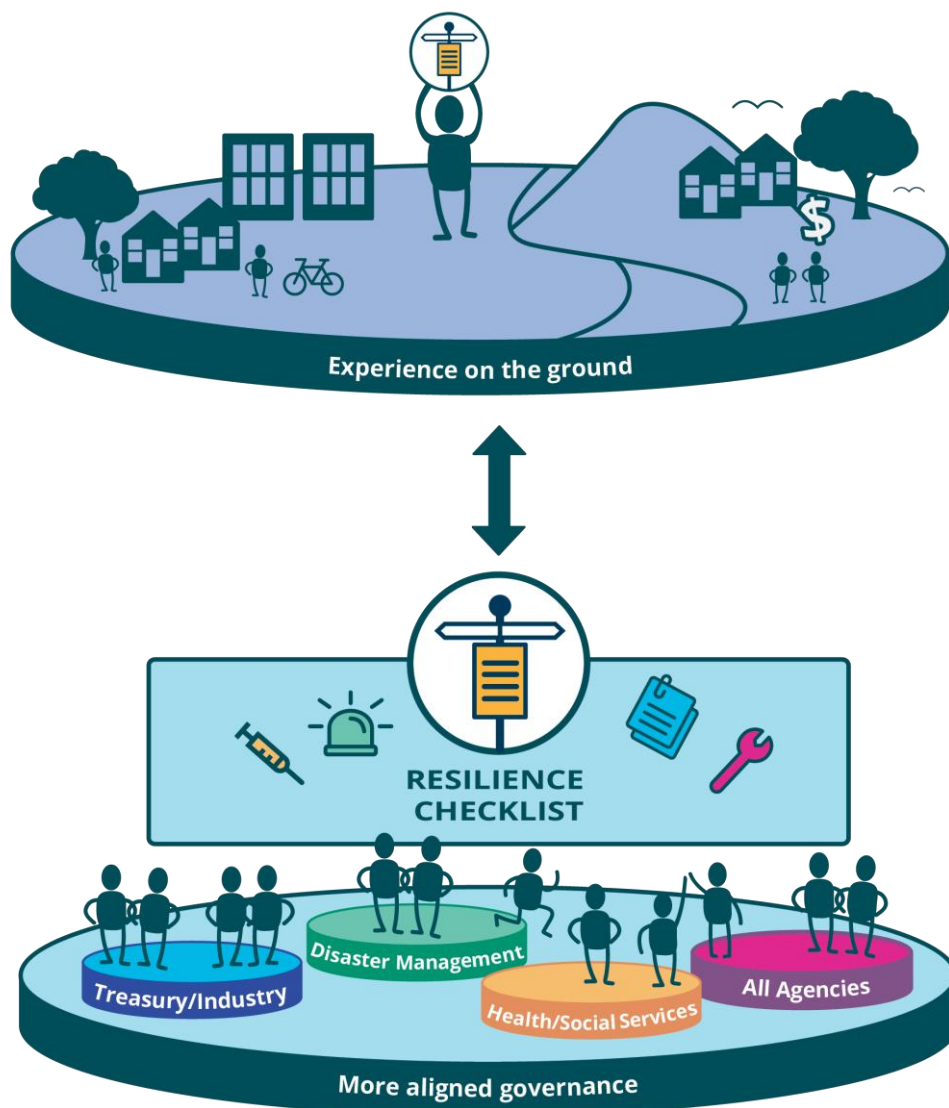


Key insights on resilience: Conversations with Queensland state agencies

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Cover image: Thinkplace. Interviews indicated a desire for agencies and sectors to work more collaboratively. This includes creating new ways of interacting and governance mechanisms for co-ordinating state government service delivery, as outlined in more detail in the companion reports published in this project.

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1 Background to this project

In May 2018, the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA) released *Resilient Queensland 2018–21 – Delivering the Queensland Strategy for Disaster Resilience* as the state-wide, whole-of-government implementation plan to strengthen Queensland’s resilience to natural disasters, with the objective to make Queensland the most disaster resilient state.

Resilient Queensland (RQ) was developed in consultation with Queensland state agencies, the private sector and local governments to coordinate the state-wide delivery of the Queensland Strategy for Disaster Resilience. It represented a whole-of-government response to disaster resilience that involves better coordination of government policy, information management, project delivery and stakeholder collaboration.

In August 2019, QRA commenced a project with CSIRO to strengthen engagement with the Resilient Queensland strategy and look for ways to harmonise resilience and adaptation across state agencies. The objectives of the project were to deliver:

- *An engagement process* to foster cross-agency interaction
- *A compelling narrative* about the importance of resilience for Queensland
- *A resilience framework* for Queensland to give a more consistent understanding and application of the concept of resilience across state agency stakeholders and what this means in a pragmatic way in terms of the vision, goals, objectives and decision criteria across agencies in Queensland.

A core component of the engagement process was to conduct interviews with representatives across a diverse range of state agencies and listen to their views about Resilient Queensland and to better understand existing approaches to resilience across state government. The aim of the interviews was to inform the subsequent development of the compelling narrative and resilience framework in order to guide the successful design and implementation of agency plans for building resilience (including adaptation and transformation).

This report summarises the findings from the interviews and brings together key messages that emerged and guided subsequent stages of the project. Additional detail about the overarching project and other project components are described elsewhere O’Connell et al. (2020). Since the interviews were conducted, QRA also released *Resilient Queensland in Action* (State of Queensland (Queensland Reconstruction Authority), 2020), which provides a progress update and showcases achievements including case studies and initiatives by state agencies, local governments and communities, incorporating climate risk and delivering a comprehensive, all-hazards approach to building disaster resilience.

2 Methods

From September to October 2019, CSIRO conducted 13 interviews plus received one written response to interview questions. The majority represented agencies on the Queensland Resilience Coordination Committee (QRCC) and in most cases were asked to participate by their Director General. Two additional interviews were conducted with agencies that were also considered critical to advancing state-level engagement with Resilient Queensland. Interviews were conducted in person with at least one interviewer with extensive experience in qualitative research methods, plus at least one additional CSIRO team member, in most cases joining by telephone or video conference to take notes. Interviews followed a semi-structured format that balanced listening, prompting, and shepherding through the questions, and took between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours.

The interview process was designed to:

- Explore the framings of interviewees and their organisations of concepts of resilience, adaptation, transition, and disaster risk reduction; current activities and exploration of what needs to happen next
- Use the information to help shape the subsequent engagement processes
- Use the information in a range of other ways as outlined in an information sheet given to participants, including writing reports; manuscripts for academic publication; website context, and promotional material for research activities.

The interview instrument was designed through an iterative process involving the research team and drawing on insights emerging from discussions with QRA staff. After the first interview the research team reviewed the interview questions and made slight adjustments to the wording to increase clarity. In total there were seven questions used to guide the interviews (Table 1).

The methodological design was reviewed and approved by the CSIRO Social and Interdisciplinary Science Human Research Ethics Committee (CSSHREC).

TABLE 1. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1	What is your name, and your role in agency or organisation?
2	What sorts of current and future disasters and disruptions are of concern to the core business of your agency and users of your services? Thinking about the ‘core business’ of your agency, how has it been affected in the past? How could it be affected in the future by these disasters?
3	What does success look like, in terms of continuing to provide agency services in the long term?
4	What relationship do you see between resilience, and disaster or climate risk reduction? What is your agency doing currently to contribute to these activities (for agency, and users of services)? What do you think is and isn’t working?
5	Ideally, what else/more should be done to reduce the future impacts of disasters/climate or build resilience for your agency and on the users of your services? How and by who?
6	What barriers are there to those things being done?
7	As you may know, Resilient Queensland is the implementation plan for the Queensland Strategy for Disaster Resilience (QSDR). How familiar are you with this plan? How much ‘traction’ does the plan have within your agency? And why? Do you think it’s useful? What needs to be done to make the plan more effective (if anything)?

Detailed notes were taken at each interview, written up as interview summaries. In addition, with the consent of interviewees, audio recordings were made of most of the interviews. Analysis of the interview summaries was based on the 'Adaptive Theory' approach (Layder 1998) which involved checking the extent to which the interviews built on existing knowledge as opposed to a fully inductive coding approach. The analysis of the interviews was conducted by two members of the research team trained in qualitative analysis and involved an iterative process of grouping and categorising responses into a set of themes using specialist software (QSR International 2019). Analysis involved a dialectic process to balance being true to the data while addressing the multiple purposes of the interview phase of the project, namely 1) to engage with Queensland agencies and listen to their perspectives, 2) to inform the next phase of the project and inform future action and 3) to uncover key insights from the interviewees about resilience and how Queensland agencies work together.

Following the interviews, a draft of the interview themes was emailed to all of the interviewees and all were invited to participate in an individual follow-up virtual 'feedback session.' Several participated and gave feedback, which was incorporated into a revised version of the themes, but none were changed substantially. All of the interviewees who provided feedback indicated that the themes resonated strongly with their own observations and experience. From the analysis the research team identified nine inter-connected themes presented in the next section.

3 Themes from interview analysis

3.1 The Narrowing Window for Preparedness, Recovery and Learning

It is recognised that the increasing duration of the disaster season is putting significant pressure on an already strained disaster management system, and this can be expected to continue.

As the disaster season spans a greater part of each year, the time for learning, reflection, preparation and policy development decreases because agencies are disproportionately focused on responding. Several participants noted that the start of the bushfire season has been getting earlier over recent years, while cyclone threats are extending later. The spatial extent of fire threat is also an issue, with multiple fires and alerts across the state, placing increasing pressure on resources. Individual regions are increasingly experiencing multiple events simultaneously or in close succession. It was recognised that these patterns are not anomalous but rather are indicative of a future unlike the past: a 'new normal.'

Collectively, the increasing frequency, intensity, duration and concurrence of events is exerting great pressure on the full range of agencies and their core business, and compresses all other business - including the longer-term thinking, planning and learning associated with resilience - into a narrowing window. It also reduces the time available to work with local governments and vulnerable communities to increase their resilience to future events, disrupts existing work programs, and challenges abilities to cooperate within the state and with interstate partners.

3.2 Shared Responsibility

Reducing disaster risk requires everyone to take responsibility – within their means, and that there is clarity in roles and responsibilities.

There is a recognition that everyone needs to play a role. During response time, agencies have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. In some cases this flows through to recovery, planning and preparation between events. Beyond these established roles during familiar circumstances, responsibility becomes more ambiguous and shifting ground. Some participants emphasised confusion around ownership of 'whole of government' risk. When it comes to doing things without precedent or established legislative requirements, there was a concern that agencies may return to silo behaviour. This connects with the 'New Normal' theme: agencies are so busy dealing with existing core business that they don't have the time or wherewithal to work through ambiguity over cross-agency responsibilities. Others indicated that carriage for some aspects of disaster management and resilience needs to shift to different – sometimes more local – levels. There was a view that communities need to be more actively engaged, or more self-sufficient and less reliant on government to provide services or assistance. In some cases this involved activities to reduce physical risk to households. In others it involved working with vulnerable populations to educate them about risk and increase their broader financial resilience and mobility and functional support needs, all of which are crucial

The Narrowing Window for Preparedness, Recovery and Learning

You're just getting into the detail of recovery from a significant event and then another event's on top of the whole workforce...

We do a lot of work with communities to help them understand their risks... the more time we are responding, the less time we have to do that work.

Today, we're reviewing bushfires from September and Paradise Dam and that's absorbing all our attention. Both of these are outside our work program which we defined back in June when neither of them had happened.

Shared Responsibility

Everyone has a role to play. No one entity or group can do it on their own.

Helping local governments... [it's] ... less about doing things 'for' and more 'with'...

Under future conditions with multiple concurrent disasters people will be less able to share resources with us leaving us to manage it on our own.

during response times Other participants emphasised the importance of engaging the private sector. This could involve extending the concept of building codes to increased requirements for reducing risk of future disasters or mandating disaster plans.

3.3 Resilience-as-Usual

Resilience has multiple meanings, and the most common interpretations of resilience included building back better, maintaining business continuity, returning to business-as-usual.

Examples of this include elevated roads, bigger bridges, re-designed commercial centres and residential developments. There is general support for this type of resilience because it appears to address visible, tangible aspects of disaster risk, and resourcing is generally available (although there can always be more). This is a relative comfort zone for resilience discussions.

These definitions of resilience tend to align with the particular core business of agencies, and sometimes reflect resilience frameworks that they have created or use. Sometimes it is spoken of in terms of a 'resilience agenda' and resilience is sometimes seen as a part or phase of disaster management, separate from other parts like recovery. Some alluded to resilience as involving longer-term thinking and planning, but it was acknowledged that this was largely aspirational (see 'Resilience as 'doing differently'').

Interviewees' reflections on resilience are suggestive of a spectrum; at one end, resilience is seen to be about maintaining the current system while at the other, it is seen to be about doing something different. Some interviewees also indicated whether they thought what they are doing is adequate.

Some acknowledged that there is no single agreed on definition of resilience, and this enables plurality and flexibility through an organic, bottom-up approach, all desirable features of resilience. However, as long as individual agencies pursue their own resilience agendas in isolation of others', it will be likely that resilience will mainly be defined in the comfort zone of building back better, and returning to business as usual, rather than recognising that resilience needs to be done differently and speak to transformative change.

3.4 Resilience as 'Doing Differently'

Beyond the comfort zone is a more systemic definition of resilience, which involves longer-term thinking and planning and revisiting assumptions and values: in short, doing things differently, not just the same things better. Moving towards a 'next generation' version of resilience by doing things differently implies connections and collaboration between agencies and sectors to support each other and avoid unintended or maladaptive cross-sectoral impacts.

There are framings on resilience and related concepts that are unresolved, intractable and contentious, which has limited much of the existing resilience discussion to the 'as-usual' space. These framings are emergent and pluralistic, in that they appreciate that there are multiple agencies, agendas and roles but everyone needs to be on the same page as far as recognising the need to do differently.

This is the murkier definition of resilience, and for many, it is 'out of the comfort zone'. It is aspirational in that we are (as a society) not there yet, it represents what (some) people hope to achieve. A key feature of this theme is doing things differently as opposed to doing the same things better. By

Resilience-as-Usual

...resilience is about taking contemporary practice and pushing it to make it better than it was

The response and recovery business: core business, everyone is on board, everyone understands that continuous improvement bit.

Internally, resilience is overused. Are we talking about organisational, personal, disaster resilience? And if we're talking about disaster resilience, then it's hazard specific because being resilient to a bushfire is not the same as being resilient to a flood.

Resilience as 'Doing Differently'

As we fund disaster recovery, we have a tendency to build back to what they were. We're using "build back better", but we need to change to "build back different" or "not build back at all". Encouraging farmers or agricultural producers to use different crops, livestock or to move to a different place.

We make these assumptions that because people do it year in year out, they are good at it and they're fine. Instead of what are the long-term impacts of having to deal with that?

'differently' this approach means seeking to avoid future harm, such as through land use planning to remove people from hazard prone areas, rather than building stronger infrastructure within a hazard zone. In some cases there may be circumstances where it is appropriate not to build back at all.

Some suggested that this approach to resilience includes new ways of framing problems and taking a long-term focus to transformative change and value shifts. It was raised by a few interviewees as a goal but hard to implement due to constraints most commonly attributed to funding, however this focus on finances may obscure other underlying constraints discussed in the 'Camouflaged Constraints' theme below.

This approach to resilience challenges agencies to address the assumption that because they are accustomed to dealing with disasters and events in a certain way, they have to continue down that path and be better at what they do without changing the fundamental nature of *what* to do.

3.5 Action Under the Radar

Much of what is needed to achieve next generation resilience may occur under different names and are not necessarily called 'resilience building' actions.

Interviewees might not call what their agencies do 'resilience building' but many of their exercises, activities, capability building, relationship and network building generate crucial trust and are very consistent with building resilience. It's not about being directive – it's about helping people build a better understanding of their vulnerability and what they can do about it. This was also said about climate adaptation – many things that people are doing are exactly that, but they don't call it this. These 'under the radar' activities have an advantage where resilience is not well understood or resisted, or in places where systemic issues such as climate change and its causes are contested.

Other examples of action 'under the radar' was to go about resilience or climate adaptation under a different name. For some of the partners who need to be involved in building their own resilience, it was more effective to portray this work as 'business continuity planning' or similar because those partners may be put off by 'resilience'. The participants who talked about these actions were competent in switching not only between terminology, but also between organisational cultures and knowing which 'buttons' to press to engage people effectively.

3.6 Camouflaged Constraints

Hidden behind the more commonly cited barriers are some less obvious or openly articulated issues which are holding back resilience headway, including institutional structural failures and misalignment, or simply not knowing what to do.

In addition to broadly acknowledged constraints such as resources (i.e. funding) or ambiguity over responsibility, the interviews brought to light a set of constraints which were camouflaged in some way. In some cases, these types of constraints were widely understood but spoken about indirectly. For example, the role of individual agendas and ideological views was described as working with 'personalities' as opposed to evidence-based policy. Another issue raised during the interviews was that the credibility of 'junior agencies' which were sometimes sidelined and struggled to influence 'central agencies' on policy matters around climate and disaster. There was a power dimension to these discussions: staff capability and budgets were sometimes

...getting people to understand that say infrastructure resilience in Queensland is not about the building: it's about where it is.

Action Under the Radar

There is no enforcement in the legislation here. Everything that you get people to do it is by persuasion.

if we're going to get... resilience, a different way of selling it is business-as-usual, business continuity plans, community continuity plans

You have to build the relationships in peacetime and have this operational for when things get tough e.g. during evacuation.

Camouflaged Constraints

That comes down to individuals...it goes through a wrangle of negotiation and we face the ideological views of public servants every day

We are all good at articulating a need for [prevention funding], but nobody has nailed what that would look like...

located in larger agencies for which resilience was less of a priority. Another way in which camouflaged constraints played out was acknowledging the inherent uncertainty about how best to build resilience. It's one thing to call for shifting resources from disaster response to prevention and resilience- and another thing to know how best to apply those resources. Several participants indicated that 'resource constraints' were sometimes obscuring an underlying issue of sometimes not knowing what actions to take, which risks to address first or which locations to focus on. Participants acknowledged that there's a case for doing more in resilience work but considered it to be 'tricky to target', in terms of knowing exactly to do.

3.7 High Stakes

From political walk throughs during emergency response through to prioritising policies to reduce future risk, disasters and resilience are high-stake political issues.

The interviews highlighted that the high degree of seasonality of Queensland disasters distinguished them from some of the southern states – particularly for cyclones and storms. Therefore, disasters present key opportunities for visibility in the public eye at somewhat predictable timeframes. For some agencies, disasters produce an 'operational imperative' – the need to be seen to be doing something, because of the lack of visibility for the work agencies typically do on the ground. Other participants expressed a similar idea in terms of leaders seeking to have a 'true community connection' which is most tangible and visible at the time of disaster response. The 'high stakes' title of this theme reflects that demonstrating a 'community' connection' was so important to leaders that it was the subject of competition between them. This issue was not only about showing compassion and symbolic action following extreme events; it also flowed through to narratives and framings around policies to prevent future harm. Across the interviews, the politicisation of disasters and resilience was not just a background issue: it formed part of the landscape in which people worked and how decisions are made.

Some interviews identified that there are also high stakes for particular economic sectors and groups that benefit from disasters, such as the construction industry, and this needs to be carefully managed by agencies that work with these sectors so that potentially perverse incentives are minimized.

3.8 Resilient Queensland: Digging Deeper

Broad awareness of Resilient Queensland exists, and some participants find it useful, but also cited abstraction, lack of ownership or connection to their own agencies' plans, and reporting challenges as barriers to its broader uptake.

All agency participants expressed an awareness of Resilient Queensland, the implementation plan of the Queensland Strategy for Disaster Resilience. Some were highly familiar with the plan and engaged with it closely. However, others were only loosely familiar with it and indicated that the plan doesn't yet have much traction in their agencies. There were a number of reasons for this which were brought to light when digging deeper into the

High Stakes

There is an operational imperative because we're going into 2020 which has a local government and state government election so the political scrutiny across any disaster event in my opinion will be amplified because of those elections.

You usually need an up front injection of funding to put in place and that is a political question more than anything else.

What is our willingness to pay taxes to guarantee a more certain future? That's political.

Resilient Queensland: Digging Deeper

We understand why it's there, and understand some parts better than others. We don't have a wide and detailed knowledge of it. It gets lost in the white noise of everything else.

More needs to be done to sell it as QLD's plan... I think the plan needs to be more accepting of other stakeholder activities.

interview analysis. An important factor is that everyone is busy and there are so many important documents in the forms of reviews, recommendations and plans. Some participants felt a level of disconnect with RQ – it didn't resonate with the work they did and the way they went about it. In some cases this was because the plan was seen to be too abstract – a broad approach which lacked concrete actions. Ownership was another issue: it was seen by some as a 'QRA document' and some participants felt more needed to be done to make it a Queensland document, particularly in terms of recognising the work of other stakeholders including those working at the local level. Ultimately, agencies aren't engaging with the plan because they cannot 'see' themselves in the plan and they don't have to engage.

The reporting and monitoring aspects of RQ were seen as problematic by some participants. Problems identified by interviewees included monitoring and reporting functions - and a supporting governance structure - that are too narrow in scope, with too much emphasis on the recovery phase. In addition, other agencies with different contributions to resilience are not required to report against the plan and have their own separate reporting processes which absorb all their effort.

Other participants were more familiar with RQ and found it to be useful. In particular they said it helped them to focus their efforts on the most effective ways to work towards resilience in their area and design programs and access resources to deliver outcomes expressed in the strategy. It also helped them to have consistent conversations with their stakeholders, depending on the audience.

3.9 Engaging with Resilient Queensland

Interviewees would like to be more engaged and feel greater ownership in Resilient Queensland, with more recognition given to existing agency work. They would like to see its practical aspects, including local applicability, measurable objectives and tangible actions.

One way in which participants would like to see RQ evolve is to make more use of it as a mechanism for engagement across a wider suite of stakeholders. It could play a large role in helping to discuss roles and coordination across government and beyond. In order to achieve this, a wider group of agencies would need to feel they had contributed to its development and hence achieve a sense of joint ownership. There was a particular interest in making the plan more applicable at the local scale. Some participants were aware of local governments engaging with RQ but there was room to expand this and to develop the plan in a way that increases the resilience of the public more generally.

Participants clarified that what is needed is not a process of telling agencies what to do. Rather it is a focus on harnessing the work they are already doing and finding a way to head in the same direction and manage overlaps and conflicts through negotiated processes.

In addition, some participants would like to see RQ become more tangible and action oriented. It could set clearer deliverables and standards with measurable objectives in a more comprehensive way than it currently does.

It helps me have a consistent way to talk to our stakeholders on why and how we do our work to bring them into that conversation.

Engaging with Resilient Queensland

It needs to make sure everyone is harnessed in the same direction so everyone is signing up to what they're trying to achieve.

QRA probably need to look at how they simplify this to ...target and promote resilience on a community and public level.

If we're all on the same page it makes it easier to work together.

4 Synthesis and Next Steps

In considering the full set of themes, the research team grouped them into four clusters of key concepts, and identified possible key messages that underpin the data, demonstrated in figure 1. There are links between these themes that highlight the interconnected nature of resilience, and call for further exploration, but several key insights can be drawn.

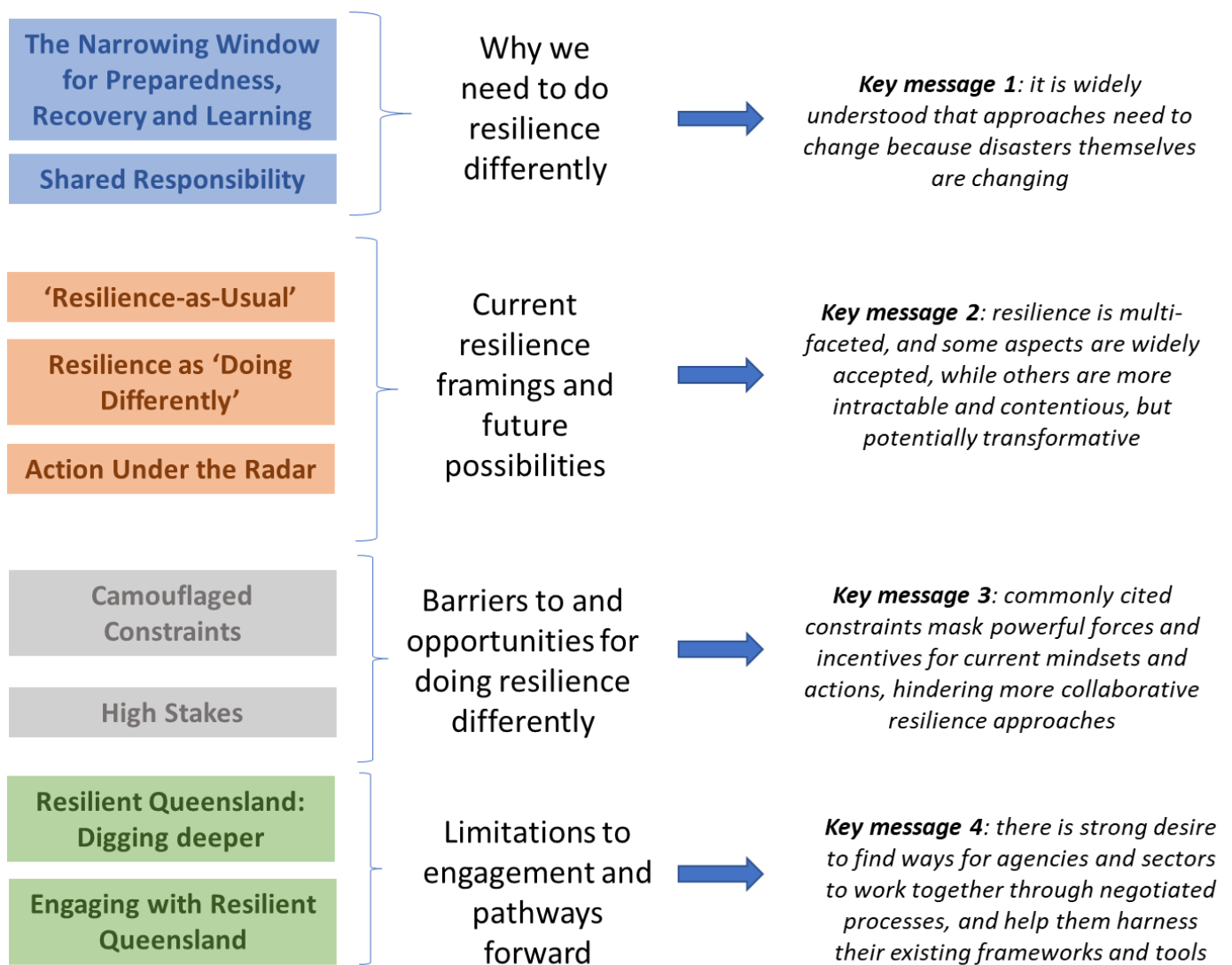


Figure 1. Clustering of interview themes around four concepts, which support four key messages.

While each of the interview themes helps to illuminate unique perspectives on resilience held by the state agency participants, any one theme on its own it only reveals part of a larger, connected narrative. For example, 'The Narrowing Window for Preparedness, Recovery and Learning' argues for the need for 'Shared Responsibility' in a changed context of disaster management and resilience (Key Message 1 in Figure 1). Yet, the paradox is that everyone is so busy performing their core functions, in increasingly less time, that they simply cannot look around to see what others are doing and envision more collaborative ways of working. Together these themes help to explain why agencies may continue to operate in a 'Resilience-as-Usual' mode (Key Message 2), further entrenched by 'Camouflaged Constraints' in a context of 'High Stakes', which is perpetuating the barriers to a more harmonious resilience approach, but points to ways to dismantle these (Key Message 3).

There was a strong consensus around the development of a new resilience framework: the interviews suggested that this was NOT what was needed, but rather, to better harness connections and collaboration between agencies and sectors to support the use of existing frameworks and tools (i.e. Key Message 4). While this message was emergent in the interviews, we were able to confirm it in the later stages of the project, through ongoing dialogue with the QRA project team and with a broader range of state agency participants regarding previous experience with RQ and limitations thereof.

Conclusion

The interview results and feedback sessions were used to help inform subsequent interactions with a view towards developing a compelling narrative and resilience framework for Queensland agencies. In particular, the interviews guided a highly interactive stakeholder workshop held in February 2020 to test and further develop the narratives that were emerging from interview analysis. The interviews provided valuable insights about what was working well and which areas still needed further attention O'Connell et al. (2020). Feedback received at the workshop emphasised that the interviews and subsequent analysis shared with participants were beneficial not only as a step in the project development, but as a way for state agency representatives to take stock of perspectives across multiple agencies and consider a distillation of key themes. Participation in the February workshop was equally appreciated by those who had not taken part in the interviews for similar reasons: the themes brought together the state of play across multiple agencies.

The feedback from the interview theme discussion held at the February workshop confirmed that development of another 'how to' tool for resilience was not desired across agencies because it would risk replicating existing tools. Rather, there was an expressed interest in showing how best to build on what was already in place and provide clear guidance on how best to harmonise and co-ordinate across established processes. Workshop participants, not limited to those who took part in the interviews, expressed a desire to continue talking as a community of interest. Steps are underway to progress specific actions to support these, as outlined in O'Connell et al. (2020).

The interviews were thus an essential step in the project. They provided the research team a key opportunity to listen to agency perspectives while also generating strong engagement and information-sharing benefits. The richness of the interview responses was underpinned by careful design of the questions used to guide conversations and the semi-structured format and open approach. This led interviewees to better articulate and provide nuance and clarity around the issues that provided an important foundation for the subsequent phases of the project.

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