IN SEARCH OF THE 'HOLY-GRAIL' OF EFFECTIVE AUSTRALIAN DISASTER MANAGEMENT

THE RISE OF THE INTELLIGENT DISASTER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (IDMS)

By

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To My Mother and Father...

**"The best minute I spend,
is the one I invest in people"**

(Blanchard & Johnson, 1994:39)

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PREFACE

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Robin James PAGRAM

ABSTRACT

This study demonstrates that disaster is highly complex, and the means of managing disaster is by no means always clear. In this respect, disaster management is influenced by a wide range of socio-political-economic-organisational factors.

Australian disaster experience identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the counter-disaster system. Opportunities to advance the development of the system have been generally erratic, slow, and incremental in their realisation; particularly when one compares the state of disaster management and planning in other countries. Having said this, it is acknowledged that there have been advances in the capabilities of organisations directly responsible for "emergency" management and in the coordinating arrangements at State and Territory levels. However, it is the argument of this thesis, that Australia has been largely trekking at the edge of effective disaster management practice. This is to suggest that in 1996, we are no further nearer establishing a disaster-based counter-disaster management system, than we were in 1986.

Quite simply, Australia using an inappropriate practice ideology, has established a disaster management system based on accident and emergency planning principles. Recognition of the importance of disaster planning principles is yet to be translated into planning and training. The organisational capacity of Australian emergency service organisations to cope with disaster, as opposed to accidents and emergencies is thus questionable. Counter-disaster management, as distinct from incident management, has traditionally drawn scant interest from governments. It is not surprising that there is low community perception and awareness of the threat of disaster in Australia. Attempts by academics and practitioners to communicate hazard risk and vulnerability to the wider public, as well as governments, has been far from satisfactory.

In order to combat the wide range of socio-political-economic-organisational impediments, the Australian disaster management system needs to become more "intelligent". Intelligence can be found in the design, development, and implementation of an Intelligent Disaster Management System (IDMS).

The IDMS structure will resemble a federation of organisational units that are typically interdependent, relying on one another for critical expertise and know-how. A Central Coordinating Council (CCC) will orchestrate the broad strategic vision for the network, and ultimately, the concept of an IDMS. The CCC will create the cultural glue which develops the necessary synergies and ensures unity of mission of purpose. The IDMS and CCC will be assisted by an Event Coordination Management System (ECMS), as opposed to a system based on command and control. The "intelligent" ECMS will be one founded on matrix organisational design and management arrangements. Adoption of leadership inspired management qualities and mentorship will strengthen the intelligence of the ECMS and overcome matrix design limitations. A reconciliation of the rational and incremental approach to decision making will provide disaster managers with the necessary "self-learning" to adapt their behavioural and managerial style to effectively deal with disaster, and more importantly, boundary or turf conflict.

It is these attributes of intelligent organisational design that provide a means of overcoming the socio-political-economic-organisational impediments that prevent effective disaster management practice. Moreover, these same intelligent attributes provide the means of attaining the benefits of centralisation versus decentralisation; stability versus dynamism; and uniformity versus diversity.

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ABBREVIATIONS

IDMS	Intelligent Disaster Management System
ECMS	Event Coordination Management System
CCC	Central Coordinating Council
ICS	Incident Command System
BES	Bureau of Emergency Services
QES	Queensland Emergency Services
QFS	Queensland Fire Service
QAS	Queensland Ambulance Service;
QASB	Queensland Ambulance Services Board
SES	State Emergency Service;
CHEM	Chemical Hazards and Emergency Management
QPS	Queensland Police Service
DMO	Disaster Management Organisation
SDC	State Disaster Council
SEMC	State Emergency Management Organisation
SEMC	State Emergency Management Committee
DEMC	District Emergency Management Committee
LEMC	Local Emergency Management Committee
EMA	Emergency Management Australia
AEMI	Australian Emergency Management Institute
CIS	Commonwealth Independent States
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
DRON	Disaster-Relevant Organisational Network
DDC	Decision Making under Disaster Conditions
PSMC	Public Sector Management Commission
NDR	Natural Disaster Reduction
IDNDR	International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction
DISPLAN	Disaster Plan
ADMIN	Australian Disaster Management Information Network

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