Improving the *practice* of conservation . . .

. . . by improving the *management* of conservation.

Summary Report to CMP

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Introduction

Report outline

This report summarises key findings from my Fulbright project, which looked at how organisations are using the Open Standards, and specifically at how they manage their conservation work.

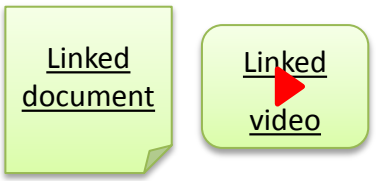
The insights have been drawn from -

- Detailed case studies with 4 organisations - Puget Sound Partnership, EcoLogic Development Fund, International Crane Foundation, and Nature Conservancy Canada. This included discussions with leadership teams, fundraisers, finance managers, and HR managers, in addition to the conservation practitioners.
- Conversations with practitioners and systems people who have experience or interest in using Open Standards and/or Miradi in an organisational context – including FOS, JGI, Asian Species Partnership, IFAW, MI, WildTeam, several WWF groups, several TNC chapters, and students at Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey.
- Conversations with several academics about change management.
- Conversations with several funders of conservation programs.

The results are summarised in a theory of change which is outlined over the following pages.

Several detailed reports have been produced during the study, aiming to help the "integrators" (M&E folks) in the case study organisations. These documents are available in a Toolkit, and are summarised in a Study of Practices.

Within this summary report, links to short videos and documents in the toolkit are shown as -



Contents

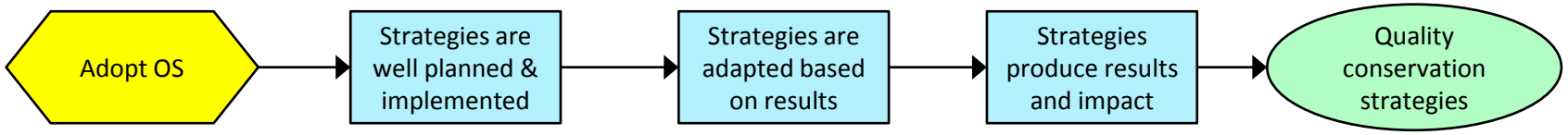
At this stage, the intended audience is limited to CMP members; I'm seeking feedback on the materials so that I can make updates to ensure they are useful resources for people involved in managing conservation projects.

If you're short on time, just read the headings. If you want more detail, read the text. If you can't sleep at night, dip into the documents and videos.

Please note a few caveats -

- the report's findings are focussed primarily on **small-to-medium sized organisations**, recognising that larger organisations deal with different challenges and levels of capacity, while people running just a single project may not have broader integration needs.
- All of the opinions are my own, and do not represent the views or situations within any one organisation.
- The study aimed to identify areas for improvement, and consequently the report focusses on "issues". Sadly, it glosses over all the wonderful things that are happening out there.

Adoption of the Open Standards is not a decision for practitioners alone



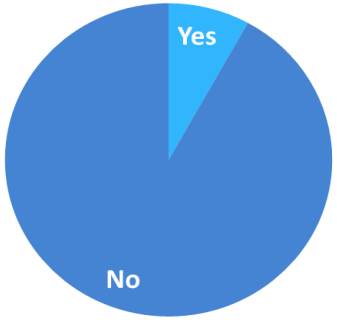
The Adoption theory of change is generally well understood:- teams using the Open Standards are more likely to -

- develop strategies that are well planned, and well implemented,
- adapt those strategies based on the results achieved relative to those expected, and
- ultimately produce results and impact through those strategies.

The key barriers to Adoption are not specific to Open Standards

The recent CMP-CCNet Evaluation listed over 80 barriers to adoption, as identified by *practitioners.* Analysis of the barriers indicates that most barriers exist in any major organisational change program rather than being specific to adoption of the Open Standards; and that key actions to address the barriers should focus on understanding perceptions, and improving guidance.

Is the barrier unique to Open Standards?



To reduce the barrier, action should be focused on . . .

Leaders and support staff are keen to improve performance

Discussions with organisation leaders and support staff (fundraisers, finance managers, HR managers) gave insight to some of these perceptions. In summary –

Leaders and support staff -

- have low awareness of OS, or of the broader business benefits offered by OS *("isn't it just something that planners use?")*
- Interest increases significantly when business benefits are demonstrated *("this would make my life a whole lot easier")*
- Leaders are reluctant to "mandate" changes to practices, and prefer to respond to a groundswell for change.

Practitioners -

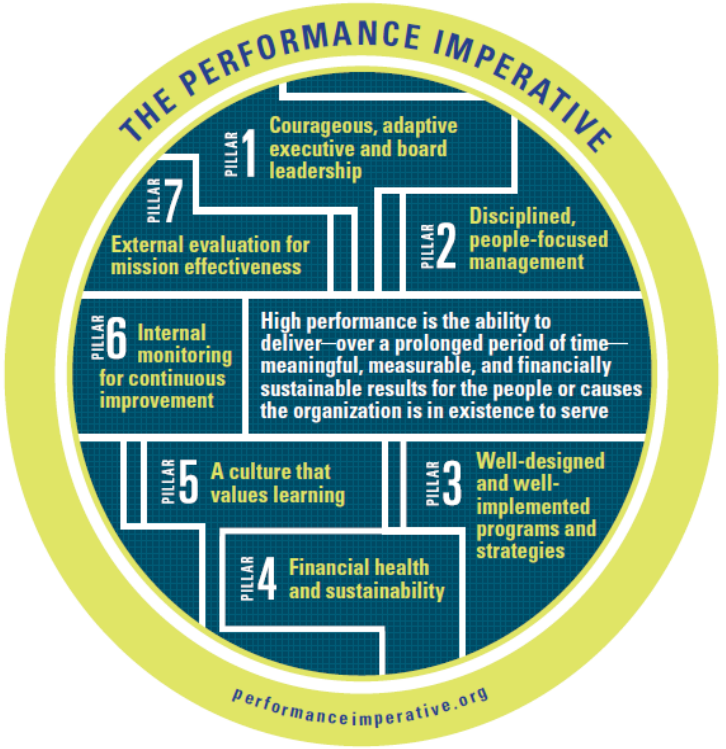
- are highly committed to their work, and generally too busy / too under-resourced to contemplate change
- many of the benefits of OS flow to others (the "greater good") so there is low incentive to change
- hence practitioners alone are unlikely to generate a groundswell for change that leaders could respond to

One way to break through this gridlock is to demonstrate the broader business benefits offered by OS, particularly showing how it can lead to improved business performance.

Open Standards sits neatly within business performance frameworks

Positioning OS within business performance and reporting frameworks shows how adoption of OS can help to improve broader organisation performance.

- A number of business performance & reporting frameworks were reviewed. These all define the high-performance characteristics that leaders aspire to, and outline various paths to achieve them.
- OS concepts support many of these characteristics, such as a clear theory of change, data-informed decisions, budgets aligned to results rather than actions, measuring what matters, and regular evaluation of performance.
- Using such frameworks, OS can be demonstrated as a 'means' to an 'ends' that is higher organisational performance, in addition to its key 'ends' of better conservation.
- One framework in current favour is The Performance Imperative
  - This was initially developed by Venture Philanthropy Partners, Bridgespan, Guidestar, and leaders from a range of social sector and philanthropic organisations. Around 100 CEOs and leaders have "signed up" as ambassadors
  - The model identifies 7 Pillars of high performance, and a number of characteristics within each (90 in all).
  - Analysis of the framework shows that Open Standards – fully adopted and operationalised – contributes to over half of the organisation-wide characteristics of high-performance.
- Other performance frameworks analysed include several from Bridgespan, the "Good to Great" leaders guide, the UK's "Value for Money" model, and several external reporting frameworks.
- These provide a business-language for communicating the benefits of OS, which may help build greater awareness at leadership levels.



Linked document

Click here for video

Open Standards products inform organisational decision-making

Developing illustrative dashboards will demonstrate the value of OS information.

Many discussions with leaders and support staff highlighted the need for summarised, insightful project information to feed organisational decision-making processes.

These discussions helped to identify some of the key types of questions that need to be answered, firstly at the project / program level, and also at the portfolio level (illustrated in this table).

Use of the Open Standards develops information that helps to answer these types of questions, positioning it as something of broader use beyond "*just something that planners use*".

Delivering this type of information through a sample dashboard puts OS project information into a business context, demonstrating the benefits of consistent, systematised, up-to-date project information and helping to build the case for adoption.

Linked document p 12

Examples of Key Management Decisions at Portfolio level	Supporting Information from Open Standards (*and other systems)*
Setting Strategic direction - Where and how can we make the greatest impact, consistent with our mission	(*Spatial analysis of biodiversity information to identify geographic priorities; market analysis of conservation pressures to identify thematic priorities; stakeholder analysis to identify gaps / overlaps / opportunities)*
Setting / Reviewing priorities - Of our priority targets (species, habitats, locations), which are getting healthier, or not, and why? - Do our partners have the capacity to deliver their commitments? - Of our existing investments, which should continue, be expanded, be contracted? - What new investments should we make?	- Roll up of like-targets (via taxonomy), their viability and trend over time relative to expectations - - Program results obtained (progress on Goals & Objectives), and expected, relative to investment needs - Program & Project proposals (Goals, theory of change, impact measures, total investment required)
Resourcing the work - What financial resources do we need to meet investments currently being made or planned, in all or parts of the portfolio? • How are we progressing towards meeting these needs? - What human resources do we need to meet investments currently being made or planned? • How are we progressing towards meeting these needs?	- Roll-up of conservation program budgets into (*Financial Plan)* • *(Fundraising plan and progress against targets)* - Roll-up of conservation program assignments (numbers, roles ,competencies) into broad (*Workforce Plan*) • *(Workforce plan and progress against targets)*
Achieving & Communicating Impact - For our priority targets (species, habitats, locations), what work are we doing, with whom, for what ends, and at what cost? - Are our existing investments having an impact? - What's the "elevator pitch" on the impact from each of our key programs?	- Roll up of like-targets (via taxonomy), related theory of change, partners and roles, Goals, budget - Program results obtained (progress on Goals & Objectives) relative to expectations - Program progress statement (drillable to detailed measures)

Managing a change process presents the greatest hurdle

Change is difficult in all organisations, but particularly so in cause-driven organisations

Adoption of the Open Standards is not a simple or mechanical process – it requires people to change their practices. As such, adoption needs to be primarily managed as a culture change process, not simply as a process or technology implementation exercise.

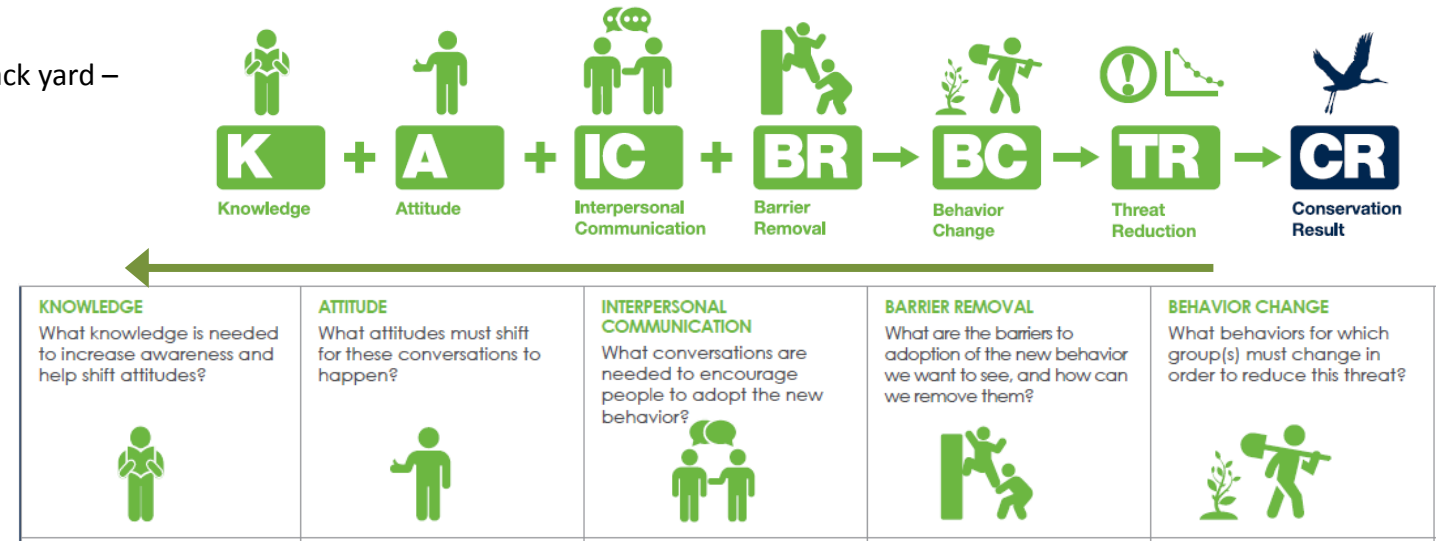
Most of the published change management literature relates to commercial organisations, and has limited applicability in cause-driven organisations where people are motivated by deep personal commitment. One possible exception, well known in business circles, is the Kotter 8-step model (shown at right) which pays particular attention to empowering people to take action, and removing the barriers. It does, however, assume that the change is driven by organisation leadership, which is often not the starting point in projects trying to adopt OS.

Discussions with HR managers and other advisors highlighted the differences between commercial and cause-driven organisation, and the need for appealing to values, not facts, as the basis for encouraging behaviour change. They advised seeking guidance from areas of social marketing and behavioural economics.

A sound guide is available in CMP's own back yard – the theory of change used by Rare.

Many OS adoption efforts have started by communicating Knowledge, and expecting behaviour change to occur. The Rare approach works backwards, thinking through the behaviour change required, identifying and removing the barriers, with Knowledge as the last step.

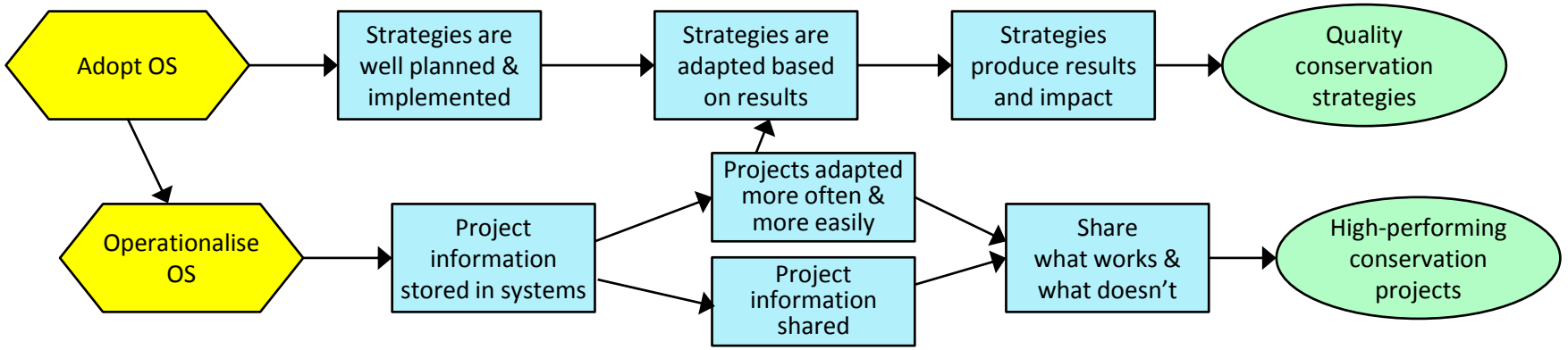
"Rare believes people will change their behaviour when they understand the benefits of a new behaviour and the barriers to its adoption are removed"



Linked document

“Operationalisation” sets OS apart from other adaptive management processes

“Operationalising” generally means putting processes and standard practices into broad use, fully exploiting all key features.



This theory of change suggests that , once organisations fully adopt and operationalise Open Standards strategies and projects, then -

- Information about projects will be stored in accessible systems, rather than as isolated or static documents
- Information is more easily accessed and updated, and so it becomes easier to make regular tweaks to adapt projects based on results
- and it’s easier to share project information because it is accessible through systems and consistently codified
- which in turn enables the shared learning that allows practitioners around the world learn what’s working and what’s not
- which over time leads to better performing conservation projects

Systems support sets OS apart from other processes

The ability to Operationalise projects is a key differentiator between OS and other Adaptive Management processes. All AM processes describe how to develop projects, but only OS provides structures that allow project information to be codified and stored in systems that allow sharing. Both of these features allow projects to be efficiently implemented and adapted, and learnings to be widely shared.

One barrier to Operationalisation is lack of guidance . . .

As noted in the Evaluation *“not all steps in the cycle are used, and generally there is a sharp attenuation after the planning stages.”*

Many practitioners don’t use the OS tools (Miradi & Miradi Share), or don’t leverage the information-management capabilities of the tools. Even when the tools are used in the initial Planning stages, people often revert to other, simpler, tools like documents and spreadsheets to manage Implementation. This breaks the connection between Plan and Implementation, making it very difficult to get the adaptive management cycle turning efficiently.

One reason is the lack of training and guidance materials for the later stages of the OS process, and for its supporting tools.

Number of pages within Open Standards v3

. . . but perceptions about technology are a bigger barrier . . .

Operationalisation is constrained by insufficient investment in technology

Perceptions on the role of technology are constraining Operationalisation

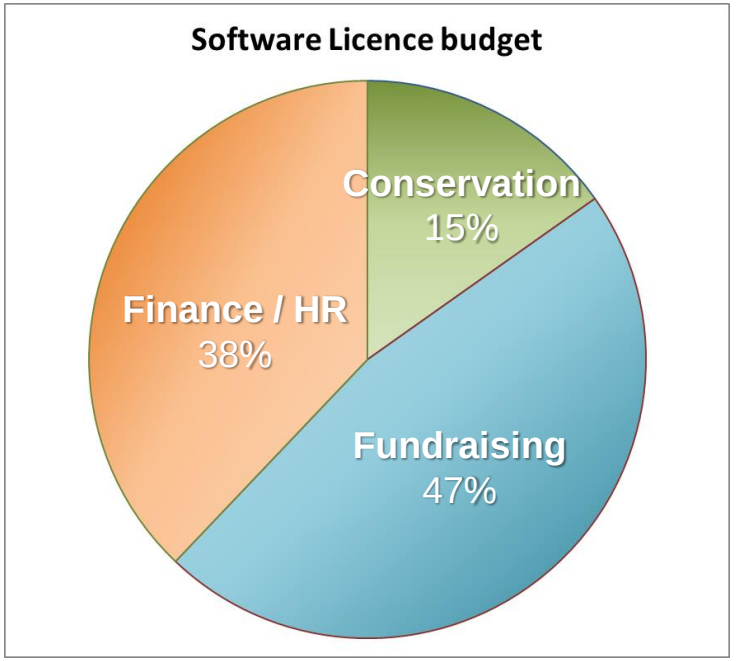
Some commonly-heard perceptions are constraining the use and growth of technology -

- Technology is often seen as something for specialists rather than for use by the broader team (eg a GIS specialist develops maps for the team).
- Many practitioners are time-poor, reluctant to change practices or learn new systems, find the OS systems difficult to learn, and consequently prefer to continue defining their projects in static documents rather that entering data into the OS systems
- There is a very low awareness of the benefits that flow from systematised information.
- Many practitioners state that "software should be free" and are reluctant to pay for software licences

This contrasts with other areas of organisations (e.g. finance, fundraising), where technology is seen as necessary to support efficient operations, and people are expected to use the systems (and are supplied with adequate training and support).

- A small survey revealed that less that 15% of total software licence budgets went to conservation (and most was for GIS licences), despite this being the core business.

These perceptions limit the funding available to continue improving the OS systems.



There is a need to lift understanding of the critical role of systematised conservation project information. It's probably OK to manually manage small projects involving just a few people; all other projects require sharing of information within and beyond the project team; this information needs to be systematised if it is to be shared efficiently.

Further technology investments are required to simplify Operationalisation

The current OS tools – Miradi and Miradi Share – provide much of the required support to operationalise projects, but need some additions and improvements. Some user requirements have been collected during the case studies, with key needs being -

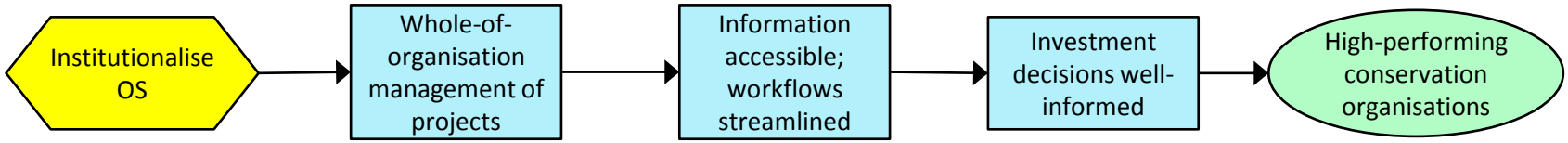
- Improved usability in terms of the user-interface, guidance and training opportunities.
- Improved reporting capabilities (people are reluctant to start putting information into systems if they cant see an easy way to get quality reports out)
- Relatively simple improvements to support projects going full-cycle
- Additional elements to fully support all products defined in the Open Standards

Conservation systems p 7-9

Operation-alising OS

“Institutionalisation” of OS can improve business performance

Institutionalisation means the OS has become standard practice, all conservation project information is stored in systems, and the information is shared with people and systems supporting other business processes such as fundraising, financial management and people management.



This theory of change suggests that, once organisations adopt & operationalise OS projects, and “institutionalise” the conservation process by integrating it with other business processes, then -

- all parts of the organisation understand the common language around conservation projects and are routinely involved in their development, implementation and management
- people in different parts of the organisation have easy access to project information. For example - budgets are built for results-chains in Miradi and flow through to the finance system, rather than being re-created separately; Fundraisers have easy access to project information to see what funding is needed, and how funded work is progressing; and project objectives inform individual and team performance plans.
- This easy access to information streamlines the workflows across the organisation, removing much of the current manual re-entry, re-work and mis-communications between areas
- Which leads to investment decisions being better informed – people can see the resources required by all projects and programs alongside the results they aim to achieve, can routinely know how these are progressing, and so are better informed to make investment / reinvestment / de-investment decisions
- This combination of efficiency and effectiveness leads to high performance at the organisational level.

Steps towards institutionalisation can build the case for adoption and operationalisation

While Institutionalisation builds on the previous two stages, an early awareness of its potential benefits can help to build the initial case for adoption of OS. During the case studies, fundraisers readily recognised the benefits to their workflows from having easy access to consistent, up-to-date, quality information about conservation projects. Finance staff also generally saw these potential benefits, but are wary of the workload involved in any transition.

There are two key barriers to Institutionalisation -

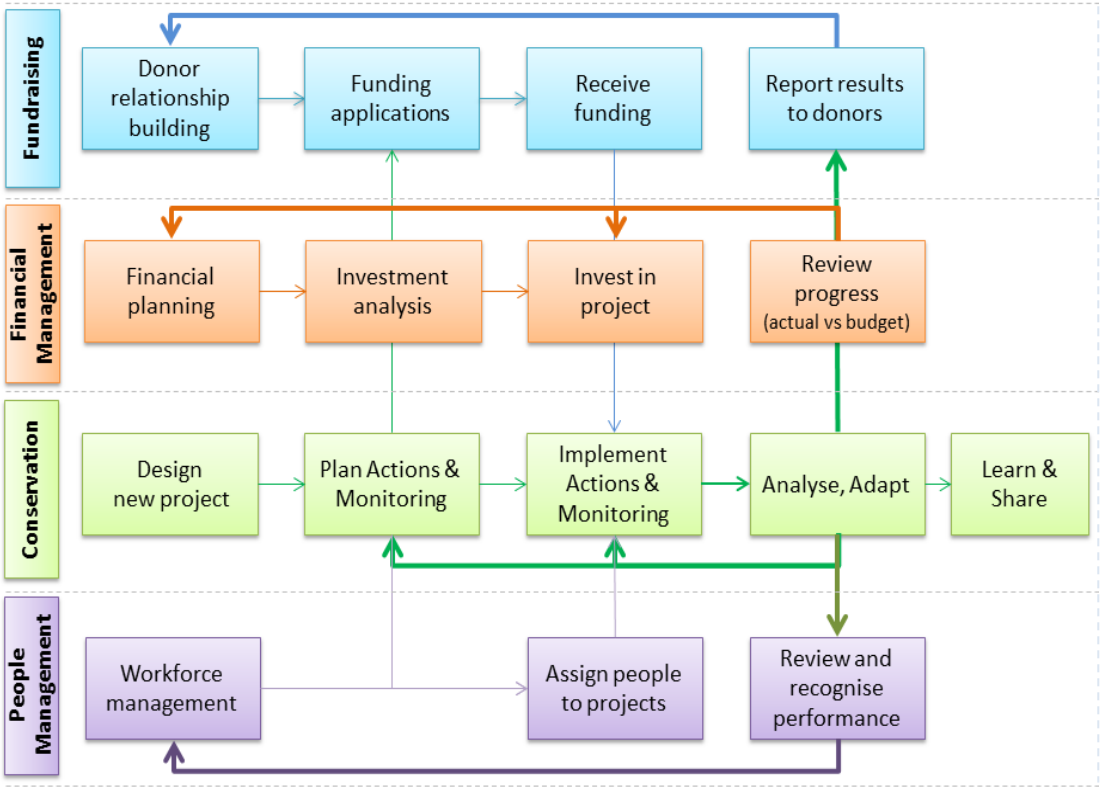
1. Low awareness of how the workflows in different business processes interact, and of how they can be made more efficient by sharing information through systems
2. There’s also a puzzling gap in the management expectations placed on different parts of the organisation

The following two pages describe these barriers and potential steps to address them.

Institution-alising OS

Workflows in key business processes depend on information from conservation projects

Conservation Business Process model



Click here for video

Conservation Business Process model (pp 2-5)

This swim-lane diagram shows the linkages between four key business processes in small-to-medium sized conservation organisations. The critical feedback loops, shown as thick arrows, all require information about how a conservation project is progressing, else these business processes start to break down.

- For example, the fundraising process requires information about a project's planned actions and results so that funding can be obtained. This process is then completely dependant on progress information coming out of the conservation process in order to maintain donor relations that in turn allows the funding cycle to be maintained.
- All processes can run more efficiently if information is available through shared systems. In practice, most information is not readily available and accordingly these processes are not as efficient as they could be; they work mainly because people spend a lot of effort chasing / finding / re-creating information.
- These inefficiencies are tolerated, even though resource constraints are the key limiting factor in most organisations *("there's never enough money to go around")*
- Operationalising conservation projects, using the Open Standards and its supporting systems, allow these information flows to occur which improves the efficiency and effectiveness of all key business processes.

Demonstrating these workflows, and the benefits offered by the streamlined flow of information, can help build support for improving business performance, and show that OS is a means to this end.

Differing management expectations are placed on each business processes

	Work practices guided by . . .	System options	Reporting characteristics
Fundraising	common approaches Charity regulators (peer compliance)	Mature market 2-3 systems dominate	Monthly FR metrics (Donor #s, $s, pipeline) Rolled up from systems
Financial Management	Accounting Standards Company regulations; Auditors (Mandated compliance)	Mature market Several options for each organisation size (small, medium, large)	Monthly Actual vs budget Detailed, high accuracy Rolled up from systems
Conservation	Open Standards or other adaptive-management approaches (Voluntary compliance)	Mature market for spatial. Miradi for project data, or manage manually, or build-your-own	Qualitative commentary Activity measures
People Management	HR practices HR & safety regulations (Mandated compliance)	Few options for non-profits; may be in finance system or managed manually	Periodically HR metrics (turnover, recruitment, etc)

Click here for video

Conservation Business Process model (pp 5-7)

Comparison of the work practices and reporting norms within the four key business processes shows that Conservation, the core business, has the most lenient expectations.

- Work practices in Finance & People Management are mandated, partly to comply with external expectations, but also for internal efficiency and consistency reasons. Fundraising success requires teamwork so common practices are generally followed.
- System options are best when the needs of the non-profit sector overlap with commercial sector (e.g. finance systems, GIS), or can leverage learnings from that mature market (eg donor systems leverage learnings from Customer Relationship Management systems). Where there is no overlap, systems options are limited due to the small market (which fails to attract technology developers) and lack of capacity (of organisations to pay for systems development).
- Reporting requirements are partly influenced by availability of systems, but also by management expectations regarding transparency, frequency, and accuracy of reporting, along with expectations for quantifiable metrics to measure performance.
- Conservation, the core business, has the least-onerous expectations. This partly results from historical norms, from the difficulty of defining metrics, and from lack of awareness about the improved practices and reporting offered by the Open Standards and its supporting information systems.

Highlighting these perception gaps can help to build awareness of the need for improved performance within the conservation process

"Financialisation" of projects changes the game

The Environmental Impact Investing market could provide the level of funding that's really required to protect global biodiversity

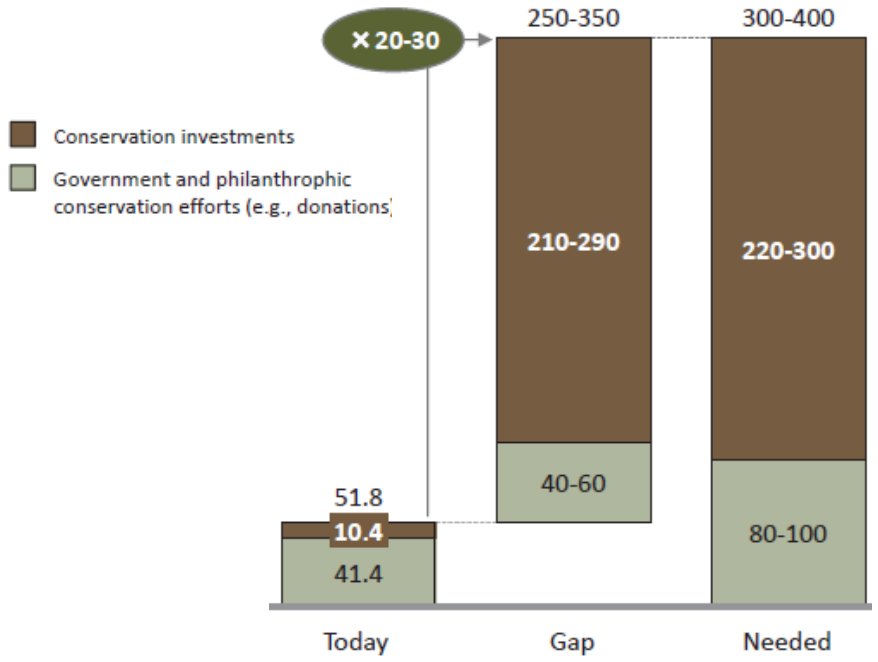
The Impact Investing market has been growing, but mainly in other parts of the social sector. Some recent reports have looked into financing conservation work. One report by Credit Suisse, WWF and McKinsey (2014):

- estimated the current global spend on conservation at about $50bn p.a.
- looked at how much funding is really required to protect biodiversity:- *"an estimate of US$300-400 billion is a reasonable working figure of the projected annual costs for global biodiversity protection".*
- estimated that government and philanthropic funding will not increase significantly but might contribute 80-100bn p.a. in future
- leaving a gap of around $300bn p.a.

The report concluded that this amount is quite achievable - *"There would be sufficient financial capital available to meet conservation investment needs if the main investor segments (i.e., high-net-worth individuals, retail and institutional investors) globally allocated 1% of their new and reinvested capital to conservation".*

The authors identified several barriers to the creation of investable projects, including "Poor ability to define and manage projects, . . . and measure effectively". They commented that the conservation sector is 10+ years behind other social sectors in being able to tap into the impact investing market.

Demand for conservation finance (US$bn)



"There's no shortage of investment funds . . . there's a shortage of investable projects"

Source: Credit Suisse / WWF / McKinsey 2014

Credit Suisse and McKinsey recently produced a follow-up report and outlined the shifts that need to occur to enable this market. They concluded that -

". . . such shifts could provide a major boost in funding. In total, they have the potential to create a conservation finance investment market of 200 - 400 billion dollars between now and 2020."

Source: Credit Suisse / McKinsey 2016

Positioning OS for Impact Investing

Click here for video

Open Standards is a "means" to multiple "ends"

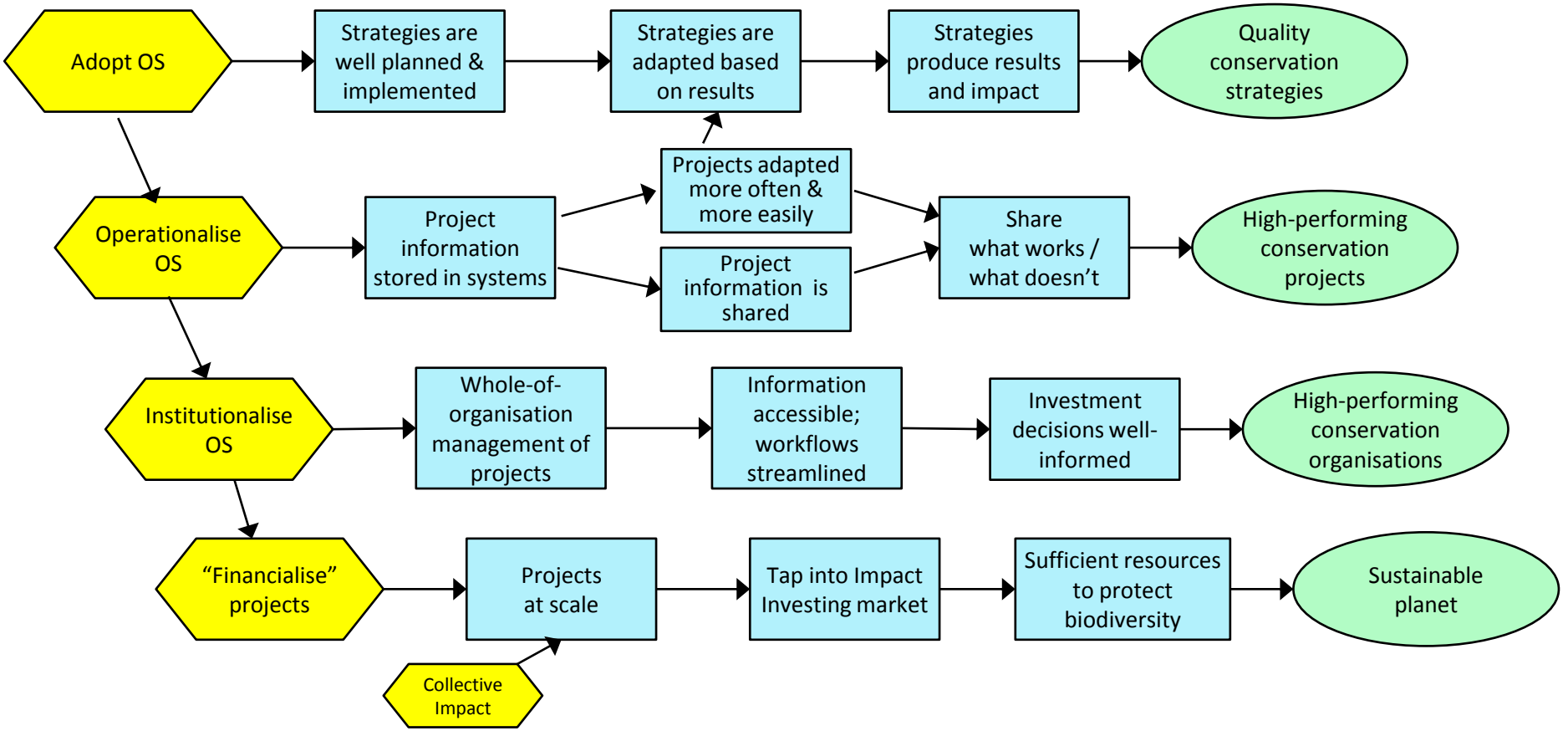
"Financialisation" requires a solid foundation of high-performing projects run by high-performing organisations

This theory of change suggests that, if all the preceding steps are in place – that is . . .

- we have a track record of running high-performing projects that produce impact,
- and we have highly-efficient, well informed and high-performing organisations,

and so long as we structure projects at scale (the Collective Impact model can help here),
then we are positioned to tap into the Environmental Impact Investing market,
which could provide the level of resourcing that's really required to save the planet.

This big-picture view helps to demonstrate the business logic for adopting the Open Standards and fully exploiting its systems capabilities.

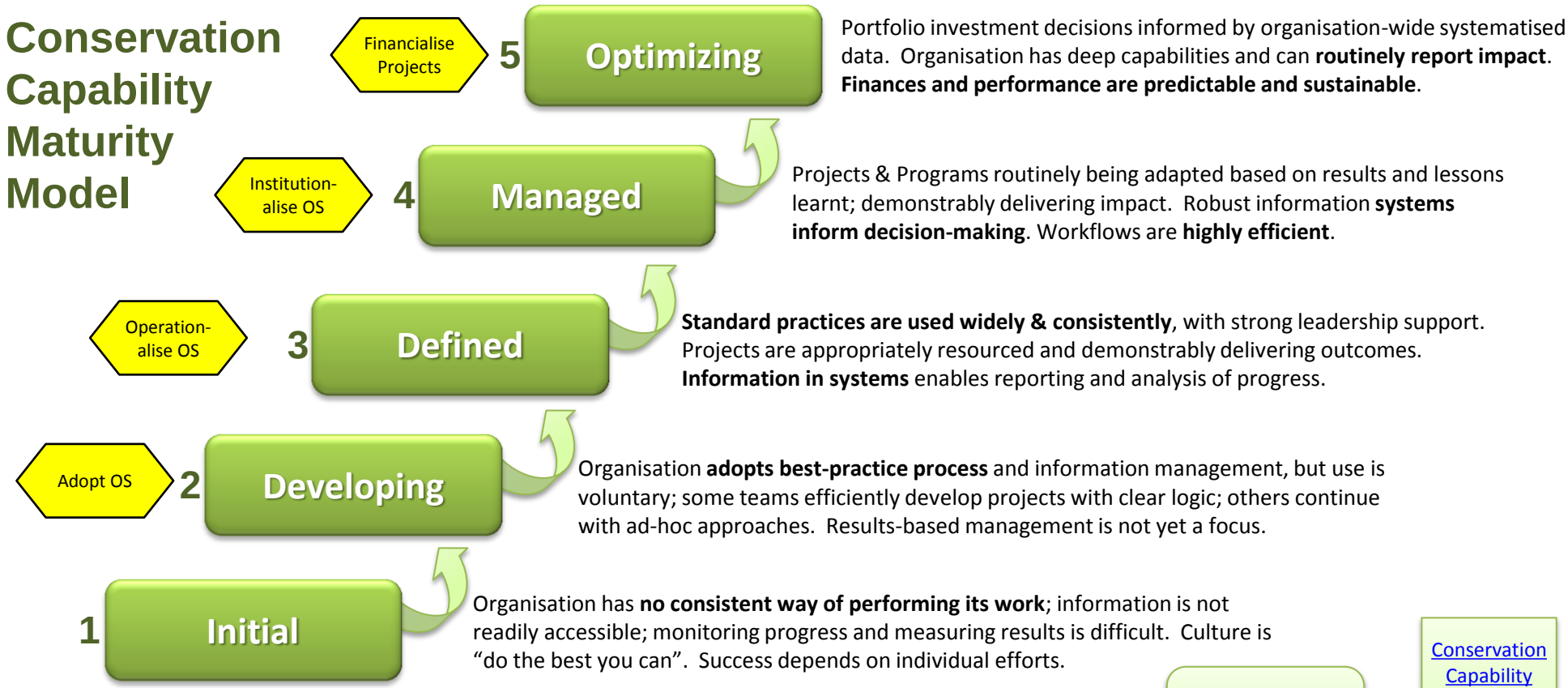


A Maturity Model helps to lay out a path for improving performance.

Capability Maturity Models originated in the software development field and are now used in a wide variety of disciplines. An initial model has been developed for Conservation, drawing on other models and outlining the key characteristics operating at each of the broad stages described in this document.

The model helps to paint a picture of a high-performing conservation organisation. It can be used by organisations to do a self-assessment of their current capabilities, and to identify desired improvements.

The model is currently an initial draft that needs wider review and input.



Click here for video

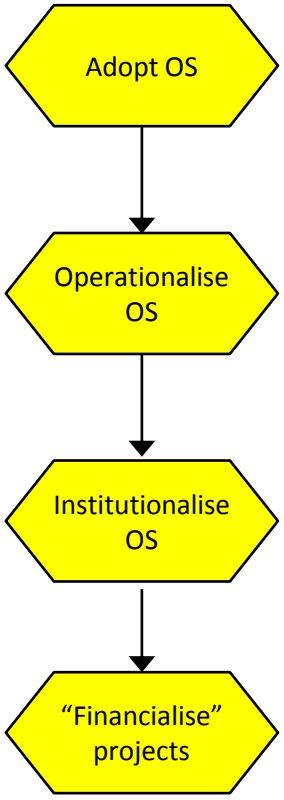
Conservation Capability Maturity Model

Some materials have been drafted to help move along this path

Some detailed reports have been produced during the study, aiming to help the "integrators" (M&E folks) in the case study organisations. All are very much in draft, and will be refined based on feedback. The documents are available in this Toolkit

Study of Practices

A "Study of Practices" provides an overview and summarises each of the documents below.



- Positioning OS within business performance and reporting frameworks and related video
- Conservation Capability Maturity Model and related video
- (tdb) Benefits of OS
- Promoting change in cause-driven organisations

- Operationalising the Open Standards
- Miradi User Group; Community site for training material
- Requirements for updates to Miradi / Miradi Share
- Mapping of OS products to Miradi
- Open Standards and Collective Impact

- Conservation Business Process Model and related video
- Institutionalising the Open Standards
- (tbd) Promoting awareness of OS to support roles
- Fundraisers guide to the Open Standards
- (tbd) journal article
- (tbd) business case for further investment in CMP's systems

- Impact Investing overview including IRIS impact reporting metrics and related video

Broader observations outside of this structured theory of change

Discussions during the study have raised several miscellaneous but important observations

These observations are described here for the record; broader discussions are required to determine any follow-on action.

1. Evolution of the Open Standards

- The Standards need to continually evolve to keep in line with, or ahead of, common practices. This has generally been occurring, with Version 3 released in April 2013.
- However several comments were made about this being a slow process and a"bit of a black box process"; not knowing how to raise suggestions for improvements, or knowing "who decides"

➢ This concern could be alleviated by making the process more transparent (e.g. a web page describing how it takes place, and how to suggest changes) and allowing for more frequent iterations. Reviewing the processes of other standards-setting bodies might provide some ideas (e.g. Accounting Standards are comprised of many small standards on specific topics that are inter-related but can evolve independently of the whole, allowing for more frequent change to particular components and for specialist sub-groups to deal with particular topics under the broader umbrella.)

2. "Conformance"

- The concept of formal "conformance" with the Standards irks some people; hearing that their project "does not comply" is demoralising, or infuriating, creating perceptions of it "blocking progress" and building resistance to broader adoption.

➢ Identifying the critical components would allow for "degrees of compliance" and more flexibility in adoption; e.g. one of the Agile authors proposes the concept of "sufficiency" – where some types of projects require a "heavy" conformance to the standards while for others a "light" application is perfectly sufficient; and the concept of a non-jealous methodology that permits substitution of similar elements from other methodologies.

3. "Just get started"

- Initial adoption of OS can be targeted at new projects, but often organisations need to transition existing projects into the Open Standards; starting again from the beginning is not a viable or attractive proposition. In the spirit of adaptive management, it should be "ok" to start at any point of the cycle and work to continually improve the project by regularly moving around the cycle.

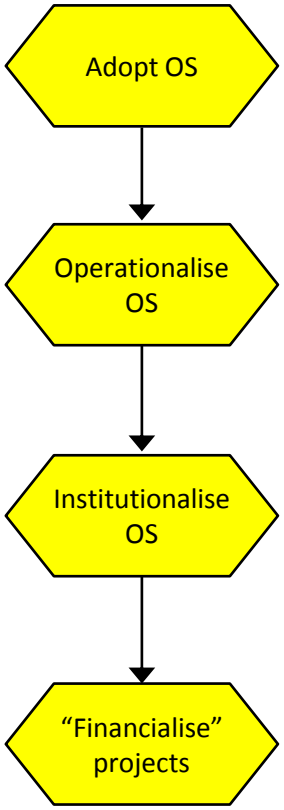
➢ The "easy on ramp" concept being discussed for Miradi , extended to OS guidance, would support this approach.

What happens next . . . . ?

Overall . . . .

- Along with other input, work any follow-up action into an updated CMP Strategic Plan with associated workplan & budget
- Seek capacity building grants to fund implementation

Specific suggestions for each section . . . .



- Create more guidance materials and training for Steps 3,4,5
- Run a regular support group for "integrators" (revamp the CMP "Implementation" working group)
- Get some skilled guidance on promoting change in cause-driven organisations
- Publish case studies demonstrating the business benefits of adoption

- Shift the mindset on software for conservation, and lift understanding of the critical role of systematised information
- Invest in the OS systems – user-interface, work-planning, reporting, dashboards, full-cycle support
- Create more training materials; for systems continue to build Miradi User Group
- Position OS as the means to multiple ends – high-performing projects & high-performing organisations

- Re-commence the CMP "Institutional decision-making" working group
- Get CEO's of small-to-medium sized CMP orgs talking / sharing experiences

- Collaborate with key players in the Conservation Finance / Impact Investment field
  - CMP should be the Conservation NGO sector rep into this world
  - help build the skills and capacity to connect with this world
  - Specific opportunity exists at Conservation Congress in Hawaii Sept '16
  - Build collaboration amongst the CFOs of CMP member organisations
- Review the current IRIS metrics for conservation, and build on them