

Thomas R. Forrest. *Structural Differentiation in Emergent Groups*. Columbus, Ohio: Disaster Research Center, 1974, 111 pp., \$2.00.

Use of disasters as “strategic research sites” has been suggested by Robert Merton and Charles Fritz in earlier separate commentaries. Here Forrest combines this advice with concepts of emergent norms from Turner-Parsonian functional problems and Buckley’s modern systems perspective in a provocative exploratory case study. The intention is to “. . . further understanding regarding structural differentiation in emergent groups and to delineate important dimensions associated with the process” (p. 91). A further contention suggests that the analytical framework used can be, when modified, extrapolated to emergent groups in non-crisis environments (p. 36). Success is modest in these difficult aims, but the insights, design, heuristics and suggestions for further research seem worthwhile.

In Southern California fires and a Pennsylvania flood, data were collected and analyzed in a two-phase, five-step design. A constant comparative method is used to study three types of variables within an induced analytical framework. Phase one consisted of data acquisition according to an interview protocol from California fires of 1970 where

five emergent groups attempted to meet identifiable needs (e.g., resource allocation or registration) that were not met by organized groups. These data were examined using the four step constant comparative method by 1) categorizing incidents, 2) integrating categories and properties, 3) delineating theory and 4) writing theory. The analytical framework incorporates independent, intervening and dependent dimensions. Size, previous patterns and attributes, goal commitment and surrounding environment are independent variables. Feedback processes and decision making are intervening variables. The dependent variable – structural differentiation – consists of group positions, tasks and norms. Finally, in Phase Two, the hypotheses generated earlier are subjected to test, interpretation and efficacy appraisal in the real environment of a 1971 Pennsylvania flood. This analysis showed that positions arose in emergent groups, tasks were defined and allocated, but that the normative structure did not fully develop.

The work benefits from the heritage and experience of the Disaster Research Center (DRC) where it was finished with partial funding support from the Center for Applied Social Problems, National Institute of Mental Health. However, its format as a scholarly monograph replete with a review of selected literature per-

haps obscures some of the message and heuristics. Some of the earlier works by the National Academy of Sciences Disaster Research Group (NAS/DRG) might provide models for a more terse treatment wherein theory and framework dovetail more expressively. Mack's *Occasion Instant* and Barton's *Social Organization Under Stress* are two examples of an effective interplay of theory and interpretation of case studies. Moreover, organizational mobilization, leadership, normative views and prior patterns of training or expectation cited by Barton might have added to Forrest's analysis. No doubt there is a dearth of study on emergent groups specifically, but a review of other case studies or analyses by NAS/DRG or System Development Corporations' Emergency Operations Symposia might sharpen and focus hypotheses.

Among the useful heuristics gleaned from the DRC experience is the "snowball" technique of contacting coordinating centers and other leads to identify emergent groups. Another is the realization that privacy for interviews is difficult to find. The ephemeral nature of emergent groups, the transitory nature of goals and even the shift of personnel or methods are underscored. Another option would be to supplement feedback from in-

dividual interviews by seeking occasional group debriefings or discussion when possible to give added interactive recollection of group processes and purposes. Use of activity logs is another source.

The author cites methodological problems that beset the study. Some of these were resolved. Others such as operationalizing feedback or procrustean interpretation of static concepts seem to hinder both observation and reporting of the dynamic flow of activity within structure. For example, some norms may emerge but others may persist and apply even without being cited specifically. Just ask any ethnomethodologist, or see experimental histories of cultures by Rose, or perhaps international simulation by Shure or even laboratory study of groups under stress/threat analogous to disaster or war by Bricton. Finally, the formulae of systems theory should be tempered by a bit more qualitative "ad hocery" in further study of emergent groups in realistic disaster settings.

This work is a good first step.

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