Toolkit for Champions

Community livelihoods and snow leopard conservation

Preface

The Snow Leopard Trust and its partners have been working with local communities in the Himalayas and Central Asia to promote the conservation of the snow leopard and associated biodiversity.

Community-based conservation is founded on the belief that the conservation of biodiversity relies on local communities.

Through direct engagement and empowerment of local people, community-based conservation aims to reduce threats to biodiversity, reduce the conservation costs that local communities often incur, and find approaches where conservation and livelihoods can co-exist.

Community-based conservation requires deep engagement of field personnel, who may not feel equipped in such approaches.

This toolkit is aimed specifically at field personnel, in particular local champions. It is separated into two main parts. Note: A separate toolkit will be developed for field assistants that include an additional section explaining how to collect robust data.

- The first part describes the Snow Leopard Trust and how it works with local communities. This section may be of particular interest to **local champions**, but will be relevant to many other readers.
- The second part outlines some leadership skills to help take charge of and lead on conservation and research projects in the field. Whilst this part may be most relevant to **field coordinators**, there may be aspects that are relevant to other readers.

The Snow Leopard Trust and its partnership with local communities

Introduction to the Snow Leopard Trust

Founded in 1981, the Snow Leopard Trust is the world's leading authority on the study and protection of the endangered snow leopard and takes a holistic approach to snow leopard conservation. Known throughout the world for its beautiful fur and elusive behavior, the endangered snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*) is found in the rugged mountains of Central Asia. Snow leopards are perfectly adapted to the cold, barren landscape of their high-altitude home, but human threats have created an uncertain future for the cats. Despite a range of over 2 million km^2, there are only between 4,000 and 6,500 snow leopards left in the wild.

The Snow Leopard Trust strives to conserve the snow leopard and its mountain ecosystem through a balanced approach that considers the needs of local people and the environment. The Trust understands that we cannot protect the species without the help of the people who share its habitat. Currently the Trust works in 5 of the 12 countries in Central and South Asia where snow leopards are found. Combined, these countries are home to nearly 75% of the world's remaining snow leopards. Each country presents a unique set of challenges, but through key partnerships, we have created successful conservation programs in vital habitat areas. With staff in China, India, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and Pakistan, we strive to create sustainable conservation programs that benefit both people and wildlife alike. In these regions, we conduct on-the-ground conservation and scientific research, community involvement, conservation education and training, and advocacy for improved national policies that beneift local communities and snow leopards.

Working with local communities

The Snow Leopard Trust and its partners have been working with local communities, communities who share their land and local resources with snow leopards, for many years to promote the conservation of the snow leopard and associated biodiversity. Community based conservation approaches recognize the important role of local communities in biodiversity conservation. Through direct involvement and empowerment of local people in conservation and conflict management, and through indirect efforts such as assisting them to improve their standard of living, community-based efforts try to reduce the disproportionate burden of conservation costs that local communities most often bear, and in so doing, seek their support for conservation.

The Trust currently implements several different community-based conservation models, supported by education and awareness initiatives wherever possible. Although we refer to our programs collectively as community-based conservation efforts, they are each unique, meeting the specific needs and challenges faced by particular communities and regions, and often have different aims.

Below you will find a description of some of the current community-based conservation initiatives the Snow Leopard Trust and our community partners are implementing and their individual goals.

Collaborative Corral Improvement – Building predator proof livestock corrals with local people in order to reduce livestock depredation.

Village Managed Livestock insurance - When livestock depredation does occur, this initiative **aims at sharing and offsetting economic losses to local people, offering financial reimbursement to herders who lose livestock to predation**. Local communities establish committees, set their own norms and fee structures, and establish a protocol for dealing with livestock depredation claims as a community. If an animal is killed by a predator, the herder it belonged to can submit a claim to a committee made up of local residents and receive reimbursement for the loss. Additionally a small annual bonus is paid out from the insurance fund to the participating herder who loses the fewest animals to predation. This creates a financial incentive to prevent snow leopard access to herds by increasing herd safety and herder vigilance. The program is reducing the financial impact of snow leopard predation by giving them the means to financially compensate their fellow community members for animals lost.

Snow Leopard Enterprises – Most herders in snow leopard habitat live below poverty levels. Families can lose up to one month's income from predator attacks on livestock. Snow leopards are often killed by herders protecting their livestock. This initiative **aims at improving the social carrying capacity for predators by linking livelihood enhancement to conservation action**. In this initiative, local women sell handmade wool items that can increase their household income by up to 40% per year. SLE involves training local people to produce handicrafts that are marketed internationally. The livelihood opportunity is provided in

exchange for community support in preventing poaching in their area. A built-in reward system, where the community is entitled to a bonus on all purchases if the conservation commitment is met, creates a positive incentive for wildlife protection.

Ecosystem Health Program – **Herder families sometimes lose up to five times more livestock to disease than to snow leopard predation.** These **herding communities depend heavily on their livestock** for food and income, and even one lost animal can cause a severe economic hardship. Access to animal vaccinations was very limited, however, and there was little herders could do to prevent disease from spreading**. This initiative** promotes tolerance of predators through a snow leopard friendly livestock vaccination program in areas where communities do not have access to adequate veterinary care and aims **to increase a community's economic stability, while reducing the threats to snow leopards living nearby.**

Village Wildlife Reserves - This initiative works with local communities with an **aim to identify pastures and collaboratively curtail natural resource harvest, including livestock grazing, from selected areas on local community land to enable wildlife recovery.** This leaves more grazing land for snow leopard prey.

Feral Dog Program – this initiative works with local communities and institutions to manage the high numbers of feral dogs and their impact. Feral dogs are sterilized and cared for through recovery and village garbage management protocols established in order to humanely decrease populations of feral dogs which directly impact wildlife and livestock herds. In decreasing the feral dog populations the program reduces a direct threat to snow leopard prey and creates less economic hardship on herders who lose livestock to these packs of dogs.

Citizen Ranger Wildlife Protection Program - P**ark rangers in protected areas as well as our partner communities' work hard** to stop poachers – but their efforts too often go unrecognized. In an aim to inspire and better appreciate the work of rangers and to encourage local people to collaborate with rangers to reduce illegal hunting, this initiative financially rewards rangers and local community members who successfully stop illegal hunting.

As highlighted above, community-based conservation often involves assisting local communities in changing conservation-unfriendly behaviors, or collaboratively addressing external threats to snow leopards and biodiversity. The initiatives try to promote the ownership and accountability of natural resource use and management among local communities. The involvement of local communities in biodiversity conservation is something the Trust advocates. However, how communities are approached is as important as the initiative that is chosen. The approach we have learned over time that allows us to effectively build resilient partnerships with communities has been described in eight principals for effective community-based conservation.

Principles for community-based conservation

Eight general principles are seen as essential for effective community-based conservation programs (Figure 1).
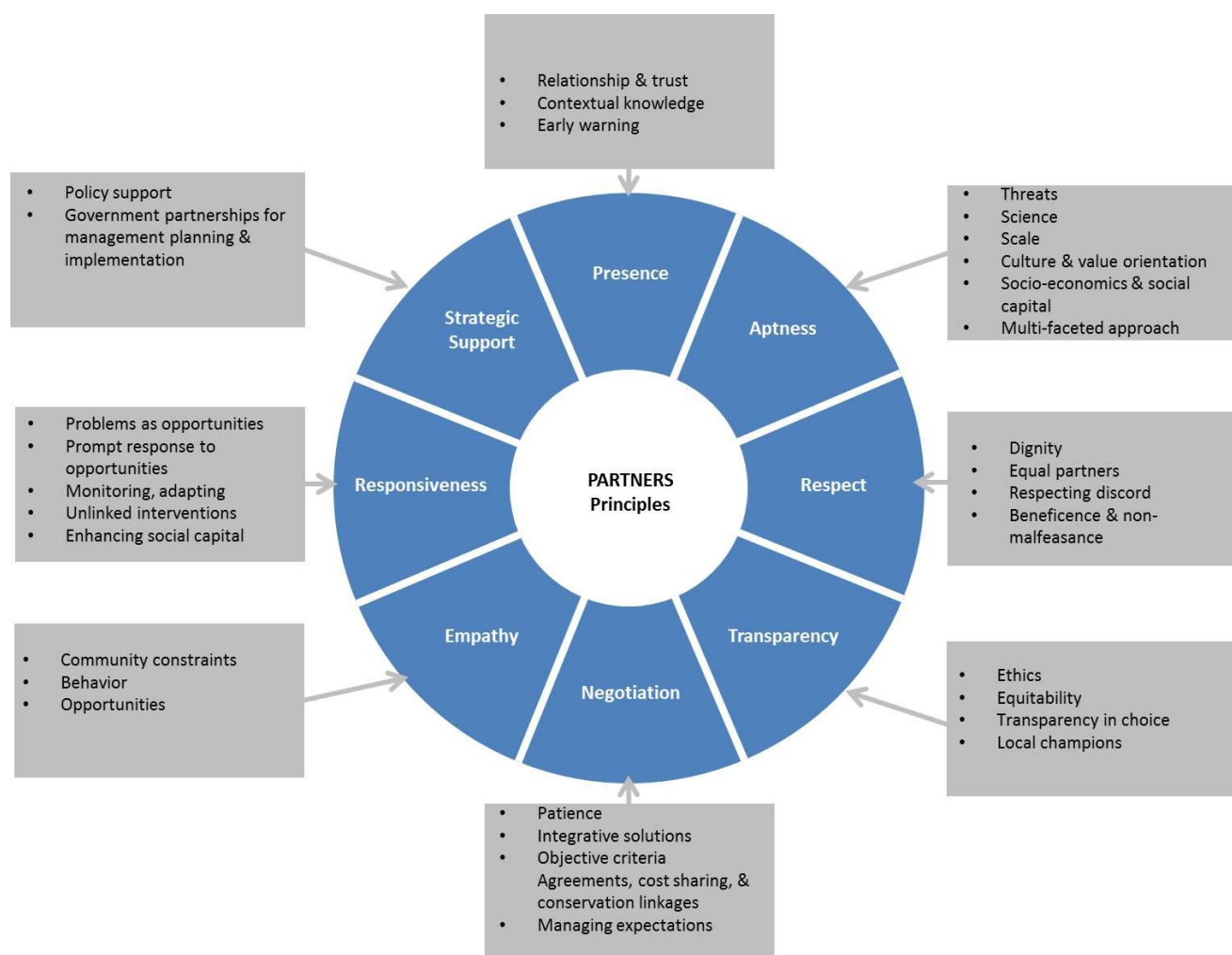

Figure 1. Eight principles for effective community-based conservation: Presence, Aptness, Respect, Transparency, Negotiations, Empathy, Responsiveness, Strategic support (or 'PARTNERS' principles).

The eight general principles include:

1) Relationship-building through the sustained and long-term *Presence* in the local community.

   Do:

   - Sustain field presence and immersion in the community
   - Build strong relationships with local people
   - Train and hire local people in the conservation team

   Don't:

   - Forget that people's emotions can be as or more important than other motives

2) The *Aptness* of specific community-based interventions.

   Do:

   - Assess rather than assume threats to biodiversity
   - Design and evaluate interventions to address specific threats
   - Design interventions that are contextually appropriate for the target community
   - Work with women and ensure adequate representation in the conservation team
   - Reach out to the majority of the community, but working with relatively small groups
   - Invest in social capital

   Don't:

   - Ignore social and cultural contexts when implementing programs
   - Focus solely on program participants forgetting to build in a role for the entire community in the intervention portfolio
   - Create new groups within the community for program operations, instead of traditional ones
   - Focus solely on community land for landscape species conservation

3) A relationship that views the community with dignity and *Respect*.

   Do:

   - Treat community members with respect
   - Seek to create an equal partnership with the community
   - Engage in open and honest communication
   - Take note of societal divisions and individual differences within the community

   Don't:

   - View local communities as recipients of aid or providers of conservation services
   - Use societal divisions and individual differences within the community to advance the conservation agenda

4) High *Transparency* in interactions with local communities with truthful and open communication regarding each other's interests, and visible equitability in program benefits to community members.

Do:

- Disclose our purpose and clearly communicating conservation goals to the community
- Reiterate our aims of beneficence and non-malfeasance
- Maintain transparency whenever making choices, such as the selection of households for a pilot intervention, or hiring of community members as program staff
- Interact with a broad set of community members, not just leaders or local program coordinators

Don't:

- Withhold information from communities, especially about potential negative impacts of conservation interventions
- Make decisions and choices without consulting the community
- Hire local champions as paid program staff

5) Integrative *Negotiations* with local communities and interventions based on formal agreements and conservation linkages.

Do:

- Employ transparent, objective criteria or fair standards in negotiations with communities
- Discuss potential conservation interventions individually with community members before formal negotiation with the community
- Involve community members in the design of interventions
- Record details and nuances of a community-based intervention through written agreements
- Include mechanisms that allow to revisiting and making changes to signed agreements
- Build in incentives and tangible stakes
- Bring third-party mediation if negotiations aren't moving forward

Don't:

- Haggle or bargain for a bigger piece of the pie
- Push the community to make urgent decisions
- Withhold information
- Walk away from the community if negotiations aren't moving forward

6) The ability to view problems, constraints and opportunities from the community's perspective with a high level of *Empathy*.

Do:

- Try to look at conservation issues from the community's perspective
- Take both rational and emotional aspects into account when making decisions
- Make the effort to increase our capability for empathy
- Assume that most community members – like most other people – are decent and intelligent

Don't:

- Forget that our own behavior can often be irrational or irresponsible
- Walk away because of perceived inaction on part of the community, rather than catalyzing action

7) The ability to adaptively improve the programs and address emerging problems and opportunities with a high level of *Responsiveness* and creativity.

Do:

- Monitor threats, interventions and impact
- Adapt and improve interventions whenever possible or necessary
- Help communities when they have urgent needs unrelated to biodiversity
- Look for ways to assist communities in biodiversity unrelated needs with interventions that are linked to biodiversity

Don't:

- Assume that threats and priorities remain stable
- Forget that problems are opportunities to improve conservation interventions
- Make promises and create expectations that one cannot keep
- Get directly involved in biodiversity-unlinked interventions if the team lacks the necessary expertise

8) *Strategic support* to increase the resilience and reach of community-based conservation efforts through partnerships with governments in management planning and implementation, and policy and legal support.

Do:

- Collaborate proactively with government officials and share expertise
- Facilitate cooperation and communication between various government sectors
- Act as a bridge between local communities and wildlife managers
- Compromise and reconcile, while being prepared to oppose the government when warranted

Don't:

- View the government as bad for community-based conservation
- Assume there is no role for the practitioner in policy formulation, management planning and implementation

Leadership and management

The roles, responsibilities and qualities of local coordinators

Local coordinators will have a number of rights and responsibilities, which should be agreed upon at the start of the coordination role, and periodically reviewed and assessed.

Generic roles and responsibilities of local coordinators will include:
- Serving as a **bridge** between the community and the conservationist
- Ensuring a transparent and equitable **distribution of opportunities or benefits** among the participating families, with support from the conservation practitioners. It is helpful to share a copy of the conservation contract with all participants so that no (perceived) bias or favoritism of local coordinators takes place.
- Continuous **interaction** (or at least once a month on average) with conservation practitioners to ensure resilience and efficiency of the program.
- Willingness to **share their experiences** about the intervention with other communities.
- Periodic **communication** with the local community in formal or informal settings to discuss any issues, or progress in the intervention.
- **Monitoring** outcomes of community engagement.

Qualities of the field coordinators include:

- **Empathy** (see above) –being able to put oneself in the place of others to better understand and acknowledge their views, values and behaviors.
- **Tolerance** in terms of being able to understand different perspectives and balance the needs of communities as well as conservation.
- **Trustworthiness** so that both conservation practitioners and the local community feel they can be honest and open about their concerns, issues and behaviors.

- **Knowledge of the local environment** – not only knowledge about the biology of the system but also knowledge about the community, its dynamics, underlying socio-economic conditions.
- **Flexibility and innovation**. A useful attribute for field coordinators is the ability to be innovative in problem-solving, to think outside the box and come up with options that can be considered by the local community. Much of this will rely on their knowledge of the local environment, their attentiveness and openness and their empathy. Such creativity and flexibility can often be a result of experience.
- **Clarity** about their role, how interventions work and what the process can entail.
- **Self-reflection.** It is essential for local coordinators to be able to reflect on what they are doing, how they are doing it and learn lessons from each experience. This will not only help avoid repeating mistakes, but improve the way in which local coordinators interact with communities.

Many of the roles outlined above will require **leadership and management skills** to take charge of and lead conservation and research projects in the field. This sections outlines some useful skills and training exercises related to leadership and management.

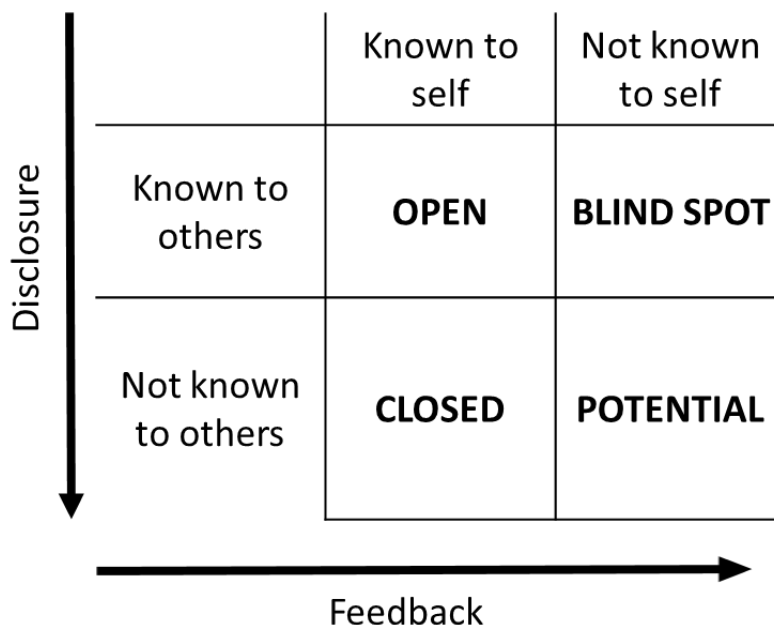Three aspects are key to effective leadership and management.

- The first is understanding oneself and how others perceive you.
- The second is effective communication.
- The third is nurturing the potential of others.

Each of these is explored in turn in this section.

Understanding oneself

One of the most important aspects in leadership and management is understanding ourselves and others. So, how people behave and why. How you behave will affect the impact you have on others, both personally and professionally. Understanding this will therefore help in developing any leadership skills.

The Johari window (below), developed by psychologists Joseph Luft and Harry Maine, is useful to help understand how aware others are of us, and how aware we are of ourselves.

	Known to self	Not known to self
Known to others	**OPEN**	**BLIND SPOT**
Not known to others	**CLOSED**	**POTENTIAL**

Disclosure (vertical axis) — Feedback (horizontal axis)

The windows can be explained in the following way:

Open: Things I know about myself and others know too. The more open I am, the bigger this window. The window will grow the more I disclose about myself, and the more people know me.

Closed: Things I know about myself which you don't. Either I have made a decision to not tell you, or the situation has not yet arisen for me to tell you.

Blind spot: Things you know about me that I am unaware of. I may be unapproachable or unable to handle the information about myself. I may be blind to my strengths as well as weaknesses, until I am told.

Potential: Things that neither you nor I know about myself. For example, neither you nor I will know whether I am good at something I have never tried doing before.

It is useful to be aware of ourselves and our behaviors, as well as our strengths and weaknesses, when we interact with others. Another useful exercise is to look at how we impact on others (training exercise 1), and how we naturally lead (see training exercise 2 below).

Do you know how you impact on others?

If you know how, you may be able to understand why things may be going right or wrong. How do others see you? Ask yourself these questions:

- What impact do I have?
- How do I affect you?
- How do I come across?
- What results am I getting?

Our impact is a result of our behaviors:

- The way we communicate: tone, language, method
- Body language
- Our listening style
- Our personal style

What happens if we make the wrong impact? What happens if we make the right impact?

Training exercise 1:

Note some examples of when you have experiences making the right and/or wrong impact. An example of a negative behavior would be to be very snappy to someone asking for advice or help because you are very busy at work. A negative long-term impact of that behavior would be that the other person might not approach you anymore for fear of being dismissed again. An example of a positive behavior would be to listen attentively to others, asking relevant questions, being very interested in their answers. The positive impact from that behavior will be that people will be more likely to talk to you in the future. Share your insights and conclusions with others.

The impact we make results from our behaviors – but these are really the tip of the iceberg in terms of what people see. It is important to remember that much of this behavior is influenced by values, beliefs, emotions and preferences.

Behaviour

Values
Beliefs
Emotions
Preferences
etc
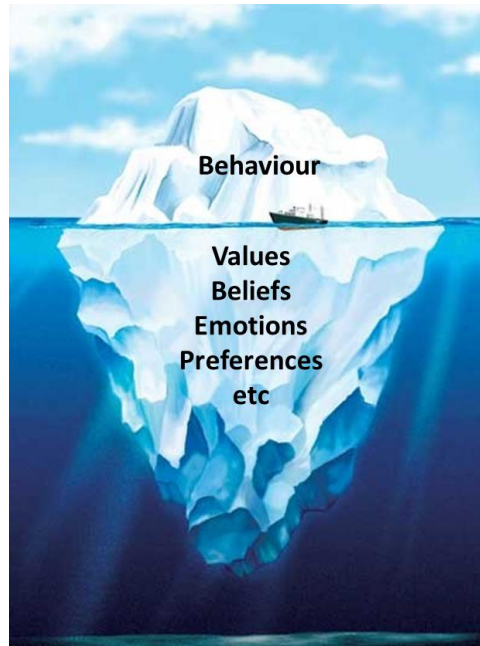
Training exercise 2: Self-reflection on leadership styles

There are many styles of leadership, but a common one is called "situational leadership", developed by Ken Blanchard and Paul Hersey. It means that people will have different levels of competencies and commitment, depending on the task they need to perform. There are four leadership styles.

Directing or Telling: Under this style, people are told what to do and there is little room for maneuver.

Coaching or Selling: This style involves some direction, but the other person will be asked for input before the leader makes a decision.

Supporting or Participating: The leader shares ideas and will facilitate decision-making with others.

Delegating: The leader provides very little support or direction, handing over responsibility to others.

Try and identify which is your natural leadership style. To be effective, we need to be able to use all styles flexibly and appropriately. Think of situations where it would be appropriate to use each leadership style.

Effective communication

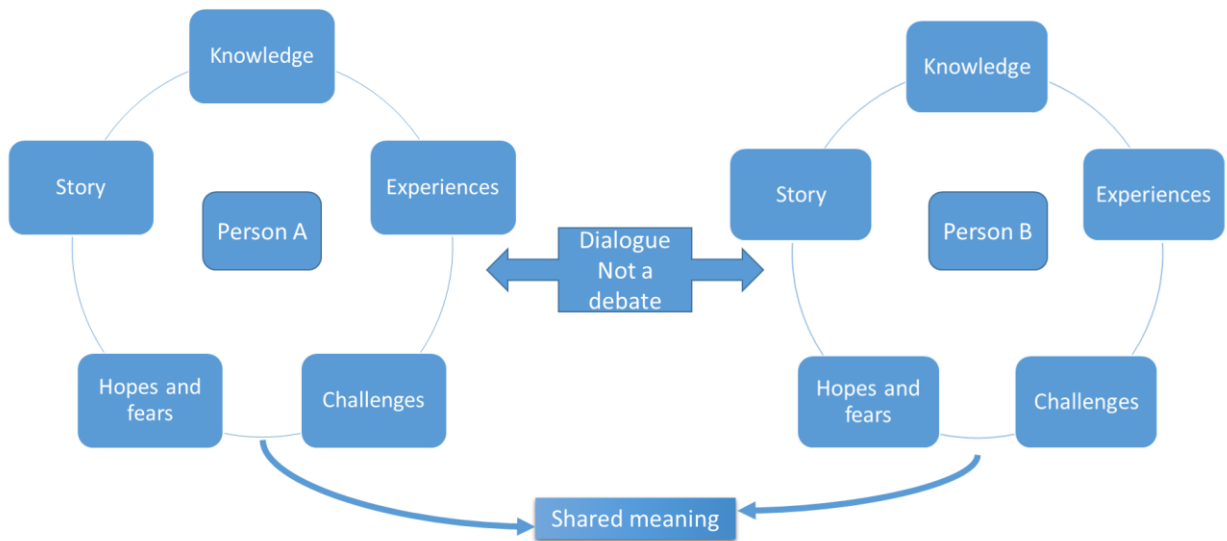Communication is perhaps the most important aspect of leadership and management.

Figure 2. How communication works

Certain elements are important in communication. The first is to learn to really listen to others. Such **active listening** requires practice, skill and hard work. Active listening requires asking good questions, encouraging respondents, being interested in what they are saying, and not focusing on one's own answers. In active listening, one usually avoids questions that will only require a yes or no answer as these questions can lead people to feel threatened and go on the defensive or worse aggressive. Ultimately this will reduce the information received and be negative in terms of relationship-building. To gain as much information on the perceptions of the communities in terms of the problems to be addressed, and gain an understanding of the interests of the communities, **open questions** are most useful. Example of open-ended questions may include:

- What is the background to this situation? The situation in question will need to be ascertained for each community, but it is best generally to keep this question as neutral as possible, for example avoiding the term "conflict" or other words with possible negative connotations.
- What are the main issues that are of concern to you, and/or the community? This is a useful question as it aims to uncover some of the shared concerns and values of the community.
- Who is involved in this situation? This question could be useful to ascertain who may be involved in the negotiation.
- How could this situation be resolved? This is opening up the discussion to start exploring joint solutions through potential intervention ideas.
- How could we contribute? This could be useful to start communicating what community-based conservation is, why it relies on the long-term support of communities, the role of the field coordinator, the institutions, how interventions work and what the process can entail. It is important to be completely honest, clear and open about what community-based conservation can and cannot do.

It is often best to avoid asking questions that start with **why**, as these can be perceived as needing justification, and can, again, put people on the defensive.

Barriers to good listening:

- Evaluating or judging what is being said to you
- Focusing on preparing your reply rather than listening attentively
- Selective hearing, or hearing what you want to hear
- Being in a hurry or rushing discussions
- Interrupting
- Wanting to put your point of view or your personal experience forward
- Disagreeing with the other person
- Closed body language
- Seeing the person as different or unequal to you

It is absolutely key in these dialogues to ensure that respondents have **the time to respond**. Silences, encouraging nods, eye contact and open posture are all very useful to enable respondents to think issues through and respond in their own words and time. It is also important to be attentive to non-verbal messages such as body language, not only respondents' but also one's own. While it easy to disguise a message in verbal communication, it is much more difficult to do so in non-verbal communication.

Respondents must feel that their **concerns and interests have been heard and acknowledged**. In addition to acknowledgement of people's concerns and interests, **active listening** can also help respondents better understand their concerns and interests. All these can combine to create a greater sense of **ownership** in the process, which will be key to ensuring that communities can design and implement interventions based on negotiations.

Training exercise 3: Active listening

Within groups of three, where one is the listener, one is a participant and one is the observer, ask the participant to outline a specific issue (this can be anything at all: what you are reading, a nice meal you have eaten, your favorite place etc.). The role of the listener is to listen *actively*, using open questions; checking assumptions; challenging in a constructive manner; rephrasing; summarizing. The observer has an important role in observing the interaction (including the body language of both listener and participant) and then constructively providing constructive feedback to the listener. Once each individual in the groups has had the chance to be listener, participant and observer, discuss as a group the challenges of active listening and lessons learned. If you cannot do this as a group of three, try practicing open questions; checking assumptions; challenging in a constructive manner; rephrasing; summarizing, whenever you can.

Another element to communication is to face **challenging conversations**. A challenging conversation is one where stakes are high (there are consequences), opinions differ and emotions are involved.

Four steps to leading a challenging conversation

1. **Prepare** – Put yourself in the best frame of mind, be clear about what you want to achieve and how you will go about it.
2. **Create your opening statement** – Your opening statement sets the tone for the conversation. You need to state your position clearly and be brief.
3. **Have a dialogue** – After your opening statement there needs to be a dialogue with active listening and talking leading to positive outcomes.
4. **Resolve** – Bring the discussion to a close with clear, concrete next steps agreed by both parties.

Another key issue to communication is **positive language**. The language we use can have a direct impact on the positivity or negativity of a situation. The more positive a situation, the more enthusiasm and creativity will be generated. Negative situation will lead to lack of energy or enthusiasm, and low creativity. So we need to switch to more positive language. The problem is that we often use negative language without even thinking about it, for example using "but" or "however" rather than "and". For an example of turning a negative into a positive:

"Thank you for that comment, but I think it should be done differently" – this is quite negative in terms of the other feeling that their contribution was useless. This could affect their confidence, the trust they have in you, and their future willingness to engage.

The sentence could be turned into a positive framing: "Thank you for that comment, and perhaps we could also include…" or "I was very interested in your comment and thought we could discuss other options". These acknowledge the other's ideas, and allow for more ideas to come into a hopefully more constructive the discussion. They do not affect the confidence of the other, and allow for future creativity.

Training exercise 4: Challenging conversations

Get into groups of three, where one take on the role of the field coordinator, one takes the role of a herder and the third is the observer. The situation is as follows: The herder is angry about the impact of snow leopards on his livestock and worried about the repercussions on his income and his family's wellbeing. He wants to talk about this to the field coordinator.

The person who has the role of field coordinator should take 5-10 minutes to prepare for this challenging conversation by answering the following questions:

Step 1: Prepare – key questions to answer:

- ➢ What is it you really need to deal with? What is the key issue here?
- ➢ How are you currently feeling about the issue and the individual involved?
- ➢ If you get what you want from the conversation, what will the consequences be? In the short and long term? What is at stake for you and for others?
- ➢ What might the other person's goals, thoughts and feelings be here? How will you take these into account?
- ➢ What do you really want from this conversation?
- ➢ How do you need to behave if this is what you really want?

Step 2: Preparing your opening statement – key questions to answer:

- ➢ Acknowledge your shared concern at the issue raised
- ➢ State your wish to resolve the issue
- ➢ Ask questions about the problem, and what has been done so far to address it: how many livestock have been lost, are they all lost due to snow leopards, what other causes have been identified etc
- ➢ Invite responses.

Once the field coordinator has put the opening statement to the herder and started a dialogue to understand the deeper issues at stake, some mutual understanding can start taking place. The observer needs to observe the interaction and feedback to the field coordinator on what was good, what could be done better, what worked well etc. The herder can also feedback in terms of what he/she felt worked well, or not so well. If there is time, allow all in the group to have a go at each role.

Nurturing potential

Most of these qualities will rely on an ability to nurture the potential of others, with the aim of inspiring, motivating and influencing them.

The GROW model was first used in sports coaching, but is now often used to bring out the best in people in a variety of settings. It works in the following way:

The GROW model of coaching

Establishing the **G**oal

- What is the goal of the discussion, activity etc?
- What do you want to achieve?
- When do you want to achieve it by?
- Is it an end goal, or an interim goal?

Check the **R**eality

- What is happening now?
- What have you done about this so far?
- What results did that produce?
- What did you learn from that?
- What would you do differently now?

Consider all **O**ptions

- What options do you have?
- What else could you do?
- What if …? (Coach may suggest other options and possibilities)

Confirm the **W**ill to act

- What are you going to do as a result of our discussion?
- When are you going to do it?
- Will this meet your goal?
- What obstacles will you face?
- How will you overcome them?
- What support will you need?

Training exercise 5: Sit down in pairs, and think of a problem. One can be the coach and the other the learner. The coach can use the questions above to help the learner. The coach will need to listen actively and facilitate the thinking of the learner through open questions (see above) – but not offer their solutions to the learner. The objective is to enable the learner to resolve the situation themselves.