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Welcome from Editors

It is our pleasure to bring to you the compiled papers from the Research Forum of the AFAC and Bushfire CRC Annual Conference, held in the Perth Exhibition and Convention Centre on the 28th of August 2012.

These papers were anonymously referred. We would like to express our gratitude to all the referees who agreed to take on this task diligently. We would also like to extend our gratitude to all those involved in the organising, and conducting of the Research Forum.

The range of papers spans many different disciplines, and really reflects the breadth of the work being undertaken, The Research Forum focuses on the delivery of research findings for emergency management personnel who need to use this knowledge for their daily work.

Not all papers presented are included in these proceedings as some authors opted to not supply full papers. However these proceedings cover the broad spectrum of work shared during this important event.

The full presentations from the Research Forum and the posters from the Bushfire CRC are available on the Bushfire CRC website www.bushfirecrc.com.

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Visions of sharing responsibility for disaster resilience: sharing control

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Abstract

Strong normative statements have been made in key policy documents and public inquiries about the need to focus on a principle of 'Shared Responsibility' in Australian emergency management. However, these statements give very little guidance on what sharing responsibility might look like on the ground, leaving stakeholders wondering what this idea mean for the way they interact and what they are expected to achieve in this sector.

This paper analyses what the idea of 'sharing responsibility' means in the context of disaster resilience from the perspectives of stakeholders that participated in a workshop held in March 2012. The workshop brought together a wide range of stakeholders from across government, communities and NGOs, and research to discuss the idea and implications of 'sharing responsibility for disaster resilience'.

Of six facets of responsibility highlighted in the literature that theorises responsibility in the context of risk, one stood out clearly in the stakeholders presentations at the workshop: agency/control. In particular, the need for public sector agencies to share control as well as responsibility with communities was emphasised.

Introduction

A reinvigorated and reinterpreted principle of 'Shared Responsibility' is one of the many legacies that the Victorian 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission left to the field of emergency management (McLennan and Handmer 2012). Alongside the priority to protect human life, this principle underpinned the 67 recommendations the Royal Commission made for reducing the risks of a tragedy like the Black Saturday bushfires occurring again (Teague *et al.* 2010: preface, p. v).

According to the Royal Commission, this principle implies "increased responsibility for all concerned" (Teague et al. 2010: vol. 2, p. 352), with the focus of responsibility being on "community safety during bushfires", and the targeted parties being "the State, municipal councils, individuals, household members and the broader community" (p. 352). The Council of Australian Government's (COAG) National Strategy for Disaster Resilience gave the principle even greater policy traction by firmly placing it as a central pillar of a "whole-of-nation, resilience-based approach to disaster management" (COAG 2011: ii). It also expanded the scope of the principle to target the "whole of society" and to focus on responsibility for the broader area of "increasing disaster resilience" (p. 3).

While these documents make strong normative statements about the need for a renewed focus on Shared Responsibility in emergency management, they give very little guidance on what sharing responsibility might look like on the ground or about how stakeholders might do it in practice. This has left emergency management practitioners and other stakeholders wondering what this idea means for the way they interact with each other, and for what this interaction is expected to achieve.

It is in this context that the Centre for Risk and Community Safety at RMIT University held a one-day workshop in March 2012 that brought a wide range of emergency management stakeholders together to consider two central questions:

1. What does the idea of 'shared responsibility' mean, and what are its implications?

2. Is it a useful policy concept, and if yes what needs to be done to implement it, and what could undermine it?

The 'visions of sharing responsibility for disaster resilience' workshop (hereafter 'the workshop') was conducted on behalf of the Bushfire CRC and the Emergency Management network of the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF). It brought together over 80 stakeholders from across the public sector, research and civil society. Twenty-four people participated as speakers, responding in whatever way they chose to the above two questions. Importantly, the speakers represented a wide range of perspectives, cutting across public agencies, research and civil society, with the latter including community members and non-government organisations. A full schedule of speakers is available in the written account of the workshop, available for download via the Bushfire CRC website (McLennan *et al.* 2012).

This paper reports on an analysis of the meanings that speakers at the workshop associated with the idea of sharing responsibility. The written account of the workshop includes a lengthy summary of the content of presentations made by speakers and the key themes that emerged in discussions held during the day. This provides a valuable insight into the meanings given to the idea of shared responsibility in the context of Australian emergency management from a broad range of stakeholder perspectives. Despite the diversity of perspectives conveyed at the workshop, it was clear that for many of the speakers sharing responsibility, particularly between government and civil society (also agencies and communities), is also very much about agencies and communities developing closer relationships and sharing control of key aspects of the emergency management process.

Facets of responsibility

Our analysis was guided by a simple conceptual framework that encompasses six key facets of responsibility. Notably, no single understanding of the concept of responsibility has developed in social, political, economic or psychological theory. Indeed, a number of authors lament the lack of conceptual clarity that accompanies analyses of responsibility across fields that include social theory, philosophy and law (Auhagen and Bierhoff 2001; Cane 2002), governance (Pellizzoni 2004), and sociology (Strydom 1999). Rather, definitions of responsibility vary according to different philosophical approaches (Fleurbaey 1995), perspectives and goals (Auhagen and Bierhoff 2001). Because of this, responsibility has been described by theorists as "a difficult notion to grasp" (Fleurbaey 1995: 684) and "an interestingly ambiguous or multi-layered term" (Giddens 1999: 8). This ambiguity is evident both in academic debate as well as in everyday interaction (Auhagen and Bierhoff 2001: 180-181).

The concept of responsibility is therefore best thought of as a multi-faceted, catch-all term that refers to a collection of interrelated ideas and meanings. When the concept is applied in a particular context, one or more of these meanings may be emphasized above others. Further, different meanings may be emphasized by different stakeholders within the same context. This raises the question: what does sharing responsibility mean in the context of disaster resilience from the perspectives of stakeholders in the disaster management community?

Within the literature that theorises responsibility in the context of risk, six themes stand out as core facets of this complex concept (McLennan and Handmer 2011).They are; causality, obligation, accountability, trustworthiness, constraint and agency/control. Each of these facets is emphasized somewhere in the literature as being particularly important for understanding the way responsibility for risk management is conceived, allocated, shared or shirked.

The notion of responsibility is often associated with assumptions about causality (Giddens, 1999; Pellizzoni, 2004; Shaver, 1985; Weiner, 2006). This requires that the particular decision or action (or absence of decision or action, e.g. Arceneaux and Stein 2006) that caused a particular outcome is identifiable (Bickerstaff, et al., 2008). However, causal

responsibility quickly becomes muddied when the outcome is attributable to multiple sources (Shaver & Schutte, 2001), as is generally the case in complex disaster situations.

Obligation refers to expectations and rules in society about the duties and roles of different parties with respect to particular activities, decisions or outcomes. Importantly, a single party may have different types of obligations that may or may not align. They include moral, legal, social and professional obligations (Bierhoff and Auhagen 2001; Shaver and Schutte 2001; Cane 2002; Bickerstaff *et al.* 2008; Pulcini 2010). These obligations may also be more or less formal in nature, varying from formal obligations codified in law to informal, unwritten but widely held social norms.

In a related sense, responsibility may also mean accountability. To be held 'responsible' for a particular outcome is to be held accountable, answerable, liable or to blame for undesired consequences. Importantly, accountabilities and obligations are interwoven. Parties are held accountable when they fail to fulfil the obligations that others perceive them to have – whether moral, legal, social or professional (Pellizzoni 2004). Accountability thus "emphasises the presence of moral or legal rules specifying rights and obligations" (Pellizzoni 2004, p. 547). As Witt (2001) points out: "Implying liability, accountability refers to individuals being subject to sanction when acting incongruently with formal guidelines, rules, or laws" (p. 139).

In a different sense, responsibility also refers to trustworthiness and the qualities of being reliable or dependable (Giddens 1999). In this sense, it is a positive quality of a person or organisation rather than a judgement about expectations or outcomes of an action (Bierhoff and Auhagen 2001). Relatedly, responsibility can also be associated with constraint in behaviour or action (Bierhoff and Auhagen 2001, p. 1). For example, we might describe a person as responsible (in the sense of trustworthy or reliable) when they refrain from doing something that, though it may benefit them personally, would disadvantage someone else. This aspect of responsibility highlights a tension between personal freedom and rights on one hand, and moral, legal and social obligations towards other members of society on the other. For this reason, responsibility is often described as a burden (Bierhoff and Auhagen 2001; Birnbacher 2001; Bickerstaff and Walker 2002, p. 2177).

Finally, the notion of responsibility is also associated with agency/control. Parties must usually be judged as having agency or freedom of choice in order to be held responsible (accountable) for the outcomes of their actions and decisions (Luhmann 1993, p. 101; Bierhoff and Auhagen 2001; Weiner 2006, p. 32). Without choice, parties cannot exercise control over outcomes and thus cannot be responsible for them. Yet even when a party has the freedom of choice to make a decision, they still may not have the capacity to put that decision into action. Hence, in addition to control over decision-making (freedom of choice), judgements of responsibility also commonly requires that a party has the capacity to carry out these decisions, also referred to as "control in acting" (Bickerstaff and Walker 2002, p. 2177) or being "response-able" (French 1992). This is highlighted by the fact that parties will argue against being held responsible for undesired outcomes on the grounds that they did not have sufficient resources, power, authority, knowledge and so forth to put an alternative decision into action (Montada, 2001).

Importantly, the agency/control facet of responsibility is particularly prevalent in theorising about risk. A number of risk theorists have shown that a close connection exists between responsibility and risk through the central importance of agency to both concepts. As social and political theorist Anthon Giddens (1999) points out, "risks only exist when there are decisions to be taken… The idea of responsibility also presumes decisions. What brings into play the notion of responsibility is that someone takes a decision having discernible consequences" (p. 8).

Sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1993: 101-102) also highlights this close connection by making a clear distinction between the ideas of risk and danger (for linguistic analyses of the difference in meaning of these terms, see Ingles 1991; Boholm 2011). Similarly to Gidden's statement above, the basis of Luhmann's distinction is whether or not consequences arise as the result of a decision. In the case of risk, negative consequences are attributed to decisions that parties have made, whereas dangers are attributed to external, uncontrollable factors. Consequently, risks are something that people have a choice about and therefore also a responsibility for. However, danger is imposed by outside forces and is uncontrollable. It therefore does not create the same responsibility as risks. In short, risks give rise to responsibilities.

Methodology

The written account of the 'visions of sharing responsibility' workshop provides a valuable insight into what 'sharing responsibility for disaster resilience' means from a wide range of stakeholder perspectives. Each of the 24 speakers who participated in the workshop was approached directly and invited to participate by the workshop organisers. They were selected because of their experience – professionally, voluntarily or personally – in aspects of disaster policy or disaster preparedness activities in which both government and community actors are widely held by law, policy or social norms to have (or potentially have) responsibilities. For example, speakers from public agencies included two people with senior roles in community safety in emergency service agencies, and two members of a Victorian Government taskforce that oversees the implementation of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience in Victoria. Speakers from non-government organisations included people with recent experience in coordinating and supporting spontaneous volunteers during post-disaster recovery. Community speakers included residents of a small community in which ten lives and a majority of homes were lost in the 'Black Saturday' bushfires in Victoria in 2009 and a member of a bushfire-prone community with a background in community-based disaster preparedness activities.

The speakers' contributions to the workshop were captured by five note-takers and summarised in the written account that is now publicly available (McLennan *et al.* 2012). Importantly, a draft of this account was circulated to speakers to review and confirm. A small number of speakers requested minor changes to the summary to clarify key points or to better convey the meaning and emphasis they intended when they spoke at the workshop.

For the analysis reported here, this written account was thematically analysed to identify which of the six facets of responsibility outlined above – causality, obligation, accountability,

trustworthiness, constraint, and agency/control—were most strongly conveyed by the speakers. These were identified using a simple method of manually coding the text of the written account through identification of these six key words and their synonyms.

Perspectives on sharing responsibility

Table 1 presents an overview of the results of this thematic coding according to three key stakeholder groups: government, community/NGO, and research. Facets/themes indicated as "weak" were referred to by a single speaker or had very few mentions overall amongst speakers in a particular stakeholder group. Those indicated as "medium" were referred to by a number of speakers but without a strong emphasis. The indication of "strong" was reserved for facets/themes that had a particularly high number of mentions by a majority of speakers in a given stakeholder group. As a full discussion of all the facets of responsibility included in Table 1 is beyond this scope of this paper, the remaining section focuses on the one facet of responsibility that was conveyed most strongly by speakers, particularly amongst the government and community/NGO stakeholder groups: agency/control.

Facets of Responsibility	Government (n=8)	Community & NGO (n=8)	Research (n=8)
Causality	Nil	Nil	Nil
Obligation/ expectation	Medium	Weak	Medium
Accountability	Weak	Weak	Medium
Agency/ control	Strong	Strong	Medium
Constraint	Nil	Weak	Weak
Trustworthiness	Nil	Medium	Weak

Table 1: Facets of responsibility conveyed most strongly by speakers according to key stakeholder groups

Table 2 (page 8) and Table 3 (page 9) outline some of the key points made by selected speakers who most directly engaged with the issue of control and responsibility. Table 2 summarises views on the need to share control between government and communities. Table 3 outlines some of the opportunities and challenges that speakers identified for sharing control in practice.

The speaker's comments in Table 2 show that a theme of government allowing greater choice and control for emergency management to rest within communities underpinned the discussion about sharing responsibility. So, for example, Anne and Kate who spoke from the perspective of community/NGO stakeholders, talked about the need for government to let go of control in order to engage communities more actively in risk management. They claimed this would involve a greater degree of risk acceptance and trust in communities' abilities to be responsible for managing risk.

From the perspectives of government stakeholders, the view was somewhat different, but nonetheless still indicated that if communities are to share greater responsibility for community bushfire safety, governments will need to relinquish a degree of control. As Chris pointed out, sharing responsibility with communities does not mean that government avoids responsibility but rather that it is honest about what it can and cannot do. In other words,

government needs to communicate the limits to its capacity (e.g. its "control in acting") to deliver risk management outcomes. He also asked how government can encourage shared responsibility without taking over, indicating that government should not control what communities do. Mark directly argued that sharing responsibility is not about government telling people what to do but supporting what people already do. Along a similar line, Terry indicated that the CFA is moving in the direction of supporting communities rather than doing things to them from the top down. Jeanette summed up the idea underlying these views by describing government's role as an enabler as much as a provider.

The views given in Table 3 both highlight challenges associated with communities having control over risk management outcomes, as well as suggesting that some of the challenges are not as big as may be feared. A key challenge recognised by a number of government stakeholders was the tension between government making space for communities to have more control while also needing to be accountable for government decision-making and spending. As Steve pointed out, distributing responsibility can dilute responsibility. However, this tension was seen as one to be managed or confronted rather than one which would preclude sharing control with communities. For example, Vanessa allayed fears about liability associated with Council's coordination of the involvement of spontaneous volunteers in emergency response, pointing out that in the case of the massive Brisbane Mud Army, liability costs to the Council were small. Limits in the risk management capacities of government and communities were also acknowledged by Kate and Terry respectively. In particular, Terry asked stakeholders to think about the limits to community members' capacity to make decisions under stress and meet the responsibilities expected of them by government.

Conclusions

Of the six facets of responsibility highlighted in the literature that theorises responsibility in the context of risk, agency/control was clearly most prevalent in the workshop. In particular, the meaning most closely associated with the idea of sharing responsibility for disaster resilience in this workshop was *sharing control*. Collectively, government and community/NGO speakers at the workshop emphasised that in order for parties in these two stakeholder groups to share responsibility for disaster resilience, they must also share control over risk management decisions, actions and processes. This emphasis reflects, at a more practical level, the intricate conceptual relationship between risk, responsibility and agency that is elaborated by social and political theorists like Luhmann (1993) and Giddens (1999). In the contest of risk, taking responsibility is also about having control, both control in decision-making (freedom of choice) and 'control in acting" (capacity) (Bickerstaff and Walker 2002, p. 2177).

The brief analysis presented here is based on a small number of stakeholder presentations at a single workshop and should therefore be taken as indicative only of stakeholder perspectives of the underlying meaning of sharing responsibility for disaster resilience in Australia. However, despite its limited scope, it draws attention to two potentially significant implications of putting a principle of Shared Responsibility into practice that may not be immediately evident to emergency management practitioners and other stakeholders.

Therese are: 1) that public sector agencies will need to allow a relatively greater degree of control of risk management processes and outcomes to rest with communities; and 2) that agencies need to clearly and directly communicate the limits of their capacities to control risk management processes and thus achieve risk management outcomes.

The active participation of community and NGO stakeholders in the workshop was important for drawing out the relationship between responsibility and agency/control more strongly than would have occurred in any of the more established stakeholder engagement forums in this sector that do not generally include community groups and NGOs. Thus an associated, broader issue highlighted by this paper is the need for a forum for emergency management stakeholders from across public sector agencies, private industry, research and civil society to exchange learning and perspectives on big questions collectively facing the sector as a whole.

Speaker	Description	Context
Community & NGO perspectives		
Anne Leadbeater - Kinglake community, Murrindindi Shire Council	▪ Shared responsibility needs to be accompanied by a freeing up of control. ▪ It starts with risk acceptance. ▪ It is also about agencies and government trusting communities in order to give up control. Communities are engaged where they think they have influence and can affect change.	Bushfire preparedness and recovery
Kate Lawrence - Mount Macedon community, National Rural Women's Coalition	▪ Preparedness and shared responsibility is about shared power, mutual respect and partnership. ▪ Government has an overarching presence /control in our lives. Communities and citizens have become dependent and disconnected from own determinism/responsibility. Are overly regulated and so we expect that someone else is always in charge. ▪ When disaster hits "the baton of responsibility is suddenly thrust at us". We are told to be engaged, responsible, self-reliant. Then the baton cannot be handed back neatly – we want to keep holding it. ▪ Few communities are well-prepared for disaster. Government needs to let go and enable communities to think for themselves.	Disaster preparedness
Government perspectives		
Chris Collett - Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department	▪ Shared responsibility is about increasing honesty about disasters and disaster risk reduction. It is not about governments avoiding responsibility. It is about governments being honest about what they can and cannot do. ▪ There is a tension in government about how to contribute to shared responsibility without taking over. How do we encourage shared responsibility from the position of big government?	Disaster resilience policy
Mark Duckworth - Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet	▪ Shared responsibility is taking off as a central idea in government. It is not about government telling people what to do; it's about harnessing and supporting what's already happening, and people learning from each other.	Disaster resilience policy
Terry Hayes - CFA	▪ The CFA is completely changing the way it does things in order to support communities rather than to do things to them from the top down. It is difficult but we are committed to this change.	Community bushfire safety
Jeanette Pope - Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development	▪ Community resilience is related to networks within communities and networks that extend outside the community. Networks are built through participation. Government has a role in encouraging participation. ▪ The role of government is more as an enabler than as a provider.	Community development

Table 1: Selected views on sharing control between government and civil society

Speaker	Description	Context
Community & NGO perspectives		
Vanessa Fabre - Brisbane City Council	▪ Dilemma - response and recovery geared around 'Command and Control' so when and how can community participate? ▪ People are often concerned about liability with managing volunteers. However, Brisbane City Council received only 10 insurance claims out of approximately 24,000 volunteers. The cost to Council was not high.	Spontaneous volunteers in flood recovery
Kate Lawrence - Mount Macedon community, National Rural Women's Coalition	▪ Communities are locked out of developing their own projects. There is no avenue for activism and agitation. ▪ Is a fear that communities will get it wrong: that misinformation will spread. But this is only worse when there is a gap between citizen and government. ▪ It needs to be said by Government "We don't know how to protect you all the time". Requires a leap of faith. It happens in other area, e.g. Landcare groups etc. but not in areas with a focus on disaster.	Disaster preparedness
Government perspectives		
Mark Duckworth - Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet	▪ Behavioural change is less about convincing communities and more about changing how governments engage with communities on these issues. ▪ Another big issue that governments need to face in doing this is accountability. How can governments be both enablers of what other groups do as well as being accountable for spending government funds? We don't have the answer to this, but it is an issue that is being talked about in government.	Disaster resilience policy
Terry Hayes - CFA	▪ There is no legislation that says people have to share responsibility. When did we agree with the community to share responsibility? When did we test their capacity to meet their responsibilities? Decision-making under stress is often poor: we are placing a lot on people in emergency situations.	Community bushfire safety
Jeanette Pope - Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development	▪ Community networks draw people back after a disaster, which helps with rebuilding. Government should reduce the red tape but the need for government accountability is a challenging issue.	Community development
Steve Opper - NSW SES	▪ Is it possible that the concept could be used to excuse government failure? Distributing responsibility can dilute accountability. ▪ Shift from a top-down to bottom-up (distributed funding) approach needs a leap of faith.	Flood preparedness and response

Table 2: Selected views on opportunities and challenges for sharing control

Acknowledgements

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