Working Relationships in Ecosystem Management: Training Designed for Collaborative Relationship Building

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Abstract: Maintaining or restoring ecological integrity within natural systems requires Parks Canada to work outside the political boundaries of its park perimeters and at broader ecosystem scales. When working at this broader scale, Parks Canada must understand and acknowledge the rights and interests of other governments, First Nations, stakeholders, and landowners, and must draw these sometimes divergent views together to work collaboratively towards the stewardship of the broader region. Working Relationships in Ecosystem Management is a Parks Canada-designed course that focuses on building strong interpersonal and inclusive decision-making skills for working collaboratively in a broad ecosystem context. The training is intended for Parks Canada staff and other governments, First Nations, and stakeholders that Parks Canada works with to achieve its ecological integrity objectives. This paper outlines how the training course was designed and discusses its content and the results from two pilot programs.

Key Words: collaboration, ecosystem management, training, conflict management, Parks Canada, Canada

Introduction

The Working Relationships in Ecosystem Management (WREM) training course was developed by Parks Canada as a result of two identified needs. The first related to a personal observation that although some Parks Canada staff were very knowledgeable about ecosystems, they lacked the skills and understanding to build strong collaborative working relationships with the stakeholders associated with Parks Canada's ecosystems. The second need related to the new Gulf Islands National Park Reserve in British Columbia (B.C.). It was evident that the stakeholders and residents of the Gulf Islands held strong environmental values and showed a high level of support for the proposed national park and marine conservation area. As a means of building upon this, it was thought that all of the new park's staff should be trained in developing skills for working collaboratively, and that the stakeholders would benefit from the same type of training so that a common language and structure for collaborative dialogues could be established.

Methods

Development of the WREM training course involved three components: training design, delivery, and evaluation.

Training Design

The WREM training course was developed over a two-year period and was based on the skills and experience of six Parks Canada staff. Jennie Sparkes acted as project manager and resource person for ecosystem-based management, interest-based communications, and negotiations; Alain Comeau was the resource for public consultation and adult education methods; Alice Gavin provided expertise on training material design; Bill Stephenson was the resource person for ecosystem-based management; Graham Dodds served as the resource for Parks Canada public participation methods; and Leah Borsa, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)[1] Champion (national office), was a partner in interest-based communications and negotiations. A modular approach ensured that both the national office ADR program and the WREM program could draw upon the same learning material related to communications and negotiations.

The target audience used in designing the training course was Parks Canada field staff who engage in collaborative relationship building with stakeholders and local communities. It was also envisioned that park stakeholders would be involved in the training so that a common skills base could be established as a foundation for working together. The assumption was made that all Parks Canada staff would receive the mandatory one-day ecological integrity training and would, therefore, have a basic understanding of the principles associated with ecological integrity and ecosystem-based management. It was recognized that the same may not be true for the stakeholders; therefore, more explanations about ecological integrity may be needed at times during the training course. It was also assumed that some participants may have been involved in some level of communications training but that this would not be the norm; therefore, the design of the course was structured as if participants had no background in public participation approaches or interest-based communications. A final assumption was that very few participants would have formal skills in negotiation.

The training course was designed to adhere to adult learning approaches. This included designing a participant's manual which enabled participants to track what they were hearing and provided some additional material and space for making notes. Leaders facilitated delivery of the course over three days, and participants were encouraged to share their experience in the various

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[1]ADR is a life skill that offers people the opportunity to strengthen their communications and relationships. ADR is about clearly communicating interests—the specific reasons or motivations underlying the positions people take in conversations (Source: Parks Canada ADR intranet web site).

topic areas and learn from each other. As a result, a general rule of 30–30–30 for content, discussion, and activities was established.

The written material produced for the training course was evaluated to determine if it was appropriate for the reading level of the target audience. The evaluation indicated that the ecosystem-based management and public participation modules were written at a Grade 10 reading level, and the interest-based communications and negotiations modules were written at a Grade 7 level. It was determined that these reading levels were suitable as most participants would have a university degree or equivalent, and that specific concepts could be elaborated upon for any stakeholders who may not have an adequate level of understanding.

The WREM training curriculum is outlined in Table 1. Appendix 1 provides descriptions and learning objectives for each module used in the course.

Table 1. Working Relationships in Ecosystem Management (WREM) course overview.

Time	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
8:00	Introduction	Module 3 Group dynamics and interest-based communications (group dynamics)	Module 4 Difficult conversations (anger/anger cycle)
9:00	Module 1 Ecosystem-based management (theory and application)	Interest-based communications (the role of emotions)	Disengaging from difficult conversations
10:00	Break	Break	Break
10:15	Module 2 Public participation (theory)	Conflict and how to manage it	Module 5 Interest-based negotiations (theory)
12:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
1:00	Public participation (methods)	Interest-based communications skills	Large group role play
4:00	Recap and evaluation	Recap and evaluation	Recap and evaluation

Two pilot programs were used to refine the training material. The first was held in Victoria, B.C. in June 2003 and was attended by Parks Canada staff. Based on the trainers' observations and on feedback received from the participants, the program was refined to track one case study over the three days and to include a module on group dynamics. At the same time, a local nongovernment organization provided feedback on the training design and material from the

perspective of a stakeholders' group. Only very minor changes were required as a result of this feedback.

The second pilot was held in Gananoque, Ontario in January 2004, and was attended by both Parks Canada staff and stakeholders. Based on feedback received from the participants, the material was further refined to refocus the content in the ecosystem-based management module and to increase the material in the public participation module to include stakeholder analysis and an introduction to relationships.

Training Delivery

Method for First Pilot

Eight participants from the Parks Canada Coastal B.C. Field Unit and the Western Canada Service Centre–Coastal attended the first pilot program, but one person could stay for only the first day, and another attended for only the first two days. The participants' backgrounds ranged from resource conservation to heritage communications and First Nations program management. Participants had a fairly good understanding of ecosystem-based management as most had taken the ecological integrity training.

The facilitators for this course were Bill Stephenson: Module 1 Ecosystem-based Management; Graham Dodds: Module 2 Building Relationships for Ecosystem-based Management; Alain Comeau and Jennie Sparkes: Module 3 Interest-based Communications, Building and Sustaining Relationships; Jennie Sparkes: Module 4 Difficult Conversations; and Jim Morgan (participant): Module 5 Interest-based Negotiations.

Method for Second Pilot

The second pilot had 17 participants: 14 were from Parks Canada including Pukaskwa, Georgian Bay Islands, Point Pelee, Bruce Peninsula/Fathom Five, St Lawrence Islands, the Ontario Service Centre, and the National Office. All Parks Canada participants represented either the heritage presentation (formerly interpretation) function or resource conservation. Participants from the Service Centre were management planners. Three stakeholders from the Thousand Islands and Area Residents' Association, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (Ottawa), and the Leeds County Stewardship Council also participated.

The facilitators for this course were Bill Stephenson: Module 1 Ecosystem-based Management; Graham Dodds: Module 2 Building Relationships for Ecosystem-based Management; Jennie Sparkes: Module 3 Interest-based Communications, Building and Sustaining Relationships; Module 4 Anger, Difficult Conversations; and Module 5 Interest-based Negotiations.

Training Evaluation

Two evaluations took place during the pilot programs. The first determined if the training was appropriate for the reading level of the participants, and it assessed the amount of learning that took place during the course. The level of understanding obtained about the concepts presented in the two pilots was measured using a short pre- and post-training questionnaire. The second evaluation dealt with the effectiveness of the teaching styles used and the relevance of the material presented. The end-of-day evaluations were done as team discussions and reports back to the larger group. Comments provided through these evaluations were integrated, where possible, into the next day's approach or content. Participants provided a written evaluation at the end of the three days that focused mainly on the overall applicability of the course to workplace situations.

Results and Discussion

The results of the pre- and post-training questionnaires for the first and second pilot programs are presented in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively.

First Pilot

Upon completing the three days of training, the participants had a 97% understanding of the ecosystem-based management material (Module 1; Table 2). This represented a 6% increase in understanding from the beginning of the course. The participants' understanding of interest-based communications concepts improved considerably, a +22% difference from the beginning of the course, with 68% of the questions being answered correctly (Modules 3–5; Table 2). Their understanding would have shown a 35% improvement (81% of questions answered correctly), if the question on positions vs. interests had not been presented (Module 5; Table 2). No participants correctly answered this question either at the beginning or the end of the course. The poor response to this question indicated that more time was needed to discuss the difference between interests and positions, or that the question needed to be reworded.

Second Pilot

The 14 Parks Canada participants in the second pilot group were very knowledgeable about, and experienced in, working collaboratively with others. The stakeholders provided valuable insights into what 'the other side' of the table thinks about issues/topics; similar comments were received from the stakeholders about insights provided by Parks Canada. The participation of stakeholders in this pilot enhanced dialogue and did not inhibit the delivery of material in any way. Most participants engaged actively in dialogues, activities, and questions.

Table 2. Participant average scores by question topics from the pre- and post-training questionnaires for the first Working Relationships in Ecosystem Management (WREM) pilot.

Theme	Ecosystem-based management		Interest-based communications					
Module*	Module 1: Ecosystem-based management		Module 3: Group dynamics and interest-based communications			Module 4: Difficult conversations		Module 5: Interest-based negotiations
Question topic	What are the goals of ecosystem-based management	What are the characteristics of ecosystem-based management	What are the barriers to communications	What is the role of power in communications	How to use 'I' statements in communication	How to diffuse angry confrontations peacefully	How to use 'self talk' constructively	What is the difference between positions and interests
Pre-training score	93%	89%	66%	43%	37%	73%	62%	0%
Post- training score	97%	97%	85%	75%	75%	91%	83%	0%
Difference in learning by question topic	+4%	+8%	+19%	+32%	+38%	+18%	+21%	0%
Difference in learning by theme	+6%				+22%			

*Module 2 was not tested during this pilot.

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Table 3. Participant average scores by question topics from the pre- and post-training questionnaires for the second Working Relationships in Ecosystem Management (WREM) pilot.

Theme	Ecosystem-based management		Public participation	Interest-based communications				
Module	Module 1: Ecosystem-based management		Module 2: Public participation	Module 3: Group dynamics and interest-based communications		Module 4: Difficult conversations		Module 5: Interest-based negotiations
Question topic	What is biodiversity	What are the characteristics of ecosystem-based management	What qualities do the public look for in governance structures	What is the role of power in communications	How to use 'I' statements in communications	How to diffuse angry confrontations peacefully	How to use 'self talk' constructively	What is the difference between positions and interests
Pre-training score	31%	23%	80%	78%	27%	18%	58%	47%
Post- training score	40%	28%	93%	98%	53%	91%	80%	88%
Difference in learning by question topic	+9%	+5%	+13%	+20%	+26%	+73%	+22%	+41%
Difference in learning by theme		+7%	+13%			+36%		

In marking the pre-training questionnaires, it became evident that, in general, participants who had a strong understanding of interest-based communications lacked the same level of understanding in ecosystem-based management. Conversely, participants who scored relatively well in the ecosystem-based management component often lacked an understanding of interest-based communications. Four of the Parks Canada participants in the second pilot had a much greater understanding of interest-based communications and negotiations going into the program than participants in the first pilot. This was likely because those four participants had been involved in Parks Canada's ADR pilots for training staff in interest-based negotiation (IBN) skills to enhance collaboration within the workplace culture. The high scores of the four participants who had taken the ADR-IBN training elevated the overall scores for all participants. Results of the pre-training questionnaire suggested that there was a fairly high level of IBN knowledge retention among the four participants who had received ADR-IBN training.

Comparison of the pre- and post-training questionnaire results indicated that more learning had taken place in the interest-based communications modules (Modules 3–5) and the public participation module than in the ecosystem-based management module (Table 3). This was likely because (1) the training material for the ecosystem-based management questions was not covered clearly enough for participants to answer the questions properly, or (2) the structure of one particular ecosystem-based management question was not clearly worded. There appeared to be equal levels of confusion related to the ecosystem-based management questions going into the course as leaving it. This suggests that the problem was likely related to the question format.

Additional Demand

There has been considerable interest in the WREM training course since it was piloted. Parks Canada Coastal B.C. Field Unit asked the Service Centre to create a modified version of the three-day training course that would focus solely on interest-based communications and negotiations skills. The Field Unit made this request in anticipation that all staff in parks and historic sites would receive this training, which would help them work collaboratively with their co-workers. As a result of this request, a two-day course, the Working Relationships Workshop, was developed. It focuses on working collaboratively in teams in the workplace, and will be delivered to most of the 150 staff in the Coastal B.C. Field Unit.

Conclusions

The WREM training course has proven to be very beneficial for both stakeholders and Parks Canada staff. Developing this training in-house has allowed it to be produced, piloted, and refined at a minimal cost. The estimated overall cost for designing and delivering the two pilots is approximately CDN$15,000.

Increasing demand for the training course is creating two challenges. The first relates to the availability of training facilitators who have skills, knowledge, and experience in ecosystem-based management, public participation methodologies, team building, interest-based communications, and negotiation. The second challenge is a result of requests made by other government and nongovernment organizations who wish to obtain the *Working Relationships in Ecosystem Management Facilitator's Guide* so that they can deliver the training themselves. Parks Canada is currently considering options for how to deal with such requests.

For further information about the WREM training course, contact Jennie Sparkes at (250) 654-4013 or jennie.sparkes@pc.gc.ca.

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Appendix 1. Descriptions and Learning Objectives for Each Module Used in the WREM Training Course

Introduction

Purpose: For participants to become familiar with all learners, the background for the training, and the structure of the three-day training course.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will become familiar with the other participants in the course.
- Participants will be aware of the guidelines for respectful learning.
- Participants will understand the importance of, and consent to, creating a safe learning environment.
- The participants will become familiar with the ecosystem management case study that they will be following over the three days.

Module 1: Ecosystem-based Management

*Purpose***:** For participants to have an introductory understanding of ecosystem-based management and the importance of working with others to achieve outcomes on an ecosystem scale.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will understand the link between ecosystem-based management and Parks Canada's ecological integrity mandate.
- Participants will understand the goals of ecosystem-based management.
- Participants will understand the ten dominant themes within ecosystem-based management.
- Participants will become familiar with the 'three faces of ecosystem management'.

Module 2: Public Participation

*Purpose***:** For participants to have an introductory understanding of the different types of relationships that are required for successful ecosystem management.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will understand the different types of relationships that people evolve into as they mature.
- Participants will become familiar with the types of formal relationship structures that Parks Canada uses.
- Participants will become familiar with the six-step process for public participation that leads Parks Canada processes.

Module 3: Group Dynamics and Interest-based Communications

Purpose: For participants to have an introductory understanding of how teams are formed and maintained and the communications skills and theory necessary for interest-based communications and working collaboratively within teams.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will understand how teams form.
- Participants will understand the origins of the concept of interest-based communications and be able to identify what 'interests' are.
- Participants will understand some of the traditional barriers to communications.
- Participants will understand the role emotions play in delivering and receiving messages.
- Participants will understand what conflict is and how it affects conversations.
- Participants will understand how conflict escalates.
- Participants will learn how to manage themselves in conflict situations.
- Participants will be able to identify and understand when to apply the five skills of interest-based communications: active listening, open-ended questioning, reframing, reflecting, and using 'I' language.

Module 4: Difficult Conversations

Purpose: For participants to have an introductory understanding of the communications skills and theory necessary for dealing with anger that leads to difficult conversations.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will understand what is meant by difficult conversations.
- Participants will understand what anger is and what causes it.
- Participants will gain an understanding of the anger cycle and the stages of anger development.
- Participants will learn how to disengage from conversations where the conflict or anger cannot be managed effectively at that time.

Module 5: Interest-based Negotiations

Purpose: For participants to understand the framework for structuring interest-based communications to work collaboratively with others within an ecosystem-based management context.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will understand what negotiation means and how it relates to team building.
- Participants will learn how to properly prepare for a meeting that will involve collaborative dialogue and outcomes.

- Participants will be familiar with the five-stage framework for 'negotiation' as a process structure.
- Participants will practice the use of interest-based communication skills within the negotiation framework to negotiate solutions to issues.
- Participants will discuss their learning experience.