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Building an Ethical Small Group (Chapter 9 of Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership)

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Building an Ethical Small Group

Cooperation is the thorough conviction that nobody can get there unless everybody gets there.

—AUTHOR VIRGINIA BURDEN TOWER

Never underestimate a minority.

—BRITISH PRIME MINISTER WINSTON CHURCHILL

WHAT'S AHEAD

This chapter examines ethical leadership in the small-group context. To help create groups that brighten rather than darken the lives of participants, leaders must foster individual ethical accountability among group members, ensure ethical group interaction, avoid moral pitfalls, and establish ethical relationships with other groups.

In his metaphor of the leader's light or shadow, Parker Palmer emphasizes that leaders shape the settings or contexts around them. According to Palmer, leaders are people who have "an unusual degree of power to create the conditions under which other people must live and move and have their being, conditions that can either be as illuminating as heaven or as shadowy as hell."¹ In this final section of the text, I'll describe some of the ways we can create conditions that illuminate the lives of followers in small-group, organizational, global, and crisis settings. Shedding light means both resisting and exerting influence. We must fend off pressures to engage in unethical behavior while actively seeking to create healthier moral environments.

THE LEADER AND THE SMALL GROUP

Leaders spend a great deal of their time in small groups. That's because teams of people do much of the world's work. Groups build roads, craft legislation, enforce laws, raise money, coordinate course schedules, oversee software installations, and so on. See Box 9.1 for a description of the key elements of small groups. Consider, for example, that one fifth of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) or \$12 trillion, is spent on temporary projects like advertising campaigns, product launches, and bridge construction.² A multitude of other groups oversee ongoing processes like manufacturing, bill processing, and Internet searches. Teams, not individuals, make most important organizational decisions. The higher the leader's organizational position, the more time she or he spends chairing

Box 9.1 Defining the Small Group

In popular usage, the term *group* can refer to everything from several individuals at a bus stop to residents living in the same apartment complex to a crowd at a political rally or concert. However, scholars have a much narrower definition in mind when they study small groups. Several elements set small groups apart:

A common purpose or goal. Several people waiting for a table at a restaurant don't constitute a small group. To be a group, individuals have something they want to accomplish together, such as completing a project for class, choosing a site for a new Walgreens drugstore, or deciding how to reduce homelessness in the city. Having a shared goal and working together leads to sense of belonging or shared identity. Consider, for example, how many groups (Habitat for Humanity volunteers, cancer survivors, dorm floors) display their loyalty by purchasing t-shirts with their team name and slogan.

Interdependence. The success of any individual member depends on everyone doing his or her part. (See the discussion of social loafing later in the chapter.) You may have discovered that, even when you carry through on our responsibilities, your grade goes down when others in your class group don't complete their parts of the project.

Mutual influence. In addition to depending on each other, group members influence each other by giving ideas, listening, agreeing or disagreeing, and so on.

Ongoing communication. In order for a group to exist, members must regularly interact, whether face-to-face or electronically through e-mail, online meetings, videoconferences, and

telephone calls. For example, neighbors may live near each other, but they don't constitute a group until they routinely communicate with each other in order to reach a goal like fighting zoning changes.

Specific size. Groups range in size from 3 to 20 people. The addition of the third individual makes a group more complex than a dyad. Group members must manage many relationships, not one. They develop coalitions as well as rules or norms to regulate group behavior. When one member leaves a dyad, it dissolves. However, a group (if large enough) can continue if it loses a member or two. Twenty is typically considered the maximum size for a small group because beyond this number, members can no longer communicate face-to-face.

Small-group communication scholars John Cragan, Chris Kasch, and David Wright summarize the five definitional elements described above in their definition of a small group: "A few people engaged in communication interaction over time, usually in face-to-face and/or computer-mediated environments, who have common goals and norms and have developed a communication pattern for meeting their goals in an interdependent manner."¹

NOTE

1. Cragan, J. F., Kasch, C. R., & Wright, D. W. (2009). *Communication in small groups: Theory, process, skills* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Source: Adapted from Hackman, M. Z., & Johnson, C. E. (2013). *Leadership: A communication perspective*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Ch. 7.

or participating in meetings. Top-level executives spend a third of their time working in committees, task forces, and other small-group settings.³ Leaders also find themselves in charge of groups outside of work, serving as chair of the local Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) board, for instance, or running the volunteer campaign team for a mayoral candidate.

Chances are, you have discovered for yourself either how bright or how dark group experiences can be. Some of your proudest moments might have taken place in teams. For example, you may have had a life-changing experience working with others on a service project or formed deep friendships on a winning basketball team or done your best work in a group that brought a successful new product to market. At the same time, some of your most painful moments might have come in groups. Your leader may have ignored your input, angry team members may have refused to work together, and the group may have failed to carry its duties or made poor moral choices. Our task as leaders, then, is to help create groups that brighten—not darken—the lives of members and the lives of others they come into contact with. To do so, we must encourage members to take their ethical responsibilities seriously, promote ethical interaction, prevent the group from falling victim to moral pitfalls, and establish ethical relationships with other teams.

FOSTERING INDIVIDUAL ETHICAL ACCOUNTABILITY

A group's success or failure is highly dependent on the behaviors of its individual members. Destructive behavior by just one person can be enough to derail the group process. Every team member has an ethical responsibility to take her or his duties seriously. The job of the leader, then, is to foster ethical accountability, to encourage followers to live up to their moral responsibilities to the rest of the group.

A critical moral duty of group members is to pursue shared goals—to cooperate. Although this might seem like a basic requirement for joining a team, far too many people act selfishly or competitively when working with others. Those pursuing individual goals ignore the needs of teammates. For example, some athletes care more about their own individual statistics, such as points and goals, than about team victories. Competitive individuals seek to advance at the expense of others, such as when the ambitious salesperson hopes to beat out the rest of the sales group to earn the largest bonus. (For a tragic example of a failed attempt at cooperation, see Case Study 9.1.)

Cooperative groups are more productive than those with an individualistic or competitive focus. Cooperative groups⁴

- are more willing to take on difficult tasks and to persist in the face of difficulties;
- retain more information;
- engage in higher-level reasoning and more critical thinking;
- generate more creative ideas, tactics, and solutions;
- transfer more learning from the group to individual members;
- are more positive about the task; and
- spend more time working on tasks.

In addition to being more effective, cooperative groups foster more positive relationships and cohesion between members. This cohesion reduces absenteeism and turnover while producing higher commitment and satisfaction. Members of cooperative groups also enjoy better psychological health (i.e., emotional maturity, autonomy, self-confidence) and learn important social and communication skills.⁵ (I'll have more to say about group communication skills later in the chapter.)

As a leader, you can focus attention on shared goals by (1) emphasizing the moral responsibility members have to cooperate with one another, (2) structuring the task so that no one person succeeds unless the group as a whole succeeds, (3) ensuring that all group members are fairly rewarded (don't reward one person for a group achievement, for instance), (4) providing feedback on how well the group and individuals are meeting performance standards, (5) encouraging individuals to help each other complete tasks, and (6) setting aside time for process sessions, where the group reflects on how well it is working together and how it might improve.⁶

Creating a cooperative climate is difficult when group members fail to do their fair share of the work. Social psychologists use the term *social loafing* to describe the fact that individuals often reduce their efforts when placed in groups.⁷ Social loafing has been found in teams charged with all kinds of tasks, ranging from shouting and rope pulling to generating ideas, rating poems, writing songs, and evaluating job candidates. Gender, nationality, and age don't seem to have much impact on the rate of social loafing, although women and people from Eastern cultures are less likely to reduce their efforts. (Determine the impact of social loafing on your class project team by completing Self-Assessment 9.1.)

A number of explanations have been offered for social loafing. When people work in a group, they may feel that their efforts will have little impact on the final result. Responsibility for the collective product is shared or diffused throughout the team. It is difficult to identify and evaluate the input of individual participants. The collective effort model, developed by Steven Karau and Kipling Williams, is an attempt to integrate the various explanations for social loafing into one framework. Karau and Williams believe that "individuals will be willing to exert effort on a collective task only to the degree that they expect their efforts to be instrumental in obtaining outcomes that they value personally."⁸ According to this definition, the motivation of group members depends on three factors: *expectancy*, or how much a person expects that her or his effort will lead to high group performance; *instrumentality*, the belief that one's personal contribution and the group's collective effort will bring about the desired result; and *valence*, how desirable the outcome is for individual group members.⁹ Motivation drops if any of these factors are low. Consider the typical class project group, for example. Team members often slack off because they believe that the group will succeed in completing the project and getting a passing grade even if they do little (low expectancy). Participants may also be convinced that the group won't get an A no matter how hard they and others try (low instrumentality). Or some on the team may have other priorities and don't think that doing well on the project is all that important (low valence).

Social loafers take advantage of others in the group and violate norms for fairness or justice. Those being victimized are less likely to cooperate and may slack off for fear of being seen as "suckers." The advantages of being in a small group can be lost because members aren't giving their best effort. Leaders need to take steps to minimize

social loafing. According to the collective effort model, they can do so by taking the following steps:

- Evaluating the inputs of individual members
- Keeping the size of work groups small (both face-to-face and virtual)
- Making sure that each person makes a unique and important contribution to the task
- Providing meaningful tasks that are intrinsically interesting and personally involving
- Emphasizing the collective group identity
- Offering performance incentives
- Fostering a sense of belonging

PROMOTING ETHICAL GROUP INTERACTION

Fostering individual accountability is an important first step toward improving a group's ethical performance. However, team members may want to cooperate and work hard but fail to work together effectively. Leaders, then, must also pay close attention to how group members interact during their deliberations. In particular, they need to encourage productive communication patterns that enable members to establish positive bonds and make wise ethical choices. Ethical communication skills and tactics include comprehensive, critical listening; supportive communication; emotional intelligence (EI); productive conflict management; and expression of minority opinion. These behaviors are particularly important in the small-group context, since teams accomplish much of their work through communication. But they are also essential to ethical leadership in the organizational, global, and crisis settings we'll discuss in upcoming chapters. By learning about these patterns in this chapter, you should be better prepared to lead in other contexts as well.

Comprehensive, Critical Listening

We spend much more time listening than speaking in small groups. If you belong to a team with ten members, you can expect to devote approximately 10% of your time to talking and 90% to listening to what others have to say. All listening involves receiving, paying attention to, interpreting, and then remembering messages. However, our motives for listening vary.¹⁰ *Discriminative listening* processes the verbal and nonverbal components of a message. It serves as the foundation for the other forms of listening because we can't accurately process or interpret messages unless we first understand what is being said and how the message is being delivered. 911 operators demonstrate the importance of discriminative listening. They frequently ask anxious callers to repeat details so they can dispatch the right emergency responders to the correct location.

Comprehensive listening is motivated by the need to understand and retain messages. We engage in this type of listening when we attend lectures, receive job instructions, attend oral briefings, or watch the evening weather report. *Therapeutic* or *empathetic*

listening is aimed at helping the speaker resolve an issue by encouraging him or her to talk about the problem. Those in helping professions such as social work and psychiatry routinely engage in this listening process. All of us act as empathetic listeners, however, when friends and family come to us for help. *Critical listening* leads to evaluation. Critical listeners pay careful attention to message content, logic, language, and other elements of persuasive attempts so that they can identify strengths and weaknesses and render a judgment. *Appreciative listening* is prompted by the desire for relaxation and entertainment. We act as appreciative listeners when we enjoy a song download from iTunes, a live concert, or a play.

Group members engage in all five types of listening during meetings, but comprehensive and critical listening are essential when groups engage in ethical problem solving. Coming up with a high-quality decision is nearly impossible unless group members first understand and remember what others have said. Participants also have to analyze the arguments of other group members critically in order to identify errors, as we saw in our discussion of argumentation in Chapter 7.

There are several barriers to comprehensive, critical listening in the group context. In one-to-one conversations, we know that we must respond to the speaker, so we tend to pay closer attention. In a group, we don't have to carry as much of the conversational load, so we're tempted to lose focus or to talk to the person sitting next to us. The content of the discussion can also make listening difficult. Ethical issues can generate strong emotional reactions because they involve deeply held values and beliefs. The natural tendency is to reject the speaker ("What does he know?" "He's got it all wrong!") and become absorbed in our counterarguments instead of concentrating on the message.¹¹ Reaching an agreement then becomes more difficult because we don't understand the other person's position but are more committed than ever to our point of view. (The group members described in "Leadership Ethics at the Movies: *Of Gods and Men*" provide one example of effective listening in a highly emotionally charged situation.)

Listening experts Larry Barker, Patrice Johnson, and Kittie Watson make the following suggestions for improving listening performance in a group setting. Our responsibility as leaders is to model these behaviors and encourage other participants to follow our example.¹²

- *Avoid interruptions.* Give the speaker a chance to finish before you respond or ask questions. The speaker may address your concerns before he or she finishes, and you can't properly evaluate a message until you've first understood it.
- *Seek areas of agreement.* Take a positive approach by searching for common ground. What do you and the speaker have in common? Commitment to solving the problem? Similar values and background?
- *Search for meanings and avoid arguing about specific words.* Discussions of terms can keep the group from addressing the real issue. Stay focused on what speakers mean; don't be distracted if they use different terms than you do.
- *Ask questions and request clarification.* When you don't understand, don't be afraid to ask for clarification. Chances are others in the

group are also confused and will appreciate more information. However, asking too many questions can give the impression that you're trying to control the speaker.

- *Be patient.* We can process information faster than speakers can deliver it. Use the extra time to reflect on the message instead of focusing on your own reactions or daydreaming.
- *Compensate for attitudinal biases.* All of us have biases based on such factors as personal appearance, age differences, and irritating mannerisms. Among my pet peeves? Men with Elvis hairdos, grown women with little-girl voices, and nearly anyone who clutters his or her speech with "ums" and "uhs." I have to suppress my urge to dismiss these kinds of speakers and concentrate on listening carefully. (Sadly, I don't always succeed.)
- *Listen for principles, concepts, and feelings.* Try to understand how individual facts fit into the bigger picture. Don't overlook nonverbal cues, such as tone of voice and posture, that reveal emotions and, at times, can contradict verbal statements. If a speaker's words and nonverbal behaviors don't seem to match (as in an expression of support uttered with a sigh of resignation), probe further to make sure you clearly understand the person's position.
- *Compensate for emotion-arousing words and ideas.* Certain words and concepts, such as *fundamentalist*, *socialist*, *terrorist*, and *fascist*, spark strong emotional responses. We need to overcome our knee-jerk reactions to these labels and strive instead to remain objective.
- *Be flexible.* Acknowledge that others' views may have merit, even though you may not completely agree with them.
- *Listen, even if the message is boring or tough to follow.* Not all messages are exciting and simple to digest, but we need to try to understand them anyway. A boring comment made early in a group discussion may later turn out to be critical to the team's success.

Defensive versus Supportive Communication

Defensiveness is a major threat to accurate listening. When group members feel threatened, they divert their attention from the task to defending themselves. As their anxiety levels increase, they think less about how to solve the problem and more about how they are coming across to others, about winning, and about protecting themselves. Listening suffers because participants distort the messages they receive, misinterpreting the motives, values, and emotions of senders. On the other hand, supportive messages increase accuracy because group members devote more energy to interpreting the content and emotional states of sources. Psychologist Jack Gibb identified six pairs of behaviors, described below, that promote either a defensive or a supportive group atmosphere.¹³ Our job as group leader is to engage in supportive communication, which contributes to a positive emotional climate and accurate understanding. At the same time, we need to challenge comments that spark defensive reactions.

Leadership Ethics at the Movies

OF GODS AND MEN

Key Cast Members: Lambert Wilson, Michael Lonsdale, Olivier Rabourdin, Philippe Laudenbach, Farid Larbi, Adel Bencheirf

Synopsis: In 1996, nine Trappist monks living peacefully with their Muslim neighbors find themselves caught between government forces and Islamic terrorists during the Algerian civil war. After the leader of the monastery, Brother Christian (Lambert Wilson), turns down an offer of protection from the local authorities, the monks must decide whether to stay or to return to France. Though divided at first, they unite, remaining in Algeria in order to show solidarity with the local population while living out their vocation as monks. Seven of the brothers are kidnapped and beheaded by the Islamic rebels soon after. Based on actual events, the film ends with a quotation from Brother Christian who, in his last

testament, predicts his death but calls for tolerance and forgiveness.

Rating: PG-13 for mature themes and occasional violence

Themes: cooperation, productive conflict, listening, argument, emotional intelligence, moral decision making, minority opinion, compassion, courage, spiritual leadership, forgiveness

Discussion Starters

1. How do the monks manage their conflicts?
2. What virtues do they demonstrate?
3. Why does the group decide to stay despite the danger? What elements factor into their decision?
4. Did the Trappists make the right choice?

Evaluation versus Description. Evaluative messages are judgmental. They can be sent through statements (“What a lousy idea!”) or through such nonverbal cues as a sarcastic tone of voice or a raised eyebrow. Those being evaluated are likely to respond by placing blame and making judgments of their own (“Your proposal is no better than mine”). Supportive messages (“I think I see where you’re coming from,” attentive posture, eye contact) create a more positive environment.

Control versus Problem Orientation. Controlling messages imply that the recipient is inadequate (i.e., uninformed, immature, stubborn, overly emotional) and needs to change. Control, like evaluation, can be communicated both verbally (issuing orders, threats) and nonverbally (stares, threatening body posture). Problem-centered messages reflect a willingness to collaborate, to work together to resolve the issue. Examples of problem-oriented statements include “What do you think we ought to do?” and “I believe we can work this out if we sit down and identify the issues.”

Strategy versus Spontaneity. Strategic communicators are seen as manipulators who try to hide their true motivations. They say they want to work with others yet withhold

information and appear to be listening when they're not. This false spontaneity angers the rest of the group. On the other hand, behavior that is truly spontaneous and honest reduces defensiveness.

Neutrality versus Empathy. Neutral messages such as "You'll get over it" and "Don't take it so seriously" imply that the listener doesn't care. Empathetic statements, such as "I can see why you would be depressed" and "I'll be thinking about you when you have that appointment with your boss," communicate reassurance and acceptance. Those who receive them enjoy a boost in self-esteem.

Superiority versus Equality. Attempts at one-upmanship generally provoke immediate defensive responses. The comment "I got an A in my ethics class" is likely to be met with this kind of reply: "Well, you may have a lot of book learning, but I had to deal with a lot of real-world ethical problems when I worked at the advertising agency." Superiority can be based on a number of factors, including wealth, social class, organizational position, and power. All groups contain members who differ in their social standing and abilities. However, these differences are less disruptive if participants indicate that they want to work with others on an equal basis.

Certainty versus Provisionalism. Dogmatic group members—those who are inflexible and claim to have all the answers—are unwilling to change or consider other points of view. As a consequence, they appear more interested in being right than in solving the problem. Listeners often perceive certainty as a mask for feelings of inferiority. In contrast to dogmatic individuals, provisional discussants signal that they are willing to work with the rest of the team in order to investigate issues and come up with a sound ethical decision.

Emotional Intelligence

Recognizing and managing emotions is essential to maintaining productive, healthy relationships in a group. Consider the negative impact of envy, for instance. Envy arises when people compare themselves to others and fall short. They then experience resentment, hostility, frustration, inferiority, longing, and ill will toward the envied individuals. Envy is common in organizations, which distribute assignments, raises, office space, and other resources unequally among members. However, this feeling may be even more frequent in teams because members know each other well and have more opportunity to engage in comparisons. Those who envy others in the group tend to reduce their efforts (see the earlier discussion of social loafing), are more likely to miss meetings, and are less satisfied with their group experience. The team as a whole is less cohesive and less successful.¹⁴

Experts assert that groups, like individuals, can learn how to cope with envy and other destructive feelings, as well as foster positive moods, through developing emotional intelligence (EI). They also report that emotionally intelligent groups are more effective and productive.¹⁵ EI consists of (1) awareness and management of personal emotions and (2) recognizing and exerting influence on the emotions of others. Teams with high EI effectively address three levels of emotions: individual, within the team, and between the team and outside groups.¹⁶ At the individual level, they recognize when a member is distracted or defensive. They point out when someone's behavior (e.g., moodiness, tardiness) is disrupting the group and provide extra support for those who need it. At

the group level, high-EI teams engage in continual self-evaluation to determine their emotional states. Members speak out when the team is discouraged, for instance, and build an affirmative climate. They develop resources like a common vocabulary and rituals to deal with unhealthy moods. For example, one executive team set 10 minutes aside for a “wailing wall.” During these 10 minutes, members could vent their frustrations. They were then ready to tackle the problems they faced.

Raising team EI is an important leadership responsibility, which is accomplished largely through role modeling and establishing norms. As leaders, we must demonstrate our personal EI before we can hope to improve the emotional climate of the group. Effective leaders display emotions that are appropriate to the situation, refrain from hostility, are sensitive to group moods, and take the lead in confronting emotional issues. Confrontation can mean reminding a group member not to criticize new ideas; phoning a member between meetings to talk about his or her rude, dismissive behavior; removing insensitive individuals from the team; calling on quiet members to hear their opinions; or bringing the group together to discuss members’ feelings of frustration or discouragement. Modeling such behaviors is critical to establishing healthy emotional norms or habits in the team, like speaking up when the group is discouraged or unproductive and celebrating collective victories. One list of group emotional norms can be found in Box 9.2.

Productive Conflict

In healthy groups, members examine and discuss ideas (solutions, procedures, proposals) in a task-related process that experts call *substantive (constructive) conflict*.¹⁷ Substantive conflicts produce a number of positive outcomes, including these:

- Accurate understanding of the arguments and positions of others in the group
- Higher-level moral reasoning
- Thorough problem analysis
- Improved self-understanding and self-improvement
- Stronger, deeper relationships
- Creativity and change
- Greater motivation to solve the problem
- Improved mastery and retention of information
- Deeper commitment to the outcome of the discussion
- Increased group cohesion and cooperation
- Improved ability to deal with future conflicts
- High-quality solutions that integrate the perspectives of all members

It is important to differentiate between *substantive conflict* and *affective (destructive) conflict*, which is centered on the personal relationships between group members. Those caught in personality-based conflicts find themselves either trying to avoid the problem

Box 9.2 Group Emotional Norms

NORMS THAT CREATE AWARENESS OF EMOTIONS

Interpersonal Understanding

1. Take time away from group tasks to get to know one another.
2. Have a check-in at the beginning of the meeting—that is, ask how everyone is doing.
3. Assume that undesirable behavior takes place for a reason. Find out what that reason is. Ask questions and listen. Avoid negative attributions.
4. Tell your teammates what you're thinking and how you're feeling.

Team Self-Evaluation

1. Schedule time to examine team effectiveness.
2. Create measurable task and process objectives and then measure them.
3. Acknowledge and discuss group moods.
4. Communicate your sense of what is transpiring in the team.
5. Allow members to call a "process check." (For instance, a team member might say, "Process check: Is this the most effective use of our time right now?")

Organizational Understanding

1. Find out the concerns and needs of others in the organization.
2. Consider who can influence the team's ability to accomplish its goals.
3. Discuss the culture and politics in the organization.

4. Ask whether proposed team actions are congruent with the organization's culture and politics.

NORMS THAT HELP REGULATE EMOTIONS

Confronting

1. Set ground rules and use them to point out errant behavior.
2. Call members out on errant behavior.
3. Create playful devices for pointing out such behavior. These often emerge from the group spontaneously. Reinforce them.

Caring

1. Support members: Volunteer to help them if they need it, be flexible, and provide emotional support.
2. Validate members' contributions. Let members know they are valued.
3. Protect members from attack.
4. Respect individuality and differences in perspectives. Listen.
5. Never be derogatory or demeaning.

Creating Resources for Working with Emotions

1. Make time to discuss difficult issues and address the emotions that surround them.
2. Find creative, shorthand ways to acknowledge and express the emotion in the group.
3. Create fun ways to acknowledge and relieve stress and tension.
4. Express acceptance of members' emotions.

Creating an Affirmative Environment

1. Reinforce that the team can meet a challenge. For example, say things like “We can get through this” or “Nothing will stop us.”
2. Focus on what you can control.
3. Remind members of the group’s important and positive mission.
4. Remind members how the group solved a similar problem before.
5. Focus on problem solving, not blaming.

Building External Relationships

1. Create opportunities for networking and interaction.
2. Ask about the needs of other teams.
3. Provide support for other teams.
4. Invite others to team meetings if they might have a stake in what you are doing.

Source: Adapted from Durskat, V. U., & Wolff, S. B. (2001, March). Building the emotional intelligence of groups. *Harvard Business Review*, 80–90. Used with permission of the publisher.

or, when the conflict can’t be ignored, escalating hostilities through name-calling, sarcasm, threats, and verbally aggressive behaviors. (Complete Self-Assessment 9.2 to determine whether your group engages in substantive or affective conflict.) In this poisoned environment, members aren’t as committed to the group process, sacrifice in-depth discussion of the problem in order to get done as soon as possible, and distance themselves from the decision. The end result? A decline in reasoning that produces an unpopular, low-quality, and often unethical solution.

Sometimes constructive conflict degenerates into affective conflict.¹⁸ This occurs when disagreement about ideas is seen as an insult or a threat and members display anger because they feel their self-concepts are threatened. Others respond in kind. Members can also become frustrated when task-oriented conflicts seem to drag on and on without resolution. (Turn to Case Study 9.2 for an example of a group caught in an extended conflict.) There are a number of ways that you as a leader can encourage substantive conflict while preventing it from being corrupted into affective conflict. Begin by paying attention to the membership of the group. Form teams made up of people with significantly different backgrounds. Groups concerned with medical ethics, for example, generally include members from both inside the medical profession (nurses, surgeons, hospital administrators) and outside (theologians, ethicists, government officials).

Next, lay down some procedural ground rules—a conflict covenant—before discussion begins. Come up with a list of conflict guideposts as a group: “Absolutely no name-calling or threats.” “No idea is a dumb idea.” “Direct all critical comments toward the problem, not the person.” “You must repeat the message of the previous speaker—to that person’s satisfaction—before you can add your comments.” Setting such guidelines is particularly important in virtual teams (see Box 9.3). Highlight the fact that conflict about ideas is an integral part of group discussion and caution against hasty decisions. Encourage individuals to stand firm instead of capitulating. This is also a good time to remind members of the importance of cooperation and emotional intelligence. Groups that emphasize shared goals view conflict as a mutual problem that needs everyone’s attention. As a result, team members feel more confident dealing with conflict, and collective performance improves.¹⁹ Teams that demonstrate high levels of EI are also more

equipped to manage conflict and therefore perform better. In particular, if members can collectively control their emotions, they listen more closely to opposing ideas and seek the best solution without being upset when their proposals are rejected.²⁰

During the discussion, make sure that members follow their conflict covenant and don't engage in conflict avoidance or escalation. Stop to revisit the ground rules when necessary. Use the argumentative competence skills introduced in Chapter 7. Be prepared to support your position. Challenge and analyze the arguments of others as you encourage them to do the same. If members get stuck in a battle of wills, reframe the discussion by asking such questions as "What kind of information would help you change your mind?" "Why shouldn't we pursue other options?" or "What would you do if you were in my position?"²¹ You can also ask participants to develop new ways to describe their ideas (in graphs, as numbers, as bulleted lists) and ask them to step back and revisit their initial assumptions in order to find common ground.

After the decision is made, ensure that the team and its members will continue to develop their conflict management skills. Debrief the decision-making process to determine whether the group achieved its goals, work on repairing relationships that might have been bruised during the discussion, and celebrate or remember stories of outstanding conflict management.²²

Minority Opinion

As we'll see in the next section of the chapter, hearing from members who take issue with the prevailing group opinion is essential if the team is to avoid moral failure. Further, minority dissent can significantly improve group performance.²³ A team with minority members generally comes up with a superior solution, even if the group doesn't change its collective mind. If there is no minority opinion, members focus on one solution. They have little reason to explore the problem in depth, so they disregard novel solutions and quickly converge on one position. Minorities cast doubt on group consensus, stimulating more thought about the dilemma. Members exert more effort because they must resolve the conflict between the majority and minority solutions. They pay closer attention to all aspects of the issue, consider more viewpoints, are more willing to share information, and employ a wider variety of problem-solving strategies. Such divergent thinking produces more creative, higher-quality solutions. When minority dissent is present across a range of groups, the organization as a whole is more innovative. Minorities also block groups from making harmful changes or adopting extreme positions. Responding to the dissenting views of minorities encourages team members to resist conformity in other settings.²⁴

Minorities can have an immediate, powerful impact on group opinion under certain conditions. Minorities are most likely to influence the rest of the group when the members are still formulating their positions on an issue, when dissenters can clearly demonstrate the superiority of their stance, and when minorities can frame their positions to fit into the values and beliefs of the group. Well-respected dissenters who consistently advocate for their positions are generally more persuasive. However, more often than not, minority influence is slow and indirect.²⁵ Majorities initially reject the dissenters' ideas but, over time, forget the source of the arguments and focus instead on the merits of their proposals. This can gradually convert them to the minority viewpoint. At other times, minorities aren't successful at convincing members to go along with them on one issue but shape their opinions on related issues. For example, in one experiment, a minority

Box 9.3 The Ethical Challenges of Virtual Teams

Odds are good that you will find yourself working in a virtual team sometime during your career. Virtual teams are made up of members who work in different geographic locations who coordinate their efforts through electronic communication channels (e-mail, videoconferencing, project management software, groupware). Approximately two thirds of multinational organizations rely on virtual teams to oversee such functions as product development, manufacturing, technical support, customer service, and other functions. Dispersed working groups are becoming more popular as companies expand their international operations and electronic communication tools continue to improve.

Virtual teams pose some special ethical challenges for leaders. Fostering collaboration is harder in dispersed groups. Physical distance often discourages members from committing themselves to the team. They don't have the opportunity to engage in the informal interaction (about children, hobbies, the weather, etc.) that builds trust in face-to-face groups. When they feel less personal connection to other team members, they generate fewer ideas. Anonymity tempts virtual team members to loaf since they can more easily hide their activities (or lack of activity) from other team members.

Conflict appears to be more common in virtual teams. There is a higher likelihood of miscommunication because electronic communication is not as rich as face-to-face interaction. Members lack nonverbal cues to tell, for example, if a speaker is joking or serious. The asynchronous nature of virtual team communication generates problems as well. Members send and receive messages at different times, not simultaneously, as they do when communicating in person. They can get frustrated with delays in return messages and are likely to make

negative attributions when others fail to respond in a timely fashion. Participants forget that receivers might not have received the original message or that colleagues in other time zones may be off work. Too much e-mail communication can lead to information overload. Cultural differences can generate significant conflicts in groups made up of members from a variety of countries. For instance, group members from collectivist societies may complain that their North American colleagues aren't cooperative enough or take issue with peer appraisal systems common in individualist cultures. Not only are conflicts more common in virtual teams, physical separation and communication limitations make them harder to resolve.

Group experts make a number of suggestions for addressing the ethical challenges of virtual teams, including the following:

To foster trust and collaboration:

- Start with a face-to-face kickoff meeting.
- Set up channels (such as an electronic bulletin board or a Facebook site) for informal communication.
- Encourage members to share personal information and pictures with other group members.
- Set clear objectives for the group's work.
- Set a standard for responding to e-mail messages, such as within twenty-four hours.
- Remind members that they build trust with other members through successful completion of their tasks and assignments.
- Recognize individual contributions.
- Communicate frequently.

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To discourage social loafing:

- Keep the group as small as possible.
- Set clear timelines and hold members to them.
- Regularly monitor the input of individual members.
- Emphasize the importance of each person doing her or his part.

To prevent and manage conflict:

- Use the richest channels whenever possible (videoconferencing instead of e-mail, for instance).
- Outlaw “flaming” and other inappropriate messages.
- Encourage members to recognize the constraints faced by other group members and to be more tolerant when using virtual tools.
- Seek to learn from errors and problems, not to blame.

- Establish a clear procedure for managing conflicts.
- Intervene to mediate conflicts between members.
- Highlight the importance of cultural awareness and tolerance.

Sources: Alnuaimi O. A., Robert Jr., L. P., & Maruping, L. M. (2010). Team size, dispersion, and social loafing in technology-supported teams: A perspective on the theory of moral disengagement. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 27, 303-230; Chidambaram, L., & Tung, L. L. (2005). Is out of sight, out of mind? An empirical study of social loafing in technology-supported groups. *Information Systems Research*, 16, 149-168; Franz, T. M. (2012). *Group dynamics and team interventions: Understanding and improving team performance*. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell; Minton-Eversol, T. (2012, July 19). Virtual teams used most by global organizations, survey says. *Society for Human Resource Management*; Rockman, K. W., & Northcraft, G. B. (2006). The ethical implications of virtual interaction. In A. E. Tenbrunsel (Ed.), *Ethics in groups* (pp. 101-123). Oxford, England: Elsevier; Schuman, S. (2010). *The handbook for working with difficult groups: How they are difficult, why they are difficult and what you can do about it*. Chichester, England: Wiley; West, M. A. (2012). *Effective teamwork: Practical lessons from organizational research*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

advocating a position on homosexuals in the military did not change opinions on that topic but did influence attitudes toward gun control, a related subject.²⁶

Being in the minority is tough because it runs contrary to our strong desire to be liked and accepted by others. Those who take a minority position are frequently the targets of dislike or disdain. Leaders, then, need to both foster minority opinion and protect dissenters. You can do so by taking these steps:²⁷

1. Form groups made up of members who have significantly different backgrounds and perspectives.
2. Encourage participation from all group members.
3. Appoint individuals to argue for an alternative point of view.
4. Develop two options for group members to evaluate based on two different sets of assumptions.
5. Remind members of the importance of minority views.

6. Create a group learning orientation that is more focused on finding better solutions than on defending one position or another.
7. Offer dissenters your support.

AVOIDING MORAL PITFALLS

Even with positive interaction, moral traps or pitfalls can derail the decision-making process during the course of the group's discussion. As team members communicate, leaders need to help the group steer clear of the following dangers: groupthink, mismanaged or false agreement, and escalating commitment.

Groupthink

Social psychologist Irving Janis believed that cohesion is the greatest obstacle faced by groups charged with making effective, ethical decisions. He developed the label *groupthink* to describe groups that put unanimous agreement ahead of reasoned problem solving. Groups suffering from this symptom are both ineffective and unethical.²⁸ They fail to (a) consider all the alternatives, (b) gather additional information, (c) reexamine a course of action when it's not working, (d) carefully weigh risks, (e) work out contingency plans, or (f) discuss important moral issues. Janis first noted faulty thinking in small groups of ordinary citizens—such as an antismoking support group that decided that quitting was impossible. He captured the attention of fellow scholars and the public through his analysis of major U.S. policy disasters such as the failure to anticipate the attack on Pearl Harbor, the invasion of North Korea, the Bay of Pigs fiasco, and the escalation of the Vietnam War. In each of these incidents, some of the brightest (and presumably most ethically minded) political and military leaders in our nation's history made terrible choices. (Turn to Case Study 9.3 for a recent example of groupthink in action.)

Janis identified the following as symptoms of groupthink. The greater the number of these characteristics displayed by a group, the greater the likelihood that members have made cohesiveness their top priority.

Signs of Overconfidence

- *Illusion of invulnerability.* Members are overly optimistic and prone to take extraordinary risks.
- *Belief in the inherent morality of the group.* Participants ignore the ethical consequences of their actions and decisions.

Signs of Closed-Mindedness

- *Collective rationalization.* Group members invent rationalizations to protect themselves from any feedback that would challenge their operating assumptions.
- *Stereotypes of outside groups.* Group members underestimate the capabilities of other groups (armies, citizens, teams), thinking that people in these groups are weak or stupid.

Signs of Group Pressure

- *Pressure on dissenters.* Dissenters are coerced to go along with the prevailing opinion in the group.
- *Self-censorship.* Individuals keep their doubts about group decisions to themselves.
- *Illusion of unanimity.* Because members keep quiet, the group mistakenly assumes that everyone agrees on a course of action.
- *Self-appointed mind guards.* Certain members take it on themselves to protect the leader and others from dissenting opinions that might disrupt the group's consensus.

The risk of groupthink increases when teams made up of members from similar backgrounds are isolated from contact with other groups. The risks increase still further when group members are under stress (due to recent failure, for instance) and follow a leader who pushes one particular solution. Self-directed work teams (SDWTs), described in more detail in “Focus on Follower Ethics: Self-Leadership in Self-Managed Teams,” are particularly vulnerable to groupthink. Members, working under strict time limits, are often isolated and undertrained. They may fail at first, and the need to function as a cohesive unit may blind them to ethical dilemmas.²⁹

Irving Janis made several suggestions for reducing groupthink. If you're appointed as the group's leader, avoid expressing a preference for a particular solution. Divide regularly into subgroups and then bring the entire group back together to negotiate differences. Bring in outsiders—experts or colleagues—to challenge the group's ideas. Avoid isolation, keeping in contact with other groups. Role-play the reactions of other groups and organizations to reduce the effects of stereotyping and rationalization. Once the decision has been made, give group members one last chance to express any remaining doubts about the decision. Janis points to the ancient Persians as an example of how to revisit decisions. The Persians made every major decision twice—once while sober and again while under the influence of wine!

A number of investigators have explored the causes and prevention of groupthink.³⁰ They have discovered that a group is in greatest danger when the leader actively promotes his or her agenda and when it doesn't have any procedures in place (like those described in Chapter 6) for solving problems. With this in mind, solicit ideas from group members. Make sure that the group adopts a decision-making format before discussing an ethical problem.

There are two structured approaches specifically designed to build disagreement or conflict into the decision-making process to reduce the likelihood of groupthink.³¹ In the devil's advocate technique, an individual or a subgroup is assigned to criticize the group's decision. The individual's or subgroup's goal is to highlight potential problems with the group's assumptions, logic, evidence, and recommendations. Following the critique, the team gathers additional information and adopts, modifies, or discontinues the proposed course of action. In the dialectic inquiry method, a subgroup or the team as a whole develops a solution. After the group identifies the underlying assumptions of the proposal, selected group members develop a counterproposal based on a different set of assumptions. Advocates of each position present and debate the merits of their

Focus on Follower Ethics

SELF-LEADERSHIP IN SELF-MANAGED TEAMS

An estimated 90% of all U.S. firms employ self-directed work teams (SDWTs) or another form of self-managed groups.¹ An SDWT is made up of 6 to 10 employees from a variety of departments who manage themselves and their tasks. SDWTs operate much like small businesses within the larger organization, overseeing the development of a service or product from start to finish. SDWTs have been credited with improving everything from workplace attendance and morale to productivity and product quality. In SDWTs, individual members have more responsibilities than they do in traditional groups where leaders make the decisions. Those in SDWTs are involved in additional tasks (e.g., staffing, evaluation, scheduling), and they have to develop new knowledge and skills to carry out these duties. Further, the ultimate success of the team now rests with followers, not leaders. In self-directed groups, it is more important than ever that followers meet their ethical obligation to complete their work.

Business experts Christopher Neck and Charles Manz believe that self-leadership is key to living up to our duties as followers. Self-leadership is the process of exercising influence over our thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors and is essential not just to our individual success as followers but to team success as well. According to Neck and Manz,

Self-leadership is just as important when you are working in a team as when you are working alone. . . . In fact, only by effectively leading yourself as a team member can you help the team lead itself, reach its potential, and thus achieve synergy. (p. 82)

There are three key components to self-leadership. First, we need to lead ourselves to do unattractive but necessary tasks. Altering our immediate worlds and exercising direct control over the self can accomplish this objective. World-altering strategies include (1) using physical reminders and cues (notes, lists, objects) to focus our attention on important tasks; (2) removing negative cues, such as those that are distracting; (3) identifying and increasing positive cues (pleasant settings, music) that encourage us to undertake the work; and (4) associating with other people who reinforce our desirable behavior. Self-control strategies include observing, recording, and analyzing our use of desirable and undesirable behaviors; setting short- and long-term goals; determining our ultimate purpose; rewarding our achievements; and engaging in physical and mental practice to improve performance.

The second component of self-leadership is taking advantage of naturally rewarding activities. Some activities make us feel competent and in control and supply us with a sense of purpose. We don't need external motivation to get us to read a novel, for example, or to play a game of pickup basketball, knit, or paint, if we find these hobbies enjoyable. When we build natural rewards into our endeavors, we are more likely to complete them. For instance, if we enjoy interacting with others, we can make sure that we leave time for informal talk during team meetings. We can also focus on the naturally rewarding aspects of our tasks instead of on the unpleasant aspects. Writing our part of a group paper for class, often perceived as a difficult chore, can be viewed instead as an opportunity to

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learn about a new subject and develop knowledge for a future career. In stressful situations, we can engage in emotional self-regulation through exercise, meditation, relaxing music, and other means.

The third component of self-leadership is shaping our psychological worlds or thought self-leadership. Thought self-leadership strategies include visualizing a successful performance (mental imagery); eliminating critical and destructive self-talk, such as “I can’t do it”; and challenging unrealistic assumptions. For example, the mental statement “I must succeed at everything, or I’m a failure” is irrational because it sets an impossibly high standard. This destructive thought can be

restated as “I can’t succeed at everything, but I’m going to try to give my best effort, no matter the task.”

Note

1. Appelbaum, S. H., Bethune, M., & Tanenbaum, R. (1999). Downsizing and the emergence of self-managed teams. *Participation and Empowerment: An International Journal*, 7, 109–130.

Source: Neck, C. P., & Manz, C. C. (2012). *Mastering self-leadership: Empowering yourself for personal excellence* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

proposals. The team or outside decision makers determine whether to adopt one position or the other, integrate the plans, or opt for a different solution altogether. Both approaches can take more than one round to complete. For example, a team may decide to submit a second plan for critique or present several counterproposals before reaching a conclusion.

Charles Manz and his colleagues believe that self-managing work teams should replace groupthink with “teamthink.”³² In teamthink, groups encourage divergent views, combining the open expression of concerns and doubts with a healthy respect for their limitations. The teamthink process is an extension of *thought self-leadership*, described above. Like individuals, groups can improve their performance (lead themselves) by adopting constructive thought patterns: visualizing successful performances, eliminating critical and destructive self-talk, and challenging unrealistic assumptions.

Teamthink, like thought self-leadership, is a combination of mental imagery, self-dialogue, and realistic thinking. Members of successful groups use mental imagery to visualize how they will complete a project and jointly establish a common vision (“to provide better job training for the long-term unemployed,” “to develop the best new software package for the company”). When talking with each other (self-dialogue), leaders and followers are particularly careful not to put pressure on deviant members; at the same time, they encourage divergent views.

Teamthink members challenge three forms of faulty reasoning that are common to small groups. The first is all-or-nothing thinking. If a risk doesn’t seem threatening, too many groups dismiss it and proceed without a backup plan. In contrast, teamthink groups realistically assess the dangers and anticipate possible setbacks. The second common form of faulty group thinking, described earlier, is the assumption that the team is inherently moral. Groups in the grip of this misconception think that

anything they do (including lying and sabotaging the work of other groups) is justified. Ethically insensitive, they don't stop to consider the moral implications of their decisions. Teamthink groups avoid this trap, questioning their motivations and raising ethical issues. The third faulty group assumption is the conviction that the task is too difficult, that the obstacles are too great to overcome. Effective, ethical groups instead view obstacles as opportunities and focus their efforts on reaching and implementing decisions.

False Agreement

George Washington University management professor Jerry Harvey offers an alternative to groupthink based on *false agreement*.³³ Harvey believes that blaming group pressure is just an excuse for our individual shortcomings. He calls this the *Gunsmoke myth*. In this myth, the lone Western sheriff (Matt Dillon in the radio and television series) stands down a mob of armed townsfolk out to lynch his prisoner. If group tyranny is really at work, Harvey argues, Dillon stands no chance. After all, he is outnumbered 100 to 1 and could be felled with a single bullet from one rioter. The mob disbands because its members really didn't want to lynch the prisoner in the first place. Harvey contends that falling prey to the *Gunsmoke* myth is immoral because as long as we can blame our peers, we don't have to accept personal responsibility as group members. In reality, we always have a choice as to how to respond.

Professor Harvey introduces the Abilene paradox as an alternative to the *Gunsmoke* myth. He describes a time when his family decided to drive (without air conditioning) 100 miles across the desert from their home in Coleman, Texas, to Abilene to eat dinner. After returning home, family members discovered that no one had really wanted to make the trip. Each agreed to go to Abilene based on the assumption that everyone else in the group was enthusiastic about eating out. Harvey believes that organizations and small groups, like his family, also take needless "trips." An example of the Abilene paradox would be teams who carry out illegal activities that everyone in the group is uneasy about. Five psychological factors account for the paradox:

1. *Action anxiety*. Group members know what should be done but are too anxious to speak up.
2. *Negative fantasies*. Action anxiety is driven in part by the negative fantasies members have about what will happen if they voice their opinions. These fantasies ("I'll be fired or branded as disloyal") serve as an excuse for not attacking the problem.
3. *Real risk*. There are risks to expressing dissent: getting fired, losing income, damaging relationships. However, most of the time, the danger is not as great as we think.
4. *Fear of separation*. Alienation and loneliness constitute the most powerful force behind the paradox. Group members fear being cut off or separated from others. To escape this fate, they cheat, lie, break the law, and so forth.

5. *Psychological reversal of risk and certainty.* Being trapped in the Abilene paradox means confusing fantasy with real risk. This confusion produces a self-fulfilling prophecy. Caught up in the fantasy that something bad may happen, decision makers act in a way that fulfills the fantasy. For instance, group members may support a project with no chances of success because they are afraid they will be fired or demoted if they don't. Ironically, they are likely to be fired or demoted anyway when the flawed project fails.

Breaking out of the paradox begins with diagnosing its symptoms in your group or organization. If the group is headed in the wrong direction, call a meeting where you own up to your true feelings and invite feedback and encourage others to do the same. (Of course, you must confront your fear of being separated from the rest of the group to take this step.) The team may immediately come up with a better approach or engage in extended conflict that generates a more creative solution. You might suffer for your honesty, but you could be rewarded for saying what everyone else was thinking. In any case, you'll feel better about yourself for speaking up.

Escalation of Commitment

One of the consequences of mismanaged agreement is continuing to pursue a failed course of action. Social psychologists refer to this tendency as *escalation of commitment*. Instead of cutting their losses, individuals and groups continue to "throw good money after bad," pouring in more resources. Costs multiply until the moment that the team admits defeat or an outside agency intervenes.³⁴ Escalation of commitment is a moral trap because it wastes time, money, and effort; threatens the health of the group and the organization; fails to meet important needs; and can even result in significant loss of life. Escalating commitment helps explain why state agencies continue to implement defective software programs, promoters put more money into advertising unpopular music acts, and investors buy additional shares of declining stocks. History is replete with well-publicized examples of this phenomenon, including the automated baggage system at the Denver International Airport (which delayed the opening of the facility and never worked) and the Taurus automated London Stock Exchange system that had to be scrapped. Escalation played a key role in the K2 incident described in Case Study 9.1. Climbers continued to summit even when they should have turned back because they were so close to reaching the top. Many also had corporate sponsors and felt additional pressure to succeed.

Escalation of commitment is driven by a number of factors.³⁵ The first is *self-enhancement*, or the need to look good. Decision makers are compelled to justify their prior investments, so they reinvest in the original project in order to demonstrate that their initial choice was correct. They deny negative feedback and concentrate on defending past choices instead of focusing on future outcomes as they ought to. Group members find it hard to admit failure publicly because doing so threatens their identity or suggests that they are incompetent. Occasionally, groups escalate in order to show off, as in the case of a company that buys another firm just to demonstrate that it is an important player in the industry.

Sunk costs also drive escalation. It's hard emotionally for group members to give up on previous investments even though such costs cannot influence future outcomes. Imagine, for example, you have two frozen dinners in your freezer, both of which have reached their "use by" date. The dinners are the same except for their price tags. If one cost \$3 and the other \$5, you will likely choose the more expensive meal for dinner because it seems less wasteful. However, it should make no difference which meal you choose since the dinners are already purchased and your money is spent. Sunk costs help explain why those near the end of a project are more likely to spend additional funds to finish it. In addition, sunk costs can encourage teams to become overly optimistic. The presence of the previous investment tempts decision makers to inflate their estimates of future success. Then, too, decision makers often labor under the illusion of control. They believe that they can control events—business trends, employee behavior, the weather—that are outside their influence.³⁶

Risk seeking is a third factor driving escalation. When faced with decisions between two losses, individuals tend to take bigger risks than warranted. They stay the course because they believe that continuing in business or putting more money into the software project will enable them to recoup their losses. They are like the gambler who goes to the horse track and loses \$95 of the \$100 he intended to bet. When the last race of the day is run, he bets on a long shot, hoping to win back his entire \$95. He would be much better off making a safer bet and winning back some of his losses instead. Group interaction can magnify the tendency to take risks because responsibility for the choice is dispersed among group members.

Management professors Mark Keil and Ramiro Montealegre offer insights to leaders who want to help their teams de-escalate from a failed course of action. De-escalation begins with recognizing that there is a problem, followed by reexamining the prior course of action, then searching for alternative courses of action, and finally planning an exit strategy. Keil and Montealegre offer seven steps to help leaders and groups navigate this process:³⁷

1. *Don't ignore negative feedback or external pressure.* These are signs that something is amiss. Recognizing these signs early on can greatly reduce escalation costs.
2. *Hire an external auditor.* Bringing in an outside expert or fresh set of eyes can help the group recognize the extent of the problem. A consultant can also recommend action that would be difficult for insiders to suggest.
3. *Don't be afraid to withhold further funding.* Don't provide additional money until more information can be gathered. Withholding funding is a sign to others that something is wrong and also reasserts the leader's control over the project.
4. *Look for opportunities to redefine the problem.* Seek creative solutions and identify additional alternatives. Encourage team members to express their concerns.

5. *Manage impressions.* Help group members to save face by putting the blame on others (if appropriate), by relying on the recommendations of consultants, and by taking the blame yourself.
6. *Prepare your stakeholders.* Warn important stakeholders in the project that you may be shutting it down. Consult with them to get their input.
7. *Deinstitutionalize the project.* Move the project from the core of the firm to the periphery. That might mean, for example, physically relocating the project or de-emphasizing the importance of the project to the group or organization. In the case of the Denver airport baggage system, city officials and the airlines agreed to open the complex without the new system, thus making baggage handling less important to the airport as a whole.

ESTABLISHING ETHICAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

So far, our focus has been on how leaders can encourage ethical behavior within their groups. Yet, groups rarely operate in isolation. The typical organization is made of subgroups, not individuals, for example. If the organization is to succeed, these teams must coordinate their actions. Leaders must foster ethical interaction between as well as within teams. *Intergroup leadership* is the process of bringing diverse groups together to achieve common goals. Intergroup leadership is becoming increasingly important as organizations decentralize and rely more on teams.³⁸ In the past, coordinating group activities was the duty of top executives. Now, lower-level leaders must redesign work processes, share information, coordinate patient care and curriculum decisions, develop fund-raising campaigns, and so on.

Competition and conflict are significant barriers to intergroup leadership. Often, the organizational units being asked to work together have been competing for staff, money, office space, and other organizational resources. These groups may also differ in status. Take the case of a business acquisition, for instance. Members of the company being acquired are at a significant disadvantage when compared to their colleagues at the parent firm. They may feel alienated, believing that the dominant group is imposing its policies and values on them. However, group identity is the major obstacle to intergroup leadership. Individuals who define themselves as students, business majors, teachers, accountants, managers, executives, or engineers find it hard to collaborate with those of other identities.

Intergroup leadership expert Todd Pittinsky offers five strategies or pathways to collaboration.³⁹ Pathway 1 is encouraging intergroup contact. Groups in conflict rarely come into contact with each other, so leaders must bring diverse teams together. Such contact can break down stereotypes and foster liking. Nonetheless, interacting with outsiders does not guarantee that group members will develop positive feelings about their

counterparts in other groups. Negative interaction, such as when members of the parent company act in a condescending manner toward members of the acquired firm, can reinforce stereotypes and generate further hostility. Try to lay the groundwork for positive contacts by emphasizing that the teams need to work together to achieve a superordinate or shared objective like instituting a change initiative.

Pathway 2 is managing conflicts over resources by fostering trust. Act in a trustworthy fashion and elicit cooperative behaviors from both groups. Pathway 3 is creating a superordinate identity. Encourage team members to see themselves as part of a larger organization, which helps break down the “us versus them” mentality. Outline a shared vision and continually emphasize the importance of coordination. Politicians in the United States use this tactic when they emphasize that while we have our differences, we are all Americans. Pathway 4 is promoting dual identities. As you highlight shared overarching goals and memberships, encourage subgroups to maintain their distinctive identities. To put it another way, help create *intergroup relational identity*.⁴⁰ Effective intergroup leaders help team members recognize that they are part of a larger organization but, at the same time, retain their identities as members of subgroups. Encourage followers to see themselves as members of teams that operate in relationship with other teams. Back up your rhetoric by acting as a boundary spanner.⁴¹ Bridge or span groups by having frequent contact with each team and developing positive relationships with individuals from every group. Be careful not to favor one group over another. Ultimately, your goal is to embody intergroup relational identity because you are seen as leading both teams, not one group or another. Serve as a role model for cooperation.

Pathway 5 is attacking negative attitudes while promoting positive attitudes.⁴² As you promote liking through intergroup contact and other means, address negative attitudes. Help followers overcome their dislike of other groups by challenging stereotypes and encouraging them to live up to such values as equality and justice. Pearl Fryar of Bishopville, South Carolina, provides one example of someone who combated a negative stereotype and reduced disliking between racial groups. Whites objected when Fryar, an African American, wanted to move into their neighborhood because they believed black people didn’t take care of their yards. Fryar proved them wrong by making his property into a topiary garden filled with plant sculptures. He became the first African American to win the town’s Garden of the Month award, and his artistic creations became the centerpiece of a major revitalization effort for his small southern town.

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

- As a leader, you will do much of your work in project and process teams, committees, task forces, boards, and other small groups. Your task is to foster the conditions that brighten, not darken, the lives of group members and result in high performance and ethical choices.
- Because destructive behavior on the part of just one member can derail the group process, encourage participants to take their ethical responsibilities seriously. Foster collaboration by promoting commitment to shared goals; take steps to minimize social loafing.

- Expect to spend most of your time in a group listening rather than speaking. Model effective comprehensive, critical listening behaviors that overcome distractions, biases, and other listening barriers.
- Build a positive, ethical group climate through supportive messages that are descriptive, problem oriented, spontaneous, empathetic, focused on equality, and provisional.
- Model emotional regulation and encourage the development of positive norms that address the needs of individuals, the team, and outside groups.
- To improve problem solving, productivity, and relationships, foster substantive or task-oriented conflict about ideas and opinions. Set ground rules to help the group avoid affective (relational) conflict involving personalities.
- Foster minority opinion in order to promote creative, higher-quality solutions.
- An overemphasis on group cohesion is a significant threat to ethical group behavior. Be alert for the symptoms of groupthink. These include signs of overconfidence (illusion of invulnerability, belief in the inherent morality of the group), signs of closed-mindedness (collective rationalization, stereotypes of outside groups), and signs of group pressure (pressure on dissenters, self-censorship, illusion of unanimity, and self-appointed mind guards).
- The devil's advocate and dialectic inquiry methods are two ways to build in disagreement and reduce the likelihood of groupthink.
- Avoid false agreement or consensus by speaking out if you are concerned about the group's direction.
- Continuing in a failed course of action wastes time and resources. Help your team de-escalate by paying close attention to negative feedback, bringing in outsiders, withholding further funding, redefining the problem, and moving the project to the periphery of the organization.
- As a leader, you will need to help your team establish ethical relationships with other groups. Act as an intergroup leader in order to bring diverse groups together to achieve common goals. Help team members see themselves as part of a larger organization or community while retaining their identities as members of subgroups. Become a boundary spanner; model cooperation.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION, CHALLENGE, AND SELF-ASSESSMENT

1. Interview a leader at your school or in another organization to develop a "meeting profile" for this person. Find out how much time this individual spends in meetings during an average week and whether this is typical of other leaders in the same organization. Identify the types of meetings she or he attends and her or his role. Determine whether ethical issues are part of these discussions. As part of your profile, record your reactions. Are you surprised by your findings? Has this assignment changed your understanding of what leaders do?

2. Brainstorm strategies for encouraging commitment to shared goals in a group that you lead or belong to. What steps can you take to implement these strategies?
3. Analyze the impact of social loafing in a project group using Self-Assessment 9.1. What loafing behaviors are particularly destructive? What factors encourage members to reduce their efforts? What can you as a leader do to raise the motivation level of participants?
4. Evaluate a recent ethical decision made by one of your groups. Was it a high-quality decision? Why or why not? What factors contributed to the group's success or failure? How did the leader (you or someone else) shape the outcome for better or worse? How would you evaluate your performance as a leader or team member? Write up your analysis.
5. Develop a plan for becoming a better listener in a group. Implement your plan and then evaluate your progress.
6. Use the self-leadership strategies in "Focus on Follower Ethics: Self-Leadership in Self-Managed Teams" to develop a strategy for carrying out your team responsibilities.
7. Have you ever been part of a group that was victimized by groupthink? If so, which symptoms were present? How did they affect the group's ethical decisions and actions? Does the Abilene paradox (false agreement) offer a better explanation for what happened?
8. Draw from current events to create an escalation of commitment case study. Describe what happened, why the group continued in a failed course of action, and the de-escalation process (if any). Identify what lessons can be learned from this case.
9. With other team members, develop a conflict covenant. Determine how you will enforce this code. Or, as an alternative, complete Self-Assessment 9.2 as a group and develop strategies for engaging in more substantive conflict.
10. Fishbowl discussion: In a fishbowl discussion, one group discusses a problem while the rest of the class looks on and then provides feedback. Assign a group to one of the cases at the end of the chapter. Make sure that each discussant has one or more observers who specifically note his or her behavior. When the discussion is over, observers should meet with their "fish." Then the class as a whole should give its impressions of the overall performance of the team. Draw on the concepts discussed in this chapter when evaluating the work of individual participants and the group.
11. Evaluate your team's relationship with outside groups based on the last section of the chapter.

STUDENT STUDY SITE

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Case Study 9.1

CHAOS ON K2

K2 has been called the most dangerous mountain in the world. At 28,251 feet, K2 is only slightly shorter than nearby Mt. Everest but is much more difficult to climb. While more than 3,000 have summited Everest, approximately 300 have made it to the top of K2. Among those climbing Everest, 10% die trying, while the death rate on K2 is at 26%. There are several reasons K2 has been nicknamed the "Savage Mountain." Further north than Everest, it is subject to colder and harsher weather conditions. It is also steeper and harder to climb.

During the summer of 2008, climbers jammed into the highest base camp on K2 and prepared to summit. The group was a "virtual UN of expeditions," including teams from the Netherlands, Korea, the United States, Serbia, Australia, and Singapore, along with independent alpinists. Language differences hindered communication. Personality differences and different approaches to climbing generated friction between groups. In one case, for example, a Dutch expedition member shunned an American independent climber because the American didn't bring the right equipment. Tensions increased as weather conditions kept the teams in base camp.

Despite the tensions, team leaders realized that they would need to coordinate their efforts if such a large group were to have any chance at reaching the top. They agreed to send a trail-breaking team out first to pack down snow and set safety lines for those who would come later.

When the weather cleared, twenty-two climbers launched their ascent in the early morning hours of August 1. Trouble began almost immediately. Some tasked with laying down rope didn't show up, and the leader of the trail-breaking team—the only person who had previously summited—fell ill. Members of the first group didn't bring enough line and laid out the rope too soon. As a result, they ran out of line before reaching the most dangerous section of the climb called the Bottleneck, a narrow, steep passage where climbers had to proceed single file. Rope then had to be passed from the bottom to be anchored farther up the slope, delaying the climb. (Later, those who successfully descended failed to mark the way back to camp with flags as they had promised.) A Serbian fell to his death as he started his ascent, and a Pakistani porter died trying to retrieve the body. Soon, climbers were clustered at the bottom of the Bottleneck.

Eighteen climbers managed to make it to the living room-sized summit, which tied the previous single-day K2 record. However, the last climber didn't reach the top until 7:30 p.m. Those who continued ascending past early afternoon put themselves in grave danger. The delay meant they would have to descend in darkness or camp out on the side of the mountain (nicknamed the Death Zone) in temperatures reaching 40 degrees below zero. One climber who summited tried to tell others that it was too late to continue on, but he soon gave up. "As I descended," he said, "everyone stopped to ask me how far it was to the summit. Did I tell people to turn around? No, you can't. There are a lot of people and they are all going up together. It's the majority against you."¹

As the teams descended, tragedy struck again as a huge ice sheet broke off, sweeping climbers to their deaths. The falling piece of glacier also carried away the ropes that those above the Bottleneck were depending on to lead them to the safety of base camp. Smaller icefalls and avalanches during the night and the next day buried other climbers. Eleven died, making this one of the worst climbing disasters of all time.

Responses to the deadly chaos unfolding on K2 ranged from selfish to heroic. Many focused on their own survival, ignoring the plight of others. Said the head of Dutch team: "They were thinking of using my gas, my rope. Everybody was fighting for himself, and I still do not understand why everybody were leaving each other."² The Sherpa climbers, on the other hand, did their best to help. They returned up the mountain from base camp to rescue disoriented climbers. Two Sherpas died while trying to rescue three Koreans tangled in rope. In an amazing feat of mountaineering, one Sherpa tied himself to a colleague who had lost his ice ax. They managed to descend using only one ax between them.

Much of the 2008 K2 disaster can be blamed on natural forces. Icefalls and avalanches claimed the majority of victims. However, human factors played a major role as well. The teams were not able to coordinate their efforts, team members didn't follow through on their responsibilities, and too many climbers fell victim to "summit fever," deciding to continue upward when they should have turned back. Self-centeredness was also a contributing factor. In the past, mountaineering teams viewed their climbs as mutual endeavors and took responsibility for one another. Not so in recent years. As one mountaineering historian noted, modern climbing now is marked by "an ethos stressing individualism and self-preservation."³

Ironically, one of the greatest examples of mountaineering selflessness came in a 1954 American summit attempt on K2. When a fellow climber fell ill, his colleagues abandoned their summit attempt and carried him thousands of feet down the mountain, only to see him swept away as they neared safety. A memorial to this climber and others who have died on the mountain still stands. The names of the eleven who died in 2008 were added to this monument.

Discussion Probes

1. Did divisions among the teams doom any attempt to cooperate?
2. Would the teams have been better off climbing on their own?
3. What steps, if any, could the team leaders have taken to foster intergroup identity?
4. Why do you think climbers continued to the top even after they should have turned back?
5. Why are modern climbers apparently more selfish than climbers of the past? What can be done to change the culture of climbing?
6. What leadership and followership ethics lessons do you take from this case?

(Continued)

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Case Study 9.2

GETTING THE PROJECT TEAM BACK ON TRACK

Jesse Cruz looked forward to leading his project team in his senior entrepreneurship capstone class. Professor Williams chose Jesse and four other team leaders from among those who applied for the positions. The teams are to create a plan for a new small business. Members may not change teams, though leaders can "fire" one member if that person seriously undermines the group's efforts. At the end of the semester, each group will present its plan to a panel of business alumni who will determine which has the best chance of success and deserves the highest grade.

Jesse's team is made up of seven members (including himself). The group performed well on the first teambuilding exercises and case studies Professor Williams assigned in class. Team members were friendly with one another and willing to share their ideas, though Jesse was concerned that one member, Ralph, seemed to dominate group discussions. That initial good will dissipated quickly when the team sat down to figure out which kind of business it wants

to create. Ralph and two other group members (Rose and Isaiah) are pushing to create a plan for a recreational marijuana store. They want to take advantage of the fact that voters in their state recently legalized recreational pot sales. Megan, Joyce, and Bernie have serious doubts about the proposal. They point out that the group would be selling a product banned by their university and still in violation of federal law. They worry that this type of business may be too controversial for the alumni evaluators and would lower the group's grade. Joyce voted against the change in the marijuana law and believes that selling pot is unethical. Megan, Joyce, and Bernie have proposed a variety of alternatives, including a smartphone repair shop and bakery, but can't seem to agree on one option.

Tensions are rising as the group continues to discuss which business to pursue. Jesse's concerns about Ralph have proven to be well founded. He comes across as a know-it-all. He declared on one occasion that those who disagreed with him were "clueless" because they didn't understand how profitable a marijuana business could be. Ralph, Rose, and Isaiah appear more interested in having their way than in listening to their counterparts. They don't seem to recognize how frustrated Megan, Joyce, and Bernie are. In fact, Megan appears to have given up and rarely speaks, checking her cell phone instead. Joyce hasn't helped matters by accusing the marijuana store supporters (whom she referred to as "potheads") of being immoral. Up to this point, Jesse has tried to remain neutral, though he has serious doubts about the marijuana business plan. He has focused on summarizing major points from both sides and encouraging members to listen to one another. He brought donuts to the last meeting in hopes of encouraging a warmer atmosphere.

Jesse realizes that the group is stuck and that the entire project (as well as the semester grade in this senior-level class) is in danger. Even he as team leader doesn't want to come to the group's meetings anymore. While tempted to side with the marijuana business subgroup just to break the deadlock, he recognizes that members of the other subgroup may not complete their parts of the project if this plan is adopted. He needs to determine what to do before the team meets again. Time is running out.

Discussion Probes

1. What has Jesse done right so far as a leader? What mistakes has he made?
2. Should Jesse break the deadlock by supporting the marijuana store proposal? Why or why not?
3. What problems do you note in the interaction between group members?
4. What skills do members need to develop? What procedures or guidelines should they adopt?
5. What steps should Jesse take to foster cooperation and address the unproductive and unethical communication patterns in the group?
6. Should Jesse fire Ralph?
7. What should be Jesse's agenda for the next team meeting?

Case Study 9.3

GROUPTHINK AT THE TOP: THE COLLAPSE OF HBOS

It seemed like a merger made in financial heaven. In 2001, the Halifax Building Society of Britain merged with the Bank of Scotland to form HBOS. The union made a lot of sense. Halifax was a successful retail mortgage lender and Bank of Scotland had experience in corporate lending and treasury investments. Between them, the two well-respected institutions had 450 years of banking experience. Their combined assets of 30 billion pounds made HBOS one of the largest financial institutions in the United Kingdom. Yet, seven years later, HBOS collapsed in one of the biggest bank failures in British history.

The seeds of the bank's destruction were sown shortly after its formation. HBOS executives set out an aggressive growth strategy for HBOS based on increasing loan volume 17% to 20% a year. To reach this target, commercial loan officers had to target smaller, riskier borrowers. Financial regulators warned HBOS of the dangers of making such risky loans, but bank officers ignored their advice. When money loaned far outstripped deposits, the bank had to turn to outside underwriters for funds to make more loans. This made HBOS extremely vulnerable to downturns in the financial markets. When the mortgage crisis began in 2007–2008, many borrowers defaulted and HBOS couldn't raise additional money to cover its losses. The British government forced HBOS to merge with the Lloyds banking group. However, government officials later had to inject 20.5 billion pounds into HBOS to keep it afloat.

A 2013 British Parliamentary review of the bank's collapse was titled "An Accident Waiting to Happen." Investigators condemned the bank's board and top managers, declaring, "The history of HBOS provides a manual of bad banking."¹ Not only was the bank's growth strategy far too ambitious, the firm lacked adequate controls to estimate and control for risk. Loan officers were rewarded for reaching sales targets, not on the quality of their loans. Most of the firm's members had little or no expertise with risk management. Government regulators failed to carry out their responsibilities.

Groupthink also played a significant role in the bank's demise. The top executive team, made up of bank chairman Dennis Stevenson, chief executive officers (CEOs) James Crosby and Andy Hornby, and commercial lending chief Peter Cummings, was supremely confident. In retrospect, their optimism appears delusional. In 2001, the chairman stated that any higher losses from making risky loans would be "more than compensated for by higher product margins."² In 2006 and 2007, bank officers boldly proclaimed that the bank was adequately managing its risks and that they were more skilled than their competitors. (This despite the fact that Cummings was the only senior official with significant banking knowledge and experience.) As the global financial crisis loomed and other banks reduced their high-risk loan portfolios, HBOS loaned out even more money. Peter Cummings appeared to mock more prudent lenders, declaring:

The job of banks is to assess risk but in the last 18–24 months that's a job many banks seem to have forgotten. . . . We never forgot. Our decision strength is assessing credit risk and assessing people. We're better at it. . . . Some people look as if they are losing their nerve, beginning to panic even in today's testing property environment, not us.³

Top management at HBOS was quick to silence dissenters. Paul Moore, in charge of monitoring the bank's risk, recommended at one board meeting that HBOS reconsider its fast-growth strategy. His warning was ignored. The meeting minutes said instead that risk controls were adequate. When Moore demanded that the minutes be written to reflect his concerns, no changes were made. CEO Crosby fired him instead, replacing him with someone far less qualified. Board members rarely challenged the decisions of the top executive team and didn't engage in much substantive debate during board sessions.

Fallout from the HBOS collapse continues. Both Stevenson and Crosby, who had been knighted, gave up their titles as Lords. They have apologized for their role in the failure. Accounting giant KPMG is being scrutinized for signing off on the bank's financial statements just prior to its collapse. Cummings was forced to pay 500,000 pounds in restitution and was banned from the financial industry. Ten additional officers may be barred from British banking and prevented from serving as company directors in any industry. The Parliamentary committee that reviewed the collapse of HBOS called for a new law making it a criminal offence for bank senior bank staff to engage in "reckless misconduct."

Discussion Probes

1. How can you tell the difference between optimism and delusional optimism?
2. What symptoms of groupthink do you note in the HBOS top management team and board of directors?
3. Do you think top management teams are more vulnerable to groupthink than managers at lower levels of the organization? Why or why not?
4. Should top leaders at HBOS be forced to give up their earnings and pensions?
5. Should bank officials and other corporate leaders be jailed if they act recklessly?
6. Should the accounting firm KPMG be punished for giving HBOS a clean financial bill of health even as it was near collapse?

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SELF-ASSESSMENT 9.1

Class Project Social Loafing Scale

Instructions: To identify the behaviors associated with the impact of social loafing on team performance, respond to the following questions based on your recent experiences with one social loafer in a class project team.

What Did the Social Loafer Do?

(1 = does not describe at all; 2 = describes the least; 3 = does not describe much; 4 = describes somewhat; 5 = describes the most)

1. Member had trouble attending team meetings.
2. Member had trouble paying attention to what was going on in the team.
3. Member was mostly silent during the team meetings.
4. Member engaged in side conversations a lot while the team was working.
5. Member came poorly prepared to the team meetings.
6. Member contributed poorly to the team discussions when present.
7. Member had trouble completing team-related homework.
8. Member mostly declined to take on any work for the team.
9. Member did a poor job of the work she/he was assigned.
10. Member did poor-quality work.
11. Member mostly distracted the team's focus on its goals and objectives.
12. Member did not fully participate in the team's formal presentation.

What Was the Impact of the Social Loafer on Your Team?

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about the impact the social loafer had on your team (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree)

As a result of the social loafing . . .

- 1. the team took longer than anticipated to complete its tasks.
- 2. the team meetings lasted longer than expected.
- 3. the team had fewer good ideas than other teams.
- 4. team members had to waste their time explaining things to the social loafer.
- 5. other team members had to do more than their share of work.
- 6. other team members were frustrated and angry.
- 7. there was a higher level of stress on the team.
- 8. other team members had to redo or revise the work done by the social loafer.
- 9. the work had to be reassigned to other members of the team.
- 10. the team's final presentation was not as high quality as that of other teams.
- 11. the team missed deadlines.

Source: Adapted from Jassawalla, A. R., Malshe, A., & Sashittal, H. (2008). Student perceptions of social loafing in undergraduate business classroom teams. *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education*, 6, 423-424. Used with permission.

SELF-ASSESSMENT 9.2

Task/Relationship Conflict Scale

Instructions: The following scale will help you determine if your team is engaged in affective or substantive conflict. Choose a problem-solving group from work or school and answer each of the following questions.

Very Little						A Great Deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- 1. How much friction is there among members in your group? _____
- 2. How much are personality conflicts evident in your group? _____
- 3. How much tension is there among members in your group? _____
- 4. How much emotional conflict is there among members in your group? _____
- 5. How often do people in your group disagree about opinions? _____
- 6. How frequently are there conflicts about ideas in your group? _____
- 7. How much conflict about the work you do is there in your group? _____
- 8. To what extent are there differences of opinion in your group? _____

Scoring:

Add up your scores from Questions 1–4 and record the total below. The higher the score, the greater the level of affective conflict in your group. Add up your scores from Questions 5–8 and record the total below. The higher the score, the greater the level of substantive or task conflict in your team.

Affective conflict _____ out of 28 Substantive/task conflict _____ out of 28

Source: Reprinted from Jehn, K. A. (1995, June). A multi-method examination of the benefits and detriments of intragroup conflict. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40, 256–282. © Johnson Graduate School of Management, Cornell University.

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