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Tripping and Falling into the Future: An Eolithic Perspective

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Thirty years ago, Dustin and McAvoy (1984) published an essay in *Environmental Ethics* titled "Toward Environmental Eolithism." The article compared and contrasted two distinct orientations to environmental planning and management: the design mentality and the eolithic mentality. The authors concluded that the more popular design mentality lacked sufficient flexibility and adaptability to maximize performance, and that the more obscure eolithic mentality was a superior orientation to environmental planning and management. In this article we extend the logic of that *Environmental Ethics* essay to criticize a popular offshoot of the design mentality—strategic planning—as it is commonly conducted in park and recreation administration, and then discuss how an eolithic perspective might complement the strategic planning process. We begin by describing the similarities between strategic planning and the design mentality as well as the shortcomings of strategic planning in a rapidly changing world. We then consider the eolithic mentality's yin to strategic planning's yang. We stress the futility of planning for a future that cannot be predicted, and, consequently, how important it is for park and recreation administrators to keep an open mind, be opportunistic, and take risks in a work world characterized by serendipity—the discovery of valuable but unforeseen opportunities that strategic planning, by its very nature, cannot anticipate. Finally, we conclude the article by discussing the management implications of both the design and eolithic orientations to park and recreation administration. We anchor our thinking in the management writings of Drucker (2001), Mintzberg's critique of strategic planning (1994), the systems thinking of Meadows (2008) and Ackoff (1983, 1979), and the contributions of other forward-looking theorists renowned for their entrepreneurial spirit and proclivity for proactive leadership.

KEYWORDS: creativity, design mentality, eolithic mentality, innovation, opportunism, strategic planning

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> *Planning,* as the term is commonly understood, is actually incompatible with an entrepreneurial society and economy. Innovation does indeed need to be purposeful and entrepreneurship has to be managed. But innovation, almost by definition, has to be decentralized, ad hoc, autonomous, specific, and microeconomic. It had better start small, tentative, flexible. Indeed, the opportunities for innovation are found, on the whole, only way down and close to events. They are not to be found in the massive aggregates with which the planner deals of necessity, but in the deviations there from—in the unexpected, in the incongruity, in the difference between "the glass half full" and "the glass half empty," in the weak link in a process. By the time the deviation becomes "statistically significant" and thereby visible to the planner, it is too late. Innovative opportunities do not come with the tempest but with the rustling of the breeze (Drucker, 2001, pp. 323–324).

Strategic planning is widely embraced as a preferred way for an organization to design its future. Organizations of all kinds routinely bring their members together to conduct strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analyses, and based on those analyses, to map out a future that maximizes the strengths and opportunities while minimizing the weaknesses and threats. Strategic planning is a highly deliberative process that is intended to clarify organizational goals and objectives, incentivize employee behavior, and otherwise avoid the chaos of blindly tripping and falling into the future. While acknowledging the merits of strategic planning, the purpose of our article is to point out its weaknesses, especially as they relate to the future's unpredictability, and to offer an alternative perspective that should serve as a constant companion to strategic planning—an eolithic mentality.

Consider the classic example of a caveman walking contentedly in a field with a full belly and nothing in particular on his mind. Suddenly, he trips and falls over a rock shaped like a spearhead, not that he has ever thought about a spear, let alone a spearhead. A light goes on in his Neolithic cranium, and he considers for the first time in the history of humankind the possibility of a spear with a spearhead affixed to it. He begins to think about the possibilities for hunting, feeding and clothing his family, and self-defense. He takes his newly found discovery back to the cave with him, and the rest, as they say, is history (Storm, 1953).

Now fast forward several thousand years to 1943. Edwin Land, a pioneer in photography, has just taken a picture of his 3-year-old daughter, Jennifer, on an outing in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Jennifer asks why she cannot see the photo immediately. It was a thought that had never crossed her father's mind, but he soon became obsessed by it. Inspired by his daughter's impatience, Mr. Land invented the Polaroid Land Camera that could develop a photograph almost immediately after its creation (Bello, 1959).

Critical to the unfolding of both of these stories is openness to serendipity—the discovery of things not sought for. This openness is the heart and soul of eolithic thinking, a way of interacting with the world that allows a person to literally trip and fall into the future. Indeed, an "eolith" is typically defined as a crudely chipped flint or Stone Age tool (*Webster's Collegiate Dictionary,* 2008). It symbolizes receptivity to events and surrendering to a future that cannot be planned. So equipped, eolithic thinkers are always on the lookout for new ways of doing things, even if they require dramatic divergences from the way things have been done in the past.

In the following pages, we examine this lesser known eolithic mentality by comparing and contrasting it with the more common design mentality. We make these comparisons in the context of strategic planning, because we believe strategic planning is one of the most prominent manifestations of a design mentality. While acknowledging the usefulness

of strategic planning, we reason that the strategic planning process should always be accompanied by an eolithic orientation to the planning process that invites, welcomes, and embraces an uncertain future.

Strategic Planning and the Design Mentality

Now imagine that same caveman, or that same Edwin Land for that matter, confronted with the same set of circumstances. Only this time, imagine they were both equipped with a design mentality; that is, they knew what they wanted from the world and they knew what fit their plan and what didn't. Unless that eolith shaped in the form of a spearhead resonated with the caveman's *a priori* understanding of what was useful, he might well have dismissed it as unimportant. The same could be said of Mr. Land if his mind were set on what fit into his pre-existing vision of the future of photography. In both instances, a design mentality would likely have closed rather than opened a door to the future.

Strategic planning can be thought of in similar terms. Typically, strategic planning is defined as "a deliberative, disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it" (Bryson, 2011, p. 26). Strategic planning commonly proceeds as a series of steps, beginning with a clear understanding of an organization's vision, mission, and goals, followed by an environmental analysis of an organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (i.e., a SWOT analysis), and concluding with the construction of an organizational strategic plan based on the results of the SWOT analysis in light of the vision, mission, and goals.

Note that the strategic planning process is governed by a design mentality. Strategic planning assumes the organization's stakeholders will know and agree upon the organization's vision, mission, and goals. It assumes a SWOT analysis will bring to light the critical inputs required to achieve the strategic plan's desired outputs over time. It assumes further that the success of the strategic plan will be ensured through "buy in" by the organization's stakeholders who will "own" the strategic plan and rely on it for future guidance. Finally, the strategic planning process anchors itself in the underlying proposition that the unfolding of future events can be anticipated, controlled, and planned (Mintzberg, 1981).

Strategic Planning's Shortcomings

In the *Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, Mintzberg (1994) challenges the usefulness of strategic planning as a way to prepare for the future. Indeed, he suggests that strategic planning is an oxymoron, because strategy by its very nature cannot be planned. Planning, he avows, is about analysis, while strategy is about synthesis. Analysis informs planning based exclusively on known information, but it provides no guidance to the planner for variables that are unknown. He argues further that strategic planning can even be counterproductive by illustrating how the strategic planning process can destroy commitment, narrow an organization's vision, discourage change, and breed an atmosphere of politics. He then describes three basic fallacies of the strategic planning process: that discontinuities can be predicted, that strategists can be detached from an organization's operations, and that the process of strategy-making itself can be formalized.

Mintzberg saves his biggest criticism of strategic planning, what he refers to as its "grand fallacy" for the culmination of his argument. "Because analysis is not synthesis," he concludes, "strategic planning is not strategy formulation" (1994, p. 321). Put differently, an organization's planning function is fundamentally different from its strategizing function. While the former involves a series of formalized steps to take apart and analyze an organization's component parts, the latter involves informal and often intuitive processes to synthesize what is learned into an organic and highly adaptive management strategy. Moreover, while the planning process often results in identifying perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of a highly generalized nature, strategizing requires a thorough understanding of specialized contexts within which the results of any such

SWOT analysis are put to use. Put differently still, while planning is often characterized by a sense of detachment from the day-to-day operations of an organization, strategizing demands a "sleeves rolled up" embeddedness in those same operations. Managers are called upon to exercise both hard and soft skills in carrying out their responsibilities, which requires tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1966), or intuitive understanding, as well as factual information. As Mintzberg concludes,

> It follows that (a) managers must take active charge of the strategy-making process; (b) in so doing, they must be able to make use of their tacit knowledge; (c) which means that their intuitive processes must be allowed liberal rein; and (d) for that to happen, they must have intimate contact with, rather than detachment from, their organization's operations and its external context" (1994, pp. 268–269).

In sum, in a fluid and constantly changing environment, strategic planning's shortcomings are magnified because what is called for is not a fixed commitment to a predetermined plan, but organizational flexibility that allows for adaptations and adjustments in quick response to changing circumstances (Bourgeois, 1980). Indeed, this kind of nimbleness typifies many cutting edge management styles, including agile management (Medinilla, 2012) and Blue Ocean strategizing (Kim Mauborgne, 2005). In each case, administrative and managerial leadership is required that is "in touch," open to change, recognizes when change is coming, and responds swiftly to new challenges and opportunities as they arise (Abell, 1978). Wildavsky (1979) characterizes this way of strategizing as more art than science. It is driven by personal vision, creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and an eolithic mindset.

The Eolithic Mentality

To evaluate eolithic thinking, it is best to begin by considering what it is not. Eolithic thinkers do not forgo goals or purposes in their work. They do not invite disorder or chaos, and they are just as ambitious as their design-thinking colleagues. They, too, are committed to their organization's long-term survival. But what separates eolithic thinkers from designers is their highly flexible, adaptable nature. This flexibility arises to deal with a simple and undeniable reality—it is nearly impossible to predict the future. Recognizing this, eolithic individuals are more inclined to modify their goals as circumstances warrant, because they are constantly attentive to the world's discontinuities and unpredictable nature (Clark, 1981). They are always on the lookout for new ways to strengthen their organization by recognizing change and getting in front of it. They are prepared to take advantage of new ideas and opportunities when they present themselves. They embrace rather than recoil from the uncertainties and vagaries of a world in flux. They are not encumbered by a predetermined strategic plan that tells them what path to take or not take on their way to the future. In sum, they are in tune with what Drucker meant when he said, "Innovative opportunities do not come with the tempest but with the rustling of the breeze" (Drucker, 2001, p. 324).

Eolithic individuals also tend to think in broader terms than designers. At the University of Utah, for example, the first author was at the helm of his academic department for the past seven years. He resisted strategic planning. His overarching goal was for his faculty members to do justice to the tripartite responsibility of teaching, scholarship, and service. He implored them to be fully engaged in their work and follow their intellectual bliss. He did not tell them what to study, what to teach, or how to teach based on a departmental strategic plan. His administrative style drove some faculty members (designers) crazy, while others of a more eolithic nature welcomed his laissez-faire approach because it allowed them to chart their own academic destinies. His administrative style was rooted in a sense of trust that individual faculty members could and should take responsibility for their own learning and a corresponding faith that in doing so they would lead the department in desirable, intrinsically rewarding, and sustainable directions. That trust and faith paid off handsomely during those seven years, leading most recently to two major

unplanned initiatives that will likely serve the department's overall goal of maintaining itself in a rapidly changing academic environment: collaborating with a new residential Honors College to offer incoming freshmen a wilderness orientation experience followed by a semester-long leadership seminar culminating in community engaged projects; and an upcoming national symposium focusing on nature's resiliency-building and restorative power for Armed Forces personnel, veterans, and their families. The department stumbled upon these opportunities because it was not tied down to a predetermined strategic plan dictating what the faculty should or should not be engaged in based on a SWOT analysis.

As Dustin and McAvoy (1984) concluded so long ago, "in a world of rapid change, the eolithic principle's malleability is appealing. As an orientation to the environment, it seems inherently more responsive to changing times. It lacks the stubborn quality associated with large psychic investments in the designer's master plans and blueprints. In terms of goal-oriented thinking, then, it seems to be a more practical way of looking at the world" (1984, p. 164). Hawkins (1968) adds that even the process of setting goals, the process of deciding what to commit oneself to, is inherently eolithic. "In the absence of some well-defined ultimate goal in light of which all other decisions would be instrumental, the individual [or organization] must choose among a variety of paths that are themselves suggestive of certain ends. By choosing a particular path, a particular direction to pursue, the individual [or organization] is creating his [its] own purposes, his [its] own goals. This is the eolithic pattern" (as quoted in Dustin & McAvoy, 1984, p. 166).

Contributions of Systems Thinking

As we have thought through the pros and cons of strategic planning, we have also benefited from systems thinking (Ackoff, 1979; Meadows, 2008). As Ackoff described it:

> "Systems thinking brings special attention to organizations: purposeful systems that contain purposeful parts with different roles and functions, and that are themselves parts of larger purposeful systems. This focus reveals three fundamental interrelated organizational problems: how to design and manage systems so that they can effectively serve their own purposes, the purposes of their parts, and those of the larger systems of which they are a part. These are the *self-control*, the *humanization* and the *environmentalization* problems, respectively" (1979, p. 96).

It is instructive to take a closer look at each of these problems in light of design and eolithic thinking along with the promise, or lack thereof, attendant to strategic planning.

Self-Control

Designers see the future as a function of carefully laid out action plans. They see themselves as engineers dedicated to making sure everything is in its place, there are no loose ends, and everything is securely "wired" through proper planning. Controlling the unfolding of the future is paramount. Yet as Ackoff observed, "There is a greater need for decision-making systems that can learn and adapt quickly and effectively in rapidly changing situations than there is for systems that produce optimal solutions that deteriorate with change" (1979, p. 98). Strategic plans are attempts to produce optimal solutions to as yet unforeseen problems based on past experiences. The fundamental flaw in this approach is that it places far too much confidence in our ability to predict the future. Consequently, while strategic planning may be useful for telling administrators what they have to work with at a given moment in time, it is not particularly useful for predicting the work they should be doing or predicting what the future portends, because the future is largely unknown.

Recognizing this, Ackoff reasoned that, "there is no such thing as an optimal plan for, or design of, a purposeful system in a dynamic environment. The objective of such efforts should be to produce systems that can pursue ideals effectively and do so in a way that provides continuing satisfaction to the participants" (1979, p. 100). This is the logic of an administrative style that encourages employees to follow their bliss and pursue meaningful

work that is intrinsically rewarding. It does not obligate them to carry out a strategic plan that deteriorates over time. It is also an administrative style that works better for some employees than others. Self-propelled, self-guided navigators of their own learning will embrace this approach with all of its question marks and uncertainties, because they want to be in charge of their own agendas. Those needing more direction (a plan to tell them what to do), or those simply uncomfortable with uncertainty, are typically left wanting.

What it boils down to, Ackoff contended, is a fundamental paradox: "Thus there is a critical type of indeterminacy inherent in the paradigm . . .: to the extent we can predict accurately the behavior of a system of which we are a part, we cannot prepare effectively for it; and to the extent that we can prepare effectively, we cannot predict accurately what we are preparing for" (1979, p. 101). Ackoff was echoing what Mintzberg called strategic planning's oxymoronic nature. Planning is based on analysis of pre-existing conditions while strategizing is the art of synthesis in anticipation of a changing and uncertain future. They do not go particularly well together.

Humanization

Ackoff (1979) also observed that the successful attainment of a purposeful system's goals and objectives depends on participant satisfaction. The lesson here is that participants are more than a means to a purposeful system's ends. The participants are also ends (purposeful systems) with their own means in mind to reach their own goals and objectives, which may or may not be in concert with the larger system's goals and objectives. Strategic planning that is conducted in a top down manner tends to ignore this reality, resulting in a plan that is carried out half-heartedly, if at all, by its participants. It is not uncommon for strategic plans to die on the vine out of neglect, because the individuals assigned to carry out specific tasks within a specific timeline to meet measurable goals and objectives simply are not motivated to get the job done.

Explaining this difficulty is what Simons (1972) termed *bounded rationality*. As Meadows (2008) describes it, "bounded rationality means that people make quite reasonable decisions based on the information they have. But they don't have perfect information, especially about more distant parts of the system." (p. 106). In other words, participants in a large purposeful system often have difficulty "seeing" the big picture. They have trouble fully envisioning what the larger system has in mind for itself. Consequently, their allegiance, focus, and commitment correspond to their own personal goals and objectives, and their bounded rationality "may not lead to decisions that further the welfare of the system as a whole" (Meadows, 2008, p. 110). Under the circumstances, individual behaviors may appear rational, but that is only because they are bounded by an incomplete understanding of the larger system's purposes. So it is in an academic community that a faculty member tends not to see what a department chair sees, a department chair tends not to see what a dean sees, a dean tends not to see what a provost sees, and a provost tends not to see what a university president sees. And so it is in a park and recreation agency that a recreation leader tends not to see what a program director sees and a program director tends not to see what a superintendent sees. Each vantage point is bounded by a more expansive one above it, and in the absence of a common vision, the different levels of purposeful systems frequently end up at odds with one another.

Strategic plans that require individual participants to modify or sacrifice their own agendas to make a larger plan work are thus challenged from the outset. If changing conditions do not quickly kill the plan, participant indifference will. This is why it is so important for individuals and the larger system of which they are a part to be in agreement with regard to goals and objectives. To the extent they are congruent, good things can happen. To the extent they are incongruent, bad things can happen. Indeed, it has been our experience that almost all personnel problems are a reflection of incongruities between a participant's view of what is in her or his best interest and the organization's view of what is in its best interest. In the absence of complementarity, the system trends toward dysfunctionality (Bresser, 1983).

Environmentalization

Adding to the complexity is the fact that purposeful systems exist within other purposeful systems. Like the layers of an onion, each is surrounded by smaller and larger systems. In the University of Utah example, students, faculty, and staff are purposeful systems housed in a larger purposeful system (department), which is housed in a larger purposeful system (college), which is housed in a larger purposeful system (health sciences), which is housed in an even larger purposeful system (university). Universities are part of larger purposeful systems still, including communities, cities, states, regions, and a nation. And so it is with the constituent parts making up park and recreation agencies. Each system has its own reason for being and pursues its ideals in the form of tangible goals and objectives. The challenge for each system is to coordinate its own operation with the operation of the systems within and beyond itself such that the various systems complement and reinforce one another. When things work well the cumulative effects are highly synergistic, including outcomes that could not have been predicted when examining any one system for analysis. This coordinating task is the responsibility of administrators and managers who are ultimately responsible for an organization's creative strategizing, and not planners, whose primary responsibility is to provide the decision makers with useful information for strategizing purposes.

Innovation, Creativity, and Thinking without a Box

Our reasoning thus far has emphasized the shortcomings of strategic planning in preparing for the future, because strategic planning is a form of analysis that relies on past and present conditions to predict future events or better control the unfolding of future events. The need to control is paramount. But the future is largely unknown, uncertain, and beyond our ken (Ackoff, 1983). One cannot prepare adequately for it through analysis of past events or present circumstances. One has to learn to think strategically, and an eolithic mindset is critical to that strategizing.

As Dustin and McAvoy (1984) pointed out, "fashioners of eoliths differ markedly from designers in their attitude toward the surrounding environment "(p. 163). Designers know what they want and what materials are required to reach their goals. Eolithic thinkers do not. They keep an open mind about the ends they are to pursue as well as the materials. They are collectors of things that others (designers) have discarded. They know such materials may serve purposes yet to be defined or even conceptualized. They respect those materials for their potential value. Eolithic thinkers are, in the final analysis, junkmen (Dustin & McAvoy, 1984). But junkmen do not occupy a position of high regard in the Western world. It is the designers who are admired for their carefully laid out plans and attention to detail. With respect to creative strategizing, one has to wonder if that admiration is not misplaced.

Perhaps the crux of the matter rests in what Hardin (1968) and others have criticized as an unbending faith in rationality (Lenz & Lyles, 1985) and the scientific method (Wildavsky, 1979). If we apply ourselves, surely we have the power to make and carry out plans which can shape the form and meaning of tomorrow's world. And so we commit ourselves to the design mentality and discount other more eolithic tendencies favoring instinct and intuition. Yet there is mounting evidence to suggest that the left side of the brain, which lends itself to analysis, may be ill-suited for creative strategizing, which requires the right side of the brain's more intuitive and synthesizing powers (Hodgkinson, Sadler-Smith, Burke, Claxton, & Sparrow, 2009; Dane & Prat, 2007; Khatri & Ng, 2000; Mintzberg, 1976). While it is too simplistic to say planners are left brained and strategists are right brained, Mintzberg claims good strategists think more holistically:

> Managers revel in ambiguity and exhibit few patterns in their work, presumably because they spend so much of their time operating in the mode of synthesis. Likewise, the mysteries surrounding such key aspects of their decision making and strategy making processes as diagnosis, design, timing, and bargaining (see Mintzberg, Raisinghani, & Theoret, 1976) can perhaps likewise be explained by their reliance on the thinking processes of the brain's right mute

> hemisphere, which are inaccessible to the apparatus of language—in other words, lost to analysis. Indeed, the whole nature of strategy making . . . compels managers to favor intuition" (1994, p. 319).

In sum, planning, which relies on analysis of past and present circumstances to prepare for future events favors the left side of the brain, while strategizing, which relies on synthesis, creativity, and vision favors the right side. To maximize performance, park and recreation administrators need to fully employ both domains.

Management Implications

What, then, are the management implications of the design and eolithic mindsets for park and recreation professionals charged with guiding their organizations into an uncertain future? The novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald (1936) suggested that "the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function" (p. 41). He might as well have been talking about park and recreation administrators. Strategic planning, for all of its good intentions, has to make room for an opposing openness to everything that has been shut out by the strategic plan, the opportunities forgone by the deliberate nature of strategic planning itself. As Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel (1998) concluded, strategies, for better and for worse, set direction for an organization that often contributes to an organizational blindness to potential dangers; focuses effort that can lead to "groupthink"that inhibits peripheral vision; defines an organization in a way that simplifies its complexity and leads to stereotyping and a superficial understanding of the organization's richness; and provides consistency, predictability, and order when strategizing requires creativity, innovation, and adaptation, qualities that thrive on inconsistency, unpredictability, and uncertainty.

The lesson for park and recreation administrators is clear. Strategic planning should be counterbalanced by a contrasting eolithic perspective that lends itself to experimentation and risk taking on short notice when unforeseen circumstances arise. To position their organizations for such contingencies, park and recreation administrators should build sensitivity, leanness, and nimbleness into their operations that make it possible for them to respond swiftly to the rustling of a breeze. Ensuring that their organizations are equipped with sufficient resources to respond quickly to new opportunities is part of this readiness as is making sure their organizations are populated with individuals who are expected to keep a critical eye on the tack the organizations have committed themselves to via their strategic plans. As we said at the outset, eolithic thinking is the yin to strategic planning's yang. Park and recreation administrators should entertain both kinds of thinking simultaneously. Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel (1998) went so far as to suggest that strategic planning has been misnamed all along, that it should have been called strategic programming, a process to formalize strategies that were developed through other means (e. g. eolithism).

Creating an organizational atmosphere of openness among employees is a critical aspect of preparedness for change. While it is important for employees to feel part of a team that is working toward commonly accepted organizational goals and objectives, it is equally important for them to feel comfortable questioning the status quo and offering fresh ideas that run counter to an established strategic plan. In an age when new information, insights, and perspectives are increasingly available to every individual in the organization who is connected to the Internet and other forms of social media, the flow of information is endless. Fostering employee incentive programs that reward far and wide ranging learning with the express purpose of enhancing the organization's effectiveness is a strategic way for administrators to generate creativity and innovation throughout the organization. Hierarchical, top down thinking is replaced with more egalitarian, horizontal thinking that results in a greater sense of employee involvement and ownership of the organization's future.

It is important to remember that strategy can be interpreted in many ways. For most people, strategy implies a deliberate intention, a formalized procedure for realizing desired goals and objectives. It is forward looking (design perspective). But intended strategies

are not always realized. In those instances, it is also instructive to look back in time to determine what took the place of the unrealized intended strategy. What else evolved as a way of doing things? Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel (1998) describe this as emergent strategy, a step-by-step or decision-by-decision unfolding of events that eventually reveals an unintended design. It, too, is a form of strategizing, and demonstrates that strategies can form as well as be formulated (eolithic perspective). Seldom are strategies purely deliberate or emergent in nature. Rather, strategies typically unfold as a blend of intended and emergent factors. This is yet another way to think about the yin and yang of design and eolithism as orientations to park and recreation administration.

Granted, the deliberate nature of strategic planning is appealing. But as we have emphasized, it also has an unappealing side. Inkpen and Choudhury (1995) even characterized the absence of strategy as virtuous because the formalized procedures and concern for consistency inherent in strategic planning often inhibit experimentation and innovation, qualities that are critical to adapting successfully to a rapidly changing world. Again, complementarity is called for between the opposing tendencies represented by the design and eolithic perspectives. Determining how best to reconcile these two different orientations to park and recreation administration is a daunting challenge. Achieving that reconciliation, however, would be the mark of a first-rate park and recreation administrative intelligence.

Conclusion

In many respects, what we have been talking about is how to address what Rittel and Webber (1973) first described as "wicked problems." Wicked problems are difficult or impossible to solve because of their incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognize, such as an uncertain future (Conklin, 2005). Wicked problems defy traditional linear problem-solving techniques like strategic planning because they are fraught with social, environmental, technological, and ethical complexities; thus, contemporary approaches to working on wicked problems center on coping strategies that require social and interpersonal cooperation. Wicked problems are no stranger to park and recreation administrators and dealing with wicked problems requires considerable managerial creativity, innovation, and thinking without a box (Mintzberg, 1987). This requirement, in turn, demands administrative flexibility and a willingness to change (Chakravarthy, 1982). An eolithic mindset helps.

In concert with Dustin and McAvoy's conclusions 30 years ago, we believe an eolithic perspective should constitute a primary frame of reference for park and recreation administration. Having discovered a goal, the design mentality (strategic planning or programming) can be applied to determining how best to reach it, but the design mentality itself should not be allowed to overpower the eolithic mentality. Goals should continually be examined and adjusted as conditions warrant. Materials should be respected for their potential as well as their present value. The future is open-ended and full of possibilities. Eolithic thinkers are open-minded and ready to take advantage of those possibilities. Therein resides the value of an eolithic perspective on park and recreation administration.

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