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Term Paper

In any organization or workplace there are things that work and things that do not. No one is ever one hundred percent satisfied at their job one hundred percent of the time even though that would be ideal. It is a learning process that almost everyone goes through. With that being said, there are different theories that help explain and shed some light on these things such as why people act the way that they do, how groups work effectively, and much more. In my own workplace I have experienced many of these things numerous times as I'm sure others have as well. One in particular, groupthink, stands out more than others which is why I chose that theory to discuss.

My workplace is a small, independently owned women's fashion boutique located in the Smith Farm Shopping Center in Owasso. It is called Beau & Arrow and we open at ten o'clock in the morning and close at seven o'clock in the evening. Typically, I will work the evening shift because I have school in the mornings. I sit at the register located in the front of the store and greet customers as they come in. Shipments will come in so I will unload the boxes, unpack each item, fold, steam, tag, price, and censor any clothing that we get shipped to us. I check customers into fitting rooms, answer phones, and process online orders as well. Lately, online orders have been through the roof with nearly 600 of them per week. That is a lot for a store our size when we only have a few employees to get the orders processed and sent out in a timely fashion. Since the store is small, I only have about three coworkers total. We are all in our twenties, including the store owner.

When it comes to customers, we usually do not have many problems. Many of them are considered regulars at our business because they come in so often. There are actually many customers that I instantly recognize and know by name when they come in, or I can recognize their voice when they call the store. Most of them are super friendly and make working fun for us. Very rarely will we have someone who is somewhat or extremely difficult to deal with. If we make a mistake and it is one hundred percent our fault, our policy is to fix it by any means necessary to make the customer happy and right our wrongs. Occasionally we will have a customer that will try to lie to get what they want, steal from the store, or write a bad review on our social media sites. More often than not, the bad review will come from someone who is known for lying, or got caught stealing and was asked to leave. Luckily those things have had little impact on the store and its reputation. Our store owner, Megan Saltink, is very professional when dealing with customer complications. She definitely cares about her customers, but she also cares about the well-being of her employees and is more likely to put us first in those kinds of situations.

Apart from the bad, there are definitely more perks to this job than most others. First of all, having a boss that is close to your age that doubles as a close friend makes the workplace a fun and relaxed environment for all of the employees. Megan is constantly thinking of fun ways to increase our amount of shoppers and she keeps us included on all of the decision making. She also invites us over to her house from time to time for games nights or dinner. We also get to dress the mannequins and pick out outfits for customers. Megan refers to us as "stylists" rather than "sales associates" and I think that makes us all feel a little bit more important in a weird kind of way. Also, she knows and understands that we are all in school so we are allowed to do homework on the clock if we have no one in the store. That really helps us get our work done because the store is rarely busy. With our small size, there are usually many windows of opportunity for homework which is very nice to have. Plus, many of our customers spend quite a bit of money when they come in so having barely any traffic is not much of a problem with all of the high spenders.

I get along with all of my coworkers perfectly. We all even hang out outside of work pretty regularly because we have become such good friends. I think that it is pretty rare to get along with all of your coworkers all the time but I think it's that way for us because there are not very many of us. I am hoping that this continues for the remainder of the time that I work there. Beau & Arrow has been open for about three years now and I have been able to see all of the progress that the store has made in those three years since that's how long I have been employed there.

Along with the progress and growth that I have seen and been a part of, I have also learned a lot from my boss. Being in communications, I have wanted to do a lot with marketing and business as well and I have acquired some of those skills through learning from Megan. She is constantly promoting her business on social media, doing gift card giveaways, or hosting an open house night with sales, snacks, and other incentives to get people to come shop at her store. I also get to observe how she shops for our merchandise along with how she decides to price our items. When you work for a big corporate company that has thousands of locations, you may not get the same kind of firsthand experience like I get at Beau & Arrow. It's almost like I'm at a paid internship sometimes.

Overall my workplace is made up of good people and a good environment which leads us to have a successful business. We all get along and we all have a say in what happens at the store, but sometimes that leads us to be guilty of groupthink. Groupthink is when a group tries to make decisions as a group to avoid any sole responsibility or conflict among the group members. It causes a lack of creativity or individuality (Schaefer & Crichlow, pg. 12). In Schaefer and Crichlow's article *Groupthink Versus High-Quality Decision Making in International Relations*, they bring the question "Are good and bad outcomes significantly affected by the decision-making process itself?" to our attention. When groups tend to all agree that things are going great and that there is nothing to worry about, it can eventually cause problems or make the group fail. Groupthink is the source of failure because thinking that there is nothing to worry about is dangerous and no one in the group speaks up to make changes. It can hinder a group or organization from living up to their full potential. A little bit of controversy or tension in the group is not always a bad thing because it will get the group to listen to each other's ideas and opinions and to think in different ways.

Groups need leaders and anxious ones at that. If a leader takes charge but never rocks the boat, it is ineffective leadership. Always being optimistic and upbeat will get your group's loyalty, but it may not be the best way to lead them to success. Anxious leaders will not be afraid to rock the boat and ask questions about their concerns such as how things can go wrong (Munuswamy & Venkataraman, pg. 58). They are constantly thinking of the worst possible outcomes and what disasters might occur. This kind of leadership is so effective because it constantly makes the group improve. Thinking of what can go wrong and planning ahead for that is a smart move for the group to be able to withstand those obstacles.

Groups need well balanced environments. The good news is that if discussion is a routine part of the group, that well balanced environment will be achieved. The bad news is that discussion often leads people in the wrong directions. Groupthink commonly occurs, as it often does, and groups fail to correct the mistakes of their members. The theory basically states that the people around us affect everything we do. When it comes to correcting others' mistakes, no one is willing or finds it necessary because it will disrupt the cohesion of the group (Milgram, pg. 34). This proves that we are all affected by one another and that groupthink is a very common outcome.

The notion of groupthink is very popular among researchers who observe groups compared to individuals. A group of intellectual individuals that decide too soon on an incorrect conclusion is one instance of a more general finding that certain specific types of strategies can succeed individually but will fail when attempted in a group (Bénabou, pg. 22). For instance, one might question their own ideas because they will not be offended by themselves. As an individual they can make the changes necessary on their own for the best possible outcome whereas those in a group will most likely be too agreeable. It's all about staying under the radar and not upsetting anyone even though it may be necessary to make changes for optimum results.

Comparing this groupthink to my everyday life at work, I can definitely think of many instances where we had fallen short because we were guilty of practicing this concept. Being a small store, our group of employees is small as well. There are only four of us, plus our boss. When one of us really likes an item and wants to purchase it for the store, there are countless times where the rest of us would nod along and agree even though we may think that the item would not sell. When items do not sell, we end up being stuck with it for a long time, essentially losing money by having to decrease the price until it is gone. Our boss would tell us to speak up when we have those feelings, but often times we keep quiet about our true thoughts so that everyone stays happy. This can also go along with the Spiral of Silence Theory. We all will agree that we like the item and then it ends up never selling once we get it.

Another instance where we have been guilty of practicing groupthink at Beau & Arrow is when we all agreed that it would be a good idea to open at midnight on Black Friday. We are a small store, so traffic on Black Friday is nowhere near what other corporate stores experience. We had no customers between the hours of 2 A.M. and 8 A.M. which meant struggling to stay awake, and losing money yet again. Things would have gone much more smoothly if someone would have spoken up and said that we wouldn't need to be open that long because of the size of our place of business.

In any workplace groupthink is going to occur, and probably very often. Managers and bosses should be aware of this and be the one to correct the problems of their employees. People who hold higher positions like that in companies are supposed to lead others and part of being a leader means being able to see what works and what doesn't. Not only do leaders need to recognize these problems and flaws, but they also need to be able to handle them in a professional manner. So instead of saying "No, that's a bad idea", they should be able to bring up questions that will make their employees think that they should try another solution such as "How could this go wrong?" or "I see a problem here, how could you fix that?" (Milgrim, pg.44). This is another reason why anxious leaders work best because they do not participate in groupthink.

There are plenty of ways to avoid groupthink. In order to prevent group isolation, it may be helpful to bring in new participants on a regular basis, use outside experts, and invite the group to meet off-site so that changes in settings and surroundings provides a fresh perspective for everyone involved. High-quality decisions are not made through intimidation, whether intentional or unintentional. Some bosses have no idea why people do not speak up, while the reason they do not is because they are likely to be attacked (Bénabou, pg. 32). Most important decisions today are made in groups and groups can do a great job, however, they often do not. Groupthink is a result of flawed procedures, poor leadership, insulation, and an unmanaged desire for the maintenance of group cohesion and its good feelings (Milgram, pg. 51).

Although I am sure that we will still practice groupthink at my workplace every now and then, I feel like I will be more likely to speak up if I truly do not agree. I will be equipped to inform my coworkers of the dangers of groupthink and hopefully they will start to be more careful when jumping on the bandwagon when we make important decisions. Groupthink is likely to happen at any place of business whether it be over something small or something larger scale. The best thing to do is prepare for it. Ask questions and speak your mind in an encouraging and professional manner to avoid stepping on any toes or crossing any lines.

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