Conservation Capability Maturity Model

A model for assessing organisational performance and identifying potential improvements

Purpose	Build awareness of the current standing of an organisation's internal capabilities, relative to characteristics of a model high-performing conservation organisation; helps to identify possible next-steps for improving organisation performance
Who should use this, and with whom?	Integrators, with managers who have a multi-program or cross-organisational remit, such as program managers, CFOs, CIOs, etc
When	Possibly as part of Strategic Planning reviews (to support analysis of "Where are we now? Where do we want to be? and How do we get there?")
How	self-assessments of the organisation's current standing, then broader discussion of insights;

Annette Stewart - Fulbright Scholarship 2016

**Improving the *practice* of conservation
by improving the *management* of conservation**

Contents

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Conservation Capability Maturity Model

"A capability is the ability to perform or achieve certain actions or outcomes; capability represents the intersection of capacity and ability."

What is a Capability Maturity Model?

Capability Maturity Models are tools that assist with improving processes; the models help to identify what an organization could do to promote behaviours that lead to improved business performance.

The concept originated in the 1990s from efforts to improve the software development processes, and has continually expanded in use and application; models are now available for a wide variety of disciplines. A key proponent of the concept is the CMMI Institute, an offshoot of Carnegie Mellon University, which administers a process improvement training and appraisal program; accreditation under CMMI is often sought by government contracts or sub-contractors.

Capability Maturity Models usually depict 5 levels of maturity for the given discipline, using a table to outline the characteristics applying at each level. The levels describe an evolutionary improvement path from ad-hoc immature processes to disciplined processes with high quality and effectiveness. Organisations can use the model to identify where their current capabilities reside, and to identify possible areas for improvement. Models range from relatively simple diagrams, which are easily used and give quick insights, through to very comprehensive documents that take considerable time to assess but which provide deep insights and clear guidance for improvements.

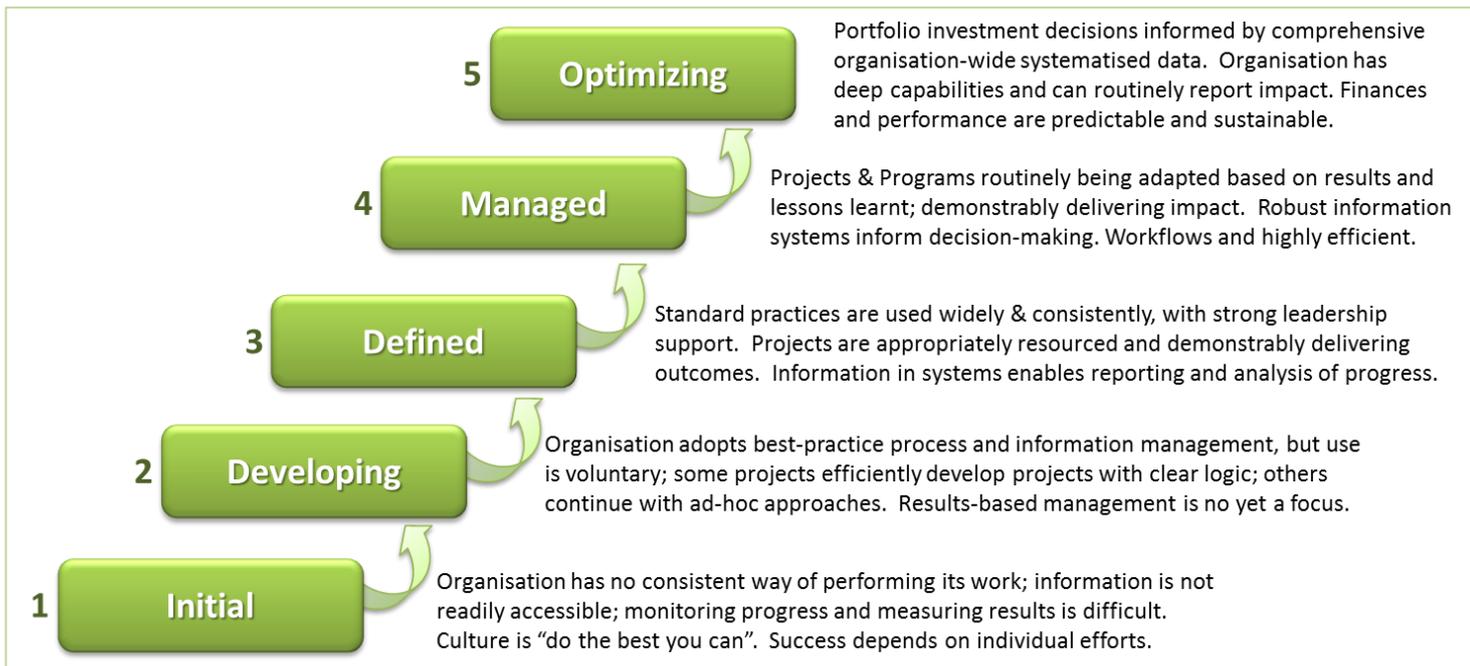## Why develop a CMM for conservation?

The conservation sector, as a "profession", is still quite young relative to most other industries which have evolved their practices over many decades and even centuries. The sector is addressing large, complex and urgent environmental challenges, so high-quality practices need to evolve rapidly if we are to meet these challenges.

But this evolution is hampered by one of the most valued attributes of the sector - conservation organisations are staffed by highly committed and skilled people who will often "do whatever it takes" to protect species and habitats. High energy and motivation can mask and overcome much inefficiency. But only to a point – the result is often sub-optimal delivery of project results, wasted resources, or burn-out of people.

A Conservation Capability Maturity Model is seen as one tool that could help organisations assess their current performance relative to a broad-based model of quality practices, and to then identify areas where they might want to focus their improvement efforts.

Overview of the model

The model looks at the key processes involved in the practice and management of conservation work. Organisational behaviours for each process are then set out at 5 levels of maturity, with 1 being the lowest level and 5 the highest. The diagram below illustrates these levels.

5 Optimizing — Portfolio investment decisions informed by comprehensive organisation-wide systematised data. Organisation has deep capabilities and can routinely report impact. Finances and performance are predictable and sustainable.

4 Managed — Projects & Programs routinely being adapted based on results and lessons learnt; demonstrably delivering impact. Robust information systems inform decision-making. Workflows and highly efficient.

3 Defined — Standard practices are used widely & consistently, with strong leadership support. Projects are appropriately resourced and demonstrably delivering outcomes. Information in systems enables reporting and analysis of progress.

2 Developing — Organisation adopts best-practice process and information management, but use is voluntary; some projects efficiently develop projects with clear logic; others continue with ad-hoc approaches. Results-based management is no yet a focus.

1 Initial — Organisation has no consistent way of performing its work; information is not readily accessible; monitoring progress and measuring results is difficult. Culture is "do the best you can". Success depends on individual efforts.

Experiences with other Maturity Models suggest that organisations follow a common progression through the levels, starting with a perception of "complete freedom" at the lowest level, through adoption of standardised processes to create efficiencies and improve focus, and on to the higher levels of "freedom within a process", in which the organisation performs at a high level of efficiency and effectiveness.   Capturing and using information is key to this progression.

This focus on process and information is seen as an important next step for improving the efficiency of the conservation sector; skills and commitment are rarely the issue. This broadly relates to the concept articulated by management consultant Jim Collins[1] of achieving high performance through "freedom and responsibility, within a framework of a highly developed system".

The conservation sector has several adaptive-management processes available to it, covering various aspects of conservation practice. However few have stretched beyond the immediate task of conservation practice to cover the systematised information management that is required for high performance. One exception is the Open Standards and its supporting tools.

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[1] Jim Collins (2009), Good to Great "The good-to-great companies built a consistent system with clear constraints, and gave people freedom and responsibility within the framework of that system. They hired self-disciplined people who didn't need to be managed, and then managed the system, not the people."

Summary Definitions of the Levels

1. **Initial** - The organisation has **no consistent way of performing its work**. Processes are variable and localised - often reinvented for different projects. Project information is not readily accessible beyond the team; **minimal sharing of information** between projects and across the organisation, precluding learning, measurement of results, and consistent investment decisions. **Success depends on individual efforts** and competencies.

2. **Developing - Standard practices** (based on sector best-practices) **for process & information management are adopted**, but **compliance is voluntary** and localised. Some projects follow standard practices, recording some data in systems; plans define expected results and measures for monitoring progress. Others continue to use ad-hoc approaches with limited sharing & systematisation of data, and much manual effort. **Results-based management is not a key focus** of the management team.

3. **Defined - Standard practices** for process & information management **are used widely and consistently** across the organisation, with strong leadership support. **Most information is captured into systems** and shared across organisation; enables timely, relevant and accurate reporting and analysis of progress and performance. Manual effort has been reduced to a minimum. **Projects are appropriately resourced and demonstrably delivering outcomes**. Culture values learning, sharing and continual improvement.

4. **Managed - Standard practices** are used widely, consistently, and deeply, **covering all stages of projects and programs;** with most projects being **adaptively managed**. **Comprehensive project information stored in systems** informs decision-making and **fact-based management reviews,** to ensure the right projects are being undertaken, are appropriately resourced over appropriate time-frames, and are **demonstrably delivering impact**. The organisation has **highly efficient workflows** and shares common beliefs about the effectiveness of their processes, systems and programs, and the need for continual adaptation.

5. **Optimizing - Portfolio investment decisions**, resource allocations and results-reporting are all drawn from **analysis of systematised data that is integrated across core business processes**, and readily available. Organisational finances and **performance are predictable and sustainable.** Funders and investors clearly see organizational efficiency and performance, and have ready access to **clear reporting of project outcomes and impact**s; Impact Investing market is being leveraged to a major extent. The organisation has **deep capabilities** to continually adapt their processes and efficiently deliver measurable conservation impact.

Structure of the model

The detailed model is documented in tables on the following pages. The processes involved in the practice and management of conservation are grouped into two categories – the first focuses on specific conservation processes, while the second covers broader organisational functions that support conservation processes.

	Level 1: Initial	Level 2: Developing	Level 3: Defined	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Optimizing
Design and Implementation of Conservation Project and Programs					
Strategic Planning					
Project Selection					
Project Planning & Implementation Process					
Information Management					
Project Resourcing and Management					
Results Measurement, Reporting and adaptation					
Learning and Sharing					
Organisational business processes supporting Conservation Programs					
Fundraising Management					
Marketing & Communications					
Financial Management					
People Management					
Culture					
Governance & Leadership					

Some general points to note about the model -

- The model's descriptions are mostly defined in terms of "projects", because much conservation work is done within the context of a project. However, the descriptions are seen as broadly relevant for higher-level groupings or projects into programs or portfolios, and for "non-project" work conducted in support of conservation actions, such as on-going advocacy.

- The levels are not strictly additive, but in general terms, performance at the higher levels cannot be sustained unless the key features of the lower levels are in place and functioning well. Each maturity level forms a necessary foundation for the next level – experience with other models suggests that trying to skip levels is usually counterproductive in the long run.

- The model can be used at various scopes, from the whole organisation through to individual regions or programs.   It is least effective at detailed levels such as individual teams or projects; these levels overlook the cross-organisational characteristics that are key to high performance.

- Level 5 is not necessarily the right target for all organisations; for many, Level 3 or 4 might be quite adequate for their circumstances; the effort required to reach the highest levels may be disproportionate to the potential outcome, and it may not be necessary for the organisation's needs. For example, a small NGO managing a few projects does not need the sophisticated portfolio management capabilities of the higher levels. Other Models warn of "Level fever", where attaining the maturity level becomes more important than achieving the business benefits that come from improved practices.

- Achieving a particular Level is never "finished"; there is continual change in the organisation's external environment and internal capabilities, so constant effort and awareness is generally required to maintain performance at a particular level. Level 5 is

the maturity level most capable of helping organizations to maintain performance; at this level change management and continual improvement has become a standard part of the culture.
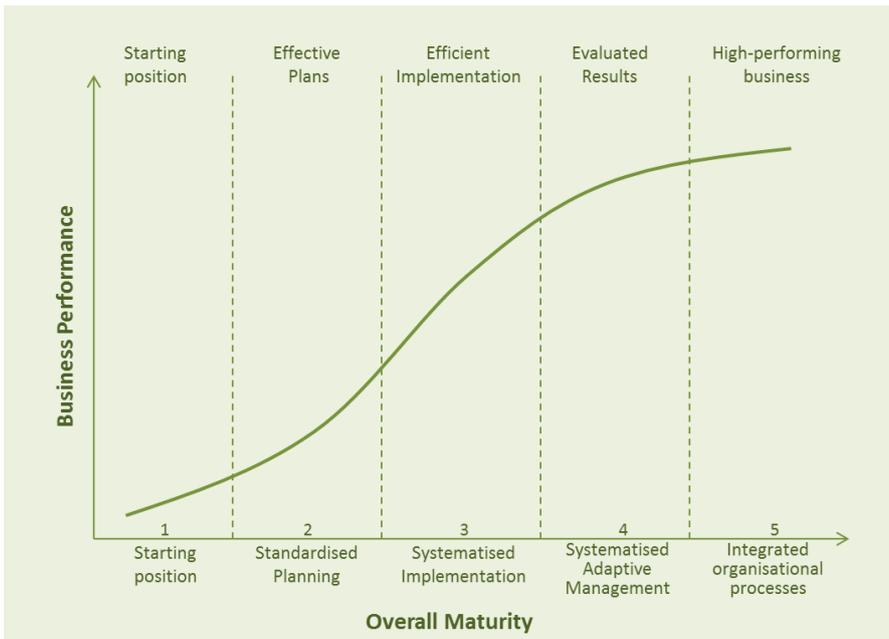
How to use the model

Use judgment and common sense to interpret the model for your organization. The model should be used in the same way that engineers and architects use models: as a learning tool, a communication tool, and a means of organizing thoughts. The tool is much less important than the conversations it can generate.

This version of the model is in the early stages of development; it is hoped that in time it will be refined based on insights from organisations using it. At this early stage, it is recommended that the model be used to make a broad-brush assessment of an organisation's current performance and to identify areas for improvement, rather than aiming for a definitive classification.

A simple assessment can be obtained by highlighting the statements that ring true for your organisation's current practices (see example below). It is quite possible that different areas of the organisation will display characteristics across more than one level within a single topic; choose the description which is the 'best fit'. Once these broad-brush ratings are made, see where the balance lies; those characteristics that lie upstream of current practice indicate potential areas for improvement. The final section of this document provides some guidance for following up on an assessment.

Design and Implementation of Conservation Project and Programs					
Strategic Planning	Organisation may or may not have a documented purpose or mission; does not have a regular process for strategic planning.	The organisation has a Mission / Vision and documented strategic plan, with a process for reviewing them. However the process is not performed regularly, or the results tend not to drive all of the organisation's operations.	The organisation has a current Strategic Plan and a documented process for periodically updating it. Qualitative review of results informs updates to the plan; goals in the plan influence project selection.	Organisation has a regular and systematic process for reviewing and updating its Strategic Plan, which is widely understood and drives investment decisions. The organisation has a robust theory of change to drive program & portfolio selection, and clear line of sight from mission to strategy to implementation and on to results.	Organisation is regularly using systematic, fact-based reviews of impact, progress against strategic goals, performance of key operations, and analysis of the broader market within which it operates. Strategic Plans are regularly adapted based on results being achieved, and tough-calls are made on investment re-alignments.
Project Selection	Project selection is localised and often opportunistic, with little or no connection to organisation strategy. No consistent information available on which to prioritise projects, or to know if the project can be resourced over the timeframe required to produce results. Projects often defined to fit particular funding opportunities.	Project selection has some alignment to strategy but the lack of consistent project definition makes prioritisation difficult; investment decisions usually based on perceptions rather than judgement of facts. Opportunistic or "new idea" projects can become a distraction.	New projects are drawn from defined strategies or broader Program Plans. Initial scoping information is developed consistent with standard process, allowing investment decisions to be made based on firm data. Opportunistic projects are defined and assessed in same manner, aiding prioritisation of investments.	Potential new projects are assessed against the existing and planned portfolio, based on consistent scoping information, enabling prioritisation and robust investment / re-investment / dis-investment decisions.	Project selection demonstrates highly focussed decisions on where and how the organisation can have greatest impact on the most important conservation issues within the scope of their mission.
Project Planning & Implementation Process	Process for planning and implementing projects is non-existent, highly variable, or ad-hoc and reactive to immediate situations. Process is based on an individual's prior experiences; project quality is highly dependent on their knowledge and skills.	Best-practice process for conservation sector is adopted, but value is not widely understood and compliance is voluntary and patchy. Some projects follow best-practice process, developing higher-quality plans with improved ability to implement and measure results; these projects can capitalise on experiences of the broader conservation sector. Other projects continue to use ad-hoc or variable approaches with limited sharing & systematisation of data, and much manual effort; project timeframes often defined to fit funding cycles rather than timeframes required to achieve conservation outcomes.	Best-practice process for planning and implementing projects is used widely and consistently across the organisation, with strong leadership support. Standardised project details and terminology allow comparisons and learnings across org. All projects have clear theory of change and measures of results; projects can "state desired results in terms of conservation outcomes, not actions", and "State how our efforts will lead to our desired results". Project resources and timeframe required to deliver results are clearly defined; funding sought to fit project timelines. Progress is actively monitored; a few projects flow around the adaptive management cycle.	Standard process is used widely, consistently, and deeply, covering all lifecycle stages of projects and programs. Projects are regularly reviewed and adapted based on analysis of data and evidence of results being achieved; results inform investment / re-investment decisions. Standard process is advocated by executive management and continually evolved based on learnings and results.	Standard process is part of the culture, with strong linkages to other core business processes. Project investments are consistently of high quality and producing results and impact. Project portfolios are increasingly framed as investments, targeting combinations of wealth-preservation or market-based returns, broadening the funding base beyond traditional philanthropy to include impact-investors.
Information Management	Minimal recording of project details; information stored locally or held by individuals; not readily accessible beyond immediate team. Heavy reliance on storing information in static systems	Standard system for capturing conservation project information implemented; used by project teams adopting best-practice process. Project data can be stored, queried, compared,	Standard system used widely and consistently across the organisation. Significant efficiency benefits obtained through reduced effort to create, format and maintain project information	Systems provide aggregation of project information to enable portfolio management. Standardised information facilitates learning and sharing with partners. Conservation project	Conservation project information integrated with other core business processes. Workflows across organization are streamlined and highly efficient. Information readily available and routinely

Experience with other models suggests that the hardest and steepest learning curve occurs in moving through phases 2 and 3. The initial task requires creating awareness of current issues and building momentum for improvement, then dealing with all the challenges of an organisational change process.

Maturity Models for Conservation Support functions

Note that this model is focused on factors which affect the quality of conservation practice, and on those processes that are of value across the organization. High performance in conservation work is dependent on broader support functions within the organisation and its partners. Capability Maturity Models exist for many of these functions, offering more-focused assessments and guidance for process improvement in these areas. The following models are suggested reference points –

Discipline	Suggested Reference
Financial Management	Financial Management Maturity Model - UK National Audit Office.
People Management	People Capability Maturity Model from CMMI Institute
Project Management	Project Management Maturity Model Project Management Institute
Information systems / IT management	Enterprise Architecture Capability Maturity Model US Dept Commerce The Open Group Architecture Framework
Data Management	Data Management Maturity Model from CMMI Institute
Collaboration	Collaboration Maturity Model

The model in detail

	Level 1: Initial	Level 2: Developing	Level 3: Defined	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Optimizing
Summary	The organisation has **no consistent way of performing its work**. Processes are variable and localised - often reinvented for different projects. Project information is not readily accessible beyond the team; **minimal sharing of information** between projects and across the organisation, precluding learning, measurement of results, and consistent investment decisions. **Success depends on individual efforts and competencies.**	**Standard practices** (based on sector best-practices) **for process & information management are adopted,** but **compliance is voluntary** and localised. Some projects follow standard practices, recording some data in systems; plans define expected results and measures for monitoring progress. Others continue to use ad-hoc approaches with limited sharing & systematisation of data, and much manual effort. **Results-based management is not a key focus** of the management team.	**Standard practices** for process & information management **are used widely and consistently** across the organisation, with strong leadership support. **Most information is captured into systems** and shared across organisation; enables timely, relevant and accurate reporting and analysis of progress and performance. Manual effort has been reduced to a minimum. **Projects are appropriately resourced and demonstrably delivering outcomes**. Organisation culture values learning, sharing and continual improvement.	**Standard practices** are used widely, consistently, and deeply, **covering all stages of projects and programs**; with most projects being adaptively managed. **Comprehensive project information stored in systems informs decision-making** and fact-based management reviews, to ensure the right projects are being undertaken, are appropriately resourced over appropriate time-frames, and are **demonstrably delivering impact**. The organisation has **highly efficient workflows** and shares common beliefs about the effectiveness of their processes, systems and programs, and the need for continual adaptation.	**Portfolio investment decisions**, resource allocations and results-reporting are all drawn from **analysis of systematised data that is integrated across core business processes**, and readily available. Organisational **finances and performance are predictable and sustainable**. Funders and investors clearly see organizational efficiency and performance, and have ready access to **clear reporting of project outcomes and impacts**; Impact Investing market is being leveraged to a major extent. The organisation has **deep capabilities** to continually adapt their processes and efficiently deliver measurable conservation impact.
Design and Implementation of Conservation Project and Programs					
Strategic Planning	Organisation may or may not have a documented purpose or mission; does not have a regular process for strategic planning.	The organisation has a Mission / Vision and documented strategic plan, with a process for reviewing them. However the process is not performed regularly, or the results tend not to drive all of the organisation's operations.	The organisation has a current Strategic Plan and a documented process for periodically updating it. Qualitative review of results informs updates to the plan; goals in the plan influence project selection.	Organisation has a regular and systematic process for reviewing and updating its Strategic Plan, which is widely understood and drives investment decisions. The organisation has a robust theory of change to drive program & portfolio selection, and clear line of sight from mission to strategy to implementation and on to results.	Organisation is regularly using systematic, fact-based reviews of impact, progress against strategic goals, performance of key operations, and analysis of the broader market within which it operates. Strategic Plans are regularly adapted based on results being achieved, and tough-calls are made on investment re-alignments.
Project Selection	Project selection is localised and often opportunistic, with little or no connection to organisation strategy. No consistent information available on which to prioritise projects, or to know if the project can be resourced	Project selection has some alignment to strategy but the lack of consistent project definition makes prioritisation difficult; investment decisions usually based on perceptions rather than judgement of facts.	New projects are drawn from defined strategies or broader Program Plans. Initial scoping information is developed consistent with standard process, allowing investment decisions to be made based on	Potential new projects are assessed against the existing and planned portfolio, based on consistent scoping information, enabling prioritisation and robust investment / re-investment / dis-investment decisions.	Project selection demonstrates highly focussed decisions on where and how the organisation can have greatest impact on the most important conservation issues within the scope of their mission.

	Level 1: Initial	Level 2: Developing	Level 3: Defined	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Optimizing
	over the timeframe required to produce results. Projects often defined to fit particular funding opportunities.	Opportunistic or "new idea" projects can become a distraction.	firm data. Opportunistic projects are defined and assessed in same manner, aiding prioritisation of investments.		
Project Planning & Implementation Process	Process for planning and implementing projects is non-existent, highly variable, or ad-hoc and reactive to immediate situations. Process is based on an individual's prior experiences; project quality is highly dependent on their knowledge and skills.	Best-practice process for conservation sector is adopted, but value is not widely understood and compliance is voluntary and patchy. Some projects follow best-practice process, developing higher-quality plans with improved ability to implement and measure results; these projects can capitalise on experiences of the broader conservation sector. Other projects continue to use ad-hoc or variable approaches with limited sharing & systematisation of data, and much manual effort; project timeframes often defined to fit funding cycles rather than timeframes required to achieve conservation outcomes.	Best-practice process for planning and implementing projects is used widely and consistently across the organisation, with strong leadership support. Standardised project details and terminology allow comparisons and learnings across org. All projects have clear theory of change and measures of results; projects can "state desired results in terms of conservation outcomes, not actions", and "State how our efforts will lead to our desired results". Project resources and timeframe required to deliver results are clearly defined; funding sought to fit project timelines. Progress is actively monitored; a few projects flow around the adaptive management cycle.	Standard process is used widely, consistently, and deeply, covering all lifecycle stages of projects and programs. Projects are regularly reviewed and adapted based on analysis of data and evidence of results being achieved; results inform investment / re-investment decisions. Standard process are advocated by executive management and continually evolved based on learnings and results.	Standard process is part of the culture, with strong linkages to other core business processes. Project investments are consistently of high quality and producing results and impact. Project portfolios are increasingly framed as investments, targeting combinations of wealth-preservation or market-based returns, broadening the funding base beyond traditional philanthropy to include impact-investors.
Information Management	Minimal recording of project details; information stored locally or held by individuals; not readily accessible beyond immediate team. Heavy reliance on storing information in static systems (eg Word, Excel); data can't be systematically aggregated or shared across projects. Much time spent on creating / formatting information; information not kept current due to effort required. Much organisational knowledge lost with staff turnover.	Standard system for capturing conservation project information implemented; used by project teams adopting best-practice process. Project data can be stored, queried, compared, reported and updated; demonstrates reduced effort in capturing and maintaining quality project information. Other projects continue to store information in static documents; comparisons not possible; reporting highly manual.	Standard system used widely and consistently across the organisation. Significant efficiency benefits obtained through reduced effort to create, format and maintain project information and documentation; data can be extracted and rolled-up for performance reviews and management reporting. Organisational knowledge is stored in systems and available to all, rather than held by individuals or teams; information is valued as an organisational resource.	Systems provide aggregation of project information to enable portfolio management. Standardised information facilitates learning and sharing with partners. Conservation project information partly integrated with other core business processes, creating automated feeds of data (eg budgets fed into finance systems).	Conservation project information integrated with other core business processes. Workflows across organization are streamlined and highly efficient. Information readily available and routinely analysed to improve decision-making, performance and learning.

	Level 1: Initial	**Level 2: Developing**	**Level 3: Defined**	**Level 4: Managed**	**Level 5: Optimizing**
Project Resourcing and Management	Localised and reactive; resource requirements (time, skills, finances) not planned in advance. Many individuals are over-committed to projects, often leading to burnout and attrition, with consequent loss of information. Budgets are minimally defined and/or for short term. Project timeframes often not defined.	Use of standard process & system allows resourcing needs (time, skills, budgets) to be defined relative to project's stated objectives, over life of project. These project managers can start to control workloads of teams / individuals and prevent burn-out; budgets are more easily managed and visible; progress can be tracked against expectations, with details captured in systems. Other Projects continue to be resourced re-actively; progress reporting not easily linked to clear project objectives or milestones.	Resourcing needs are planned in advance, reviewed relative to project objectives, and made available to projects, or else project deliverables and timeframes are adjusted to fit resource availability. Budgets are clearly linked to project actions and planned results. Progress against plan is routinely tracked, and captured in systems to develop a history of activity for future reference; details shared across projects to aid learning. Stakeholders and Risks are routinely managed. Skills in Project Management and People Management are highly valued & supported by organisation.	Project and program resourcing decisions are made at the portfolio level, ensuring clear priorities and allocation of an appropriate quality and quantity of resources for the project's duration. Fact-based reviews of project results inform periodic re-evaluation of resourcing decisions. All projects have clear exit strategies. Stakeholder Management and Risk Management practices are highly advanced.	Portfolio planning and prioritisation is based on analysis of organisation-wide knowledge and detailed risk-return metrics.
Results Measurement, Reporting and adaptation	No effective results-based management; there is no objective basis for judging the quality of project. Expected results often not clearly articulated; project success usually measured after-the-fact; mainly qualitative commentary on activity (what was done) rather than fact-based assessment of results (what was achieved) relative to original objectives of project.	Some projects can measure results, primarily focussed on activities and outputs (measuring what's easy to measure, rather than measuring what matters). Improvements are limited to those projects adopting the standard process; other projects largely continue with poor definition of expected results and ad-hoc reporting. Management reviews of project performance are minimal or superficial.	Details of progress and results are stored in systems; progress reporting becomes visible beyond the team. Managers and Executive have visibility into project details; can see degree of progress (qualitative commentary and quantitative measures of Indicators) relative to Objectives and resource investment. Quality of measurement has moved beyond Outputs to also report Outcomes relative to expected results.	Managers and Executive have visibility into portfolios of projects and their results; projects are measuring what matters, and can "Adapt our strategies based on what we have learned", routinely going around the adaptive management loop. Organisation critically reviews and measures project results-chains, from inputs through to outcomes, with some ability to report impact. Analysis enables fact-based investment decisions and (re-)allocation of resources.	Organisation has highly efficient results-based management capabilities. Managers have access to succinct reporting dashboards, with drill-down to details; going beyond "what happened" to also guide "what to do". Org routinely assesses impacts, drawn from consistent systematised information; can prove value for money. Enables regular Performance Reporting to funders and investors.
Learning and Sharing	Organisation is inward-focussed, just trying to keep everything afloat. No time for reflection or learning about what's working or not. No standardised project information so can't share / learn from others.	Use of standard process & system results in consistent terminology and project information, creating initial opportunities to share projects and learnings. Other projects have limited learning opportunities.	Standardised process and consistent terminology provides opportunities for all projects to share and learn from each other, within the organisation, with partners, and across the broader conservation sector.	Leadership creates a safe culture for learning; actively encourages learning and openness. Widespread culture of "red is good" results in honest and transparent reporting. Lessons from previous & current projects drive improvements in related and future projects.	Organisation has high confidence in its processes and systems, and fearlessly produces honest, transparent reporting of successes & failures to all internal and external stakeholders. External evaluations regularly used to learn and improve projects and processes.

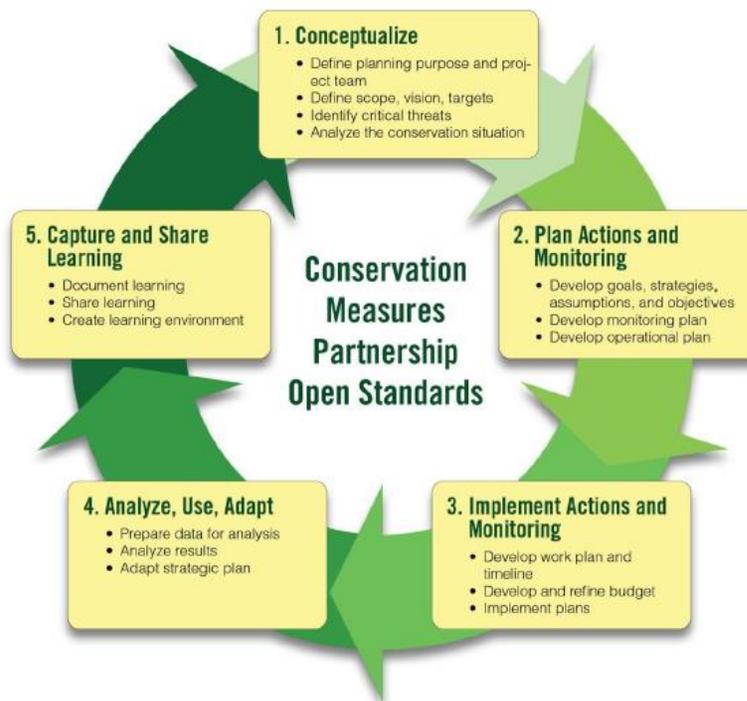|	Level 1: Initial	Level 2: Developing	Level 3: Defined	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Optimizing
Organisational business processes supporting Conservation Programs					
Fundraising Management	Each project is unique; documentation is inconsistent, often minimal, and not accessible; fundraisers spend significant time learning about project objectives and proposed outcomes, which can morph over time making subsequent reporting to funders very difficult and risking trust in the relationship.	Some projects use consistent process and terminology, producing high-quality standardised project information, stored in systems. Fundraisers can more easily access and interpret project information, which streamlines workflows for identifying interested donors and making funding applications. Projects using ad-hoc processes still require significant effort from fundraisers to locate and interpret project information.	All projects use consistent process for planning and implementation. Fundraisers have ready access to up-to-date project information and reports that streamline donor cultivation, funding applications, and progress reporting. High-quality reporting of outcomes and results relative to project objectives improves feedback to donors, and engenders greater trust and confidence in the organisation's ability to deliver results.	Consistent process and systematised information enables robust investment decisions, creating clear and manageable priorities for fundraising activities. Regular review and adaptation of conservation projects ensures they deliver the results and impact that were promised to donors in funding applications and progress updates. Systems provide donors with direct access to project information allowing full transparency and open and honest reporting, deepening donor relationships.	Conservation projects and programs are of highest quality and consistently demonstrate results and Impact; project information is fully integrated with donor management systems. The organisation's project portfolios are increasingly framed as investment opportunities. Fundraisers have highly efficient workflows and can focus all efforts on building donor relationships and exploiting the Impact Investing market.
Marketing & Communic-ations	Communications staff struggle to find information on project results, so focus is on reporting stories about activity. Annual Reports show little connection from the strategies outlined in one year to results in the following year.	Some standardised project information available in systems, giving marketing and communications staff easier access to details of planned projects; stories can cover not just "what we are doing", but also "why we are doing it", and what results we expect.	Consistent, systematised information on project plans and progress gives marketers and communicators easy access to high quality information, streamlining their workflows. Marketing materials and stories can focus on outcomes being achieved, supported by data and evidence, helping to build the organisation's reputation.	Communicators have ready access to comprehensive details of prioritised new project investments, as well as data and evidence supporting the results and impact being achieved by existing projects.	Marketing staff have easy access to comprehensive information about the organisation's proposed and current projects. Their workflows are highly efficient, and effort is focused on strengthening the organisations reputation based on reporting of clear evidence. Performance Reporting, relating inputs, outputs and impacts, is routine.
Financial Management	Budgets prepared manually each year with only broad connection to project objectives and actions; budgets & planning horizon generally covers only 1 financial year. Amount of funding sought cannot be readily tested against the benefits expected from the project. Inconsistent information makes comparisons between projects very difficult.	Improved project plans allow preparation of budgets that recognise the project's resource needs and timeframes. Budgets and planning horizon generally covers only 1 financial year in any detail, with simple estimates for later years. Budgets developed manually and re-entered into finance systems, risking disconnect from project objectives. Expenditure monitoring (actual vs budget) usually disconnected from any monitoring of project activities.	Projects consistently defined, including multi-year budgets clearly related to project objectives; allows investment appraisals and comparisons across projects; results in clear and transparent resource allocation decisions. Manual creation / re-entry of budgets is minimised through systems linkages. Expenditure is monitored relative to project activities and outcomes; allowing fact-based decisions regarding continued investment. Project teams have strong financial literacy.	Organisation's financial model can readily factor in future funding needs based on clear investment decisions using defined project benefits and costs. Rolling budgets and forecasts are routine. Activity-based costing is analysed and provides valuable insight for decision-making. Poorly performing projects are curtailed where necessary and funding invested in other parts of the portfolio.	Managers at all levels have access to reporting systems / dashboards that provide succinct information, with ability to drill-down to details, to efficiently manage the performance of projects and the broader business. The organisation's strong capabilities in project planning & management, track record in delivery of results, and sound investment processes create financial sustainability, and allow and encourage long term commitments.

	Level 1: Initial	Level 2: Developing	Level 3: Defined	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Optimizing
People Management	Projects generally lack details about the resources (skills, roles, number of people) required to manage & deliver the project, so are often under-resourced. People are highly committed to their work and will take on "too much"; high risk of burnout with consequent loss of organisational knowledge. Project objectives / outputs not clearly defined, so performance appraisals of teams and individuals are largely based on perceptions.	Some projects use the consistent process, producing high-quality plans with details of the resources needed to deliver planned results; this improves ability to allocate the right number and type of resources to the project, and to manage the workload of individuals and teams. Managers ensure their people have the skills needed to perform their work. Other projects continue ad-hoc approach with variable quality of plans, so are difficult to resource appropriately.	Consistent process in place for planning & implementing all projects. Project plans include details of resourcing needs (skills, roles, numbers) from staff, volunteers and partners. Individual and team objectives are set based on defined project objectives. Performance reviews are based on details of project progress and results, drawn from systems, allowing more fact-based performance appraisals. Risk of burn-out has been minimised. New staff are quickly and thoroughly trained in the organisation's processes and systems. People-management skills are valued and supported.	The organisation has a prioritised project portfolio, which guides planning for current and future resource needs (skills, roles, numbers). Clear investment decisions mean projects are appropriately resourced. HR practices use project results to monitor, recognise and reward performance of individuals and teams. Staff and volunteers have a clear "line of sight" between their activities and contribution to conservation outcomes and organisational success.	Strategic workforce planning is routine, benefiting from the organisation's financial sustainability. Systems provide integrated information to streamline management of resources and related HR practices. The organisation is focused on continuously improving it's capabilities and workforce practices.
Culture	"Do the best you can." Acceptance of inefficient processes is seen as the norm for not-for-profits. Fear that standardised processes and systematised information will cause loss of independence; can be seen as "too corporate". Critical analysis of projects not done for fear of demoralising people. Strong faith from leaders and funders creates little impetus for change.	Some innovators seek to create better ways, to improve project & organisational performance and ensure donor funds are used wisely. Change is largely localised and a "bottom-up push". Often there is strong organisational affinity and team-based culture, but little collaboration across the organisation; most areas operate as "silos" with separate information and processes.	Use of a consistent process and terminology allows more collaboration between project teams, and with other organisational units. This increases sharing and learning, and creates drive for further improvement. Organisation leadership see the benefits flowing from progress to date and create the "top-down pull" required for further transformation.	A Learning Organisation has developed; results are shared within and beyond the organisation respectfully, honestly, and transparently to facilitate learning. Leadership has created a "safe" culture in which problems can be exposed and examined; data is readily accessible and routinely analysed to improve performance.	Organisation has a Results culture, in which fact-based evaluations drive continuous performance improvements. The organisation actively seeks external evaluations and benchmarks, and acts on findings.
Governance & Leadership	Board and senior leadership are focussed largely on big picture issues, new opportunities and external relations; often assuming that operational processes are OK. Exacerbated by lack of accessible progress information and metrics.	Focus remains on big-picture issues. Governance is focused on financial performance, often with only superficial reviews of project performance. There is some recognition of need for process improvements but other priorities generally prevent any serious commitment to these efforts.	Generally increased size of organisation creates greater leadership capacity. Senior-management team aware of the need for and benefits of process improvements and sharing of data; actively supports adoption and use of standard process & information systems.	Leadership team has ready access to comprehensive project & program information to efficiently review performance, inform decision-making and drive investment decisions. Leaders use results to drive continual performance improvements to projects, processes and systems.	Leadership team has data-driven, rigorous decision-making and investment processes; driving results and impact. Internal and external communications are honest and transparent.

Guidance for acting on insights

Once you have completed a broad assessment, conversations within your organisation should aim to identify which areas are seen as most in need of improvement, then lay out a roadmap for working towards these improvements.

As mentioned earlier, relatively few organisations in the conservation sector have addressed the systematisation of their conservation information, which is required for high performance. One process that is well positioned to fulfil this role is the *Open Standards for the practice of conservation*, developed by the Conservation Measures Partnership. The Standard provides a rigorous "best-practice" process for doing conservation work, while the supporting systems, Miradi and Miradi Share, provide the information management capabilities.

Once fully adopted, use of the Open Standards and its supporting systems will generally place an organisation at Level 4.   If this adoption is pursued through to full institutionalisation[2], an organisation can conceivably be operating at Level 5.

Achieving this transformation can only happen in stages, over time. As with any process, organisational experience needs to be gradually built up, ensuring that characteristics of lower levels are working well so that the more sophisticated capabilities can be built on top.

The table below indicates the key challenges and actions that could be taken at each level. These will need to be addressed in any efforts aiming to improve performance.

Level 1: Initial	Level 2: Developing	Level 3: Defined	Level 4: Managed
Aim to build awareness amongst management of the gap between current capabilities and those offered at higher levels; emphasising the productivity and effectiveness benefits that could be obtained.	Use pilot project(s) to build awareness of the benefits from improved quality of projects and systematisation of information; aim to build a groundswell of support to encourage others to try, and to generate interest amongst leadership group	Build awareness of the need for improved business performance. Build awareness of how systematised conservation information streamlines workflow in other parts of the organisation	Generate support amongst staff in support roles and responsible for other business processes, to integrate systems and streamline workflows.

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[2] See Glossary for definition

The table below provides guidance for improving each of the competencies.

Capability	How to improve
Project selection	Spatial analysis (e.g. using GIS systems and tools such as Marxan) to assess conservation status and priorities; analyse stakeholders in the priority regions to identify collaborations and avoid duplication of effort. The Collective Impact model provides guidance for building partnerships to address complex problems. Once potential projects are identified, Open Standards Step 1 provides guidance for establishing a core team to analyse the project context and opportunities.
Project Planning and Implementation Process	Open Standards Step 2 guides participatory development of robust strategies including their theory of change and associated monitoring plan and high-level workplans to guide investment decisions. Open Standards Step 3 provides guidance for developing detailed workplans, and implementing the actions and monitoring.
Information Management	Project information needs to be stored in systems that are accessible, sharable and "query-able", to inform decisions and other processes. Miradi and Miradi Share provide these functions for project information developed following Open Standards guidelines.
Project Resourcing and Management	Open Standards Steps 2 & 3 help to define the resourcing (funding, skills, roles, quantities) required to implement and monitor projects, and the objectives that those roles are trying to achieve. Miradi provides systems support to capture this information, which can then be integrated with other systems that manage fundraising, finances, HR, and Volunteers;
Results Measurement and Reporting	Open Standards Step 4 provides guidance for analysing monitoring information to identify and report the results being achieved relative to the impact identified in the theory of change, as well as identifying how the project should be adapted based on results and changing circumstances. Miradi and Miradi Share can store and report this information; when integrated with other core systems it provides for cross-organisational reporting. Adoption of broad-based metrics such as IRIS allows for comparable external reporting.
Learning and Sharing	Open Standards Step 5 provides guidance for creating a learning environment, and capturing and sharing learnings from project implementation.

Glossary

Adaptive management - The incorporation of a formal learning process into conservation action. Specifically, it is the integration of project design, management, and monitoring, to provide a framework to systematically test assumptions, promote learning, and supply timely information for management decisions.

Evaluation – An assessment of a project in relation to its own previously stated goals and objectives.

Goal – defines a desired impact of a project, such as the desired future status of a target.

Impact – The desired future state of a conservation target. A goal states the desired impact.

Indicator – A measurable entity related to a specific information need such as the status of a target, change in a threat, or progress toward an objective.

Institutionalization - the building of infrastructure and culture that supports practices so that they are the ongoing way of doing business. The result is the deployment and implementation of processes that are effective, usable, and consistently applied across the organization. Institutionalization implies that the process is ingrained in the way the work is performed and there is commitment and consistency to performing the process.

Monitoring – The periodic collection and evaluation of data relative to stated project goals and objectives (also referred to as monitoring and evaluation (abbreviated M&E).

Objective – A formal statement detailing a desired outcome of a project such as reducing a critical threat. A good objective meets the criteria of being: results oriented, measurable, time limited, specific, and practical. If the project is well conceptualized and designed, realization of a project's objectives should lead to the fulfilment of the project's goals and ultimately its vision.

Outcome – The desired future state of a threat or opportunity factor. An objective is a formal statement of the desired outcome.

Process – or Business Process, a collection of related, structured activities that produce a specific service or product (serve a particular goal); "Processes are the behaviours of real people and events – not documents!"

Program – A group of projects which together aim to achieve a common broad vision.

Project – A set of actions undertaken by a defined group of practitioners to achieve defined goals and objectives. The basic unit of conservation work.

Portfolio – a high-level grouping of projects and programs, managed together to achieve a strategic objective; portfolio management aims to focus resources on the right projects and programs.

Result – The desired future state of a target. Results include impacts which are linked to targets and outcomes which are linked to threats and opportunities.

Results-Chain - A graphical depiction of a project's core assumption, the logical sequence linking project strategies to one or more targets. In scientific terms, it lays out hypothesized relationships.

Target – An element of biodiversity at a project site, which can be a species, habitat, or ecological system that a project has chosen to focus on; can also be a human wellbeing target which, in the context of conservation projects, focus on those components of human wellbeing affected by the status of conservation targets.

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