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**DOES SILENCE DURING STAFF MEETINGS IMPLY CONSENSUS? AN EXAMINATION OF PUBLIC MANAGERS FOR THE CITY OF NEW BRAUNFELS, TEXAS AND THE LEVEL OF GROUPTHINK WITHIN IT**

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EXAMINATION OF PUBLIC MANAGERS FOR THE CITY OF NEW BRAUNFELS,
TEXAS AND THE LEVEL OF GROUPTHINK WITHIN IT

A Master Thesis Capstone
Submitted to the Faculty
of
American Public University
by
Stephen Mark Hanna
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Public Administration
September 2018
American Public University
Charles Town, WV
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife and family, who have shown a tremendous amount of patience and understanding as I have worked through the master’s program. My wife April was supportive throughout this process and I cannot thank her enough. To my daughter Emily, I hope this sets a good example for you to follow. To my parents, Mark and Lynda, thank-you for laying the foundation that made me who I am.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the City Manager’s Office for the City of New Braunfels who were supportive in this endeavor and permitted this study to take place. I thank City Manager Robert Camareno as well as Assistant City Managers Kristi Aday and Brian Woods who showed a tremendous amount of support and excitement throughout this study. I would also like to acknowledge Jose Vargas who helped inspire, encourage, and listened to me over the past three years. I acknowledge and thank all my professors at American Military University, especially Dr. Elizabeth Keavney, who invested time and effort in to my learning journey, and who I one day hope to work with on future research projects. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge and thank my Master Capstone Thesis Project professor, Dr. Erik Dillman, who provided valuable direction and critique to make this a better paper.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

DOES SILENCE DURING STAFF MEETINGS IMPLY CONSENSUS? AN EXAMINATION OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS FOR THE CITY OF NEW BRAUNFELS, TEXAS AND THE LEVEL OF GROUPTHINK WITHIN IT

By

Stephen Mark Hanna

American Public University System, September 2018

Charles Town, West Virginia

Professor Erik Dillman, Ph.D., Thesis Professor

Public managers for local government organizations often meet through regular staff meetings to discuss and decide on how to best implement the public policies enacted by the local legislative body and ways to improve upon the delivery of public goods and services. While at times these staff meetings may involve a crisis, most staff meetings are conducted under normal circumstances where decisions are made that impact how public goods and services will be delivered. The need for innovative and creative ideas should be the purpose of such meetings, but this is often not the case. The purpose of this study was to examine certain groupthink traits that may be inhibiting the expression of innovative and creative ideas so that the executive decision makers would have an expanded knowledge about how to improve on dialogue during staff meetings. This study examined conformity (self-censorship), cohesion, and management styles as groupthink traits and how generational groups reacted to each trait. It also examines how management styles influence the dialogue during a staff meeting, and how communication between managers outside the staff meeting impact the discussions of staff meetings. This study
used public managers from the City of New Braunfels, Texas to assess whether silence during staff meetings implies a consensus in decision-making and if this silence is suppressing the expression of creative and innovative ideas.
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Introduction

Public managers seem reluctant to express or communicate new ideas during staff meetings even as public organizational philosophies shift towards a new openness about the expression of ideas to improve upon the delivery of public goods and services. One challenge to this has been the vertical hierarchical structure of many public organizations that desire horizontal communication between management and practitioner, yet somehow there seems to be little advancement in innovative solutions to public issues (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). One argument for why this is occurring was proposed by Irving L. Janis (1973, p. 22), who suggested that individuals of an organization who had been together for some time had become so cohesive that the decisions coming out of the group lacked critical thought and would result in negative outcomes.

The administration of public policy became a focal point of research studies after President Woodrow Wilson suggested that public administration should be studied as a separate field apart from political institutions. He, along with Frank Goodnow, saw political institutions and the administration of public policy as two separate fields with different roles. This led to the development of the politics-administrative dichotomy, and much of the public administration research that took place during the early 1900s centered around this separation (McCandless & Guy, 2013; Shafritz & Hyde, 2012). As a result, public administration has developed into its own field of study, with research examining how public organizations function and the impact they have on the development of public policy, including how public administrators make decisions regarding policy implementation.

Public organizations that have the most day-to-day interactions and contacts with citizens are local governments such as municipalities and county governments. In the United States,
Thomas Jefferson was one of the first proponents for self-governance at the local level, advocating that local communities and their citizens were better suited for understanding their needs and interests (Box, 2015). City governments have the responsibility of crafting public policies that will provide the necessary public goods and services expected from its citizenry and should include citizen engagement and participation in the policy development process. This allows an exchange of ideas and information that elected representative can use to pass public policy, but also allows public administrators insight to how the public perceives public services should be delivered (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). Public administrators have the responsibility of ensuring that public goods and services are delivered to citizens, and this requires input from both internal and external stakeholders.

The decisions made by public administrators over the implementation of public policy should be inclusive of the ideas garnered from citizen engagement. Public administrators who develop and build positive relationships throughout the community they serve and exercise value-based behaviors within their organization have a much better chance for harnessing innovative and creative ideas (Cropf, 2008). The decisions public administrators make during their work day as to how public goods and services will be delivered are the result of group discussions and interactions, and effective meetings allows for the expression of innovative and creative ideas when conducted where public practitioners feel empowered to speak. It is then an important aspect of public administration for examining the way staff meetings are conducted, and if these staff meeting allow for open dialogue and debate in coming to the best ways to implement public policy.

To better understand the decisions coming from staff meetings about fulfilling the public’s demands for public goods and services, one needs to examine a local government entity
and the perceptions public managers have about the expression of information and ideas during staff meetings. In today’s workforce, there are as many as five generations that are a part of the workforce, and each generation embodies values and norms that are used to characterize that generation (Gibson, Greenwood, & Murphy, 2011). Public managers, those who supervise other public practitioners, can vary in age and experience in the public sector, and this along with generational differences may have an effect on the level of communication that takes place in staff meetings. This study will examine the perceptions public managers have about the interactions and dialogue during and outside of staff meetings, and what role generational differences and groupthink behavior antecedents may have in decreasing the expression of information and ideas.

**Research Questions and Thesis Statement**

The following research questions are the focal points of this study that are believed to have an influence over groupthink behavior within a local government organization that decreases the expression of innovative and creative ideas towards public policy implementation.

Research question 1: What role does generational differences have in lending to groupthink behavior in staff meetings?

Research question 2: Does the type of management style employed during day-to-day operations influence the expression of ideas during a staff meeting?

Research question 3: Do the individual interactions between public managers outside a formal staff meeting impact the dialogue during a staff meeting?

Thesis statement: Groupthink behavior within a local government organization decreases the expression of innovative and creative solutions towards public policy implementation due to
generational differences, management styles, and public managers interactions outside the group setting.

This study will utilize a survey questionnaire that will be sent out to potential participants who are employed by the City of New Braunfels, Texas as public managers or executive leaders within the organization. The survey questionnaire instrument (See Appendix B) will be in the form of an online survey and will commence on August 10, 2018 and will end on August 24, 2018. Participants of this study will be asked to voluntarily provide responses to 29 questions that include demographic questions of gender, age group, length of time in public service, and length of time as a public manager. There is also an inclusive question asking as to whether the participant is a public manager, as this study’s focus is on staff meetings that involve public managers and executive leaders.

The City of New Braunfels, Texas is a mid-sized city in central Texas that is situated in between San Antonio, Texas and Austin, Texas. The City of New Braunfels, Texas has been experiencing rapid growth with an increasing demand upon its services, and this growth requires public managers to have expert knowledge over there area of responsibility and the ability to express creative and innovative ideas over the delivery of public goods and service (Camareno, 2017). With the assistance of the City Manager’s Office for the City of New Braunfels, Texas, this study will help to identify those factors that are contributing in a decrease in the expression of information and ideas among public managers so that practices can be put in place to increase the expression of ideas.

It is expected that public managers remain silent during staff meeting due to a strong desire to conform to the group’s majority and the group leader’s opinion over subject matter. Further contributing to group silence during a staff meeting is the belief that multiple
generational groups in the workforce inhibit the expression of ideas because of generational differences. This aspect of groupthink behavior has not been examined in prior studies. Another aspect that has not been examined to a great extent is how individual interactions outside a formal group setting such as a staff meeting influences the communication during a staff meeting. It is believed that public managers who communicate ideas with one another outside the staff meeting are less likely to express these ideas during a staff meeting.

**Conclusion**

Public administration is a growing field of study that is evolving with society and its growing expectations and demands in the delivery of public goods and services. As these expectations grow and the demands change, public administrator must be able to quickly adapt to their changing environment so that public organizations can meet these challenges head on. Public administrators need to be surrounded by public managers who are willing to engage in open dialogue about current issues and trends in public administration. Regular staff meetings between administrators and public managers is one way that this occurs, yet there seems to be relatively little exchange of innovative and creative ideas which can result in public administrator making decisions that have poor outcomes.

Prior studies have examined the negative outcomes that come from the group decision-making process, and Irving Janis (1973) described this as groupthink behavior. This study utilizes several components of Janis’ groupthink behavior antecedents and applies them to the dialogue of a local governmental agency under normal circumstances versus crisis. Since local governmental agencies have the greatest contact with citizens on a day-in and day-out basis, a municipal government was used to conduct this study. The study is expected to collect data that will demonstrate that silence during staff meeting is due in part to generational differences that
lend to groupthink behavior; is influenced by the type of management style used by public administrators; and increases because of the individual conversations that occur outside of staff meetings.

By identifying the components of groupthink that result in a decrease in the expression of innovative and creative ideas, public administrators can create a plan of action for overcoming group silence and increasing the level of expression and dialogue that should occur during staff meetings. The following is a review of key literature on this topic and will explore administrative and group theory, groupthink and cohesion, generational differences, and management styles in public administration.
Literature Review

Introduction

Early research of public organizations focused on management and processes as a direct result of trying to improve organizational outputs, and thus efficiency became an early value of public administrators who sought to increase productivity through standardized processes (Fry & Raadschelders, 2014; Lee, 2011; Shafritz & Hyde, 2012). This strong focus on efficiency led to a bureaucratic style of management that was at the core of Old Public Administration. As the bureaucratic model of public administration grew, the citizen took a backseat to the procedures that had been put in place, and soon new ideas would emerge on how to best operate a public organization. A New Public Management model was explored that placed more emphasis on providing the necessary public services to the citizens based on business practices in use at the time (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015).

Accountability to the public under the old public administration model was based around the structure of the organization with an emphasis on hierarchical chain of command, but the new public management model of public administration focused on performance measures geared toward process improvement (Dixon & Frolova, 2013). These performance measures were used by public managers to enhance the economic position of public employees through merit raises and other benefits and viewed this as a way to hold public employees accountable for providing quality public service. If public employees failed to meet expectations, public managers could demote or terminate a public employee, essentially negatively impacting an employees’ economic status.

Both the old public administration model and the new public management model employed a hierarchical organizational structure, but the new public management used a
business performance measure model by employing economic benefits to produce higher outputs (Jarvis, 2014). Whereas the old public administration placed high value on efficiency, the new public management desired to be more effective in an efficient manner by doing more with less, yet both were guided by meeting public demands. Both efficiency and efficacy under these two models were driven by the principal-agent theory but did little to include citizen involvement in the ways public service was provided (Anderson, 2009).

As the study of public administration has evolved over time, so have the values that public administrators share in implementing public policies. While efficiency and efficacy have remained core values of public administration, other values have emerged that guide how public administrators conduct daily operations within public organizations, and much of this is driven by having greater citizen involvement. These values include efficacy, transparency, accountability, ethics, responsiveness, and fairness and equity (Box, 2014; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). A new public service framework has emerged that places a stronger emphasis on citizen involvement in the democratic process, and this includes the day-to-day operations of how public policy will be administrated. This new framework calls upon public administrators and public managers to build relationships with citizens, businesses, and other public organizations so that the public service provided to the community is crafted around the community’s true public interests.

What was also becoming more apparent as research advanced in the field of public administration was the social construct of the organization and the role it played in public administration. Social scientist Robert Merton explored the idea of how one’s view of themselves influenced their behavior and led to a self-fulfilling prophecy about their work product, but also how this self-perception and interaction with other co-workers influenced the
organizational culture. When public organizations have strict rules and procedures in place with high expectations for worker outputs, coupled with managers who enforced the expectations, an organizational value of conformity arose that stifled new ideas or the expression of ideas for improving processes (Cropf, 2008). This study will examine the impact generational differences and executive leadership have on the cohesiveness of a group, and how this creates silence during staff meetings. The following is a review of the literature on this topic and can be organized in the following manner: Administrative and Group Theory; Groupthink and Cohesion; Generational Differences; and Management Styles, all discussed here.

**Administrative and Group Theory**

The organizational setting was recognized to be a place where social interaction occurred and thereby became a place where employees developed relationships with each other that created an organizational culture established by the shared values of the individual workers and the organization (Fry & Raadschelders, 2014). Group theorists Mary Parker Follet studied industrial administration from the perspective of how human relationships within an organization influenced the outputs from workers. She believed that an individual’s fulfillment was achieved through social relationships developed within a group, and that a group was a collection of individuals that had a common interest, belief, or value. She viewed an organization as a specialized group that was structured to perform activities, and that to achieve the objectives of an organization required a functional unity of all the smaller groups within the organization (Fry & Raadschelders, 2014, p. 170).

Organizational relationships have an impact on the individual worker’s behavior, and in turn the individual worker’s behavior has an influence on the greater society. Follett observed how an individual’s sense of fulfillment impacted work productivity and focused on the
authoritative side of administration and how a strong centralized hierarchy coupled with mundane tasks inhibited socialization in the workplace, thereby decreasing the sense of fulfillment a worker had (Shafritz & Hyde, 212).

Organizational theory could best be described as a collection of diverse approaches or ideas used to explain the formal and informal relationships within an organization in analyzing how organizations operate and function. These ideas have included scientific management, human relations, values-based, bureaucratic, and the network models just to name a few. Each of these try to explain how the social interactions of the individuals who are part of the organization influence the organization and how the organization influences the individuals by providing a framework for analysis. Each organization will have its own set of values and belief that will dictate how individuals are to behave within the organization, and these can be from formal rules established by the organization or informal rules formed within groups of individuals in the organization. These shared values, formal or informal, are what create the organizational culture (Box, 2015).

One of the complexities of studying public administration is trying to develop a one size fits all notion for how to administrate public policy within a public organization. It is possible to theorize how decisions are made at a macro level, and then apply the theoretical framework at the micro level to institute change or better understand a variable being studied. However, when it comes to understanding the drivers of the decision-making process, it is difficult to formulate a macro level theory that can account for the vast number of variables that a researcher may wish to study (Argyris, 1997). One reason for this is that it is difficult to isolate a dependent and independent variable in the complex world of public administration because the vast number of variables present each have an influence on one another to some degree.
Charles E. Lindblom not only recognized this, but pointed out how values of individuals, organizational values, and political values vary in their level of importance and application in public administration. Many times, these values conflict or compete, making it hard to rationalize how the application of one value in each situation and time may not work in another similar situation in a different place and time. The limited ability of humans to absorb vast amounts of knowledge for use in developing and implementing public policy in a short time frame across a complex social structure further inhibits the applicability of a macro theory of administration that could be used to scientifically study administration (Shafritz & Hyde, 2012).

Instead, Lindblom argued that administration should be studied from the micro-level aspect of how incremental or successive limited comparisons effect policy implementation, which in turn can influence micro-changes in how decisions are made. He designated this viewpoint, that is macro and micro level theory, as the root and branch study methods of administration (Shafritz & Hyde, 2012, p. 160-161). Since the branch method takes place in successive and incremental ways, it is more feasible to study these incremental changes and postulate reasons for such occurrences without having a broad framework that could be applied universally. These successive comparisons, when researched using sound scientific methodologies, add to the general knowledge base even if they do not result in a broad theoretical framework. Lindblom’s “muddling through” is the study of how administrators administrate in a systematic fashion while making incremental changes along the way (Shafritz & Hyde, 2012).

What is instrumental in administrative theory is understanding the motivational needs that drive both workers and managers so that organizational objectives can be met in a productive way. This entails looking at what not only works, but what does not work when it
comes to public management. If executives in public administration fail to acknowledge and redress the multifaceted relationships that take place between managers, workers, and citizens; then the quality of public service could result in a disorganized society that has been excluded from the governance process. Follett understood the circular response that reflects humans interacting with one another and the changes that results as this process continues.

Administration is a continuous process where objectives and situations change, and the exchange of new and creative ideas are an asset for a public organization looking to provide quality public services.

The social construct of a public organization must be examined from an approach that examines how these interactions impact the decision-making process of organizational leaders, namely public managers. Since the exchange of information and ideas take place during staff meetings and individual interactions outside these staff meetings, a better understanding of this process should be garnered through research to improve the knowledge and abilities of public administrators who can use his knowledge to enhance their organization’s ability in developing innovative and creative alternatives to public issues. A group’s decision can have a lasting impact on the type of public goods and services that are delivered to citizens, so the rationale of the group decision-making should be studied.

**Groupthink and Cohesion**

Groupthink was a term first coined by Irving Janis (1973) in the early 1970s as part of a hypothesis for explaining poor decisions made from closely knit groups. The basis of his hypothesis was formed from the examination of several military events that had negative outcomes, including the attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States’ failed strike during the Bay of Pigs, and how the groups that made these decisions had used faulty judgements based on
an assortment of factors associated with group dynamics (Janis, 1973, p. 20). Janis believed that members of a group influenced each another while interacting in a group setting, and that each member’s input during a conversation had the ability to sway another member’s way of thinking (Janis & Field, 1956). This type of persuasion, from one conversation to another, could lead a group to become more cohesive over time and was a principal characteristic in Janis’ groupthink model of concurrence seeking behavior (Janis, 1973).

Janis was not the first to recognize such group dynamics and the influence that individual members had on one another. Mary Parker Follett (2013) pointed out how a conversation between two individuals with two different perspectives influenced their perceptions of a topic and how each approached the next conversation with one another. Every interaction a person has with another person influences the next interaction that is had. When individuals are members of the same group or organization, the interactions that occur over time lead to a more cohesive group that leads to thinking alike (Janis, 1973). It became obvious to Janis (1973) that this tendency to think the same way led to group decisions that had poor outcomes.

While Janis noted the negative outcomes from the poor decisions emanating out of groups, his real focus was on the decision-making process and what steps could be taken to limit negative outcomes from group decision-making. A few of the symptoms identified by Janis as indicative of groupthink behavior were collective rationalization, pressure on any group member who voiced alternative measures, the illusion that the group was in total agreement, and a self-appointed member or group leader who insured certain information did not make it into the group’s discussion (Janis, 1973, p. 21-22). The basic argument portrayed was that the dynamics of the group ultimately led to a concurring seeking behavior so as not to interfere with the
group’s cohesiveness, and that this groupthink behavior did not allow for the flow of diverse and alternative ideas in solving problems.

There have since been several arguments raised against Janis’ proposition of groupthink behavior, with some arguing that even though a group’s decision may not illicit the best course of action, it did not necessarily lead to negative outcomes because other aspects of the problem-solving process corrected the poor decisions of the group (Ahlfinger & Esser, 2001; Welch, 1989; Wray, 2014). Welch (1989) argued that an analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis utilizing a coding system based upon groupthink behavior symptoms did not necessarily produce a reliable instrument for overcoming groupthink behavior, even though many of the groupthink symptoms may be predictors of how decisions get made. The premise being that to understand the decision-making process of any group, one must examine past decisions of the group and the factors that led up to the decision. Most studies prior to 1990, including those done by Janis, have examined incidents that had negative outcomes to posit ways of overcoming poor decision making, but there was limited information about positive outcomes being analyzed from a groupthink behavior perspective.

More recently, a small amount of attention has been placed on testing Janis’ groupthink behavior predictors in lab settings (Chen et al., 2016; Jiang et al., 2016; Katopol, 2015; Rempel & Fisher, 1997; Riccobono, Bruccoleri, & Grössler, 2016). Groupthink behavior concepts originated in the behavioral sciences and has as much to do with human behavior and socialization as it does the decision-making processes. Chen et al. (2016) pointed out the negative connotation that groupthink literature applied to group cohesion and suggested that strong group cohesion viewed in a positive light could be described as group harmony. Yet group harmony within this context relies upon a cohesive group with added social benefits for a
level of loyalty to the group. It was a strong loyalty to the group that Janis (1973) argued would lead to groupthink behavior, yet Chen et al. (2016) found that group harmony can result in positive innovative performance.

Group cohesion describes a certain loyalty to the group, and Janis (1973) viewed this as a symptom of groupthink behavior because it meant that the group believed it had the higher moral ground and saw other groups as potential threats. This becomes an important element when looking at a public organization because of the many departments, or groups, that make up that organization. Each department within a public organization, such as the police and fire department, may be very cohesive with similar beliefs and values, yet view the other as a potential threat in having to compete for public money against each other. The public organization may also be very cohesive and view other public organizations as threats, and this can be a predictor in the decision-making process for both public administrators and department heads.

Martin Rempel and Ronald Fisher (1997) described how group cohesion could be viewed as a social-emotional response or a task-driven response, and that the level of cohesion exhibited through each did have an impact on the decision-making process (p. 218). Groups that were cohesive due to social-emotional responses were more likely to have a strong cohesion that resulted in decisions where outcomes were poor. Task centered cohesion often resulted in group members wanting to perform better for group acceptance and was linked to stronger cohesion when the group was centered around performance (Jiang et al., 2014; Rempel & Fisher, 1997). Public managers often work with one another over several years and develop perceptions about each other and the level of commitment had toward the organization. If the cohesiveness of the
group is based on social-emotional responses more than task-oriented responses, there is a stronger tendency for the group’s decision-making to lead to poor outcomes.

It is also important to realize that members of a group may perceive a threat of job security for failing to go concur with the dominating viewpoint of the group, and this can lead to group members intentionally avoiding conflict during staff meetings. Group members may elect not to voice their viewpoint or even withhold information if not in alignment with the group’s overriding logic (Riccobono et al., 2016). Public managers and administrators often work at the whim of a higher-ranking supervisor or legislative body, and this can instill a sense of having to concur with the leader of the group or at least what the leader has opined. One area of group dynamics that the literature failed to shed light on was the sense of job security group members may have perceived as a potential factor in concurrence seeking behavior.

**Generational Differences**

One demographic factor that several studies evaluated when testing groupthink behavior was the age of the group member. Age appeared to be more of a relevant factor when looking at group cohesiveness as either a social-emotional response or task-oriented response (Baptist, 2017; Chen et al., 2016; Jiang et al., 2016). What was not explored was how different generational groups could influence the level of groupthink behavior exhibited in the decision-making process. There are now five generational groups in the workforce with each generational group having generalized characteristics and commonalities about it that are different from other generational groups (Center for Generational Kinetics, 2016). When a group is composed of members from different generational groups, it may be safe to presume that generational differences will have an impact on the dynamics of the group and thereby influence the decision-making behavior of the group.
The Center for Generational Kinetics (2016) provided a timeline for defining the five different generational groups currently in the workforce. The Traditionalist group is composed of those born prior to 1945, Baby Boomers from 1946 to 1964, Generation X from 1965 to 1976, Millennials from 1977 to 1995, and Centennials from 1996 and later. While these timelines may vary across different studies about generational differences, it is consistent with more recent research on the topic and how generational groups are viewed (Moore, Gruenberg, & Krause, 2015; Twenge, 2017). Generational differences look at the norms, values, and attitudes of each generational group in trying to gain a better understanding of how this impacts that culture of an organization when there are multiple generational groups within it (Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Twenge, 2017).

There are three main cohorts in the workforce, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials (Gibson, Greenwood, & Murphy, 2009; Moore et al., 2015). This does not exclude the fact that many public organizations still employ those in the Traditionalist cohort and are hiring those in the Centennial cohort. Studies about generational differences in the workplace examine a cross section of values, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior amongst the cohorts and how this impacts performance. They also look at the perceptions of individual workers across cohorts and how the organizational culture shifts with cohort diversity (Lyons & Kuron, 2013).

These studies demonstrate that as generational cohorts interact over time, they begin to improve task performance and have a positive outlook on organizational change (Moore et al., 2015). This appears to indicate that group cohesiveness becomes stronger over time, even when there are different generational cohorts within the organization. When age was used to assess cohesiveness, younger subjects were more inclined to base the cohesiveness around socio-emotional needs whereas older subjects tended to find cohesiveness in task-oriented performance.
DOES SILENCE DURING STAFF MEETINGS IMPLY CONSENSUS

measures (Chen et al., 2016). This was also relevant when examining age and self-censorship, as younger subjects were more likely to remain silent in a group meeting (Baptist, 2015).

**Management Styles**

Janis (1973) recognized that dissenting opinions from the group’s tendencies were quelled through group pressure, and that this lack of engagement was part of a broader problem of information sharing that was necessary for a quality decision from the group. As public organizations begin to focus more on citizen participation in the development and implementation of public policy, the information provided must be voiced during regular staff meetings so that a more informed decision can be made. Staff meetings between public managers and executives of the local government organization are vital for the delivery of public services to the local community, and the decisions being made about the day-to-day operations impact the citizen more than any other level of government (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015).

Barry W. Stevenson (2012) recognized that organizations do not just have objectives but are social institutions that have norms and values that can influence any attempt to adopt change (p. 87). Organizational development is centered around the idea that an organization is planning for the future by making necessary changes within the organization’s structure and/or processes through the organizational culture (Abad, 2014). Organizational development must then entail processes and structures that seeks to make an organization more effective through change by recognizing the social and behavioral elements present within the organization (Abad, 2014; Stevenson, 2012).

The culture of an organization has long been perceived to be associated with how an organizational leader develops and enacts expected behaviors through what is demonstrated by the leader’s own actions in meeting organizational goals. Organizational culture centers around
the visible structures and processes of an organization, the espoused beliefs that describe organizational practices and behaviors, and the informal practices that arise from group norms within the organization (Armenakis, Brown, & Mehta, 2011, p. 306). Each organization will have its own set of values and belief that will dictate how individuals are to behave within the organization, and these can be from formal rules established by the organization or informal rules formed within groups of individuals in the organization. These shared values, formal or informal, are what create the organizational culture (Box, 2015).

Organizational management can recognize the need for change, but failure to address the organizational culture through organizational development techniques may inhibit any change from having effective results. Organizational development helps facilitate organizational changes and re-designs but should also include levels of diversity as part of the change. An organization has many different components and systems working in a coordinated effort to achieve objectives, and each component may have its own set of norms and values that should be addressed in organizational development. Organizational members who perceive that their contributions were included during a change are more likely to influence the organizational culture to accept the changes. Organizational development appears to address the informal cultural structure when the formal authoritative structure understands the importance of group behaviors towards change (Stevenson, 2012).

Management carries the connotation of authority and rank, but leadership is the ability to influence others. Managers can have a position of authority within an organization but have little influence with employees. Employees may follow managers because they are required to but will follow a leader because they want to follow. James Kotterman (2006) described the function of managers as controlling processes and solving problems, while stating that leaders
motivate and inspire as they set the direction of the organization (p. 15). Public organizations will have executive leadership that sets the direction of the organization and public managers who ensure that the organization’s mission is carried out.

Organizational leaders and managers have the greatest influence over the organizational culture, and the organizational culture can be viewed as a reflection of the leader (Armenakis et al., 2011; Eide & Allen, 2012; Popa, 2013). As organizational leadership changes, whether through attrition, promotion, or termination, the organizational culture may be resistant to organizational change as the new vision or direction of the organization is viewed as a change away from the accepted values held by organizational members. Organizational members who perceive the current processes to be effective may find that a structural change within the organization may result in new expectations or processes that could affect the member in a negative way, and therefore the organizational culture is resistant to the change.

Public managers then become a focal point for examining how decisions are made in the implementation of public policy, and the type of input or lack thereof that is provided in a group setting. Kelman et al. (2017) examined to what extent subcabinet decision makers at the federal level relied on tenured civil servants for advice in policy implementation, and how the decision maker was able to invite opposing viewpoints. Two aspects of this research, tenure and leadership, play an important role in groupthink but do not necessarily support that this leads to negative outcomes as suggested by Janis.

A group’s formal leader has a strong input on the level of discourse that takes place during a staff meeting and may have already promoted a certain course of action before the meeting even took place. This has been termed as promotional leadership and argues that the preconceived solutions or responses to a problem has been promoted by the leader to the degree
that the group failed to voice any opposition or provide contradictory information (Ahlfinger & Esser, 2001; Knoll & Redman, 2016). What makes trying to assess the level of promotion a group leader has on the direction of dialogue is the willingness of a group leader to acknowledge how their style of management impacts a staff meeting (Eaton, 2001). On the other side of this argument is the leader who places a high value on information sharing and dissenting viewpoints (Kelman, Sanders, & Pandit, 2017; Mintz & Wayne, 2016).

When examining the level of promotion exhibited by a group leader, studies have found that the faster a group comes to a decision the more likely it is that the group leader promoted a course of action (Ahlfinger & Esser, 2001; Eaton, 2001). However, vigilant leaders who expect to have dissenting viewpoints shared within the group may face a level of self-censorship from the group that is not based on the leader’s style of management during a staff meeting. A desire to have active voices during a staff meeting is meet with passive silence, and the group fails to provide alternative solutions to a decision maker to avoid any type of group conflict (Hoefer & Green, 2016). A group’s diversity, which many identify as the best way to have multiple viewpoints, is more likely to spur group conflict even if not displayed through verbal sparring, but the inability of public managers to deal with this conflict leads to poor performance (Shih & Susanto, 2010).

Much of this conflict takes place outside the setting of any staff meeting but creates an air of silence during a meeting that group leaders must overcome (Baptist, 2015; Eaton, 2001). The group’s cohesiveness, as it derives from tenured civil servants in management roles, can develop a group norm not promoted by the group’s leader, such as a department head that has less job protections. The group leader may be the newest member of the group and must face criticism from group members who may not agree with the direction of the leader (Peterson et al., 2003;
Wray, 2014). This conflict with the group leader may lead to group silence, as the operating organizational culture resists the organizational culture the group leader is advocating (Sims & Sauser, 2013).

Janis’ findings about groupthink behavior has been challenged over the past four decades with most arguing that groupthink behavior was not the sole explanation for decisions that produced negative outcomes (Barr & Mintz, 2018; Riccobono, Bruccoleri, & Grössler, 2016). There has been a great deal of research that has examined the effects of groupthink on decisions and the decision-making process, and more recently the notion that groupthink does not produce the negative outcomes expected from cohesive groups; but there appears to be a gap about the causes of groupthink and how managers may influence it (Kelman, Sanders, & Pandit, 2017; Mintz, A., & Wayne, 2016; Riccobono et al., 2016). The research reviewed examined decision-making and group dynamics within executive leadership in the federal government, business sector, and educational settings; but there is little research that examines groupthink at the local level of public administration.

Conclusion

Most of the studies reviewed examined the decision-making process of groups during stressful events or under lab conditions designed to induce stress (Baptist, 2015). Riccobono et al. (2016) wanted to understand how group dynamics influenced groupthink and performance outcomes and found that group behavior was influenced by a desire to avoid conflict to achieve outcomes, even if the outcomes were viewed negatively. This “concurrence seeking behavior” was a focal point of the study and demonstrated that constructive individual input was not provided to avoid group conflict (Riccobono et al., 2016, p. 623). What has not been studied is how the individual interactions of group members outside a staff meeting influenced group
dialogue during meetings that did not involve having to make an immediate decision. This study will be unique because it will explore how generational differences and management styles affect the cohesiveness of the group, and how this relates to self-censorship during staff meetings. The following is an overview of the methodology and theoretical framework that this study will utilize to collect and analyze data over generational differences and management styles in a public organization.
Methodology

Introduction

It is believed that groupthink behavior within a local government organization decreases the expression of innovative and creative ideas about the implementation of public policy during regular staff meetings. Public managers often remain silent during staff meetings, and this level of groupthink behavior may be based on the generational differences among group members, the style of management asserted in a staff meeting, and the individual interactions between public managers that takes place outside of staff meetings. This study seeks to answer the questions of what role generational differences, management styles, and individual interactions have in lending to groupthink behavior that decreases the open expression of ideas. By having a better understanding of what role generational differences and individual interactions have in limiting the expression of ideas, then group leaders may be able to adjust their management style to improve a more open dialogue during staff meetings. This research study examines a local government organization that has experienced silence during regular staff meetings and tries to determine if this is due to generational differences, management styles and/or the individual interactions of group members outside the meeting setting.

Research Questions and Thesis Statement

The following research questions are the focal points of this study that are believed to have an influence over groupthink behavior within a local government organization that decreases the expression of innovative and creative ideas towards public policy implementation.

Research question 1: What role does generational differences have in lending to groupthink behavior in staff meetings?
Research question 2: Does the type of management style employed during day-to-day operations influence the expression of ideas during a staff meeting?

Research question 3: Do the individual interactions between public managers outside a formal staff meeting impact the dialogue during a staff meeting?

Thesis statement: Groupthink behavior within a local government organization decreases the expression of innovative and creative solutions towards public policy implementation due to generational differences, management styles, and public managers interactions outside the group setting.

**Research Design**

This study utilizes a quantitative methods and analysis approach using an online survey that was developed based on research questions used in other studies examining groupthink behavior. The survey questionnaire (See Appendix B) was developed to answer the questions of what role generational differences have in lending to groupthink behavior during staff meetings; how group leaders’ styles of management in day-to-day operations influences the expression of ideas during a staff meeting; and the impact of individual interactions between public managers outside staff meetings impact the dialogue during a meeting.

The survey consists of a total of 29 questions, with five of the survey questions being demographic questions that are related to gender, age group, tenure in public service, and tenure as a public manager. One of the demographic questions is used to qualify the participant as a public manager who supervises people. The age groups were defined around the literature describing the five different generations groups, so that this could be examined more closely as to how generational differences related to groupthink behavior (See Table 1).
Table 1: Generational Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generational Groups</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Baby Boomer</th>
<th>Generation X</th>
<th>Millennial</th>
<th>Centennial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Ranges (Years)</td>
<td>73 and Over</td>
<td>54-72</td>
<td>39-53</td>
<td>24-38</td>
<td>Under 23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data for generational groups from Center for Generational Kinetics (2016).

The remaining 24 questions on the survey are designed to have participants describe their level of agreement with the question using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). These survey questions are centered around group cohesion, self-censorship, and group leadership and are randomly distributed within the survey. Group cohesion questions on the survey include such examples as “I am surrounded by people who share my values” and “I try to avoid conflict during staff meetings”. Self-censorship questions include such examples as “I keep silent about any misgivings during a staff meeting” and “I seldom express my opinions during a staff meeting”. Group leader’s management style questions include such examples as “Meeting leaders express his/her opinion often” and “In a meeting, I am not prevented from challenging the leader or thinking of the majority”. There are six questions that relate to group cohesion, nine questions relating to self-censorship (silence), and nine questions relating to the group leadership. The University’s Institutional Review Board approved the use of the survey instrument (See Appendix A).

Data Collection

The survey questionnaire will be administered through a secure online survey program, Survey Monkey, with the hyperlink to the survey being embedded in an email sent out through the City of New Braunfels, Texas emailer server. The email sent to potential participants includes an explanation of the study and informed them of their right to not participate in the
study. The first page of the survey included a question that ask for voluntary participation, and if one chose to “agree” to participate in the study, it would navigate them to the remaining questions on the survey. If they did not want to participate in the survey, the participant had the option to not click on the hyperlink or to select “disagree” on the first page of the survey. Participants were informed that they did not have to answer a question if they did not want to, and that they could end the survey at any time.

The research participants for this study include public supervisors, managers and executive leaders employed by the City of New Braunfels, Texas. The City of New Braunfels, Texas was chosen based on the researcher’s employment with this public organizations for over 26 years. It has been observed over the past ten years that many of the supervisors fail to engage in productive dialogue during regular staff meetings, but that open discussion about ongoing issues and concerns take place outside these staff meetings. While this observation has primarily revolved around the supervisors of the New Braunfels Police Department, it is believed that this is an organizational phenomenon that is related to groupthink behavior due to the concurrence seeking manifestation that takes place during staff meetings.

The City of New Braunfels, Texas is a mid-sized local government organization located in South Central Texas between the cities of San Antonio and Austin, Texas. It employs over 600 full-time public employees who provide public services to the residents and citizens who live and work in the city. (Camareno, 2018). There are 114 public supervisors, managers, and executive leaders working for the City of New Braunfels, Texas; and this study targets those in positions of leadership and meet on a regular basis to make decisions regarding the types of public service that will be provided to its citizens. The City Manager for New Braunfels, Texas has given his permission for this survey to be administered to the 114 public managers.
For this study, public managers are those who have a leadership position with the City of New Braunfels, Texas and supervise other employees, such as Corporals, Sergeants, or others who have a management role; and include mid-level managers who are tasked with developing policies and overseeing public supervisors. Executive leaders include the City Manager and his assistants, and the various department heads that oversee the operations for their respective department, such as police, fire, parks, and public works.

Participants will be recruited through the email server for the City of New Braunfels, Texas and were only those assigned to the managers/supervisors’ email list established and maintained by the City of New Braunfels, Texas. The City Manager’s Office will disseminate the email through the City’s email server that will describe the study being conducted as well as an electronic consent form. The survey will be conducted over a two-week period starting in early August and should be completed by late August 2018. The target estimate for this study is 60 participants so that a large enough sample can be provided for a more accurate representation of public management for the City of New Braunfels, Texas, with 114 public supervisors, managers, and executives authorized to participate.

**Data Analysis**

The collected data will be stored in a secure manner on an encrypted flash drive and analyzed for a relationship between age groups (generational differences) and groupthink behavior traits (cohesion and self-censorship). A sample t-test will be used to test the differences in means within an age group to the means of each predictor variable (Brown & Hale, 2014). The data will also be analyzed through quantitative methods in the form of correlation analysis to test the significance that management styles have in the expression of ideas. Another correlation analysis will be used to test the significance that individual interactions that public managers
engage in outside of staff meetings has on the expression of ideas. Both should demonstrate the level of relationship that exists between the tested variables if any. A final analysis will ascertain if a relationship exists between the length of time a participant has been a public manager and the groupthink traits used for this study.

By examining the statistical significance between age groups and groupthink behavior traits, a relationship may be identified that demonstrates the level of influence groupthink traits have on each generational grouping or if a relationship even exists between generational groups and groupthink traits. Since it is believed that management styles that are perceived to bring anxiety are more likely to decrease the expression of ideas, there should be a significant statistical finding that management styles increase silence during staff meetings.

It is also believed that the individual interactions between public managers outside the formal staff meetings decreases the expression of ideas during a staff meeting. The perception is that this type of interaction decreases the open exchange of innovative and creative ideas but may not necessarily be related to groupthink behavior even though groupthink traits are exhibited. To test this, a correlation analysis will be utilized to compare a scaled variable composed of items that are related to silence during a meeting against each of the items related to informal meetings of public managers. If there is a relationship between these two variables, there should be a statistically significant finding that demonstrates that the relationship decreases the expression of ideas (Brown & Hale, 2014).

**Theoretical Framework**

This study uses a framework centered around Irving Janis’ (1973) proposed theory of groupthink behavior which posited a five-stage model of group decision-making. The five stages have been described as antecedent, concurrence seeking, symptom experiences, decision-making
defects, and poor decision outcome (Baptist, 2015, p. 5-6). Janis (1973) based his proposition from his analysis of the decision-making process of several military events that had negative outcomes, and from this he developed a theoretical framework that identified several predictors of poor decision-making within a group setting. Janis would coin this as groupthink behavior and identified the predominant characteristics of the group that led to poor decisions.

The first stage of Janis’ five-stage model, the antecedent stage, dealt with the cohesiveness of the group. He argued that groups who had similar values, education, training, and experiences developed close-knit bonds that led to a strong cohesion where group pressure was amplified to bring about group conformity (Baptist, 2015; Eaton, 2001; Janis, 1973; Moussaïd et al., 2018; Rempel & Fisher, 1997). The second stage, concurrence seeking, is the backbone of Janis’ proposition and suggests that even if members of the group disagree with the majority opinion, the high cohesion and avoidance of conflict between group members will lead to those members concurring with the rest of the group (Riccobono et al., 2016).

The third stage, symptoms experiences, describes the eight symptoms of groupthink behavior as group rationalization, conformity, mind guards, biases against other groups, self-censorship, group invulnerability, group morality, and group consensus (Baptist, 2015; Janis, 1973). The fourth stage, decision-making defect, deals with the group’s inability to seek out other alternatives; and the fifth stage is the negative outcome that resulted from the poor decision of the group. This study examines an aspect of the antecedent stage by examining how tenure of public service, generational groups, and tenure of management correlate to the group’s cohesion. This study also examines the third stage symptoms of self-censorship and group consensus and what role generational differences and group leaders have in leading to silence during staff meetings.
This framework is an extension of the earlier ideas and observations of Mary Parker Follet who understood that organizations were groups of individuals with common interests, and that each encounter between the group or individuals of the group changed how decisions were made in the future (Follet, 2013). Follet (2013) also described how situations often dictated how decisions were made, and this became known as the law of the situation. Follet’s position demonstrates that when public managers interact with one another on an individual basis, this interaction changes how each public manager processes information for later encounters, and this could lead to remaining silent during staff meetings to avoid conflict in conforming with group norms. The day-to-day operations of administering public policies are the situations that dictate how a group will come to a decision that one hopes has positive outcomes, but this requires being able to express alternative ideas that may be outside the rationale of the group. This study utilizes both Follet’s and Janis’ framework as a basis for examining how generational differences, group silence, and group leader style are involved in a group’s dialogue between public managers during staff meetings.

**Limitations**

This study is limited by the number of potential participants who may choose not to participate in the study, and the sample size may be too small to ascertain a significant relationship from the data. While this study is based on a single, local government organization, this study is limited in its applicability to other local government organizations because of characteristics not exhibited or displayed in other local government organizations. This study also utilizes only a small number of the groupthink traits identified by Janis as leading to groupthink behavior, so this study is limited in making assumptions about groupthink behavior of public managers employed by the City of New Braunfels, Texas.
Conclusion

This study will use participants from the City of New Braunfels, Texas to provide data that will explore how generational differences, management styles, and individual interactions between public managers affect staff meetings that take place within the City. An online survey questionnaire will be used to collect the data which will be analyzed through a quantitative analysis method. The data will be framed around the concepts and theories posited by Irving Janis regarding groupthink behavior and Mary Parker Follet’s ideas on group dynamics. However, this study only incorporates a small number of the groupthink traits that appear to be more relevant to the City of New Braunfels, Texas; namely group cohesion, self-censorship, and leadership.

Another component that this study attempts to address is the role generational differences has in the expression of ideas during staff meetings, and if there is a significant relationship between public tenure and generational differences as they relate to the limited groupthink traits. After the data is collected over a two-week period, it will be stored on a flash drive for analysis. The following is an analysis of key data to test the thesis and answer key research questions related to generational differences and groupthink behavior, how management styles influence the expression of ideas, and how individual interactions impact group dialogue.
Analysis

The survey questionnaire was sent out on August 10, 2018 and was open for two weeks to give those who wanted to participate the opportunity to respond to the survey questions. The survey was closed on August 24, 2018 and the data was exported into an Excel file that was then imported into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software program, version 25. There were 73 responses to the survey questionnaire, with two of the responses indicating that they did not want to participate in the study. Of the 71 remaining responses, six agreed to take the survey but did not answer any survey questions, so these six responses were eliminated from the analysis. Another six of the respondents answered “No” when asked if they were a public manager, and this survey question was intended to include only those respondents who supervised other employees. These six respondents were also eliminated from the data set for analysis. This meant that 59 survey responses were used to conduct this analysis, in line with what was anticipated.

Descriptive Statistics

Out of the 59 participants in the survey, 10 participants were female (16.9%), 46 participants were male (78.0%), and three participants did not want to disclose their gender (5.1%). The age groups utilized in this survey corresponded to the generational groups talked about in the literature review. With the potential of five generational groups being present in the workforce, only three generational groups were identified as being public managers for the City of New Braunfels, Texas. Two of the participants did not indicate an age group and their information was not used toward the valid percentage of age grouping (See Table 2). The three generational groups represented by the participants were Baby Boomers (17.5%), Generation Xers (66.7%), and Millennials (15.8%).
The two remaining demographic questions in the survey related to the tenure of the participants as public practitioners and as public managers. The length of time that participants had in public service was grouped by years of service. Those with less than one year (1.7%), those with one to five years (5.1%), those with six to 10 years (16.9%), those with 11 to 20 years (30.5%), and those with over 20 years of public service (45.8%) (See Table 3). The length of time that participants had been public managers was also grouped by years, being categorized as less than one year (3.4%), one to five years (8.6%), six to 10 years (31.0%), and 10 years or longer (56.9%) (See Table 4). One participant did not respond to this question and was not included in the calculation for public manager tenure.
Table 4: Public Manager Time Frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure as Public Manager</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid Less than one year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 5 Years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 -10 Years</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Years or more</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>98.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing System</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Data for public manager time frequencies from IBM Corp. SPSS Statistics (2017).*

The collected data and analysis of this data were calculated using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). A correlation analysis was used to determine the Pearson’s correlation between Public Service Tenure and Public Manager Tenure through a two-tailed Sig test using mean and standard deviation. It showed that the Pearson correlation was 0.665 and was significant at the $p<0.01$ level (2-tailed). Public Service Tenure over 10 years accounted for 76.3 percent of the participants, while Public Manager Tenure over 10 years accounted for 56.9 percent of the participants. It is logical to assume that one would have to spend a longer amount of time as a public practitioner before being promoted to a public manager, and seeing that the Pearson correlation factor is 0.665, demonstrates that there is a significant correlation between the two groups.

A descriptive analysis was then conducted on each of the 24 survey questions that had been coded as one through five based on the responses received, and these were designated as the independent variables for this study. The coding was represented from one being “Strongly Disagree” through five “Strongly Agree”. Each of the 24 items was provided a short label within the SPSS software to make it easier to identify (See Appendix C). The initial analysis of all 24 items was based on the mean, standard deviation, and variance with $N=59$. For full statistical
analysis report (See Appendix D). A one-sample t-test was then conducted on each of the 24 survey questions using the test value of 3 at the 95 percent confidence interval, and this was done so that the results could be assessed as to where or not they would fall along a normal distribution. The test value of 3 was used at this was assumed to be the mean within a normal distribution of responses to each of the survey questions. Survey questions that did not have a significance level below $p < .05$ (2-tailed) were identified but not automatically excluded from being used.

The survey question “Supervisors treat each other with respect” had a significance level of 0.17; “Executive leadership and managers trust each other” had a significance level of 0.303; and “Staff meeting are conducted efficiently had a significance level of 0.114. There were five survey questions that had a level of significance greater than 0.5 (Questions 11, 15, 18, 23, and 27). One explanation for such a low level of significance for these questions may be the test value used for each question, as each could have a test value slightly higher or lower than the assumed value for normal distribution.

**Estimates of Reliability and Factor Analysis**

Four scales were developed from the 24 coded survey questions and designated as the independent variables that would be used for statistical analysis. The scales were titled *Cohesion* (2 items), *Conformity* (8 items), *Management Style* (10 items), and *Outside Meetings* (4 items). The *Conformity* scale composite variable was self-censorship, and the *Management Style* scale had two composite variables, open leadership and closed leadership. The *Outside Meeting* scale utilized survey questions that were designed to capture the interactions amongst public managers that take place outside the formal group setting and will be used to measure its impact on group dialogue.
Cronbach’s alpha coefficient reliability estimates were conducted on each of the four scales using SPSS. An alpha coefficient of 0.70 is considered acceptable in the social sciences, and alpha coefficient scores above 0.90 are considered excellent. Items that are redundant, or similarly worded, are more likely to have the same internal consistency and therefore be more reliable (DeVellis, 2003). In conjunction with the estimates of reliability, a factor analysis was used to reduce the items used within a scale so that there was one predominant factor that the scale explained when being used for analysis. Factor analysis helps determine goodness of fit of the items being used within a scale and can assist in determining which items to retain for use in the scale (Costello & Osbourne, 2005).

This study used an initial solution of a correlation matrix by pulling out the item coefficients, examining the significance levels, and running a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test for sampling accuracy and a Bartlett test for sphericity. The KMO needed to be above .80 and the Bartlett significant to be able to make assumptions using the factor analysis (Baptist, 2015). The extraction method used was the principal component analysis based on a correlation matrix having an eigenvalue greater than one, but many have argued that this is not always the best method for reducing factors, so a scree plot was also used (Costello & Osbourne, 2005). A varimax rotation was used to simplify the data if more than one component was identified, but factors that had correlations along a single component did not need to be rotated.

Small sample sizes used to collect data can have an impact on a factor analysis, but many research studies have used a subject to item ratio of 5:1 or less and have been able to make assumption about their data analysis (Costello & Osbourne, 2005). This study has a subject to item ratio just above 2:1 and is comparable to other studies that have used such a small ratio.
The *Cohesion* scale of two items produced an alpha coefficient reliability score of .50, which is well below the acceptable levels of reliability in the social sciences, but it can still be used to make assumptions when dealing with small sample populations (DeVellis, 2003). The *Cohesion* scale included the two items “Supervisors treat each other with respect” and “I am surrounded by people who share my values.” These two questions were derived from a previous study of predictor variables for groupthink symptoms that had found these two items to be linked to strong cohesive measurements for groupthink behavior, but the participants in that study responded to these questions while under stress in a decision-making group exercise (Baptist, 2015). The item “I am respected by other managers outside of meetings” is closely worded to an item used for this scale but was placed in the *Outside Meetings* scale.

Since there were only two items for the *Cohesion* scale, a bivariate correlation test was conducted and found that The Pearson’s correlation coefficient was .353 and significant at the p<.01 level (2-tailed). While significant, it did not reach the minimally acceptable level of correlation to be retained. For this study, the *Cohesion* factor was reduced to one item to measure the impact cohesion has along generational differences, but it is recognized that this cannot provide a valid measure of cohesion for groupthink behavior within a larger population. It will be used to make assumptions about the cohesion antecedent of groupthink behavior within the City of New Braunfels.

The *Conformity* scale of eight items produced an alpha coefficient reliability score of .733 and showed that the item “I assume that members who remain silent during a meeting are in agreement with the majority” had a negative correlation with all other items in the scale. When this item is removed from the scale, the scale then has an alpha coefficient reliability score of .821. While this item was chosen from a different study about groupthink behavior and was used
as a predictor variable to groupthink behavior, it did not fit within this study as reliable and was therefore removed from the scale.

A factor analysis was conducted using the remaining seven items of the Conformity scale and a two-factor component emerged with a KMO coefficient of .761 with a significant Bartlett test of sphericity. The item “I seldom voice disagreement with what someone else said during a meeting” had the lowest value for component one and the highest value for component two. It was removed from the scale and another factor analysis conducted. The second factor analysis yielded a single component with a KMO coefficient of .807 and a significant Bartlett test of sphericity. The Conformity scale was reduced to six items to be used for testing.

The Management Styles scale of ten items produced a Cronbach alpha coefficient reliability score of .847 which is a very good alpha score. The alpha coefficient would have changed very little if any item was removed from the test, so all ten items were retained. A factor analysis was completed using a correlation matrix and a principal component extraction method. The KMO coefficient was .801 with a significant Bartlett’s test of sphericity. Three principal components were extracted with component one, designated as Open Leadership, having an eigenvalue of 4.285 and accounting for 42.85 percent of the variance. The other two principal components each had an eigenvalue just over one with each accounting for just over 11 percent of the variance. The scree plot supported one principal component, with only item scoring under .400, that being the item “Meeting leaders express his/her opinion often.”

The Open Leadership subscale of nine items produced a Cronbach alpha coefficient reliability score of .858 which is a very good alpha score for this subscale. The remaining item that scored below .400 but scored above .600 on the second extracted component of the analysis was designated as Closed Leadership and was left as an independent variable. Previous studies
of groupthink antecedents that examined the closed leadership style using this item had found that it was a strong indicator of groupthink behavior (Ahlfinger & Esser, 2001; Baptist, 2015; Flitcraft, 2015). The use of a single variable to analyze an antecedent is not recommended but will be used for this study to make assumptions about closed leadership within the City of New Braunfels, Texas.

The Outside of Meeting scale was created to assess the amount of dialogue that took place outside the formal staff meeting setting and is not a symptom or antecedent of groupthink behavior. The Outside of Meeting scale produced an alpha coefficient of reliability of .258, with an improvement of the alpha coefficient to .360 when the item “I am respected by other managers outside of meetings” was deleted from the scale. Neither alpha coefficient was within the acceptable level and fell well below .650 that has been used as a minimum level for drawing conclusions for small sample populations (DeVellis, 2003). The fact that the Outside Meeting scale had a low level of reliability, the scale was eliminated, and the three items would be used independently to examine how they related to generational differences and public manager tenure. Table 3 displays the five scaled variables used in the survey along with the corresponding Cronbach alpha coefficient of reliability of the scale.

Research Question 1

To answer the question of what role generational differences have in lending to groupthink behavior, a student $t$-test will be used to compare the means within each age group to that of the groupthink traits identified in the above analysis. The $t$-test requires a test value to be used to compare against, and assumptions can be made against the findings. The test value of 3 was used for this assessment because 3 was used as the coded numeric for a response that neither
agreed nor disagreed to the survey item. If a groupthink behavior trait was present within the sample, the mean response should be above 3.

The first one-sample $t$-test conducted compared the response about shared values, indicative of group cohesion, to that between the age groups (See Figure 1). Each generational group has a “shared value” mean above 3, indicating that each age group believes that they share the same values as others within their group. Each generational group had a $t$-test that was $p < .05$ indicating a statistical significance. There were greater perceptions of shared values from Generation X with a stronger statistical significance than the other two generational groups.

**Figure 1: Shared Values One-Sample Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24 - 38</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>.667</td>
<td>.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 - 53</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.916</td>
<td>.149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54 - 72</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.738</td>
<td>.233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next $t$-test conducted compared the responses to the composite variable of *Conformity*, to that between generational groups (See Figure 2). The composite variable of the Conformity scale used was self-censorship, an antecedent of groupthink behavior. The results generated from the conformity sample $t$-test with each of the generational groups having a mean below the numeric value of 3, indicating that each generational group leaned more towards disagreeing that self-censorship was occurring during staff meetings. This finding was
DOES SILENCE DURING STAFF MEETINGS IMPLY CONSENSUS

statistically significant at $p < .05$ across the generational groups, with the Millennial generation disagreeing more about self-censorship taking place than other generational groups. The Millennial generation also had a stronger statistical significance at $p < .001$.

**Figure 2: Conformity One-Sample Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Conformity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24 - 38</td>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.3519</td>
<td>.50308</td>
<td>.16769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 - 53</td>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2.7325</td>
<td>.79463</td>
<td>.12891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54 - 72</td>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.3833</td>
<td>.82421</td>
<td>.26064</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conformity One-Sample Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Test Value = 3</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 - 38</td>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>-3.865</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>-.64815</td>
<td>-1.0348 -2.614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 - 53</td>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>-2.075</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>-.26754</td>
<td>-.5287 -.0064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54 - 72</td>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>-2.366</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>-.61667</td>
<td>-1.2063 -.0271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Data for shared values one-sample test obtained from IBM Corp. SPSS Statistics (2017).

The final $t$-test that was conducted used the variable most aligned with closed leadership, often referred to in groupthink literature as promotional leadership. Promotional leadership is an antecedent of groupthink behavior, and while one item that addresses this antecedent is not enough to take a strong position, it can be used to make assumptions of promotional leadership as it relates to public managers at the City of New Braunfels, Texas. The item “Meeting leaders express his/her opinion often” was compared to the different generational groups. The results generated from the leader opinion one-sample $t$-test showed each generational group leaning towards agreement that meeting leaders often express his/her opinion often (See Figure 3). However, while Millennials and Generation Xers have a statistically significant finding at $p < .01$, there is not a statistical significance for the Baby Boomers.
Research Question 2

To address the research question about the role management style has on the expression of ideas during a staff meeting, the survey instrument was reevaluated for items that related to remaining silent during a meeting. Several items were identified and placed in a scale that was then tested for reliability. The scale was readjusted as tests were conducted to eliminate those items that lowered the reliability of the scale, and three items were finally chosen that had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of reliability of .792. These three items were “Silent Opinion”, “Silent on Misgivings”, and “Fear of Job Loss” and was named the Meeting Silence scale. These three items had also been used to construct the Conformity scale. To assess the relationship between management styles and the expression of ideas, a correlation analysis was conducted using the Open Leadership scale, the “Leader Opinion” item, the Meeting Silence scale, and the Conformity scale. It was anticipated that the Conformity and Meeting Silence variables would have a strong correlation based on having some of the same items but were used to examine the contrast between leadership styles.

Figure 3: Leader Opinion One-Sample Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Leader Opinion</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24 - 38</td>
<td>Leader Opinion</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>.441</td>
<td>.147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 - 53</td>
<td>Leader Opinion</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.950</td>
<td>.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54 - 72</td>
<td>Leader Opinion</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.080</td>
<td>.342</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data for leader opinion one-sample test obtained from IBM Corp. SPSS Statistics (2017).
The results of the analysis showed a small correlation between the two management styles of leader opinion, representative of closed leadership, and open leadership (See Figure 4). The correlation between a closed leadership style (Leader Opinion) and Meeting Silence was a Pearson coefficient of \( -0.278 \) at \( p < 0.05 \) (2-tailed) demonstrating that there is a small negative correlation relationship between Meeting Silence and a leader expressing their opinion often during a meeting. The correlation between Open Leadership and Meeting Silence was also a negative correlation that was greater than had between a leader’s expression of opinion and meeting silence. The Open Leadership/Meeting Silence Pearson correlation coefficient was \( -0.570 \) at with a strong significance level at \( p < 0.01 \) (2-tailed).

**Figure 4: Management Style/Meeting Silence Correlations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Style/Meeting Silence Correlations</th>
<th>Leader Opinion</th>
<th>Open Leadership</th>
<th>Conformity</th>
<th>Meeting Silence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leader Opinion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pearson Correlation</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.218</td>
<td>-0.201</td>
<td>-0.278*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig. (2-tailed)</strong></td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sum of Squares and Cross-products</strong></td>
<td>46.712</td>
<td>8.527</td>
<td>-7.907</td>
<td>-12.695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Covariance</strong></td>
<td>0.805</td>
<td>0.147</td>
<td>-0.136</td>
<td>-0.219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open Leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pearson Correlation</strong></td>
<td>0.218</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.632**</td>
<td>-0.570**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig. (2-tailed)</strong></td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sum of Squares and Cross-products</strong></td>
<td>8.527</td>
<td>32.819</td>
<td>-20.894</td>
<td>-21.811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Covariance</strong></td>
<td>0.147</td>
<td>0.566</td>
<td>-0.360</td>
<td>-0.376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conformity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pearson Correlation</strong></td>
<td>-0.201</td>
<td>-0.632**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.923**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig. (2-tailed)</strong></td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sum of Squares and Cross-products</strong></td>
<td>-7.907</td>
<td>-20.894</td>
<td>33.272</td>
<td>35.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Covariance</strong></td>
<td>-0.136</td>
<td>-0.360</td>
<td>0.574</td>
<td>0.614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meeting Silence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pearson Correlation</strong></td>
<td>-0.278*</td>
<td>-0.570**</td>
<td>0.923**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig. (2-tailed)</strong></td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sum of Squares and Cross-products</strong></td>
<td>-12.695</td>
<td>-21.811</td>
<td>35.588</td>
<td>44.670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Covariance</strong></td>
<td>-0.219</td>
<td>-0.376</td>
<td>0.614</td>
<td>0.770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: Data for management style/meeting silence correlations obtained from IBM Corp. SPSS Statistics (2017).
This would seem to indicate that that the expression of ideas during a staff meeting is not affected much even when a leader expresses his/her opinion often. When a group leader has an open leadership style, there is even greater movement away from groupthink behavior traits and a willingness to be more expressive with ideas during a meeting. This is also supported by comparing group conformity to open leadership, as there is a stronger correlation away from conformity than just remaining silent during a meeting when leaders encourage openness.

Research Question 3

It becomes a bit more complicated to measure the impact that individual conversations between managers outside of staff meetings have on the dialogue during a staff meeting due to the construction of the survey instrument. Three of the survey items specifically address communication between managers outside a staff meeting, but an earlier analysis of the data did not show a reliable coefficient between the three items. The other issue is having a narrower scope of whether these interactions impacted group dialogue or if it was based on a groupthink antecedent such as conformity, leadership, etc. This would have been better advanced through a survey interview instrument or focus group that asked directly how ideas were exchanged outside a staff meeting and if these ideas were discussed during a subsequent staff meeting.

To have at minimum some general understanding of the relationship between outside meetings and group discussion, another scale was developed to address the lack of dialogue during a meeting based on the items present within the survey instrument. The Closed Dialogue scale was developed that started off with seven items (all but one was in the Conformity scale) and a Cronbach alpha coefficient of reliability of .667 was achieved. When the item “Silent Agreement with Majority” was removed, and alpha coefficient of .787 was achieved. The only
difference between this scale and the Conformity scale was that the item “Conflict Avoidance” was removed.

The Closed Dialogue scale was converted into its own variable and then used in the correlation matrix used to examine the relationship between it and the three survey items that addressed manager communication outside of staff meetings. These items had been labeled as communicates ideas, comfortable speaking, and sharing ideas. Communicates ideas refers to the item “I communicate ideas with other managers outside staff meetings”; comfortable speaking refers to the item “I feel more comfortable speaking to other managers about my ideas outside of staff meetings”; and sharing ideas refers to the item “More information and/or ideas are shared with individual managers after a staff meeting has concluded”.

The results of the analysis showed a correlation between each of the listed items, but this study is interested in the correlations between Closed Dialogue and the three items of communication outside of staff meetings (See Figure 5). The results show that there is a

**Figure 5: Outside Meetings/Staff Meeting Correlations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Closed Dialogue</th>
<th>Communicate Ideas</th>
<th>Comfortable Speaking</th>
<th>Sharing Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Closed Dialogue</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.388*</td>
<td>.555**</td>
<td>.310*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communicate Ideas</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.388**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>-.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.914</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comfortable Speaking</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.555**</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.476**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.914</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sharing Ideas</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.310*</td>
<td>-.075</td>
<td>.476**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.574</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

*Note:* Data for outside meetings/staff meetings correlations obtained from IBM Corp. SPSS Statistics (2017).
negative correlation between Closed Dialogue and communicates ideas with a Pearson’s coefficient of -.388 with a strong significance level at $p < .01$ (2-tailed). This translates into the idea that public managers who communicate ideas with each other outside a staff meeting are more inclined to discuss these ideas during a staff meeting.

The other two results produced a different finding than the one just mentioned. The correlation between Closed Dialogue and comfortable speaking produced a Pearson’s coefficient of .555 with a strong significance level at $p < .01$ (2-tailed). This translates into the idea that public managers who are more comfortable speaking about their ideas outside of staff meetings are less inclined to speak about their ideas during a staff meeting. The correlation between Closed Dialogue and sharing ideas produced a Pearson’s coefficient of .310 and was significant at the level $p < .05$ (2-tailed). The translates into the idea that public managers who share information and/or ideas after a staff meeting has concluded are less likely to speak about their ideas during a staff meeting.

An examination of the frequency for each item that addressed public managers communicating outside a staff meeting showed that 89.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they communicated ideas with other managers outside of staff meetings, 57.6 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more comfortable speaking about their ideas outside a staff meeting, and 57.7 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they engaged in conversations after a staff meeting. Most public managers for the City of New Braunfels, Texas communicate or express ideas outside of staff meetings, but this information is not being communicated during a staff meeting.
Public Managers Tenure and Groupthink

An additional analysis was conducted to assess the role that public manager tenure has toward groupthink traits. For this analysis a sample $t$-test was used to compare the means of each groupthink variable utilized for the generational group’s analysis to the grouped tenure of public managers. There were four groups of tenure years that include less than one year, one to five years, six to ten years, and ten years or longer. Since the $t$-test requires a specified value to be compared against the variables, the test value of 3 was used for this assessment because it was coded as a value for being neutral, neither agreeing or disagreeing with the survey item. A mean score above 3 would be indicative of the presence of a groupthink trait.

Instead of conducting individual $t$-test for each variable, the public manager tenure data was split and each of the four groupthink variables listed as the variable to be tested using a sample $t$-test (See Figure 6). The results of the sample $t$-test, which also provided the means that were used to conduct the analysis, had a small sample for those who had been a public manager for less than a year, and therefore the statistical analysis was not significant. Each of the public tenured groups had a $t$-test result that was left-tailed when tested against the Conformity scaled variable, but this was only significant at the $p < .05$ for those who had been public managers 10 years or longer. The Open Leadership scaled variable was right-tailed for each of the tenured years groups, but there was no statistical significance in the data. Both the Cohesion and Closed Leadership variables were composed of one item each, with Cohesion having the most significance for those who had been public managers for six to ten years (at the $p < .01$ level) and Closed Leadership having significance for public managers with six to ten years ($p < .01$ level) and 10 years or longer ($p < .05$ level).
Based on the data collected for public manager tenure, public managers for the City of New Braunfels, Texas with six to ten years as a public manager are more likely to experience group cohesiveness than other public manager tenured groups. Public managers within the City of New Braunfels, Texas who have 10 years or longer as a public manager are less likely to have
group conformity, indicating that more tenured public managers are not as easily pressured to go along with the group. While not statistically significant, those with one to five years as a public manager are more likely to respond to open leadership during a staff meeting than other tenured groups, but also perceive that group leaders voice their opinion often during a staff meeting. The following is the findings and conclusion of this study and what was learned through this analysis.
Findings and Conclusion

The City of New Braunfels, Texas employs around 114 public managers who are responsible for ensuring that the day-to-day operations of the City are carried out. The survey questionnaire was emailed to these 114 managers and 73 at least started to take the survey. It was discovered through the survey instrument and discussions with department heads that there are public managers employed by the City who do not actually supervise people, and as a result data was utilized from a total of 59 respondents. This is still more than a 50 percent return rate and allows for assumptions to be made about public managers for the City of New Braunfels, Texas.

It was believed that groupthink antecedents would be different across generational groups, but it was discovered that the three generational groups found to be public managers for the City of New Braunfels, Texas were similar in their distinctions for shared values (cohesion), conformity, and closed leadership (leader expressing opinion often). What was surprising was that group conformity was not a groupthink antecedent for public managers across all generational groups, and therefore group conformity does not present itself as a factor to groupthink behavior for public managers with the City of New Braunfels, Texas. This does fall in line with other studies that have found that groups having to make critical decisions under stress do not always conform to the group’s thinking when considering alternatives (Ahlfinger & Esser, 2001; Park, 2000).

Each of the generational groups did perceive that the group leader of a staff meeting tended to express his/her opinion often, and this was most notable for the Millennial generation. However, this perception does not appear to be predictive of groupthink tendencies for public managers with the City of New Braunfels, Texas as it does not inhibit public managers from
expressing their ideas during a meeting. This is supported in the findings of a study about groupthink tendencies that asked who executives relied upon for information when coming to a decision, and staff was one of the higher responses (Kelman et al., 2017). So even though group leaders are expressing their opinions often, they are also relying on group members to provide then with information for making a more informed decision.

Like generational groups was the findings that public manager tenure had toward groupthink tendencies. Public managers in the six to ten years range as manager were more likely to be cohesive while public managers with more than ten years as a manager were less likely to feel pressured to agree with the group. As the Millennial generation continues to take over the workforce and by default the role of public manager, it could be important to understand how their experience as public managers changes their willingness to express ideas during a staff meeting.

Management style was believed to have an important impact as to why public managers remained silent during a staff meeting, yet the data did not support this claim and demonstrated that public managers experiencing either a closed or open leadership style still felt that they could express their ideas. It was evident that an open leadership style was more conducive to the expression of ideas during a staff meeting, but silence during a staff meeting was not prompted by management style. While promotional leadership (closed leadership) has been found to be a strong indicator of groupthink tendencies, this study did not find that groupthink traits were promoted by closed leadership (Ahlfinger & Esser, 2001).

The analysis of individual manager interaction outside of regular staff meeting may have produced the most enlightening information regarding silence during a staff meeting. Public managers who spoke about ideas outside of regular staff meeting were more likely to speak
about these ideas during a staff meeting. This correlation could be based on the exchange of information and ideas from subordinate personnel that are then presented in a staff meeting with executive leadership. This study did not address this topic in a manner that allows for such an assumption, but when compared to how comfortable public managers felt in speaking to other managers outside of meetings, the data indicated that public managers under these conditions were less likely to speak up during a staff meeting.

Public managers may not have agreed with the group’s decisions during a staff meeting and voiced their opinions and ideas outside the meeting where they felt more comfortable; yet when attending another staff meeting they were more inclined to remain silent than to express their ideas or alternatives. Remaining silent during a meeting did not inhibit public managers from talking about it after the meeting was over, yet any ideas or alternatives discussed after a staff meeting were less likely to be brought up in subsequent staff meetings. What was clear from the items addressing communication outside of staff meeting was that most agreed or strongly agreed that this communication took place. The important aspect of this is for executive leadership to determine what approach or method could be employed to have this open exchange of ideas during a staff meeting and not just outside formal meetings. This study realizes that while the exchange of ideas and information may not be taking place in staff meetings, the silence experienced during staff meeting does not imply that there is a consensus from public managers.

**Practical Implications**

Executive leadership for the City of New Braunfels, Texas can benefit from this study by being able to utilize the information discovered through this study. While this study was limited in that amount and type of information collected, it can provide executives with a framework to
improve the exchange of ideas and information during staff meetings. This study was not intended to make assumptions about other local government organizations, but to assess certain conditions within the City of New Braunfels, Texas over groupthink attributes.

**Limitations**

This study was limited by type of survey instrument used to measure the data collected and would have gathered better information had it been used in conjunction with an interview questionnaire or focus groups composed of public managers and executive leadership. It was also limited in the number of groupthink antecedents it studied and lacked the needed number of items for proper scaling of antecedents that were used in the analysis. This study did not inquire as to how long each participant had been with the City of New Braunfels, Texas or how long they had been a public manager for the City. It is possible that participants have only worked for the City for a short period of time and have gained their public service experience at other organizations. This could have been an important assessment over group cohesion since the longer a group has been together the more likely it is to be cohesive (Janis, 1973).

**Future Research**

This study utilized groupthink antecedents as potential factors for the decreased expression of ideas during staff meetings and did not fully examine the impact of group dynamics that emerged from individual encounters outside group settings. It was discovered that these individual encounters between public managers led to a level of silence during staff meetings so that potential innovative and creative ideas were not expressed. Future studies could take a more in depth look at how these individual encounters influence silence within a group setting, and if there is any relationship between groupthink behavior and individual encounters. This would require both a qualitative and quantitative methods approach in collecting data, as a
combination of personal interviews, focus groups, and survey questionnaires could be used more effectively to study how individual differences effect group dynamics especially within local government organizations.

Conclusion

Local government organizations rely upon executive leaders, public managers, and public practitioners for the delivery of public goods and services and expect that the public policies passed by the governing body will be implemented with efficiency, efficacy, equity, and responsiveness. To complete this task requires the exchange of ideas and information amongst public practitioners, public managers, executive leaders, council persons, and citizens. With the responsibility of public service falling squarely on public practitioners, it becomes an even greater responsibility of public managers and executive leaders to have an open exchange of innovative and creative ideas. This should not be done only outside the formal staff meetings held on a regular basis, but during staff meeting when healthy debate can elicit the best ideas. If public managers feel more comfortable communicating ideas outside the setting of a formal staff meeting, it may be necessary to change the environmental setting to one that is more conducive to open dialogue. Great ideas are most likely talked about outside the regular staff meeting, now they need to be talked about during a staff meeting.
References


Sims, R. R., & Sauser, W. I. (2013). Toward a better understanding of the relationships among received wisdom, groupthink, and organizational ethical culture. *Journal of Management*


Appendix A

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Application Number: 2018-120

Application Title: Does silence during group meetings imply consensus? An examination of public managers/administrators for the City of New Braunfels and the level of groupthink within it.

07/03/2018
Dear stephen hanna2,

The APUS IRB has reviewed and approved the above application as Exempt from further review.
Date of IRB approval: 07/03/2018
Date of IRB approval expiration: 07/02/2023

The approval is valid for five calendar years from the date of approval. Should your research using human subjects extend beyond the time covered by this approval, you will need to submit an extension request form to the IRB.

Changes in the research design (e.g., recruitment process, advertisements) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented. If the revised research design is no longer Exempt, then the IRB committee will need to review the application and issue a new approval.

It is the responsibility of the investigators to report to the IRB any serious, unexpected, and related adverse events and potential unanticipated problems related to risks to subjects and others using the unanticipated problems notification.

Please direct any question to apus-irb@apus.edu. The forms mentioned above are available at http://www.apus.edu/community-scholars/institutional-review-board/apply.htm.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Appendix B

* 1. By selecting DISAGREE, you do not wish to participate in the research study, and may exit your browser.

By selecting AGREE, you consent that:

- You have read and understand the information above regarding this study;
- You are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study and understand that you can opt out at any time without penalty; and
- You are at least 18 years of age.

☐ Disagree
☐ Agree

2. Groupthink Survey

2. Are you a public manager (supervise other people)?

☐ Yes
☐ No

3. How long have you been a public manager?

☐ Less than one year
☐ One year to five years
☐ Six to ten years
☐ Ten years or longer

4. Communication between managers and executive leaders (Department heads and higher) is good in my organization.

☐ Strongly Disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly Agree
s5Supervisors treat each other with respect.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Executive Leadership (Department heads and higher) and managers trust each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. I am surrounded by people who share my values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither disagree nor agree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Staff meetings are conducted efficiently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Executive leaders (Department heads or higher) listen to managers' opinions when making decisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. I am respected by other managers outside of meetings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. I look forward to attending staff meetings.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

12. I communicate ideas with other managers outside staff meetings.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

13. During a meeting, I feel pressured to agree with the group's decision.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

14. I seldom express my opinions during a staff meeting.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

15. I assume that members who remain silent during a meeting are in agreement with the majority.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

16. I keep silent about any misgivings during a staff meeting.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

17. In a meeting, I am not prevented from challenging the leader or thinking of the majority.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

18. I feel empowered to question the rationale of the majority during a meeting.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

19. I feel more comfortable speaking to other managers about my ideas outside of staff meetings.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

20. I feel fear or anxiety over expressing my opinion during a staff meeting.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

21. Meeting leaders express his/her opinion often.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

22. During a meeting, the meeting's leader encourages others to express their own ideas.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
23. I seldom voice disagreement with what someone else said during a meeting.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

24. I feel encouraged to bring up contrary information after a decision has been made in a staff meeting.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

25. More information and/or ideas are shared with individual managers after a staff meeting has concluded.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

26. I fear my job may be in jeopardy if I express my opinion during a staff meeting.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

27. I try to avoid conflict during staff meetings.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

28. How long have you worked in public service?
   - Less than one year
   - One to five years
   - Six to ten years
   - Eleven to twenty years
29. What age group are you in?
- Under 23
- 24-38
- 39-53
- 54-72
- Over 73

30. What is your gender?
- Female
- Male
- Other
  - Do not wish to disclose
Appendix C

Label for SPSS Software

V1 Good Manager Communication – Communication between manager and Execs is good.
V2 Respect - Supervisors treat each other with respect
V3 Trust – Execs and managers trust each other
V4 Shared Values – I am surrounded by people who share my values
V5 Efficient Meetings – Staff meeting are conducted efficiently
V6 Listen to Opinions – Execs listen to managers’ opinions
V7 Manager Respect – I am respected by other managers outside staff meetings
V8 Anticipation – I look forward to attending staff meetings
V9 Communicate Ideas – I communicate ideas with managers outside staff meetings
V10 Pressure to Agree – During a meeting I feel pressured to agree with group’s decision
V11 Silent Opinion – I seldom express my opinion during a staff meeting
V12 Silent Agreement with Majority – I assume that members who remain silent are in agree..
V13 Silent on Misgivings – I keep silent about any misgivings during a staff meeting
V14 Challenging Majority – In a meeting, I am not prevented from challenging the leader
V15 Empowered to Question – I feel empowered to question the rationale of majority
V16 Comfortable Speaking – I feel more comfortable speaking to managers outside of …
V17 Fear of Opinion – I feel fear or anxiety over expressing my opinion during a meeting
V18 Leader Opinion – Meeting leaders express his/her opinion often
V19 Leader Encouragement – During a meeting, the leader encourages expression of ideas
V20 Silent on Disagreement – I seldom voice disagreement with what someone else said in meet
V21 Encourage Contrary Information – I feel encouraged to bring up contrary info after dec..
V22 Sharing Ideas – More info/ideas shared after staff meeting
V23 Fear of Job Loss – I fear my job may be in jeopardy is I express my opinion
V24 Conflict Avoidance – I try to avoid conflict during a staff meeting
### Appendix D

**Descriptive Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V1 Good Manager Communication</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>1.048</td>
<td>1.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2 Respect Treatment</td>
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<td>3.22</td>
<td>1.219</td>
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<td>V3 Trust</td>
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<td>1.269</td>
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<td>V4 Shared Values</td>
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<td>.866</td>
<td>.750</td>
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<td>V5 Efficient Meetings</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>1.102</td>
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<td>V18 Leader Opinion</td>
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<td>.914</td>
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<tr>
<td>V21 Encourage Contrary Information</td>
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<td>1.090</td>
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<tr>
<td>V22 Sharing Ideas</td>
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<td>.656</td>
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<td>V23 Fear of Job Security</td>
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<td>1.058</td>
<td>1.120</td>
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<td>.926</td>
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<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
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</table>