



The Marine CoLAB: Taking a CoLABorative, Values Based Approach to Connect People to the Ocean

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With growing complex and systemic challenges facing the ocean, there is an urgent need to increase the scale and effectiveness of approaches to marine conservation, including protecting and recognizing the value of all of its services. Stronger multi-sector networks of organizations are needed, sharing knowledge and working in unison to create a common narrative for the ocean and the solutions to its protection. In an innovative experiment, the Marine CoLABoration (CoLAB) brings together nine non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to explore collaboratively how to communicate more effectively. The CoLAB hypothesizes that communicating the full value of the ocean in all its rich diversity connects with people's deeply held, personal values and leads to more impactful ocean conservation. Through horizon scanning with the wider sector, the CoLAB determines experiment themes to test this hypothesis. These are based predominantly in the United Kingdom and include #OneLess, Agents of Change and We are Ocean. The CoLAB's work demonstrates that by effectively building and promoting an understanding of the full value of the ocean, it is possible to trigger a wider range of human values to catalyze engagement with marine conservation issues. A joined up, interdisciplinary approach to communicating why the ocean matters, engaging a wide range of actors will be crucial in effecting long term, systemic change for the ocean. The need for greater United Kingdom ocean literacy has also been highlighted across the CoLAB and its experiments and presents an opportunity for further work.

Keywords: marine conservation, values based approach, collaboration, systems change, ocean literacy

INTRODUCTION

The global ocean provides much of what makes life possible – it produces approximately half of the oxygen on the planet; is pivotal to climate regulation; feeds billions; provides a multitude of livelihoods; and provides many less tangible benefits to human wellbeing (Völker and Kistemann, 2011; Béné et al., 2015; Gattuso et al., 2015). Despite growing knowledge about the importance of the ocean, its health and ability to provide these services is being threatened (Halpern et al., 2017). The ocean is warming and becoming more acidic, sea-levels are rising, oxygen

levels are decreasing, all of which threatens marine life already stressed by pervasive pollution, habitat loss and over-exploitation (Hoegh-Guldberg et al., 2007; Domingues et al., 2008; Falkowski et al., 2011; Church et al., 2013; Trathan et al., 2015; Vince and Hardesty, 2017).

The complexity of issues facing the ocean presents a challenge in engaging the public in ocean protection (Steel et al., 2005). Research suggests that there is a significant gap between what scientists and NGOs are saying and public perceptions about ocean conservation issues (Jefferson et al., 2014; Potts et al., 2016; Lindland and Volmert, 2017). Although there has been an increase in public and political awareness around issues such as plastic pollution (Vince and Hardesty, 2018), more work is needed to further global ocean literacy (Cava et al., 2005; Schoedinger et al., 2010; Guest et al., 2015). Research suggests that in order for people to endorse initiatives to safeguard the ocean, interventions need to resonate with people and reflect their values (Gelcich et al., 2014; Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, 2018).

The Marine CoLABoration (CoLAB) was established following research commissioned by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to tackle the lack of collaboration and effective communication around the value of the ocean, identified as a key challenge for the marine NGO sector (Birney and Taplin, 2013). The CoLAB hypothesizes that communicating the full value of the ocean in all its diversity connects with people's deeply held values and leads to more impactful ocean conservation. This article will present three key experiments across the CoLAB that exemplify our approach, together with insights from our model of collaboration.

METHODS

The core group is comprised of nine NGOs: Client Earth; The International Programme for the State of the Ocean; The Institute of European Environmental Policy; Fauna and Flora International; Forum for the Future; New Economics Foundation; Marine Conservation Society; Thames Estuary Partnership and Zoological Society of London. These form a steering group that provide overall governance, maintain the strategy and design the collaborative infrastructure. As part of the CoLAB's approach, the group draws on and conducts values and framing research (Lindland and Volmert, 2017). During its development, the CoLAB developed a collective vision and initiated experiments. It then began incubating experiments which evolved through prototyping cycles, while formulating long-term objectives and operational models. These cross-sector, systemic interventions are identified collaboratively through horizon-scanning and enable the group to investigate real world challenges, addressing key needs around the CoLAB's approach. These include:

#OneLess – A Systems Change Approach to Catalyze a Refill Revolution in London, United Kingdom

#OneLess aims to increase people's connection with the ocean via drawing attention to the ubiquitous single-use plastic water

bottle, and, in doing so, foster a more 'ocean-friendly' society and reduce the amount of plastic entering the ocean. In the current system, most Londoners consume water using single-use plastic packaging, which contributes to plastic pollution in the River Thames and the ocean (McGoran et al., 2017). System innovation requires a set of actions that shift a system onto a more sustainable path (Birney and Draper, 2010). Initially #OneLess determined the 'boundary' of the system, identifying challenges and key leverage points. It then established pioneering networks of practice – prototyping and showcasing new and better ways to operate and catalyzing policy innovation. Now it will focus on activities to sustain the transition and set new rules for the mainstream where new modes of water delivery will be taken up more widely.

Agents of Change – Uncovering Shared Value and Developing a New Narrative for Marine Conservation Zones in the United Kingdom

Agents of Change aims to better understand local views about Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) and use this to support local people in re-framing conversations. The experiment hypothesizes that engaging a wider range of stakeholders in management processes will increase a local sense of connection and ownership of MCZs and lead to more effective and locally accepted management (Bryce et al., 2016; Christie et al., 2017). The experiment brings together a group of national NGOs and sea-users from Sussex and North Norfolk in three pilot areas: Beachy Head East, Kingmere and Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds, building on previous work (Cumming and Norwood, 2012) and testing innovative approaches with communities and MCZs at different stages. Collaborative facilitation techniques including community visioning workshops (Sheppard, 2006) are encouraging local groups to share aspirations for their community and priority steps to achieve aspirations. In Kingmere, the experiment is capturing perceptions of the MCZ through stakeholder interviews, and increasing the visibility of the MCZ through a community-focused website (Agents of Change, 2018b). At Beachy Head East, a recommended MCZ, the experiment is engaging stakeholders through the Backing Beachy Head East campaign (Agents of Change, 2018a).

We Are Ocean – Collaboration to Establish a New Ocean Literacy Network

Since the CoLAB's inception, there has been considerable energy and enthusiasm among environmental and other organizations to build a network to transform levels of ocean literacy in the United Kingdom. This manifested itself initially as a learning community of marine education practitioners, led by the Marine Conservation Society. As the community grew, it developed into the We are Ocean network, comprised of a small core of organizations, aligned by shared objectives on the need for effective ocean literacy collaboration. The group tests new approaches and draws on strengths in existing work, developing interventions that collectively make a bigger impact. The first was World Ocean Day for Schools, launched on World Ocean Day

2018. This experiment aims to catalyze a shift in United Kingdom ocean literacy and inspire students, teachers and parents to learn about and connect with the ocean via a digital schools' package (Wild Labs, 2018).

RESULTS

Independent evaluation using stakeholder interviews and learning exchange workshops across the CoLAB suggest that the group have developed a collaborative ethos, an ecosystem of skills and bilateral exchange of knowledge and insights with over 100 organizations engaged through experiments (Table 1). Members are also developing a model of systemic working and a collective knowledge base around the elements of the CoLAB's approach

(Baker and Usher, 2018). The CoLAB has found willingness among a diverse range of actors within the marine conservation sector and beyond, to engage in collaborative experiments and campaigns with learning appearing to be particularly high among non-typical ocean actors (Chambers, 2018). For example, #OneLess works to prototype and showcase innovative practice, with the Natural History Museum, ZSL London and Whipsnade Zoos, Selfridges and Borough Market, all eliminating single-use plastic water bottles from their premises and engagement with the Mayor of London resulting in funding for 20 sites for public water fountains across London (Baker and Usher, 2018). Agents of Change has found success in creative socio-cultural engagement as an approach to encourage dialogue with local groups. This has included community visioning workshops, engaging a local crochet network to create a model of the MCZ

TABLE 1 | Examples of the Marine CoLAB's impact, drawn from independent evaluation, including stakeholder interviews, learning exchange workshops and experiment reporting.

CoLAB Principle	Outcome	Learning question	Examples of impact
Communication	The capacity of the sector to communicate the value of the ocean in human well-being is increased so more people understand why a healthy ocean matters and take action to protect it	How is the Marine CoLAB contributing to better communication of the value of the ocean?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiments communicate and frame the value of the ocean in a way that appeals to a range of human values. #OneLess, for example, frames the single use plastic water bottle (SUPWB) problem in London as an ocean issue; project partners have ascribed wider reach to this framing (Chambers, 2018). Experiments help to kick-start new conversations about the ocean, for example, through World Ocean Day for Schools, engaging education practitioners with the need to protect the ocean (Baker and Usher, 2018).
Capacity building and engagement	The work of others (our organizations, other NGOs and funders) is improved through taking a CoLABoratory and values based approach	How is the Marine CoLAB sharing learning and building capacity in adopting a VBA and CoLABoratory approach?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners are building new skills and knowledge from the CoLAB's approach and take new ways of working back to their organizations and networks (Baker and Usher, 2018). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This has included taking amigurumi ocean creatures to High Seas Treaty Negotiations, designed to switch delegates out of negotiator mode and remind them of the wider value of the ocean and importance of high seas protection (High Seas Alliance, 2019).
Experimentation	Experiments that test a values based approach deliver measurable progress toward ocean health	How is the Marine CoLAB leading to better management and increased protection of our ocean?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiments are inspiring and enabling behavior change. This has included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than 1000 people responding to the Backing Beachy Head East campaign. Selfridges, ZSL Whipsnade and London Zoos all ceasing to sell SUPWBs. The Mayor of London committing to installing drinking fountains across London with £2.5 million of funding (Baker and Usher, 2018). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 84% of fountain users surveyed through #OneLess agreed or strongly agreed that they consciously avoid using single use plastic bottles because they want to protect the ocean (Nolan et al., 2019).
Collaboration	Collaborations between Marine CoLAB organizations and with those beyond the Marine CoLAB is strengthened	How is the Marine CoLAB strengthening collaboration between Marine CoLAB organizations and those in the wider Marine sector?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CoLAB has built exceptionally high levels of trust between members and a commitment to collaborate (DP Evaluation, 2017). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To date, over 100 organizations have worked with the CoLAB, with 59 members engaged through #OneLess (2019). Experiments are creating a space for people working in the marine sector to consolidate, develop their work and share learning together (Baker and Usher, 2018).

and a collaborative exhibition between local fishers, divers, anglers and photographers to celebrate the local black bream (*Spondyliosoma cantharus*) population (Worthing Borough Council, 2019).

The CoLAB's experiments reveal that participatory processes can foster wider collaboration. The Agents of Change 'Backing Beachy Head East' postcard campaign for example engaged over 1000 members of the public and all three local MPs with the designation process (Baker and Usher, 2018). Community visioning workshops are also revealing priorities locally for MCZs, including a need for increased information flow to visitors and locals, and education of children about their local MCZ (Chambers, 2018). The need for increased ocean literacy is echoed across the experiment's pilot sites, highlighting that communities may be aware of their local MCZs, though do not fully understand its benefit to them (Tebb, 2019). Greater ocean literacy has also emerged as a priority from the CoLAB's horizon scanning activities, and across other experiments, including the World Ocean Day for Schools experiment, with more than 400 schools engaging in 2018 (Baker and Usher, 2018).

DISCUSSION

To enable systemic change and innovation, stronger networks of organizations are needed, working together across sectors and disciplines, sharing knowledge and expertise (Schaffers and Turkama, 2012; Baird et al., 2019). A collaborative approach has been called for that builds interdisciplinary scientific capacity, 'puts the ocean back together' and promotes coherence and innovation in the messaging and actions of the sector (Leslie and McLeod, 2007; Wyborn and Leith, 2018). Investing time in a group and allowing space for reflection and relationship development is crucial in fostering collaboration (Guerrero et al., 2015). Clear onboarding and transparency has also been vital in building an understanding of the CoLAB's approach and ethos (DP Evaluation, 2017). Through creating a joined up vision the CoLAB is able to move quickly, exemplified in an open letter to the United Kingdom government following "Blue Planet II", with 37 organizations signing up to three key actions (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2019). The CoLAB is looking to build on this learning by scoping the development of a collaborative communications strategy for those that frame the ocean. The group recognizes that working collaboratively to tackle complex and systemic issues can be challenging and requires continual assessment of new approaches, including testing new models in collaborative governance, creative approaches to engagement and learning from success and failure as outlined by other researchers (Brennan, 2018; Clarke and Crane, 2018; Rilov et al., 2019). The CoLAB's experiments have been effective as a method to engage, collaborate and build relationships, helping to embed the group's approach within participating organizations and beyond. Experiments are modeling recommendations from framing research (Lindland and Volmert, 2017) and testing values based approaches to

communication. #OneLess, for example, is communicating to values including universalism and protecting the environment as well as self-directive values around pride. These include slogans like "drink water the London way." Partners working across the CoLAB's experiments are also reporting the value of place-based approaches and localism, allowing teams to learn from what is working in one area and scale where appropriate (Chambers, 2018). Research in the field of marine social science, including public perceptions of the marine environment and marine citizenship is fast moving and expanding rapidly (McKinley and Fletcher, 2010; Jefferson et al., 2015). It will be crucial to continue to build the CoLAB's collective knowledge base in this area and engage with research to ensure its evolution.

CONCLUSION

The CoLAB seeks to grow the community to all organizations interested in a collaborative approach to creating a more ocean-friendly society and will refine its support to the community through specific tools. The CoLAB exemplifies the value of building effective, long-lasting and cross-sectoral collaboration beyond existing networks to tackle complex, systemic issues such as ocean health. It requires honesty, transparency and time to build relationships and foster group commitment. In order to make the case for investment in collaboration across the sector, it will be crucial to communicate its often less tangible and long-term value.

As the CoLAB continues to experiment with collaborative governance models, it will trial a new model, which takes a three-pronged approach to: shift the narrative; identify and address strategic gaps; and build capacity and engagement. The CoLAB will continue to grow existing experiments whilst incubating new ones which address strategic challenges. The need for greater United Kingdom ocean literacy is highlighted across the CoLAB's experiments and presents an opportunity for further work. Increasing the reach of the We Are Ocean network and embedding ocean literacy across the CoLAB's approach will be a key priority.

The CoLAB's experiments reveal that through collaboration and communicating why the ocean matters in a way that speaks to and uncovers shared human values, it is possible to achieve greater cut through to audiences. There is growing appetite in the wider sector to learn from the CoLAB's approach and experiments are resonating with funders. Insights from this approach and model of collaboration may advance ongoing research around the relationship between human values and behavior change with potentially substantial impact for ocean protection.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

RC, JL, and SW contributed to manuscript conception and design. RC, SR, AB, and CA contributed content that formed the foundations. RC led the review, design, and development in collaboration with JL, NH, and LH.

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