

Wednesday, July 2
133 Emerson Hall
12 – 1:00 PM

A conceptual framework for resource-based assessment of environmental conservation

Attendance - 13

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I would like to thank each of you and CCSF for your roles in the July 2nd lunch discussion of research ideas that grow out of consideration of the analytical challenges that emerge from consideration of adaptation as an organizational process. This is a work in progress, and I welcome further discussion.

A few specific questions arose in our discussion that stimulated my thinking usefully. I will comment here on two of them. 1) It was suggested that I need for more clear articulation of potential roles for ecologists, and 2) question was raised how this work would serve to extend existing capacity to motivate responses to incentives.

With respect to the first issue, my thinking is that ecologists and other scientists can play direct roles in measuring and analyzing changes in environmental status stemming from socio-technical change. At the most basic level, my intention is to explain and support conservation outcomes through reference to distributions of resources and competencies within populations of organizations. More generally, ecologists' engagement is needed to select

problems to study, design studies and develop hypotheses regarding the specific resources and competencies that shape performance of natural resource managers and the organizations in which they work. To date, in the context of developing this analytical framework, I have partnered with a forester and soil ecologists. More cross-disciplinary engagement is needed to refine thinking and to learn how to better organize multi-disciplinary research teams.

Secondly, a question arose regarding how this approach adds value given that economic analyses are already able to do a decent job at predicting average responses to incentives. I agree that our knowledge regarding how populations respond to incentives is well-developed. Additionally, I want to study 'what lies between incentives and action'. I seek to understand through what investments and strategies actors respond to social problems and respond to the incentive regimes we construct to induce behavioral change. For example, assume that a carbon tax is imposed on an industry. As a result, we are likely to see a range of responses with diverse effects on carbon emissions by firms in the industry. My goal is to understand the range of responses in the population and work toward identifying the critical resources and resource constraints in play. Are the key bottlenecks linked to human capital constraints (e.g., firms do not have sufficiently competent employees to respond), inappropriate management structures (e.g., information flows, access to resources), weak linkages (e.g., connections between industry and potential technology suppliers are underdeveloped) or other resource constraints?

Results from this research might be useful for driving down the cost of adaptation. Understanding the range of responses actors pursue and the effectiveness (and the costs) of those responses will provide organizations and change agents (i.e., actors engaged in (sustainable) development processes such as universities, government agencies, NGOs, industry associations, consultants, lenders, insurers Σ) with tools to support local actors investments. I argue that actors can (and must) learn from each others experience. While there is a justified tendency to provide increasing flexibility to local actors on the basis that they know their own constraints and resources better than central planners can, I see great value in studying local actors' actions. We'll be continuing to develop these ideas and I welcome your involvement.

Steven Wolf