

Grounded and Nimble: RCP Leadership and Communication Structures for Memory Retention and Adaptability

Session 3A – Hunt Room
2017 RCP Network Gathering

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Introduction

- About myself:
 - I've been working in environmental work for over 20 years
 - Started out in NYC in organizational outreach and was a consultant
 - Was a push-in educator in NYC – brought animals into schools for education
 - I'm an "organizational hobby-ist"
 - PhD research involved studying RCP organizational resilience and knowledge transfer
- Today, going to talk about my dissertation research and lead into an activity

Research Recap

- Defining the problem:
 - Conservation theory promotes collaboration but in practice is often "top-down"
 - There is resistance to interdisciplinary work in conservation
 - There is a disconnect between how we manage social and natural systems even though one is reliant on the other
 - There is a lack of communication infrastructure between disciplines
- Background on Knowledge Transfer:
 - Perera et al (2007) introduced ideas about how knowledge is communicated between foresters – it's often on-the-ground, walking the land, talking to each other
 - It's a long distance to move information from the knowledge creator (often academia) to the user (conservation practitioners, foresters, etc.)
 - There is a lot of communication infrastructure to move from knowledge creation and theory (colleges and universities) to the users, but very little infrastructure for feedback from users back to academia
- Background on RCPs:
 - RCPs are region-focused and pursue functional landscapes
 - RCPs are both a physical and psychological presence for policymakers and the public
 - They provide anecdotal success for landscape scale conservation
- Research purpose:
 - Define the nature of RCPs in New England and identify promising communication and collaboration practices that support landscape scale conservation work.
 - This is for academic theoretical purposes, so there is a definition of RCPs in the literature.

- Then, capture the secondary benefits of RCPs: communication infrastructure for communication theory and practice to be shared
- What are conservation networks?
 - Associations of individuals that cooperatively manage a resource, meet conservation goals together, and support a conservation initiative.
 - Networks can share and sort an overload of information
- RCP characteristics:
 - The most valued characteristics of RCPs are information sharing and strategic planning
 - Reaction to the term “strategic planning” was negative or unusual, but most RCPs *do* strategic planning without *calling* it that.
 - There was a big uptick in strategic partnerships in 2008-2010
 - Could correlated with economic downturn?
- RCPs aid conservation goals at different scales
 - Very pragmatic approach to conservation – “functional landscapes”

Relevant Findings

Risks to Organizational Resilience

- Addressing Risks to RCP Resilience
 - Defining resilience: analogous to the keel of a ship – a small, nimble boat can take a hard shock and bounce back. You might not be back where you started, but you may be stronger and in a new place.
 - Institutional Memory: It’s only memory if the person in charge of it remembers. You need to make sure the information doesn’t disappear.
 - Knowledge transfer: People work side by side to transfer knowledge in multiple ways. RCPs are knowledge transfer specialists.
- Related findings:
 - RCPs are an elastic and vibrant type of collaboration.
 - Individualized by RCP
 - They value trust, clear goals, communication and storytelling
 - RCPs that were founded by grant are most at risk, ones that formed more organically are stronger
 - Link stakeholders with those who have needed skills
 - Leverage shared resources to conserve land and influence policy
 - Non-brittle, fluid structures – there are some ephemeral partnerships. Having a loose bond is the most successful model.

Explicit vs. Tacit Knowledge

- There’s an iceberg model for knowledge – explicit knowledge is at the top of a triangle, but there is a huge base of tacit knowledge that is extremely important
- Later in this session, we’re going to try to define our tacit knowledge and do an activity to assess risk for it
 - Many RCPs are hitting the 10-year mark, losing funding sources, etc.

Knowledge Transfer and Communication Infrastructure

- Knowledge transfer

- Captures, organizes, and/or distributes knowledge
- Adds value to knowledge through personalization
- Address tacit knowledge problem through codification – have terms that everyone understands mutually that help codify tacit knowledge
- Related Findings:
 - RCPs in New England actively have strong communication infrastructure
 - The connect theory to practice to policy
 - They maintain feedback loops to improve systems
 - They are pragmatic

Threats to Function

- Collaboration Fatigue and Organizational Entropy
- Solutions to collaboration fatigue:
 - Organizational fatigue is normal, and anticipating it can help mitigate it
 - Change up routine
 - Engage new membership/ideas
 - Be okay with dissolution or joining another RCP
- Common reasons for breakdown of knowledge transfer
 - Individuals with information and knowledge leave organization
 - Member of organization leaves RCP
 - Loss of funding or federal support
- Solutions to Knowledge Transfer Threats:
 - Identify activities that require tacit knowledge
 - Expand the leadership circle
 - Identify and support boundary spanners
 - Strategic planning as an ongoing operation procedure

Activity

- This activity will help RCPs identify actions to address knowledge transfer threats.
- 1. Paraphrase your RCP's mission statement
 - How close do you think you were?
 - Mostly "sideways" thumb - people think they were fairly accurate at knowing their RCP's mission statement
 - Every member should be able to rattle off the mission statement and be able to paraphrase quickly
- 2. List up to 5 organizational activities that directly support the mission
 - From the research, the top 5 examples were:
 - Conserving land
 - Landowner outreach
 - Other projects and events
 - Fundraising
 - Policymaking Outreach
- 3. List up to 5 organizational activities that are necessary, but do not directly support the mission.
 - From research, the top 5 examples were:

- Information sharing among partners
 - Strategic planning
 - Problem solving
 - Research
 - Legal
 - Event planning
- Now, work to label each activity as explicit or tacit knowledge, rank their importance, and list *who* holds that knowledge in your organization
- 4. With your #1 Ranked EXPLICIT KNOWLEDGE activity...
 - What was the activity?
 - Who has the knowledge now?
 - What would have to occur for that knowledge to be stored securely?
- 5. What is your #1 ranked TACIT KNOWLEDGE activity
 - What was the activity?
 - Who has the knowledge now?
 - Is there a way for you to train a second person and start sharing responsibility?
- 6. Devise and report actions points – how can you ensure that this knowledge doesn't get lost?

Feedback and Conclusions

- This reinforces the importance of delegation
- This is an important topic in the field of conservation in general – it's important to think about how we do this effectively
- Jill Weiss is available and willing to come talk to RCPs about this work
- PDF for the dissertation is available
- The most effective RCPs have specific characteristics in common