

## THE PILLARS APPROACH

or ..... "Four legs good, two legs bad"

A paper on planning and analysis in CALM presented to the  
1991 Managers Meeting by Roger Underwood

As in previous years I am taking this opportunity to share some philosophical and management thoughts with CALM's senior field and specialist managers. This year I want to discuss what I call "the four pillars of CALM" - the fundamental factors which support, influence or underpin everything we do - and to give a personal perspective on how we have dealt or are dealing with them, and how they can be used for project planning and analysis.

My thesis is this: if we are to achieve our goals (for example good, lasting success with programs or projects) in CALM we must ensure that we properly manage four fundamental sets of factors. These are:

- Political factors - our interaction with the people and organisations outside CALM;
- Scientific factors - our interaction with nature, and with the science and technology of conservation and land management;
- People factors - the productivity, well-being and loyalty of those who work within CALM; and
- Money factors - our capacity to fund what we want to do, and to provide a return for funds invested.

Over the last few years, I have been involved in the planning or analysis of numerous programs or projects which have succeeded ... or failed. During this time, I have become increasingly aware of how important the four pillars are as a structure, and how they can explain or predict success or failure. Each pillar is individually important, but as an interconnected framework, they make up the very joists, frames and rafters of CALM.

The model is a fairly simple one, and is most easily depicted as a box on four legs (the four pillars) - see Figure 1. The box can be taken to represent anything you like, from the operations of the Department as a whole, to any specific project or plan at a branch, region or district level.

A four legged box will stand most robustly, and with greatest stability under pressure, if all four legs are firmly in place, and are well maintained. Inattention to one pillar will not necessarily topple the whole structure, but the structure will become weakened and wobbly. A northwest wind, or unexpected incident may easily buckle it.

If any two legs are taken away, or not put into place in the beginning, the thing may possibly stand on a completely level surface by a miracle of balance for a brief moment, but the exposure to failure is great. The weakest situation is when only one set of factors is dealt with, only one leg is in place; this produces a structure which will not stand at all, let alone persist in the face of the slightest pressure.

I frequently find people attempting to do things in CALM who fail to realise that you must get all four pillars in place, or who do not understand what each comprises. The result is incomplete projects, stalled programs, wastage of precious resources, frustration and stress. Each of us has our own perspectives on these things. For example, some of us are good at science or with money or people, but forgetful over politics. This causes

frustration and stress .... with well-known consequences! Others of us are politically tuned, but cannot manage finance - and so on. The point is not "which pillar is most important?". It is "none of them are unimportant - all are vital".

### Composition of the pillars

Each of the pillars has a number of component parts. Specific checklists can be drawn up for individual projects or programs, but here are a few of the general comments:

#### Politics

Politics is much more than politicians. It is dealing with everyone external to the department who has an interest in what we do, or who can influence our capacity to do our job. We have all studied Stakeholder Theory and we all understand about Local Heroes and Interested Publics. We all by now also understand that it is **perceptions** about what we do, more than reality that count. Surprisingly we still make political mistakes and miscalculations. These result usually from failing to systematically identify stakeholders, springing surprises on them, underestimating their interest, misreading a change in stakeholder attitudes or believing that if we are right (rather than if we are perceived to be right), it is enough.

For every operation we need a checklist of stakeholders and we need a review of the way in which we will position ourselves with respect to their interests and attitudes. A sample checklist might cover:

- The government
- The minister
- The political parties
- State and federal MPs
- Local government councils and councillors
- Special interest groups and organisations
- Businesses using resources we manage
- Other government agencies
- Local heroes
- Neighbours
- Students
- The media

This checklist is not exhaustive; indeed, each sub-heading can be further sub-divided (and should be) by those who want to make sure they get their politics right.

Note: our political goal may often be simply to survive, rather than to win. This is particularly true where we are caught up in controversial issues where government policy is unclear or conflicting, or in situations where one section of the community is in conflict with another. In these situations, CALM can never "win" and the objective is survival, keeping a low profile, staying off the radar.

Finally, the basic rules of political survival for a government agency:

- (i) Never surprise the public.
- (ii) If possible, never be taken by surprise - ie, ensure effective intelligence on stakeholders.
- (iii) Never get into a situation in which you cannot be confident that your Minister will support you; or into a situation where only win or lose are possible outcomes.

- (iv) Do what you are told by the Minister, and never try to run a hidden agenda on him/her (but be sure to advise of consequences).
- (v) Help your friends and work on your supporters to convert them to friends.
- (vi) Obey the law, and tell the truth!
- (vii) Never trust a zealot. They will always double-cross you or sacrifice you, if it furthers their cause, and they will unhesitatingly undermine you behind your back if it suits them.

## **People**

People management is a standard module of every management course, and the essence of good management. The need for, and the importance of good personnel management is very well known to CALM managers, most of us having come up from the bottom. Getting our structures and reporting arrangements right, providing goals and feedback, strategic planning which links organisational, workplace and individual goals, structured and comprehensive training, and effective industrial relations are all part of our daily life.

Nevertheless, there are some common failings. For example, the need to specifically plan the personnel aspects of a new project or program can occasionally be overlooked. Another failing is to consult widely with the public, but to forget our own staff. Both situations can result in a failed project.

The two biggest innovations in people management in CALM in recent years has been the introduction of QI (ie, CALM people solving CALM problems in a scientific way) and the development of joint consultative committees in workplaces. These approaches are helping us capture creativity, remove hassles and decrease hierarchical/autocratic management.

## **Science**

CALM is absolutely dependent on getting its science right, and having the technology to allow us to work efficiently. It is my view that if we can be confident that our management is based on credible science, we are more than 50% home. Furthermore, this is one of the most important areas where we should be setting a good example to the public at large.

Little needs to be added on the need to employ the most up-to-date technology. Without it we simply are unable to solve the sort of complexities of management thrust upon a modern conservation and land management agency. The risk here is failing to analyse cost/benefits. This must always be done before huge sums are invested.

I believe we also fail to institute effective monitoring programs – in other words, actually measuring outcomes versus expectations, and using this analysis to refine and update what we do. This is an area in which much greater input from CALM scientists is needed.

## **Money**

Without money we can do nothing. Finance is our lifeblood. Yet it is also our Achilles heal, since we must be able always to account for what we spend and, ultimately, we must be able to show that a wise investment has been made. Consequently, there are always two aspects of this issue to be considered: getting the stuff, and then accounting accurately for its expenditure.

A third consideration is earning money. Maximising "stay at home" revenue needs to be a consideration in every aspect of CALM life.

## **Conclusion**

In order to achieve the goals of any program or project in CALM we must ensure that we consider how best to deal with:

- its politics (how it will affect, or be perceived or influenced by the outside world);
- its science (how it will affect nature conservation and the environment) and technology (how modern equipment and techniques can best be used to maximise efficiency and enable complexities to be dealt with);
- the CALM people involved (how they can best contribute, and gain most reward from it); and
- money (how to fund it, how to account properly for what is spent; whether there are opportunities for revenue and whether the community is getting a fair return for its investment).

As a wise man correctly said: "we don't manage issues, we manage ourselves to deal effectively with issues". Managing our four pillars, so they are set firmly in place and well maintained, is the way I believe we should approach this challenge.

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