion and get other points to discuss. And I started acting as if I was a representative from the mother company. I learn very early in my career to basically not be the owner of the solution to all projects. So, I was allowing or putting the ownership of the solution back to the business group, and not making the IT people drive a solution, but more the business side. And to do that, I always had to, in the meetings that I had, sort of facilitated in a way for them – and if I say them, the business side and the IT side, not to see me as their spokesperson, but more a person that looks objectively to the solutions. So, they sort of got used to me, and it always worked that we ended up in a good solution. So, they started getting comfortable with me playing that role. And I have to admit it, I can do that, whereas I place it, they can't say when I'm really serious and when I'm not. So, I can manipulate the group if I have to. And that's a dangerous situation, but I had to be ethical, and play it in a way that I can get the best solution discussed by both sides. And after this recording, I will explain to you where, why, and how I got this. But basically, they got in a habit of trusting me on where and how to do that. So, when I started that situation in that project, it took them a few minutes in that specific meeting to realize that what I'm doing is actually playing this role, and luckily for me, they started acting in a way where they try to defend their side and I try to defend the other side. And it actually ended up in very very good discussions from both sides, where none of the people got heated up and doesn't want to listen to the

other side. So, after that meeting, for instance, the people came back to me, and they say, “That was one of most productive sessions that I ever had,” because now they see the benefit of discussing alternatives. (ID 5039)

Yes, and it’s a trusted source. If these leaders now on a team of – the other thing with the groupthink – again, I put some thought into this, and I’d be more than happy to meet with you again, and talk more – is you’ve got cultural considerations. So, in the case of say a merger, you’ve got your legacy company A and legacy company B, where legacy company A is saying, “Uh-uh, not on my watch,” with the system that’s going to replace their system, or the new compensation structure, or the new job title structure. Doesn’t have to be an IT system, but there’s lots of situations where you’ve got two different group-thinking clashing, the culture clash. Talk about politics, where sometimes your organization will say, “Do as I say, not as I do,” or ask for a reward for B. And people will, “Come on, you can be honest, tell the truth,” but you don’t tell the truth, you’ll get let go, or you won’t be part of the bonus pool, or what have you. So, you’ll get labeled as a troublemaker. So, the culture, I think, is very important as a consideration. Maybe you can’t really adjust the culture, but you need to be aware of what the culture is in order to overcome whatever those barriers are. The other thing that I look at the PMBOK was about group creativity. Again, there’s very little in there about teams at all, and group decision-making. And both the group creativity was on one page – it was on one page, and then also in the glossary. And group decision-making was – both of them were about gathering

> requirements, so that you want the creativity in driving out, I guess, the voice of the customer, and driving out what the requirements look like. And the decision-making is also with estimating your time. (ID 8461)

The second theme was silent to vocal team members. Strategies that help individual members become vocal, participate in decision-making, challenge assumptions, survey alternatives, and examine risks help avoid groupthink in project teams. Interview responses that validated this theme were as follows:

> Well I think you build trust by following- for lack of a better word, following your orders, following the process and a procedure. You know, following the guidelines that's set forth by leadership, to avoid the wrong information that may have changed. So it's not about being a nice guy and having them like you. They should respect your job and your role and that you are basically sworn to secrecy so that things can't get out in the press. That thing you won't go home talking to your husband or wife that works at another competitor. People inherently understand that you're trusted with certain information but they're going to try anyway but I feel like I've built a good reputation because of that because of standing my ground and not being afraid to have you walk away feeling like, "Oh, I'm mad at [ID 2734]," but if this was my job, I'm a serious steward of that information. Security risks and things like that, they're very, very sensitive information. So you know, merger acquisitions in the financial services industry, there's insider trading, there's a whole lot of laws you've got to adhere to and if you don't like it, you can't be in this kind of job. I remember a colleague telling

> me that if you're going to be a nice guy, you'd better choose a different field. (ID 2734)
>
> It was a fairly long process. Number one was trying to get the project sponsor to understand that I was there to help not to hinder what was going on, that I was looking out for her best interest. That took a while to get that trust built. It also took the same thing to get with the IT people to understand that there has to be trust there, that if we can all be marching to the same drummer on this stuff we will be successful and everybody's life will be much better. It's just a lot of interaction with the different parties and also making sure the vendor understands that he's not going to be able to do a snow job on anybody. It's not an overnight process, I guess the key point is building trust with all the stakeholders and the project members to get them to see what reality is. Even though it may be painful to say that the project's not going to complete for maybe six months later, if everybody can understand that's the reality, it's not somebody's wishful thinking. Am I answering your question on that? (ID 3520)

The third theme was project management tactics. This includes approaches and skills that project managers use to prevent groupthink. Interview responses that were relevant this theme included:

> Well, who's going to lose their job? Are people going to get general selection where they've got to push for their own jobs? Maybe they're wondering whether they're going to be canned or what's going to happen to the department. Is it going to be expanded, absorbed or maybe its location [will change]? Are they

getting rid of everyone at a given location? So it's a wide variety of different types of rumors but all around being able to deal with change, being able to adapt to change and that's the key ingredient. As a project manager you have to be able to adapt to change, sometimes there's opportunity from a merger acquisition that wasn't there before but it is really the concern of losing their jobs. It really boils down to that impact. (ID 2734)

We had to have all those different layers because we were going to lose an entire company. That was shareholders, those were employees, were patients at risk. So, sometimes there's a sophistication to certain projects, that take a different animal in the thought process going in and you've got to think through going in, executing your conception, execution and on the back side of commercialization and you added a strategy. (ID 3480)

I think that's a good question. I mean, if you systematically go through and have that checklist, I'm just saying in my experience, I'm not sure that everyone or we, have or ultimately do go through a validation process but come to that visual, something consensus, they should say a consensus. I mean, one really should be- and I guess that you know, what are the risk factors that are involved? What's the return on investments? You know, all your consulting kind of indicators as to whether a project is viable or what you're thinking, sounds like something that actually can work and how you define that work. As I said here, "Do you have enough resources? Are the actual solutions fitting the objectives of this strategic objective of the company that you are working with or trying to assist?"

So, I mean, it probably is formal or should be a little bit more formal indicators, that one should have before you sort of say, “Okay, we’ve got the green light to move forward.” I’m just not sure in my experience in reality that people will always go through that kind of checkpoint just to make sure that the consensus is not just for the sake of consensus or everyone just let it seems like it was a logical path to go to, whether they actually validate it. Now, maybe that makes me a bad consultant or maybe not. (ID 4693)

Yes John, I would say that one of the main things that a project manager should focus on is the soft skills in the project. And what I’m saying by that is not what everybody – it is including what everybody understands as soft skills. But it’s actually having the soft skills to work with people individually and see and understand the person behind their employee, and then working on a basis where you can get the trust of each person, and that they can trust you. And then one thing that I will say is what you will basically understand is people cannot underestimate the fact of knowledge of a project manager. And it’s not only just about a project or whatever, it’s about project management, where a project manager needs to have the knowledge and experience to pick up things like groupthink, and then in a way that’s subtle enough but strong enough to break it, and not upset people. I think that is a huge benefit for a project manager to have that skill set, and try to execute that in it. And it comes down to building a strong and a decent trusting project team. And if I say team, from both sides, from the IT side and from the business side, to be seen as one team. (ID 5039)

The current company that I'm working for, WEC Energy, had been mature, after the mergers they're kind of scrambling a little bit but I will tell you this and it's unfortunate, they want to be mature again and there were a couple of people that were holding back and they went through a major reorg like literally 2 weeks after I started and the two people that hired me were let go because they were just not on board with the new project processes and methodologies. And I can already see huge impacts to the way projects are being run because people are like, "Oh, this is the value of the senior management team and what they value and that's- we have to make- well we do what we say we're going to do, we do it on time and we do it in budget and we don't have carryover from year after year after year." So they're spending more time on the planning side, so then when it comes back to roll out, repeat. (ID 6352)

Alright, but when I get them in a room together to actualize that right answer suddenly there's a debate on what is the right answer and which direction we should go. So as a facilitator, as a strategy leader, my job is to recognize that groupthink and identify the players who are driving that groupthink and partner with them or come up with strategies to minimize their causation to the problem or to the challenge. I wouldn't call it a problem but to the challenge. And so that takes some psychology techniques. That takes some stakeholder management techniques. That takes some coaxing right so and some coaching right. And I play all those…I play all those roles. I even sometimes put on different leadership styles to test the response that will give me what I'm looking for or which is more

of a group player, one that respects others' opinions and not bring to bear their leverage of title and consequence right so. (ID 8625)

As a project manager, it has lead me to spend a lot of time making sure that I have one-on-one conversations with people, before we go into certain meetings and so that I know their opinion before I walk in and see how they react in front of other people, especially executives and groupthink is often, either because someone doesn't have a strong opinion, has a strong opinion and is afraid that it will not be well received or has decided that it's not their responsibility and that's the way the bosses want to do it, that's what we'll do but even though they think quite frankly to themselves, that they wouldn't do it that way, if it was them. And he very often was right. So, in fairness to him, he was, like I said, he was just a genius but he just really just had such high expectations and often times he just would bulldoze through what needed to happen. So, what I experienced and what I knew because of that, a relationship we've had since 2005 is to step back and know, as an outside consultant, I had a role to play and yes, I needed the job just like anybody else does because that's how I get paid but it was actually nice to be an outside consultant because I also knew that the reason you hired me and paid me, what you pay me, is so that I would be that consultant and by the definition of a consultant is to consult you on what I know to be the right things. So, for the most part, I would be vocal when I knew that we ran up against a challenge that needed additional either investigation or re-think about it. I will also tell you there were times that I would look at David and literally say to his face, "You know, I am not

> going to fight this because I know you're adamant about it but I want it on the record now, that I disagree because you're not taking into consideration other people that may or may not have spoken up about this matter." (ID 9637)
>
> I think the standing my ground would be one important thing, as well as apprising the PM of my concerns and working with the PM to potentially find a way to hire someone who had experience with telecommunication projects. I also should have documented what occurred and shared it with my manager and her manager. Documentation in this instance would had made it a little easier for me to provide evidence the project would not have move in the direction that was needed because of the lack of skills and knowledge of the PM assuming the project. (ID 9803)

The fourth theme was company strategies to combat groupthink. These include strategies that help companies prevent groupthink. The interview responses that provided suggestions for this theme were:

> The other thing I see in a lot of projects that's missing is it requires traceability measurements linking back to the original technical and non-technical specifications as well as back to the business requirements. What is that connection back to the business requirement? Even though in some projects they've defined the business requirement but as the project developed, they never did link the business requirement to a technical or non-technical specification or to something that was actually tested in unit testing or UAT. (ID 2378)

That's not a day one thing, that's probably after a few weeks and getting a little confidence, that probably would have been the best move is to bring the key stakeholders together and say, "Here's what I see, here's where we are. Here's what's still to be done, here's what I see as the true schedule," that kind of stuff. That's what I did anyway, but it probably was not as orchestrated as it should have been. (ID 3520)

But yeah, I mean you have to have your stakeholder buy-in, and you have to have your sponsor making it clear to everybody involved in the project, this is important, and this is our vision, and this is why this is going to happen, and this is what our organization is doing to promote support and care about this initiative. And that it isn't just something that's going to go in, and then people are going to forget, and be onto the next thing. So, I think the groupthink can be overcome if you have visible leadership demonstrating that the project matters to somebody, and that they have skin in the game. (ID 8461)

So it takes a little bit of time to roll down a project when you're involving major consulting firms. But as a part of our process of ending an engagement we always get customer feedback whether it's successful or not. Right so as a part of that process of course post mortem occurs whether it's successful or not. So, in a post mortem review, what we…what came out of that discussion was one, at the beginning of the project we needed to establish the authorities of the participating members of the team. The second thing we decided we probably could've changed is leadership check-ins as a part of our stakeholder management process.

> We needed to have more regular leadership check-ins. In other words, demo what's going on or provide feedback. That kind of stuff right and then the last thing we could've done when the leader came in and this is the project team when I say we. (ID 8625)

Figure 5 shows the percentages of responses that fall into these themes.

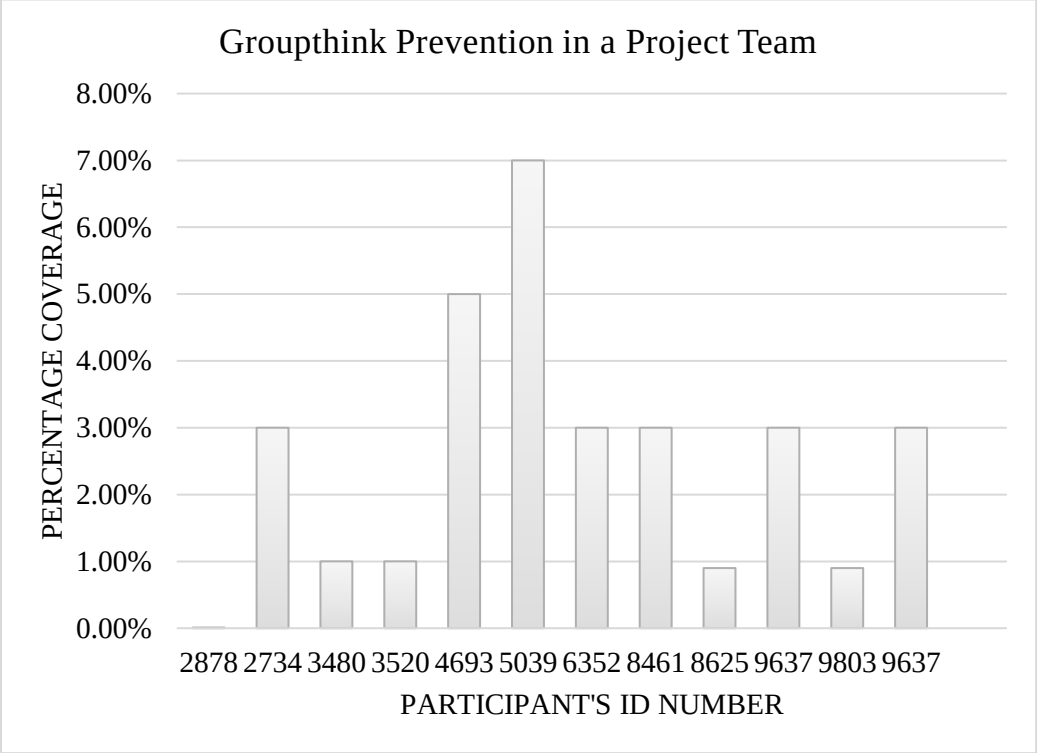

Figure 5. Summary of RQ4 and the percentage coverage each participant input towards the question.

Summary

The research findings presented in this chapter provide the perspectives of 16 senior project managers on groupthink in a project setting. I ensured the research process exercised trustworthiness by emphasizing to all participants that their experiences would only appear in this research and their names, employers, or any other demographic information would remain anonymous. No major adjustments were necessary in the areas of credibility, transferability, dependability, or confirmability. I imported the analysis from the interview transcripts into NVivo 11 for coding. Open coding of all transcripts developed answers to the four research questions of this study. From the coding, a four-level coding scheme emerged. The coding produced 101 (not unique) codes. The 13 themes highlighted in Figure 5 provide answers to the four research questions. Chapter 5 includes the conclusions of this research by providing a summary of the research, challenges encountered during the research, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research studies, and social change implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to understand why project teams are susceptible to groupthink and what precautions might prevent teams from derailing good decision-making according to the perspectives of project managers. The key findings of this research revealed 101 (not unique) codes that fell under 13 themes based on the four research questions. The themes correlated with some of Janis' (1982) eight symptoms of groupthink. For example, the theme *dysfunctional teams are problematic* aligns with "mindguards – a group member acts as an information filter to control the decision-making process towards a specific and limited number of alternatives" (Janis, 1982, p. 9). It also is similar to the *pressure to conform* theme. "Group members pressure dissenters by making it clear that divergent views are not welcome" (Janis, 1982, p. 10).

The present research validated a consistent generality amongst all 16 participants regarding the value of project managers' experiences performing tasks. The *project management experience* element was a theme within RQ1 (identifying and avoiding groupthink) that appears to mitigate groupthink. Each participant stated that groupthink in project teams occurs; how a project manager prevents it from occurring depends on their personal experience (and length of time) as a project manager.

Interpretation of Findings

The purpose of this research was to understand how groupthink occurs in a project team from the perspective of project managers in a variety of industries. Interpretation of the findings regarding the four research questions appears in the following section.

Research Question 1

RQ1. What are the experiences of project managers in project teams that result in groupthink?

The interview data indicated that each of the project managers experienced groupthink in a project setting. Of the four themes that emerged from RQ1, *consensus is detrimental* resonated most with the project managers. Aubé and Rousseau (2014) noted the omission of a discussion of how consensus thinking may also negatively impact performance, and attributed poor group performance to individuals' bad behaviors. The project managers in the present study indicated that project team members often felt as if they had to reach consensus to avoid retribution or isolation from other members of the project team. They also felt, depending upon the team member's title or role in the organization, that the person with the highest title influences the will of the project team. This leads to a loss of creativity, silencing of voices, conforming to pressure, and ultimately making poor decisions. Riordan and Riordan (2013) asserted, "Although groupthink does not assure the failure of a decision, its presence increases the chances of low quality, including unethical, decision-making in an organization" (p. 1).

My interpretation of the data from RQ1 was that project managers' approaches to preventing groupthink depend on their experience level. Most of the participants indicated that they experienced groupthink, but all experiences were from past endeavors, not current or recent experiences. This supports the assertion that "project managers need specific leadership skills to determine how groups work at both macro and micro levels" (Akpan, 2015, p. 34). The new question becomes whether experienced project managers

are enough to avoid groupthink, depending on their skill level. The data from these interviews suggests an answer to this question in the affirmative, but more research is necessary to validate this statement.

Research Question 2

RQ2. What antecedents do project managers identify in project teams during their experiences of groupthink?

There were four themes that emerged from RQ2 with no real consensus across the interviews. The data highlighted the themes *cost of poor communication* and *immature organizations and work environments*. Characteristics that emerged from this section included descriptors such as poor communication, intentional sabotage, and immature organizations. One of the themes from RQ1 (consensus was detrimental) also emerged as a theme in RQ2. The data from the interviews highlighted the fact that poor communication among project team members was not due to how project team members or the project manager communicated with each other, but instead was due to a lack of communication in the project team overall. The project team members felt as if they did not have a voice. Janis (1982) characterized this as "shared illusion of unanimity – group members who remain silent are assumed to be agreement" (p. 10). Based on the data from the interviews, poor communication leads project teams to make decisions that are counterproductive to the team and can lead the team to experience groupthink.

Immature organization and work environment are common in temporary organizational project teams. PMBOK (2017) defined project teams as temporary structures within organizations that disperse once a task is complete. Project teams are

vulnerable to groupthink due to their temporary nature, which leaves little time to create controls to minimize stereotyping, apathy, and mindless risk-taking (Hassan, 2013).

The data from the current study revealed that immature organizations tend to produce unsuccessful projects outcomes, unidentified risks, unsolicited opportunities, and too many compromises. Psychological safety is an important variant to successful group performance (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Psychological safety is the act of creating an environment that fosters learning and eliminates obstacles that team members may perceive as threats (Hirak et al., 2012). Hirak et al. (2012) asserted that groups fostering psychological safety might promote better group performance. Edmondson et al. (2016) illustrated differences in psychological safety based on work type, hierarchical status, and leadership effectiveness. Edmondson et al. (2016) determined that psychological safety plays a vital role in developing employees and cultivating a learning organization.

What I gleaned from the data collection for RQ2 was that project teams are inherently flawed because of their temporary nature. These teams have loosely defined structures and unrealistic expectations, which leads temporary project teams to reach consensus without weighing alternatives. Temporary teams tend to acquiesce when faced with difficult decisions to achieve a favorable outcome more quickly. Project methodology is a "system of practice, techniques, procedures, a rule used by those who work in a discipline" (PMBOK, 2017, p. 711). Project methodology usually helps project teams create and implement an organizational structure, but if the project team and the project manager are not skilled in utilizing a methodology, the outcome may lead to unsuccessful results.

Research Question 3

RQ3. What outcomes do project managers experience after groupthink surfaces in a project team?

The two themes that arose from RQ3 were *project failure affects employment* and *impact of groupthink on project outcomes*. The data from the interviews indicated that unsuccessful projects may lead to job terminations, reassignments, demotions, and resignations of project managers, contractors, and company personnel. These outcomes align with most situations in which something does not go as planned; someone will be responsible for the outcome. PMBOK (2017) cited project managers as the people responsible for ensuring that project teams efficiently accomplish objectives. This mode of thinking places the project manager in a risky position, especially if the project does not meet its goal. As one of the participants stated, "the project manager is damned if they do or don't" (ID 2708). Projects that are overbudget, not properly resourced, or have unrealistic expectations are difficult for managers; groupthink tends to seep in when the project is spinning out of control.

An underlying theme among theorists regarding groupthink is that once it occurs within a group, it may be difficult to overcome (Burnette et al., 2011; Castaño et al., 2013; Hirunyawipada et al., 2015; Quintane et al., 2013; Riordan & Riordan, 2013). The project manager and team members may engage in behaviors that further erode the project after groupthink begins. Some of these behaviors emerged in the interviews, such as attempting to abandon a project by asking for a reassignment or sabotaging the project so the organization would cancel it. Regardless project manager experience level, if a

project does not meet its intended goal, the manager is responsible for any negative outcome. Most of the project managers in this research stated that completing a project was the genesis of being a project manager.

Research Question 4

RQ4. What actions do project managers think might prevent the onset of groupthink?

The four themes that emerged from RQ4 were *preventing groupthink in a project management team, from silent to vocal team member, project management tactics,* and *company strategies to combat groupthink.* The data from the interviews suggested that project managers engage teams by promoting divergent ideas and multi-lateral decision-making, hold team members accountable, and play devil's advocate. When a project team must unanimously agree on a decision as a group, a member of the team should play devil's advocate to ensure proper examination of the decision (Riordan & Riordan, 2013).

Another trend in the data from the interviews indicated that group composition and the size of the group influence how members can manage groupthink. The data indicated that the larger the group, the less likely it is to rebound from a groupthink experience. Other trends in the data indicated that project managers can reduce groupthink by encouraging each project team member to critically evaluate ideas, come to an agreement based on the presented information, obtain leaders buy-in and support, and build trust among project team members.

My interpretation of the data was that project managers recommended similar approaches to those in previous studies on the subject of groupthink. Ben-Hur et al.

(2012) asserted that "saying what needs to be said without the concern of retaliatory actions from team members" helps avoid groupthink (p. 717). This statement relates to the theme *from silent to vocal team members*. A notable element that did not surface during data analysis was the inference that cohesion is a requirement for groupthink to occur. Janis (1982) suggested that cohesion was a primary antecedent for groupthink. None of the participants citied cohesion as a variant for groupthink or as a problem they experienced when forming or managing a project team. Groupthink in a project team surfaced when the team did not have an experienced project manager to employ tactics to help avoid groupthink. Some of these tactics include critically analyzing ideas, fostering two-way communication, minimizing individualized views, and training project team members to be more aware of the symptoms of groupthink.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations exist in every study, some of which are out of the researcher's control. Adequately addressed limitations do not reduce a study's value (Bernard & Bernard, 2012; Beskow et al., 2009). The first limitation of this study was that it did not represent the total population of project managers. I limited the study to senior project managers with a PMP certification because of the experience level of a project manager with PMP designation. The participants in this study were project managers with at least 10 years of experience and a PMP certification. The participants also managed a traditional project as the project manager.

Another limitation of the study was that I solicited all participants using the LinkedIn database. The results may be different for persons without a LinkedIn profile.

This study included 16 total participants from the technology, financial services, government, and consulting industries. The findings apply only to the data from the 16 participants regarding their experiences of groupthink.

Another limitation in the study was the level of response from each participant. Some participants elaborated generously in response to the questions, and other participants answered the questions more succinctly despite follow-up questions. The more succinct answers may make it more difficult for a person replicating the research to weigh the context of the longer answers versus the shorter answers.

Recommendations

The goal of this research was to understand how groupthink impacts project teams from the perspective of project managers to reveal ways to prevent the onset of groupthink. Project managers with over 10 years of experience completed interviews. The project managers (most with master degrees; eight of the PMPs had over 20 years of professional experience) provided detailed accounts of their experiences with groupthink and what they did to avoid it.

I used a qualitative phenomenological design for this study. A qualitative method was suitable for the study because perceptions and lived experiences of project managers are not specifically quantifiable. In phenomenological studies, the researcher seeks to understand the experiences of individuals to make sense of a phenomenon by obtaining comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon in a natural state (Gullick & West, 2012; Khan, 2014). The data indicated that the experiences of project managers influence their approach to preventing groupthink. Most of the project managers indicated their personal

experiences with groupthink were from past projects and shared what they learned from those projects.

Future research may explore whether there is a correlation between groupthink and the experiences of project managers in project teams. The project managers in this study were men and women. A future study could determine if men and women experience groupthink in project team differently from one another.

In this research, I did not determine whether there is a difference between how groupthink surfaces in a temporary organization versus a permanent organization. Data from the interviews indicated there is a difference in how each type of organization encounters groupthink; more research is necessary on this topic. There were a few instances in the data that indicated groupthink could garner positive results when the project is under severe constraints (e.g., time deadlines or regulatory requirements that cannot change). More research is necessary in this area to determine whether this useful group behavior is the same as groupthink. Groupthink may bring about positive results for teams that are task-driven, such as sport teams, military platoons, or a school band. Further research may determine how these groups experience groupthink and if it is any different from a temporary group, such as a project team.

An unintentional consequence of this research was the finding related to the conditions and heightened responsibilities of project managers that lead to the success of projects. The interview data analysis indicated that project managers are in a no-win situation if a project does not meet its intended goal. They are the only professionals who face some form of discipline for a negative project outcome. Additional research in this

area is necessary to better understand what happens to team members in each project team role when a project does not meet its goal. Is the outcome the same for the project managers, project team members, and project sponsors (the organizational leaders who fund the project)?

The results of this research also indicated that cohesion was not a relevant factor for project teams experiencing groupthink. Future research may determine other details of project teams' experiences of groupthink. Is groupthink related to task cohesion or some other form of cohesion not previously mentioned in the research on groupthink in project teams?

Implications

The purpose of social change in research is to improve the conditions of people who may be influenced by the results of a study (Du et al., 2013). Another objective of social change is to permanently replace negative patterns with approaches that generate optimal outcomes (Hielscher et al., 2012). Social change in companies employing project teams to accomplish goals brings about better project outcomes. For example, Vallone et al. (2016) completed a project to stop teen and young adult smokers by enlisting non-smokers with similar demographics to help the campaign. The project accomplished its goal of curbing smokers, and generated $88.6 million in earned media value. This shows that companies can encourage good business practices and be profitable at the same time. Thus, the present research highlights the need for project teams to engage in behaviors that improve the chances of a successful project.

The present study included interviews with 16 experienced project managers. Most of the project managers indicated that they believe their PMP professional experience helps prevent groupthink from surfacing on projects they currently manage compared to past projects when they first gained experience. One social change for companies is to avoid staffing projects with team members with experience that is not commensurate with the necessary work for the project. Many companies staff project teams with available employees who may not be capable of completing the goal. Bloch et al. (2012) conducted a study of 5,400 projects; the total overrun costs were $66 billion due to unmet goals and extensions of project delivery dates. The projects used available employees, not employees with required skills, to complete the work. The research did not evaluate the effect of an experienced versus inexperienced project manager on the project outcome (Bloch et al., 2012). When a project does not meet its goal, the project manager takes most of the blame. There is little recognition of project managers when a project meets its objective. As more organizations use project teams to advance their businesses, they must assess why projects fail to meet goals and what resources (e.g., conducting lessons learned meetings after the project with a person not working on the project) might help avoid future unsatisfactory results.

Most of the project managers interviewed for this research indicated they became project managers by performing another job where they quickly realized that managing projects was a full-time job that required specialized skills. PMI is the professional association through which persons who perform project work obtain a PMP certification, train, participate in chapter meetings, and attend national conferences. Many companies

that perform project work may not see the value in PMI until they are forced to change their behaviors due to projects that fail to accomplish the intended goals (Shore, 2008).

The present research did not include sufficient data to determine the origins of groupthink or how it prevents a team from completing an intended goal. The findings did raise several points about how teams struggle with indifference or views that are not in line with the majority. Riordan and Riordan (2013) suggested that team members should become devil's advocates and critically analyze thoughts before making a final decision. Teams struggle with this concept because teams do not encourage discourse; organizations discourage discourse and mute perspectives that could provide insightful context to address problems. To create social change in the workplace, project teams must embrace alternative perspectives and respect differences of opinion. Reeler (2015) suggested that to move forward, teams must "unlearn the inner constraints that holds us back from personal transformation" (p. 15). Positive social change cannot occur until individuals let go of personal dogma and embrace the perspectives of others.

Conclusions

Reeler (2015) stated, "Human beings can identify and solve problems and imagine or envision different possibilities or solutions for the future" (p. 18). The present research increased the understanding of how project managers experience groupthink in a project setting and how they synthesize information to formulate a description of groupthink. Edmondson et al. (2016) determined that psychological safety plays a vital role in developing employees and cultivating a learning organization. If project team members do not feel safe to make decisions, they will revert to behaviors such as being

silent and going along with the majority to avoid discourse. These are two tenets of groupthink: *shared illusion of unanimity* and *self-censorship* (Janis, 1982).

The biggest changes companies can make to prevent the onset of groupthink in a project setting are to allow project teams to work without improper intrusions (e.g., project sponsors pushing unrealistic project timelines) and to foster an environment that rewards project managers and team members for escalating project issues without fear of retribution or retaliation. The present research findings indicated that experience plays a vital role in mitigating groupthink. Organizations should create project teams with the appropriate skill sets and invest in resources that may be more expensive in the short-term. This may avoid budget overruns, defects, and reworks that cost companies billions of dollars and cost project managers their jobs if the project does not achieve its goal.

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Appendix A. Email Sent to Participants

Attached is the Consent form that provides all of the pertinent information for our discussion. All that is left is to set up an interview time that works for you. Just let me know when you can spare 30 minutes, and I will set it up. My schedule is pretty open so just propose a few times that work for you.

Please let me know if you have any additional questions.

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Appendix B. 101 Codes

Name	Description	Sources	References
General Experience with Groupthink	A project manager's overall experience with groupthink.	13	33
Being Disruptive	An innovation that creates new markets.	1	1
Being Strategic	Strategies that project managers use to prevent groupthink.	2	2
Communication	Transmitting or exchanging information.	2	2
Control	To exert power over someone.	2	4
Influencers	The act of producing an effect without exertion of force.	4	4
Missing Deadlines	Not completing a project by the date or time in which it must be done.	1	1
Move Towards Consensus	General agreement by project management team members.	7	11
No Value Added	A new product produced by a project management team that has little utility, worth, or importance.	1	2
Order Taker	A person who takes direction without asking questions or offering ideas.	2	2
Project Manager Skills and Expertise	A project manager's ability to use his or her knowledge,	4	4

Name	Description	Sources	References
	abilities, and talents in the execution of a task.		
Rejected Views	The act of ignoring one's perspective.	1	1
Retribution	A person who is in fear of losing his or her job out of retaliation.	1	1
Success and Failure	Projects that are either victorious or a debacle.	1	1
Groupthink Example	Illustrations of groupthink experienced by project managers.	14	30
Beneficial	Examples of groupthink that are favourable or profitable.	1	1
Outcome	The end-result of groupthink.	1	4
New Product	An object or good produced by intellectual effort.	1	2
Processes Mapped	A series of actions, techniques, or routines that have been documented.	1	1
Reasons	An explanation for an act or belief.	0	0
Disruptive	An innovation that creates new markets.	1	1
Strategic	Strategies that project managers use to prevent groupthink.	1	1

Name	Description	Sources	References
Problematic	Examples of groupthink that are troublesome.	14	50
Outcome	The end-result of groupthink.	10	23
Costly Corrections	The outcome of a project that is expensive to correct.	1	1
Lost Customers	Clients who were not pleased with a product and took their business to another company.	1	1
New Project Deadlines	Aspects of projects that are removed to meet a deadline, and a new deadline and milestones are set to complete the parts that were removed.	1	1
Product Cancelled	A product that has been abandoned.	1	1
Product Not Used	A product that has been shelved and is not being used.	1	1
Project Completed	A successful or unsuccessful project that has been completed.	2	2
Project Extended	A project's timeline that has been extended.	1	1
Project Failed	A project that was unsuccessful.	2	3
Project Salvaged	A project that was initially unsuccessful but was rescued or saved.	2	2

Name	Description	Sources	References
Project Stopped	A project that has been discontinued.	2	3
Reassignments	A project manager who has been removed and assigned to a different project.	1	2
Resignations	A project manager who quit.	1	2
Terminations and Demotions	Project managers, contractors, or staff who have been fired or demoted.	3	9
Reasons	An explanation for an act or belief.	0	0
Business Resources Not Engaged	Human, financial, physical, and knowledge resources that companies need to perform business processes.	1	1
Competing Priorities	Conflicting projects that are given preference over others.	1	1
Consensus	General agreement by project manager team members.	2	3
Fear of Retribution	A person who is in fear of losing his or her job out of retaliation.	2	2
Group Composition	The structure of project team that supports or combats groupthink.	1	1
Immature Project Methodology	The inability to respond to project management issues in a systematic manner and assess all risks.	1	1

Name		Description	Sources	References
	Inadequate Work	An insufficient work product produced by a project management team.	2	2
	Influence, Control, and Power	The act of producing an effect without exertion of force.	8	18
	Lack of Communication	A breakdown of communication between project management team members and/or leadership.	1	1
	Lack of Company Experience	A company that has little experience in carrying out a project.	2	2
	Lack of Documentation	Inadequate record keeping of policies and rules, processes, reports, minutes of meetings, discussions and negotiations, budgets, IT plans, and other activities important for project management.	5	8
	Lack of Information	Insufficient facts or intelligence.	1	1
	Lack of Knowledge	Minimal familiarity with a particular subject acquired through experience or education.	2	3
	Lack of Manager Support	Project managers who are not aided or helped by their superiors.	1	1

Name		Description	Sources	References
	Lack of People Engagement	Inadequate interaction with project team members.	2	3
	Not Speaking Up	Project management team members who are not vocal or participate in decision-making, often leading to group consensus and groupthink.	4	6
	Order Taker	A person who takes direction without asking questions or offering ideas.	1	1
	Overly Optimistic	Project management team members who have fallen behind on a project and are confident that a project will be completed on time.	1	2
	Project Manager Experience	A project manager's ability to use his or her knowledge, abilities, and talents in the execution of a task.	2	3
	Project Team Discord	Dissention among project management team members.	1	1
	Resistance	Project management team members who work against or oppose the completion and implementation of a project.	1	1
	Unrealistic Timelines	Setting project timelines that are hard to meet.	2	5
Groupthink Prevention Strategy		Methods used by project managers to prevent groupthink.	12	42

Name	Description	Sources	References
Adaptability	Having the ability to change to deal with new situations.	1	1
Being Disruptive	An innovation that creates new markets.	1	2
Being Strategic	Strategies that project managers use to prevent groupthink.	7	11
Building Consensus	Developing unanimity among project team members based on a discussion of diverse ideas and creativity.	2	3
Building Trust	Creating confidence among project teams.	2	2
Communication	Transmitting or exchanging information.	8	13
Cultural Awareness	Having knowledge about the distinct ways of living by a group of people.	1	1
Customer Feedback	The process of obtaining a response to an inquiry about a product from a client.	1	1
Developing Group Creativity	Creating divergent, innovative, and imaginative ideas among project teams.	1	1
Documenting and Due Diligence	Performing adequate record keeping of policies and rules, processes, reports, minutes of meetings, discussions and negotiations, budgets, IT plans, and other activities important	6	13

Name	Description	Sources	References
	for project management. Reasonable steps taken by a person to satisfy legal requirements.		
Establishing Authority and Leadership	Appointing and distinguishing leaders in teams at the beginning of projects. Demonstrating visible leadership.	2	2
Focus on Business Processes	Directing attention to a collection of linked tasks in the delivery of a product or service to a client.	1	1
Group Composition	The structure of project team that supports or combats groupthink.	2	5
Holding People Accountable	Keeping project management team members responsible for their actions.	1	2
Multi-lateral decision-making	Decision-making that involves multiple people.	2	2
Playing Devil's Advocate	A person who purposively takes an opposing viewpoint to critically evaluate an idea, plan, or decision.	2	4
Project Manager as Facilitator	A project manager who coordinates discussion and action in such a way as to combat groupthink in project management teams.	4	5

Name	Description	Sources	References
Project Members Taking Action	Project management members who knowingly or unknowingly take steps to prevent or promote groupthink.	2	2
Providing Choices	Suggesting alternatives to leaders or project management team members that will generate discussion to reach a final decision.	3	4
Providing Information	Transmitting or exchanging intelligence and data.	2	4
Revisiting Project Scope	Reviewing the project scope for clarity.	1	1
Standing Your Ground	Being firm in one's decision.	1	1
Traceability Measurements	Technical and non-technical specifications that can be linked back to the business requirements.	1	1
Upholding Value	Supporting something (e.g., principle) that is intrinsically valuable.	1	3
Using Soft Skills	A combination of social and people skills used by project managers to prevent groupthink.	1	1
Validation	Assessment of an action, decision, or plan that is being implemented or completed.	1	3
Project Examples	Discussion of projects or aspects of projects experienced	4	9

Name	Description	Sources	References
	by interviewees that are not groupthink examples.		
Project Management Career Path	The path that interviewees took to become a project manager.	16	35
Industry	The sector of the economy in which the interviewee works.	16	20
Location	The location where the interviewee works.	9	10
Years of Experience	The length of time an interviewee has been a project manager or worked in project management.	12	13
Project Management Challenges	Issues or problems experienced by project managers when managing projects.	7	14
Communication	Transmitting or exchanging information.	2	4
Control	To exert power over someone.	3	3
Different Perspectives	Divergent views on decisions and actions that must be taken for a project.	1	1
PMBOK Lack of Instruction on Group Creativity	Minimal instruction in the PMBOK about developing and fostering group creativity and decision-making.	1	1
Project Destined to Fail	A case in which a project is doomed to fail but is salvaged by the project manager.	1	1

Name	Description	Sources	References
Rescue and Recovery	A case in which a project is experiencing problems over time, including multiple project managers, but the project is recovered.	1	2
Scope Creep	A change in a project's scope after the project has begun.	1	1
Time	Unrealistic project deadlines.	3	3