

Beyond what works — in practice

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The plan

- Apply thinking about how decisions are made, and on what information.
- Consider the use of, and loss of, collective intelligence, and the role of herd thinking.
- Discuss examples where the decision was controversial, where the outcome is now (mostly) known, and may well have had negative consequences.

Groupthink

First coined by (Janis 1972) discussing Bay of Pigs invasion.

Bay of Pigs

- Planned under Eisenhower administration, executed by Kennedy.
- 15 April 1961 - CIA-supplied B26 bombers bomb Cuban airfields.
- 17 April — 1400 CIA-funded paramilitaries landed in Bay of Pigs.
- Soon opposed by about 20,000 Cuban troops.
- Kennedy withdraws [further planned air support](#)
- 20 April — surrender.

[Wikipedia](#)

Putting the group into groupthink

There were 50 or so of us, presumably the most experienced and smartest people we could get, to plan such an operation. Most of us thought it would work. . . . But five minutes after it began to fall in, we all looked at each other and asked, ‘How could we have been so stupid?’. [Time article](#).

Groups and groupthink

[The advisors] never pressed, partly out of a fear of being labeled

‘soft’ or undaring in the eyes of their colleagues. (Janis 1972).

... senior officials were unanimous for going ahead... Had one senior advisor opposed the adventure, I believe that Kennedy would have canceled it. No one spoke against it.” (Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.)

Background to problem 1 — homeopathy and cholera

- The government anticipated the cholera epidemic of 1854.
- It sacked a competent Board of Health and appointed an eminent one.
- This Board produced multiple confused reports that failed to take Snow’s observations into account.
- It did produce mortality figures for the London hospitals.

See (Hempel 2014; Paneth et al. 1998).

Background — homeopathy and cholera

In the 1854 Cholera epidemic:

- London Homeopathic Hospital (LHH) : 10 deaths of 61 cases admitted (16.4%) (this information did not appear in the Board’s reports).
- Middlesex hospital : 123 / 231 cases (53.2%) (this did appear).

See [this page on the London Homeopathic Hospital \(LHH\)](#)

Your task

Imagine yourself, as far as you can, as being a contemporary of the events, in 1854 and 1855. The epidemic is over, but cholera continues to be a major health risk, of national concern.

- You are the Board. You have the figures for the LHH. You do not believe homeopathy is an effective treatment. Do you release the figures? If so, why? If not, why not?
- You are an MP. Someone has pointed out the missing figures for LHH. How do you respond?
- You are an administrator in a hospital. The figures are confirmed. How do you respond?

Background to problem — Covid-19 and childhood vaccination

- [UK: 38.6% uptake of vaccination for 18-29 years old](#)

- [Vaccine hesitancy and Covid](#)

Myocarditis

Clinical myocarditis after second dose in 12-17 year old males, after Covid vaccination:

- [1 in 2,680 after dose 2 in Hong Kong](#)
- [1 in 2,650 in Kaiser Permanente health system](#)

Subclinical - rate unclear, but:

- A Thai study showed [2.3% raised cardiac biomarker or lab study positive after Pfizer vaccination](#).
- In a study in Swiss health-care employees [“vaccine-associated myocardial injury was adjudicated in 22 participants \[of 777\] \(2.8% ...”](#).

See the [CDC data on hospitalization rate for Covid in 12-17 year olds](#)

One response

- [Counter-disinformation unit \(CDU\)](#)
- [CDU monitoring](#)
- Fact-checkers and “misinformation”.

Your second task

It is January 2021. The Covid mRNA vaccine has been approved and is being rolled out for adults. There is, as yet, no clear sign about vaccine harms, but you know this is an as-yet little-tested and novel vaccine delivery method. You are the leader of a group that will give advice to the governor of a US state on their policy for Covid vaccination for children and adolescents.

- What recommendation do you give in January 2021? Do you recommend childhood vaccination?
- What will you do to try and engage the public in *carrying out* your recommendations?
- What will you do to try and engage the public in *reviewing* your recommendations?
- A member of the team proposes engaging a state university in collaborating with social media to deal with disinformation. What is your response? What engagement should there be with social media about your recommendations.

The end

Materials at <https://github.com/matthew-brett/lis-leadership>.

References

- Hempel, Sandra. 2014. *The Medical Detective: John Snow, Cholera and the Mystery of the Broad Street Pump*. Granta Books.
- Janis, Irving L. 1972. “Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascos.”
- Paneth, Nigel, Peter Vinten-Johansen, Howard Brody, and Michael Rip. 1998. “A Rivalry of Foulness: Official and Unofficial Investigations of the London Cholera Epidemic of 1854.” *American Journal of Public Health* 88 (10): 1545–53.