

Decision-Making in the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy: A Descriptive Analysis Employing Irving Janis' Groupthink Hypothesis

Groupthink and Decision-Making

In 1972, a new concept was added to the study of small group decision-making. After studying decision-making fiascoes of foreign policy groups,¹ Irving Janis formulated the concept of groupthink, "a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' striving for unanimity overrides their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action."² Put another way, conforming to the norms of the group supersedes effective decision-making.

Groupthink, which is seen as a destructive variable in the small group decision-making process, has eight symptoms. One or more of these symptoms is usually present when a group makes a poor decision. In groups such as those studied by Janis, symptoms of groupthink can be detected in historical records, memoirs of participants, and observer's accounts of conversations.³ Prevalent in the decision-making groups that Janis studied was the tendency for the group to display one or more of the of the following symptoms of groupthink: (a) a feeling of invulnerability, (b) ignoring the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions due to a belief of inherent morality of the group, (c) the tendency to rationalize the group's decisions in light of warnings that challenge the group's status quo, (d) making negative stereotypes of competing or out-groups, (e) placing direct pressure on any dissenting member of the group to conform to the group's decision, (f) engage in self-censorship so that members do not introduce any information that might go against the prevailing opinion of the group, (g) assume that silence by group members implies consent or an "illusion of unanimity," and (h) members of the group acting as "mindguards" who protect the group from any facts, criticisms, re-evaluations, etc., that might disrupt the

group's false feeling of unanimity.⁴

Whenever a group displays most of these symptoms, Janis believes the group will also display symptoms of defective decision-making. These include:

1. Incomplete survey of alternatives.
2. An incomplete survey of objectives.
3. Failure to examine risks of preferred choices.
4. Failure to reappraise initially rejected alternatives.
5. Poor information search.
6. Subjective bias in processing information at hand.
7. Failure to work out contingency plans.⁵

Inherent in Janis' groupthink hypothesis is the notion that groupthink can only take place in groups that are highly cohesive. Additional antecedent conditions that make groupthink more likely to occur include insulation of the group, a lack of impartial leadership, and the absence of norms requiring methodical procedures for dealing with the decision-making tasks of the group.

Janis also analyzed foreign-policy decision-making groups that did not fall victim to groupthink. In some cases these successful decision-making groups had many of the same members of the groups that made disastrous foreign-policy decisions.⁶ However, the members of these groups exhibited behaviors that counteracted the occurrence of groupthink. From his analysis of these successful decision-making groups, Janis formulated behaviors that are correctives to groupthink. These correctives to groupthink include: (a) members of the group playing the role of critical evaluator, (b) the leader of the group not letting his or her biases be known to the group, (c) the decision-making group having an independent group working on the same problem with a different leader, (d) the decision-making group dividing into two or more subgroups before a decision is made to avoid concurrence-seeking norms, (e) each member of the group discussing

the group's deliberations with a trusted associate, (f) having qualified outsiders invited to the group's meetings to challenge the status quo of the group, (g) having group members play the role of devil's advocate, (h) the decision-making group taking time to analyze competing group's responses to their decisions, and (i) once a consensus is reached, the group holds a final meeting so that the group will rethink the issue at hand before a final decision is made.⁷

Janis' groupthink hypothesis has received wide acceptance as an analytical tool for describing small group behavior in the field of speech communication. Examination of most basic small group communication texts (see Brillhart; Fisher; Phillips, Pederson, and Wood; Tubbs; and Verderber⁸), and texts on group theory (see Shaw and Swapp⁹) demonstrates the pervasiveness of this concept. In addition, several studies of small group behavior have employed this hypothesis through the work of Raven, Courtright, Flowers, and Tetlock.¹⁰

Raven's analysis of "the Nixon Group"--a group comprised of Richard Nixon and his key advisors (who attempted to cover-up the Watergate scandal)--supported Janis' groupthink hypothesis. Raven concluded that though the Nixon group was not a highly cohesive group, "they were all bound to the group through loyalty, acceptance, and identification with their leader, Richard M. Nixon."¹¹

Courtright created two sets of groups: groups that were high in cohesion and a set of groups that were low in cohesion in an empirical analysis of groupthink. Courtright concluded that cohesion wasn't the dominant variable for the occurrence of groupthink; rather he summarized that the absence of disagreement may be the most important variable in the manifestation of groupthink.

In another empirical investigation of groupthink, Flowers tested two independent variables, leadership style and group cohesiveness and their effect on decision-making. Like Courtright, Flowers concluded that group cohesiveness was not the sine qua non for the occurrence of groupthink. When a closed (directive) leader led the group, groupthink was more prevalent than when an open

(non-directive) leader led the group. Flowers believes that a revision of the groupthink hypothesis may be in order with cohesiveness eliminated as the crucial variable for the occurrence of groupthink.

Finally, Tetlock analyzed public statements by leading decision-makers in the same foreign policy-making groups studied by Janis. His results indicated that decision-makers who do not fall victim to groupthink were not as simplistic in their perception of policy issues, and did not make as many positive referenes to the United States and its allies as did decision-makers exhibiting groupthink. These findings are consistent with Janis' hypothesis. However, inconsistent with Janis' findings, groups experiencing groupthink did not make more negative references to competing or out-groups. Tetlock concluded "[T]he present study underscores how multiple methods of investigation--ranging from case studies to content analysis to laboratory experiments--can be brought together to test the validity of the groupthink hypothesis."¹²

Of all the groups studied by speech communication scholars, one group stands absent: the Warren Commission. This analysis centers on this controversial decision-making group in an attempt to apply Janis' groupthink hypothesis. It seeks to examine the effectiveness of this group through an analysis of the Commission's transcripts. The groupthink hypothesis is used in this analysis to examine the effectiveness of the Warren Commission to answer the following questions:

1. Did the Warren Commission manifest communication symptomatic of groupthink?
2. As a decision-making group, did the Warren Commission manifest communication that was indicative of correctives to groupthink?

An additional question was asked in light of any symptoms of groupthink present in the deliberations of the Warren Commission:

3. If symptoms of groupthink were present, did they result in symptoms of defective decision-making?

Before these questions may be answered, it is necessary to to examine the formation of the Warren Commission and the controversy surrounding this Commission.

The Warren Commission

After the assassination of President Kennedy and the subsequent murder of his accused assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, a presidential commission was created to investigate the deaths of both men. The President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy (more commonly referred to as the Warren Commission, after the Commission's chair Chief Justice Earl Warren) was formed by President Johnson via Executive Order 11130 to "evaluate and report upon the facts relating to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the subsequent violent death of the man charged with his assassination. . . ."13

In addition to Chief Justice Warren, this Commission consisted of Senators Richard B. Russell and John Sherman Cooper, Representatives Gerald R. Ford and Hale Boggs, the former director of the CIA Allen W. Dulles, and the former president of the World Bank John J. McCloy. A seventh man was chosen as the Commission's General Counsel: the former Solicitor General of the United States, J. Lee Rankin.

On September 18, 1964, the Warren Commission released its findings in the long awaited Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy (the Warren Report). The Warren Report concluded that Oswald was the lone assassin of Kennedy, that there was no conspiracy in Kennedy's death, and that there was no connection between Oswald and his murderer, Jack Ruby. For the moment, the public accept this official version of the assassination.¹⁴ However, the public's belief in the Warren Report was to erode with time and other

governmental investigations, and presently eighty percent of those polled now doubt the Commission's findings.¹⁵

Whether or not criticisms leveled at the Commission have been appropriate, a careful study of the Warren Commission's work raises questions about the manner in which it pursued its task. This analysis is not an attempt to resolve the controversy surrounding the death of the thirty-fifth president of the United States. Rather it is an attempt to analyze aspects of the decision-making process of the Warren Commission that may have contributed to the controversy, and seeks to achieve a judgment concerning the quality of the Commission's work.

Antecedent Conditions for Groupthink in the Warren Commission

The Warren Commission as a Cohesive Group

Of all of the antecedent conditions for groupthink, Janis believes that a high level of group cohesiveness is the most essential variable for the occurrence of groupthink. Though Courtright and Flowers have disputed this, Janis still stands by his original claim.¹⁶ Was the Warren Commission a cohesive group? At first appearance, the answer is no. Two members of the Warren Commission, Earl Warren and Richard Russell, were coerced by Johnson to serve on the Commission.¹⁷

In addition to reluctant membership, attendance for the thirteen times the Commission met was fairly poor, but this is generally the norm for presidential commissions.¹⁸ Yet once the Commission was formed, it was held together by Executive Order 11130 that gave the Commission the responsibility to "evaluate, and report upon the facts relating to the assassination of President Kennedy."¹⁹ The Commission was cohesive in the fact that it wanted to "appear credible and what was regarded as necessary for acceptability or at least reduce criticism [that] could not be eliminated in advance."²⁰ Much like the Nixon group that was held together by a common dependence on Nixon, the Warren Commission could be considered a cohesive group in the sense that all members wanted their final

report to to appear credible and put to rest rumors about the assassination. Their desire to produce such a report was the thread that held them together.

Leadership in the Warren Commission

The role of leadership in the Warren Commission was assumed by J. Lee Rankin, the Commission's General Counsel (executive director). Harold Weisberg, who has been investigating the Warren Commission for over twenty years, claims that it was Rankin and not Warren who was the most powerful and influential man in the Commission.²¹ As Popper points out, executive directors shoulder most of the burden of presidential commissions.²² He or she is responsible for staff selections and also acts as a mediator between the commission and their staff. The executive director also has the "the nearly impossible task of making commissioners and staff members regard the commission as a cohesive group, not as a fragmented temporary collection of individuals."²³ Rankin was the person in the Commission who was influential in directing the activities of the group, and all communication between governmental agencies (i.e., FBI, Secret Service, CIA, etc.) and the Commission went through Rankin before it was passed on to the rest of the Commission.

Janis claims that in order for groupthink to occur, a leader must promote a preferred solution. Though Rankin may not have openly promoted a preferred solution, the direction he gave the Commission in their investigation precluded any other solution other than Oswald being the lone assassin of Kennedy. A progress report Rankin prepared for Warren on January 11, 1964 (after only three Commission meetings), indicated his feelings about the nature of the investigation. Rankin divided the work into six areas:

- (1) Assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963; (2) Lee Harvey Oswald as the Assassin of President Kennedy (emphasis added); (3) Lee Harvey Oswald: Background and Possible Motive; (4) Oswald's Foreign Activity; (5) Murder of Lee Harvey Oswald by Jack Ruby; and (6) Security Precautions to Protect the President.²⁴

When the Warren Report was released nine months later, the eight chapters of the report varied little from these six areas of investigation.

Insulation of the Warren Commission

One of the biggest criticisms of the Warren Commission was the secrecy in which it conducted its investigation. One of the main reasons the Commission was created was to eliminate rumors about the assassination,²⁵ but its decision not to release any details about its work until its completion spawned many criticisms and speculations. In addition, the Commission took all of its testimony in secret, classified its transcripts and records without having the proper authority, and released virtually nothing of substance to the press.²⁶ As one weekly news magazine stated:

By its very silence for so long, the commission headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren made its own task that much harder. It gave a long headstart to confusion and conjecture even among the best intentioned; and it nourished a whole mythology of assassination literature, ranging from outlandish theories to cunningly plausible doubts.²⁷

The Warren Commission's Decision-Making Procedure

The Warren Commission's decision-making procedure will be discussed in detail later in this analysis. However, of all sessions of the Commission's thirteen meetings, in only two sessions is there a mention of an agenda (February 24 and April 30, 1964).²⁸

A reading of the now declassified transcripts of the Commission's deliberations reveals that Warren would introduce the topic to be covered, and then Rankin directed the discussion to follow. Members did not appear to be briefed beforehand on the topic of discussion which would be indicative of a failure on Rankin's part to circulate an agenda before the Commission met.

With the Warren Commission exhibiting Janis' antecedent conditions for the occurrence of groupthink, an analysis of the Commission's once top-secret

transcripts follows. The purpose of this analysis is to ascertain if the Commission was guilty of groupthink.

Method of Analysis of the Warren Commission Transcripts

To determine if groupthink was prevalent in the Warren Commission's meetings, an episodic analysis via Frenzt and Farrell's language-action paradigm, was employed.²⁹ An episode may be seen as a "sequence of symbolic acts generated by two or more actors who are collectively oriented toward emergent goals."³⁰ Frenzt and Farrell's language-action paradigm consists of three hierarchically structured constructs: context, episode, and symbolic act.

Context refers to the criteria humans use for interpreting communicative events. During communicative encounters, participants (actors) will "survey the probable rules of propriety and--in principle--exclude the least likely candidates."³¹ Episodes entail the actual application of these rules. The episode is a sequence of action by communicators that is understandable only in terms of the context in which they occur. Symbolic acts, the final hierarchical component of the language-action paradigm, consists of the basic communicative elements from which actors create episodes. Symbolic acts influence and are influenced by the episode, and the choice of symbolic acts by the actors direct the nature of the episode.

In the analysis of the Warren Commission's transcripts, it was necessary to understand the communicative behavior of the Commissioners during each meeting in regard to the total context of this incident. The importance of examining the total context of communicative episodes is best presented by Frenzt and Farrell in their language-action paradigm. Consider the following episode fragment:

A: Could I have a drink of water?
B: Mark, it's bedtime.
A: But I'm thirsty.
B: Really?

A: Yes.

B: Just a second, I'll get it.

If the first two acts are taken out of context, when A asks B for a drink of water, B's response seems inappropriate. Only if the first two communicative acts are seen in the total context of the episode does a logical relationship between them occur.³² Thus, each symbolic act (discussion by commissioners) was analyzed with respect to the episode in which it occurred (commission meeting) in relation to the total context of this event (investigation of Kennedy's assassination).

Limitations and Modifications of the Groupthink Hypothesis

One drawback in using Janis' symptoms of, and correctives to groupthink is that Janis was not thinking exclusively in terms of interaction via a transcript analysis. He was relying more on observer accounts and recollections of those involved in the groupthink fiascoes. He was in many cases able to identify the psychological state of participants through subsequent interviews.³³ Through this process Janis developed the groupthink symptom of self-censorship. It would be impossible to detect such a psychological state from a transcript. The symptoms of mindguarding and illusion of unanimity also represent psychological states that would not be apparent from reading a transcript. However, in addition to the transcripts of the Warren Commission, other available information was utilized that shed light on the psychological states of some Commissioners.³⁴

The symptoms and correctives of groupthink as presented by Janis in Groupthink were modified for this analysis. Categories were created that would support or undermine groupthink as defined by Janis and would be inferrable from the transcripts. Several symptoms were added which are overt and would be indicative of groupthink. These symptoms include purposely withholding information from competing groups and group members' making solution-centered statements before the problem is thoroughly evaluated.

In addition to Janis' symptom of stereotyping "out" or competing groups, it seems likely that a group guilty of groupthink would not share any information with these groups. This would be done not only to hinder the efforts of these groups, but also evaluate the feeling of superiority and cohesiveness of their group. One of the main conditions for groupthink is a highly cohesive group where the norm is "don't disrupt the group." Such groups would most likely be solution-centered so they would not have to go through the conflict of reaching a solution through a critical analysis of each issue. (The modified symptoms of groupthink used in this analysis are presented in Table 1.)

From Janis' original correctives to groupthink, the following were eliminated from this analysis: the decision-making group having an independent policy-planning and evaluation group working on the same problem with a different leader, decision-making groups dividing into two or more subgroups, qualified experts from outside the group being invited to group meetings and being encouraged to challenge the view of core group members, and each member of the group discussing the group's deliberations with a trusted associate.

The Warren Commission was a unique decision-making group because it was a presidential commission. Because of this, there were no other groups sanctioned by President Johnson to investigate Kennedy's assassination.³⁵ The nature of a presidential commission does not call for a division of the commission, and no experts are called before a commission's deliberations; all experts are called before the commission's hearings.³⁶ The corrective of each group member discussing the group's deliberations with a trusted associate was eliminated because detection of this was not possible in the Warren Commission's transcripts. Since the Warren Commission met behind closed doors, members could not volunteer information from associates outside of the group; this would indicate they had violated the secrecy of the Commission's meetings.³⁷

Two additional correctives to groupthink were added for this analysis: group

members seeking information for additional understanding/clarification of issues and the willingness to offer information to competing groups.

To avoid groupthink, group members may try to seek additional information (or at least recognize the need for it) about the nature of the problem as opposed to going along with other group members' point of view. In addition, a decision-making group may express an intention to give information to competing groups to see if they reach the same conclusions to act as a check on their decision-making abilities. (See Table 2 for the correctives to groupthink employed in this analysis.)

The Warren Commission's Investigation

The Warren Commission met a total of thirteen times to discuss the procedure for the investigation of Kennedy's death. The Warren Commission was a policy-making group. It did not deliberate to uncover the facts surrounding the Kennedy assassination; rather, the Commission's met to discuss how the facts should be investigated. The staff of the Commission bore the responsibility of the analysis of the facts uncovered. By January 11, 1964, Rankin had decided for the Commission that the focus of the staff's investigation would be on why and how Oswald assassinated Kennedy.³⁸ However, late in January the Commission faced an obstacle that was not part of Rankin's six areas of investigation that he had presented to Warren on January 11.

In January of 1964, a Houston newspaper reported that Oswald may have been an informant for the FBI. This was due to the fact that when Oswald was apprehended by the Dallas police, listed in his address book was the name, home and office phone number, and license plate number of Dallas FBI special agent James Hosty.³⁹ Waggoner Carr, the Texas Attorney General, called Rankin on January 22 to inform him of the Oswald-FBI allegations. The possible connection between the FBI and Oswald presented the Commission with an unexpected problem in their pre-planned

investigation. The Commission now had to resolve the issue of whether or not the man charged with assassinating Kennedy was a former employee of the governmental agency that was the investigative arm of the Warren Commission. Commissioner Ford stated: "Thus the matter of determining at the onset how to handle the rumor that Oswald was connected to the FBI was a test of the ability of the Commission to execute its mission."⁴⁰

On January 22 and 27, 1964, the Commission met to discuss the allegations that Lee Harvey Oswald was an FBI undercover agent. The transcripts of these meetings were analyzed in light of Janis' groupthink hypothesis. In the analysis, episodes were defined as sequences in which Commission members had to make crucial decisions about Oswald's possible connection to the FBI. The total context of these discussions was considered in relation to the symbolic acts making up each critical episode. The communicative acts of each episode in the Commission's meetings of January 22 and 27 were compared to Janis' symptoms and correctives of groupthink as presented in Tables 1 and 2 to analyze the communicative behavior of the Commission in light of Janis' groupthink hypothesis. Inferences were made from data in the episodes analyzed to the classification categories (symptoms and correctives) to which key utterances were assigned.

With respect to the Warren Commission's final decision regarding Oswald's possible association with the FBI, the Warren Commission decided to rely solely on the testimony of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and several FBI agents. In other words, the Commission decided that there would be no independent investigation of this matter. Given some of the dubious distinctions that have been revealed about the FBI since Hoover's death, it is doubtful that under Hoover's direction the FBI would have ever admitted to employing Oswald.

Lonnie Hudkins, the Houston Newspaper man who first broke the story, was never called before the Commission for questioning. On May 5, 1964, FBI agents John Fain, John Quigley, and James Hosty testified before the Commission. Each

claimed that Oswald was not in the employ of the FBI.⁴¹ On May 14, 1964, the Assistant to the Director of the FBI, Alan Belmont testified before the Commission that "Oswald was not, never was, an agent or informant of the FBI."⁴² Also on the same day, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover testified before the Commission stating that "I know at no time was he [Oswald] an informant or agent or special employee or working in any capacity for the FBI."⁴³ Regarding Oswald's possible connections with the FBI, the Warren Report concluded:

Director Hoover has sworn that he caused a search to be made of the records of the Bureau, and that the search discloses that Oswald "was never an informant of the FBI, and never assigned a symbol number in that capacity, and was never paid any amount by the FBI in any regard."⁴⁴

Indications of Symptoms of and Corrective to Groupthink

During the two meetings in which the Warren Commission discussed the Oswald-FBI allegations, nine episodes relevant to the presence and management of groupthink were identified. They include for the January 22 meeting:

1. The discussion of Oswald's possible role as an FBI undercover agent.
2. Oswald's venture into the Soviet Union when he defected to the East in 1959.
3. Oswald's ease in obtaining a passport to return to the Soviet Union.
4. The Consequences of Oswald's FBI connection.

The following episodes were identified for the January 27 meeting:

1. How to carry out the investigation to determine if Oswald was an agent of the FBI.
2. Proof that Oswald was an agent of the FBI.
3. The integrity of J. Edgar Hoover.
4. The Commission's opinion of the FBI.
5. The Commission's consensus on the Oswald-FBI investigation.

The episodes were examined to answer the two questions that were pertinent to this analysis:

1. Did the Warren Commission manifest communication symptomatic of groupthink?
2. As a decision-making group, did the Warren Commission manifest communication that was indicative of correctives to groupthink?

Symptoms of Groupthink

The following symptoms of groupthink were present in the episodes examined with respect to the Commission's decision-making processes:

Collective Rationalization. In the first episode of the January 22 meeting, Rankin made every effort to rationalize to the group that it could never be proved that Oswald was an FBI agent. It is important to remember that Rankin outlined a sequence for the investigation eleven days earlier in which Oswald was presumed to be Kennedy's assassin. This attempt by Rankin to foster collective rationalization may have been so the Commission would not have to examine any evidence contrary to his initial judgment. Dulles also supported Rankin in this area. A hypothesis that is presented as impossible to prove would probably lead a group away from carefully examining any evidence contrary to the current thinking. This would tend to introduce a potential source of conflict that could disrupt the cohesion of the group.

At the end of the January 22 meeting, the Commission members collectively rationalized the judgment that the record of the meeting should be destroyed or only circulated to members of the Commission. With such an important issue at hand, the Commission members' decision not to let this information out may be seen as the Commission's "we are justified because we are a presidential commission" attitude. No one in the group mentioned that one of the Commission's main purposes was to determine the truth and report all of their findings to the

American public.

When the Commission discussed whether Oswald was an agent of the FBI in the January 27 meeting, the members again displayed symptoms of collective rationalization. They failed to discuss any alternative ways of proving whether Oswald was an FBI agent and ended the discussion with an implied consensus that they would have to take the word of the federal agencies involved.

Stereotyping of Out-Groups. Though in earlier meetings of December 5 and 6, 1963, the Commission had stereotyped the Texas Board of Inquiry (who was performing their own investigation of the assassination) in a negative way, they did not let this symptom interfere with receiving the Oswald-FBI information from the Texas Board of Inquiry. However, in the January 27 meeting the FBI surfaces as the true out-group, and is characterized as having incompetent agents. This may have been due to the Commission's frustration of having to rely on the FBI for its investigations.

Pressures on Dissenting Members to Conform. During the January 22 meeting, Dulles made every attempt to pressure the group into believing that Oswald would have had no difficulty in obtaining a passport to return to Russia. Even greater pressure was exerted by Rankin in the January 27 meeting. He tried to get the Commission members to accept his idea that they should not cross the FBI by doing an independent investigation of this issue. However, whereas in the episode of the January 22 meeting the Commission members yielded to Dulles' insistence that a past defector could obtain a passport so easily, this was not the case in the January 27 episode. The Commissioners, most notably Russell, do not completely yield to Rankin's insistence. Yet it is apparent that the members of the Commission were reluctant to do a completely independent investigation. No member made the needed comment, "Since the FBI has already made its decision, any further

investigation by them would be of little value."

Solution-Centeredness. Rankin, the Commission's General Counsel and leader, had obviously made up his mind that a completely independent investigation of the Oswald-FBI connection was out of the question. At the opening of the January 27 meeting, he let the group know that he favored approaching the FBI and letting them resolve this matter. Each time the Commission moved away from this suggestion, Rankin became increasingly insistent. When the Commission left the matter up to Rankin in the final episode of the discussion, he chose to rely on the testimony of Hoover and the FBI records.

Mindguarding. The one member of the Commission who appeared to act as a mindguard was Dulles. During the January 22 meeting, he made no attempt to mention his former agency (CIA) when the discussion turned to Oswald's venture in the Soviet Union. A mindguard protects a group from information that might affect the judgment and the cohesion of a group. Why did Dulles, with his intelligence background, never mention that it may have been possible for Oswald to have been an agent of the CIA while in Russia? This insinuation would have expanded the Commission's already focused areas of investigation.

In addition, it is curious that Dulles engaged in efforts to convince Commission members that Oswald shouldn't have had a problem in obtaining a passport to Russia though he had already once defected there. Dulles, with his CIA background, probably knew that with a defector like Oswald, a "lookout card" should have been prepared on Oswald by the State Department notifying the appropriate parties that Oswald may not have been entitled to receive a passport because of his defection. However, Oswald was able to obtain a passport to return to Russia in only twenty-four hours.

It may only be speculated that Dulles was mindguarding the Commission in these exchanges. Perhaps he was simply lying to the Commission. One aspect of

mindguarding may be lying. This too would prevent the group from considering potentially relevant issues. We know Dulles never mentioned the CIA-Mafia plots to assassinate Cuban Leader Fidel Castro⁴⁵ (which would have supplied the Cubans' with a motive to have Kennedy assassinated) to the Commission--again a question of mindguarding or possibly lying. It would seem that any effort to insulate a group from information that might disrupt the group's initial posture could be classified as mindguarding even if it involved lying.

Correctives to Groupthink

The following correctives to groupthink were present in the episodes examined:

Critical Evaluator. Russell, and to a lesser extent Boggs and McCloy, played the role of critical evaluator in the Commission's deliberations for the January 27 meeting (though this role was never assigned by the group's leader Rankin). This symptom was most noticeable when the members discussed how to carry out an investigation regarding the Oswald FBI connection. Each pushed Rankin for a wider investigation. In fact, throughout the January 27 meeting, Russell made numerous attempts to critically evaluate Rankin's preference to rely on the FBI.

Devil's Advocate. When Rankin and Cooper tried to convince the Commission members that the public would not place much belief in an investigation by Robert Kennedy in the January 27 meeting, Cooper, followed by McCloy, assumed the role of the devil's advocate. Each pointed out that there would be no one more responsible than the Attorney General in carrying out this investigation. Russell, in another attempt to check Rankin, played the devil's advocate in this same meeting. He reminded the Commission that there would be a thousand "doubting Thomases" if the Commission relied only upon the FBI. Russell's comment proved to be quite prophetic, the Commission's reliance solely upon the FBI for the investigation of this matter gave rise to several thousand "doubting Thomases"

after the Warren Report was released.

It is evident from the examination of the Warren Commission's transcripts that the communicative acts of the Commissioners in each episode closely resemble Janis' definition of groupthink: "a mode of thinking that people engage in whenever they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, where the members' striving for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action."⁴⁶ In the January 22 meeting, there were no correctives to groupthink employed, and the Commissioners were reluctant to challenge each other beyond superficial questioning to realistically appraise any alternative courses of action.

In the January 27 meeting, members made more of an effort to question alternative courses of action, but their fear of Hoover and the FBI apparently prevented them from carrying this matter any further than simply discussing the issue: There was no implementation of the Commission members' desire to pursue this issue beyond the FBI's investigation. (Senator Richard Russell was the thorn in Rankin's side who slowed Rankin from pushing his suggestion through the Commission, though Rankin eventually did what he had originally proposed.)

With respect to the two questions that were the focus of this study, the Warren Commission manifested communication that was both symptomatic of and corrective to groupthink. Qualitatively, their comments appear to be more symptomatic of groupthink than corrective of it. The Commission's major cause of defective decision-making was the lack of follow-ups on the correctives to groupthink that did surface. Without such follow-ups, the Commission failed to examine the Oswald-FBI allegations from a variety of perspectives and failed to employ error-checking methods. Had the members pursued their inclinations, they may have been less vulnerable to the criticisms leveled at the Commission for over twenty years.

At times, members took it upon themselves to play the roles of critical

evaluator and devil's advocate, yet no other correctives to groupthink were observed in the analysis of the transcripts. One corrective, "Leader does not let his bias be known to the group," was constantly ignored by Rankin as he let the Commission members know all of his biases on this issue.

Other correctives not present in the discussions included the Commission's decision to ignore the Texas Board of Inquiry, a competing group; a third meeting on this issue in which members would have been allowed to express their doubts and rethink this issue before making a final decision; and the Commission's insistence not to offer any information to the competing Texas Board of Inquiry.

Given the judgment of the Warren Commission in the Oswald-FBI issue, and in the manner in which it was reached, it may be postulated that the absence of correctives to groupthink may be just as destructive to the decision-making process as the symptoms of groupthink themselves.

Janis states that "whenever a policy-making group displays most of the symptoms of groupthink, we can expect to find that the group also displays symptoms of defective decision-making."⁴⁷ Janis has outlined seven such symptoms, and these will be examined in light of the decision-making of the Warren Commission.

Symptoms of Defective Decision-Making

Since the Warren Commission displayed several symptoms of groupthink, did they also manifest symptoms of ineffective decision-making? As mentioned earlier, these symptoms include: (1) incomplete survey of alternatives, (2) incomplete survey of objectives, (3) failure to examine risks of preferred choices, (4) failure to reappraise initially rejected alternatives, (5) poor information search, (6) selective bias in processing information at hand, and (7) failure to work out contingency plans.

Incomplete Survey of Alternatives

The Warren Commission never discussed any alternatives to Oswald's role as an FBI agent. With his extremely peculiar travel background (Europe, Russia, and Mexico City) for a man of meager income, his both pro and anti-Castro affiliations, his military background at a top secret air base, and his ease in obtaining a passport back to Russia after he had previously defected there, the Warren Commission should have, at least, had the idea to determine if Oswald was an intelligence agent of the U.S. government. Yet, this possibility was never mentioned. Instead, the Commission focused only on how to discover whether Oswald was connected to the FBI.

With respect to possible alternatives for making this determination, the Commission only gave itself two: (1) rely on the FBI, and/or (2) perform an independent investigation. Members of the Commission at times voiced a desire for an independent investigation but never really felt comfortable with the idea of embarrassing Hoover. The Commission members never seemed to realize that due to their dependence upon the FBI, an independent investigation by the Commission was virtually an impossibility. Whenever the Commissioners mentioned an independent investigation of this issue, they failed to discuss how such an investigation could be carried out without the FBI.

The one alternative the Commission never considered was an investigation by the Texas Board of Inquiry. This group had first-hand knowledge of the issue and was made up of responsible individuals outside the purview of the FBI. However, the Commissioners' failure to even consider this course of action precluded the possibility of arriving at a different conclusion about Oswald's government ties.

Incomplete Survey of Objectives

One well-known requirement for effective decision-making is to have clearly stated objectives at the outset of each decision-making discussion. Terms such as

"defining the problem" and "understanding the charge" are common in small group literature designed to familiarize students with the need for specific goals for a group to understand and pursue. The Warren Commission never had any real objectives for the Oswald-FBI issue except to put the rumor to rest as quickly as possible. One major objective that was never considered and that still haunts the Warren Report was "what can the Commission best do to prove to the American people that Oswald was not connected to the FBI or any other governmental agency?" Instead, the Commission agonized on how not to offend Hoover, and never clearly stated any clear objective related to the more important underlying issue of whether or not Oswald was connected to the FBI.

Failure to Examine Risks of Preferred Choices

With the exception of Rankin, most of the members of the Commission seemed to favor an independent investigation if it could be made without offending Hoover. Yet the Commissioners were guilty of tunnel vision when they examined the risks of their preferred choice. The only risk they envisioned was an embarrassment of Hoover, which was something all members wanted to avoid. Thus, it was not so much a failure to examine the risk of a preferred choice, rather, it was the weight they assigned this risk. No one in the Commission made the comment that "Yes, if we do an independent investigation, we may embarrass Hoover. But isn't it of greater importance that we get to the truth of this matter. If the FBI was negligent, they must suffer the consequences." In this case, not undermining the credibility of the FBI appeared to carry more weight than pursuing the truth of the matter.

Failure to Reappraise Initially Rejected Alternatives

The one major alternative presented when the Commission members discussed the investigation of the Oswald-FBI connection was the use of Attorney General Robert

Kennedy. This idea was passed off as an unrealistic solution because Rankin thought it would produce more friction between Kennedy and Hoover. Robert Kennedy was a man of action, but the decision to approach him was never reappraised. Kennedy had demonstrated he could get results independent of Hoover's agents. Without the help of the FBI, Kennedy's Justice Department lawyers had put a sizeable dent in organized crime. In 1961, when he became Attorney General, there were only 121 indictments for offenses associated with organized crime; by 1963, this number had risen to 615. The number of convictions for organized crime activities rose from only thirty-five in 1960 before Robert Kennedy took office to a high of over five-hundred-and-fifty in 1963.⁴⁸

This one rejected alternative that received little discussion may have been one of the most effective ways this issue could have been investigated.

Poor Information Search

The Commission's final inquiry, the testimony of Hoover and other FBI agents, and the examination of the FBI records resulted in a poor decision.⁴⁹ As Dulles and Rankin had constantly told the Commission members, (1) Hoover would never admit that Oswald was an FBI agent, and (2) FBI records would never show a connection between Oswald and the FBI. Yet the FBI was exactly who the Commission relied on to draw the conclusion that Oswald had never been in the employ of the FBI. Thus, the Commission used in the Warren Report evidence that could have possibly been false, or at the very least suffered from the personal bias of the witnesses.

One crucial aspect of fact-finding is the consideration of the possible bias of witnesses. By calling only on the FBI, the Commission ignored the FBI's obvious bias in this matter and accepted Hoover's testimony with little question or reservation. The Commission was so intent on maintaining a good relationship with Hoover that it sent Hoover the transcript of his testimony for approval

before it was published in the Hearings Before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy.⁵⁰ When the FBI received this transcript, it edited Hoover's testimony and made many revisions. This doctored version of Hoover's testimony on the Oswald-FBI matter was then returned to the Warren Commission and published with the FBI approved revisions. The FBI claimed that in making these changes "apparently the court reporter did not record the Director's testimony accurately in some instances. We have made as few changes as possible, in order to preserve the intent and accuracy of the Director's testimony."⁵¹

Selective Bias in Processing Information

The only information that the Warren Commission had on hand was the information relayed to them by Texas Attorney General Waggoner Carr. Rankin was responsible for any bias in processing (investigating) this information once the Commission members gave him the go-ahead to investigate the Oswald-FBI connection as he saw fit. Rankin made no attempt to utilize the investigative capabilities of the Texas Board of Inquiry and failed to call Lonnie Hudkins before the Commission to testify on the validity of this information.

Most of the Commission members in their deliberations did not demonstrate a bias in evaluating the information at hand; Russell, Boggs, and McCloy made numerous efforts to force an independent investigation. Yet in the end, the failure of the Commission members to demand an independent investigation outside the FBI probably has helped fuel the criticisms directed at the Warren Report.

Failure to Work Out Contingency Plans

The Warren Commission never worked out any explicit contingency plans for the investigation of the Oswald-FBI connection. Their main consideration was an independent investigation that did not embarrass the FBI and would rely somewhat on the FBI itself. However, there was never any mention of any alternative plans of action. They did not seriously consider using any other investigative agencies

besides the FBI.

In addition to displaying symptoms of groupthink, the Warren Commission also displayed several characteristics of defective decision-making consistent with Janis' suppositions about groupthink and decision-making. These symptoms of defective decision-making may have been countered if the Commission members applied more correctives to groupthink. Rankin's leadership was not very effective for the Commission. He failed to encourage members to either critically evaluate the group's judgments or to play the devil's advocate; members such as Russell and Boggs took it upon themselves to play these roles. With more attention to these correctives, there might have been more conflict in the Commission's deliberations that may have yielded a wider variety of alternatives from which to approach this issue.

With the Commission members apparently thinking that Rankin was going to perform an independent investigation, the Commission ended the discussion on the Oswald-FBI issue in the January 27 meeting. Had they taken the time to hold one final meeting to iron out the criteria for this investigation, it may have become clear to the Commissioners that Rankin was not planning the sort of investigation along the lines that Russell had hoped for.

Solution-Orientedness of the Warren Commission

The haste with which the Warren Commission put the Oswald-FBI matter to rest, and its failure to discuss realistically or consider any contingency plans may have been due to the solution-orientation of the Commission. The Commission failed to begin the investigation of Kennedy's death as an inquiry; it operated under the premise that Oswald was Kennedy's assassin. Rankin was a leader truly guilty of solution-centeredness that reflects an anxious state of reaching a solution to a problem as given. This behavior leads to a premature evaluation of solutions, "which tend to inhibit the exploration of novel avenues of attack on

the problem and the generation of new or inventive ideas about the problem."⁵²
The idea that Oswald could have been an undercover agent for the FBI could have seriously hampered Rankin's initial assumption. Rankin let his feelings be known on this issue during the January 27 meeting:

We do have a dirty rumor that is very bad for the Commission, the problem and it is very damaging to the agencies that are involved in it and must be wiped out insofar as it is possible to do so by the Commission.⁵³

It seems that Rankin's solution-orientation was also embedded in the Oswald-FBI issue. His comment about "wiping-out" this rumor shows his preoccupation with getting this matter out of the way as quickly as possible as opposed to taking a more cautious problem-oriented approach. Maier and Solem have concluded that groups that use a problem-oriented as opposed to a solution-oriented approach increase the quality of group problem-solving.⁵⁴ Nine years later another group would make a disastrous decision due to a preconceived solution that may be equated with the Warren Commission. After the Watergate break-in, President Nixon's advisors began with a solution of containment, a policy of obscuring any connection between the Watergate burglars and the Nixon White House. The solution of containment was a flawed policy that led the Nixon group to failure. According to Gouran:

Were it not for the intrusion of the Administration and the Committee to Re-Elect the President officials, the incident could have come to a natural conclusion, with those involved being prosecuted for their felonious entry into the DNC [Democratic National Committee] offices.⁵⁵

Had the Warren Commission begun with a problem-oriented as opposed to a solution-oriented approach, the Warren Report, like Nixon's containment policy, may not have produced an unsatisfactory outcome.

Problems with Presidential Commissions

When Popper made the observation that "Presidential Commissions have many flaws. In general they are too political,"⁵⁶ he made a point that applies to the Warren Commission. The Commission's members were all appointed by Lyndon Johnson as one of his first acts as President following the assassination. Johnson's pressure on the Commission to complete its task before the presidential election in November 1964, left the Commission with only ten months to complete its report: he wanted the Commission's findings on his desk by September 1. Popper claims that "The deadlines imposed on commissions should be relaxed. The present tight deadlines--usually eighteen months or less--hinder the recruitment of good staff members, and also mean that lawyers and government employees are more likely to be hired than writers or academics."⁵⁷ In the Warren Commission's case, someone from outside the government, not concerned with politics, may have made the group realize how much time they were giving to worrying about not embarrassing Hoover as opposed to getting at the truth of the Oswald-FBI issue. The Warren Commission under the pressure of Johnson to avoid a political issue--an unresolved presidential assassination before a presidential election--was left with only fifty-five percent of the minimal recommended time to finish its investigation and report.

Johnson's choice to appoint a commission made up of all lawyers may have been unintentional. The appointments of Russell, Boggs, Cooper, and Ford was most likely an attempt of bicameral balancing, yet these men along with Dulles and McCloy were all lawyers. Gouran points out that one of the problems of the composition of the Nixon group that attempted the Watergate cover-up was the similarities of its members.⁵⁸ The Warren Commission, like the Nixon group, was a homogeneous group. Shaw claims that a group made up

of homogeneous members might not be as effective as a heterogeneous group due to a restricted number of member attributes.⁵⁹ The danger in homogeneity may be that it will foster a lack of provocativeness within the group.⁶⁰ This condition could possibly lead to a more cohesive group, but also a group that will be less likely to engage in conflict. Popper states that constructive debate and dissent are needed aspects of presidential commissions and any decision-making group.⁶¹

Senator Richard Russell initially went along with most of the Warren Commission's decisions, but by 1970, he claimed that he never believed that Oswald acted alone.⁶² While the Commission was in progress, Russell did demand that a disclaimer sentence be put in the Warren Report before he would sign it. This sentence reads:

Because of the difficulty of proving negatives to a certainty the possibility of others being involved with either Oswald or Ruby cannot be established categorically, but if there is any such evidence it has been beyond the reach of all the investigative agencies and resources of the United States and has not come to the attention of this Commission.⁶³

Yet when the Warren Report was released in September 1964, it was supposedly presented by a unified Commission. The public was led to believe that there was no dissent among the members. The New York Times reported that the Commission was unified in its decision and stated that "Chief Justice Earl Warren and the six other members of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy were unanimous on this [Oswald being the lone assassin] and all questions."⁶⁴

The pressure for a united front by a presidential commission may interfere with the needed conflict in decision-making. According to Popper, "In fact, divided position statements, as well as divided final reports, should not be discouraged; they should be encouraged."⁶⁵ Any such deviance from the norm of a

unified report was not tolerated in the Warren Commission. In fact, it has been reported that when Russell, promised his dissent would appear in a transcript of the Commission's last meeting on September 18, 1964, was lied to by Rankin. Instead there is no transcript of this meeting, only a brief narrative of the minutes of the Commission. There is no mention of any dissent by Russell, who according to Weisberg, was told his dissent would appear in an official transcript. Russell reportedly was furious when told of the contents of this "transcript."⁶⁶

Summary and Conclusions

The following conclusions may be drawn from the results of this analysis with respect to the decision-making of the Warren Commission in their discussion of the Oswald-FBI connection: (1) As a decision-making group, the Warren Commission displayed several symptoms of groupthink. Among these were collective rationalization, stereotyping of out-groups, pressure on dissenting members to conform, solution-centeredness, and mindguarding. (2) The decision-making of the Warren Commission revealed few correctives to groupthink--in particular the assumption of the roles of critical evaluator and devil's advocate.

A high level of cohesiveness will probably play an important role in the manifestation of groupthink along with poor decision-making procedures; however, in this analysis the insulation of the Commission and Rankin promoting a preferred solution were probably the two key variables leading to groupthink.

By insulating itself, the Warren Commission was unable to rely on other decision-making groups for input on how to handle the Oswald-FBI allegations sufficiently. The Texas Board of Inquiry collectively was not held in high esteem by the Commission, yet this group would have been a perfect ally to help to get to the bottom of the Oswald-FBI issue. However, because of political reasons, the Commission ignored this group.

Rankin's preference for an investigation that relied upon the FBI was obviously his preferred solution. His preference for an "Oswald as the Assassin" conclusion clouded the Commission's ability to examine both the Oswald-FBI allegations and the assassination investigation from a wider variety of alternatives.

Courtright claims that the absence of disagreement may be more important than group cohesion in the manifestation of groupthink.⁶⁷ This could be an important alteration to the groupthink hypothesis. Though the Warren Commission was a cohesive group, it was not as tightly a cohesive group as the other groups Janis has studied. Yet the Warren Commission did display several symptoms of groupthink and little conflict in their deliberations on the Oswald-FBI issue. One thing that may have accounted for the absence of disagreement in the Commission was the failure of the Commissioners to employ more correctives to groupthink. Courtright's claim about the lack of disagreement being an important variable for groupthink may be compounded by the failure to employ correctives to groupthink, leading to ineffective decision-making.

Flowers' conclusion that leader power may be a more important variable in determining groupthink than group cohesion may have some validity in light of this analysis.⁶⁸ In the Warren Commission, Rankin's power to carry out the investigation in the way he preferred was one of the crucial factors in his decision to rely solely upon the FBI. Rankin's power base in the Commission was a factor in the manifestation of groupthink consistent with Flowers' hypothesis.

Though group cohesion is certainly an important variable for determining the possibility of the groupthink syndrome, other variables may be just as important. The most important consideration of the possibility of groupthink may well lie in an equal consideration of all antecedent conditions, giving group cohesion an equal weight in the study of the groupthink syndrome.

Table 1
Symptoms of Groupthink*

1. Illusion of Invulnerability

A group creates an illusion of invulnerability when:

- a) group members ignore the possible consequences of their actions; e.g. "I think we should not insult J. Edgar Hoover in this matter."
- b) group members express the idea that since all are in agreement, they must be right; e.g., "Since we all agree, let us continue."
- c) no group member mentions the possibility of error; e.g., "We are justified because we are a Presidential Commission."

2. Collective Rationalization

A group is engaged in collective rationalization when:

- a) group members do not examine carefully any evidence that is contradictory to the preferred alternative; e.g., "we want to avoid public hearings as long as possible."
- b) members have a "we are right" attitude because of prestige of group; e. g., "In order to protect ourselves we should not ask any other agencies to make a report on the assassination."
- c) group members bolster points on which they agree, even though there may be grounds for disagreement; e.g., "Yes, I agree, the minutes of this meeting should not be circulated to anybody."

3. Stereotyping Out-Groups

A group is engaged in stereotyping of out groups when:

- a) group members offer general characteristics of other competing investigative groups, such as the

press and political bodies that are made without exceptions; e.g., "The Texas Board of Inquiry is a strange institution . . . it is a procedure that can be abused."

- b) group members portray such groups in a typically negative way; e.g. "The FBI employs some agents of limited intelligence."
- c) group members portray how such groups will behave without any apparent basis; e.g. "The FBI will think we are impeaching them if we investigate the matter this way."

4. Direct Pressures on Dissenting Members to Conform

A group engages in pressuring dissenting members to conform when:

- a) group members make direct comments to members to conform to group's current opinion; e.g., "I think you realize that we all don't share your opinion."
- b) members are reminded of a time constraint by which they must reach a decision; e.g., "We don't have too much time to cover this issue."
- c) the group has set a specific deadline to reach a solution that reinforces a sense of urgency; e.g., "Our final report must be done by early June."

5. Group Purposely Withholds Information from Out/Competing Groups

A group is withholding information from out/competing groups when:

- a) the group denies requests from out/competing groups for information; e.g., "We will not give the Texas Board of Inquiry any information, they will have to find it on their own."
- b) members of the group express a desire to keep all their information confidential; e.g., "The only people who will see this evidencence are members of the Commission."

6. Group Makes Solution-Centered Statements

A group is making solution-centered statements when:

- a) it makes little or no attempt to make sure that all group members understand the problem before it starts proposing solutions; i.e., "How can we best prove that Oswald was not an FBI agent?"
- b) there is no mention of examining the problem from different areas before solutions are proposed; e.g., "We don't want to open up that can of worms, let's keep our focus on Oswald."
- c) the leader lets the group know his preferred solution; e.g., "I think we should approach the FBI to determine if this rumor has any substance."

*The symptoms of self-censorship, illusion of unanimity, and mindguarding were not defined operationally since they operate at a covert level.

Table 2
Correctives to Groupthink

1. Leader Assures Role of Critical Evaluator Is Played

A leader assures the role of critical evaluator is played when:

- a) the leader asks at least one member per meeting for critical comments; e.g., "Senator Russell, do you have any objections to having public hearings?"
- b) the group members ask other group members for criticisms of their ideas; e.g., "Mr. Dulles, do you agree that we should not make the FBI's report public?"

2. Leader Does Not Let His Biases Known to the Group

A leader does not let his biases known to the group when he or she:

- a) does not tell the group what his ideas are on how the problem should be solved; e.g., "Before I give you my views on this issue, I would like to hear your viewpoints."
- b) does not state specific proposals that he would like to be followed; e.g. "What does the Commission feel about having public hearings?"

3. Group Seeks to Obtain Information Contrary to Group Norm

A group seeks to obtain information contrary to the group norm when:

- a) before each meeting, a group members is asked to obtain information contrary to the group's norm; e.g., "Why don't you see what the Secret Service knows about Oswald?"
- b) the leader asks each group member if he has any differences with group norm; e.g., "Senator Boggs, do you have any disagreements with our decision?"

4. Role of Devils's Advocate Is Assigned

A group assigns a role of devil's advocate when:

- a) the leader asks at least one member per meeting to take opposite side of prevailing group opinion; e.g., "Mr. McCloy, why don't you take the con side of whatever we decide for this meeting?"

5. Group Takes Time to Evaluate Decisions of Competing Groups

A group will take time to evaluate the decisions of other groups working on the same problem when:

- a) the group discusses and evaluates the decisions of competing groups; e.g., "Before we begin, I think we should carefully examine the evidence provided by the Texas Board of Inquiry."
- b) the group asks members of competing groups to attend meetings for comments and input; i.e., "I think we need to invite Waggoner Carr [Texas Attorney General] to our next meeting on this investigation."

6. Group Holds One Final Meeting After A Consensus Is Reached Where Members Can Express Doubts and Rethink Issue Before Making Final Decision

This is evident when:

- a) Once a consensus is reached, leader calls for one last meeting to make sure all agree with consensus reached; e.g., "Gentlemen, now that we have our final decision, let's meet one more time to make sure we all are in complete consensus."

7. Group Members Seek Information for Additional Understanding/Clairification

Group members are seeking understanding/clarification when:

- a) they ask other group members to elaborate on previous statements; e.g., "What do you mean, the FBI wants us to fold up and quit?"

- b) they make sure they are clear on information presented; e.g., "Let me know if I am clear on this, we are not going to perform an independent investigation?"

B. Group Is Willing to Offer Information to Competing Groups

A group is willing to offer information to competing groups when:

- a) they are not directed to give information to other groups but do so freely; e.g., "I think that we should make sure that the Texas Board of Inquiry is sent up to date reports on what we are doing."
 - b) the group acknowledges requests from competing groups for information; e.g., "Send an FBI Summary Report to Waggoner Carr as soon as we get it."
-

NOTES

¹See Irving L. Janis, Victims of Groupthink (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972). The foreign policy groups who made disastrous decisions included the following: Admiral Kimmel's advisory group that decided Pearl Harbor was immune from a Japanese attack, the Kennedy advisory group that supported the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the Truman advisory group that concluded that North Korea could be invaded without China entering the Korean War, and the Johnson "Tuesday Lunch Group" that decided that escalating the bombing of North Vietnam could lead to an extrication of U.S. military involvement. Janis has updated his original groupthink hypothesis to include the analysis of groups that did not deal solely with foreign policy. See Irving L. Janis, Groupthink, 2nd. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).

²Janis, Groupthink, p. 174.

³Janis, Groupthink, p. 174

⁴Janis, Groupthink, pp. 174-75.

⁵Janis, Groupthink, p. 175.

⁶An example of this are two advisory groups that had many of the same members and the same leader (John Kennedy) but made two decisions, one disastrous one successful. These decisions were to invade Cuba that led to the Bay of Pigs disaster and the naval blockade of Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis which turned out to be a most successful decision.

⁷Janis, Groupthink, pp. 262-71.

⁸John K. Brillhart, Effective Group Discussion (Dubuque, Ia.: William C. Brown, 1982); B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision-Making (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980); Gerald M. Phillips, Douglas J. Pedersen, and Julia T. Wood, Effective Group Discussion: A Practical Guide to Participation and Leadership (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979); Stewart L. Tubbs, A Systems Approach to Small Group Interaction (Reading, Ma.: Addison-Wesley, 1984; and Rudolph F. Verderber, Working Together: Fundamentals of Group Decision Making (Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth, 1982).

⁹Marvin E. Shaw, The Psychology of Small Group Behavior, 2nd. ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976) and Walter C. Swapp (Ed.), Group Decision-Making (Beverly Hills Ca.: Sage, 1984)

¹⁰Bertram H. Raven, "The Nixon Group," Journal of Social Issues, 30 (1974), 297-320; John A. Courtright, "A Laboratory Investigation of Groupthink," Communication Monographs, 45 (1978), 229-46; Matie L. Flowers, "A Laboratory Test of Janis' Groupthink Hypothesis," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 35 (1977), 888-96; and Philip E. Tetlock, "Identifying Victims of Groupthink from Public Statements of Decision Makers," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37 (1977), 1314-24.

¹¹Raven, p. 297.

¹²Tetlock, pp. 13-23.

¹³Executive Order 11130, 28 Federal Register 12789, 1963.

¹⁴See Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964) (hereafter cited as the WC Report). For a description of the public's initial acceptance of this report see G. Robert Blakey and Richard N. Billings, The Plot to Kill the President (New York: Times Books, 1981), p. 8.

¹⁵The Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), (hereafter cited as HSCA Report) concluded that the Warren Report was incorrect regarding the number of assassins shooting at Kennedy. The Warren Report concluded that Oswald was the only assassin; the HSCA Report concluded that there were two assassins firing at Kennedy. According to a 1983 Washington Post poll, eighty percent of those polled doubt the findings of the Warren Commission. See Barry Sussman, "A Poll on the John F. Kennedy Assassination," Washington Post, 20 November 1983, p. F2.

¹⁶See Janis, Groupthink, pp. 176-77.

¹⁷Johnson threatened Warren that if he did not serve on the commission a nuclear could result if the confusion surrounding Kennedy's death were not cleared up. See Chief Justice Earl Warren, The Memoirs of Earl Warren (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1977), p. 358. When Richard Russell refused to serve on this presidential commission, Johnson simply went ahead and announced to the public that Russell was on the Warren Commission; this left Russell little choice but to serve on the Warren Commission.

¹⁸Only Rankin and Warren attended all the Commission's meetings; Dulles and Cooper each missed one meeting; Ford missed two, McCloy three, Boggs five, and Russell six.

¹⁹Executive Order 11130.

²⁰Letter received from Harold Weisberg, 6 February 1985.

²¹Weisberg letter.

²²Frank Popper, The President's Commissions, (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1970), pp. 21-24.

²³Popper, p. 24.

²⁴National Archives Record Group 220, "Records of Presidential Committees, Commissions, and Boards," President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, Alphabetical Files of Outgoing Letters, Box No. 4, File "Members of the Commission," J. Lee Rankin to Earl Warren memorandum, 11 January 1964.

²⁵See Nicholas deB. Katzenbach memorandum to Bill Moyers, 25 November 1963, FBI Record Group 62-109090, "Liason with the Commission."

²⁷"The Assassination: The Warren Commission Report," Newsweek, 5 October 1964, p. 32.

²⁸It is not known whether or not an agenda was circulated during the Meeting of May 19, 1963; for some reason the transcript of this meeting is still classified.

²⁹Thomas S. Frenz and Thomas B. Farrell, "Language-Action: A Paradigm for Communication," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 62 (1976), 333-49.

³⁰Frenz and Farrell, p. 336.

³¹Frenz and Farrell, p. 336.

³²Frenz and Farrell, p. 341.

³³Janis, Groupthink, pp. 39-40.

³⁴This includes material in the National Archives Record Group 270 and FBI Record Groups 62-109060 and 62-109090.

³⁵There was, however, an independent investigation in Texas under the Texas Attorney General Waggoner Carr.

³⁶The record of those who testified in front of the Warren Commission's Hearings may be found in the twenty-six volumes of Hearings Before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964, I-XXVI (hereater cited as WC Hearings)).

³⁷Records have indicated that Gerald Ford violated the secrecy of the Commission's meetings by keeping FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover apprised on anything the Commission discussed that might have embarrassed the FBI. See William C. Sullivan, The Bureau: My Thirty Years in Hoover's FBI (New York: Pinnacle, 1979), p. 53.

³⁸Rankin to Warren memorandum, 11 January 1964.

³⁹For an in-depth look at this incident see Harold Feldman, "Oswald and the FBI," The Nation, 27 January 1964, pp. 86-89.

⁴⁰Gerald R. Ford with John R. Stiles, Portrait of the Assassin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 22.

⁴¹WC Hearings, IV, pp. 429, 440, 469.

⁴²WC Hearings, V p. 27

⁴³WC Hearings, V p. 106.

⁴⁴WC Report, p. 327.

⁴⁵ For a description of these plots to kill Castro see Balkey and Billings, pp. 52-61.

⁴⁶ Janis, Victims of Groupthink, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Janis, Groupthink, p. 175

⁴⁸ Blakey and Billings, pp. 198-99.

⁴⁹ See WC Hearings, IV, pp. 403-76; V, pp. 1-32, 97-119.

⁵⁰ WC Hearings, V, pp. 97-119.

⁵¹ Alan Belmont to Clyde Tolson memorandum, FBI Headquarter File 62-109090, 5 May 1964.

⁵² Norman F. Maier and Allen R. Solem, "Improvinhg Solutions by Turning Choice Situations Into Problems," Personnel Psychology, 15 (1962), 151.

⁵³ National Archives Record Group 272, "Transcripts of the Executive Sessions on the Assassination of President Kennedy," 27 January 1964, p. 139.

⁵⁴ Maier and Solem, p. 152.

⁵⁵ Dennis S. Gouran, "The Watergate Cover-up: Its Dynamics and Its Implications," Commnication Monographs, 43 (1976), 177.

⁵⁶ Popper, p. 56.

⁵⁷ Popper, pp. 60-61.

⁵⁸ Gouran, p. 180.

⁵⁹ Shaw, pp. 219-32.

⁶⁰ Gouran, p. 180.

⁶¹ Popper, p. 63.

⁶² Don Oberdorfer, "Russell Says He Never Believed Oswald Acted Alone," Washington Post, 19 January 1970, p. A3.

⁶³ WC Report, p. 22.

⁶⁴ Anthony Lewis, "Warren Commission Finds Oswald Guilty and Says Assassin and Ruby Acted Alone; Panel Unanimous: Theory of Conspiracy By Left or Right is Rejected," New York Times, 28 September 1962, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Popper, p. 63.

⁶⁶ Harold Weisberg, Whitewash IV: JFK Assassination Transcript (Frederick, Md.: Harold Weisberg, 1974), pp. 20-21.