Understanding conflicting perspectives in event planning and management using Q method

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HIGHLIGHTS
- Q methodology is used to investigate conflicting actor perspectives of a major event.
- Q methodology revealed four perspectives: Skeptics; Materialists; Middle-grounders and Supporters.
- Q methodology is a useful tool in managing highly controversial major events.

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ABSTRACT
There is a need to better understand the interests of actors in the planning and management of major events. The diversity of actor perspectives about an event creates a wicked problem set that event organisers and public officials find difficult to understand, let alone address. This paper focuses on problem identification as one stage in the event planning and management process. It explores how problem structuring can contribute to more effective planning and management of actors’ interests. The value of Q methodology is explored through a case study of the Australian World Rally Championship. Four perspectives are identified in the problem structuring process: the Skeptics, the Materialists, the Middle-grounders and the Supporters. The findings demonstrate that Q methodology is effective in identifying the depth and breadth of different problem perspectives, providing insights into the importance of different perspectives, and can be used reflexively to anticipate and manage potential conflict.

1. Introduction

Tourism and major events are increasingly intertwined as governments seek to promote economic development, diversification and place branding (Foley, McGillivray, & McPherson, 2009). Such are the perceived benefits of events that governments are becoming increasingly active in bidding for hosting rights and creating ‘the right’ conditions for the staging of major events. This government involvement has increased as evidenced by a growing body of special purpose legislation designed to support the bidding for and staging of events, growth in public investment in events, and the provision and use of public assets (i.e., stadia, temporary infrastructure, emergency services) (Dredge et al., 2010; Hall & Rusher, 2004). Thus government involvement in event planning and management is further complicated because governments are now juggling two potentially competing roles in: (1) facilitating the bidding for and staging of events; and (2) protecting broader public interests and managing negative impacts.

In the time constrained environment of event planning, policy development and decision-making can be captured by industry interests, resulting in potential problems and impacts identified by the community often receiving less attention (Hede, 2007; Mules & Faulkner, 1996; Whitford, 2004). Actors may feel their concerns have been overlooked or minimised; hurt and distrust toward the authority may lead to active opposition to the event including legal challenges, protest activities or eventually voting against public officials who support the event (Chain, 2009; Fredline, 2000; Krippendorf, 1987). As a result, images of protest and community unrest can be juxtaposed alongside images of the event intended to promote tourism to global markets. Little is known about the impact of such contradictory messages, but there is a high degree of consensus around the need to adequately consult with a broad
range of actors and manage potential conflicts before they arise (Bramwell, 2011; Jamal & Getz, 2000).

The premise of this paper is that it is important to anticipate and deal appropriately with potential issues and problems in advance, rather than reactively dealing with the negative effects of conflict once it has emerged. Explicit attention on problem identification in the planning of major events can help identify potential conflict and improve management. Yet a dearth of literature suggests little attention has been paid to problem identification as an important and legitimate step in managing issues before they become controversial (Getz, 2008; Hall & Rusher, 2004). In response, this paper firstly aims to explore the notion of problem identification and its contribution in the event planning and management process. Secondly, the paper explores the extent to which problem structuring methods (PSMs), a family of methods specifically designed to facilitate the effective identification of policy problems, is a practical tool to assist in improving event planning and management. In addressing these aims, the paper applies the problem structuring approach to a case study of the World Rally Championship, held in the Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales (NSW), Australia, in September 2009.

2. Literature review

2.1. Challenges of problem identification

In the past policymaking was generated by policy actors from within government, who often shared similar views, values and objectives (Van der Heijden & Thissen, 1996). Van de Riet (2003) called this a single-actor policy setting, characterised by clear problem definition and a perceived consensus among all actors involved in identifying a solution or action. In the contemporary setting however, globalisation and rapid increases in population and cultural diversity have created a multitude of different socio-cultural groups, each with different backgrounds, interests and value systems (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Planners and policymakers have realised they are operating in ‘interconnected networks of systems’ (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 22) or ‘multiple-actor policy settings’ (Van de Riet, 2003, p. 159), where resources (i.e., knowledge, money, political support) are spread across various interdependent policy actors and goals can only be achieved by pooling resources within complex governance arrangements (Bramwell, 2011; Dredge, 2006).

In some countries, governments continue to occupy a central role due to their financial and legislative power (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000), however in many liberal democratic societies where neoliberal public management has come to dominate, policy and planning can be captured by business interests and civil society actors are continually hampered in accessing decision-making (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Dredge & Jenkins, 2007, 2012). It is within this complex setting that actors have to deal with problems which are not clearly articulated, and where relationships and interdependence are very hard to identify (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Social pluralism also means that policy actors possess diverse knowledge and worldviews, so that problems and issues are perceived very differently. Reaching a consensus in problem definition is thus much harder, as each party believes they possess ‘the truth’ and are not always willing to reflect on others’ views (Van de Riet, 2003).

As a result, most public policy problems are no longer ‘tame’ or ‘structured’, nor are they clearly defined by a few ‘experts’ sitting around the decision-making table (Batie, 2008). Being social and political constructs, policy problems are now described as ‘wicked’, ‘messy’, ‘a swamp ground’, or ‘unstructured’ (Brown, Harris, & Russell, 2010; Head, 2008; Horn & Weber, 2007; Rosenhead & Mingers, 2001; Walker, 2000). Wicked problems and associated metaphors capture the notion that problems can be dynamic, intractable, multilayered and require action by many actors such that solutions are very difficult to implement. As a result, problem identification itself is difficult due to the existence of multiple actors, diverse perspectives, incommensurable and/or conflicting interests. Not surprisingly, difficulties in problem formulation have been detected in almost all aspects of public policy and planning, including more recently, tourism (Brown, 2008; Dredge, Jenkins, & Whitford, 2011; Ioannides & Debbage, 1998; Lew, 2007) and the planning of major events (Phi, Dredge, & Whitford, 2010).

2.2. Problem identification in event management

The event policy community comprises not only of those who are directly and indirectly involved or affected by an event but also any organisations and individuals who will be affected by governments’ decisions (Getz, 2009). As a result, these various event policy actors bring diverse interests and perspectives to event policymaking. For instance governments, businesses and community groups may have varying levels of interest in social, environmental and economic issues pertaining to events, and their level of engagement may vary greatly (Hede, 2007; Stokes, 2008). Further, the goals of different government agencies or event stakeholders in a multi-tiered system may differ (Whitford, 2004, 2005). The issues emerging from the hosting of major events are therefore not only diverse and complex but are also interrelated across the economic, social-cultural, environmental and political dimensions. For example, large numbers of event visitors attracted to host destinations give rise to temporally and spatially concentrated impacts and conflicts that may not emerge if visitation were spread more evenly over a longer period, as in the case of tourism. In addition, the nature, extent and depth of impacts also vary greatly. As a result, issues including whether an event should or should not be held, how it should be managed and what the desired outcomes might be are very much dependent on each actor’s appreciation of (and apprehension about) the different issues at hand. It is in this complex environment that event organisers, planners and managers face great difficulties in anticipating problems and issues associated with planning and managing an event, in understanding the links between various problems and in finding solutions or treatments for those problems associated with the concerns and interests of multiple policy actors.

3. Research approach and methods

3.1. Approaches to event problem identification

There are two general approaches to identifying and formulating wicked problem definitions: one aims to reduce uncertainty and diversity while the other adopts a more collaborative approach, accepting that uncertainty and diversity are now integral to policymaking (Arentsen, Bressers, & O’Toole, 2000). To date, public officials involved in event planning and management have mainly attempted to reduce uncertainty by dealing with event planning and management in a closed system. However, the planning and management of an event (Whitford, 2009). As a consequence, the policies developed may be biased and address only a few issues perceived as important by government actors.
(e.g., economic imperatives), while many other issues (e.g., socio-cultural or environmental concerns) may be neglected.

Short timeframes between winning a bid and hosting the event often influence policymakers to opt for quick solutions to realise pending deadlines, instead of adopting a more time-consuming process aimed at properly identifying and addressing policy problems (Hall & Rusher, 2004). As every event takes place in a unique context, problems associated with each event are also unique and require specific policies to address problems (Getz, 2005; Goldblatt, 2007). With this in mind, a tendency to use special purpose legislation as a generic response to create certainty and overcome problems in the planning and management of major events runs the risk of oversimplifying the full gamut of associated issues. Such generic responses may result in the values and concerns of many policy actors being lost in the search for the ubiquitous ‘public benefit’ (Dredge, 2010; Dredge & Whitford, 2011). Taking into account then, that policymakers are increasingly employing legislation (arguably developed by a small, elite group of government policy actors and event organisers), as a reactive response to complex event policy problems, it would seem fair to suggest that the ‘real’ policy problems associated with individual events are all too often not identified or addressed. In short, problem identification in the planning and management of an event using current approaches may be both inadequate and ineffective.

Alternatively, collaborative approaches to identifying issues and problems often rest on the notion of ‘governance’. Governance refers to a non-hierarchical form of steering, where public and private policy actors within a policy community contribute their perspectives on what problems might arise and how to address them (Rhodes, 1997; Runhaar, Dieperink, & Driessen, 2006). Nevertheless, in a practical setting such as events, where temporal constraints of mean decisions need to be made quickly, there are many challenges in using the collaborative approach to reach consensus in problem definition (Bell & Morse, 2007; Roberts, 2002). For instance, all too often actors’ different perceptions and divergent goals get in the way, influencing them to talk past one another and engage in the ‘dialog of the deaf’ instead of communicating with each other (Bohm, 1990; Van Eeten, 1999). Meaningful communication deteriorates and can turn into heated debate. As conflict between actors increases, their positions become more rigid and agreement becomes even more difficult to achieve (Roberts, 2002). Furthermore, policy actors might also try to influence the policymaking process to their advantage by engaging in a parallel discourse in a ‘back room’ with those actors perceived to hold greatest influence (Hardy & Phillips, 1998). In this context, the application of PSMs (Rosenhead & Mingers, 2001) has the potential to help actors overcome these challenges.

### 3.2. Problem structuring methods and problem identification

Emerging in the late 1960s as a response to the failure of existing methods of dealing with wicked policy problems, PSMs originally emanated from the field of Operations Research (Rosenhead, 1996). In recent years, many methods that share PSM characteristics but are outside the field have also emerged (Van de Lei & Thissen, 2009). The key word in PSMs is ‘structuring’. In the beginning, a wicked problem is ill-structured, with each policy actor possessing their version of the problem and a desired solution (Gray, 1989). Through a ‘structuring’ process, actors’ diverse perspectives are gradually brought together until a consensus on the problem definition is reached (Franco, Cushman, & Rosenhead, 2006; Rosenhead & Mingers, 2001). PSMs enable this structuring process to happen by incorporating the following five characteristics:

1. **Transparent** — in the sense that ‘little or nothing happens in the back rooms’ (Rosenhead, 1996, p. 120).
2. **Participative** — where all policy actors enjoy equal positions and openly exchange their perspectives and ideas to jointly construct a multi-perspective problem definition (Checkland, 2001; Roberts, 2002).
3. **Model-based** — explicit models are used to record and present all issues identified (and the relationships between them) as relevant to the problem situation by the participants. PSM models therefore act as ‘transactional objects’ (De Geus, 1988), providing policy actors with a dynamic, shared view that helps increase their understanding of the multiple aspects of a problem or issue (Franco et al., 2006; Rosenhead, 1996; Shaw, Westcombe, Hodgkin, & Montibeller, 2004).
4. **Language-based** — as policy actors often have different backgrounds and many do not respond positively to numbers and mathematical symbols, the use of the participant’s own language (qualitative input) in PSMs makes it much easier to communicate the complex problem problems (Eden & Ackermann, 2004; Rosenhead & Mingers, 2001).
5. **Facilitated** — the facilitator(s) play(s) an important role in the PSM process (Franco, 2008). Their roles are very demanding in that they have to manage both the complexities of the problem content and the group’s interpersonal communication processes (Rosenhead, 1996).

These characteristics suggest that the PSM family has great potential in assisting the effective identification of event policy problems. Going through the PSM process, policy actors can equally contribute their understanding of the policy problem, leading to a model that represents all issues that make up the problem situation surrounding the hosting of an event (see Rosenhead & Mingers, 2001). In addition, transparency not only significantly limits the possibility of actors trying to manipulate the process, but it also helps increase credibility and validity of problem definition, making them more likely to be accepted by all actors (Franco, 2006). The active participation of policy actors also helps produce strong ownership of this problem definition (Rosenhead, 1996).

However, despite the scholarly credentials of PSMs’ potential applicability (e.g., Midgley & Ochoa-Arias, 2004; Rosenhead & Mingers, 2001; Van de Riet, 2003), PSMs’ practical use is still quite limited (Bell & Morse, 2007). PSMs were applied to risk management in the 1998 Notting Hill Carnival event (Hollrick-Jones & Rosenhead, 2007) but to date there has been no other application in event policy, planning and management. One of the reasons for this limited application is PSMs rely on holding workshops and face-to-face meetings, which make the process very costly, difficult and time-consuming to organise (Morton, Ackermann, & Belton, 2007). As a result, PSMs’ focus has been on small groups, whose members are not only stakeholders but also decision-makers with the power to adopt or reject proposed courses of action (Shaw et al., 2004).

The design of a traditional PSM process contrasts sharply to typical settings of event policymaking, which often involve a large number of policy actors, many of whom have little or no authority over the final decision (Shaw et al., 2004). Beside the traditional intervention approach that requires policy actors to participate in face-to-face deliberation in a workshop, Van de Lei and Thissen (2009) suggest that PSMs using a desktop research approach can also help to effectively identify policy problems. In the desktop research approach, the researcher collects information including publicly available reports, individual interviews and/or surveys. The information collected is then used to structure the problem and communicate results of the study back to the actors (Van de Lei & Thissen, 2009). Arguably, the traditional intervention approach is still more desirable than the desktop research approach as actors can interact with each other and listen to other parties’ views as a way to help gain a better
understanding of the problem situation (Rosenhead & Mingers, 2001). This kind of social interaction is claimed to be useful in solving emotional conflicts between and within individuals and groups (Hoppe & Hisschemoller, 1995). Nevertheless, a desktop research approach was deemed a more appropriate option in the present case study based on the following factors: (1) short timelines and budget constraints; (2) the existence of comprehensive background information collated from a previous project; (3) extensive media coverage of the event; and (4) the inaccessibility (and unwillingness) of high profile policy actors to be involved in research associated with what had become a politically charged and highly controversial major event. Taking these factors into account, Q methodology was the PSM adopted for the 2009 Australian World Rally Championship (AWRC) case study.

3.3. Case study: the 2009 Australian World Rally Championship

In 2007, the New South Wales State government was presented with the opportunity to host the AWRC. Seeing the event’s potential to boost regional tourism, Events NSW (a private corporation created by, and operating on behalf of, the NSW State government) entered into negotiations with the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport (CAMS) with little to no discussion or consultation with the other actors. Nevertheless, an agreement was reached and an announcement was made on 10 September 2008 that the Rally would be staged in the Northern Rivers of NSW every second year until 2017, with an option to extend for a further five events.

The event organisers and the NSW State government promoted the event as a vehicle to provide in excess of $20 million worth of economic benefits to the region. The decision to stage the Rally was initially welcomed by both local residents and local councils. Concerns soon emerged however, when the host community learned that rally cars would race on rural public roads and even pass through national parks. Numerous questions about the social and environmental impacts of the event were raised and when the community began to realise that the event organisers were avoiding or not adequately acknowledging these concerns, opposition to the event grew. The event’s economic benefits were also questioned when community actors realised that the Western Australian State government chose to discontinue hosting the event due to its high cost and low economic returns. Protests and negative media about the Rally arguably gave organisers and the NSW State government cause for concern about the fate of the event.

Under normal circumstances, actors usually have the opportunity to voice their concerns about an event when a Development Application (DA) is lodged with the local municipality. Yet actors’ concerns about the proposed AWRC event were never heard as the DA was never lodged by the event organisers. Instead, special purpose legislation (the Motor Sports Bill 2009) was passed by the NSW government, which effectively bypassed long established local government approval processes and effectively removed the event from local planning and environmental requirements. Not surprisingly, this move generated a backlash from those concerned about the apparent lack of democratic process and public consultation. In a last attempt, AWRC protesters applied to the Federal Court for an injunction against the event based on environmental grounds. Heard in less than 2 h the day before the event was due to start, the Judge dismissed the application and the race went ahead. Various anti-rally protests were held throughout the event period with many observers suggesting that the event made headlines for ‘all the wrong reasons’ (Williams, 2010, p. 1).

By fast-tracking the event through the approvals process, the NSW State government tried to create certainty around the staging of the event. However, the extent of community activism during the event suggests that a multitude of complex policy problems were not adequately addressed. For instance, ineffective communication was a constant cause for concern. Different policy actors tended to communicate through media and research reports rather than directly with each other because no dialog space had been created or fostered. Actors tried to argue their position, giving little or no consideration to the stance of other actors. As a result, the overarching community of actors associated with the 2009 AWRC was extremely complex, unpredictable and volatile. Consequently, there is value in effective problem identification (using PSMs) to shed light on the issues and to aid in managing actor relations.

3.4. Q methodology data collection and analysis

Q methodology employs a mixed method that combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches and aims to detect subjective opinions or preferences in a group (Brown, 1993; Stephenson, 1953). Q methodology possesses typical characteristics of PSM (transparent, participative, model-based, language-based and facilitated) and has recently been included in the PSM family (Van de Lee, 2009). In policymaking, Q methodology has been used extensively to obtain actors’ beliefs and values in many policy situations, especially in environmental issues (e.g., Addams & Proops, 2000). In tourism, studies using Q methodology are rare (e.g. see Farsari, Butler, & Szivas, 2011; Stergiou & Airey, 2010) and it appears this study has been the only application in the event context.

Q methodology typically involves four stages which incorporate an iterative process of data collection and analysis. In this case, an initial round of data collection was followed by analysis. The results were used as input into the next round of data collection (Robson, 1993; Van Exel & De Graaf, 2005). In the first stage, a Q-concourse – ‘the collection of all the possible statements the respondents can make about the subject at hand’ was built (Van Exel & De Graaf, 2005, p. 4). The 2009 AWRC concourse aimed to capture all actors’ relevant perspectives in the policy discourse surrounding the event and was derived from both primary and secondary data.

Transcripts from twenty semi-structured interviews, predominantly with local government actors who had direct involvement with, or detailed knowledge of, the event were used. These interviews were carried out as part of a larger research project and provided valuable insights into the thoughts and perceptions of a range of policy actors. Secondary sources were also gathered, including newspaper reports, parliamentary transcripts and post-event evaluation reports. Analysis of the transcripts was underpinned by elements of grounded theory (e.g., Venable, Pidgeon, Simmons, Henwood, & Parkhill, 2009) and involved looking for statements reflecting distinguishing opinions of policy actors. The process ceased when no new opinions could be identified, resulting in a Q-concourse of 112 statements.

In the second stage, a qualitative approach was employed to select a sample of representative statements (a Q sample) from the Q-concourse of 112 statements. To reduce bias and the potential exclusion of important views, a structured sampling strategy was used. The Q-concourse was sorted into a theoretical structure, which included four main categories and twenty-eight sub-components of event issues relating to economic, socio-cultural, environmental and political dimensions. Some sub-components were empty while others had more than one statement because the theoretical structure developed was generic for any event discourse and some issues (i.e., commodification of culture) might not appear in the 2009 AWRC discourse. AWRC policy actors might also have more diverse opinions on particular issues. Each sub-component was examined to decide if there were any closely related opinion statements that could be substituted with one general, all encompassing statement. At the end of this stage, a Q sample of 37 statements was created.
In the third stage, the Q sample was presented to a small group of respondents (called a P-set) using a purposive sampling technique. Guided by the event policy community map (Whitford, 2009), the research targeted actors from many different policy sectors including the local business community, local and regional interest groups, local protest groups, local government agencies, State government agencies and the host event organisation. Eighty-five potential participants were identified through media archives, reports, parliamentary transcripts and the snowballing technique used in the semi-structured interviews. Of these, 36 participated in a web-based survey. Whilst this might be considered a small sample size if using traditional quantitative analysis, Q methodology describes a population of viewpoints rather than a population of people (Hunter, 2011). According to Kitzinger (1987), the aim of a Q study is not to provide a statistical description of the viewpoints that characterise the sample, but to assess the diversity and structure of those viewpoints. As a result, sample sizes are generally smaller and the number of participants is much less important than who the actors are and what viewpoints they contribute (Van Exel & De Graaf, 2005). In fact, a group of 20–60 representative participants is typical for many Q studies and is claimed to be enough to capture the available viewpoints on a topic (Brown, 1997).

The central task in this third stage was undertaking a Q sort, the process through which participants ranked the Q-sample statements, based on their individual opinions/perceptions in relation to one another on a nine-point Likert scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) forced into a quasi-normal distribution (i.e., symmetrical about the middle) (Fig. 1). By ranking (valuing) these statements as a whole, a participant gives priority to each statement (i.e., each issue in the policy discourse) and as a result, assembles a model of his/her own perspective of the policy problem (Brouwer, 1999). The ‘pick, group and rank’ function in Qualtrics was used to create a similar process to the traditional Q distribution that would be done if participants were asked to physically organise statement cards. Two additional questions on the survey were used to identify the participants’ background organisation in order to ensure the results reflected the diversity of viewpoints from different policy actors, and to gather additional qualitative data by asking participants to comment on any issue they felt strongly about.

During stage four (i.e., the statistical analysis), Q methodology preserves these policy actors’ self-referent perspectives (represented by their Q sorts, used as variables in the analysis) and registers the degree of similarity or dissimilarity between them (correlation) and condenses them from a large number into a communicable number of perspectives (factor analysis) (Robbins & Krueger, 2000). These statistical procedures were done with the assistance of PQMethod 2.11 software (Qmethod, 2012). First, each Q sort was compared with one another to create a 36 by 36 correlation matrix. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was then applied followed by a varimax rotation to arrive at 4 main factors (perspectives) in the output.

Interestingly, in these four factors, factor 2 has thirteen Q sorts loaded significantly on, four of which being negative loadings. Having both negative and positive significant loadings, factor 2 is thus considered a bipolar factor (Mckeown & Thomas, 1988). This bipolarity indicates internal conflict within the factor (Goldstein & Goldstein, 2005), of which two groups of participants ranked the Q sample in completely opposite ways, one of which is the ‘mirror-image’ of the other (Van Eeten, 1999). In order to interpret and communicate the result more easily, factor score, defined as ‘the score for a statement as a ‘kind of average’ of the scores given to that statement by all of the Q sorts associated with the factor’ was calculated (Brown, 1993, p. 134).

4. Results

4.1. Participants background

The 36 respondents to the survey were spread across different policy domains, including state government (n = 2); local government (n = 4); local protest groups (n = 10); environmental interest groups (n = 7); local tourism organisations (n = 2). In the interests of privacy, “other” and “skip” responses were also included and 11 participants (31%) chose this option. Additional ‘other’ participant information included: Chamber of Commerce, Ratepayer & resident, Political Party. It is important to acknowledge that valuable perspectives of people from key policy domains such as Rally Australia (i.e., the host event organisation) or Events NSW (i.e., the major sponsor of the event) may not be represented. The potential impact of this sample on the findings will be discussed in the conclusions of this paper.

4.2. The four perspectives

The Q-sort analysis identified four factors which were interpreted as four perspectives that make up the clusters of problems associated with the hosting of the 2009 AWRC at the time the survey was rolled out. Interpretation was partly guided by statistical significance (i.e., the statements with highest and lowest scores for a factor are the center of focus because they indicate what a group of respondents felt most strongly about). In addition, a stronger emphasis was placed on seeking out the ‘overall ranking patterns’ and ‘interrelationships between the statements’, which explains the distinct perception of each group of respondents (Addams, 2000, p. 32). To further assist with the interpretation,
respondents that loaded significantly on each factor were identified based on Q-sort numbers and their qualitative data collected from the open-ended question (if applicable) would be used respectively. The similarity/dissimilarity across all perspectives was also considered, with consensus and/or distinguishable statements between the perspectives highlighted. Finally, to simplify the discussion, each group of respondents that loaded highly on a perspective were categorised based on the typology of beliefs that underpinned the perspective. These were labeled: The Skeptics; The Materialists; The Middle-grounders; and; The Supporters.

4.2.1. The Skeptic perspective
This perspective reveals a skeptical view toward the hosting of the 2009 AWRC. According to Table 1, the Skeptics have negative views toward the political issues surrounding the hosting of the event and the event itself. However, they place a strong emphasis on the political dimension of the event, with statements relating to the degree of community control over the event and government’s accountability receiving highest scores. They are also characterised by a deep distrust of both the event organisers and the State government. A distinguishing point is their belief that the majority of the community possesses the same view, yet the event still created a problem by dividing the community.

The Skeptics provided the richest qualitative data, including:

- ‘The State government had the ‘behind-closed-doors’ negotiations deal done before the public even knew about it, least of all the residents of the region.’
- ‘The situation of mistrust, inaccurate stereotyping on both sides and open animosity towards one citizen to another, all over the relative value of having a car race, all this manifested strongly in the region as a consequence of this rally event and still does to this day.’
- ‘It is totally inappropriate to hold such an event in such an environmentally significant region as the northern NSW coastal and hinterland areas’

4.2.2. The Materialist perspective
The Materialist perspective indicates a strong focus on the economic aspect of the event, with the highest scores being given to mostly economic-related statements. As noted earlier, this perspective is bipolar and constituted two groups of respondents with completely opposite views. The polarisation between these two groups is demonstrated in the sub-labels given to each perspective: The Optimistic Materialist perspective and the Pessimistic Materialist perspective.

The Optimistic Materialist perspective is characterised by the general belief that State government’s investment in the 2009 AWRC did, and will continue to bring significant benefits to the host region’s economy. Concomitantly, the Optimistic Materialists strongly agreed that the event organisers did take into account the community’s concerns and that problems were created by only few interest groups, who should have compromised for the common good, with ‘common good’ being interpreted in this case as ‘economic benefits for the host community’.

This Optimistic Materialistic perspective is best represented by the following two respondents, who wrote:

- ‘What the hell is the problem? It’s only for four days. As long as the organisers take note of peoples’ legitimate concerns, a few people with strange agendas is always going to happen. No matter what you organise for the good of the majority.’
- ‘The rally was allowed to be hijacked by a vocal minority. More effort should be made to prevent their negative publicity and to prosecute their illegal activities against the event.’

The Pessimistic Materialist perspective is a mirror image of the Optimistic Materialist perspective, which means the ranking of statements in Table 2 is completely reversed. As the name indicates, actors holding this perspective rejected any genuine economic benefits from the event. In addition, they also expressed concern of possible damage to the local ecosystem in the long term (i.e., +4). This perspective thus has some correlation to the Skeptic perspective, with both groups holding a skeptical view toward the event itself. However, regarding political opinions, the Skeptics concentrated their perspectives on the degree of community control in the event and compliance with the law and democratic rights, while the Pessimistic Materialists focused on the lack of transparency in the use of public funds in facilitating the event. Comments illustrating this view include:

- ‘Events NSW should disclose what it spent of taxpayers’ money to secure the event.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Statements received highest positive and negative scores in the Skeptic perspective.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree (+4)</td>
<td>Policy for the event should comply with existing laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree (+3)</td>
<td>State government’s role as regulator and sponsor of the event was a conflict of interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree (+3)</td>
<td>A Rally event is a poor match to the image of the Northern Rivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree: other distinguishing statements</td>
<td>Residents living on the rally route experienced great disruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree (−4)</td>
<td>The Rally created a problem by dividing the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree (−3)</td>
<td>The event may produce long-term damage to the local ecosystem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree (−3)</td>
<td>The event organisers were committed to community consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree: other distinguishing statements</td>
<td>Opposition to the Rally came from a minority of very vocal stakeholders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Statements received highest positive and negative scores in the Materialist perspective.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree (+4)</td>
<td>The event boosted the Tweed economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree (+3)</td>
<td>The event showcased the region to the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree (+3)</td>
<td>The event organisers were committed to community consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree: other distinguishing statements</td>
<td>The event brought investment opportunities to the region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree (−4)</td>
<td>The Gold Coast received most of the Rally’s economic benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree (−3)</td>
<td>The event may produce long-term damage to the local ecosystem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree (−3)</td>
<td>State government’s role as regulator and sponsor of the event was a conflict of interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree: other distinguishing statements</td>
<td>Aboriginal Groups were not properly consulted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree: other distinguishing statements</td>
<td>Anti-social behavior increased as a result of the event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree: other distinguishing statements</td>
<td>The Rally will probably lead to large financial losses by NSW taxpayers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.3. The Middle-grounder perspective

Table 3 illustrates that the Middle-grounders share common ground with both the Skeptics and the Optimistic Materialists. First, the Middle-grounders correlate positively with the Optimistic Materialists in that they share strong positive belief about the event’s economic benefits. Hence both groups feel strongly that actors opposing the event should compromise for the common good (i.e., +3, +3).

Alternatively, there is also a degree of similarity between the Skeptics and the Middle-grounders in the rankings of various statements relating to the event’s political dimension. For instance, both perspectives agreed that the use of special legislation to fast-track the approval process should not be encouraged (i.e., −3, −3). However, the Middle-grounders differ to the Skeptics in one important aspect: they believed opposition to the event is driven by a minority (i.e., +3), and that most of these protestors are only objecting to the policymaking process and not the event itself. This suggests that the Middle-grounders have great confidence the event would still pass the local approval process. Rather, the main purpose of following the existing DA approval process is to ensure the host community can reserve a certain degree of control and ownership over the event. In short, people holding this perspective supported the event because it provides benefits to the host region, but at the same time the event’s benefits do not justify the use of special legislation to bypass the local approval process.

4.2.4. The Supporter perspective

In Table 4, the Supporters are characterised by their positive view about the hosting of the AWRC, which led them to support both the event and the policymaking process that enabled the event to take place. The Supporter perspective lies in stark contrast to the Skeptic perspective, which reveals negative views about all issues in the event discourse. This uncovers another point of potential conflict within the community of actors that needs to be bridged, in addition to the apparent conflict in the bipolar Materialistic perspective mentioned earlier.

A distinctive view within this perspective is that the Supporters endorsed the government’s authoritative approach to investing and regulating major events in order to bring economic benefits to the host region. Unlike the Skeptics and the Middle-grounders, the Supporters do not see the use of special legislation to bypass the local approval process as taking away community input into decision-making. This view is guided partly by the belief that opposition to the event only comes from a minority of vocal actors (i.e., +3) but mainly because they believed sufficient consultation with the community, especially with local indigenous Aboriginal Groups (i.e., −4) has been carried out. Trust and support of government actions by the Supporters are further reiterated by a strong disagreement with the exemption of event organising liability associated with the event (i.e., −4); but at the same time they agreed that public authorities should be protected by special legislation. The main problem the Supporters find is that the Motor Sports Bill NSW 2009 was not introduced in a timely manner (i.e., +3), which created ‘confusion and delay in activities carried out to assist the hosting of the event’, one respondent commented.

5. Discussion

This paper aimed to explore the notion of problem identification and its contribution in the event planning and management process. A review of literature found problem identification in event policy, planning and management processes is very challenging due to the presence of complex interrelated issues that are not easily identified or understood by the range of policy actors.
involved. To identify the problems in the case of 2009 AWRC, Q methodology helped to reduce the initial, overwhelmingly large number of opinion statements (112 statements) to four perspectives comprising sets of problems and issues. Importantly, from these sets of problems, the ranking associated with each statement in Q methodology further identified the urgency of problems from each of the four key perspectives (see Tables 1–4). Based on the highest ranked statements, each perspective’s focus on what constitutes the key problems is shown in Table 5:

Q methodology also facilitated the identification of problems that were non-urgent. For instance, environmental issues which were the focus of media attention in the 2009 AWRC (e.g., koalas and their habitat were an emotive icon within the debate) were not viewed as significant to many actors at the time the research was undertaken. The identification of non-urgent and urgent issues that have the potential to polarise public debate has important implications pertaining to the prioritisation of issues and thus for effective policy, event planning and management.

Q methodology also helped to reveal points of potential conflict within the 2009 AWRC event discourse. For instance, the Skeptics and the Middle-grounders argued for different approaches that allow the community to retain control over the event (Table 5), while the Supporters wanted to use special purpose legislation to ensure smooth planning and management of the event. Arguably, special purpose legislation is only one tool to ensure this happens. By identifying conflict of opinions, policymakers can facilitate effective planning and management of the event but at the same time, also ensure the host community retains some control over the event. In short, the study’s results have demonstrated that PSMs (i.e., Q methodology) can be effectively employed to help identify differing perspectives of policy actors, and in turn provide policymakers with a more comprehensive problem picture of associated event planning and management issues.

The paper’s second objective was to explore the extent to which PSMs are a practical tool to assist in improving event planning and management. The examination of literature on PSMs found that this family of methods has great potential to effectively identify and differentiate the different perspectives on the problems and issues that might exist. PSMs achieve this task by creating a problem structuring process that is transparent, participative, model-based, language-based and facilitated (i.e., by the researcher/consultant) (Franco, 2008). By better understanding the different perspectives that exist in relation to an event, event organisers, public officials and other actors are likely to better anticipate and manage potential conflict. In this study, Q methodology was applied to assist problem identification in the 2009 AWRC event. The extent to which PSMs and Q methodology assisted effective problem identification is reflected upon below.

**Language-based**: Language was used extensively throughout the study. The Q-sample statements given to participants for sorting and ranking were selected from their own communications about the issues regarding the 2009 AWRC. Results were also mainly communicated through thick descriptions of the perspectives and problems, with the Q-sort ranking numbers only being used for analysis and interpretation.

**Model-based**: Every time a PSM is applied, a framework or model that represents a range of issues that make up the problem situation associated with the hosting of an event is created (see Rosenhead & Mingers, 2001). In this study, the framework created by Q methodology is the summary of the different perspectives and current problem situation in the 2009 AWRC.

**Participative**: In the case of the 2009 AWRC, where deep conflicts and distrust made actors unlikely to participate in face-to-face workshops, Q methodology proved to be effective in identifying and bringing actors’ different perspectives together without the need for direct (and quite possibly confrontational) communications (Van de Lei & Thissen, 2009). Participation of actors and inclusion of the widest perspectives possible was achieved firstly through the creation of a Q sample. Second, various actors were invited to participate in a survey where each could contribute his/her perspective (through sorting and ranking the Q-sample statements) individually and anonymously. Importantly then, Q methodology has the capacity to produce collaborative useful knowledge while protecting the participants’ privacy (Webler, Danielson, & Tuler, 2009).

However, the degree of actors’ participation, and in turn success of PSMs depends on the actors’ interest in the problem structuring process as well as the timing of the process. Fredline (2000, p. 197) observed that actors with ‘strong feelings, either positive or negative, would be more inclined to make an effort to complete and return the survey, than those who do not really care’. This observation also held true in this study. Actors from some sectors (e.g., local protest groups and environmental groups) appeared to be more willing to participate than actors from other sectors (e.g., event organisers and government). This might also be explained given government and event organisers already held the balance of power, their approach had been secretive from the start, and they had shown little interest in genuine consultation. As a result, they were less likely to value the outcomes of this type of research. Additionally, timing also seemed to be a key factor that influenced the participation of actors. As the situation evolved, new issues were added to the problem picture that tended to deepen the conflict between actors and make them even less willing to collaborate. Arguably then, the earlier the problem structuring process was carried out, the higher the chance of policy actors agreeing to share their perspectives in a collaborative process.

**Transparent and facilitated**: According to Van de Riet (2003, p. 116), ‘if a stakeholder does not trust the analysis, the stakeholder will consider its outcome irrelevant’. In this study, the researcher provided thorough details of how the process was carried out. Yet, unlike the traditional approach using workshops, where actors can monitor the problem structuring process from the start to finish; total transparency in the desktop research approach is impossible to achieve. Acceptance of the results therefore depends on how actors consider the trustworthiness of the facilitator (in this case the researcher).

Therefore, not only does the facilitator’s skills play a vital role in the successful application of PSMs (Eden & Ackermann, 2006), but also the facilitator’s background is an important factor for the results to be considered valid by the community of actors. The recruiting of facilitator(s) to carry out the problem structuring process therefore should follow strict criteria to ensure the

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**Table 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Most urgent issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Skeptic</td>
<td>Focus is on political issues, especially the degree of community control over the event and government’s accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Materialist</td>
<td>Focus is on economic issues related to the event, with two opposite views:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic Materialist</td>
<td>Government’s investment in the event is encouraged to realise economic benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pessimistic Materialist</td>
<td>Interest groups should compromise for the sake of using public funds and will lead to financial losses to taxpayers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Middle-grounder</td>
<td>Focus is on political issues. Compliance to the existing local approval process is needed to ensure community retains some degree of control over the event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Supporter</td>
<td>Focus is on political issues. The government should take an even more active role and utilise special legislation to ensure the rally and other major events are efficiently facilitated and create maximise return on investment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
community’s acceptance of the results. Arguably, the chosen facilitator(s) should have: high credibility/high reputation in their work; never publicly taken any position in the debate or have little to no knowledge of the debate before being recruited; and no stake in the results produced.

6. Conclusions & recommendations

The research found that multiple-actor policy setting and diverse perspectives are often manifested as wicked problems, which pose significant challenges to identifying and prioritising potential problems associated with the planning and management of an event. Yet low awareness and a lack of recognition of wicked problems are common among actors involved in event planning and management. According to Conklin (2006, p. 4), “a big feature of wicked problems is that many people come to the table believing that the problem actually is not wicked at all—they think they know what kind of problem it is and what kinds of solutions are valid”. The findings in this research suggest that it is important that event planners and managers recognise and/or acknowledge the diversity of issues in the event environment from which wicked problems arise (i.e., diverse policy actors with diverse values and priorities). Arguably, by realising/acknowledging that wicked problems exist, event planners, managers and policymakers can move away from a tendency to treat problems as ‘tame’ problems. Such a shift would include the design of event policy, planning and management processes that embrace the diversity of perspectives present in the event policy community.

The 2009 AWRC case provided a good example of the rapid appearance of so many issues and problems surrounding the hosting of an event. The initial review of media, reports and interviews for this research revealed 112 opinion statements. Even if the event planners and managers were aware of all these issues, the challenge would be to know which problems were more urgent and important to address, and which problems were less important. Moreover, the importance of dealing with problems efficiently and effectively is exacerbated by the short time frame to stage the event. In such cases, where there are a large number of policy actors, a diversity of issues and pressing timelines, PSM (e.g., Q methodology) would appear to be an effective vehicle to shed light on the problem field.

The exploratory nature of this study has laid the foundation for future research opportunities. First, besides Q methodology, the family of PSMs is quite large with diverse methods and the application of these methods in future studies can help to enrich the methodological dimensions of event research. Second, PSM was applied to the 2009 AWRC in its evaluation stage. At this stage, conflicts between actors were heightened and many more problems arose as a result of different actors’ unexpected actions, further complicating the problem. Additionally, many evaluation reports published after the first event helped to fill the knowledge gap and in turn changed the nature of the problem (i.e., environmental issues are no longer the focus). A future study may look at the application of PSM from an early stage of the event lifecycle (e.g., bidding or planning phase) and investigate whether this can help increase the effectiveness of event policy, planning and management processes. Additionally, the intervention approach of the PSM family, which has not been applied in this research, can also be explored in future studies. Comparative case studies can be undertaken to compare/contrast results derived from both the intervention approach and the desktop research approach.

References


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