

Competition over resources leads to intergroup conflict.

177; 138; 159; 101

General Description of the Literature:

Realistic group conflict theory (RGCT) proposes that when two groups are in competition for scarce resources, the potential success of one group threatens the well-being of the other, resulting in negative outgroup attitudes (Sherif & Sherif, 1969). These may be tangible resources, such as money, or may involve issues of power or control (e.g., political power; Bobo, 1988). Much research in psychology has shown support for the theory that when groups are in competition for resources, group conflict occurs. Studies have included threats that directly impacted the individuals involved, as well as threats to the interests of a group as a whole (e.g. a White male may perceive affirmative action as threatening the overall interests of his ingroup even when he is not personally affected.)

Detailed Analyses

177: *Competition over resources leads to intergroup conflict.*

Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: Brown, Maras, Masser, Vivian, and Hewstone (2001) examined conflict and intergroup bias between British ferry passengers and the French during a period when French fishermen were blockading a port used by the British ferry, which threatened the goals of the British passengers. In line with the predictions of RGCT, both perceived and actual (objective) conflict between the groups were related to higher levels of aggression toward the French. In another study, Quillian (1995) examined national survey data in 12 countries and found that when economic conditions were poor and the size of a racial minority or immigrant group was large in proportion to the majority group, bias toward these groups was high. It seems that when there is a large outgroup presence, economic difficulties are attributed to these outgroup members who are seen as threatening ingroup well-being. Other researchers have applied RGCT to explain bias toward immigrant groups by assuming that the perception that immigrant gains come at the expense of the resident group creates negative attitudes toward immigration and immigrants (Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001; Esses, Jackson, & Armstrong, 1998). McLaren (2003) measured levels of realistic threat in 17 European countries and found that levels of perceived realistic threat were related to a preference for the expulsion of immigrants. These studies provide strong support showing that competition over resources (viewed as a threat to the self or the group) leads to intergroup conflict. These studies are strong when viewed together because they include naturalistic settings and show converging support for the hypothesis.

Empirical Support Score: 8 = Multiple quantitative analyses supporting the hypothesis

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: The context in which support was found is varied, including children in a summer camp (see 104) and adults in Western Europe and America. They also include both experimental studies as well as naturalistic data (e.g. a national survey and realistic threat). However, these results should generalize to VEOs (the psychological processes underlying cooperation should be the same with adults in VEOs). It does not seem likely that any circumstances (e.g. geographical or temporal) would affect the results. For example, if al Qaeda sees the U.S. as a threat to their goals, intergroup conflict will occur no matter how proximal or distal the two groups are. It is more likely, however, that the degree to which the different groups care about type of threat

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should matter. For example, if it is a threat over resources and both groups have sufficient resources, intergroup conflict should be less than if the groups did not have sufficient resources

Applicability Score: High Confidence – Different Context: Empirical results are derived from contexts involving quite different types of actors (e.g., states, firms, government agencies), but are sufficiently robust or broadly-supported across actor types that the researcher has *high* confidence that they apply similarly to the context of VEOs.

138: *In conditions of inter-constituent group competition over scarce resources, increases in resources reduces VEO activity.*

Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: N/A

Empirical Support Score: 0 = No empirical support (for or against the hypothesis)

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: N/A

Applicability Score: N/A

159: *In conditions of inter-constituent group competition over scarce resources, reframing the amount of resources to sound less scarce reduces VEO activity.*

Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: N/A

Empirical Support Score: 0 = No empirical support (for or against the hypothesis)

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: N/A

Applicability Score: N/A

101: *In conditions of inter-constituent group competition over scarce resources, encouraging groups to work in a cooperative fashion vis-à-vis resource allocation reduces VEO activity.*

Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: Related to the competition over resources are issues of intergroup goals. Sherif and Sherif (1969) proposed that when the goals of different groups are complementary, relations between the groups will be positive; however, when conflicting goals exist, relations will deteriorate. The resulting conflict may increase ingroup solidarity, which in turn widens the ingroup/outgroup distinction, creating intergroup hostility. To test this, Sherif et al. (1961) divided children in a summer camp program into two separate groups. Once group boundaries were established, the children engaged in a number of zero-sum, competitive activities (e.g., sporting events). Because these activities permitted victory of only one group over the other, one group's success precluded and thus threatened the success of the other group. As competition continued, hostility between the groups increased. This hostility became quite severe and in some cases led to physical violence. The bias between the groups decreased only when common goals that required intergroup cooperation were introduced. In addition to the camp study, other researchers have shown that both incompatible goals and perceived competition between groups are related to negative outgroup attitudes, lower levels of support for affirmative action programs, and stereotyping (Beaton & Tougas, 2001; Langford & Ponting, 1992; Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Joly, 1995; Watts, 1996; Zarate, Garcia, Garza, & Hitlan, 2004). **The cooperation in the camp study was oriented toward an overarching goal held by both groups, not regarding resource allocation, but these results show that

encouraged cooperation can reduce intergroup conflict. Thus, there is initial, if somewhat weak, evidence supporting the hypothesis.

Empirical Support Score: 6 = Comparative case study(ies) supporting the hypothesis

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: The context in which (qualified) support was found is with children in a summer camp. However, these results should generalize to VEOs (the psychological processes underlying cooperation should be the same with children and with adults in VEOs). It does not seem likely that any circumstances (e.g. geographical or temporal) would affect the results. It is more likely, however, that the degree to which the different groups care about the overarching goal or the resources should act as moderators to the relationship.

Applicability Score: High Confidence – Different Context: Empirical results are derived from contexts involving quite different types of actors (e.g., states, firms, government agencies), but are sufficiently robust or broadly-supported across actor types that the researcher has *high* confidence that they apply similarly to the context of VEOs.

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