

EXPLORING A CAPACITY FOR ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE IN THE (BUSH)FIRE MANAGEMENT POLICY SECTOR: THE ROLE OF BUREAUCRATS & REFLEXIVE LEARNING

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THEORETICAL BASIS

In governance, govt is one of many players BUT it has roles & responsibilities that others do not. And within those lies the role of bureaucrats/ public servants

How governance functions is underpinned by frames and informal institutions

Frames underpin the implicit collection of beliefs about aims & intentions of departments, agencies and policies

Informal institutions are the 'unwritten rules' with a normative / obligatory dimension

Governance & institutions need to facilitate cross-sectoral, multi-level interactions and co-operation

Adaptive governance requires a capacity to reflect upon and possibly change policies, governance arrangements but especially the underlying frames & informal institutions (requires 3 orders of learning - single, double & triple-loop)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

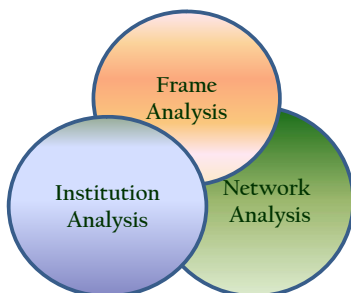
How do the sector's bureaucrats frame the subjects of fire management and climate change?

What informal institutions influence reflexive learning?

How diverse are the networks among the sector's bureaucrats?

What can the sector build upon to support its capacity for adaptive governance?

THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK



RESULTS

Frames

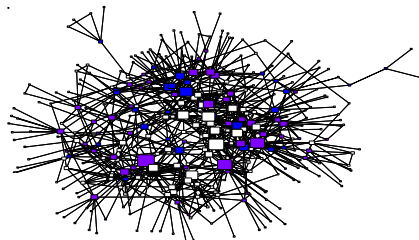
Emergency Management (EM) - Human safety is paramount, defend ourselves against it. (Fire = an enemy to be subdued). 'Control over nature' narrative

Sustainability - Balancing ecology & safety (Live with fire) 'Humans as part of nature' narrative

Informal Institutions

Several informal institutions were found. Two surrounded what participating bureaucrats felt was expected of them: Visible, quantifiable actions or outputs that are immediate/ politically expedient and that their decisions be infallible. Internally created & maintained informal institutions included the idea that "science will provide the answer", which ignores that science can inform our decisions, it cannot make them. Institutions also define which knowledge is considered more 'legitimate' than others. In this case, knowledge about hazard mgt – suppression & fuel management. Equally, institutions define « taboo subjects » in this case, the limits of suppression & difficulties in FRB. All these institutions seemed driven by a broader societal rationality of control over nature. All of which fed a perceived competition for reputation with communities & politicians

Networks



Master frame did not appear to influence 9 people potentially the most influential
 Networks are used for new info, testing new ideas
 Networks are also used to 'convince' others (of frame)

DISCUSSION POINTS

Although FM mostly viewed through a 'sustainability' frame, EM frame Institutionalised
 Reactive decision-making without underlying reflexive practice will rely on existing approaches

If demonstrable (quantifiable) approaches predominate, this will dictate the kinds of 'science' or evidence for policies

Adaptation likely to be constrained b/c not all knowledge is able to be quantified

Girding 'hierarchy of reputational capital' undermines need to convey complexities, risks and different approaches

Societal 'rationality of control' is reinforced even though recognised as constraining

Adaptive capacity & adaptive governance will be challenging in context of control rationality

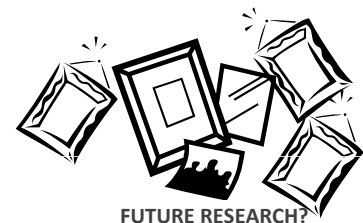
However, networks enable flow of information from different perspectives – many of the sector's people are open to new ideas

CONCLUSIONS

Capacity for reflexive learning (AG) constrained by institutions ('latent')

Frame reflexive practice may open it up and build improved adaptive capacity

Use and build on sectoral networks – restructures may not assist



FUTURE RESEARCH?

Networks beyond sector

How challenge the broader political & societal institutions: rationality of control over nature & rational model of public administration?

Does fire management has emotive to sway to start such a dialogue?

How 'experiment' in fire management, particularly around 'community safety'?