MAKING DECISIONS TO MINIMISE RISK: A MULTILEVEL RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

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Context

Of the Ten Lessons from Murrindindi (McLennan & Elliott, 2010):
— Two identified the importance of community and social context,
— Two identified the importance of information and its sources,
— One identified the vital role of anxiety and emotional regulation for survival.

There is clearly scope to apply what we know from psychology to better understand cognitive processing, individual decision making, and community behaviours.

Rationale

Individuals are influenced by a range of factors, namely the broader community context, the information they encounter, and their own individual dispositional characteristics.

This project will explore the combined and interactive role of these factors in decision making.

Beyond the bushfire context, we also seek to contribute to and build on existing psychological theory.

Research Questions

1. Why are some communities better prepared and more resilient to bushfires than others and what can be done to raise the bar?

2. How do individuals use information and warnings to guide their actions?
   — What information should/should not be provided?
   — How and when is the information best delivered?
   — How does the community context moderate the effectiveness of messages?

3. Are some individuals more able than others to make good decisions during a bushfire crisis and can better decision making be enabled?
   — Can we develop an effective cognitive bias modification program for field use?

Methodology

We intend to utilise a variety of methods across the three research areas including:
— Consultation with key stakeholders and subject matter experts.
— Field research with residents of bushfire prone areas.
— Laboratory studies (simulations of bushfire scenarios).
— Hypothetical scenarios ("What would you do if...").

We also intend to collaborate with other Bushfire CRC researchers.

Proposed Deliverables

1. Community-level interventions designed to improve preparedness and resilience to bushfires.

2. Individual Bushfire Readiness Barometer.

3. Improved warning and information delivery interventions
   — Improved education programs.

4. Self-administered cognitive bias modification intervention.

Research Framework

Our Team

The UWA/Flinders team brings expertise in:
— Social change,
— Health psychology,
— Organisational behaviour, and
— Cognitive bias.