

Catch poles and metaphors

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Abstract

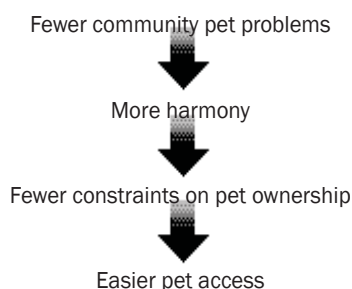
Divergent public opinion exists about the merit of keeping pet animals and also about what defines the terms “acceptable, responsible and necessary” when it comes to their control and restraint. This polarisation of public opinion has historically conflict between opposing points of view. As a consequence, Local Government and animal management officers particularly, often feel they are “a target from all sides” while seeking nothing more than harmony and consideration about pets and pet ownership in the community. The wagon wheel, the spinning top and the motor car might be useful metaphors to help animal management personnel to see through their “catch poles” so to speak, to a different and more positive perspective.

Introduction

Pet ownership is a truly interesting business – a business that cuts surprisingly deep into the emotional instincts of both individuals and community. Like them or dislike them, there is no mistake that passions about pets run high, especially so when conflict about them occurs. This makes dynamite for animal management staff who, when it is all said and done, seek only the middle road of tolerance, harmony and consideration in the community.

On the one hand we see pet ownership as an important personal freedom. But at the same time, we have to acknowledge that pets can also be a source of community nuisance – to the extent that the status of pets in our society is being threatened by some of the nuisance they cause. It is easy for the conflict aspects of municipal animal management to seem all regulatory and depriving in nature. This paper sets out to look at the occupation of urban animal management in a different way.

Pet accessibility (the opportunity for people to keep pets) will always be a direct function of community-pet animal harmony as shown by the following cascade graphic:



Seen in this light, animal management is not an activity that crushes freedom and deprives people of pets; it is on the contrary, an activity that facilitates pet ownership and all the benefits that flow there from. Good animal management is all about social enrichment. It embraces the full quadruple bottom line of good municipal management:

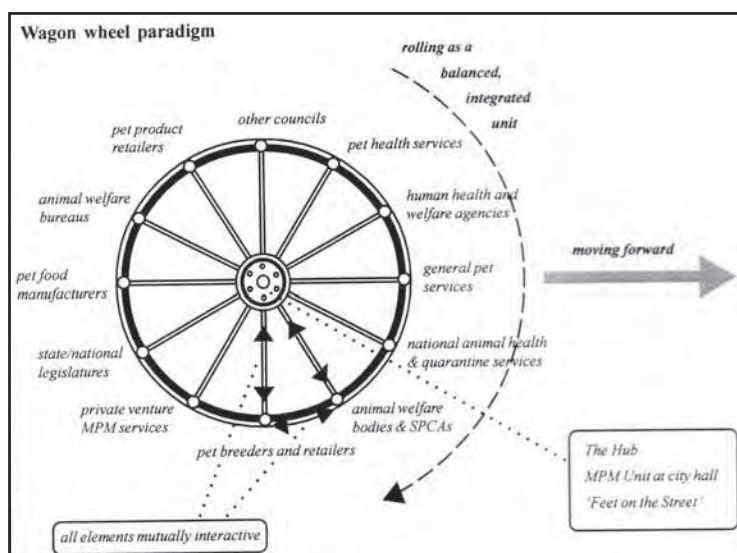
- Social
- Economy
- Environment
- Governance

By using metaphors, it is perhaps possible to step away from the complexity of the regulatory (“catchpole”) foreground to see more clearly the bigger picture of what it is we try to achieve with urban animal management.

Metaphor 1. The wagon wheel

The wagon wheel metaphor presents animal management activities in local government as being the essential central hub of a big wheel.

The wheel itself incorporates many influential rim elements and every part of the rim depends on every other part. Most importantly, all the rim elements depicted depend on the hub of the wheel and the hub is animal management.



There are at least four sets of interest groups that depend on there being good animal management service in Local Government. These are: Commercial interests catering for owners, statutory and regulatory institutions, welfare institutions and private venture pet management agencies, and the community at large.

1. *Commercial interests:* This first group employs about 45,000¹ people in Australia and contributes significantly to the national economy:

- Pet breeder and retailer groups: providing pet supply to meet market demand
- Pet product retailers: selling products for pets and pet owners
- Pet health services: operating from veterinary clinics and hospitals in every town and city
- General pet services: including everything from boarding kennels to grooming enterprises
- Pet food manufacturers: employing thousands of people

To give insight into the value of pet animal business, it is worth noting that the total annual consumer expenditure on pet care products and services in Australia is estimated to be \$4.62 billion (1).

¹Statistic from: 6th edition (2006) of the ACAC publication Contribution of the pet care industry to the Australian economy

For these corporate entities, pet owning communities are a market place. They all have strong vested interests in seeing animal management services in local government being well resourced, well supported and professionally executed. They do not want to see pet benefit and pet access being compromised by the nuisance pets of nuisance people².

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2. Statutory and regulatory institutions: Consider the range of statutory and regulatory institutions that have a vested interest in assisting each Council achieve its best animal management outcomes. These might include:

- Animal health and biosecurity agencies
- Other councils
- Public health and wellbeing authorities
- Other councils
- Community welfare and amenity organisations
- Other councils
- Wildlife and biodiversity protection agencies

It is not by mistake that “other councils” feature prominently in the above list. Hundreds of individual town, shire and city councils are all seeking the same goals. In animal management, every council is linked and merged with all other councils in all sorts of geographical, social, functional and material ways. A “dead runner” council pulls everybody back.

3. Welfare institutions and private venture pet management agencies: Each council is directly linked to an even broader umbrella of agencies that have both something to offer to and something to gain from better systems of municipal animal management. These agencies include:

- Animal welfare groups: coping with and trying to prevent irresponsible pet ownership
- Animal shelters: coping with issues of pet abandonment and neglect
- Private venture animal control agencies: offering animal management services such as impounding services, pound management, equipment services etc.

4. The community: Finally, let’s never forget the first and last client of animal management: The community at large. All these groups (1-4 above) not only depend on municipal animal management delivering good outcomes for them, they can also contribute to it.

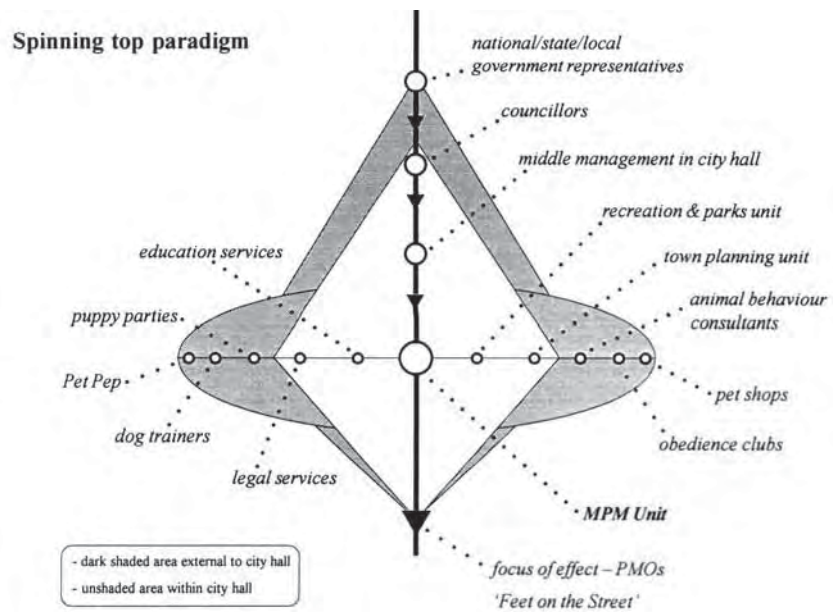
The bottom line is that municipal animal management matters – it matters a lot – and it matters to a lot of people. Animal management is not there just to cater for pet owners, it is there for the whole community.

When everybody on the rim and everybody at the hub realises where they fit and how they can contribute, the wheel can achieve the following outcomes:

- Encourage animal management officers to see themselves at the hub of a great management wheel that rolls towards better pet access and a more enriched community.
- Ask animal management officers to walk away from the bad guy dog-catcher image that spells only isolation and aggravation and look more to a theme of management and facilitation.
- Invite animal management officers to link out for support to other people on the rim of the wheel who might be interested to assist and work with them.
- Emphasise the critical role of animal management in local government as coordinators of competent and considerate pet ownership in their communities.
- Encourage other interest groups (rim elements) to support each other as well as the activities of local government in a balanced way.

Metaphor # 2. The spinning top

The ability of an animal management unit in any council to put best practice philosophy to work on the streets requires both vertical and horizontal integration of effort. The spinning top shows us how.



We all know that a top won’t spin unless it is well aligned down its vertical axis. If any elements of the vertical frame are out of alignment the top will do nothing but wobble and fall. It doesn’t matter how much effort is invested in trying to start it up and keep it running. The thing simply won’t work. On the other hand however, with sweet vertical alignment, the top will not fall - it will spin straight and fast and it will spin right on the spot where it is supposed to be.

We also know that the power of the spin comes from kinetic energy. A top won’t work like a top, or even look like a top, if it doesn’t have that familiar bell-shaped bottom half. The bell-shaped bottom half is where the top’s energy is stored around its horizontal axis. With a weighty balanced horizontal structure, the top will have power to spin on and on.

² Graphic from 6th edition (2006) of the ACAC publication Contribution of the pet care industry to the Australian economy

Vertical axis: Five strata can be identified in the vertical axis of council animal management activity:

- State legislation and administration - these are the statutes under which local government must operate.
- Council policy makers- these are the local elected representatives and senior council executives who formulate local animal management policy.
- Council middle management - these municipal managers process council policy for animal management officers to implement.
- Animal management unit of council – this includes all the animal management officers who deliver the service at the public interface.

Horizontal axis: For animal management service to operate effectively and efficiently, it needs support from a whole range of other interdependent service providers. Some of these are located within the council and others from without as follows:

- Council's recreation and parks management process. Lets not forget that people with pets are mainstream park users and infrastructure needs to reflect this
- Council's public awareness and education services. The activities of the education and media management unit of council can make or break a council's animal management service quality. Unless people can see why pet regulation is necessary, they're unlikely to support management initiatives
- State Government animal management umbrella organisations such as the Victorian Bureau of Animal Welfare and the South Australian Dog and Cat Management Board that provide valuable "shared" service delivery resources of all kinds from officer training to public education
- Council's legal service and policy unit. Animal management personnel are not lawyers so when drafting and enforcing local laws it makes sense to dovetail expertise with objectives
- Council's town planning services. There are many direct ways in which animal management interfaces with town planning.
- Trainers, obedience clubs and behaviour advisors. Dogs are better behaved at home and less troublesome in a neighbourhood sense if they managed competently
- Veterinary practices that undertake puppy socialisation and early training workshops
- Primary schools teaching pet care and responsibility
- Pet and pet product retail outlets effectively contributing to assist council animal management service providers
- Private venture animal management contract services.

When you think of an animal management system in a town or city council as having the shape and form of a spinning top with axes both vertical and horizontal, it is easy to see where the system is strong and where it is weak. Using this picture model you can immediately see three very important things:

1. Are all the elements in good vertical alignment?
2. Is the horizontal energy base connected correctly?
3. Are you getting maximum benefit from alignment and connectivity?

Metaphor # 3. The motor car

The regulatory nature of animal management activity can trouble animal management officers and their bosses. This in turn can negatively colour the way they do their jobs. Fairly applied control and regulation should not be seen as an overly negative and debilitating influence because in the long run it is not.

Animal management for pets, just like traffic management for motor cars, does have to employ control and regulation devices to achieve its aim of community harmony, safety and amenity. There will always be those few who will not bother to be considerate or reasonable or compliant with the "rule book" everyone else has agreed to work from. They do have to be straightened up and pointed in the right direction.

Motor vehicles are important to people. But while they can provide freedom and opportunity, motor vehicles can also be a menace and a nuisance. To manage traffic safely, our society has devised a whole package of rigorously enforced supervision and regulation measures. This, when combined with appropriate education, infrastructure and administration, is what makes it possible for the wheels to keep turning.



It helps to think of pet ownership in the same way as we think of car ownership.

There are many parallels between the two kinds of ownership. Just as no-one must have a pet, no-one must have a car. People do so because they want to - it suits them.

How does our society cope with road traffic? It does so by a combined process of education, regulation and enforcement as follows:

- Establishing a set of road rules, backed by the force of law that are uniform across all municipal boundaries
- Supervising competency of vehicle ownership and operation
- Managing ownership records that are current and correct through a process of registration at point of sale that is then followed by annual ratification and renewal
- Dealing with non-compliance ie. infringement penalties and prosecution for offenders
- Promoting responsible attitudes eg. drink/drive risk awareness
- Providing appropriate material infrastructure for vehicle owners and users such as roads, bridges, car parking etc
- Operating administrative bodies to support and coordinate an efficient, safe traffic system eg. Dept. of Transport

The overall message to the community at large is clear and simple: If you wish to be a vehicle user, that's fine – we will help make that possible for you. BUT:

1. Don't be a menace to other highway users; abide by the rules.
2. Be advised, our traffic rules are community based and are reasonable, verifiable, enforceable and enforced.
3. Understand your responsibility and your liability.

Q. How many of these guidelines can be transferred directly to *animal management*?

A. All of them!

Seen in this light and stripped of its emotion, regulation loses its depriving face. The car metaphor allows us to feel confident about using regulation (in conjunction with education and infrastructure), because it is not really a depriving influence at all.

Metaphor (somewhat mixed) # 4. The blind kicker, Alice and the wheel of planning

The wagon wheel, the spinning top and the motor car metaphors all help to get our minds around what we do in animal management. They help by creating picture paradigms of complex management systems that assist us in seeing what's what and what fits where.

We should not forget, however, these systems on their own are only half the story.

- Unless the systems take us somewhere that we wish to go to, all the effort and expense is for naught.
- Unless we can clearly see what we are aiming for in the first place all the systems in the world amount to nothing.

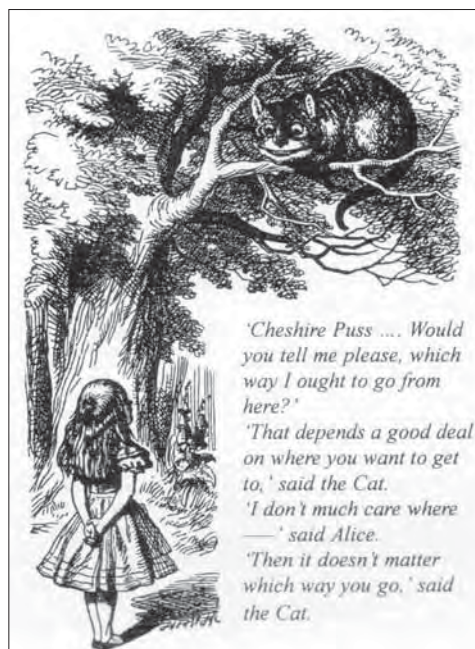
Think of having a goal kicker at a footy match who is blindfolded and turned round five times each time he needs to take a shot. He might be a brilliant kicker, he might have the best kicking boots in the world but he is still going to get a success rate of about of naught out of ten isn't he?



It was like that when Alice found herself in Wonderland at the bottom of the rabbit hole. You will recall that Alice was uncertain about which path she should take and sought directions from the Cheshire Cat. When the Cat asked where she was trying to go to, Alice replied that she wasn't sure. The Cat cryptically pointed out that under those circumstances, any path would do nicely and he was dead right.

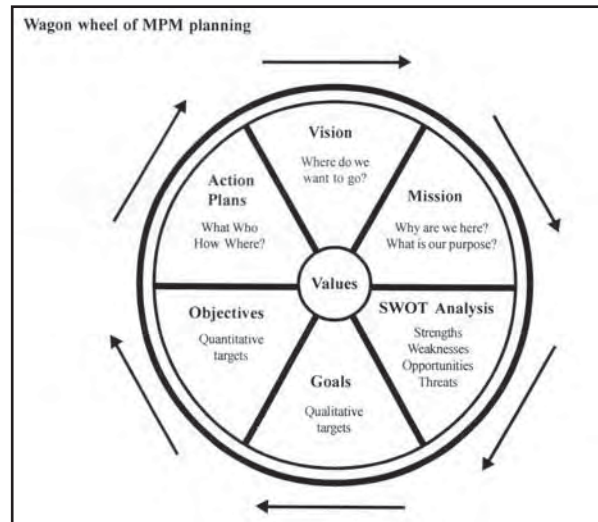
Alice's problem was of course that she didn't have a clue where she was going; she didn't even know where she was to start with! It is a bit like that for some people engaged in urban animal management.

There is no point in trying to do it unless you know where you are and where you are trying to get. It is important to stop from time to time to take stock not only of system functions and efficiency, but also to review system direction and purpose.



- How can you be efficient if you are doing the job without knowing clearly what the product is and what it is supposed to do?
- How many Local Authorities actually do take time out with their animal management team from time to time to do proper systems review and planning workshops?

All well run enterprises make sure they review their business plan from time to time. They do so to ensure these components are being maintained in a mutually supportive and relevant fashion.



It is often said that the only thing constant is change and with animal management service, both internal and external environments are subject to change. Staff, managers, policies, work tools, resource access and even the communities themselves change.

A well-balanced strategic business plan has a hub that represents central values. It also has spokes and rim elements representing: vision, mission, goals, objectives, action plans etc. This wheel metaphor (like all wheel metaphors) emphasises hub, spoke and rim elements all needing to operate together in a balanced way.

Acknowledgments

In writing this paper, the author was drawn from the advice and encouragement of his many colleagues in animal management circles. He has also drawn extensively from material originally published in a book called Dogs and Cats in the Urban Environment that was written by himself and his sister Helen Penridge³. The creative work involved in the shaping of the ideas of that book was greatly assisted by brother-in-law Les Penridge. Though published in the mid 1990s, it all still seems very relevant today.

About the author

Dick Murray currently holds the office of President of the Australian Institute of Animal Management. Dick is a North Queensland veterinary practitioner who has had a long and deep interest in animal management. For work done in this field of endeavour he has been awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia, an Australian Veterinary Association's Meritorious Service Award, an AVA Gilruth Prize and Fellowship of the AVA.

³ MurrayRW and Penridge HE (1997). Dogs and Cats in the Urban Environment - A Handbook of Municipal Pet Management. Chiron Media ISBN 0 9586784 1 3