On Wed, Jun 20, 2018 at 6:35 AM, Facebook
<case++aazquh4g3477ff@support.facebook.com> wrote:
Hi Moana,

Thank you again for your report. I appreciate the details you provided and the concerns you raised here.

The privacy model for our Groups product draws a distinction between Public, Closed, and Secret groups. We describe the differences between those groups in more detail at https://www.facebook.com/help/220336891328465 and in various places on Facebook. In particular, the membership of Public and Closed groups is generally available, while the membership of Secret groups is only visible to members. In addition we allow group members to add their friends as members of a group. https://www.facebook.com/help/162550990475119 describes that process in more detail.

Your report highlighted a few different areas of concern which I'd like to address individually.

1. We do not provide a setting for groups which allows membership to be hidden while still allowing the group to be discoverable. That is an accurate assessment of our product as it exists today. We believe (and we have conducted real-world research, conclusions for which support the idea) that providing social context (ie: how many members a group has, how many and which of your friends may be members, etc) is valuable for helping people identify groups that they may potentially be interested in joining. Without that social context it is difficult for an individual searching for a group to distinguish between various similar options. For example, an individual searching for "Stop Smoking Support Group" can find dozens of groups, with a variety of photos and descriptions. Membership information helps people understand if a group is large or small, provides some context around activity level, highlights existing social connections (ie: several of your friends may be members of a group for a shared interest), etc.

The tradeoff here, as you noted, is for a group to make itself Secret. That prevents the group from being discoverable and also limits the access to the member list as a result. As you noted, that limits the ability for new people to join the group unless an existing member invites them. In some use-cases that may be a non-issue. For instance, a secret group that consists of people with a common real-life connection can maintain its membership via individuals adding other individuals to the group. But other types of groups which rely on self-identification may not fit well within that model.

Removing or hiding some membership information for closed groups may improve the experience in some specific situations, as you highlighted. However it may also increase other potential risks, such as impersonation of a group (ie: a malicious individual creating a group

with the same name/description/cover photo) due to the lack of additional context. In general our goal is to ensure that group administrators and members are aware of the privacy controls available to them and can make informed decisions about the groups they join and interact with as a result.

2. We do not provide a setting for individuals to control the visibility of their membership in a group. Again, that is an accurate description of the Groups product today. As I explained in relation to group membership in general we have found that social context is an important feature for allowing people to identify groups that they may want to join. Our focus here is on ensuring that group members are aware of the privacy of their membership when they join, and that if the privacy of the group changes they are aware of such changes and can take action. We also have limitations in place to prevent Secret groups, for example, from changing themselves to more open privacy settings after they exceed a certain size. This behavior is intended to prevent the negative experience of having content you posted / a group you joined under one set of expectations being exposed more broadly.

3. We allow people to add their friends into groups. When an individual is added to a group by a friend they receive a notification telling them that they have been added, which provides them with an opportunity to view the group and remove their connection

You also mentioned people who explicitly join a group but are pending admin-approval and who are later approved. In those circumstances people will be added as members, since they made an explicit decision to join the group. They have the opportunity to leave the group at any time, and had the ability to remove themselves from the group prior to the administrator approving their request.

Our Groups team has been exploring potential changes related to group membership and privacy controls for groups, with the goal of understanding whether providing different options can better align the controls with the expectations of group administrators and members. That work is ongoing and may lead to changes that address some of your concerns going forward. However I do not have any additional details to share beyond that.

As you noted, some people may have legitimate reasons to want to create groups which have different feature-sets than the functionality we provide today. We would like to provide as many people as possible with a way to use Groups to serve their needs. However, we can not guarantee that our Groups product will always have the exact feature-set that people want. A lack of such functionality may be disappointing for people and limit certain usage of Facebook, but we do not consider it to be a privacy or security concern in the product. For instance, people who are concerned about their membership in groups being seen by others are able to simply not use the Groups product, or can limit their usage to secret groups. If people are confused about the privacy of their membership in a group that is an unfortunate situation and

we are committed to finding ways to reduce such occurrences. We will continue to work to ensure that both administrators and members of groups are aware of the privacy expectations of their interactions, and to determine if there are any changes we can make to Groups which can make those expectations more obvious.

Please feel free to follow up if you have any additional questions or clarifications here!

Best,
Neal