Conservation Leadership Capacity Building: a Landscape Study

Appendix

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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

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APPENDIX Methods

Study Scope

Leadership

Our focus is primarily placed on individual behaviors and practices (rather than groups, teams, or organizations). We also concentrated on the ability for individuals to "lead from anywhere," within a group or organization, rather than limiting the focus of leadership only to those in designated and/or positional leadership roles. However we acknowledge that conservation success can sometimes hinge on the efforts and passion of a singular out-in-front individual, oftentimes an individual at the helm of an organization or team.

Based on a review of the literature, we modified a previous definition of leadership (Drouillard & Kleiner, 1996 as cited in Mango 2018) as a guide for this study:

The influencing of others, by means of reason and inclusion, and based on a critical and systems understanding of context, to achieve organizational goals that are in the long-term best interest of all involved, with the wellbeing of society in mind.

Key considerations to operationalize this definition in conservation include:

· Understanding that individuals, teams, and the work they undertake operate within an open, dynamic social-ecological system. To be effective, a leader needs to recognize the interplay at the boundaries between each of these elements and influence them accordingly.

· Understanding the technical aspects of the context and system is important. For conservation work this means an understanding of ecology and biology, social aspects and dynamics (including economics, finance, human needs and motivation), the cultural context, and others. An effective leader will understand the need for this knowledge and either possess it, be able to acquire it, or assemble a team that harnesses it.

· By "means of reason and inclusion" is interpreted to mean that a leader is able to catalyze collaboration among different actors/stakeholders, including those internal and those external to an organization. This includes providing opportunities for stakeholders to participate in decisions and outcomes (i.e., sharing power), developing goals collaboratively, and leading in general in an effective and ethical manner. This is likely to require an awareness and understanding of and the ability to respect different knowledge systems and viewpoints and negotiate across them.

· As system behavior is dynamic, leaders have to be able to lead/operate/be comfortable under varying levels of uncertainty, and expect an "infinite game" with evolving rules of the game. Focus is as much on success as doing better through learning and examination of failure (Englefield et al. 2019).

Conservation

We used a broad understanding of biodiversity conservation for this study that encompasses the conservation of species, ecosystems, and biodiversity hotspots, mitigation of threats stemming from "brown" environmental issues (e.g., climate change, pollution), and action around the human dimensions of conservation, such as social and cultural contexts, law, policy, and diversity and inclusion.

Mapping the landscape

We assembled a list of diverse capacity building programs with a leadership component or dimension, and applicability to conservation as our preliminary landscape map. In order to arrive at this map, we first assembled a list of programs or initiatives from the following sources:

The collective knowledge and expertise of the consulting team.
· Results from Boolean Google searches with the terms "leader* AND conservation AND program OR training" plus world region or sector.

- A sub-database from a previous study on conservation training programs in formal education (Elliott et al. 2018). We evaluated 60 programs from this list of 650; those that mentioned leader or leadership in their title or description.
- Consultations with the the collaborating organizations that commissioned this study.

We used the following inclusion criteria on these results, at the request of collaborators:
- English language
- Any geographic location
- Targeting or open to early to mid-career professionals
- Including both conservation and leadership as primary focus, or focused on either

This produced a list of 148 programs, which were then evaluated for fit to the primary questions of the study (see Figure 1). Fit was determined by assigning each program 0 or 1 on three questions: Is it conservation focused? Is the building of leadership skills or abilities a primary focus? Is it available to early and/or mid-career professionals? Each program was then assessed by each of the five consulting partners, and scores to each of the three questions were averaged. High scoring programs (2 and above) were retained, and we discussed disagreements and borderline cases to arrive at a final list of 86 programs.

The map also includes selected leadership training and learning opportunities that may be relevant to conservation practitioners, but have either only a conservation focus or only a leadership focus, but not both. These were selected from the larger list of 148 programs to add diversity and maximize our learning. In order to be included in this supplemental list, programs needed to contribute an element of geographic diversity (by region: Europe, Asia; Austro-Pacific; North America; Caribbean; South and Central America), sector (Development, Education, Health, IPLC/culturally grounded leadership, Multisectoral), by target audience (Women, Individual, Grad/Early career, Mid-career, Community level, Organizational, Systemic), format used for learning (Face-to-face, Degree program, Online, Mentorship, Internship, Training +Funding), or duration (Weeks, Months, Years).

Surveys

Online surveys were developed with input from all consulting partners and two rounds of review from the Collaborators. Four versions of the survey were developed: 1) one for program directors/managers, 2) one for program participants (current or previous), 3) one for program collaborators, and 4) one for directors/managers of programs in the map not primarily targeting both conservation and leadership. These versions had varying levels of overlap around a core set of questions which focused on leadership practices, elements of program success, and perceived gaps and needs (See Appendix C).

For leadership practices we started by reviewing a list of 19 leadership principles and practices from a previous study (Bruyere 2015) and contrasted this with a more recent (unpublished) synthesis of interviews with 72 practitioners, 28 articles and 16 programs (led by Bruyere as part of a course assignment with 34 undergraduate students). This led to a list of seven important practices for leadership in conservation, with three additional practices added by the consultants, in consultation with the Collaborators.
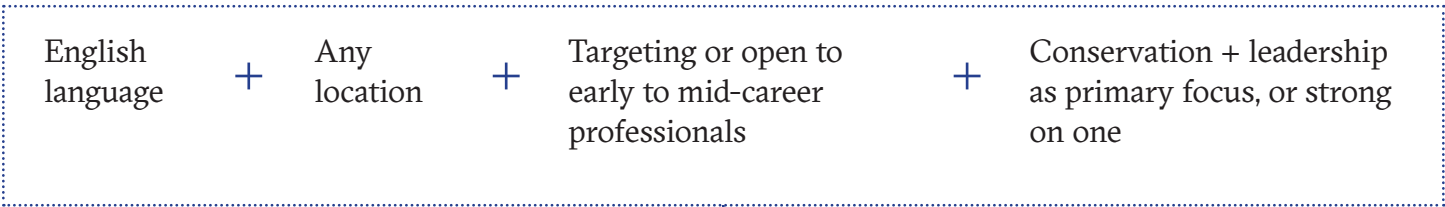
List of leadership practices important to conservation presented to survey respondents for ranking.
1. Collaboration: values input from and shares decision-making power with diverse stakeholders
2. Ethics: integrity exhibited by behaviors that illustrate transparency and a defined set of guiding values
3. Adaptability: ability to react to unanticipated events and uncertainty with stability and support of others
4. Trust: builds relationships with collaborators and stakeholders based on honesty and a concern for all interests
5. Problem-solving: integration of multiple disciplines and input to collaboratively design solutions
6. Vision: ability to define the aspirational goals and purpose of a group's actions with the input of others, and inspire others
7. Communication: active listening, conflict management and respectful interaction
8. Contextual understanding: an understanding of the internal (organizational) and external (social and environmental) contexts and systems of their work
9. Persistence: persist and motivate others through adversity with passion and stability
10. Empowerment: establishing an environment in which all members of the team, organization, or partnership thrive and contribute to their full potential

Broad starting list assembled from:
- Collective knowledge and expertise of consulting team
- Boolean searches
- A sub-database of 60 conservation training programs in formal education (from list of 650; Elliott et al. 2018)
- Consultations with the Collaborators

Filter for

English language	+	Any location	+	Targeting or open to early to mid-career professionals	+	Conservation + leadership as primary focus, or strong on one

148 provider organizations, some with multiple programs

Assess fit to questions:
- Is it conservation focused?
- Is leadership development a primary focus?
- Is it available to early and/or mid-career professionals?

Select representative programs for diversity in:
- Geography
- Sector
- Target audience
- Format of learning
- Duration

Validate and expand through consultations with practitioners

Landscape map:
- 96 organizations
- 110+ programs

40 core organizations/ programs

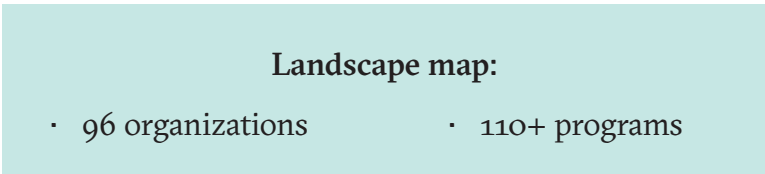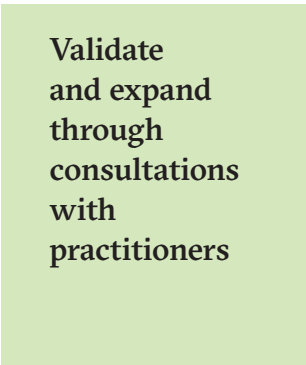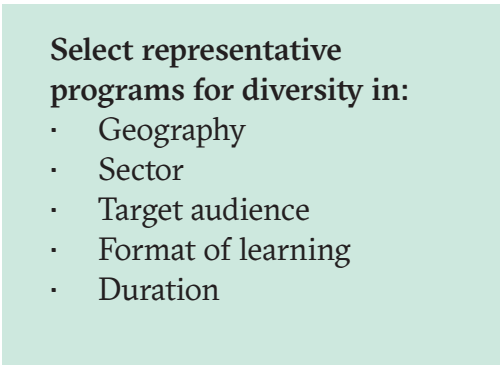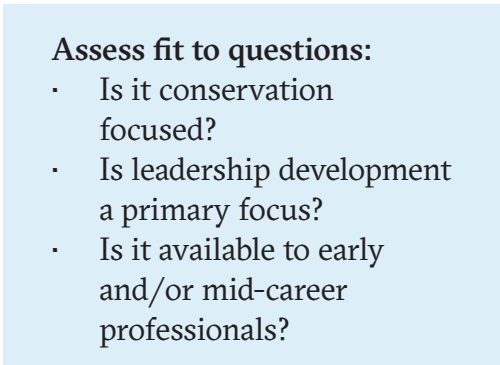58 additional organizations/ programs

Figure 1. Summary of the steps used to arrive at the interim landscape map.

Surveys were programmed using SurveyMonkey and shared with 168 recipients encompassing all of the provider organizations and programs in the landscape map. Responses were accepted between April 15 and May 15, 2019.

This original survey was subsequently shortened and adapted for use with all registered participants of the international conference on Capacity Building for Conservation (July 30-August 1, London, UK).

Interviews

Based on the responses and information gathered in the mapping and survey stages, and keeping in mind our desire to build a balanced portfolio of cases for deeper evaluation, we selected a portfolio of 20 programs from the landscape map, and a set of 31 individuals associated with these programs, for in-depth interviews during Phase 1. These individuals represented staff, past participants or collaborators of the programs. We also interviewed seven grantees who have participated in the capacity development programs of NGS and GWC, and who represented an audience of interest for the Collaborators, resulting in a total of 38 interviews (Appendix C).

Questions for interviews were developed with input from all consulting partners and two rounds of review from the Collaborators. (Appendix C). Interviews were carried out between May 21 and June 18, 2019. Each interview lasted between 45 and 85 minutes and was led by one to two consulting partners, recorded, and transcribed either automatically from the recording (using Otter software) or notes taken in real time. Selected responses from the interviews are shared in this report.

We extended our interviews in Phase 2 to 21 individuals from programs and organizations with a specific area of interest to the project, such as mentoring, cross-sector partnerships and online learning. In addition, we interviewed individuals from some of the most highly relevant programs -- the programs that would likely be the closest peers to a new program in conservation leadership, such as the Conservation Leadership Programme, and the Cambridge University MPhil in Conservation Leadership -- for discussion regarding some of our emerging themes and ideas, and the integration of mentoring. Interviewers were free to include questions from the set used in Phase 1, as well as new questions tailored to the interviewee expertise. A list of these individuals can be found in Appendix C.

In addition to one-on-one interviews, during Phase 2 we collected further insights and perspectives through exchanges with capacity development practitioners during the Symposium on New Directions in Conservation Leadership (June 25-27, Cambridge, UK), and the international conference on Capacity Building for Conservation (July 30-August 1, London, UK). At the Capacity Building for Conservation conference we hosted a one-hour group discussion ("focus group") with 16 individuals in the conservation capacity development field who volunteered to provide insight and reaction to hypothetical program scenarios, as a strategy to stimulate thoughts and discussion about best practices for building leadership capacity. In addition, participants at this session were asked to complete a one-page worksheet, as an additional means for capturing their thoughts, suggestions and reactions.

We also hosted a table at the Conference's afternoon Marketplace event, a three hour opportunity for attendees to participate in informal and less structured discussions and activities at their own pace and following their own interests. Our table included two activities: the first was to review our Landscape Map (which was printed as a poster for display) and add suggestions for programs we should consider adding to the Map; and second, participants were asked to review the same four scenarios presented in the group discussion described above (also printed as a poster), and provide concise feedback via sticky notes which were placed in each scenario's quadrant. We estimate that approximately 30 individuals participated in one or both of our Marketplace activities.

Analysis

Qualitative data from the Phase 1 surveys and interviews were coded for emergent themes in order to systematically draw out lessons learned from across the whole portfolio. Open-ended survey responses were initially reviewed by two individuals from the project team, and qualitative codes were then developed for each of the 15 open-ended questions. Responses were then reviewed a second time to assign codes to the answers. Frequency of codes were then tabulated as a measure of salience of a particular code.

Using an inductive coding process, each interviewer reviewed their interview responses to devise a set of themes arising across these interviews. Then three members of the team worked iteratively to group the resulting themes

into a hierarchical coding system nested within a suite of eight categories. The entire team reviewed these theme categories and sub-codes to ensure nothing was missing and the codes were clear. A collated document of all transcripts was then analyzed using ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software to distill all portions of the transcripts relevant to themes. Based on these transcript portions, the consultant team then derived a synthesis and summary of the findings under these themes.

For Phase 2 interviews, each interview was summarized with a set of key take-aways by the interviewers. This larger set of summary points was reviewed by all members of the project team to identify salient points and particularly poignant insights, and brights spots or examples to refer to in the final report for Collaborators.

Finally, in order to assess which content topics are more frequently covered and which are gaps that may require more attention, we reviewed the content of core programs in the Landscape Map to assess the extent to which the content addressed all of the following leadership topics:

· self-awareness
· systems thinking
· communication and conflict management
· innovation
· empowering environments
· diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice
· collaboration with conservation stakeholders
· collaboration with non-conservation sector
· monitoring and evaluation

Sources reviewed typically started with information on program websites, such as course descriptions, objectives, schedule of topics and events, and related content. In addition, where available we reviewed electronic copies of their promotional materials, reports, student projects and similar resources. Finally, annual reports of sponsoring organizations sometimes described and/or summarized the programs. The content above was assigned a rating for each program based on whether the topic appeared to be a primary focal area of the program, a secondary area, or not addressed by the program.

Limitations

We noted the following limitations to the inquiry work described above.

1. The inclusion criteria for the landscape map is limited to programs which are offered in English, and which target early or mid-career individuals. Other capacity-building programs for conservation leadership likely exist, but are not represented here.

2. The timeline for this project is relatively short, and our inquiry efforts are based on what was feasible within the four month time period of Phase 1. Additional time would allow for a more thorough survey and interview process. Although we feel our initial results are likely indicative of the prevailing thoughts and sentiments within the field, additional time would have allowed us an opportunity to collect input from a broader spectrum of conservation professionals, rather than only individuals affiliated with conservation training programs.

3. Our initial methods called for interviewing a suite of individuals around a program from across staff, alumni, and program partners (a version of 360 around the program). We were only able to accomplish this for a subset of the programs due to low response rates, particularly from the alumni and program partners. Reaching these two groups was dependent on program staff providing names and contact information of their alumni and partners, and follow through on those requests was sporadic. A greater amount of time would have allowed us to track down more people from the non-staff categories.