

ARE YOU ALL ON THE SAME PAGE? IS THE WHOLE TEAM ON THE BUS? Is the entire company moving in one direction, toward one goal, like a well-oiled machine? Well, that's your problem, right there: the Stepford organization.

It's both a cliché and a truism that no one wants to be surrounded by yes men. What we want, instead, is to be surrounded by vocal skeptics . . . who just happen to say yes to everything.

Sure, conformity makes things easier. A CEO who adheres to a particular consulting matrix will grumble less if everyone enthusiastically falls in line. Compiling teams of compatible personalities makes everything smoother. Any manager will have a easier time handling a group of people who are, more or less, in her own image. And even with equal-opportunity programs and goals in place, it's only natural to hire people who fit a narrow, familiar profile—that of the person doing the hiring.

The danger is, of course, groupthink, in which people not only float along on the prevailing winds, so as to be on the winning side of an argument, but actively root out those hesitant to go with the flow. In coining the term sixty years ago, William H. Whyte defined groupthink as “a *rationalized* conformity—an open, articulate philosophy which holds that group values are not only expedient but right and good as well.” In today's volatile business environment, marching in lockstep can have fatal consequences: failure to recognize emerging markets or potentially disruptive competitors, missing unconventional opportunities, not challenging obviously bad ideas that originate in the C-suite. Unexpected, out-of-left-field, serendipitous facts and opinions are at the root of both fostering innovation and avoiding icebergs.

How to avoid groupthink? Start by bringing aboard people who aren't naturally part of the group. In this issue, John Buchanan's “Think Different?” clearly distinguishes between traditional diversity and diversity of thought—that is, between people who look different and people who, well, think different. This doesn't necessarily mean giving free rein to would-be whistleblowers (though, as Ann Kraemer argued in these pages last year, it's not a bad idea). But it does mean being more tolerant—in your heart, not just in stated policy—of dissent, of stated reservations, of people who express ideas and concerns in a different style than you might.

There's another essential element to independent organizational thinking—broadening your own horizons. This requires a conscious effort: As the world expands, what appears on our own PC and tablet and smartphone screens is ever narrower, with news and opinions customized to match our own; social media promises a wide range of views but basically confirms that most of our friends and colleagues agree on pretty much everything.

So: Along with working to diversify the voices and views around you at the office by encouraging different types of thinking, try to diversify what you read and hear at home and on the train. Avoiding groupthink begins with what's in your own head.



MATTHEW BUDMAN
Editor-in-Chief

