

A Conceptual Framework of Group Evolution

Considerations for Decision Makers and Analysts



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The Challenge

When deciding the best courses of action to resolve conflicts, decision makers need to understand the individual, community and societal factors that drive group participation. The changing nature of conflict has presented numerous challenges in understanding the motivations and actions of the groups involved. Limited understanding of not only the structure of these groups, but also how and who these groups interact with and why, both internally and externally can result in adverse effects. Often even well intentioned decisions can have devastating consequences on communities due to a lack of cultural awareness and appreciation of the complexity of group dynamics. To enable more informed decisions, decision makers need to understand the nuance of group behavior and within this how groups form and evolve.

Research Aim

This research aims to develop a conceptual framework grounded in social science theory that could, in the future, be incorporated into decision making tools. The conceptual framework will attempt to address the challenge of understanding group dynamics, providing decision makers with a guide to critically examine the factors which influence how groups are structured and interact with broader society.

Methodology

- Informal multidisciplinary focus group to identify concepts and the relationships between these concepts to aid in the development of the framework.
- Multidisciplinary online forum to identify:
 - What supporting and/conflicting theory explains the concepts already identified within the framework?
 - Are there any additional concepts which could be added to the framework?
 - How do you see the concepts within the conceptual framework being related?

Implications

It is considered that the use of the framework could be used to provide both explanation and understanding of complex societal and group processes in particular conflict and critical situations.

Future Direction

The next step in the development of the framework is to seek out real-world scenarios of groups and situations that can be used to assess the framework in terms of its applicability and utility in generating actual models of those groups and situations. It is hoped the application of a relatively abstract framework to a real world situation will help ground it and potentially confirm if the concepts within the framework are key factors in helping to explain group evolution.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

