

## **BRIDGING DIFFERENCES: A MODEL FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES THROUGH CONSERVATION TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR PROFESSIONALS**

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### **Abstract**

Training programs have long recognized the importance of communication. However, not all programs have fully understood that effective communication depends on understanding and communicating across a variety of differences, including professional differences, in order to achieve quality decision-making, if not “break-through ideas”. The MBI model (Mapping, Bridging, Integrating), a three-component process, simply and clearly shows that understanding and a willingness to communicate from a neutral position can “bridge differences” and lead to positive decision-making. Bridging differences is at the core of a postgraduate conservation training program—the Architectural Conservation Program (ACP) at The University of Hong Kong—and the program, through its pedagogy, has been able to help its students better understand the differences between professionals (disciplines) involved in the field of conservation. Through a questionnaire and follow-up interviews, the success of the program in bridging differences is evaluated. Recommendations for making the program even more effective are discussed, and the potential of using the model for other kinds of training programs in the field of conservation is noted.

**Keywords:** *effective communication, bridging differences, MBI model*

### **1.0 Introduction**

Effective communication between disciplines is increasingly seen as one of the most important aspects of conservation-related work. It is particularly critical in the field of conservation for two main reasons: (1) the nature of conservation issues is often subjective and sometimes controversial; (2) the professional disciplines involved in the field are many and diverse, and this leads to complex communication problems. It is therefore imperative for these multi-disciplinary professionals to come closer and bridge their differences. The word “bridge” thus becomes a metaphor for good and effective communication among conservation professionals, and it also symbolizes the crossing over from one discipline to another for better mutual understanding and consensus building.

The paper explores the applicability of a model from the social sciences for bridging differences among professionals – the MBI model – to the field of conservation by examining a postgraduate-level conservation training program at The University of Hong Kong. The MBI model is used to help understand and explain how successful the program has been in helping its students understand the differences between the diverse

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disciplines involved in conservation projects – and, even more importantly, how successful the program has been in helping students bridge these differences in order to achieve better decision-making.

## **2.0 Theoretical Foundation**

### **2.1 Effective Communication**

Effective communication can be defined as “transmission of meaning from one person to another, as it was intended by the first person” (Maznevski and DiStefano, 2000, p.199). But it is also about minimizing misunderstanding among a group of people working towards a common objective, since effective communication depends on “the degree to which the participants attach similar meanings to the messages exchanged” (Gudykunst, 1998, p.27). It requires that the parties involved share a common “vocabulary” and that they all understand each other’s “language”. Unfortunately, in real life, effective communication between people is difficult because the meaning of words is often understood differently by different people; the same word may carry different meanings as “we attach meaning to messages we construct and transmit” to others and also “attach meaning to messages we receive” (Gudykunst, 1998). Ineffective communication often leads to conflict and tension.

Two types of differences that can lead to ineffective communication:

1. *Cultural differences*, where the cultural background of people involved plays an important role in the communication process. Here culture is defined as the shared beliefs, traditions, habits and values controlling the behavior of a social group. “Our cultures influence our communication and our communication influences our culture” (Gudykunst, 1998, p.44). Among the many dimensions of cultural variability, two especially contribute to misunderstanding in communication across cultures: individualism-collectivism and low - and high-context communication.
2. *Group differences*, which are attributed to the effect of group membership on people’s behavior. People form social identities based on their membership in a certain group (or groups), which can be based on a number of categories such as demographic profiles (e.g. nationality, ethnicity, gender), the roles they play (e.g. student, professor, parents) or their associations or professions (e.g. architect, planner, engineer). The groups of people with whom they are associated are referred to as *ingroups* and the groups of people with whom they are not associated are referred to as *outgroups* (Gudykunst, 1998). The “language” and “vocabulary” used by *ingroups* are often different from those used by *outgroups*. The different views, and especially evaluative perspectives of each group for the other, can cause misunderstandings.

### **2.2 Bridging Differences**

Very often, people interpret messages of others using their own frames of reference, which are usually shaped by one’s own cultural background and professional affiliation. The frame of reference is also influenced by personal traits, which are shaped by social

and personal experiences. Bridging is an attempt to minimize these differences by understanding the frames of reference of others. When effective, “bridging results in good communication among team members whose perspectives are different” (Maznevski and DiStefano, 2000, p.199). The word “bridging” is more than just understanding differences between people; it is about overcoming the obstacle of differences between people and crossing over to the “other” side. In this context, “bridge signifies foundational strength and support, flexibility of movement, and a path to cross over to another destination” (The University of North Carolina).

### 2.3 Models of Bridging Differences

Bridging cultural differences among people is an important area of study for business, communications, management and psychology. Most of the studies revolve around identifying dimensions of national cultures as reflected by personal traits of people working in multinational organizations. A number of models and theories that can help facilitate the understanding and management of cultural differences have been formulated, and they can be summarized as follows:

1. **Hofstede** (1980) suggests a framework for assessing cultures by identifying five value dimensions of national cultures of people working in multinational organizations.
2. **Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) Research Project** expands on Hofstede’s work and identifies nine dimensions on which national cultures differ (Mansour and House, 2001). It aims to describe, understand and predict the influence of cultural variables on leadership and organizational processes.
3. **Myer-Briggs Type Indicator** (MBTI) (Myers, *et al.*, 1985) and the **Big Five model** (Robbins, 2003) use personality frameworks to explain individual behaviors that can, in turn, be used to further understand the relationship between cultural differences.
4. **Berry et al.** (1992) and **Gudykunst** (1998) also dwell on cultural differences and the ways to manage conflicts arising out of such differences.
5. The **MBI** (Mapping, Bridging, Integrating) **model** put forward by Maznevski and DiStefano (2000), which is described in detail in the following section, has gained wide acceptance in business, communications and management fields for its simplicity and adaptability to different contexts.

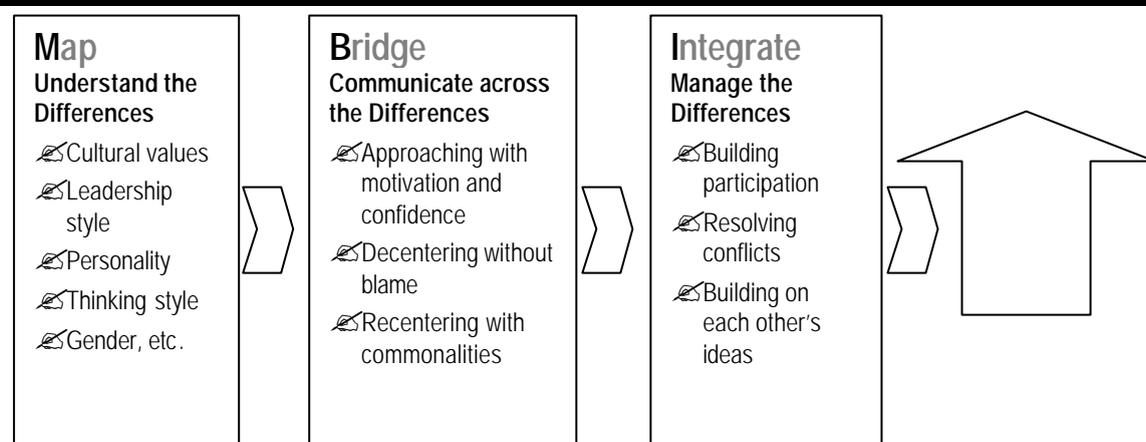
The first three items above are primarily descriptions of the types of differences in culture (1 & 2) and personality (3) that are observable; they do not explicitly address the issue of how to overcome the differences and come up with good decisions. The fourth item is a general work on communication that focuses on cross-cultural contexts and lacks the methodological direction of using the differences for better decision-making. But the fifth model is both more specific and has empirical research linking the application of the model to effectiveness and performance (Maznevski, 1994). This model is also being used in a number of training programs on bridging differences in various institutions around the world, including cultural heritage applications (DiStefano and Ekelund, 2002) and even peace-keeping (Schneider, 2000). The main strength of the model is its ability to leverage cultural differences for better decision-making, while other

models stop short at fulfilling the objective of increasing group performance. For these reasons, the MBI model was chosen to analyze the processes in the Architectural Conservation Program described in this paper. Therefore, the next section will describe the MBI model in greater detail.

## 2.4 The MBI Model

The MBI model is a three-component process, which adopts three principles and creates a means to bridge differences in multicultural teams. The three components are mapping, bridging and integrating (MBI) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** The MBI Model of Managing Differences



Source: J. J. DiStefano, and B. Z. Ekelund, 2001.

### *Mapping: Understand the Differences*

The first component of the MBI model is describing and understanding differences among (multinational) team members and the impact of the differences on team objectives in measurable ways.<sup>1</sup> This component involves three aspects:

1. *Selecting* which characteristics are to be mapped.
2. *Describing* members' characteristics.
3. *Identifying* the impact of these characteristics.

“The principles of mapping require a commitment to understand the underlying characteristics affecting each member’s approach to the team” (DiStefano and Maznevski, 2000, p.48).

### *Bridging: Communicate across the Differences*

The second component of the MBI model is communicating effectively across the differences to bring people and ideas together. The main objective of bridging is to prevent miscommunication and there are three aspects to building a strong bridge:

<sup>1</sup> Since this paper is concerned primarily with process, individual differences, other than those associated with professional training, will not be discussed in detail.

1. *Preparing* involves motivating people to communicate and building confidence in them to overcome problems. Both motivation and confidence are very important for bridging, since even after differences are understood, team members may not be motivated to use this understanding to improve performance, and, if discouraged by the complexity of the problem, they may become even less confident after mapping than before.
2. *Decentering* requires team members to incorporate their understanding of differences in the communication process by changing their own behaviour and thinking in order to accommodate the culture of the people with whom they are working. One of the important elements of decentering is suspending judgment about the behavior of others and not blaming them for being difficult. This is often a problem when *ingroups* have negative evaluations of *outgroups*.
3. *Recentering* is the final aspect of bridging where team members develop a new basis for interaction. It depends on having a good understanding of the differences and agreeing upon shared norms for interaction.

#### *Integrating: Manage the Differences*

The third component of the MBI model ensures team members leverage their differences and come up with good decisions. It is “where understanding (from mapping) and communicating (from bridging) get converted into productive results” (Maznevski and DiStefano, 2000, p.54). There are three aspects to integrating, each of which requires good mapping and bridging:

1. *Managing participation* means ensuring all members are given equal opportunity to participate by accommodating different norms of participation resulting from cultural differences.
2. *Resolving disagreement or conflict* means that conflicts are addressed before they become dysfunctional. Mapping helps to provide early detection of potential areas of conflict, while bridging and participation help make personal conflicts – the worst type – manageable. This only leaves cognitive conflicts or task-based conflicts, which are helpful for better quality decisions, and these can be resolved constructively.
3. *Building on ideas* is the final aspect of integrating. By seeing individual ideas as the starting point for discussion and letting go of idea ownership, “breakthrough ideas” can be produced. However, it is very important that the “temptation to compromise” is avoided and the quality of the decision gets priority in decision-making.

### **3.0 Applicability of the MBI Model to Cultural Heritage Management**

Although the MBI model was designed to bridge cultural differences in multinational teams, due to its robust nature, it can also be used for bridging group differences within

teams composed of people from diverse professional disciplines.<sup>2</sup> This is not surprising, given what is now understood to be step one in the model: *Mapping: Understand the Differences*. In this critical first step, cultural background, professional affiliation and personal traits are all seen as important aspects of mapping. Whether a team is multinational or not, all aspects must be considered to reach an understanding of the individual team member's position.

A good example of the MBI model's application in a cultural heritage setting is discussed in a conference paper by DiStefano et. al. (2001). In this paper, presented at the Heritage and Identity Convention, The Heyerdahl Institute, Sandefjord, Norway in 2001, the authors demonstrate that the model is effective in three specific "cultural" contexts:

1. "Interaction between people from business and museums working to build creative solutions together;
2. Cooperation between professional people from different traditions working in the same organization (such as curators, administrators and marketing people);
3. ...and between curators with different professional backgrounds."

Given the demonstrated success of the MBI model in a number of cross-cultural situations and the cultural heritage setting cited above, it is not surprising that the principles expressed in the model can be applied to other areas requiring cross-disciplinary understanding (step 1), effective communication (step 2) and creative problem solving (step 3). The field of conservation appears to be one of these fields, and as this paper will explore, training programs that actively promote the importance of "bridging differences" can make a measurable difference in how both individual practitioners and cross-disciplinary teams perform.

## **4.0 Putting Theory to Practice: The MBI Model and ACP**

### **4.1 Program Description**

Established in 2000, the Architectural Conservation Program (ACP) is an intensive part- or full-time postgraduate program in the Department of Architecture at The University of Hong Kong. ACP is advised by ICCROM and UNESCO-Bangkok and is designed to meet the continuing educational needs of practicing professionals involved directly or indirectly in conservation.

### **4.2 Program Objectives**

The program has a number of objectives, but for the purpose of this paper, three major objectives need to be identified and briefly described.

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<sup>2</sup> See DiStefano and Maznevski (2000) and Maznevski and DiStefano (2000) for a wide variety of examples. The power of the model in explaining performance in diverse teams has been demonstrated across 17 highly varied teams with a wide range of performance (DiStefano, 2003).

### *Objective #1: Provide Core Knowledge*

One of ACP's primary objectives is to provide core knowledge about the theory and practice of conservation in both the Asian and Western contexts. This primary objective is now shared with two other key objectives, namely, promoting Integrated Conservation and encouraging teamwork. This shift reflects the increasing maturity of the program and the recognition that conservation efforts must be framed within a broad context and must recognize the reality of working with diverse people from a variety of disciplines.

### *Objective #2: Promote Integrated Conservation*

Since the start of the program, there has been a marked shift to a more holistic approach to conservation planning and management, an approach that is less project-based and more process-oriented.<sup>3</sup> In fact, during the 2003-2004 academic year, the concept of Integrated Conservation was formally introduced as the underlying theme for the entire year, and the "traditional" emphasis on conservation projects "as projects" was replaced by emphasis on the importance of understanding the need to plan and manage conservation initiatives within the broad framework of governmental and non-governmental bodies. In other words, emphasis is placed on understanding the policies and objectives of all conservation "players", whether governmental or non-governmental, commercial or non-profit, as the basis for conservation initiatives.

### *Objective #3: Encourage Team Work*

Another objective that has been clearly articulated from the beginning is to encourage teamwork, and especially cross-disciplinary teams, as it is believed that an important aspect of the program is the opportunity for professionals from different disciplines to exchange viewpoints and work together on a variety of group assignments. With this in mind, all program applicants are interviewed face-to-face by members of the teaching staff, and are assessed on a number of dimensions, both academic and non-academic, including the ability to work within a team. This objective has remained constant throughout the four years of the program's operation and the importance of understanding other disciplines through teamwork has become an even more explicit part of the training experience. The elimination of formal grades (see below) in ACP also has helped to generate more willingness to share knowledge and work together rather than compete with one another.

## **4.3 Program Framework and Individual Courses**

In addition to the three overall objectives of the program discussed above, each of the program's core courses carries specific objectives. These course objectives are clearly cited at the beginning of each course and referred to, throughout its duration. Each core course

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<sup>3</sup> This process has been aided by ACP's advisors: Richard Engelhardt, UNESCO Regional Advisor, Office for Culture in Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok; Harold Kalman, Principal, Commonwealth Historic Resource Management Limited, Vancouver; and Herb Stovel, former Unit Director, Heritage Settlements Unit, ICCROM, Rome (and presently Assistant Professor, School of Canadian Studies, Carleton University, Ottawa).

is part of a carefully constructed program framework, which blends theoretical and practical learning in a series of core and elective courses that sequentially build upon one another. There are no traditional examinations. Rather, each core course includes an assignment which combines research and fieldwork. Each student then receives constructive comments with an indicative “Distinction”, “Pass” or “Fail”.

For the *Postgraduate Diploma in Conservation (PDip(Conservation))* program, students take an elective course and eight compulsory core courses, most of which build upon a three-day *Conservation Workshop* in which students, working in teams of five to six people, prepare a comprehensive conservation plan for a local conservation project. A professional panel critiques each plan, and students have three weeks to revise their reports. Four core courses follow in succession: *Cultural Heritage and the Built Environment*; *Materials and Techniques of Conservation*; *Cultural Heritage: Charters and Legislation*; and *Conservation Management and Practice*. All students are required to keep a *Conservation Logbook* (also a core course), the theme of which should reflect each student’s professional interests. Two field-study trips complete the core course component.

For the *Master of Science in Conservation (MSc (Conservation))* program, students take four additional compulsory core courses, including writing a dissertation, and an additional elective course. One of the core courses, *Research Methods in Conservation*, prepares students for their dissertations, while another course, *Seminar in Heritage Conservation*, gives students the opportunity to look at the most pressing and timely issues in conservation. The last core course is *Practical Training*, which provides students with the opportunity to participate in conservation projects and conservation-related activities throughout Asia, Europe and North America.

#### **4.4 Program Pedagogy**

From the beginning of their studies, students in ACP are encouraged to discuss and debate conservation topics and issues in a friendly and informal classroom environment that is purposefully designed to encourage lively exchange not only among students, but also between students and the teaching staff. Students are also encouraged to continue discussions after class. As a consequence, each class has become a tightly-knit social unit organizing extra-curricular activities that are almost always related to conservation. An elected Student Representative from each class becomes the Social Convenor for the class.

#### **4.5 ACP and Bridging Differences**

How has ACP contributed to students’ ability to communicate and effectively bridge differences? To answer these questions, a two-part study was conducted. For the first part, to obtain preliminary understanding of the impact of the program on students’ communication with others, 74 questionnaires were sent to all present and past students out of which 28 (37.1%) were returned. For the second part, and based on the returned questionnaires, eight students who responded in detail were selected randomly for in-depth interviews to further explore the spectrum of responses and to better understand the thinking behind the responses.

## *Survey Results*

The results of the survey indicate that ACP has had a positive impact on students' understanding of other disciplines. Most respondents (96.4%) think that the program has helped them understand the relationship between different disciplines, the contribution of different disciplines to the field of conservation and the importance of communication/coordination across disciplines. However, when asked if the understanding of other disciplines affected their working relationships with those either inside or outside their departments/organizations, only 52% of respondents indicated a change in their working relationships with those inside their departments/organizations. On the other hand, 78% indicated a change in their working relationships with those outside their departments/organizations.

### *a) Working Relationships Inside Departments/Organizations*

In explaining why the program has had less impact on working relationships with those inside their departments/organizations, respondents cited the following reasons: (1) from their perspective, there had simply been no problems communicating with others within their own departments/organizations and/or (2) their current jobs were not related to the field of conservation.

Within the context of Hong Kong, these findings suggest that within departments/organizations there is a pre-existing higher level of understanding among colleagues in comparison with the level of understanding with colleagues outside respondents' departments/organizations. In brief, ACP appears to have had less effect on intra-departmental/organizational understanding, although further study is needed to better evaluate this finding. For example, as already discussed, bridging differences is more than understanding other disciplines; it also applies to understanding cultural differences and personal traits.

On the other hand, respondents who think that ACP has had a positive impact on their working relationships with those inside their departments/organizations indicate that they now have more understanding of their own colleagues' capacities to contribute to the decision-making process. This particular group of respondents seems to be more receptive to comments made by people outside their own professions and more accepting of others' constraints. They also allow more time for discussion and consultation and they give emphasis to communication and shared vision.

### *b) Working Relationships Outside Departments/Organizations*

In explaining why the program has had more impact on working relationships with those outside their departments/organizations, respondents noted the following reasons:

1. ACP stresses a holistic view of conservation and explores the interrelatedness of disciplines that touch on this field, which, again, has compelled students to see conservation as a process in which many disciplines work together to achieve common conservation goals.

2. ACP places emphasis on an integrated approach to conservation, which, in turn, has helped students to appreciate their relationship with different disciplines and their contribution to the field of conservation.
3. ACP helps students to acquire a better understanding of organizations related to the field of conservation. This understanding has helped to improve communication with people working in these organizations.
4. ACP enables students to be knowledgeable advocates for conservation. It has also been instrumental in encouraging them to use a “language” that all disciplines can understand.

#### *Interviewee Case #1*

Further investigation during interviews revealed ACP is very effective in certain areas. One interviewee, who has academic qualifications in architecture and urban planning, and professional working experience as a chartered surveyor, said that in his current position as a property valuator, which often requires him to deal with heritage properties, ACP has provided him with a more sensitive appreciation of the cultural value of built heritage. More significantly, he pointed out that ACP has considerably influenced his way of working in several ways:

He now has a more holistic approach to his work as he sees a building as part of a broader context and, consequently, understands the need for dialogue with people related to this extended environment. In the process, he has also gained a better understanding of the importance of community participation.

1. Second, he is better able to defend the retention of cultural heritage assets. He attributes this to the good theoretical background acquired through ACP courses as well as from field-study trips organized as part of the program.
2. Additionally, he has a better understanding of Integrated Conservation and, thus, a better understanding of the whole conservation process. This helps him to persuade other professionals on his team, including people from his own profession, to be more aware of the importance of cultural heritage conservation.

#### *Interviewee Case #2*

Another interviewee, who is an architect by training and part of a multidisciplinary team in a government department, related that his new understanding of what it means to work on a conservation project (through ACP) has provided insight into the differences between an architectural project and a conservation project. He thinks that, while architects normally assume the role of team/project leaders in architectural projects, in conservation projects they are no more important than the other professionals involved, such as archaeologists, historians or museum curators. He commented that when dealing with cultural heritage “architects have to put away their egos and become equal members of the community.”

In one of his current projects, this interviewee is trying to promote public participation as a way of shaping the project and making it more relevant to the community. After the initial doubt of his superior about the success of such an initiative, the interviewee was able to convince him of the importance of public participation in such projects. Consequently, he was able to invite an NGO, which had previous experience in a similar project (resettlement of residents within the same estate), to act as a facilitator. The interviewee attributes his understanding of the importance of such dialogues to the training he received in ACP, which emphasized the importance of stakeholder participation in conservation initiatives.

#### *Other Interviewee Cases*

Of equal importance, a number of interviewees mentioned that ACP provided them with the confidence needed to communicate with professionals outside their own discipline. They believe this confidence comes mainly from knowledge of the subject matter directly related to conservation and a deeper understanding of the nature of related disciplines. Interestingly enough, one interviewee mentioned that knowing the right “vocabulary” was important in overcoming communication problems with other disciplines. Another interviewee mentioned that knowing how organizational structures affect decisions made by others, and the preferred communication methods of different organizations, helped shape his own methods of communication with them.

Both the survey and in-depth interviews reveal that ACP has made a significant contribution to how students understand colleagues both *inside* and *outside* their own departments/organizations. Although the study results are based on a small sample, and longitudinal research may be required to confirm all the findings, the study provides a good indication of the success of the program. The next section will explore the reasons for this success, and consider ways in which the program can be made even more effective in bridging differences.

#### **4.6 ACP: Learning from Bridging Differences**

What are the main reasons for the success of the program in bridging differences? The most important reason is the fundamental belief that to achieve conservation goals, stakeholders, including the conservation professional, must understand one another **and** must be able to communicate effectively with one another. It is only with interdisciplinary understanding and interdisciplinary communication that conservation initiatives can respond to and reflect the expectations of widely diverse stakeholders – from professionals to members of the community.

The MBI model offers a sound theoretical framework for understanding the bridging process, a process frequently acknowledged as important in achieving departmental/organizational goals, but which is, in fact, not always fully understood or clearly articulated. The MBI model with its three-component process sets out simply the complex process of effective communication and problem-solving across differences. The challenge of bridging differences has been an inherent part of ACP from the beginning,

although it was not as forcefully articulated in the first two years of the program as in the subsequent two years. For example, in the first year of the program, three professionals representing three different stakeholder groups (business, the community and government) were asked to lecture on the communication “styles” of their respective fields. Although the teaching staff was impressed by the lectures and the communication message (three different “languages”), students did not see the value of the presentations. In subsequent years, the challenge of “language” has been dealt with differently. “Language” differences are explored when lecturers and case presenters come from different disciplines, and considerable discussion revolves around the issue of shared meaning.

### *Mapping: Understand the Differences*

The example of “language” differences leads us to the first component of the MBI model – *Mapping: Understand the Differences*. As set out in the model, characteristics to be mapped must first be determined, and then the characteristics of each team member must be described and their potential effect on the team identified. In ACP, professional disciplines are explicitly mapped and such additional characteristics as cultural differences and personal traits are implicitly mapped. These three characteristics, as mentioned earlier in the paper, are among the most important in understanding differences. The mapping process takes place both inside the program among students and outside the program among professionals involved with ACP.

In the future, cultural differences will be an explicit part of mapping. This is necessitated by the change in student composition (more students from outside Hong Kong will be attending ACP) and it will be important to better understand such differences. Personal traits will remain an implicit part of the mapping exercise.

### *Bridging: Communicate across the Differences*

In the second component of the MBI model – *Bridging: Communicate across the Differences*, team members must first be motivated to communicate and then be able to decenter (suspend judgment) and recenter (establish a new basis for interaction). In ACP, students are encouraged to demonstrate their understanding of other disciplines in project work (both within the program and within their own workplace) and urged to be as neutral as possible in judging other disciplines during the process of establishing a new basis for interaction (suppressing blame). It is in this stage that the program has been especially successful and two of the main reasons for its success have been the realization that (1) effective communication is a critical part of the conservation process and (2) core competencies can give students additional confidence in their ability to understand, communicate and reach creative, viable solutions. In the aforementioned survey and interviews, in fact, students frequently mentioned the importance of understanding conservation theory and practice as a foundation for communicating across differences. This training alone helped them to establish their credibility as a professional in the field and, in turn, helped to boost their confidence in their ability to represent the interests of conservation.

In the future, the program will be even more explicit in giving students the opportunity to explore decentering and recentering within the context of group assignments and group projects. To achieve this, the ACP teaching staff will have to ensure that students working in groups are as diverse as possible (based on careful mapping, of course!) and that the value of such group work in bridging differences is fully articulated.

### *Integrating: Manage the Differences*

During the third component of the MBI model - Integrating: Manage the Differences, team members must move from understanding and communicating with each other to working together to reach solutions that build on the professional expertise of all team members. Ideally, decisions reflect the input of each team member and reflect what has been called by Maznevski and DiStefano (2000) "breakthrough ideas". In ACP, within the context of group assignments and group work, students are challenged to come up with fresh ideas about different aspects of conservation. Briefs for such exercises are kept deliberately open so that students must look to each other for solutions. Although some students have found this a positive experience, others have found it less so. The most adventuresome groups have tended to address conservation holistically, while less adventuresome groups have tended to focus on technical issues. Frustrated or not by such assignments, students have carried the lessons learned to the workplace and understand better the need to think broadly and creatively when addressing even a seemingly simple technical problem.

ACP has recognized the importance of bridging differences in its approach to training professionals in conservation. Its success in doing so can be attributed to a number of things, but especially to program design and pedagogy, as well as to the nature of the students. ACP students are practicing professions from a wide variety of professional fields. It can be said, in fact, that ACP is almost a microcosm of the real world of conservation. Even better than the real world, it offers students the opportunity to take risks with few repercussions. ACP's non-competitive assessment system supports this kind of positive learning environment.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

Involving professionals from different disciplines in conservation efforts is not a matter of choice, but of necessity. This is especially so in urban conservation where there is a wide range of stakeholders. Conservation training programs can be instrumental in bridging differences between different stakeholders by helping them to (1) understand their differences (mapping), (2) communicate across differences (bridging) and (3) manage the differences (integrating).

Although this paper has explored the effectiveness of bridging differences using the MBI model within the context of a post-graduate conservation program, the model can be used as a basis for other kinds of training and learning activities, including conservation

workshops designed for specific groups of people.<sup>4</sup> Not surprisingly, its usefulness can be affected by the arena in which it is used. There is the arena at the policy level, where heritage tries to find its place within development programs (and especially at policy levels where communication takes place between romantic “poets” and practical “engineers”), and there is the arena at the project level where communication takes place between professionals and other stakeholders. Although the MBI model can be effective in both situations, the challenges faced in these distinct arenas are very different in both nature and scale.

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<sup>4</sup> For a thorough description of how to use the MBI model in training contexts with examples of materials, simulations and exercises, see DiStefano and Maznevski (2003).

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