

CONNECT

Do We Go Along To Get Along?

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If you go along to get along – be sure it's along to somewhere you WANT to go!

- 1 How did Watergate happen? It was the "Abilene Paradox" in action. Not everyone thought bugging the Democratic headquarters was a good idea – but those who didn't stayed silent – "went along to get along."

Numerous Watergate figures later testified in court that they were appalled at the plan - they thought it was risky and unnecessary -but didn't say so, at the time, however. They all agreed to take part - because the other people were so keen on the idea. Whether or not this account of Watergate is what *really* happened, it shows the power of the Abilene Paradox.

- 2 According to former professor of business and psychology, Dale Hartley, in [The Abilene Paradox: Why People Go Along to Get Along](#) on "Psychology Today", the Watergate scandal was the brainstorm of G Gordon Liddy, the Finance Counsel for the Committee for the Re-Election of the President.

Other perpetrators of the break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate building went along with the plan but later claimed, as I said, that they didn't want to do it.

[To borrow a phrase from [Mandy Rice-Davies](#), who had been involved in an earlier political scandal of a different kind in the UK – *they would, wouldn't they!*

The Wikipedia [Watergate Scandal](#) article does not distinguish between the leaders and followers in the Watergate burglary, the bugging and the cover-up that led to President Nixon resigning. Quite rightly, because whether one *wants* to do something or not – by going along with it, one will end up in the same place.

Originally, that place was Abilene, in the original 1974 "Abilene Paradox". I'm sure Abilene is a lovely place - but on this occasion, nobody was happy about going there – it was too far and the day was too hot. Everyone in the group was unhappy because they had *gone along to get along*. They had all agreed to go to Abilene because they thought THE OTHERS wanted to.

Like Watergate, the [Abilene Paradox](#) is a true story and is wonderfully explained here on the platform, Sketchplanations.

- 3 The Abilene Paradox, as Dale Hartley says, sounds like [groupthink](#), described on Psychology Today as a group of people making irrational decisions.

Their motivation being that they wish to conform, or they believe that dissent is impossible. The result is usually people behaving a lot like sheep – one following the other - or the Borg from Star Trek in human form – that is, beings who all think the same.

In groupthink, people refrain from expressing doubts and judgments or disagreeing with the consensus. They may also ignore ethical or moral consequences. Groupthink, by definition, results in decisions that are irrational or dangerous. It can ignore ethics and morals, prioritise only one specific goal while ignoring countless collateral consequences, or even cause death and destruction - such as the invasion of Iraq.

Self-censorship - especially from fear of being shunned or derided - is one potential symptom of groupthink - along with people who hold dissenting views being pressured to recant or conform to the majority view.

- 4 Now, groupthink sounds extremely familiar - as does the Abilene Paradox. Both of these are behaviours of *going along to get along* which has now become somewhat epidemic in proportion.

But there is an important difference between groupthink and the Abilene Paradox.

In groupthink, people agree with each other. However, In the Abilene Paradox, people privately disagree with the collective unanimous decision.

Dale Hartley makes the interesting argument that groupthink members vote with their conscience, while "Abilene Paradoxers" do not. That is true, at least to the extent that people caught up in groupthink *have* functioning consciences, given that groupthink overrides ethical and moral considerations.

- 5 The Abilene Paradox, like many psychology experiments, is a great way to expand our understanding of how the human mind works. While it is not the same as groupthink, I think it is worthwhile to consider the following questions:

Do I agree with other people – while not really agreeing?
If so, why do I do that?

Does "agreeing" by obeying, complying or not disagreeing openly – so, not really agreeing – *going along to get along* – take me to places that I am glad I have arrived at?
Or is the opposite true?

Those are questions to be considered as individual people, but what happens if people collectively agree, while not agreeing. In other words, if a lot of people *go along to get along*?

Where do we get to, if we simply just *go along*?

Isn't it best for us all to work out what we all – individually and collectively - want to do? Irrespective of what other people want us to do – or more likely, what we *think* they want us to do?

Because, when it comes to deciding where we all want to go, that *might be* Abilene – or it might *not*. What matters is that *WE choose* where to go.

CONNECT'S Maxim and Oath

Connect is only interested in finding and sharing the TRUTH.
In search of that TRUTH, we only pose questions – we have no answers.

By: Helen King

Source: CONNECT: [Magazine](#)

- 2 [LINK](#) Psychology Today: The Abilene Paradox: Why People Go Along to Get Along
- 2 [LINK](#) Wikipedia: Mandy Rice-Davies
- 2 [LINK](#) Wikipedia: Watergate Scandal
- 2 [LINK](#) Sketchplanations: The Abilene Paradox
- 3 [LINK](#) Psychology Today: Groupthink

FURTHER READING

[LINK](#) Manage Train Learn: The Abilene Paradox and Groupthink

[LINK](#) Wikipedia: Borg [Star Trek]

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