from collaborative action to collective impact

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Better bred than dead
David Challinor on the efforts of zoos to preserve rare species

ZOO DIRECTORS and others concerned with the survival and well-being of zoo animals are increasingly interested in the ability of wild animals to adapt to captivity. The present design of new zoo exhibits reflects in part this concern. Not only are the new barren enclosures more aesthetically pleasing to the visitor, but they are also designed to reduce some of the neurotic behaviour shown by some mammals, particularly primates and cats, when confined to the old fashioned menagerie cage. The moats and glass barriers now used are designed to protect the animal from the visitor and, in the case of glass panels in primate houses, serve the double purpose of keeping the monkeys from catching humans' colds and freeing the visitor from the animals' pungent smell.

Despite such improvements, some zoo-bred animals, when moved from cramped quarters to landscaped habitats, cannot readily adapt. We have had several examples of animals' difficulty in breaking habitual behaviour at the Smithsonian National Zoo. Our white tiger, Mohini, released from her old barred cage to expansive new quarters with trees, grass and even a swimming pool, seldom strayed from her electrically heated concrete pad. She even wore out the grass walking back and forth in front of it, covering exactly the distance she had travelled during her years in her old quarters. Eventually, after a few months, she was able to break this pattern and occupy the entire enclosure. Yet, one of our polar bears, when moved to large new quarters, was unable to swim freely in his new pool, paddling in a tight circle of the same diameter as of his old pool.

The most recent anecdote about animal
their new enclosure would climb only along
the stable wooden framework and supporting
cables. The flexible natural branches
were too much for these old males, but not
for the younger animals in the troops, who
readily adapted to their new surroundings.

Although some animals are adapting
too well to captivity, unexpected problems
continually arise. The magnificent sable
antelope is now breeding successfully at the
Smithsonian's Conservation Research
Center at Front Royal, Virginia. However,
their hooves are not worn down as fast in
Grass is better than concrete
the lush pastures and hardwood thickets of
Virginia as they are in the flinty soils of
their home ranges. Unless manually trim-
med about twice a year, their excessive
length can damage the muscles and small
bones in their feet. Trimming is done while
the antelope in tranquilised by a dart gun.
Unfortunately, sable antelope seem to be
more vulnerable than other antelope
species to darting, with the result that we
have lost some animals by using this
method. The challenge is now to find other
ways to keep their hooves the proper
length.
What makes this a “critical moment”…

- Changes in the modes of communication
- New competitors
- Political shifts
- Economic concentration
- Info deluge

Image source: https://www.crimestoppersqld.com.au/discover/about_us/our_puzzle_pieces.jsp#.Vvv8mGQrL6c
Fields and Transitions…

1. Fields tend toward stasis

Image source: FlippyCat https://www.youtube.com/flippycat
Fields and Transitions...

2. Innovations happen on the fringes

Image source: FlippyCat https://www.youtube.com/flippycat
Fields and Transitions...

3. Field-wide change depends on networks

Image source: FlippyCat https://www.youtube.com/flippycat
Not a single extraordinary genius...
...but a network of players

Image source: https://www.hivestreaming.com/
If
• This is a critical moment
• Fringe players innovate
• Networks bring change

Then
• Alignment is a transformative tactic
Collective Impact brings people together in a structured way to achieve social change.
Common Agenda

Shared Measurement

Mutually Reinforcing Activities

Continuous Communications

Backbone Support