

Institutional credibility and leadership: critical challenges for community-based natural resource governance in rural and remote Australia

Lionel V. Pero · Timothy F. Smith

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Abstract Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) institutions are challenged with finding common ground as a basis for action among diverse resource users and stakeholders. Establishing and maintaining institutional credibility within their regions, catchments, communities and among their membership is fundamental to overcoming the challenge. So too is applying appropriate institutional and governance structures and appointing appropriate leaders. Drawing on triangulated case study data collected over a 12-month period using multiple methods, this paper examines the influence of institutional credibility and leadership on the functioning, decision-making and governance of two CBNRM institutions in Queensland, Australia. The paper shows that stakeholders have very different expectations of what makes a CBNRM institution credible. Satisfying the multiple expectations requires CBNRM institutions to incorporate diverse stakeholder representation, assert their legitimacy and demonstrate accountability, transparency, fairness and justice. The paper also draws attention to the value and importance of appointing inspirational leaders who focus on encouraging followers to pursue collective goals. Comparing the merits and constraints of appointing average Joes versus community elites to the Boards of CBNRM institutions, the paper highlights the urgent need for community-based natural resource governance and inspirational leadership education and training programs to

improve the availability and quality of CBNRM leadership in rural Australia. Since combining credible CBNRM institutions with inspirational leaders does not necessarily equate to sustainable on-ground NRM outcomes, it is critical that the education and training programs emphasise the importance of monitoring and evaluating the improvements in decision-making processes and in decision outcomes.

Keywords Community-based · Natural resource management · Institutional credibility · Governance · Inspirational leadership

Introduction

Recent international natural resource management (NRM) policy trends highlight the increasing popularity of democratic decentralisation (Plummer and FitzGibbon 2004; Ribot 2002)—largely resulting from perceived social and environmental failures of top-down governance models. Participatory forms of natural resource governance (NRG) have been adopted to reverse the perceived failures and are also promoted as having other benefits, including reducing conflict and galvanising community action. Korfmacher (2001) succinctly describes three rationales that help to justify more participatory forms of NRM, including: (1) a democratic rationale, whereby there is an inherent value in involving communities in decisions that affect them within democratic societies; (2) a substantive rationale, whereby members of communities often make unique contributions (e.g. local knowledge or community-based research) that inform NRM decisions and improve the decision outcomes; and (3) a pragmatic rationale, whereby communities that have been involved in decisions are more likely to not only support, but to also help implement the decisions.

L. V. Pero (✉)
GPO Box 668, Brisbane, QLD 4001, Australia
e-mail: Lionel.Pero@ghd.com.au

T. F. Smith
University of the Sunshine Coast,
Maroochydore, DC 4558, Australia

Korfmacher's (2001) view is similar to that of Lee (1993), who argues that sustainability is achieved through a process of social learning (Milbrath 1989), whereby communities need to be active participants in decision-making.

As an institutionalised form of participatory governance, democratic decentralisation requires NRM institutions to promote collaborative and deliberative decision-making between multiple stakeholders (Brosius et al. 1998; Cortner and Moote 1999; Hemmati 2002; Karkkainen 2003; Leach 2004). Democratic decentralisation also requires NRM institutions to demonstrate upward accountability to the devolving government/s and downward accountability to the local communities and populations they represent (Lane et al. 2004; Ribot 2004). People's perceptions of an NRM institution's accountability, together with their perceptions of its representation, legitimacy, transparency, fairness and justice collectively influence the perceived credibility of that institution. The importance of institutional credibility for promoting collaboration and deliberation in NRM is underpinned by people's perceptions thereof influencing their level of trust, support, satisfaction and cooperation with that institution (Beierle 1999; Beierle and Konisky 2000; Brinkerhoff 2005; Innes and Booher 1999; Lawrence 2004).

Leadership is also increasingly being recognised as important in NRM (Berry and Gordon 1993; Danter et al. 2000; Egri and Herman 2000; Fenton 2004; Gray et al. 2005; Kan and Parry 2004). The importance of leadership is underpinned by its role in promoting interaction; integrating different cultures; fostering a common identity; promoting mutual social and environmental values; promoting and driving change; and facilitating collective action (Pero 2005).

In Australia, the \$3 billion Natural Heritage Trust Extension Program (NHT2) (CoA 2004) and the \$1.4 billion National Action Plan for Water Quality and Salinity (NAP) (CoA 2002) have been instrumental in promoting community commitment to NRM and the development of local NRM leadership (RIWG 2004). The NHT2 and NAP objectives are consistent with the increasing emphasis being placed on rural communities to become more self-determining (CoA 2001) and to take greater responsibility for the management of their natural resources (Gray et al. 2005). In the State of Queensland, 14 regional community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) institutions are responsible for implementing the two National programs. As community-based organisations, the membership of these institutions combines the multiple resource user and stakeholder interests of primary industries, community groups, conservation groups, Indigenous groups and the local governments within their respective geographical regions. The NHT2 and NAP programs

require Queensland's CBNRM institutions to facilitate the inclusion and participation of all parties with a stake in the natural resources of their regions in collaborative decision-making (CoA 2002, 2004). The programs also require the CBNRM institutions to facilitate collective on-ground action that achieves sustainable NRM outcomes. These requirements challenge CBNRM institutions with finding common ground as a basis for action among diverse resource users and stakeholders. Many of the stakeholders not only have conflicting philosophies, values and interests, but also complex social interdependencies (Bawden 2000; Probst and Hagmann 2003; Ravnborg and Westermann 2002; Wit and Kerr 2002). The challenge is made more onerous by the actions of CBNRM institutions having the potential to affect the economic viability and social welfare of individuals, groups and communities (Thompson et al. 1998).

Notwithstanding rural leadership being a key requirement for the successful implementation of the two National programs, Macadam et al. (2004) draw attention to the poor availability and quality thereof in rural Australia. Indicators of the lack of rural leadership include the underrepresentation of females, young people, Indigenous Australians and people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds occupying senior positions in rural organisations (Macadam et al. 2004). There is also evidence to suggest that leadership education in Australia lags behind contemporary international leadership education. A leadership scoping study commissioned by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission in 2001 found that none of the 26 Australian leadership development programs it surveyed addressed the need for leadership to promote and achieve attitudinal and cultural change [F. Lynn (Murray-Darling Basin Commission) 2005, personal communication 11 November]. Furthermore, Australian leadership programs have been found to emphasise the development of executive or individual leaders over facilitative or generative leaders (Gray et al. 2005; Macadam et al. 2004).

Taking cognisance of the institutional credibility and leadership challenges facing CBNRM institutions, this paper promotes a better understanding of the two concepts and their roles and influences for promoting sustainable NRM outcomes. The sections on 'Understanding the value and importance of institutional credibility for CBNRM institutions' and 'Understanding the value and importance of leadership for CBNRM institutions' provide insights to the importance of the two concepts. The practical application is then examined through two case studies of community-based NRM in Queensland, Australia. The 'Research findings' sub-headings highlight the key lessons learnt from each case. Finally, comparing the research findings for the two cases, the paper discusses their multiple insights and implications for CBNRM.

Understanding the value and importance of institutional credibility for CBNRM institutions

Institutional credibility refers to peoples' acceptance of an institution based on their perceptions of that institutions' accountability, representation, legitimacy, transparency, fairness and justice. The collective importance of these six aspects can be inferred from the multiple links between them and the overlap in their definitions, as demonstrated by Brinkerhoff (2005), Hunt and Haider (2001), Innes and Booher (1999), Lawrence et al. (1997) and Lind et al. (1997). Hence, to enhance their credibility, CBNRM institutions need to incorporate diverse stakeholder representation, assert their legitimacy and demonstrate their accountability, transparency, fairness and justice.

From a NRM stakeholder representation perspective, credible institutions are those perceived as democratic, open, honest and inclusive, and which incorporate and represent all (including conflicting) interests, cultures, values and worldviews (Beierle and Konisky 2000; Innes and Booher 1999; McCay 2002; Williams and Matheny 1995). Brinkerhoff (2005) suggests that institutions that adhere to societal expectations and that build a reputation for their appropriateness and correctness are more likely to be viewed as legitimate. People are also, in general, willing to voluntarily accept an institution's decisions and obey its rules where they perceive the institution to be trustworthy and legitimate (De Cremer and Tyler 2005). According to Brinkerhoff (2005), legitimacy can be gained by conforming to socially accepted forms and practices; communicating with constituents in ways that connect to selected terminology, images, beliefs and symbols; and influencing constituents' perceptions of reality.

Accountability and transparency concerns are largely associated with the mistrust of individuals, organisations and institutions (O'Neill 2002). Demonstrating accountability and transparency is particularly important in group processes, where the decision-makers' thinking may be quite different from the thinking of those affected by their decisions (Nancarrow and Syme 2001). Huse (2005) and Roberts et al. (2005) suggest that insights into the accountability of institutions may be gained by examining the behaviour of their governing entities, in particular: their decision-making cultures; their formal and informal structures and norms; and their internal and external interactions.

NRM decision-making frequently involves allocating limited resources among multiple constituents (Smith and McDonough 2001), with considerations of procedural and distributive fairness and justice being central and fundamental to the cooperation of these constituents (Colquitt et al. 2001; Hunt and Haider 2001; Marshall 2004; Syme and Nancarrow 2001). Hegtvædt and Markovsky (1995) show that a fair decision outcome is unlikely to receive strong

acceptance and support where the process for making that decision was not perceived to be fair. Similarly, a fair and just decision process can reduce the level of dissatisfaction with a decision outcome perceived to be unfair (Lawrence et al. 1997; Vining and Ebreo 2002). Researchers have also shown that procedural justice judgments are major determinants of acceptance and trust of authority; support for social and political institutions; obedience to laws; and acceptance of and obedience to negotiated and mediated agreements (Lind and Tyler 1988; Lind et al. 1997).

In summary, the literature on accountability, representation, legitimacy, transparency, fairness and justice emphasises that understanding the value and importance of institutional credibility for promoting and facilitating sustainable NRM outcomes are important considerations for CBNRM institutions. However, as credible institutions and good governance models do not necessarily equate to improved on-ground NRM outcomes, further research is needed to assess the linkages between governance and improvements in the condition of natural assets.

Understanding the value and importance of leadership for CBNRM institutions

Leadership is associated with influence (van Knippenberg et al. 2004) and setting purpose and direction (Tyler and De Cremer 2005). Leadership's other defining features include it: being a group process; being dependent on followers; being critical in mobilising a group to take action; and being instrumental in promoting change (Adizes 1999; Hogg et al. 2004; Kan and Parry 2004; Prewitt 2003; Reicher et al. 2005). Burns' (1978) and Bass' (1985) transactional/transformational leader dichotomy is the most widely cited leadership classification (Bono and Anderson 2005; Podsakoff et al. 1990; Popper 2004; Rubin et al. 2005). Transactional leadership tends to focus on subordinate task performance (Egri and Herman 2000), while transformational leadership (an inspirational leadership style) is associated with using inspirational motivation to encourage followers to pursue collective goals (Burns 1978; Hofmann and Jones 2005; Kan and Parry 2004; Rubin et al. 2005). While transformational leadership is the most discussed leadership style, the behavioural sciences literature draws attention to several other inspirational leadership styles. These are summarised in Table 1.

Inspirational leadership's potential for promoting collaborative CBNRM decision-making and facilitating collective on-ground NRM action is highlighted in the literature dealing with its influence on values, culture, collective identity processes, and fairness and justice. For example, by behaving in a manner that exemplifies their followers' values and by promoting aspirations and ideals

Table 1 Inspirational leadership styles and their emphases

Styles	Emphases	Authors
Ecocentric	Underpinned by an ecological philosophy, identity and ideals. Requires leaders to be role models thereof	Shrivastava (1994), Stead and Stead (1996)
Collaborative/ connective	Promotes inclusiveness and strives to build personal relationships and partnerships. Requires leaders to serve as catalysts for engaging with people and for promoting trust and reciprocity	Lipman-Blumen (2000), Rubin (2002), Ayres (2005), Bernard and Young (1997), Eisler (1995)
Pro-social	Underpinned by values of benevolence and a vested interest in the welfare of others. Requires leaders to motivate, influence, change behaviour, inspire and articulate a vision	Lorenzi (2004), Stead and Stead (1996), Thompson et al. (1998)

that reflect their followers' aspirations, transformational leaders are able to transform the needs, values, preferences and aspirations of their followers, and instil new values and a common culture (Haslam and Platow 2001; Kan and Parry 2004; Pawar and Eastman 1997; Sosik 2005). The role of leadership in promoting a common culture is of critical importance for environmental and NRM problem-solving, particularly in the absence of a history of trust and reciprocity between stakeholders (Scheffer et al. 2000).

Referring to Schwartz's (1994) personal values scale, several authors have found inspirational leaders to display greater self-transcendent (pro-social) than self-enhancement (pro-self) personal value orientations (Egri and Herman 2000; Michie and Gooty 2005). Berry and Gordon (1993) indicate that environmental leaders are distinguished from traditional leaders by the differences in their general and environmental values. Egri and Herman (2000) cite several authors who regard the success of environmental institutions to be strongly linked to the alignment of their members' values and beliefs with the institution's goals—a typical inspirational leadership objective.

Commenting on the interplay between leadership and collective identity processes, Reicher et al. (2005) assert that leadership is impossible without the existence of a shared identity between leaders and followers. Indeed, followers expect their leaders to act as a role model of that identity (Reicher et al. 2005). Inspirational leadership styles, in particular, have been found to play an active role in creating and redefining leader-follower and other forms of group and collective identities (Epitropaki and Martin 2005; Hogan and Kaiser 2005; Reicher et al. 2005; van Knippenberg et al. 2004). The role of transformational leadership in promoting a common identity is critical in CBNRM, which requires institutions to combine different stakeholder interests and to promote collaboration and collective action.

Leadership also has a strong influence on perceptions of fairness and justice (Tyler and De Cremer 2005; van Knippenberg et al. 2004). Colquitt (2004) found that trust in a team leader influenced the team members' perceptions of procedural justice. Similarly, Hogg et al. (2004) indicate

that leaders are able to mobilise followers to take action where they are viewed as just people who can be trusted to act in the followers best interests. Leadership behaviour that enacts procedural justice and fairness is strongly endorsed by followers (Platow et al. 1998) who, as a result thereof, are more likely to show a voluntary willingness to cooperate (Tyler and De Cremer 2005).

It is evident from the leadership literature that inspirational leadership styles are well suited to the CBNRM leadership context. It is also evident from the literature dealing with the influences of transformational leadership on values, culture, collective identity and institutional credibility, that followers' perceptions of a leader's status in the community (i.e. being a typical versus atypical community member) are important. Perceptions of a leader's status in the community are of particular importance in participatory and collaborative processes, like CBNRM decision-making (Rydin and Pennington 2000). It is not uncommon for CBNRM processes to be dominated by the selective participation of vocal and well organised interest groups and sub-groups (e.g. agricultural lobby groups) (Gray et al. 2005; Rydin and Pennington 2000). It is also not uncommon for the leadership of CBNRM institutions responsible for applying participatory and collaborative processes to be dominated by atypical rather than typical members of the community (Beierle 1999). Several authors have found the leadership of community-based institutions to be distinguished from their members, and the community in general, by the following characteristics: being older; male-dominated; better educated; politically savvy; and financially better off (Gray et al. 2005; Shucksmith and Chapman 1998; Spies et al. 1998). Collectively, these characteristics label the leadership as representing typical 'community elites' rather than typical community members. The capture of decision-making by community elites is an important concern associated with CBNRM (Beierle 1999; Lawrence 2004; Reddel 2002; Yandle 2003). Davis and Bailey (1996) indicate that a common consequence of having community elites as leaders is the tendency for the leaders to marginalise particular groups, capture the organisational processes, and reap the benefits of doing so.

Research approach and methods

Recognising that generalisation is not a goal of case study research (Stake 1995), the transferability and generalisability of this study's research findings are strengthened by: studying two cases of the same phenomena (Schutt 2004); using a dichotomous case selection strategy to identify and select the two cases (LeCompte and Schensul 1999; Seawright and Gerring 2005); and by incorporating source, method and data triangulation strategies as part of the analyses (Hays 2004; Morse and Richards 2002; Stake 1995).

The dichotomous case selection strategy entailed first defining CBNRM institution criteria of interest, including: geographical location; physical area; regional population size; Indigenous persons as a percentage of the regional population; dominant land uses and key industries; government funding allocations; number of catchments, catchment management associations (CMAs) and Landcare groups; stakeholder representation; voting structures; and governance structures. Queensland's 14 CBNRM institutions were arranged along a defined continuum relevant to the identified criteria, with the institutions located at the extremes being selected as research cases. To protect the identities of the two institutions, this paper refers to them as Case A and Case B.

Data was collected from those informants considered most likely to possess an 'insider's knowledge' of the research domain (Thomas 1993), namely the eight Board members from each of the two CBNRM institutions. Data collection occurred during 2005 via a 12-month study designed to develop an in-depth understanding of the functioning, decision-making and governance of the two institutions. The sampling strategy enabled the research findings to be validated and verified through combining multiple access (to group meetings, Board meetings and Board teleconferences) with the use of mixed methods, including: a questionnaire survey; followed by three rounds of quarterly interviews with each research informant; and supplemented by participant observation, personal conversations and a review of select organisational documentation. The transdisciplinary conceptual framework, CIVILS (see Pero 2005) was applied to the examination of the two case institutions.

Description of the cases

Case A

Case A's NRM region covers a combined land-based and adjoining ocean-based area of approximately 230,000 km² (8.2% of Queensland and equivalent to nearly 80% of the

United Kingdom's land-based area). The region is inhabited by fewer than 10,000 people, including some 2,400 Indigenous persons. Case A was endorsed as the region's designated CBNRM institution in 2001. Its mandate was to develop and implement a regional NRM plan and regional investment strategy (RIS). By the end of 2005, Case A's combined funding allocation from the Australian Government and the Queensland State Government exceeded \$12 million for the period 2004–2008.

Case A is distinguished by the following socio-economic and NRM characteristics: the region is remote and sparsely populated; it has a comparatively high proportion of Indigenous people (relative to many other Australian regions); most economic activities are directly linked to the natural resource base; low landscape agricultural productivity; beef cattle grazing is the dominant land use; limited physical infrastructure; most communities lack access to basic community facilities and welfare services; the region is socio-economically disadvantaged compared to other regions in Australia; the region has a poor history of NRM project uptake and success; and the region's land managers having little interaction with NRM technical and science professionals or government representatives.

Case B

Case B's NRM region covers a land-based area of approximately 100,000 km² (4.3% of Queensland and equivalent to approximately 42% of the United Kingdom's land-based area). Some 44,000 people live in the region, of which fewer than 2,000 people are Indigenous persons. Case B was endorsed as the region's designated CBNRM institution in 2003. Similar to Case A, its mandate was to develop and implement a regional NRM plan and RIS. By the end of 2005, Case B's combined funding allocation from the Australian Government and the Queensland State Government amounted to more than \$30 million for the period 2004–2008.

While Case B shares the same NRM policy and legislative context as Case A, its socio-economic context is quite different. Case B is distinguished by its larger rural (as opposed to remote) population; lower proportion of Indigenous people; smaller average property sizes; a greater diversity of regional industries; greater landscape agricultural productivity; a greater diversity of land uses; basic physical infrastructure; most communities having access to basic community facilities and welfare services; a 15-year history of NRM project uptake and success; and the region's land managers periodically interacting with NRM technical and science professionals and government representatives.

Research findings

The sub-headings of this section highlight the key lessons learnt from each case. The section first critiques the key institutional credibility lessons for Case A and Case B, followed by a critique of their key leadership lessons.

Promoting institutional credibility

Neither Case A nor Case B promoted all six aspects of institutional credibility. Instead, each case focussed on particular aspects while neglecting the remainder.

Case A focused on equitable stakeholder representation but ignored the need to demonstrate good governance

Case A's constitution divided the CBNRM institution's more than 25 members into the following five sectors: Indigenous; conservation; community; industry; and local government. The constitution provided each sector with 20% of the vote and the individual sectors were responsible for deciding on who would represent them as their Director on the Board. Case A's stakeholder representation and voting structures contributed substantially towards enhancing the institution's credibility among its member sectors, particularly among the local government, conservation and Indigenous sectors. Case A's sector-based representation and proportional voting structures also contributed to the Directors' positive perceptions of their organisation's credibility.

I feel that this is the only regional body around that is strongly committed to the feelings of each group (sector) [Informant A1]. Everyone having an equal say—it is just the way we operate [Informant A2].

Case A was particularly innovative in its approach towards gaining the Indigenous sector's acceptance of its credibility. The CBNRM institution used a combination of measures to do so, including: (1) electing an Indigenous person as its Deputy Chair; (2) having a second Indigenous person serve on the Board as the Indigenous sector Director; (3) supporting and funding the formation of a regional Indigenous organisation to coordinate and liaise between the CBNRM institution and the Indigenous sector; and (4) structuring its constitution to allow for two representatives from each of the Indigenous language groups in the region to become members of the institution and to attend its meetings as representatives of their respective language groups. These measures collectively contributed towards Case A receiving strong support and loyalty from its Indigenous members.

The Indigenous groups of the region have come to the meetings and have contributed to the direction of the group [Informant A8]. Our relationship with our Indigenous sector is an absolute shining example that can be held up to all the other regions as something to aspire to [Informant A7].

The following quote shows that Case A's approach to promoting equitable stakeholder representation also afforded the institution a measure of credibility in the eyes of many of the region's grazing land managers:

When Steven Robertson was still the (Queensland Government) Minister for Natural Resources and Mines and he was up in this region about a native title meeting and the leaseholds. There was a hall full of graziers and when he addressed them, the graziers said that they want everything done through (Case A) because they trust (Case A) [Informant A5].

While equitable stakeholder representation was important to Case A, the need to adhere to formal organisational procedures and apply basic principles of good governance was not. The institution's approach to governance was influenced by its members considering organisational formalities to be threatening, bureaucratic and something that government was trying to impose on them.

There is a fear of becoming like a bureaucracy [Informant A8]. They (government) want us to do it this way as this is how bureaucracy works, this is how it should work and we should have all these processes set up. But I feel sometimes that they want to impose that on us, because it makes their life easier or whatever [Informant A4].

The Board's reluctance towards demonstrating good governance let Case A down when it came to the perceptions of some of its Directors regarding transparency and accountability.

I think unfortunately some people do not understand that when you have a Board, the Board's business needs to be transparent and accountable [Informant A6]. The Board struggles to sort of get a handle on how the RIS money is to be spent. It may be that we are not fully involved or fully informed [Informant A3]. If only half the people know about something and they think it is (expletive) then it just breaks down the credibility of the whole Board [Informant A8].

During the research period, several Directors repeatedly voiced their concerns at the meetings and in their interviews regarding the organisation's lack of formality. A select number of Directors also repeatedly expressed

their concerns regarding the overall lack of corporate governance, in particular: the Board not making formal decisions and recording their decisions; the absence of regular Board teleconference and meeting minutes; and the associated lack of Board minutes for the general membership's perusal. These same Directors were also concerned that key organisational documents, like the RIS, were not made available to all Directors or to the general membership for their perusal.

The Directors' increasing concern resulted in several of them making repeated suggestions for the Board to undertake corporate governance training. However, key Board members continually rebuffed these suggestions, telling the others that training was unnecessary and that it would be a waste of their time. Case A's disregard for organisational formalities and the need to demonstrate procedural and distributive fairness and justice in the institution's decision-making also provoked considerable discontent among the institution's members. During the 12-month period, the members' growing dissatisfaction with the institution's approach to governance contributed to a complete breakdown of relationships within the Board and among the membership.

Case B demonstrated accountability and transparency but ignored the importance of equitable stakeholder representation, fairness and justice

In direct contrast to Case A, Case B promoted institutional credibility through its formal processes and its perceived adherence to the governance principles of transparency and accountability. The institution's meetings were very formal, well-organised and well run, with comprehensive meeting information packs distributed to all meeting attendants at least a week prior to the meeting dates. All Board and general meeting decisions were formally made and recorded, all meetings were comprehensively minuted and all minutes were made available to the membership. Case B also made its financial records and its RIS available to the membership for their scrutiny at their meetings. Furthermore, during the research period, the organisation subjected itself to a voluntary performance review and a voluntary financial audit, while the Directors also underwent a day of formal corporate governance training.

It (the corporate governance training) made us realise what our responsibilities and roles are in this new atmosphere of greater accountability. It will allow us to operate more professionally [Informant B6].

While applying formal organisational processes and corporate governance principles was important to Case B, ensuring equitable stakeholder representation in the

institution's decision-making was not. This was evidenced by the CBNRM institution's articles of association apportioning the decision-making vote disproportionately among its 23 members and seven member classes in the following manner: (1) CMAs (10 members with three votes each); (2) local government associations (two members with one vote each); (3) Ministerial Advisory Councils (MACs) (three members with four votes each); (4) regional Indigenous people's associations (two members with one vote each); (5) land and resource conservation associations (two members with one vote each); (6) Landcare and catchment management (one member with one vote); and (7) rural industry organisations (three members with one vote each). During the research period, the Board comprised four Directors from the CMA class, two Directors from the local government association class, one Director from the MAC class, and the GM. It is evident from the above breakdown that two classes, the CMAs and the MACs (together holding more than 80% of the total vote), disproportionately dominated Case B's Board and hence its decision-making.

Case B's inequitable voting structure ensured that commercial agricultural land managers would dominate its Board. Based on the contents of Case B's articles of association, it was more important for the CBNRM institution to be perceived by the land managers in the region as an organisation run by farmers for farmers. However, adopting this approach compromised the extent to which Case B was perceived by its other member classes as being fair and just in its processes and in its decision-making. Case B's approach also compromised the extent to which certain member classes were likely to have a member elected to the Board. For example, with 4% of the vote each during the study period, it was unlikely that the conservation and the Indigenous member classes would have much influence in Case B's affairs. Furthermore, with only one Indigenous organisation represented on the general committee and the region being home to more than 10 different Indigenous language groups, it was unlikely that the Indigenous class would have a member elected to the Board who was authorised to represent and speak on behalf of all the Indigenous language groups in the region. The following quote alludes to Case B's insensitivity to Indigenous culture:

Their (Indigenous) tribes don't trust each others' tribes. Indigenous people have got to realise that they are entitled to one representative just the same as local government and Agforce (primary producer group) and the other groups [Informant B8].

This study found that Case B consistently marginalised the conservation and Indigenous member classes, which consequently had little influence in the institution's decision-

making and even less influence in its associated implementation outcomes.

Leader status in the community and leadership styles

While Case A and Case B promoted contrasting perceptions of their Directors' community member status, both cases highlighted the value and importance of inspirational leadership to CBNRM.

'Average Joes' as Directors and the General Manager as the institution's and the Board's leader

Case A's Directors promoted themselves as 'average Joe's', i.e. ordinary members of the community. They were proud of the fact that their CBNRM institution had people on its Board that other institutions would have considered unsuitable simply because they were average Joes.

They (the Directors) are just real community people [Informant A7]. There are genuine people on the Board compared to other committees and groups, which are usually controlled by mayors and solicitors and that type of people [Informant A8].

Having a Board comprised of average Joes benefited Case A in several ways, including promoting the institution as credible within the community; promoting the community's trust in the institution; and promoting the community's identification with the institution. However, being comprised of average Joes constrained the Board's own effectiveness through the Directors' lack of leadership and other Board-related skills and experience. Several of Case A's Directors acknowledged that the Board lacked these skills.

I haven't got a great deal of personal experience and knowledge of what corporate governance really means [Informant A8]. We need to improve our corporate governance skills and knowledge [Informant A1]. Most of the people who are on the Board are not tertiary-educated people, so they possibly lack some of the skills [Informant A6].

Because of their lack of experience, most of the Directors were also unaware of what their Board roles and responsibilities entailed.

The Directors lack an understanding of what their role is [Informant A4]. Because a lot of the Board are not professional people or may not even have a managerial background, they find a lot of these tasks quite daunting [Informant A6].

Having a Board made up of average Joes contributed towards the GM, with the Chair's and most of the Directors' approval, assuming leadership of the Board.

The leadership that (the GM) provides to the Board is probably the most important part of the function of the Board [Informant A7]. (The GM) has been delegated all authority by the Board [Informant A6]. It is not like we are slack. It is like we trust (the GM) because she is doing an awesome job [Informant A4].

Displaying strong inspirational leadership traits, the GM was a dynamic, proactive and pro-social person. The Board, the membership and the staff all respected the GM and recognised that she was instrumental to the CBNRM institution's success. Consequently, the GM had an enormous influence on the Board and on the institution. Applying traits synonymous with the pro-social style of leadership, the GM used her influence in several ways. The GM promoted greater member identification with the institution by frequently telling the membership that their CBNRM institution was much better than any of the other NRM regional bodies, not just in Queensland but across Australia.

(The GM) often makes statements along the line that this group is the best group in Queensland, or it is well ahead of all the other groups or it is achieving more. The result of that is that the members feel quite proud of their achievements and they think they are doing very well and that they are doing better than other groups [Informant A6].

Through her strong personal outlook and enthusiasm, the GM was instrumental in strengthening the Board's pro-social outlook and in promoting that outlook amongst Case A's broader membership. The GM did this through speaking openly about her passion for the region and its people. She also continually reaffirmed the importance of community to the Directors and to the institution's members. The GM's efforts were so successful that she was able to influence several Directors to the extent that they shared a similar pro-social outlook for the region. The following quotes are typical of that outlook:

We are doing it for the good of the area. We are trying to better our communities [Informant A2]. Groups like this are putting drivers back into the community and enabling the community to stand on its own two feet and to organise itself and to be positive about itself [Informant A7].

This study found that the Directors' shared outlook was largely one of superficial environmental concern as it tended to focus more on seeking ways to improve the region's socio-economic outcomes than on improving

regional environmental outcomes. Furthermore, while Case A's outlook promoted a better understanding by the membership of the need for practice change, their understanding was driven by a focus on improving agricultural profitability and productivity.

Community elites as Directors and the Chair as the institution's and the Board's leader

Case B's Directors displayed several characteristics typical of community elites, including: there were only two female Directors; all of the Directors had been or were currently involved in running their own commercial agricultural family enterprises; all but one of the Directors had in the past served as a local government councillor; all of the Directors had wide social networks through being members of between four and eight other industry and community groups; and many of the Directors held leadership roles in other industry and community groups. The following quotes show the Directors' recognition of these and other characteristics that distinguished them from other members of the community:

It could be argued that we are not as representative of the broader community [Informant B6]. Most of the Board have multi-million dollar businesses to run [Informant B2]. Most of us have been in local government [Informant B8].

While Case B employed fulltime staff, its membership and its Directors were volunteers. The Chair and GM were the only salaried Board members. As volunteers, the Directors received token remuneration in the form of sitting fees and travel and accommodation reimbursements for attending meetings. The amount of time (approximately one week per month) and effort that the Directors committed to the organisation suggested that it would be difficult for Case B to attract anyone other than community elites to serve on its Board. The following quotes bear testimony to these observations:

The direction is provided by a lot of volunteers. The heart of it is our Board, who again are volunteers [Informant B5]. It is all driven by our interest and the volunteer aspect of the people and you need a certain amount of self-sufficiency before you can do it [Informant B3].

While elite-dominated Boards may have some limitations in terms of potentially representing majority interests (e.g. commercial agricultural land managers)—justified on the grounds that they minimise needless (and endless) discussion from minority perspectives—the research found that having community elites as Directors also provided the

Board and the CBNRM institution with a range of benefits. Through their past local government and community group leadership experiences, the Directors all had a good grasp of their Board roles and responsibilities. The Directors were also comfortable with Case B's corporate governance requirements and the formalities associated with the Board's decision-making processes. Furthermore, as land managers running profitable commercial enterprises, the Directors were able to contribute to decision-making from multiple perspectives, including providing business, financial and practical on-ground insights and advice.

Most of us have been land managers for a fair while. We understand the implications of dealing with a body like (Case B) and that adds a degree of reality to some of the decisions we have made [Informant B6].

The Directors placed considerable emphasis on their ability to contribute to the decision-making as practical land managers with NRM experience.

We try to guide them (the staff) so that they don't walk like a bull at the gate and instead try to think the way landholders think [Informant B4]. It is about trying to get the landholder perspective through. We are all people who have lived on the land all their lives and it is our livelihood, hence we have a greater understanding of what is and isn't possible and what is and isn't feasible [Informant B7].

Furthermore, based on their prior community-based leadership experience, several of the Directors considered networking on behalf of Case B to be an implicit Board responsibility. These Directors indicated that they used their personal social networks to promote Case B's goals and objectives whenever the opportunity arose.

Having a Board comprised of Directors who were all leaders in their own right required a skilful Chair to ensure that they performed effectively as a Board. Case B's Chair was a very dynamic, proactive and strongly pro-social person who had a significant positive influence on the Board and on the institution. The Chair was well respected by the staff, the institution's members and its Board. As demonstrated by the following quotes, the Chair received considerable support from the Board, who recognised his outstanding leadership skills and ability:

Our great Chairman. I think that he has done a magnificent job. Our Chair has been one of our greatest assets [Informant B2]. (The Chair) is visionary and very proactive. He has exceptional ability [Informant B7].

Through his inspirational leadership style and approach, the Chair was instrumental in promoting cohesion and fostering a Board culture of good governance. He did this

by: (1) promoting fair and honest procedures in the institution's and the Board's dealings; (2) ensuring that the Board maintained a broader community view in their deliberations; (3) keeping the discussions positive and ensuring that everyone had the opportunity to be heard but not allowing anyone to dominate; and (4) by setting an example through his own behaviour towards others.

The Chair has kept us focussed just by his expertise and he has always kept it very professional [Informant B2].

The Chair used his good communication and negotiation skills to promote a positive organisational identity and positive interpersonal relationships both within the CBNRM institution and between it and other NRM stakeholders, including industry groups, government departments and research entities.

I honestly feel that the Board's achievements are only achieved as a result of the whole organisation moving forward. I guess it is the guidance that we have had, particularly from our Chair [informant B1]. (The Chair's) exceptional ability to communicate with the government and with getting more interaction with Agforce and with the government agencies [Informant B7].

Typical of his inspirational leadership style, the Chair paid particular attention to the welfare of the staff, as indicated in the following quote by him:

I personally in my employment of my own staff, I make it a priority to keep my staff happy and motivated and therefore effective and I personally realise the importance of that. So I am very pleased to see that our Board has taken the same approach to their corporate responsibilities to the staff. I don't think that I am influencing the rest of the Board on this aspect. I try not to influence them too much. I would be interested in what the other Directors said about this because I want to do it right.

Several of the Director's, who over time were observed copying the Chair's behaviour, provided evidence of the success of his influence on them. In this regard, the Directors' behaviour at their meetings and during their functions was characterised by a number of traits typical of inspirational leadership styles. These included: seeking the opinion of meeting participants, including guests and junior staff; making a point of speaking to all participants; communicating with staff members and enquiring about their work; complimenting the staff and members on their achievements; ensuring that the staff were treated fairly and with respect; and ensuring that the staff, the members and the other Directors remained motivated in their jobs.

Discussion

While both cases recognised the need to ensure that the land managers in their respective regions perceived the CBNRM institutions as credible, they exhibited very different approaches to demonstrating their credibility. The two cases' approaches appeared to be influenced by their respective NRM contexts. Case A's focus on ensuring equitable resource user representation appeared to be influenced by most economic activities in the region being linked to the natural resource base and by the region's high proportion of Indigenous people (approximately 25% of the region's population), hence the importance of Indigenous representation. Case A's contextual factors also reinforced the institution's rejection of formality and the basic principles of good governance, which they associated with government and bureaucracy.

Case B's approach to demonstrating institutional credibility appeared to be aligned with the CBNRM institution's sub-catchment planning and implementation process. The process required the land managers in the region, who wanted to access NRM funding from Case B, to join together with their neighbours in forming sub-catchment groups. The sub-catchment groups were then assisted by Case B's technical staff in developing a NRM plan and a corresponding budget to cover the activities that they wanted to undertake on their properties and in their sub-catchments. The land managers were generally required to make labour and other forms of in-kind contributions amounting to 50% of the total cost of their activities, with Case B providing the balance in cash. Given that Case B's success was largely reliant on the participation and cooperation of the region's agricultural land managers, the CBNRM institution focussed on satisfying that sector's perceptions of its credibility.

Consistent with research elsewhere on the benefits of equitable representation, this study found that Case A's approach to equitable stakeholder representation in its decision-making structures benefited it in several ways, including: promoting the institution's legitimacy (Plummer and FitzGibbon 2004); promoting support for the institution (Lind and Tyler 1988); and promoting trust in the institution by the sectors represented in its decision-making structures (Rudd 2000). Conversely, through not having equitable representation in its decision-making structures, Case B experienced the inverse of these effects (i.e. not being perceived as legitimate, not being supported and not being trusted) among those stakeholder classes not represented in their decision-making, particularly the conservation and Indigenous classes.

The literature's emphasis on the roles of governing entities for maintaining accountability and for ensuring transparency highlight not only the importance of these two

aspects of institutional credibility, but also the high expectations placed on governing entities for ensuring them (Huse 2005; Roberts et al. 2005; Robinson 2001). Consistent with Lane et al. (2004), Case B placed considerable importance on the need to show downward and upward accountability and transparency to its membership and to its government funders. The Australian Government and the Queensland State Government funding agencies both acknowledged Case B's strict adherence to corporate governance principles and its efforts in undergoing regular performance reviews and audits. Case B's general meetings also evidenced few accountability and transparency concerns being expressed by the institution's general membership. By comparison, Case A's adverse approach to good governance contributed towards the institution's decision-making marginalising certain Directors, through it often taking place without the contribution, support and/or knowledge of all Directors. These irregularities prompted the marginalised Directors to voice their concerns regarding the transparency, accountability and overall legitimacy of Case A's decision-making.

While Case A's Board's equitable stakeholder representation did much to promote support and trust for the institution, the level of trust and support was systematically eroded by the institution's lack of attention to demonstrating accountability, transparency, fairness and justice in its functioning and decision-making. Case A's approach to governance contributed towards growing suspicion, low morale, tension and ultimately conflict within the Board and the CBNRM institution. As such, this paper draws attention to the fact that although accountability and transparency are widely recognised as being essential components of good governance (Commission of the European Communities 2001), they are clearly not implicit in community-based NRG structures. Comparing the two cases' approaches to institutional credibility, the research findings suggest that Case A would have enhanced its institutional credibility by implementing aspects of Case B's governance procedures. Similarly, Case B would have enhanced its institutional credibility by structuring its Board in a more representative and equitable manner, similar to that of Case A. These insights highlight the importance of CBNRM institutions demonstrating their credibility through multiple means, including equitable stakeholder representation; legitimacy; accountability; transparency; fairness and justice.

Just as the two cases' regional contexts influenced their perceptions of institutional credibility, so too did the regional contexts influence the cases' perceptions of what the most appropriate leader status was for their respective CBNRM institutions. While the literature presents a strong argument against electing elitists as leaders (Beierle 1999; Lawrence 2004; Reddel 2002; Shucksmith and Chapman 1998; Yandle 2003), it provides little information on the

disadvantages of electing average Joes (i.e. typical community members). Comparing the status of the two cases' Boards, i.e. Case A's average Joes versus Case B's community elites, provides interesting insights on the merits and constraints thereof. This study found that while having a Board comprised of average Joes benefited Case A in several ways, it also constrained the institution's ability to perform efficiently and effectively. The institution's performance constraints were largely associated with the Directors' lack of leadership experience; their lack of skills in group decision-making processes and fundamental corporate governance principles; and they were largely unaware of their Director roles and responsibilities. While Case A could easily have addressed these shortcomings through Director induction programs and governance and leadership training, the GM's own inexperience, the Chair's resistance and the rest of the Board's reluctance to change the way they operated contributed to the status quo.

By comparison, Case B did not experience any of the problems that Case A experienced relevant to its Board's status. Rather, Case B's Directors' traits underpinned their Board's smooth performance and contributed towards the CBNRM institution operating and functioning in an effective and efficient manner. While this paper's findings suggest that electing community elites as Directors would be more beneficial than electing average Joes, they do not take into account the differences between the two institutions, including their representativeness and diversity, and their contextual influences which include the availability and willingness of suitable people to serve as Directors. For example, Case A's Board exhibited a high level of stakeholder representativeness and diversity, while Case B's Board combined only three of the institution's seven member classes and all of its Directors were commercial agricultural land managers. Furthermore, given Case A's regional context, which included a small population and a poor record of successful NRM projects, it was unlikely that the CBNRM institution would attract too many suitable and willing people to serve voluntarily on its Board. Similarly, based on Case B's organisational processes and on the requirements of its articles of association, the institution was unlikely to appoint anyone other than community elites to its Board. Consistent with Davis and Bailey (1996), this study found that having a Board made up of community elites contributed towards particular member sectors being marginalised. It also contributed towards Case B's Board capturing the decision-making process and, as a result thereof, the institution's agricultural land manager members benefited the most from the Board's decision-making. However, these outcomes were as much an artefact of the Board's status as they were of Case B's organisational and decision-making processes and the requirements of its articles of association.

Berry and Gordon (1993) contend that dealing with environmental problems, which are typically characterised by being long-term, complex, dynamic, multi-disciplinary and emotion-charged, requires environmental leadership to be different from traditional forms of leadership. Comparing the leadership of the two case institutions, this study found that the individuals who exerted the greatest leadership (as opposed to management) influence on their respective organisations, in particular their Boards, both exhibited typical inspirational leadership traits. While Case A's GM had little leadership experience, she was insightful and she had a lot of passion and natural leadership ability. The GM was visionary in her outlook and played a leading role in establishing, maintaining and reinforcing the CBNRM institution's purpose and direction. Furthermore, through her behaviour, drive and enthusiasm, Case A's GM was instrumental in instilling an organisational culture; aligning the members' interests with those of the collective; and aligning the members' identity with that of the CBNRM institution. These influences are typical of transformational leadership behaviour (Pawar and Eastman 1997; Podsakoff et al. 1990; Sosik 2005; Tyler and De Cremer 2005; van Knippenberg et al. 2004). Further typical inspirational leadership behaviour exhibited by the GM included her showing enormous self-sacrifice; emphasising shared values; promoting trust-building; and showing support for the followers' needs (Bryan 2004; Epitropaki and Martin 2005; Podsakoff et al. 1990; van Knippenberg et al. 2004).

Case B's Chair was similarly enthusiastic, pro-active and inspirational. He was an accomplished leader and made a substantial contribution to promoting cohesion within the Board and between the Board and the staff. The Chair played a significant role in promoting Case B as a credible institution. The Chair was able to influence the Board's behaviour through his inspirational leadership behaviour, which included him promoting staff empowerment; fostering group work; showing support for followers' needs; and showing self-confidence (Epitropaki and Martin 2005; Popper 2004; Sosik 2005; van Knippenberg et al. 2004). Consistent with Gray et al. (2005), Egri and Herman (2000), Danter et al. (2000) and Kan and Parry (2004), this paper shows that inspirational leadership styles are well suited to NRM institutions, particularly where the leaders' own circumstances resemble those of their followers and where promoting practice change for sustainable NRM threatens established values, goals and interests.

Berry and Gordon (1993) and Egri and Herman (2000) found that environmental/NRM leaders typically exhibited different environmental values compared to other leaders. Egri and Herman (2000) explain this phenomenon on the basis that environmental/NRM leadership involves advocating significant changes in current societal and organisational values, and in ecologically unsustainable

practices. Concurring with these findings, several authors have shown that pro-social leaders are inclined to have ecocentric values (Nordlund and Garvill 2002; Olli et al. 2001; Schultz and Zelezny 1999). This study found that while both leaders displayed strong pro-social personal values, only one of them was predisposed to having ecocentric values. Contrary to the literature's expectations, that person did not use his/her position of influence to promote the ecocentric worldview and to try and influence his/her followers' perceptions thereof. Instead, the reverse happened with the leaders' worldview becoming more anthropocentric as the study progressed.

The insights presented in this paper raise important concerns regarding the sustainability of the two cases' decision-making. These include: Case A's decision-making focussing on improving agricultural profitability and productivity, and on seeking ways to improve the region's socio-economic outcomes over improving regional environmental outcomes; while Case B's decision-making was dominated by agricultural land managers and marginalised the institution's conservation and Indigenous member classes. Furthermore, the Directors of the two institutions were only involved in implementing their decisions where implementation took place on their own properties or provided them with some personal benefit.

Based on the lessons and insights presented in this paper, it is suggested that CBNRM institutions would benefit from addressing the following education and training needs and opportunities: (1) establishing, promoting and hosting forums and workshops that encourage the sharing of innovations, lessons and insights between the staff, governing Boards and members of CBNRM institutions; (2) using the outcomes of these forums and workshops to develop information packages and training programs on best practice NRG and NRM leadership principles and approaches; (3) providing community-based NRG and leadership training; and (4) establishing and supporting NRM leadership development and mentorship programs. It is also recommended that the education and training programs emphasise the need to monitor and continually evaluate the decision-making processes and the decision outcomes to ensure that CBNRM achieves its goal of improving the condition of natural resource assets. These suggestions are considered pertinent given that the International Council for Science (2005) has identified governance and institutions as critical research priority areas for promoting sustainable development.

Conclusions

This paper demonstrates the practical relevance and functional importance of the concepts of institutional credibility

and leadership to CBNRM and NRG. As suggested by Pero (2005), these two overarching concepts are fundamental to the ability of CBNRM institutions to promote and facilitate sustainable NRM outcomes. Based on the lessons and insights presented in this paper, the authors suggest that CBNRM institutions will not achieve the outcomes expected of them unless: (1) they are able to promote their functioning, governance and decision-making as credible to all resource users and stakeholders; and (2) they adopt and apply inspirational leadership styles that are conducive to promoting cooperation, collaboration and collective action. In addition, the findings suggest that monitoring and evaluating the community-based NRG improvements to perceived social and environmental failures, resulting from past top-down NRG approaches, will be critical to understanding the abilities of CBNRM institutions and justifying their importance.

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