**Let’s Get Networked: Connecting Evaluation and Conservation Through Systems Thinking Imperial College London**

Silwood Park Campus 26th to 29th August 2014

Day 1: Getting to know each other (Lunch to tea)

**Theme:** **How do we fail?**

Confusing enthusiasms with insisting other people have to share them

Lack of clarity in definitions

Avoiding differences of opinion

Switch off when annoyed/Ignore people if disagree

Finish more confused than started

But, we should not fear some confusion as we have a second workshop

Talking past each other – cross-purposes

Come away with no clear sense of what we should do

Avoid responsibility

**Theme: Workshop principles**

*Diversity*

Consider racial and cultural diversity in evaluation. What will evaluation mean to a game ranger? What is success to them?

Consider differences within the fields of conservation, evaluation and systems, as well as differences between

*Innovation*

Workshop definition – bringing 2 things together and creating something new

How do we use the 3 components of the workshop: Evaluation, conservation, systems thinking, to see how they fit together?

Systems thinking may provide the overall link as we think in systems even if we don’t engage with the literature

Evaluation is not a new concept as we all evaluate all the time

*Non-judgement*

Empathy in understanding perspectives and tensions

Suspend judgement in ideas at first, being aware of ‘mindfulness’, as this opens up the door for curiosity to come in

Exploring what we think we know

*Knowing outcomes and expectations*

Ensure a constructive event with results

Pursuing outcome rather than output so typical workshop output of publication should be resisted

**Theme: What contributes to success and what limits success?**

In considering items that have contributed to success and limited success, patterns were identified with courage appearing on both lists. Considerable resource was identified among the workshop participants with those skills that people have said they are lacking, accounted for by skills that make people successful.

**Theme: What worked well for projects and what didn’t?**

A mixture of characteristics and categories included in the lists.

The following were picked out as interesting concepts and discussed: Ignorance, inexorability combined with empathy, cunning and subterfuge as positives.

It was highlighted that most of the items are really difficult to measure.

Also there were few surprises on the list – *if we know reasons for success and failure why do so many projects fail?*

Day 1: Systems introduction and preparation: Relationships, perspectives and boundaries (Tea to Finish)

**Introducing Systems Thinking – Bob Williams**

What is the relationship between the evaluation & systems field and how can lessons in the approaches that have been adopted be applied to the conservation field?

Both the evaluation and systems thinking fields are very large with hundreds to thousands of methods and methodologies. Such a huge range of approaches available if wish to engage more effectively in systems or evaluation field, yet how do you know whether you are starting in the right place and picking the best method?

Instead of learning all the methods, are there ways in making familiar approaches in conservation more evaluative and more systemic?

Fundamentally, evaluation is about a simple set of ideas: *Judgement, Merit, Value, Worth*. If you are making informed judgement about merit, value and worth you are conducting evaluation, there is nothing magical about it

Bob suggested that the definition of evaluation as ‘attributing value to an intervention over and above the counterfactual’ is too narrow and could use broadening.

A similar approach is being taken within the systems field in finding a way of understanding the root of all ideas of system thinking rather than learning scores of methodologies.

The following is a set of concepts to understanding systems:

*Inter-relationships* - understanding relationships. We need to understand the inter-relationships within the system we are working, the takes you have in a situation influences how you behave.

*Perspectives* - engaging with multiple perspectives, the systems approach starts when ‘you see the world through the eyes of another’/’walking in someone else’s shoes’.

*Boundaries* - reflecting on boundaries. Being holistic is about being smart about what you leave out; it isn’t necessary to include everything, and then deciding where to draw boundaries.

A title suggested for the concepts above:

*A general framework to map out modules and the programme of systems thinking in practice*

What is a boundary?

Boundaries delineate what is in and what is out. What is in has value, worth, meaning. What is outside is marginalised/victimised. The consequences of drawing a boundary should be considered. Things that are marginalised should be kept within the frame of reference as otherwise, things that happened outside of the boundary may cause issues after a time-lag.

**Group Discussion**

Definitions of/ways to think about merit, worth and value were discussed with the different suggestions below provided. These provide different perspectives but it was emphasised that an agreed definition is not necessary.

1. Making a judgement against criteria:

Merit – objective measurement /something with an intrinsic goodness

Worth –normative measurement

Value - subjective measurement

2. Environmental ethics

Value – in terms of intrinsic and instrumental

Intrinsic value – animal rights discourse

Instrumental value – its worth, its consequences (climate change discourse)

Evaluation is about what matters (Scriven). Systematically collecting data but putting perspectives at the front of it – if no one values its not worth doing. Someone is calling for understanding of what is the merit, value, worth of this.

*What is agency?* Actors with the standing to represent their perspectives in a discussion. The ability to have freedom to move but not necessarily do anything/ have limited power.

**Summary**

Providing frameworks and ideas that can be applied to own skill-set

Potentially avoiding a whole bunch of new frameworks and approaches

Allow freedom to think how can we apply this to our practice

Consider the extent to which it may relate or not relate to our own practice