Using a Strategic Choice Matrix to Communicate the Role of Human Dimensions in Agency Adaptation and Transformation

Daniel J. Decker
Professor and Director
Human Dimensions Research Unit
Cornell University

Ann B. Forstchen
Human Dimensions Coordinator
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
F&W agency transformation is topic of professional discussion at national level
What’s the core message?

• Transformation will either be done to you or by you (i.e., as a purposeful organizational effort to provide strategic direction to change)

What’s indicated?

• Strategic change requires adaptive capacity

• Adaptive capacity for strategic change requires social science insight and effective stakeholder engagement (i.e., HD)
What is transformative change?

- A major or substantial change in an organization’s...
  - *Goals*: domain addressed by agency
  - *Activities*: products and services
  - *Boundaries*: who is considered a stakeholder
How does transformative change occur?

- **Involuntary, Exogenous Pressures, Environmental Determinism**

- **Voluntary, Internally Driven, Strategic Choice**
  - Vision
  - Adaptive leadership
  - Strategy
  - Knowledge to inform leaders in strategy development and implementation → HD insight!
What is needed to enable organizational adaptation that leads to transformation?

• Ability to understand and predict changing stakeholder interests.

• Monitor factors that affect stakeholder attitudes and behaviors.

• HD inquiry and stakeholder engagement processes that lead to HD integration in policy and management decision making.
These enablers of strategic change all fall in the realm of human dimensions!

• HD specialists have a unique opportunity and particular responsibility to help F&W agencies respond to change pressures.

• Not all senior and mid-level agency leaders will intuitively see the HD role, so it is our job to articulate how HD can help.

• We present one way to think about that task.
Range of responses of State F&W Agencies to pressures to change:

Rigid $\leftrightarrow$ Adaptable

- **Rigidity** $\rightarrow$ Resist, Retrench, Decline $\rightarrow$ *Be Replaced*
- **Adaptability** $\rightarrow$ Analyze, Strategic Choice, Transform $\rightarrow$ *Retain Relevance*
How will the future of State F&W Agencies be determined?

Fate, Choice or Guided Combination?
Environmental Determinism or Strategic Choice?

• False dichotomy! – both are at work in an atmosphere of internally and externally recognized need to change.
Environmental Determinism or and Strategic Choice

- Adaptive F&W agency leaders:
  - assess the direction and impacts of exogenous forces on the organization (environmental determinism) and
  - evaluate the potential and costs of creating a desired future (strategic choice).
Role of HD specialist

• Communicate the urgency

• Articulate contributions of HD to capacity of agency to adapt and transform strategically

• Demonstrate the benefits of HD inquiry and effective SH engagement

• Advise leader(s) during change efforts

• Formative evaluation of change outcomes
Communicate the urgency

• Conceptualizing organizational adaptation may help in communicating urgency

• Organizational Adaptation: Strategic Choice and Environmental Determinism (Hrebiniak and Joyce, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Sep., 1985), 336-349.)
## Strategic Choice and Environmental Determinism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Choice</th>
<th>Environmental Determinism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>A. Strategic Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>C. Undifferentiated Choice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Environmental Determinism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Choice</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **A. Strategic Choice** | - Maximum choice  
- Adaptation by agency design  
- *Agency seldom has this freedom*  
- *Has legal mandate and is accountable*  
- Political realities | **B. Constrained Strategic Choice** |  
- Choice within mandate  
- Adaptation by design within constraints  
- *Environmental (endogenous) influences can be modified* |
| **C. Undifferentiated Choice** | - Incremental choice  
- Adaptation by chance  
- This mode equates to being *adrift* and therefore likely to become *irrelevant* → “*wink out*” or be cut out | **D. Natural Selection** |  
- Minimum choice  
- Adapt (react) or “*wink out*” to be replaced by something different |
## Translation of Concepts Applied to F&W Agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Choice</th>
<th>Environmental Determinism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
<td>A. Strategic Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Deluded Sense of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independence”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td>B. Constrained Strategic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Proactive/Responsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agent of F&amp;W Trust”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
<td>C. Undifferentiated Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Irrelevant, Vestigial,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political Target”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td>D. Natural Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Reactionary Victim”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Crux of the “urgency” argument based on strategic choice matrix:

- If you accept that independence from exogenous pressures is not possible for a public trust resource management agency, then you have 3 options:
  - Accept eventual irrelevance
  - Assume posture of “victim” → irrelevance
  - Proactively attempt to strategically guide change, which takes time → urgency to act
Articulate contributions of HD inquiry to capacity of agency to adapt and transform strategically

- Reveals diversity of SH needs and interests (trends, current and likely future), preferences, impacts sought, expectations of agency, etc.
- Improves stakeholder engagement by having data to inform stakeholder deliberations
- Improves decisions by replacing intuition about SHs with systematically acquired data
Demonstrate the benefits of HD inquiry and effective SH engagement

- Get case studies/evaluations of HD use in change efforts of other agencies in hands of leaders in your agency
- Put agency leaders in touch with individuals from other states who have used HD effectively and successfully
Available from Organization of Wildlife Planners
Advise leader(s) during change efforts

• HD specialists (internal or external) can help agency leaders interpret HD data and apply it during change process

• HD specialists can help anticipate and prioritize HD information needs that may require inquiry
Formative evaluation of change outcomes

- Given adaptability is an ongoing need for an agency during this period of rapid environmental and social change →
- a planned, systematic formative evaluation effort should be part of the change strategy
- HD expertise (theory & techniques) needed.
Concluding comment

- **Interventionist** — taking action with a purpose to fix or improve something—providing guidance

- **Risky business** — lots *could* go wrong, but lots likely *will* go wrong without solid HD insight guiding the ongoing changes that agencies inevitably will be experiencing
THANK YOU!