

Closed communities

David belongs to a secret society. Well, that isn't quite true, but he plays a game in which he is a 'spy' and the game organisers have forums and social networks set up which can only be accessed by paying players. David gets a lot of fun out of the game, even if some of his friends think he is a bit geeky. In fact, so enjoyable is the game that around 30 of his friends in the local area also play it on a regular basis.

Many of the players are also on other, publically available, social networking sites. The game rules forbid them to mention anything about the game in public (after all, they are spies!), and generally people manage to abide by the rules.

After one of his friends was treated a bit harshly by one of the referees, who judged that their 'character' had been wounded whilst trying to escape from foreign agents, there was a bit of an incident on the game's forums. The friend saw red and let the powers-that-be know about their shortcomings, occasionally in some colourful language.

Whilst David sympathised with his friend because the judgement had been unjust, the outburst made (game-related) life quite tricky for a while. Some people decided they couldn't trust David anymore because of his friendship, and because he had defended the guy in the online forum. David had remained calm and polite throughout, but was now in a position where his friend's reaction had had a negative impact on his own reputation. In a 'real life' situation, this would probably have blown over, as memories started to fade, and people gradually left the game and were replaced with new blood. However, the persistent nature of the incident, recorded in the archives, meant that it never quite seemed to go away.



¹ Image by Gerald_G in public domain available from http://openclipart.org/media/files/Gerald_G/216



Worksheet 7

Context:

Imagine you are a member of a national society, which has an online presence for its members in the form of email lists. Only members of the society are allowed to join the lists, read emails coming from the list, and send emails to it. You know:

Andrew - via the email list only

Bill - via the email list at first but he lives close by, so you've met up in the pub a couple of times

Cassandra - you knew before, and she was the one who encouraged you to join the society

Derek - you know from University, before you joined the society

Ericka - you met in the society, and then later elsewhere

Frederick - you know through the society, and he lives in the same town as you

Gerald - holds a position of authority in the society, although he isn't in charge

Harriet - someone you dislike

You read your mail one afternoon, and one of the emails is an angry diatribe, targeting those currently in charge of the society. For each of the above people in turn, assume they were the person who sent the email.

1) How does sending the e-mail change the DI of the sender?

2) How does it change the DI of the target?

3) How does it change the DI of the society internally?

4) What impact does it have on relationships outside of the society?

5) How do you respond to it?

6) What can be done to mitigate the effects?

