

TRANSFORMING RESEARCH RESULTS TO ON-GROUND MANAGEMENT ACTION

Experimental Management

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All management is to some extent experimental given that management is ongoing and that research knowledge can never be complete.

Experimental management can range from trial and error in the absence of any research knowledge through to the more preferable situation of assessing research findings in operational practice.

Experimental management requires close liaison between researchers and managers. This liaison can be formalized through a system of monitoring, ensuring constant feedback between researchers and managers.

Experimental Management in Spinifex Communities

Experimental management should be directed towards specific objectives in the management of these communities, due to limited resources. Specific objectives identified by the group are;

1. Fire - especially the control of large wildfires.
2. Re-introduction of rare or restricted species.
3. Increasing biodiversity.
4. Habitat rehabilitation and manipulation.

Underlying all of these objectives is a need to bring stability, and to reduce the scale of disturbance to the spinifex communities.

Is Experimental Management Being Used by Managers?

Experimental management is being used, but the level of commitment depends on other pressures on managers' time. It can be a low priority for on-ground managers such as Park Rangers, due to the pressure of day to day commitments.

For experimental management to work it requires top management to be committed to the idea. The idea must also be sold throughout the hierarchy of the organization.

Making Experimental Management Happen

(i) Institutional

Within an organization it is important that there is a culture supporting experimental management. The institution must be structured to allow experimentation to occur and support managers, some of whom may see experimentation as risky.

Communication within and by the organisation is vital. Interaction between researchers and managers needs to be ongoing. Lobbying is an effective means of promoting ideas within an organization. Public support can be enhanced by positive media coverage.

Both managers and researchers need to be involved at the grassroots level of development of experimental management. New ideas in management always take time to become established in an organization. Reasonable periods of time are necessary to allow new ideas to be incorporated into planning and budgeting.

A specialised role was recognized for a person to act as a bridge, or facilitator, between research and management. In CALM this person is known as an Ecologist and the Ecologist positions are based both in Head Office and in Regional offices. It is desirable that these people have long-term tenure within a Region in order to understand its ecology and management issues of the area.

(ii) Public

Experimental management must be made to appeal to the general public and to other land users. The involvement of other land users is particularly important as much of the spinifex lands are not within conservation reserves.

Ways of appealing to the public include;

- (a) appeal to national pride; images of restoring the outback;
- (b) encourage active participation such as Friends of Parks;
- (c) provide interpretive material;

- (d) ensuring media coverage, making sure that good news is given along with any bad news;
- (e) making sure messages from different organizations are consistent;
- (f) structuring projects to have political appeal.

Conservation agencies should employ people with professional skills in public relations.

Resources to Carry Out Experimental Management

Managers and bureaucrats are very conscious of cost and so low cost approaches to management will be accepted most readily. Within an organization resources will either have to be redirected or new money found. Corporate sponsorship is a promising prospect, especially as the business community is working to improve its environmental image. In attracting additional resources within government it is important to present projects to appeal politically.