



The Psychology of small groups: Implications for counter terrorism investigations

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Aims

- Psychology of small groups
- Explore how small terror/criminal groups develop
- Implications for counter terrorism investigations
- implications for
 - Risk assessment
 - Information collection and analysis



How do groups form?

- Model of group formation (Bruce Tuckman, 1965; 1977)
- Four processes of formation
 - Forming
 - Storming
 - Norming
 - Performing
- One stage after destruction of group
 - Mourning
- Generally
 - Groups face inward at first then progressively more outward facing
 - Group coherence moves from low to high



Forming

- When a group first comes together
 - Uncertainty amongst member
 - Shyness if strangers
 - Extraverts may rapidly assume leadership role
- Maintaining group is major concern
- Inward facing
- No group identity set up
- New Groups vulnerable to collapse at this stage



Storming

- Inward looking, group main concern
- Most uncomfortable phase
- Disagreements
- Jockeying for
 - Position
 - Authority
 - Influence

- Roles eventually allocated
- Initial leaders may not survive this
- Group may fragment
 - Breakaway factions



Norming

- Group inward and outward looking
- What
 - does the group stand for?
 - Is expected of members?
 - Do members need to contribute?
- Begin to form group identity
- Strong group coherence makes performing most likely
- May slip back to storming i.e. disagreements
 - E.g. AQ Azzam and Bin Laden; Breakaway factions
- Again group may break up



High group coherence

- *Greatest when: norming successful*
 - Group members close to each other in time and space
 - Meet regularly
 - Perceive other group members as similar to self
 - Prior beliefs consistent with the groups beliefs
 - If group is important to members
 - Group perceived to be different from others
 - Perceived threat to group
 - Group is separated from others
 - Directive leadership

 - Includes on-line interaction



Group think

- Highest group coherence
- Performance most likely



Groupthink Symptoms

- A feeling of invulnerability creates excessive optimism and encourages risk taking.
- Discounting warnings that might challenge assumptions.
- An unquestioned belief in the group's morality, causing members to ignore the consequences of their actions.
- Stereotyped views of outsiders.
- Pressure to conform against members of the group who disagree.
- Shutting down of ideas that deviate from the apparent group consensus.
- An illusion of unanimity with regards to going along with the group.
- Mindguards — self-appointed members who shield the group from dissenting opinions



Performing

- Outward looking
- Group begins to act out
- Acts may be reviewed
- i.e. consider performance
 - did it work?
 - did someone fail? If so who?
 - who's fault was failure?
 - Is the leader good enough?
 - Are our goals valid
- Can slip back to storming or re-norming
- Performing also way of creating and maintaining group coherence



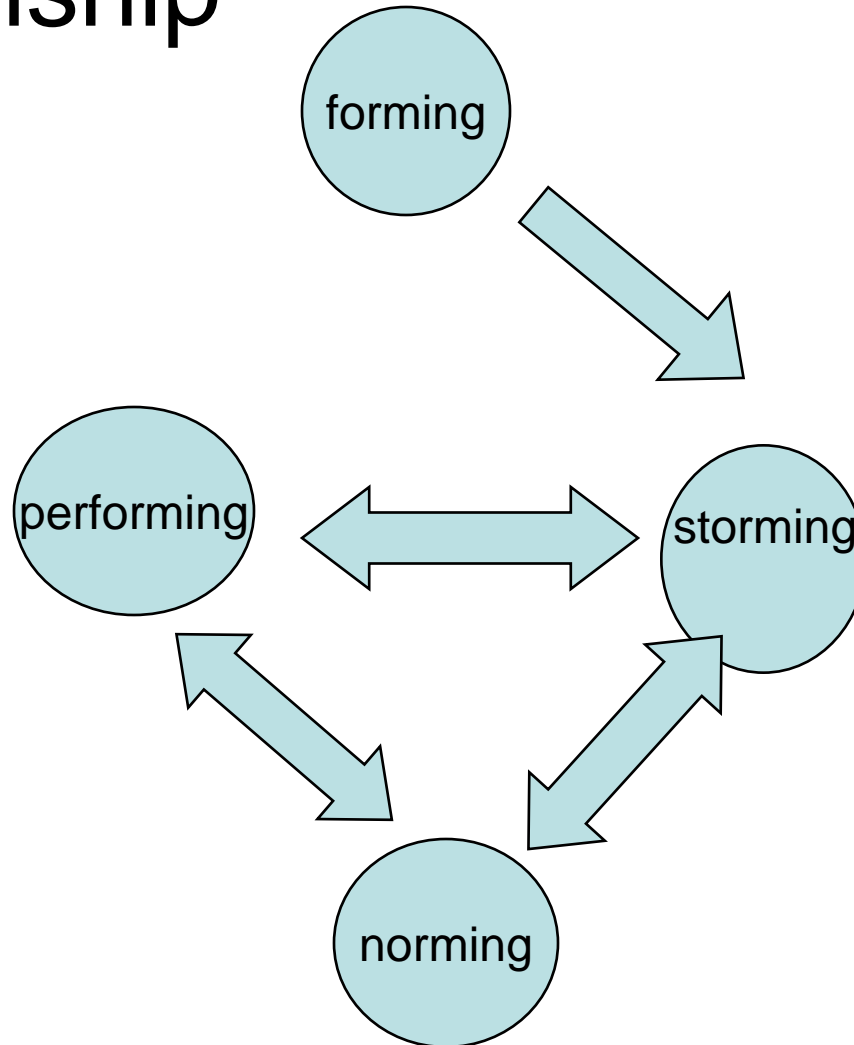
Mourning

- If the group breaks up
- Feelings of distress
- Desire to be back with the group
- Attempts to recreate the group or similar
 - Red Army Faction - at least 3 incarnations
 - 21/7 bombers phone calls



Relationship

Mourning





Implications for CT Investigations

- Identifying group stages
 - Possible weak points of group
 - Points of intervention/disruption
- Evidence for behaviours showing
 - group coherence
 - Group think
- Risk
 - When is a group greatest and least threat?
 - Targeted and types of intervention
- Mourning –
 - Behaviours after arrest
 - after arrest - separate members/minimize contact?



Conclusions

- Application of behavioural science model to investigation
- Tuckman's model
 - Simplistic and applicable
 - Makes predictions
 - Allows reasoned judgements
- Some success in use in UK CT



Any Questions?

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