Conceptual diagrams are "thought drawings"

Conceptual diagrams are an important communication tool for both studying and solving environmental problems. Based on the idea that a diagram can be worth 10,000 words, they provide diagrammatic representations of ecosystems in which key features and major impacts can be illustrated. Conceptual diagrams serve to highlight the most important ecosystem features and interactions. They can depict the processes and biota, and provide focus for research or monitoring efforts. Good conceptual diagrams have many lives in many places.

Conceptual diagrams facilitate communication

Conceptual diagrams help to clarify thinking—words can be ambiguous but an image commits to the message being portrayed. Conceptual diagrams provide a communication interface between peer scientists, and between scientists and non-scientists. Conceptual diagrams can be used in a variety of publications including presentations, posters, science communication products, books, and between scientists and non-scientists. Conceptual diagrams can be used as an interactive image library for use in science communication publications. The IAN website also has a discussion forum about conceptual diagrams where users can effectively synthesize current knowledge, helping to identify gaps as well as key links and processes. These diagrams can be readily meaningful when viewed in grayscale.

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Science communication is an essential component of environmental problem solving. Effective scientific communication requires synthesis, visualization and appropriate context. Conceptual diagrams, or "thought drawings," are an excellent means of providing these requirements. A conceptual diagram uses symbols to convey the essential attributes of a system. There are four important reasons for using conceptual diagrams: 1: to clarify thinking and avoid ambiguities; 2: to provide a unique communication interface between scientific disciplines or between scientists and non-scientists; 3: to identify gaps, establish priorities and solicit an agreed synthesis; and 4: better define scales of processes and linkages within habitats and communities. Conceptual diagrams can be applied in: a: setting research agendas; b: developing scientific syntheses; c: designing monitoring programs; and d: identifying management priorities. Significant web resources, including free downloadable symbol libraries and tutorials, are available and are increasingly being used by a global audience.

Abstract

"...visual language unleashes the full power of communication"