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New Maps for New Times

A Fresh Look at Persons and Community

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Prepared for the 2011 National Recreation Summit

New Maps for New Times: A Fresh Look at Persons and Communities

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Executive Summary

An executive summary not exceeding two pages should be provided here.

Keywords: keyword 1, keyword 2, etc.

Table of Contents

Understanding Ways to Fail as a Key to Success	4
How are we doing in parks and recreation?	6
A Map of Where We Are and Where We Are Going	6
Type chapter title (level 2).....	5
Type chapter title (level 3)	6
A Map of Where We are and Where We are Going	4
Type chapter title (level 2).....	5
Type chapter title (level 3)	6

New Maps for New Times: A Fresh Look at Persons and Communities

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Understanding Ways to Fail as a Key to Success

“Why have we in the parks and recreation movement not had more success?”

It is obvious that the return on our investments of imagination, time, energy, commitment and money have not resulted in the kind of society to which we are committed. As a culture we are more obese, stressed, segmented and conflicted than we had hoped for; than we have promised ourselves we would be by now. What has gone wrong?

One way to approach this question is to identify and understand the main types of ways we as human persons and communities can fail; can get it wrong. This may allow us to determine where to focus our energy as we seek a better future.

First and most obviously, our doing can fail; our physical operations can go sour. Here the examples are endless. It can cost more to heat the rink than we had planned. We can only provide ice when those who need it most cannot come. Parks are not close enough to walk to. Our facilities may be worn and rundown. These are the mistakes of operations and administration. Operational problems take most of our time, but are easiest to deal with. If we can access the required tools, technologies and money, typically we know how to fix operational problems.

Second, our thinking can fail; what and how we think about our situation can be inadequate. Again, examples are legion. We may think “Master Plans” still mean master planning for a specific and predictable future. In spite of our inclinations to the contrary, we may give in to the demands that we present a business case for parks and recreation. Whatever case we do present may be so illogical that it does not add up. We may set goals that are merely a better version of today, rather a reflection of a truly new tomorrow. These are the mistakes of policy and management. Management

issues take less time than operations, but still consume it in large quantities. They are also more difficult than operational issues. New ways of thinking are often required.

Third, our seeing can fail; the inherited lens (sensitivity) through which we see our situation may be so out of date we are incapable of making sense of today without grossly selecting among the available data. Here the examples are more subtle. We may still see parks and recreation in the place assigned to us by our modern/Industrial society – at the margins of the “real” work of production and consumption. We may still do our needs analysis at the level of citizen or community wants and preferences, rather than also at the societal level. We seldom ask, “What is our citizens need parks and recreation to be at this time in history?” We may undertake strategic planning without first doing serious strategic foresight, thus trapping ourselves in inherited ways of seeing the world. These are the mistakes of governance. It is new work. Most of what is called *governance* today is some combination of operational and management issues. The new work of governance – seeing, exploring and understanding the context of strategic planning and management – is not yet firmly on our agendas. I am willing to wager that no parks and recreation organization has a formal process and permanent support system for such governance work. The only organization that I know of in any sector that has such a support system is IBM.

The litany that follows from these types of mistakes is as follows:

- As we see the world, so we will think/understand it.
- As we think/understand the world, so we will act within it.
- As we act in the world, so we are shaping our future.
- To shape a truly humane future we must be able to see, think and act in the world with a reasonable degree of adequacy and coherence.

At this stage, it is useful to note two things:

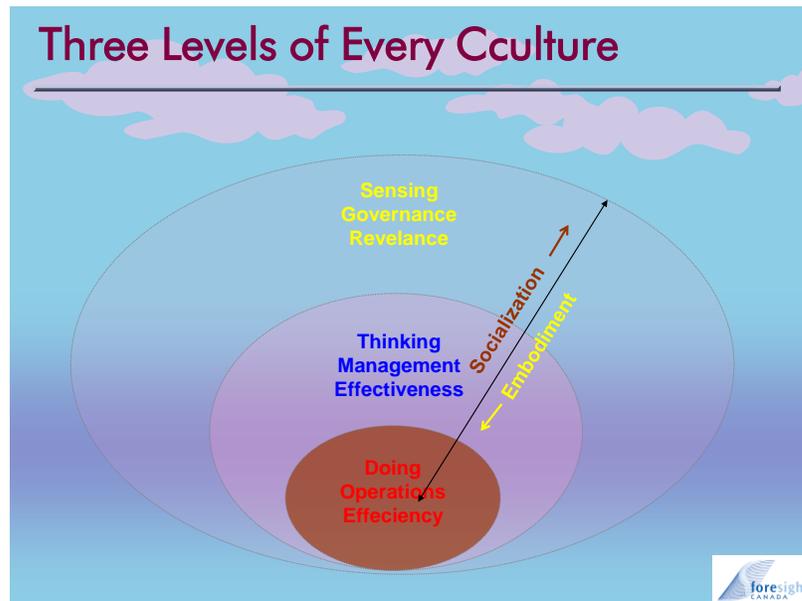
One, the logic of the litany is clear. Perception trumps thinking and thinking trumps physical doing. In today’s business language, governance must provide a coherent and grounded context for management, just as management must provide such a context for operations. Put another way, no amount of innovative doing will correct faulty thinking, just as no amount of fresh thinking will correct fundamentally mistaken perceptions.

Two, we live in a society that does not yet see or understand the logic of the above litany. For us in our modern/Industrial culture doing physical things is valued over thinking, and thinking is seen to trump re-perceiving. Consider that having a

reputation as “doer,” as one who get things done, trumps being known as a “thinker.” Consider also that those who promote innovation and creativity, at best, focus on “thinking outside the box.” The vast majority of cheerleaders of what is now a multi-billion dollar innovation business do not even hint at the fact that an even more fundamental task awaits us – to learn to see, name, understand and then move beyond our inherited cultural frames of reference. Such persons do not yet grasp the fact that new patterns of thinking that still serve outworn images of cultural perception can make things worse; that under such conditions we can come to damage systematically and rapidly, where before we could only damage randomly and slowly.

How are we doing in parks and recreation?

As a visual image, one can think of the relationship among operations, management and governance as three concentric circles. (See figure 1.)



The Three Levels of Every Culture

Figure 1

At each level of generality the top word is the key activity, the middle word is the business name by which it is commonly known, and the bottom word indicates the criteria for judging success and failure.

We can use the three-fold distinction among governance, management and operations to ask new questions. “Where are we in parks and recreation putting most of our money and effort?” “How do our patterns of spending and organization reflect our implicit priorities?” Clearly, almost all of us we have well developed operational structures and support systems. We may not have enough resources, but we could put

more resources to good use through the support systems we now have in place. Most of us even have some permanent support structures for serious thinking on a fairly regular basis. What we have may not be wholly adequate, but there is some “there” there. However, as with most organization in 2011, we in parks and recreation have little inclination to seriously re-view our inherited patterns of perception, let alone have already installed a permanent support system to do so. So we role merrily along, thinking outside the box and are quite oblivious to the ways our inherited frames of reference limits and shape what and how we think.

In summary, as is the case with our society in general, we in parks and recreation attend more closely to what we do than to how we think and hardly at all to how we perceive. Most senior executives think that strategic planning, goal setting and policy making are their most important top-level tasks. They are under the illusion that if they do these things well, that they will continue to be relevant to and aligned to our profoundly changing world. The topic of learning to see their world in truly new perspectives in order to ensure that they stay relevant to a profoundly changing world does not even make it onto the list of “things that may possibly be critically important.” It has yet to dawn on enough of us to make an actual difference that a whole new level of work is actually required to ensure relevance and alignment to change. In Foresight Canada, we call this new work of *whole systems governance*.

But what if the bias of our late modern culture gets in the way of undertaking the most important work we need to be about in the early decades of the 21st Century? What if we are at a truly rare time in history during which our most fundamental work is to learn to see the world with new eyes and to conceive it with a fresh mind? What if our deepest need is for new mental maps for truly new times? Is this thought even credible to us? Is it credible to you?

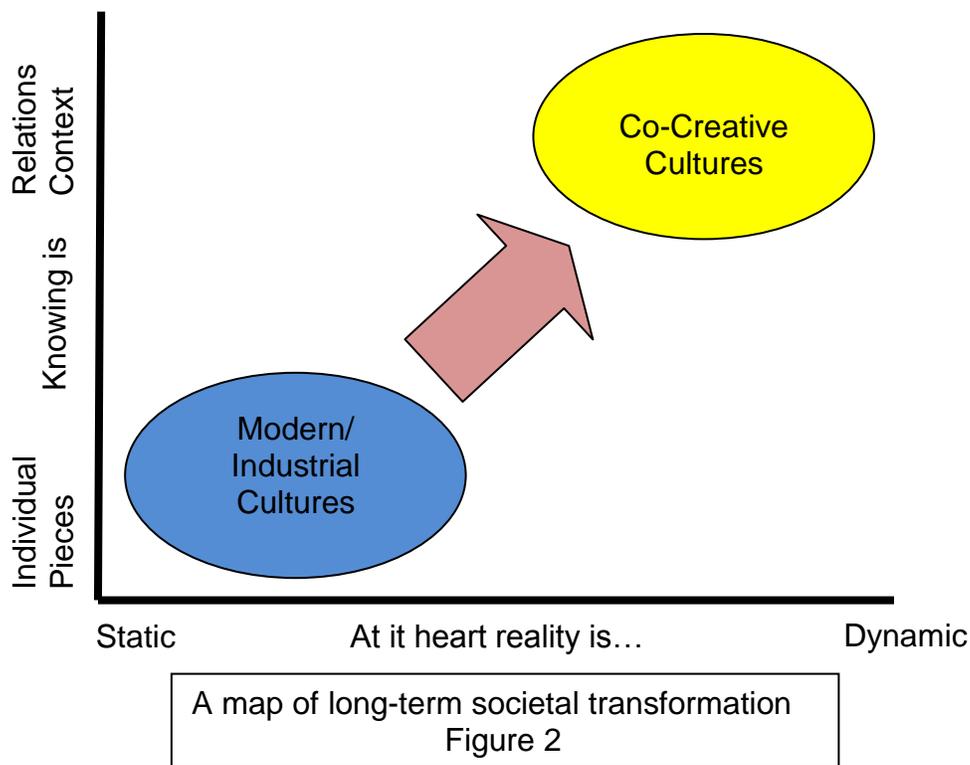
It is to me. Pursuing it, digesting it and trying to figure out what it means for us has been my work for over four decades. In what space remains I will explore one way to visualize the deep societal shift that is now taking place among and within us and what it may mean for parks and recreation.

A Map of Where We Are and Where We Are Going

The map we will use to locate our past, present and future is found in Figure 2.

The “X” axis indicates the deep (mostly unconscious) assumptions of a culture about the nature of reality. The fundamental choices are whether reality is, at heart, static or dynamic. If static, then while things may appear to change, in essence they do

not. This common distinction arose in cultures that assumed a static sense of reality in order to account for the kind of changes we all know to take place, an oak grows from an acorn, a child grows through adolescence in adulthood. But in essence, these cultures knew that the truly true and the really real do not change. In short, the default position is that continuity is normal. Deviations from the norm are... deviant. It is assumed that one can accurately forecast the future if one has enough good information. On the other hand, if reality is seen to be essentially dynamic then none of the assumptions at the static end hold. Rather, change is normal. Assertions of truth must be qualified by the time, place and community within which they are true. Change any one of these parameters and one may face a different outcome. Accurate forecasting, then in principle, is impossible. The future is inherently uncertain, not just unknown.



The “Y” axis indicates what is required in order to know reality reliably. At the “Individual Pieces” end, it is assumed that each part of reality can be known by itself, without any reference to anything else or its context. What is more, it is assumed that each “piece” is itself made up of smaller pieces. It follows that analysis is the key to reliable knowing – knowing things in smaller and smaller units as they are broken into their constituent parts. Newtonian mechanics with its precise calculations rules this world. At the “Relations/Context” end, it is assumed that things can only be known reliably in context; only if the relationships by which they are constituted are also recognized. Therefore, while analysis may reveal important things, synthesis of the

whole into truly big picture understandings is also necessary if one is to understand at all well. Reality is not merely additive (arithmetic) and complicated, it is synergistic and complex. This is the world of post-normal science and post-normal times.

A few moments reflection will determine that our modern/Industrial culture arose in the bottom left corner. In its most pure form a culture such as ours assumed that things are made up of individual pieces which can be known by themselves, without any reference to context. And we assumed that reality was, is and will be unchanging. The fact that neither of these assumptions are as secure today as they were in 1950 can be taken as a sign that ours truly is a time of change that is more profound than usual. But before we consider the fact and manner of deep change today, it is important to see clearly that our modern world was born into the bottom left corner, and that this is the foundation of today's parks and recreation.

The focus on

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Footnotes

Footnotes may be included, but should be kept to a minimum. Format footnotes as illustrated at the bottom of this page.¹

Final Submission Guidelines

Commissioned papers must be submitted fully-formatted as a PDF file via email to the National Recreation Summit Secretariat at nrspapers@arpaonline.ca no later than September 15th, 2011.

References

The list of references and in-text citations should be formatted consistently in your choice of style. References should be kept to a minimum.

¹ Please format footnotes in this style.