

# CRITICAL REVIEW DEVIL'S ADVOCATE STRATEGY

Jacob Lamp



# Overview



## **The Devil's Advocate: A Strategy to Avoid Groupthink and Stimulate Discussion in Focus Groups**

**Colin MacDougall, Frances Baum**

This study describes the results of using the Devil's Advocate strategy in focus groups.

# Definitions

- **Groupthink:** Occurs when team members make uniform decisions, possibly due to fear of standing out
- **Devil's Advocate:** A person in a group who raises unique concerns, with the goal of reducing groupthink

# Authors



**Colin MacDougall**

- Department of Public Health at Flinders University of South Australia
- Doctorate



**Frances Baum**

- Department of Public Health at Flinders University of South Australia
- South Australian Community Health Research Unit
- PhD
- Multiple awards

# Argument

**According to the authors, the Devil's Advocate strategy is:**

- Generally a useful tool to prevent groupthink
- Should be implemented along with proper training
- Should not be forced into every project

# Supporting the Argument



## Interview Questions

Participants in the focus group were interviewed after the study was performed. Some interview responses were cited in the article.

“ [The Devil's Advocate strategy] was useful, I remember at least one occasion when the devil's advocate put another viewpoint that I hadn't considered. Opens up your mind a bit

Focus Group Participant

# Persuasiveness

## **The article is somewhat persuasive:**

- Contains low bias
- Cites interview responses directly, allowing audience to draw their own conclusions
  - Not all responses are included, so the included responses may be cherry-picked

## **The article fulfills its goals:**

- Communicates a conclusion about the effectiveness of the Devil's Advocate strategy



“ Face-to-face training including a trial focus group would deal with many of [the participant's] criticisms

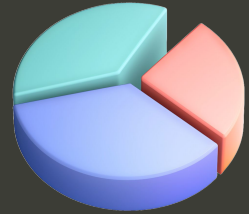
# Shortcomings

- **Full interview responses not included:**  
Only a few interview responses were cited throughout the article. The full raw interview transcripts would be useful to have, to get a sense of the proportion of positive to negative responses
- **Failure to support claim about suggested training:**  
The article suggests that training in a trial focus group would solve many of the criticisms mentioned, but this training was never performed

# Missing Components

- **Numerical data:**

The article only used interview questions to support its argument, but no numerical data was included. The authors could have counted the number of positive and negative interview responses to get a sense of the effectiveness of the strategy



# Works Cited

- MacDougall, Colin, and Frances Baum. “The Devil’s Advocate: A Strategy to Avoid Groupthink and Stimulate Discussion in Focus Groups.” Sage Journals, Nov. 1997, [journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/104973239700700407](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/104973239700700407).
- “Groupthink.” Corporate Finance Institute, 2 Feb. 2024, [corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/management/groupthink-decisions/](https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/management/groupthink-decisions/).
- “The Psychology of Groupthink and the Desperate, Dangerous Desire for Social Acceptance.” PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, 26 June 2023, [www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/psychology-of-groupthink-desperate-dangerous-desire-for-social-acceptance/](https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/psychology-of-groupthink-desperate-dangerous-desire-for-social-acceptance/).
- Phillips, Brad. “Eight Questions to Ask before Every Interview.” Throughline Group, 2 Apr. 2019, [www.throughlinegroup.com/2013/05/09/eight-questions-to-ask-before-every-interview/](https://www.throughlinegroup.com/2013/05/09/eight-questions-to-ask-before-every-interview/).
- Kabir, Ahmed. “3d Pie Chart on Transparent Background.” Vecteezy, [www.vecteezy.com/png/27735600-3d-pie-chart-on-transparent-background](https://www.vecteezy.com/png/27735600-3d-pie-chart-on-transparent-background). Accessed 24 July 2025.