bushfire&natural HAZARDS CRC

The drive to use research to inform practice is growing. This research has developed a self-assessment tool and guidelines to help agencies maximize their investment in research.

Closing the research-practice gap

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The University of Tasmania (UTAS) in partnership with the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC and the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC) have developed the research utilisation matrix and guidelines to assist agencies to utilise research to support evidence-informed practice .

Introduction

One of the challenges facing the emergency management sector is the gap between research and practice. Despite the considerable investment in publicly funded and commissioned disaster research, the application of research findings to operational practice often lags, if implemented at all. This project has identified activities involved in the research utilisation process to support agencies to gain maximum benefit from their investment in research.

Methods

Initial survey results were discussed with members of the AFAC Knowledge Innovation Research Utilisation Network (KIRUN) and in collaboration with them a research utilisation maturity matrix has been designed as a self-assessment tool. Indicators associated with the tool were then used in a later survey to test a model of research utilization that could predict levels of implementation.

Results

The survey was completed by 190 respondents from 29 fire and emergency services agencies across Australia and New Zealand. The survey included (in part) indicators of two models of research utilisation: the science-push/demand pull model and a more relational model of knowledge building called the socially-interactive organisation model. The socially interactive organisation model was a better fit for indicators of effective research implementation. Figure 1 shows a model to conceptualise how these elements may work together to support research utilisation.
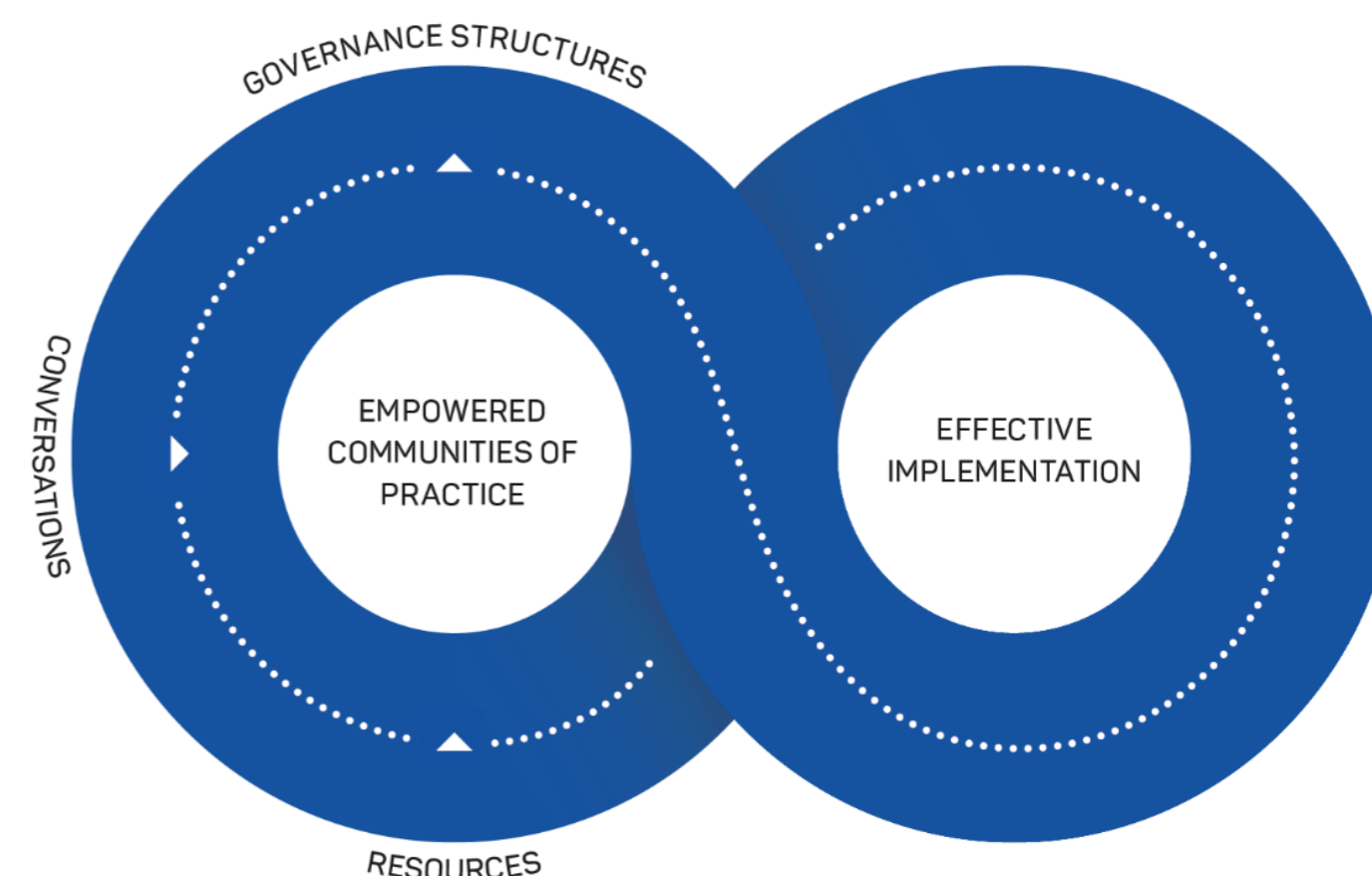
Discussion

Conversations and communities of practice within agencies are the first step in building effective implementation activities.

The research utilisation maturity matrix is designed to aid reflection, inform development and promote change. It can be used by individuals, in teams, or across a whole agency at a strategic level. The matrix provides a mechanism for supporting structured and ongoing discussions about the level of utilisation maturity in the organisation.

The matrix can be used in a number of ways and at different stages in the development of research-informed practice. Its uses include:

- benchmarking current research utilisation capability
- identifying differences in perceptions, and building consensus across different roles, functions and teams about research utilisation
- helping units and agencies to identify their own areas of strength and areas for improvement, and tracking these over time
- demonstrating characteristics of an organisation and/ or team with a more developed approach to research utilization
- encouraging peer support – matching those with something to share to those with something to learn.

A model of research utilisation

Enabler	Description
People	The degree to which people in the unit or agency are expected to have or supported in obtaining the skills necessary to find, appraise and use research. The degree to which utilisation is authorised as part of core activity, embedded within job roles.
Culture	The underlying beliefs, values and behaviours of the unit/agency that inhibit or support research utilisation. This includes how receptive (or resistant) the culture is to adopting and promoting research utilisation in its everyday practice and decision making, and the extent to which research utilisation is viewed by personnel as central to the development and improvement of future policy and practice.
Communic-ation and Engagement	The degree to which engaging in utilising research is an individual or collective affair. Is it driven by passionate individuals alone or are there engaged communities of practice where people discuss, share insights? Are these found within the unit or agency and/or between agencies; potentially introducing utilisation insights from other sectors?
Resources and professional develop-ment	The degree of investment in resources to develop and improve the capability of all personnel to understand and enable research utilisation. This includes the extent of sufficient learning opportunities provided for personnel to develop their skills, knowledge and experience of research and utilisation.
Policies, procedures and doctrine	The presence or absence of appropriate policies, procedures and doctrine so that research is used to inform practice. The processes by which policies may link utilising research to the agency's core business.
Structures	The presence or absence of appropriate mechanisms to capture and facilitate research utilisation, to monitor its implementation and to disseminate and promote it throughout the organisation and the wider sector.
Governance	The processes in place to monitor, implement and report on research utilisation including quality assurance for continuous improvement.
Products	What happens to the products emerging from research. The degree to which these are taken up across the agency or simply sit on the shelf.

Download the Guidelines at
https://www.afac.com.au/docs/default-source/ru/afac-rumm-guidelines.pdf?sfvrsn=2

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