

# EXPLORING ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE IN THE FIRE MANAGEMENT SECTOR OF VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA: THE ROLE OF BUREAUCRATS IN REFLEXIVE LEARNING

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## THEORETICAL BASIS

Governance of a policy sector involves cross-sectoral, multi-level interactions and co-operation

While government is one of many players in governance of a sector, it has roles & responsibilities that others do not. Bureaucrats/ public servants work within those

A sector's governance is underpinned by frames and informal institutions

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

Informal institutions are the sector's 'unwritten rules'

*Adaptive* governance requires a capacity to reflect upon and possibly change policies, governance arrangements but especially the underlying frames & informal institutions

This requires 3 orders of learning - single, double & triple-loop

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

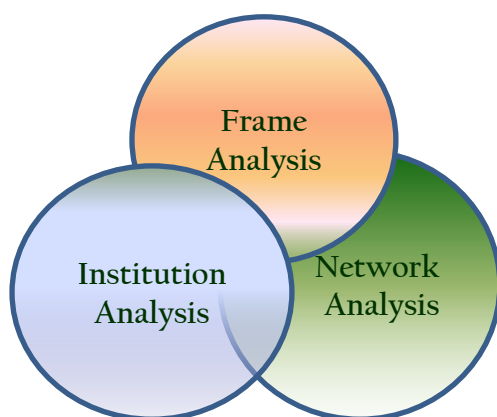
How do the sector's bureaucrats frame the subjects of fire management and climate change?

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

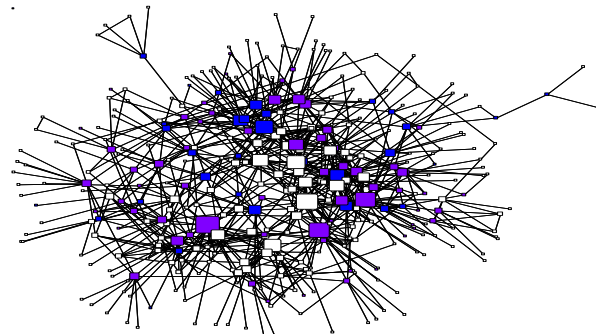
### Informal Institutions

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, that there are limits to suppression capacities & difficulties in prescribed burning.

All the institutions seemed driven by a broader societal rationality of control over nature, which in turn seems to feed a perceived competition for reputation with communities & politicians

### Networks



Policy frame did not appear to influence 'who talks to whom'

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 encourages reliance on existing approaches

Quantifiable approaches predominate & dictate the kinds of 'science' or evidence used for policy basis. But adaptation likely to be constrained because not all knowledge can be quantified

Girding 'competition for reputational capital' undermines need to convey complexities, risks and different approaches. This reinforces the broader societal 'rationality of control' even though it is recognised as constraining the sector

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

Bureaucratic network suggests however, that information from different perspectives can move easily through the sector – 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'?

Comparative studies – different sectors, different countries, etc