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# Dialogue in conservation decision-making

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An analysis of the impact of stakeholder consultation during the conservation decision-making processes is presented. Defining and finding opportunities for stakeholder communication within conservation work is an ethical necessity when working with cultural heritage, but the limits and practice of this necessity are less clear. Case studies are used to explore which aspects of the conservation process stakeholders are most likely to be consulted about, and reviews the impact of their views. It asks whether conservators have a preference in which decisions they are prepared to share with stakeholders across three aspects of conservation: the initial appraisal, treatment and the display or storage. Where consultation relates to treatment, conservators are more likely to fall back on their own technical authority except when those consulted are regarded as fellow professionals. Other categories of stakeholder such as artists, originating communities, and religious groups were found to be more constructively consulted on the understanding of the object and on care related to display and storage. Conservators should be offered more explicit guidance on the ethics of consultation, the aspects of consultation that they should engage with and on the ethical ways to deal with conflict arising from consultation.

**Keywords:** Stakeholders, Ethics, Consultation, Decision-making, Communication

## Introduction

Conservators, regardless of their specialism, have their work guided by a familiar range of ethical codes (AIC, 1994; AICCM, 2002; ICOM, 2011) and within these codes are the requirements for consultation with stakeholders. This paper reviews the relationship of conservators and those they consult by examining a series of published case studies to understand who was consulted, on what aspect of conservation and to correlate this with the impact that their views had on the conservation process.

## Consultation in codes of ethics

ICOM's code of ethics encourages museums to collaborate with communities from which their collections originate as well as those they serve (ICOM, 2011). The Nara charter explains elegantly 'that the cultural heritage of each is the cultural heritage of all' (UNESCO, 1994). The China Principles (ICOMOS, 2015) call for stakeholders to take part in the conservation management planning process. The Canadian *Code of Ethics* states that the conservation decision-making process includes the consideration of non-material properties such as religious or cultural significance or the artists' intention (CAC & CAPC, 2000).

AIC's *Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice* states that 'all actions of the conservation professional must be governed by an informed respect for the cultural property, its unique character and significance, and the people or person who created it' (AIC, 1994). Ethical codes are often 'the result of long discussion and hard bargaining' (O'Keefe, 1998, p. 33). They represent the consensus rather than the view of a specific individual or group. Conservators often consult because they cannot be expected to know every significant quality of the cultural heritage to be preserved (Clavir, 2009) so consultation helps extend that understanding. Inevitably, this consultation is with individuals or groups with specific perspectives. Although the term 'stakeholder' has increased significantly in public discourse since the 1980s (Ngram Viewer, 2015) the concept of consultation is firmly embedded in ethical conservation decision-making.

## Who should be consulted?

Ethical codes can only serve as a guide to thinking rather than directing practice. Enacting the codes remains situational, their application varying according to what is being conserved. The codes are consistent in expressing the need to consult relevant people during or before the conservation process. For example, the Victoria and Albert Museum's conservation ethics checklist (Ashley-Smith & Richmond, 2004) asks 'Have I consulted stakeholders, peers,

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other specialists?’ defining stakeholders as anyone who has a valid interest in the outcome of conservation decisions. This solution relies on the interpretation of a concept such as ‘valid interest’ and ‘is only as good as the person administering it’ (Dhar, 2006). An attempt to seek clarity on who to consult can lead to comprehensive and perhaps un-manageable lists of potential stakeholders.

### *Identified stakeholders*

Some branches of conservation have placed an emphasis on consultation with specific stakeholders. Codified in the USA by NAGPRA (1990), the law requires consultation on the conservation of Native American heritage. Conservators working in heritage landscapes commonly associated with first peoples are particularly aware of the need to ‘consult with all relevant stakeholders before making treatment or other decisions’ on the conservation of material with cultural and spiritual significance (AICCM, 2002). The role of such consultation is almost always to develop an understanding of the object under conservation. This can be challenging as it is important to recognise ‘that people connected culturally to objects in their collections may have values and priorities that differ significantly from how we have been practicing conservation to date’ (Sease, 1998, p. 106).

Whilst the need to consult is both explicit and nearly universal, who to consult and how to manage any conflict arising from consultation is far less clear. This opens the door to selective practice where stakeholder consultation is just another box to tick in an ethical checklist, where those selected for consultation can be pre-determined by their acceptability. The exception to this is first nations people, for example AICCM members are instructed to recognise the ‘unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as first peoples, and as key stakeholders in the conservation of their cultural heritage material’ (AICCM, 2002). Ethical codes do not specifically identify other groups, such as creators and artists, owners or curators, as more significant, although the creator or artist’s intent is often identified as an important consideration.

Understanding the rationale for the identification of unique status for first nations people is important in considering whether this privilege can, or should, be extended to other groups such as artists / creators. Can, and should, unique status be offered to more than one group? If so ethical codes should clarify the contexts in which each unique status would apply. Fundamentally, the underpinning motivations for offering this status should be considered. If the status is offered as a redress for past ethical failures reflecting systematic discrimination, then the extension would be to other disempowered groups. If the status is offered

based on a unique understanding and relationship to the cultural heritage then the similarity to creators is far more pertinent (Edmonds, 1999). Wain (2014, p. 55) raises the concern that the act of offering ‘unique status’ on these terms may suggest that conservators making decisions in other contexts ‘are *not* expected to allow cultural requirements to take precedence’ perhaps this masks a tacit acceptance that intangible heritage has a lower status than tangible in conservation decisions. In response a clear procedure for defining and evaluating stakeholder consultation, for setting the context in which stakeholders are invited to comment and for equalising tangible and intangible aspects is recommended.

### **Stakeholders must have relationship of value**

An examination of conventional definitions of stakeholders returns a broad category of people with an issue or concern. To throw the net too widely results in a paralysing amount of consultation. The opportunity to consult selectively creates opportunities for selection or confirmation bias (Newell *et al.*, 2007). Conservators seeking to engage with the public are all too aware that the public is a ‘rich variety of people with diverse opinions and needs’ (Jones, 2002). For practical reasons focus is required.

For conservation, a more explicit definition of stakeholders would be useful. The concept of a ‘valid claim’ is subjective, whereas opening consultation to people with ‘any concern’ is insufficiently distinct. Stakeholders in conservation decisions could be defined as people who attribute value to an object or collection and by sharing this, they enable the conservator to maintain its social and cultural value during conservation. This recognition of value and impact is a way to narrow down the necessary consultations while still justly recognising diverse voices.

This relationship of value appears to be a broader definition than offered by some. Viñas (2005, p. 177) implies that people involved in ‘practical functions’ such as tourist connections, economy or politics may not be stakeholders but he argues that their role is nonetheless important to consider in addition to stakeholders. Remembering that value can come from these more ‘mundane’ aspects of an object (Viñas, 2005) is essential in maintaining a current and dynamic sense of the value of objects being treated. As Vestheim *et al.* note, ‘no value is absolute. Objects and their values change over time. They have their own history and exist and change in their own social and geographical context’ (2001, pp. 221–22). Considering who attributes value to an object, even in the economic or political sense, is a route to maintaining awareness of the sociocultural significance of what is being conserved.

## Consultation in practice

In order to evaluate stakeholder impact on conservation decisions, 28 case studies that described consultation undertaken with stakeholders to inform conservation decisions were examined for this paper. There are many definitions of conservation in the sector, for simplicity this research categorised three aspects of conservation practice: the initial appraisal and information gathering activities around the expression of need for the task; the treatment aspect which encompasses the construction and implementation of an interventive or preventive conservation plan; and the display or storage of an item which should be informed by conservation considerations but which may not necessarily follow treatment. Each reported case study was examined to consider the types of stakeholder consulted and whether advice was taken. A summary is presented in Table 1.

The stakeholders were categorised by the authors into differing stakeholder types: religious groups; originating communities; artists; and professionals. A summary (Fig. 1) shows that consultation on appraisal was the predominant aspect considered and treatment the least across all stakeholder groups (Fig. 2). Although this sample is not extensive, it is unsurprising that stakeholders are contributing more to the understanding of the objects than the determination of the treatment.

## The issue of technical authority

Should conservators consider the role of stakeholders as being restricted to offering insight into the meaning of the cultural heritage and the way that it is kept, reserving the technical authority to plan and implement treatment? Viñas (2005) argues that moral authority is not interchangeable with technical knowledge and that technical expertise is what allows for methodical decisions to be made in an educated way that a 'layperson' is not authorised to decide. Whilst the delineation between appraisal and treatment may be theoretically clear, consultation is not such a clear-cut process. Those consulted may not restrict their opinions simply to meaning; their advice might spill over into consequences for practice.

Examining the case studies further revealed a more nuanced pattern of consultation (Table 2). Despite the limitations of sample size there is a pattern illustrating where conservators are, and are not, able to enact the input of stakeholders. It appears from the case studies that there is both a tendency not to consult on treatment, but also more worryingly not to act on input received in this area unless the views come from fellow professionals. The over-ruling or ignoring of stakeholder opinion or advice may have good intentions; however, it must be remembered that conservation is a socio-cultural activity, not only technical

practice, and that the value attached to heritage can be more than simply aesthetic or historic (Mason, 2002). Those classified by the authors as 'professional' stakeholders, archaeologists, art historians, and scholars for example, were found to be more present during decisions on the treatment process than other stakeholders.

## Case studies

These trends described can be illustrated using the narratives from the conservation literature. Malkogeorgou (2012) reported on the conservation of a Buddha statue where extensive consultation was undertaken as to whether or not to open a scroll contained within the statue. Although the consultees, religious groups, expressed a clear preference for leaving the scroll unchanged, the final decision was made to open it. The conservator appears to have been overruled by curatorial colleagues. The question of whether it is worse, in ethical terms, to consult and ignore advice or not to consult at all is raised by this case.

An example of a struggle between ethical conservation standards and the moral obligation to respond to all stakeholders, is a case study by Stein *et al.* (2000). The conservators consulted with church staff, parish representatives, and clergy, but feedback focussed on only one aspect of the work, with many consultees expressing an opinion that the altarpiece and pulpit should be re-gilded. The conservators felt that such a re-gilding was unnecessary, detracted from the current acceptable condition, and was consequently unethical. As a result, the conservators did not re-gild and this caused a lack of satisfaction for both parties. The conservators felt their work was undervalued and the stakeholders felt that their voices were not heard. The ethical standards the conservators were attempting to follow caused the stakeholders to feel as though what was being conserved, liturgical pieces of worship, were being treated following ethics for 'museum pieces' rather than part of a working church. This 'ethical relativism' arbitrating 'between competing priorities' (Aitchinson, 2007, p. 122) is not unusual during stakeholder consultation.

Davies & Heuman (2004) reported on the impact of conservation decisions on the options for an artist to create a new work within a gallery. Gallacio's work involved creating a sugar glass carpet visitors could walk on. Concerns were raised of dust and pests affecting the exhibit and being moved to other exhibits via visitor movement. Suggestions of covering the carpet or altering the application of the sugar were made. The requirements fundamentally changed the artist's intentions leading to an altered and smaller exhibition. The stakeholder (the artist) was not able to conduct her art as she wanted to; the museum and conservation

**Table 1 Organisation of case studies and the conservation impact following ignored or acted on discussion with stakeholders**

Case study	What is discussed?	Who was consulted	Ignored or acted	Impact summary	Notes
Albini, <i>et al.</i> (1996)	Subterranean plasterwork and mosaics in Roman Houses at San Paolino Alla Regola.	Archaeologist and conservator working together.	Acted on: Minimum intervention achieved as wanted by archaeologists with assistance of the on-site conservators.	Minimum cost, minimum intervention, and more historical content remaining on site.	
Brajer & Thillemann (2002)	Wall paintings in Tirsted Church.	Art historians and representatives of the Church community.	Acted on: Reconstruction satisfied the community; different from original, which satisfied the conservators; satisfied historians with ID of scene.	Rather than an 'easy and aesthetically pleasing solution' of presenting original fragments only, compromises were made to satisfy everyone.	Departure from familiar conservation ethical practice.
Carroll & Wharton (1996)	Finds at Kaman-Kalehöyük site in Turkey.	Conservators working with archaeologists and zooarchaeologists.	Acted on: Conservation of bones changed to reduce post-excavation damage as needed by zooarchaeologist. More appropriate materials used by archaeologists with conservator advice.	Better preservation of materials. Mutual benefit of how to operate together on an archaeological site to maintain integrity of artefacts, etc. as well as to better excavate/label things on site.	
Clavir (1994)	Native American objects at the Museum of New Mexico.	Representatives from the pueblos.	Acted on: Collaboration with the tribe led to an entire room dedicated to the culturally sensitive objects apart from the rest of the collections.	The room allows for a compromise in preserving the 'conceptual integrity' according to 'the wishes of the originators' and the 'physical integrity' according to museum practice.	Compromising has allowed access to tribal people to resolve any issues in a culturally appropriate manner rather than an immediate call for repatriation.
Cotte (2013)	Buddhist thangkas.	High-rank Lama, monk/co-director of monastery in Nepal, translator to Dalai Lama, and lay-person Australian-Tibetan married to member of Tibetan exiled government.	Acted on: Collaborated with traditional painters. Direct involvement of the interviewees was permitted.	Collaboration with traditional painters led to accurate representation of deity while preserving integrity. Minimal in-painting rather than archaeological missing-piece-showing approach.	Case shows that Tibetan culture and modernity can work together. Discussed the concept of secular as being respect for all in relation to the display of thangkas as suggested by the interviewees.
Davies & Heuman (2004)	Kapoor's sculptures with loose pigments; Whiteread's large room installations; and Gallacio's sugar glass carpet.	Tate conservators working with the artists.	Partially acted on : Method of re-pigmenting was agreed with Kapoor; Whiteread's assistant worked with Tate to address the complex conservation issues; the conservation challenges of displaying a sticky and pest attracting substance led to a fundamental change to Gallacio's art.	For two artists the art was adapted for one it was rejected.	Conservation acting as gatekeeper based on practical ethics. What is the limit of a code of ethics in the face of practical challenges exist?

*Continued*

**Table 1 Continued**

Case study	What is discussed?	Who was consulted	Ignored or acted	Impact summary	Notes
de Roemer (2008)	Large copper alloy Shiva sculpture.	Museum curators, members of Hindu community and bronze founder.	Acted on: Restored to accurate and original depiction after the vandalism.	Conservators able to examine the structural components and past repairs to stabilise it and to understand the artistic and spiritual reasons for its appearance.	Access and information on manufacture increased appropriate display methods and structural strengthening.
Dempwolf (2006)	Engine in Wustermark diesel power station.	Former workers and operators at facility.	Acted on: Not really taking direct advice from stakeholder but using their accounts as justification for final display of the engine.	Oil stripped off from ironwork to reveal a shiny metal surface.	Stakeholder testimony of past treatment while engine was working justified the conservation treatment of stripping oil and maintaining a shiny metal surface.
Dhar (2006)	Monuments of Mahayana tradition of Himalayan region; temple in Ladakh.	Mahayana Buddhists, scholars and monks in Ladakh, and communities.	Not acted: Traditional minimal western approach to conservation enacted.	Conservation leaving some losses without reconstruction conflicts with stakeholder beliefs. A tradition of repainting damaged images or losses led to large-scale overpainting once conservators have left.	Conservator's understanding of how the western philosophy of conservation may not match 'the ethos of the people whom the paintings serve'. Recognised need for familiar vocabulary and better addressing of local concerns to create effective outcomes.
Fletcher <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Contemporary American Indian Ceramics.	The artists. (Denver Art Museum).	Acted on: Artists' intentions shown through the interviews. Knowing what to keep shiny how to display to maintain meaning the artist wanted.	Preventive conservation used when it became clear intervention could alter the appearance of pieces and thus alter meaning.	
Greene (2006)	Native American Objects.	Curator spoken on behalf of Native American tribe. Curator not identified in text as member of originating community but as expert in determining accurate representation of objects.	Acted on: The conservator's opinion is overruled as the curator dictated the extent and parameters of the treatments.	Display to the curator's satisfaction.	No evidence of independent validation of interpretation so risk of mis-representation.
Grün (2006)	44 pillared basalt blocks titled, <i>The End of the Twentieth Century</i> by Joseph Beuys.	Witnesses to the creation of the piece.	Acted on: stakeholder consultation showed clay and felt should not be obscured by reconstruction.	A more preventive approach was taken so as to un-obscure Beuys' personal touches.	'Without the accounts of their recollections of the creation process, important aspects would have remained in the dark'.
Jones-Amin <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Gamelan in use at museum.	Gamelan makers. Gamelan players.	Acted on: Recognition of spiritual nature and use of the gamelan with tuner / maker invited to tune the object. Players request not acted on	Allowed the gamelan to maintain spiritual nature through use. The players do not like the museum's rules.	The museum maintains that the object is more 'in context' than the players request.

*Continued*

Table 1 Continued

Case study	What is discussed?	Who was consulted	Ignored or acted	Impact summary	Notes
Kaminitz, <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Ceremonial dance regalia.	National Museum of the American Indian loaning dance regalia to Confederated Tribes of Siletz Oregon (many distinct tribal groups in W Oregon and NW California).	Acted on: The tribe was able to use the original ceremonial regalia with precautions taken to ensure material stability.	The regalia got some damage but repaired and responsibility to the tribe was fulfilled.	Allowed a renewal in tribal traditions bringing pride in the heritage. Consultation 'strengthens the museum programming and reverberates back to the Native community'.
Kokten & Cetin (2010)	Archaeological and ethnographic collections in Northern Cypress 2005–2007.	Department of Antiquities in Northern Cyprus.	Acted on: The museums (stakeholders) asked for help and the conservators formulated an educational programme in preventive conservation for the museum specialists.	The collection is in a safer state. The museum specialists and the conservators were both able to expand professionally.	
Malkogeorgou (2012)	Cu alloy Buddha.	Tibetan representatives.	Not acted on: The argument for aesthetics in a design museum trumped the Tibetan stakeholders' comments.	The museum's position to represent objects as de-contextualised overruled the spiritual/cultural stakeholder input and justified the opening of the statue and removal of inner papers.	Clear views by stakeholders were sought but not acted upon.
Mars & Pacheco (2008)	Work involving synthetic binding agents.	Artist Eduardo Sales Encarnación.	Acted on: Material from his art studied and technique studied for accurate intervention and authenticity.	Artist intent established and recorded for future conservation. Knowledge of the artist's desire for longevity of his work.	Contact with the artist can provide information about the uses and application procedures of the materials as well as to the intended future of his work.
Moffet <i>et al.</i> (2002)	Mixed media modern piece and modern ceramic piece in Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art.	Artist Rudzani Nemasetoni & Magdalene Odundo.	Acted on: Minute losses on R.N.'s piece were left un-restored with minimal consolidation, the metal area was treated with corrosion inhibitor and large areas were reconstructed. Odondo's piece was left untouched as per her intention.	R.N.'s intention was maintained through his direct advice on treatment, which included allowing efflorescence in the piece to continue. Non-intrusive conservation methods were justified by Odondo's intention to allow for spalling as a consequence of manufacture.	Typical treatment of deterioration was deterred after artist interviews and their personal choices in conservation showed how conservators could treat while maintaining intent and aesthetic appearance.
Orea (2002)	Wall paintings in Mexico (60s–90s)	Mexican team working with UNESCO. Got help from elder masons.	Acted on: Treatment was done by combining traditional and modern treatments.	Wall paintings were treated while simultaneously instructing and demonstrating conservation methods.	Development of the conservation profession in Mexico.

Continued

**Table 1 Continued**

Case study	What is discussed?	Who was consulted	Ignored or acted	Impact summary	Notes
Sayer, 2013	Sami human remains exhumed in 1915 in Neiden.	Sami peoples and government.	Acted on: The Neiden people were reburied after debate.	Stakeholders' 'colonial guilt' led to the reburial.	Questions about knowledge that could have been gained from examination remained unanswered—future archaeologists left without information.
Silva (2013)	Heritage site in Portugal.	Community members.	Neither: The stakeholder consideration was never addressed before the actions.	Certain restored areas became unused (historic area too small for residents) and many with negative outlook on the tourism brought in by the heritage designation.	Residents feel the work was not done well with roof tiles breaking and causing leaks. Increase in costs of living due to tourism increase has left many residents unhappy.
Smith & Winkelbauer (2006)	Maori eel trap.	Maori tribe representatives; Maori Advisory Committee (MAC.)	Acted on: Conserved for display, as requested by MAC.	The initial treatment plan was changed from storage to display after consultation.	The living nature of the object was respected by being conserved and put on display, respecting the Treaty of Waitangi and the tribe.
Stein <i>et al.</i> (2000)	Baroque altarpiece, pulpit, and font of Oslo Cathedral.	Church council, parish representatives, Directorate for Cultural Heritage, clergy, church staff, and sponsor (a.k.a. the steering group.)	Not acted upon: The pieces were not re-gilded as there was 'no need for re-gilding'. NIKU and SVK noted that the original gold was still beautiful and re-gilding may not add the right look to the even tone of the pieces.	Other conservation issues were not discussed with the stakeholders because the discussion focused on the re-gilding. Treatment was reworked to restore the gilding far more than originally planned.	The conservators were left feeling their work was not well justified to the stakeholders and stakeholders felt their voices had no influence in the final decision. Stakeholders noted that their church furnishings should not be observed as art until they are actually in a museum.
Stein (2002)	Virgsted church Denmark.	Conservators with local elected parish council, architects, church authorities, and antiquarians.	Not acted on then Acted on: The expected and desired regilding of the organ by the stakeholders was not approved as it was 'not needed' and would impact future treatment. Consolidation of the original surfaces and the pulpit altar were planned instead.	Furniture was realised as more important so the structural consolidation to surfaces was needed, though deemed 'not visible' by congregation. The treatment was within the budget, so congregation was pleased even without the obvious signs of restoration.	Could not please everyone but compromises were made based on the conservators, antiquarians, and most of the diocese defending the 'consolidation only' proposal.
Thorn (2006)	Indigenous paintings in national parks.	Australian indigenous peoples.	Acted on: The conservator had discussions and supervisions with tribe elders to ensure the spiritual nature of rock was maintained during treatment.	Observations made of conservation values being mindful of Aboriginal cultural such as making Mayali paintings re-paintable.	Treatment plans were formulated with a compromise of ephemeral spiritual actions and conservation.

*Continued*

Table 1 Continued

Case study	What is discussed?	Who was consulted	Ignored or acted	Impact summary	Notes
van Saaze (2013)	Two different installation art pieces (one at Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht and one at S.M.A.K. in Ghent.)	Artist Joëlle Tuerlinckx.	Acted on: The handling was different but the two museums managed to consider the artist's intent through their own relationships formed with the artist.	One museum having an installation piece measured and close to the original, while the other displayed working with the artist creating the concept of her work to fit the collection while also being flexible.	Results formed through the relationship between conservators and artist. The original intention of the artist does not have to be the ultimate arbitrator.
Wharton (2008)	Kamehameha I statue.	Mixed heritage population in Nokohala community.	Acted on: The paint or gild decision voted on by people, and their paint choices, were applied even with knowledge of the original appearance.	People more involved in the care of the statue. There is an understanding and respect of conservation because their views were considered.	Voting within community decided the outcome. Spiritual and aesthetic representations were connected to the decisions.
Wisse et al. (2005)	Trobriand yam storehouse.	Anthropologists, specialists, and curators.	Acted on: Attempt to combine original practice and intent with the resources available and needs of the museum as voiced by all parties involved.	Research and collaboration led to understanding of materials used in the past and possibly for future repairs. Displays maintained meaning for community.	Collaboration led to understanding how far conservation should go without detracting from the possible anthropological evidence on the artefact and how it should be displayed maintaining meaning.

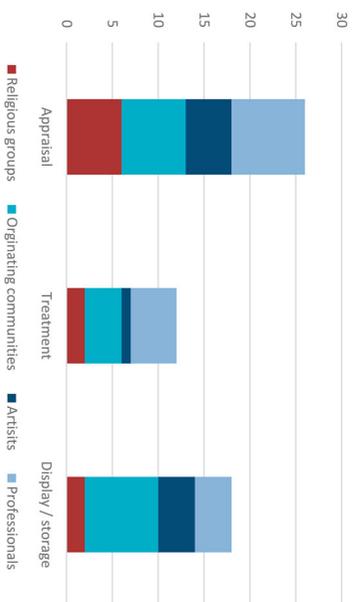


Figure 1 Presence of stakeholders in appraisal, treatment, and display/storage in case study samples.

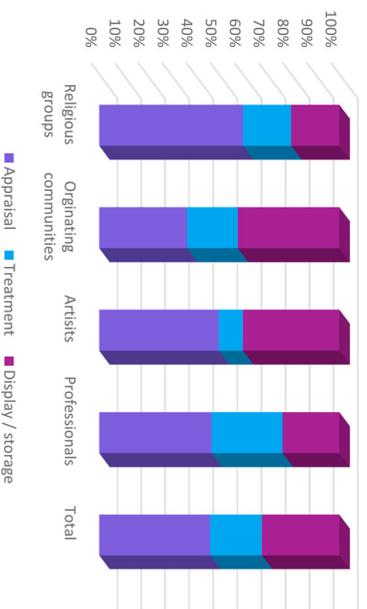


Figure 2 Aspects of conservation consulted upon by stakeholder type as found in case study samples.

necessities took precedence. This case shows conservators as gatekeepers, controlling the criteria and the message of an object or artwork. Another case reported by Davies & Heuman described collaborations with the assistants of both Kapoor and Whiteread, who had been directly involved in the creation of their works. These collaborations allowed conservators to display and accurately understand the construction and subsequent treatment necessities of these works. Although seemingly unique to contemporary art conservation, these collaborations are similar to the consultation with professionals in other conservation branches where the process of creation and technology of an object are discussed.

A contrasting case study was reported by Wharton (2008) regarding the conservation of the *Kamehameha I* in Hawaii. In this case, the originating community were consulted and included extensively in guiding the conservator during treatment. Although it was only the conservator who treated the object, the stakeholders were involved in choosing the paint and end appearance of the object. The treatment was a significant divergence from the original plan but was enacted by the conservator with the support of the community. This apparently harmonious outcome was only possible because the conservator relinquished the original commission and found alternative funding

**Table 2** Case studies separated by stakeholder group cross-referenced with conservation actions they influenced

Case studies	Conservation actions with impact		
	Appraisal	Treatment	Display and storage
<i>Religious groups</i>			
Brajer & Thillemann (2002)	X		
Cotte (2013)	X	X	X
de Roemer (2008)	X		
Dhar (2006)	X		
Malkogeorgou (2012)	X	X	
Stein <i>et al.</i> (2000)	X	X	X
<i>Originating communities</i>			
Dhar (2006)	X		
Clavir (1994)	X		X
Greene (2006)		X	X
Jones-Amin <i>et al.</i> (2006)	X	X	X
Kaminitz <i>et al.</i> (2005)	X		
Sayer (2013)			X
Silva (2013)			X
Smith & Winkelbauer (2006)	X		X
Thorn (2006)	X	X	X
Wharton (2008)	X	X	X
<i>Artists</i>			
Davies & Heuman (2004)	X	X	X
Fletcher <i>et al.</i> (2006)	X		X
Grün (2006)	X		
Mars & Pacheco (2008)	X		
Moffet <i>et al.</i> (2002)	X		X
Van Saaze (2013)			X
<i>Professionals</i>			
Albini <i>et al.</i> (1996)	X	X	
Brajer & Thillemann (2002)	X		
Carroll & Wharton (1996)	X	X	
Dempwolf (2006)	X		X
de Roemer (2008)	X		
Dhar (2006)	X		
Kokten & Cetin (2010)		X	X
Orea (2002)		X	
Stein (2002)	X		X
Wisse <i>et al.</i> (2005)	X	X	X

X: acted upon X: not acted upon.

to respect the conservation outcomes determined as a result of consultation.

### Communication

There has been a move to a minimalist approach in conservation, perhaps stemming from the desire for reversibility, and distaste for overly interventive

treatment of the past destroying evidence. With the conservation of Buddhist objects, Dhar (2006) describes the stakeholders' opinions were enacted respecting the religious sanctions and canons that held detailed technical traits on the repainting of images, but significantly altering the conservator's more minimalist initial conservation proposal. Being able to communicate the reasoning behind leaving an object a certain way, or altering that which may be considered valued is key in being able to work with stakeholders. Stakeholders can provide the link to showing others that conservation is important and worthwhile. Conservators must reflect on how they are perceived and in turn, how they can be appreciated and respected 'we need to demonstrate our role in preserving culturally significant artefacts and bringing the knowledge obtained through that process into the public domain' (Brooks, 2013, p. 5). Likewise, including stakeholder interaction in conservation work is important for future treatment, yet as Sloggett (2009) points out there is not consistent practice in including acknowledgements of stakeholder views in condition reports and other conservation documentation. Direct communication with stakeholders and consideration of their values tied with the object can provide information that universal codes and indirect historical knowledge cannot. Understanding that stakeholders can provide meaningful knowledge about an object can help conservators see beyond the typical conservation aspects of treatment.

The success of, and therefore satisfaction with, communication is contingent upon the degree to which those consulting are open to outcomes that might be generated from the input of consultees. Involving stakeholders can be a challenge to conservators who feel protective of their technical expertise. Jones (2002) observes that although the need for conservation communication is not new, it seems as if conservators do not feel it is worth it, despite the fact that having skills such as communication are essential for conservators 'to do their jobs properly'. In the cases evaluated for this study, negative results correlated with communication breakdowns. To ensure stakeholder consultation within an ethical framework the consultation must plan who to consult and which aspects of the process are genuinely open for discussion. Reflecting prior to consultation on whether any potential outcomes are beyond either acceptable boundaries of technical authority or ethical codes is important in order to communicate clearly and manage expectations. Consulting and then failing to act upon the feedback must be considered one of the least satisfactory outcomes for all parties.

Conservation's familiar ethical practice may be a barrier to conserving what is truly important and valuable in the object. Good communication, and the

inclusion of this in conservation literature, can only further inform an understanding between conservators and stakeholders. Relaxing the grip of technical authority can help ‘conservation to engage with and to drive political agendas and policy development’ (Sloggett, 2009, p. 181).

In the case of contemporary art the opportunity to communicate directly with the creator who can offer information on significance, techniques of manufacture, and planned future use has aspects that are singularly replicated in other branches of conservation but to have all three represented by one stakeholder is distinct. This represents a great opportunity for conservators but also a risk that when consulting each of these distinct domains are not considered clearly. It may be that the tolerance of the conservator to outcome changing input might be different for each domain. The opportunity to clarify, reflect on the nature of the consultation, and therefore manage expectations should increase the likelihood for a satisfactory consultation. In the contemporary art sector, there is also the opportunity to contact those removed from the creator and the distinction in their roles must be clear. As with O’Reilly’s experience (2014) with Donald Rodney’s work, consulting a family member about the meaning of a piece of art might transfer almost identical insight into intangible aspects of the art as would be offered by the artists and consulting with an assistant offers near identical technical authority. However each of the roles of the creator: meaning; technical construction and future purpose may not transfer equally to each of these close contacts. The relationship of each consultee to the decision-making process and the aspects that they are being consulted upon is critical.

### Ethical practice

Oddy, writing about the formation of codes of ethics in 1996 discussed using a code of ethics to distinguish right from wrong. He stated,

In conservation, what may be right for one customer or curator will be wrong for another: thus, I believe that we should abandon attempts to write *codes of ethics* and instead construct *codes of practice* ... It is a system of rules or regulations relating to a method of working (1996, p. 9).

These codes of practice can be more open and adaptable to the information and involvement of stakeholders adding knowledge and value to conservation decisions. Moving from ethical rules to ethical practice leads to an examination of how a decision was made and the rationale behind it, rather than attempting to see the future and what ethical standards the outcome will meet. Interestingly Oddy did qualify this openness with one proviso: ‘nothing should be

done to an object which compromises any original part of it.’ This bottom line creates circumstances where stakeholders could be expected to be overruled when offering opinions of the value of intangible aspects.

To examine each of the issues raised: who to consider as stakeholder; their relation to value and to outcomes; the aspects of conservation to discuss; the need for communication to offer a range of potential outcomes; and a recognition of tangible and intangible value fit more neatly into Oddy’s conception of a code of practice than a statements of right and wrong. Interestingly, the recognition of the intangible nature of cultural heritage and the centrality (or unique role) of some stakeholders in defining this stand in stark contrast to his final proviso. For conservators who go beyond a recognition of the physical integrity of the cultural heritage and begin to recognise the need to safeguard the intangible qualities (Vecco, 2010) requires evaluation of less quantifiable aspects. Decision making in uncertainty requires skills in the identification and evaluation of decision-making criteria (Henderson & Waller, 2016) and codes of practice could guide conservators to the types of criteria to consider.

### The artist’s intent and the preservation of original material

The definition of stakeholders and the imperative to consult are general principles guiding conservation practice. The nature and status of consultees is a less uniformly agreed concept. Some stakeholders emerge as more equal than others, specifically originating communities where an active process is needed to counteract historical power relations and to properly represent intangible values. Other stakeholders hold more power in practice, such as the professional whose authority has been shown to be more influential. This raises interesting questions as to whether artists, as originators, should have an enhanced status in ethical codes and whether that authority should transfer to their families or artistic communities on their death. The concept of transferring unique status must be debateable despite the fact that an assistant’s immediate connection to the artist must transfer technical authority.

The argument that an artist should contribute to the definition of the meaning of their own piece is almost self-evident, yet their relationship to conservation intervention may be different. Does creation confer permanent and pre-emptive rights to decisions about material interventions? Should conservators be more explicit on which domains they are sharing authority? If a discussion extends to outcomes that appear to conflict with what conservators have in the past considered to be sacred, such as Oddy’s (1996)

preservation of the ‘original part,’ how will these conflicts be negotiated? Van Saaze (2013) discusses contemporary art conservation in this context. The concepts of authenticity and intent can theoretically be determined with the help of an artist as a stakeholder through a communication -based relationship. However, ethical guidelines cannot specify how much a conservator or an artist can dictate for the conceptual and physical extents involved in conservation decision-making (van Saaze, 2013, p. 55). This power struggle or ethical ambiguity is not unique to contemporary art. In the same way artists are used to establish intent and authenticity of an object or art piece, religious groups, originating communities, and other professionals do so for other conservators.

## Conclusion

The study found that in existing practice across a range of conservation disciplines, consultation about the meaning of cultural heritage tends to be common, constructive, and satisfactory. Where that consultation strays into the aspects of conservation practice and decisions that impinge on the physical manifestation of the object there is less ease within the community. Consultations that are not fulfilled lead to poor satisfaction for all parties. Conservators who work with first nations collections are often at the forefront of discussions about input, and their input into codes such as the AICCM code of ethics and practice make it clear that at times specific redress is needed. Whether that redress would be most effectively acted upon identifying a unique relationship based on connection and knowledge within a code of ethics or whether work on establishing the importance of intangible value as a criterion in conservation decisions within a code of practice is available for discussion.

It may be difficult to step outside the conservation bubble of what seems right and ethical, but genuine consultation with stakeholders will have a positive impact on the conservation of value. Excluding stakeholders from conservation decision-making, and avoiding communication, can only lead to negative results. The two factors, the imperative to consult and the non-uniformity of consultees, represent both a consensus and a conflict. Conservators should consult but the result of the consultation may point to conservation practice that is a departure from the previous learned and preferred approach. Conservators should ‘openly acknowledge the validity of other cultural approaches to the preservation of objects’ ... and ‘recognize that in some instances, conservation as we currently practice it will be the only one of many options that might be chosen’ (Sease, 1998, p. 108). In these cases difficult choices arise. Understanding who can provide information based on the value they attribute to an object can help in

clearing the ambiguity from a too broad definition of stakeholders. Consideration of which aspects of the decision making are available to external input is essential to avoid unnecessary conflict. Planning how conflicting views can be managed may require an examination of power and authority of consultees. Conservation of contemporary culture can learn from the other branches of conservation about inviting and responding to stakeholder input, sadly the lesson may be that clarity is still required across the entire profession.

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