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Value Focused Thinking: An objective model for community resilience

Simona Verga, Ph.D.

Defence Research and Development Canada's Centre for Security Science

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The *Resilient Communities Workshop: from Concepts to Implementation*, organized by Emergency Management British Columbia (EMBC) and the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) on February 25th, 2014, provided an opportunity to engage with a group of key stakeholders from government, academia, and communities. The workshop consisted of academics conducting research on the subject of community resilience, as well as stakeholders from government organizations and communities in the British Columbia (BC) region. During a focus group discussion with workshop participants, a Value Focused Thinking (VFT) approach was implemented and an elicitation exercise was conducted in order to generate inputs towards building an objective model for community resilience, centered on values. Consultations with stakeholders are essential for uncovering the values to which the communities subscribe.

This effort was funded through the Canadian Safety and Security Program (CSSP), a federal program led by Defence Research and Development Canada's Centre for Security Science (DRDC CSS), in partnership with Public Safety Canada.

STUDY AIMS

The study sought to generate a comprehensive list of objectives for community resilience, and to identify relationships that will help structure those objectives into a hierarchical model. The results helped to identify fundamental objectives for a Community of Practice (CoP) centered on Community Resilience, supported through the CSSP, to build a hierarchy of objectives, and to identify activities that will contribute towards achieving those objectives. The exercise was useful to examine the mandate and scope of the CoP, and to identify research and membership gaps, priorities, and ways to address them. The focus group discussion at JIBC was the first in a series of planned workshops intended to engage constituencies (e.g., policy, S&T, national, regional, and municipal) with a range of interests. The results of focus group consultations will be integrated to produce an overall objectives model for the Community Resilience CoP.

METHODS

To accomplish the study objectives, a facilitated focus group discussion was conducted, using the VFT approach. The group was first provided with the decision context; the structure of a statement of objective; and ways to derive objectives by identifying means-ends relationships. The elicitation followed a number of steps based on research findings in the literature [1], in order to maximize the number of relevant objectives produced.

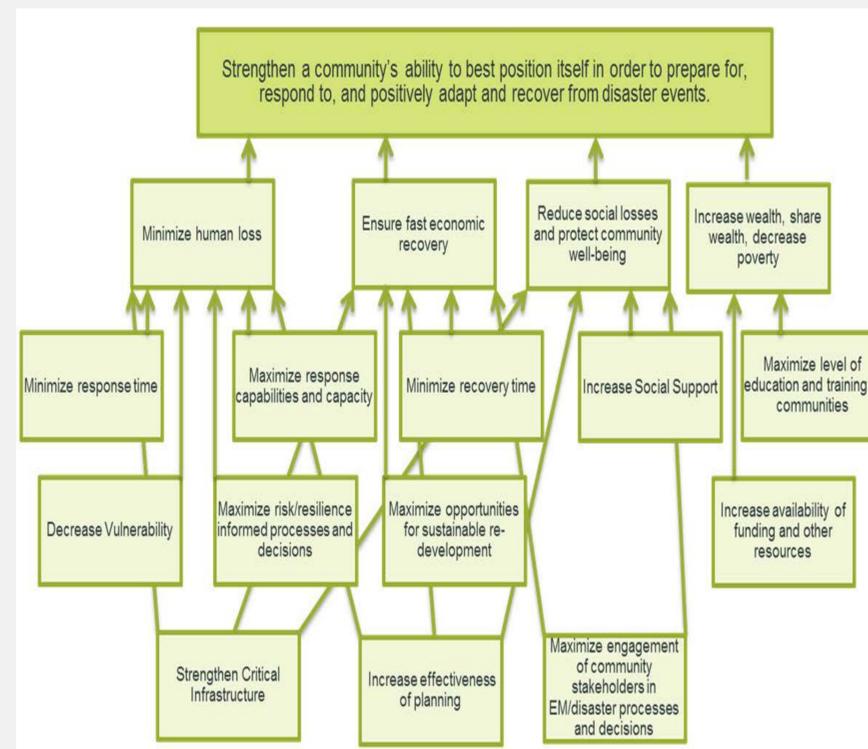
RESULTS

A total of 102 suggestions for objectives were made during the elicitation exercise, which the participants grouped into the 10 categories. The detailed results are documented in a DRDC Scientific Letter [2]. Upon closer examination, intended to clarify means-ends relationships between objectives at different levels in a hierarchy, four items were identified as a more explicit articulation of fundamental objectives, towards which many of the other suggested objectives appear to contribute:

- I. Minimize human loss
- II. Increase wealth, share wealth, decrease poverty
- III. Reduce social losses and protect community well-being
- IV. Ensure fast economic recovery

The diagram in Figure 1 illustrates means-ends relationships between objectives at different levels in the hierarchy. To improve readability, the hierarchy is only presented as far down as the level represented by categorical objectives derived from the discussions at JIBC. This objective model will be integrated with additional models produced by consulting other groups of stakeholders in the Community Resilience CoP. The final model will be further refined by examining its relevance to the decision context, which is to inform CSSP priorities that enhance community resilience, through its CoP mechanism.

Figure 1: Higher levels and cross-linkages in a VFT community resilience objectives hierarchy.



DISCUSSION

A VFT approach was employed to generate objectives, identify linkages, and build an objective model for bolstering community resilience. The model produced represents the perspective of BC regional stakeholders, and their understanding of the decision context. The objectives generated through the elicitation exercise, which were grouped by participants into descriptive categories, were analyzed post-workshop in order to clarify their structure, as well as to identify relationships. The approach was appreciated by participants as an innovative, new way of thinking that can be used to articulate desired achievements for community resilience, centred on values. However, additional effort will be placed in future consultations to better explain the decision context, and to clarify the understanding of "values" as an articulation of what is important to the decision-maker or to the decision stakeholders.

CONCLUSIONS

The VFT approach, implemented during a focus group discussion with stakeholders from government, academia, and communities attending the *Resilient Communities Workshop: from Concepts to Implementation* which took place on February 25th, 2014, at the JIBC, helped to identify objectives and linkages, and to produce a preliminary objective hierarchy for community resilience. These findings will be integrated with others obtained through additional focus group consultations, in order to produce an overall objectives model for the Community Resilience CoP.

REFERENCES

1. Bond, S.D., Carlson, K.A., and Keeney, R.L., 2010 "Improving the Generation of Decision Objectives", *Decision Analysis* Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 238–255.
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CONTACT

Simona Verga, Ph.D.
Defence Research and Development
Canada- Centre for Security Science
Email: simona.verga@drdc-rddc.gc.ca
Phone: (613) 944-8165
Website: www.science.gc.ca/cssp

@DRDC_RDDC



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