

System Dynamics Approach to Managing Community Development

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Abstract

Most community development work viewed as planned social change often involves or leads to conflict. The basic premise of conflicts is usually distribution of benefits in society, with one group seeking to maximize its potential. Social conflict is a behaviour threat by one party directed at the territory - rights, interests, or privilege- of another party. If conflict is seen as functional social process, one is likely to be committed to it as a useful tool to achieve the change desired. This paper applies system dynamics as a tool for explaining social behaviour over time and integrating experimental learning in community development for social science students and community development practitioners. The lectures incorporate experimentation in computer-based learning for understanding theories and information relationships existing in social changes, social conflicts and development. The dynamics simulation model developed in this paper aims to study the community conflict in terms of territoriality which helps in understanding what the problem is and who is causing it. Robinson's conflict cycle is applied as feedback system interacting with the actors -dominator, manipulator, mediator, compromiser and avoider - in terms of participant's behaviour styles in the conflict situation. Students were evaluated to be energetic in discussion among themselves the strategies regarding conflict for approaching to community development, preventing it or managing and resolving it while learning and doing assignments.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Community development is concerned with public policies, government action, economic activities, institution building, and other types of actions that not only affect people but can be affected by people" (Christenson et al., 1989:3). Sanders (1958) classified community development into 4 types: process, method, program and movement. Warren (1978:20) defines community development as "a process of helping community people analyze their problems....". The primary goal is to help people improve their social and economic situation which can be achieved through a variety of methods such as selfhelp, technical assistance, and conflict (Christenson, 1989:32). Most community development work may be viewed as planned social change and often involves or leads to conflict (Alinsky, 1969, 1972). No two conflicts are the same. Based on levels and entities involved, conflicts involving community can be identified into three major levels: 1) conflicts within communities; 2) conflicts between neighbouring communities; and 3) conflicts between communities and outside entities. In heterogeneous and change-oriented societies, conflict is seen as a positive and necessary force serving as an important impetus for positive change. While conflict can be very destructive and is seen as a negative performance in more homogeneous and tradition-oriented societies (FAO, 1994:3,10). Whether societies view conflict as threat or close to core value, they have to deal with it in terms of using it or preventing it or managing and resolving it. This paper applies system dynamics as a tool for explaining theories and information relationships existing in social changes, social conflicts and community development to social science students and community development practitioners. The simulation model developed in this paper aims to study the community conflict in terms of territoriality which helps in understanding what the problem is and who is causing it.

2. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

Regarding literature, Hillery (1955) and Willis (1977) suggest four main components for defining the concept of community : *people* (community members), *territory* (space, rights, interests, or privilege), *social interaction* (shared territory, a common life, and collective behaviour) and *psychological tie* (common attachment of or psychological identification with a community). Based on Christenson et al. (1989:9), *development* implies *improvement*, *growth* and *change*- "Development as improvement means social transformation in the direction of more egalitarian distribution of social goods such as education, health services, housing, participation in political decision making, and other dimensions of people's chances. Development as growth focuses on economic prosperity. It includes the institutional transformation of structures to facilitate technological advancement and improvement in the production and distribution of goods and services. Development as social change is putting a particular ideological orientation into action to restructure the social normative and economic order for desired ends." *Community development* together, therefore, is purposive effort by people to articulate and maintain community as a relationship among themselves. In practice, community development means that people who are engaged in efforts to reach specific goals and solve specific community problems also pay attention to the community relationships involved in their efforts (Wilkinson, 1989).

3. ROBINSON' S CONFLICT CYCLE CONCEPT

Robinson' s conflict cycle comprises 5 stages : 1) behaviour threat, 2) tension development, 3) role dilemma, 4) injustice collection, 5) confrontation or adjustment. Social Conflict in terms of *a behaviour threat* by one party directed at the territory -right, interests, or privileges- of another party is usually directed toward limiting or eliminating one party's access to some resource or goal. The *behaviour threats* are prompted by values and goals and are directed towards policy changes. If the threat is strong and the issue are clear, some community members may choose sides at this stage. Others may delay this decision until additional information is available or until pressure is applied. *The strong threats* cause fear or *tension development*. This results in *role dilemma* stage. The questions will be raised by the community members. The decision making to take sides will be taken place by the end of this stage. *Injustice collection* follows *role dilemma*. During injustice collection, adversaries become polarized further through a process of name-calling, making innuendoes, and taking public positions. Emotion and information are directed toward weakening the opponent's position. This reinforces negative behaviour, and encourage dysfunctional criticism in all parties. Some conflicts move from injustice collection to face-to-face confrontation while others move to stage of adjustment. Severe confrontations often lead to the destruction of property and tend to reinforce the belief that conflict is always bad. The final stage is adjustment process comprising at least four alternatives: domination, cold war, withdrawal or isolation and compromise. Compromise may be regarded as a positive solution while the rest can have positive or negative effects depending on the opposing parties (Robinson, 1989:96-99).

4. BEHAVIOUR STYLES OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONFLICT

The most important factor influencing a conflict is a participant's behaviour style in the conflict situation. Each participant may be a *dominator*, a *manipulator*, a *mediator*, a *compromiser*, or an *avoider*. *Dominators* appear to know the best solution and use authority and power to impose it.

They are rigid and tell people what to do to solve the conflict. The *manipulator* lacks the courage, strength, and power of dominators. They also are rigid and respect authority but do not know how to use it. His style is likely to offend people. *Mediators* explore and develop alternatives. They use flexible behaviour but can rigidly enforce fairness and rules of fair play as individuals discuss and decide on an issue. *Compromiser* would like to resolve conflicts in a favourable way, but may lack the patience, courage and skill to do so. Thus, while the compromiser might argue a little, he or she avoids the judging and ridiculing behaviour. However the compromiser may try to buy solutions with rewards and bribes. *Avoider* abhors conflict and avoids fights (Robinson, 1989:100-102).

5. FEEDBACK LOOP OF CONFLICT IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

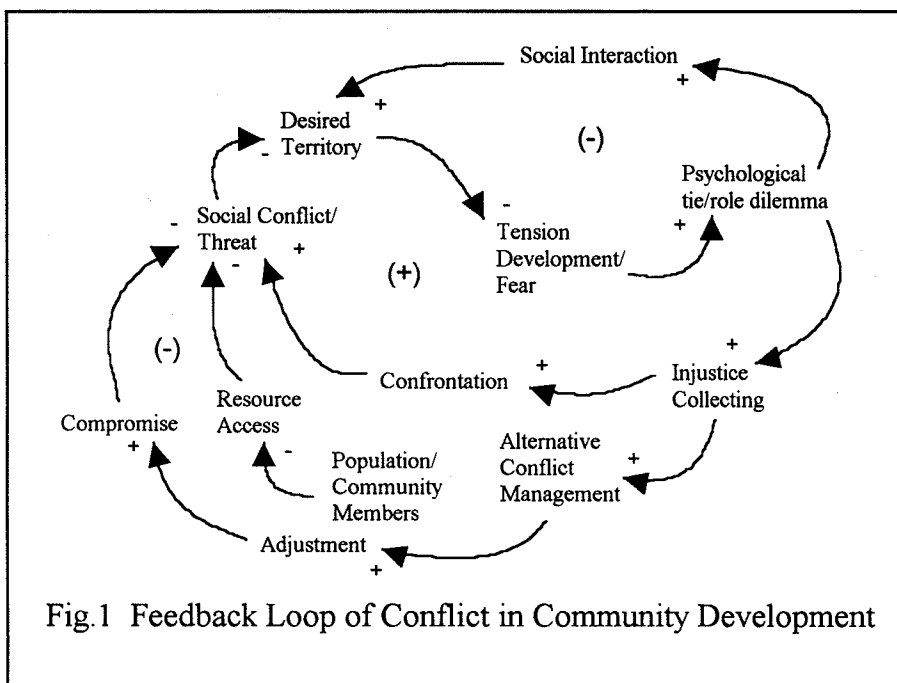


Fig.1 shows the feedback structure of conflict in community development. Robinson's concept of conflict cycle is incorporated in the community system comprising four elements: population, desired territory, social interaction and psychological tie. The development as social change is the goal of the community system. An increase of community population results in difficulties of resource access. This develops the threat or

social conflict between parties within a community or between neighbouring communities. The behaviour threat reduces desired territories. This results in more fear or tension development and motivates more psychological tie with community to have more potential in social interaction in order to maintain or gain more desired territory. The growth of psychological tie in terms of negative view resulting in injustice collecting of information and might cause face-to-face confrontation and again develop more behaviour threat. To approach alternative conflict management for solving the conflict tends to change conflict situation into adjustment process and might result in more compromise which can reduce the threat.

6. MODEL STRUCTURE

The previous causal-loop diagram is interpreted to define the types of variables in terms of levels and rates as well as significant parameters. The model has been developed with Powersim Package. Technical details of the model are available on request.

7. EVALUATION ON STUDENTS ' PERFORMANCE

Since every conflict is unique, to understand the dynamics of conflicts in community development would bring together social science theory and knowledge as well as the real practice experience. Policies, goals and values, as a key in social change, define rights, interests and privileges in our society. "One part of social change is concerned with changes that are planned and some portion of these planned changes are carried out through a process identified as community development" (Cary, 1989:162). "All groups and individuals do not share commitments to common policies, goals and values. ...Because their goals and values are incompatible and their feelings are strong, the respective groups are likely to encounter conflict" (Robinson, 1989:90). Without real practice experience, but experimental and interactive learning cooperatively with the simulation model developed in this paper, there is potential for students to improve their thinking and rapidly grasp the significant parameter which is sensitive to the community development. Case studies from culture to culture differing in their scope and scale were also illustrated. Students were evaluated to be energetic in discussion among themselves the strategies regarding conflict for approaching to community development, preventing it or managing and resolving it while learning and doing assignments. Based on feedback concept, they also learned how to organize questions and answers in various conflict situations. This indirectly automated them to become optimistic and have good social interaction. The important changed performance reported by students after learning is that they viewed conflicts as positive movement for a better change of society. When they dealt with conflicts at home, they made their efforts to seek for *win-win* rather than win-lose solutions.

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