NASA ROSES-SOCIAL RESEARCH IN A TIME OF CATALYTIC EVENTS

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CATALYTIC EVENTS

- We are in the midst of a series of impossible to ignore "catalytic events" that affects all social research currently being done.
 - Every survey questionnaire, every focus group or interview study has had to contend with this threat to external validity by either measuring the effects or controlling for them.
 - We are in uncharted waters. In mid-March, most academic institutions closed down all human subjects research that was not being conducted online. Many researchers, myself included, held out for the possibility of waiting till quarantines were lifted in order to collect data in the "normal" way.
- Things have opened up, but the escalating case rate in Florida has led researchers like myself to the decision of furthering delaying our work or moving our studies online.

CONTEXTUAL MODEL OF PUBLIC WATER UTILITY DECISION MAKING

- My study looks at developing a contextual model of decision making with respect to introducing down scaled climate information into the decision-making process of two public water utilities, with the goal of discovering commonalities and differences.
- A secondary goal is to look at use/adoption of a range of decision support tools which could be utilized in the decision making process, as well as barriers and enablers to adoption.
- These utilities differ in terms of size, water source (s) and storage facilities, municipalities served, permitting, governing board make up, etc.

RQ: HOW DO WATER RESOURCE MANAGERS USE CLIMATE INFORMATION?

- Previous research had suggested water resource managers were not using climate information. Utility differences most likely explain some of the "why" – utilities are not monolithic in nature and many barriers exist, which must be overcome before new information/decision-making processes can be successfully introduced.
- I have conducted a preliminary cognitive interview of a draft survey instrument with one of the utilities, from which I revised the draft instrument, and submitted to IRB.
- Recent catalytic events have given me pause, however, to reexamine additional factors which may be relevant to utility decision making. As a result, I therefore plan to start my efforts with a semi structured interview with key informants at the two utilities.



- Research suggests catalytic events affect the pace of change, and with respect to water resource management and climate change, I think this will be a factor in my own research.
- Utilities are influenced, like every other organization, by societal forces that can mediate normal business practices.
- The effects of the pandemic, racial inequities/unrest and a global recession may pressure utilities to factor in societal concerns as to environmental, social and governance issues more so than before.
- These "ESG issues" could lead to more acceptance of climate information, possibly overcoming existing barriers to adoption/utilization.

THE BOTTOM LINE-DEALING WITH THREATS TO EXTERNAL VALIDITY

- For social science researchers everywhere, the past six months constitute an unparalleled situation in which every research study has to contend with the presence of external threats to validity.
- As a result, these catalytic events have to either be measured or controlled for.
- With all this in mind, I might need to ask my key informants to consider before/after Covid and do a little futuring.
- Crystal ball, anyone?

THANKS