

# An analysis of groupthink and decision making in a collectivism culture: the case of a public organization in Tanzania

Groupthink  
and decision  
making

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Crecencia Godfrey Tarmo

*Institute of Development Studies, University of Dar es Salaam,  
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and*

Faisal H. Issa

*Department of Administrative Studies,  
Mzumbe University Dar es Salaam Campus College, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania*

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Groupthink happens in-group decision-making processes whereby members of a group prematurely arrive at a decision that may indicate consensus but for the aim of protecting group harmony. This limits the contributions of the individuals' talents, ideas, competences and experiences to more effective decisions. Although there are a number of studies on predictors (forecasters) of groupthink, they do not consider the influence of the African cultural aspects of collectivism, high power distance and tolerance on groupthink that may characterise the decision-making context in African settings. It is in that context that this case study analyses groupthink in a public sector organization in Tanzania.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper unveils the presence of groupthink predictors that can affect the quality of decisions made in groups within the Tanzania context. The study was conducted in one of the public institutions in Tanzania that is under the Ministry of Home affairs. The study population included Directors, Managers, Heads of units, District registration officers and other officials as shown in Table 1. These are the people who participate in decision-making processes in the organization and were drawn from different offices of the organization including the headquarter office, Kibaha Data centre, District Registration offices from different regions including Dares Salaam, Coast region, Arusha, Mtwara, Mwanza, Manyara, Mbeya, Singida, Dodoma, Geita, Lindi and Njombe – these 12 administrative regions are among the 27 regions that make up the Tanzania mainland. Through simple random and purposive sampling methods, a total of 97 participants participated effectively. The criterion for participation being participants must have been involved with at least one decision-making group experience. The choice of the organization was done on the basis that it is a relatively a new institution of importance; it was also possible to get from it the needed data.

**Findings** – The results of the study show that there is the presence of groupthink predictors of high trust, conformity and promotional leadership in decision-making groups in the organization. Furthermore, the diversity of group members alone indicates to be insufficient reason to avoid Groupthink. It is suggested that other important factors might be at play in group decision making including the influence of African cultural characteristics.

**Research limitations/implications** – This study was limited to only one institution. For a study of this nature to be undertaken access to data could be a very significant problem. Limiting it to one organization we are familiar with made it a bit easy to achieve access.

**Practical implications** – Group decision making and groupthink are rarely in discourse in Africa. Tanzania is not isolated from the world, and being a country that unity is a cultural tenet that is promoted at every level from the family to national level (Rwegelera, 2003; Tripp, 1999) effects of groupthink is reasonably conspicuous because of the inbuilt national culture that has shaped people to be tolerant and accepting of different perspectives, ethnic groups, religious and races (Tripp, 1999). The same tolerance and acceptance may be transferred to decision-making groups and easily cause the occurrence of groupthink that can affect the quality of decisions made.

**Social implications** – The Tanzania government has dedicated itself to putting strict measures to prohibit unethical and erroneous decisions that cost the nation including reducing employees' misconduct. The findings of this study indicate that there are hidden aspects like groupthink that are not reached by those measures yet ironically impacts the decisions made in organizations and in turn costs organizations and the country at large and calls for the government and its institutions together with the private sector to be awakened and alerted if they are dedicated and concerned about the quality of decisions they make.

**Originality/value** – This is an original research work building on previous research. Some findings on groupthink and implications have Western origins. In Africa, we need to figure out what is making the



continent not to make significant steps to change the social-economic environment. This study highlights to both African academics and leaders with no management background to make them understand groupthink as a phenomena that has implications to quality decisions. It will also prompt similar studies and therefore widen understanding on decisions making.

**Keywords** Groupthink, Decision making, Cohesiveness, Trust, Promotional leadership, Conformity, Collectivism and power distance

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Decision making is a vital process for every organization and it is closely linked to the firm's overall performance (Yu and Raksong, 2019). Decisions are made on issues like better utilization of resources, facing emerging challenges, increasing organizational efficiency, facilitating innovation and competing successfully in the business environment (Mutonyi *et al.*, 2020). It is observed that organizations that are successful are the ones that make timely decisions that are of quality (Maciariello, 2009).

Research shows that there are pathological behaviours such as groupthink that affect the realization of quality decisions in groups (t' Hart, 1991; Janis, 1991). In efforts to proactively deal with occurrence of groupthink, the predictors (forecasters) of groupthink have been studied (Baptist, 2015; Janis, 1991; Park, 2000). However, not considered is the influence of African cultural aspects of collectivism and tolerance to the occurrence of groupthink behaviour and consequences in public institutions in Africa. The goal of this study was to identify groupthink predictors that dominate in the decision-making groups of a public organisation in Tanzania. This study had the following specific objectives: to identify the prevailing groupthink predictors in decision-making groups, to determine the dominant groupthink predictors and associations between them in the context of the studied organisation and to seek to find linkages between groupthink predictors and the predictors of quality of decisions.

## Literature review

### *Groupthink predictors*

Groupthink is a phenomenon that occurs when individuals in a group agree with certain decisions neglecting critical reasoning and evaluation of the decisions (Baptist, 2015; Janis, 1991). Groupthink predictors are, therefore, described as the indicator signs that are to warn groups that groupthink is about to occur (Baptist, 2015; Janis, 1991). Previously, most studies about groupthink were done retrospectively, that is studying the phenomenon of groupthink occurrence in decision making after a decision has been made (t' Hart, 1991; Janis, 1991; McCauley, 1989). This only confirmed that certain decisions, especially the ones with bad outcomes, were either influenced by groupthink or not.

Later studies on groupthink were also to identify its potential predictors and to deal with them accordingly to avoid groupthink occurrences (Baptist, 2015; Park, 2000). In this study, groupthink predictors that are explored have been adopted from different literature and they are cohesiveness, trust, conformity, promotional leadership and member's diversity (Baptist, 2015; Janis, 1991; Park, 2000; Rose, 2011).

### *Cohesiveness*

This reflects the degree of mutual interest a group has. Cohesiveness is significant when members of a group prioritize group harmony and group solidarity by investing energies in maintaining this cohesiveness than in making the right decisions (Baptist, 2015; Janis, 1991; Park, 2000). Group cohesiveness has been found to be a good thing as it can bring the members of a group together and thus reduce conflicts in the groups (Mullen *et al.*, 1994). However, it has its hazards especially when the pressure of maintaining that cohesiveness

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overrides the confidence and freedom of individual members to gather, present and digest different information and consequently leading to groupthink (Banwo *et al.*, 2015; Baptist, 2015; Brawley *et al.*, 1987).

#### *High trust among members*

Trust is suggested to have a positive impact on individuals, groups and organizations at large. Kramer and Dougherty (2013) identify benefits of trust to include decreased conflicts, improved communication among members and increased responsibility for decisions made. However, in a group setting, the more trust is built, there is increased individual autonomy, while in the end individual contributions are necessary to support quality decisions (Langfred, 2004). This may highly affect group performance as it opens doors to groupthink (Baptist, 2015).

#### *Conformity*

This is the tendency of group members to openly agree to a course of action, even if they privately disagree with it. This behaviour is driven by the motive of being seen as a team player and protector. In other words, everyone is trying his or her best not to rock the boat or to be seen to do that. Conformity not only overestimates the ability of the group but also has a direct impact on individual satisfaction (Riasudeen *et al.*, 2019). A critical analysis of costs, risks and benefits of alternatives is viably skipped when there is collective rationalization in groups (Rose, 2011; Sims and Sauser, 2013). Furthermore, conformity results in reduced individual mental efficiency, reality testing and risk forecasting (Sims and Sauser, 2013). This greatly contributes to the occurrence of groupthink (Janis, 1991; Park, 2000).

#### *Promotional leadership*

Promotional leaders are the ones who are quick to advocate their views on issues; wish others to take up what they suggest, give their suggestions and preferences at the beginning of discussions, and indirectly lead others to comply to their thoughts and not giving room to opposing views (Baptist, 2015; Sims and Sauser, 2013) Promotional leadership critically leads to groupthink, as people tend to align themselves with what has been suggested by their leaders without much analysis of the given ideas (Baptist, 2015; Esser, 1998; Janis, 1991; Sims and Sauser, 2013). It affects the aspect of vision sharing in groups, guidance and relationship among members, and this creates higher likelihood of groupthink (Colesa *et al.*, 2014; t' Hart, 1991; Janis, 1991; Pielstick, 2000; Sims and Sauser, 2013). When promotional leadership is present in groups, there is more likelihood of both poor decision-making processes and poor decision quality (Baptist, 2015).

#### *Homogeneity of members*

The homogeneity of members in groups is defined as similarities between members – that are both visible and less visible. They include gender, race, age, ethnicity, education levels, personalities, background, experiences, attitudes and values (Mannix and Neale, 2005; O'Reilly *et al.*, 1998). Diversity among group members is emphasized in groups because the homogeneity of members in groups limits opportunities for sharing knowledge, experiences and availability of varieties of information, approaches and perspectives (Colesa *et al.*, 2014; Mannix and Neale, 2005).

Colesa *et al.* (2014) linked the collapse of Swissair to the homogeneity of members of its management board that contributed to some poor decisions. Another study done by Riccobono *et al.* (2016) found out that a group of homogeneous nature lacking diverse expertise, skills, knowledge, norms and values contributed to poor decisions. Additionally, a

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recent study conducted in Tanzania by [Mori et al. \(2014\)](#), on decision making when selecting essential medicines, indicated that not involving a wide range of people outside the group and a less consultative process contributed to non-consideration of other essential factors such as cost-effectiveness before a decision was made to select medicines.

### *Groupthink and quality of decisions*

A quality decision is one that considers many of the following: environmental factors, organizational priorities/goals, collection of enough information, developing alternatives, weighing alternatives correctly to assess the risks of each and developing contingency plans ([Mullen et al., 1994](#); [Negulescu and Doval, 2014](#)). Among the challenges of attaining quality decisions in groups has been groupthink. As we have seen, groupthink brings unhealthy communication behaviours in groups that affect the critical consideration of environmental factors, collection of enough information and identification and assessments of alternatives.

### *Role of power distance and collectivism culture on groupthink*

Cultural variations across the world bring about behavioural variations in individuals which affect the way they behave and act ([Smith, 2011](#)). This makes it important to assess the influence of culture on predictors of groupthink, if we are to deal with groupthink correctly in a particular environment.

([Hofstede et al., 2010](#)) assessed, among others, how people act in regard to inequalities in societies that they termed “power distance”. Accordingly, power distance is the extent individual members in a particular society expect and interpret equality among individuals of that society in terms of power, respect, wealth, status and intellectual capacities. In high power distance societies, individuals are afraid to express disagreements with their leaders and hence highly elevate the position of leaders in decision making. Also in high power distance societies, individuals tend to depend on the leaders preferences and in rare instances individuals prefer consultations ([Hofstede et al., 2010](#)). Collectivism is a cultural behaviour whereby people in the society are strongly integrated with one another, form cohesive groups and individuals are trained to value and protect their integration at any cost from birth to old age ([Hofstede et al., 2010](#)). In Tanzania, which is named among the countries with high power distance and collectivism culture, the spirit of national unity and community interests have been reported to take the upper hand over individual interests ([Rwegelera, 2012](#); [Wangwe, 2005](#)).

## **Research method, sample and analysis**

### *Data and sample*

The study was conducted in one public institution in Tanzania. The study population included the management team, heads of units, district officers and other officials as shown in [Table 1](#). These were drawn from different offices including the Headquarters, Data Processing Office, District Offices from different regions including Dar es Salaam, Coast, Arusha, Mtwara, Mwanza, Manyara, Mbeya, Singida, Dodoma, Geita, Lindi, and Njombe regions. These 12 administrative regions are among the 27 regions that make up the Tanzania mainland. Through simple random sampling method, district and regional registration officers, and other officials were involved; and through purposive sampling method the senior management team was recruited. The criterion for participation was for the participants to have been involved in at least one decision-making group experience that came up with a less optimal decision. The choice of this organization was done on the basis that it is a relatively new institution with a national mandate; and thus it was also possible to get from it the needed data.

**Table 1.**  
Characteristics of the  
study participants

Characteristic	Category	<i>N</i>	Male (%)	Female (%)
Age	20–30	4	75	25
	31–40	75	53	47
	41–50	14	79	21
	51+	4	75	25
Marital status	Married	68	62	38
	Single	29	66	34
Education	Doctorate degree	5	80	20
	Master degree	29	86	14
	Bachelor degree	62	50	50
	Diploma	1	100	0
Position	Director general	1	100	0
	Department directors	2	100	0
	Department Managers	9	78	22
	Heads of units	10	80	20
	District registration officers	41	54	46
	Registration officers Officers	23 11	52 82	48 18

### Data collection and analysis

In this study, data were obtained through the administered online questionnaire (<https://forms.gle/gBq3aZ2BrRucF32q6>) and hardcopy questionnaires that comprised 33 statements/questions. After sending the invitation notices to participate in the study, a link was sent to those who were ready to participate and they were given instructions on how to fill in the questionnaires, and were also instructed to recall one of their experiences in a group decision where they made a less optimal decision and to reflect on the experience (retrospective sense) when filling the questionnaire. They were then asked to submit the filled questionnaires online. A total of 97 fully filled questionnaires were received giving a response rate of 74.6%. The characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 1.

The groupthink predictors studied in this study were cohesiveness, trust, conformity, promotional leadership and members' diversity as adopted from different researchers (Baptist, 2015; Janis, 1991; Park, 2000). On assessing the presence of each predictor, statements were developed on the basis of different kinds of literature as follows: Group cohesiveness (Banwo *et al.*, 2015; Mpeera Ntayi *et al.*, 2010; Mullen *et al.*, 1994; Park, 2000; Turner *et al.*, 1992); Trust (Simons and Peterson, 1998; Janis, 1991; t' Hart, 1991; Baptist, 2015). Leadership styles in groups was also assessed to identify the presence of promotional leadership which has been mentioned as a profound antecedent from (Rose, 2011) and Group members diversity adopted from Baptist (2015), Park (2000), Smith and Nichols (2015). In all statements, a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, was used for collecting respondents' views.

Data analysis involved four steps: coding of collected data under respective study categories, and initial analysis through SPSS to obtain descriptive statistics (frequencies, ratios, mean, median and percentages) from each surveyed item to obtain essential patterns. Then, comparison through Kruskal–Wallis and post hoc test (Dunn's multiple comparisons test) was done to determine the response category between the five (Strongly agree to strongly disagree) that had received a high percentage and hence confirm or disconfirm the presence of a specific predictor. After that, cross-tabulation was done to observe possible associations between different variables in groupthink predictors and predictors of quality of decisions.

## Results of the study

### *Cohesiveness*

Group cohesiveness was assessed to figure out the paradigm of attention in a group that is (1) either toward tasks or unity; (2) how individual behaviours were influenced to match the group norm or interest, (3) readiness to accommodate new members of divergent skills, experiences and outlooks (Table 2). Comparison through Kruskal–Wallis and post hoc test (Dunn’s multiple comparisons) was conducted to examine the differences in responses across all statements predicting group cohesion. The results indicate that cohesion was not as high as anticipated in the decision-making groups studied whereby among the five response categories analysed across all statements predicting group cohesion, the median percentage of the Disagree response was the highest (Table 2) as compared to other responses and significantly higher than strongly agree response ( $p = 0.0062$ ,  $KW = 14.357$ ).

Cross tabulation indicates that there is no statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 23.430$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p = 0.103$ ) between unity being mostly valued in groups and group members having same skills, knowledge and experiences. The results also show that there is no significant relationship between development of cohesion and group size ( $111.768$ ,  $df = 128$ ,  $p = 0.846$ ) and between cohesion and the time group members spent together ( $\chi^2 = 111.768$ ,  $df = 128$ ,  $p = 0.846$ ). Furthermore, there has been no significant difference in the development of cohesiveness between the groups that had few members (up to 4) to groups that had as many as 120 members. The results of this study further indicate no difference in terms of cohesiveness for groups that spent more time (more than one month) or less (zero to one day) together.

### *Trust among group members*

This study also explored (1) the extent individual members trusted each other and the whole group when it comes to decision making, (2) group members’ views on the capacity of their group to make decisions on their own, and (3) if they see it necessary to involve members from outside their group to support group decision making. The results indicate that there was high trust in decision-making groups within the organisation (Table 3).

Comparison through Kruskal–Wallis and post hoc test (Dunn’s multiple comparisons) was conducted to examine the differences in responses across all statements predicting Trust among group members. The results show that among the five response categories analysed, the median percentage of the Agree response was highest as compared to other

Statements	<i>n</i> (percentage) of responses				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
In our group, our unity is mostly valued than what we do	14 (14.4)	44 (45.4)	19 (19.6)	18 (18.6)	2 (2.0)
Most of the time I failed to oppose what others suggested because it would depict a bad manner	3 (3.1)	39 (40.2)	13 (14.4)	34 (35.1)	7 (7.2)
In our group, we had the same skills, knowledge and experiences	1 (1.0)	18 (18.6)	10 (10.3)	55 (56.7)	13 (13.4)
I would feel weak when our group is to mix with people with more or different skills, knowledge and experiences from outside	0	21 (21.6)	12 (12.4)	53 (54.6)	11 (11.4)
Median percentage of responses	2.0	30.9	13.4	44.8	9.3

**Note(s):** *n* = number of respondents

**Table 2.**  
Cohesiveness  
statements with  
respective responses  
and percentages

responses and significantly higher than the strongly Disagree response ( $p = 0.0218$ ,  $KW = 11.461$ ).

Moreover, the results show high trust among group members regardless of their gender ( $\chi^2 = 6.201$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = 0.185$ ), education levels ( $\chi^2 = 25.131$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ) and their positions in the organization ( $\chi^2 = 45.144$ ,  $df = 24$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ). This shows that members of decision-making groups trust one another even though they have different educational levels and are of different positions and gender. However, trust levels among members of the groups were predictively different across different age groups ( $\chi^2 = 0.201.754$ ,  $df = 92$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). In the present study, the respondents were aged between 28 and 58 years.

### Conformity

Conformity was another item of study that intended to gather respondents' opinions and views on their compliance with group decisions and their freedom in giving opposing views in the group. The statements provided to respondents and their opinions are indicated in Table 4. Comparison through Kruskal–Wallis and post hoc test (Dunn's multiple comparisons) was also conducted to examine differences in responses across all statements predicting conformity. The results indicate that conformity was present in decision-making groups whereby, among the five response categories analysed across all statements predicting conformity among group members, Agree response was the highest; and significantly higher than the strongly Disagree response ( $p = 0.0229$ ,  $KW = 11.349$ ).

### Promotional leadership

This was another groupthink predictor which was studied. Respondents were presented with several statements to assess the leadership styles in their decision groups as indicated in Table 5. Comparison through Kruskal–Wallis and post hoc test (Dunn's multiple comparisons) was also conducted to examine differences in responses across all statements predicting promotional leadership. The results suggested promotional leadership in the studied decision-making groups. Among the five response categories analysed across all statements predicting promotional leadership among group members, the Agree response was the highest; and significantly higher than the strongly Disagree response ( $p = 0.0027$ ,  $KW = 16.270$ ).

Statements	n (%) of responses				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
In our group, we have people who are good decision-makers and so they can make good decisions even if other members are not present	11 (11.3)	63 (64.9)	11 (11.3)	11 (11.3)	1 (1.2)
I believe other members of the group can make good decisions; so it is not necessary for me to be in the group all the time when making decisions	7 (7.2)	45 (46.4)	12 (12.4)	30 (30.9)	3 (3.1)
Our group is capable of making good decisions without any help from outside	13 (13.4)	56 (57.7)	14 (14.4)	13 (13.4)	1 (1.1)
Median percentage of responses	11.3	57.7	12.4	13.4	1.2

**Note(s):** n = number of respondents

**Table 3.**  
Trust statements with  
respective responses  
and percentages

**Table 4.**  
Conformity statements  
with respective  
responses and  
percentages

Statements	<i>n</i> (%) of responses				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I openly agreed with the group decision even if I privately disagreed/did not want that decision	8 (8.2)	54 (55.7)	10 (10.3)	20 (20.6)	5 (5.2)
I had doubts with group decisions so I challenged the decision openly before the final decision was made	20 (20.6)	41 (42.3)	17 (17.5)	19 (19.6)	0
Some members of the group ensured that the idea that most/ key members saw the best was supported by all	8 (8.2)	52 (53.6)	23 (23.7)	13 (13.4)	1 (1.1)
Median percentage of responses	8.2	53.6	17.5	19.6	1.1

**Table 5.**  
Promotional leadership  
statements with  
respective responses  
and percentages

Statements	<i>n</i> (%) of responses				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Our group leader normally gave his/her views at the beginning of our discussions	11 (11.3)	42 (43.3)	16 (16.5)	22 (22.7)	6 (6.2)
Our group leader encouraged everyone in the group to give out his/her views	23 (23.7)	40 (41.2)	9 (9.3)	20 (20.6)	5 (5.2)
Our group leader showed his/her ideas were the best compared to others'	10 (10.3)	37 (38.1)	14 (14.4)	28 (28.9)	8 (8.2)
Our group sometimes differed with the leader's opinions	13 (13.4)	49 (50.5)	7 (7.2)	19 (19.6)	9 (9.3)
Our group leader had the potential power to make the final decision	13 (13.4)	47 (47.8)	15 (15.4)	19 (19.6)	3 (3.1)
The median percentage of responses	13.4	43.3	14.4	20.6	8.2

The results also show a significant association ( $\chi^2 = 38.726$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) between the leader's behaviour of encouraging everyone to give out his or her views and freedom of the members of the group to fully give their views. There is also significant association ( $\chi^2 = 42.589$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) between leader's behaviour of encouraging everyone to give out his or her views and the possibility of group members to differ with the leader's opinions.

#### *Diversity of members in decision-making groups*

The researchers also studied the nature of the respondents to identify any similarities or differences between them in terms of skills, knowledge and experiences. Respondents were asked to remember one of their experiences involving a less optimal group decision and to give clues on the nature of the group members' diversity. Table 6 gives a summary of the statements presented to respondents in that regard.

Comparison through Kruskal–Wallis and post hoc test (Dunn's multiple comparisons) was also conducted to examine the differences in responses across all statements predicting members' homogeneity. The results indicate diversity of members in decision-making groups studied whereby, among the five analysed response categories across all statements predicting members homogeneity, the median percentage of the Disagree response was the highest (55.7%); and significantly higher than the strongly Disagree response ( $p = 0.0093$ ,  $KW = 13.439$ ).



**Table 6.**  
Members' diversity  
statements with  
respective responses  
and percentages

Statements	n (%) of responses				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
In our group, we had the same skills, knowledge and experiences	1(1)	18 (18.6)	10 (10.3)	55 (56.7)	13 (13.4)
I feel weak when our group wants to mix us with people with more or different skills, knowledge and experiences	0	21 (21.6)	12 (12.4)	53 (54.6)	11(11.4)
We had members from outside the group who helped us in clarifying certain options	5 (5.2)	18 (18.6)	5 (5.2)	59 (60.8)	10 (10.2)
Our group is capable of making a good decision without any help from outside	13 (13.4)	56 (57.7)	14 (14.4)	13 (13.4)	1 (1)
Median percentage of responses	3.1	20.1	11.3	55.7	10.8

*Groupthink predictors and the predictors of quality of decisions*

To assess the association between groupthink predictors and predictors of quality of decisions, Two-dimensional cross-tab analysis was performed between groupthink predictors (cohesiveness, trust, conformity, promotional leadership, group member's diversity) and predictors of quality of decisions (presence of several alternatives, adequate analysis of each alternative, position of group leaders in making decisions and interest of group members in critical analysis of alternatives before reaching a decision). The summary of findings on the association between Groupthink predictors and the predictors of quality of decisions is given in Table 7. The results indicate a significant association between high trust among group members and the behaviour of members of having no interest in critical analysis of alternatives before making the decision ( $\chi^2 = 68.217$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), and between promotional leadership and groups having few alternatives, discussing few facts and prematurely reached decisions ( $\chi^2 = 28.718$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). A similar association also holds between cohesion and free discussion of all options presented before selecting an alternative. On the other hand, the results indicate no significant association between conformity and freedom of group members to analyse fully each alternative ( $\chi^2 = 27.958$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p = 0.032$ ); member's diversity in terms of skills, knowledge and experiences, and having several options before reaching a decision ( $\chi^2 = 24.702$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p = 0.075$ ).

**Discussions**

This study analysed the presence of groupthink predictors, identified the dominant predictors in the context of the studied organisation, and sought to find linkages between groupthink predictors and the predictors of quality of decisions. The study was also

**Table 7.**  
Association between  
groupthink predictors  
and predictors of  
quality of decisions

Groupthink predictor	Quality of decision predictor	$\chi^2$	df	p-value
Trust	Interest in critical analysis of alternatives	68.217	16	0.000
Promotional Leadership	Few alternatives	28.718	12	0.004
Conformity	Freedom for full analysis of each alternative	27.958	16	0.032
Members' diversity	Having Several options	24.702	16	0.075
Cohesion	Analysis of all options presented	71.607	16	0.000

**Note(s):**  $\chi^2$  = Chi square value, df = Degrees of freedom

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interested in the possible associations between the different elements of the groupthink predictors and their relevance to groupthink in the case study organisation.

The findings show that there is low cohesiveness in the studied groups; and this was not expected in groups that have a collective cultural background. However, low cohesiveness in these groups does not necessarily prevent groupthink behaviours. These findings are in line with [Banwo \*et al.\* \(2015\)](#), [Chang and Bordia \(2001\)](#), [Mullen \*et al.\* \(1994\)](#) and [Rose \(2011\)](#), who found out that the relationship between group cohesion and good or poor performance of a group is complicated. This suggests that attention in our context may need to shift away from cohesiveness of groups to other factors when groupthink behaviour is to be avoided as also indicated by other studies ([t' Hart, 1991](#); [Mpeera Ntayi \*et al.\*, 2010](#)).

Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that majority of respondents (58%) mostly value unity over the decisions made or anything else they do in the groups. This suggests that strong unity and cohesion in groups can be looked at separately and further studied. The findings also suggest that groups can value unity as their core objective regardless of diversity of group members.

The results show no significant relationship between cohesion in groups and group size and the time group members spend together. It is indicated that regardless of size, cohesion can develop; and this is different from [Mullen \*et al.\* \(1994\)](#) who found that there was a difference in the level of cohesiveness between groups with a large number of members and those with a small number. This study also differs with [Carron \*et al.\* \(1997\)](#) who posited that cohesion was significantly increasing as the number of group members decreased. In this study, the group size ranged from 4 to 120 members. The insignificance of group size on the development of group cohesion as observed in the current study could possibly be caused by the nature of groups, the context and culture as suggested by [Banwo \*et al.\* \(2015\)](#) and could also possibly be explained by collectivism cultural background of the studied groups.

The level of cohesiveness had no significant difference between groups that spent less than a day in making a decision and those who spent more than a month. This indicates that groups could develop cohesiveness or could not regardless of the time they spend together. Hence other reasons for the development of cohesion in groups can be suggested along with the time spent together in making a decision. Similarly, [Chang and Bordia \(2001\)](#) found out that the impact of time on the cohesiveness of the group was not conclusive. However, the findings of this study contradict the findings of [Pescosolido \(2003\)](#) which concluded that the more group members stayed together the more communication and relationship improved, and hence individual ego was reduced while cohesiveness developed.

From the trust predictor, respondents indicated clearly that in their groups there were people they trusted such that it was not necessary for them to be present in the group discussions all the time. To them, the few trusted individuals could make decisions on their behalf; and they just believed the decisions would be good. They also indicated to trust their groups' capacity of making good decisions to the extent that they did not see the need for help from outside the groups.

Different educational levels and positions showed no influence on trust levels in the decision-making groups in the collectivism cultural context. Cultural background is said to influence the way individuals in the organization communicate, trust their leaders and trust each other ([Khan and Law, 2018](#); [Li \*et al.\*, 2001](#); [Willmott, 2000](#)). The members in these groups showed readiness and willingness to take responsibilities and be accountable for the actions of others as indicated to be common in most groups with high trust [Mayer \*et al.\* \(1995\)](#). Conversely, trust levels among members of the groups were predictively different across age groups. This can give leaders a clue that having decision-making groups whose members are of different age groups might be necessary in avoiding groupthink and decisions that are less optimal.

The results have also indicated that conformity was present in the studied decision-making groups whereby group members did not give their individual opinions freely and instead complied with group decisions although they were not internally satisfied with the decisions made. Furthermore, the findings showed that there were mind guards in decision-making groups who were there to make sure that what the few members (potential) in the group suggested was supported by all. In groups with conformity, groupthink paves its way easily to decision making (Boateng, 2012; McCauley, 1989; Turner *et al.*, 1992). For these reasons, organizations should find ways to minimize as much as possible conformity and collective rationalization even by facilitating anonymity when making decisions in groups as suggested by Tsikerdekis (2013) otherwise, decisions will be less optimal and employees will not be motivated or have a sense of ownership of the decisions made.

The findings of this study have shown diversity of members in decision-making groups in terms of skills, knowledge and experiences. However, this diversity did not work against groupthink, implying that diversity of members alone cannot make decisions by groups avoid the influence of groupthink. This is contrary to the common assumptions that diversity of members and low cohesiveness work against groupthink (Janis, 1991; Moorhead *et al.*, 1991). This study shows that neither diversity nor low cohesiveness works against groupthink behaviour as it could also be attributed to the prevailing cultural background of the studied groups.

The study results have also indicated insignificant relationship between past experiences of members in decision making and the current members' behaviours to prefer or not prefer critical analysis of alternatives before making decisions in groups. This indicates that past experience neither affects the current behaviour of members nor encourages critical analysis of the alternatives before making decisions. This finding is similar to Loe *et al.* (2000) who highlighted that past experience in decision making had no influence on the future decision-making processes. However, the current findings diverge from Abazeed (2019) and Ghattas *et al.* (2014) whose findings revealed that the two variables had a relationship.

The results on promotional leadership reveal the presence of promotional leadership in decision-making groups whereby leaders give their views at the beginning of discussions. Leaders see what they suggest as the best compared to the suggestions of others. These findings call for institutional leaders to be patient and seek opinions of others before giving their opinions in decision-making groups. This is particularly important where frankness is not an option for many, particularly in collectivism culture (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010; Smith, 2011). It was also found out that leaders in decision-making groups were not positive about inviting contrasting standpoints whereby 60% of respondents agreed with the statement that "giving opposing viewpoints was not easy and free in our groups."

As for connection between groupthink predictors and predictors of decision quality, the results have indicated a significant association between high trust among group members and the behaviour of members of having no interest in critical analysis of alternatives before making the decisions; and between promotional leadership and groups having few alternatives, discussing few facts, and prematurely reached decisions. A significant association also holds between cohesion and free discussion of all options presented before selecting the best alternative. However, it was found out that there is no significant association between conformity and freedom of group members to fully analyse each alternative; and between members' diversity in terms of skills, knowledge and experiences and having several options before reaching a decision. On the whole, the findings are indicative of the fact that groupthink can greatly influence the quality of decisions in given contexts.

Groupthink and its implications might have recently become important in the politics of the United States of America; its possibly going to be widely studied and written about as it is has been spoken about in the US media. Going along and conforming, not being ready to be

the devil's advocate might have led to the after US elections saga between the end of 2020 and early 2021. In developing countries, linking culture, group dynamics, group decision making and outcomes of decisions is not that common. It is, therefore, important to study groupthink and implications to create awareness and to take appropriate actions. Further studies of more depth and width have, therefore, to be encouraged. The appropriate actions, as generally provided, can include: encouraging individuals to express their doubts and to criticize group ideas; allowing key members to adopt initial and impartial stand on solutions; and dividing the group into sub-groups to stimulate new ideas and to confront each other to find out why they differ. It is equally important to periodically invite outsiders to challenge group views; and once a tentative decision is made, a meeting may be called to have members express doubts about the proposed decisions and to give another look to the neglected ones [Colesa et al. \(2014\)](#).

### Conclusion

The current practice in the world necessitates organizations to move into group decision making so that they can utilize and benefit from unique talents, experiences, knowledge that their employees possess. However, this is difficult to achieve in the presence of groupthink in decision-making groups particularly those in collectivism, tolerance and high power distance cultures. There is an African saying that "one finger does not break the lice" and "unity is power" all of which emphasize that that success comes from working together. However, this may wrongly be interpreted and practiced in decision-making groups by limiting access to individualized talents, thinking and projections in the name of protecting unity thereby giving way to groupthink and its possible negative outcomes.

The results of this study, which involved a public institution in the context of an African country, provides some new insights on the predictors of groupthink in a collective culture and high power distance society. The groupthink predictors of trust, conformity and promotional leadership seem to contribute to the occurrence of groupthink more than other predictors, specifically cohesiveness and homogeneity of group members. More so, this study calls for leaders in public institutions in developing countries to be aware of the groupthink phenomenon, its possible impact on made decisions and to take essential steps to improve the decision-making environment by working on the relevant groupthink predictors.

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**Corresponding author**

Faisal H. Issa can be contacted at: [kahin2halima@gmail.com](mailto:kahin2halima@gmail.com)