

CAVE MANAGEMENT IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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Abstract

The last ten years have seen a remarkable shift in the social, political and economic environment. The so-called 'new liberalism' as an ideology and globalisation as an economic program have had immense impacts on the world, and most organisations have had considerable trouble in adapting to this change.

This paper will outline the characteristics and effects of the change, which will have a continuing impact for the foreseeable future, and will assess its impact upon management of public lands. At the simplest, resources for public land management are being reduced; managers are expected to become entrepreneurs who earn their own funding; but meanwhile, poverty is increasing so a large number of people are being excluded from public land access by increased visitor fees and travel costs. Some suggestions for effective response to these changes will be presented.

Introduction

Any consideration of the next millennium must take into account the remarkable and accelerating global changes of the last ten years. We find ourselves taken over by the ideology of the so-called new liberalism and the economic program and strategies known as globalisation. First of all, we need a few simple definitions. New Liberalism is a political ideology, and we must understand that it is not the property of any one political party, but rather an over-arching political agenda embraced by most countries and most political parties. It essentially believes, in the words of Margaret Thatcher, that

... There is no such thing as society ... There are only winners and losers!

In other words, we are looking towards a society in which competition, as opposed to co-operation, is the basic principle of social organisation. Moreover, it has become subject to a sort of 'dollar fundamentalism' in which many see value only in terms of money (Soros 2000). It opens the door to unbridled expression of greed and power. Only in Australia, it is often known as economic rationalism – a term initially coined by Michael Pusey (1991) as a criticism of decision-making in Canberra, and then proudly appropriated by those he was criticising.

Globalisation is a difficult word in that it is applied very widely to a range of phenomena. At the most basic, and in the most useful sense, it refers to the free movement of capital across the world, irrespective of national boundaries. But it can be and has been used for anything that spreads across national boundaries – culture, knowledge and technology, communication, invasive animals and plants (Low 1999) or almost anything else you like.

Historically, of course, it is not new. It probably commenced in the mid 19th century with the rise of the robber barons, but waned with the inevitable economic unpredictability and the depression of the 1890s. It was then suppressed by the World War and the consequent world order imposed by the League of Nations and other international agreements. Just as it was beginning to re-emerge, it was again suppressed by World War II and

then in particular by the Bretton Woods agreement and the cold war. But then the unilateral destruction of Bretton Woods by Nixon and the end of the cold war opened the floodgates.

In fact, globalisation serves to de-power governments. National governments now have all too little control over their own destiny or that of their people (Bauman 2001). Genuine political debate has been replaced by the melodrama of inter-personal contest, essentially focussed upon which snouts get in which trough, and public amusements like the Bill and Monica roadshow or Pauline Hanson's latest fashion.

One commonly hears the rise of globalisation defined as being based in the concurrent rise of computing. While computing has certainly been a great enabler, and has facilitated both the frenetic pace of financial transfers and the globalisation of communication, it would be totally wrong to argue that information technology has caused and driven the globalisation process. That can only be blamed upon ordinary human greed and predation – a very long established process. But both the new liberalism and globalisation as I have defined them above have been accompanied onto the world stage by the information revolution and a number of other world-wide factors, many of which will be further discussed below:

- Re-structuring of the world financial system
- The massive transfer of public assets to the private sector
- MacDonaldisation
- A new awareness of and preoccupation with risk control
- Managerialism

One of the stranger outcomes of globalisation is that politicians and others make so many totally bizarre decisions. Indeed, Kennedy (1998) argues that any adequate explanation of globalisation must be able to explain this phenomenon. Kennedy himself and McMichael (1999) both argue that the cause lies in the new dominance of the money market, with most financial transactions being based purely in money speculation and various other 'funny money'

transactions rather than productivity. They refer to notions of parasitic capitalism or virtual capitalism.

Malcolm Fraser made the very acute observation that ‘the economic rationalists are driven purely by ideology and take no notice of fact or logic.’ Perhaps this also relates to intellectual lag - the fact that the questions being asked are in constant change, and those of the new millennium are being answered in terms of the thinking that might have been right in the 1950s. The result is often a growing gap between rhetoric and action, a failure to deliver promises and continued or growing disaffection with government.

Thomas Friedman (1999) points to the inherent dualism and dialectic of globalisation – in his *Lexus and the Olive Tree*, he argues that people simultaneously want to enjoy the luxuries made possible (for some) by globalisation (symbolised by the Lexus) and at the same time, want to sit under the Olive Tree in their own backyard, or in other words, to hold onto traditional community values.

It is now time to turn to the many outcomes and issues that face protected area and cave managers in the new millennium. At present, we are still coming to terms with (or failing to come to terms with) the impacts of globalisation, but it is certain that they will shape our foreseeable future.

Financial Restructuring

The globalisation of the world economic system with its concurrent focus on the money market is the most basic force operating upon us all.

... the world economy has become a casino economy – save that in this particular casino, ordinary people don’t get to play. Their money is often involved – in the shape for instance of pension funds. But it is banks, finance companies and other power brokers who take the decisions about what happens to it. (Giddens, 2000: 15.)

All too often, the players lose and both many workers and even the shareholders are the ones who pay.

Friedman (1999: 92ff.) adds the dramatic analogy of the electronic herd, *... made up of all the faceless stock, bond and currency traders sitting behind computer screens all over the globe ... (and just like a herd of bison, this herd can stampede at the first scent of danger) leaving a whole nation as road-kill ...*

In a range of ways, this

- leads to constraints upon the availability of funds for public purposes, and
- massive unpredictability in the economy as a whole, and hence
- in the private resources available for tourism

Certainly most land managers will be very aware that they have to increasingly depend upon project funding rather than program funding. This leads in turn to

- fragmentation and discontinuities in park management,
- discontinuities in staffing with consequent erosion of expertise, and
- the immense difficulty in dealing adequately with forward planning and implementation of any programs that by their very nature demand a long time-frame.

Further, the rise of enthusiasm for privatisation of the public sector and for the use of management models from the private sector for those things (including many parks) that cannot be privatised result in

- the expectation that parks can raise their own funding from visitor fees and other charges (which is occurring at the same time as the growth of widespread poverty – more below), and in turn to
- emphasis upon saleable visitor programs (products) coupled with neglect of maintenance and protection of conservation values.

The response of the park and cave management profession needs to include

- Making the case for more long-term and predictable program funding, while
- Seeking special grants through philanthropic trusts, appropriate sponsors and other donors
- Building bequest and trust programs

Managerialism

Confusion reigns supreme – governments are constantly experimenting with new fads in managerialism, and ‘restructuring’ at every opportunity. Financial discontinuity is allied with discontinuity of organisational arrangements and high staff turnover. The enthusiasm of governments for de-regulation of anything that may be a barrier to profit has created a multitude of breakdowns in quality.

Probably one of the biggest problems is the extent to which management is considered to be content-free – it is all too commonly assumed that a ‘good manager’ can manage anything, and simply by being awarded with the title of manager and a very high salary, automatically acquires the necessary expertise. Fortunately, most park management has been exempt from this to date – but don’t be surprised if it starts to spread!

Sadly, all this distracts attention from the very positive advantages of modern management being properly applied. McCarthy (1998) provides a very useful overview of ways in which quality management is being utilised to enhance quality of performance in parks organisations. The lessons are obvious – management should be used as a tool to ensure quality of performance.

Most Australian parks managers seem to be unaware of the International Standards ISO9000 (general quality management systems) and ISO14000 (environmental management systems). The latter is currently under review, partly to ensure its congruence with the 9000 series (see also Morrison et al. 2000). There is certainly

an extent to which these standards have been mis-used in Australia simply to get accreditation and then use that in publicity; but a number of European countries use ISO systems as a basis for continuing improvement in performance and de-emphasise accreditation per se.

But instead of good management as a shared, devolutionary and co-operative process, we find, even in some parks, an undue focus on top-down management, with internal contest, greed, bullying, attempts to suppress any criticism or dissent, wastage and mis-direction of resources. Rhetoric and publicity is seen as more important as real performance and even as a simple way to conceal bad performance. Even worse, greed leads many companies and government agencies into unethical and even criminal behaviour, all in the name of managing for profit (Hager and Burton 1999, Beder 2000).

MacDonaldisation

Ritzer (1996) coined this term to denote management systems based in economic efficiency with a strong emphasis upon uniformity and predictability. MacDonalds are, of course, the prototype of this management style. It no longer just applies to fast food, but to most retail shopping, community services and even to such phenomena as cave tours and a number of higher education programs.

The uniformity and predictability are accompanied by the attempt to satisfy the widest possible range of customers, and hence result in lowest-common-denominator products or services, probably all equally boring in the long run. Some, like electronic telephone answering, are downright offensive.

Products that are localised, variable, highly individualistic, even exciting, and often based in a local community culture represent the opposite thrust. Obviously, so does top quality. Thus, in the food industry, people are coming to refer to slow food – top quality food eaten in a relaxed and socially comfortable way.

Tourism is rapidly coming to place a very high premium upon top quality products and service, even though Australia as a whole lags behind. Of the 9 coffee-shops in my local shopping centre, the one which has both attained top quality and re-positioned itself in relation to the others now gets as many customers as the rest put together.

But it is clear that if caves are to hold their own, the quality must go up very significantly at most sites. We cannot afford to remain focussed upon old-style tours.

Right now, a few cave destinations are experiencing an unprecedented boom in visitor numbers, most are receiving about the same number of visitors (which means they are steadily losing market share) and the rest are at the top of or part way down the slippery slide.

The Control of Risk

One of the strangest outcomes of the new liberalism is the extent to which it has heightened recognition of risk

and a mania for risk control (Beck 1999). While risks to health and safety rightly demand considerable attention, the litigation response to even minor incidents has caused probably more problems than it has resolved. Management of outdoor recreation is now constantly faced with high costs in accident prevention measures and insurance cover. At the same time, contrary to the deregulation of industry, risk control has spawned an immense number of new regulations that make for greater cost and more expenditure on enforcement.

However, the biggest element of risk control is the immense effort to offset political and managerial risk. Sound accountability procedures have been changed in the effort to avoid the risk of being blamed for whatever might go wrong; mountains of paperwork are prepared to ensure that blame can always be passed on or avoided altogether.

It is very difficult to see ways of minimising all this; we have developed a self-maintaining, self-driving network of risk that includes issues of 'politics, ethics, mathematics, mass media, technologies, cultural definitions and perception' (Beck 1999: 146). Escape from it is impossible – but again it does offer both negative and positive opportunities and the latter must engage much more of our attention.

Competition, Managerialism and the Re-invention of Human Beings

Human beings are coming to be valued in our society as consumers rather than as sentient and participating people. Terms like customers, consumers, tourists, and the somewhat derogatory 'punters' are all means of de-powering the people who deserve better. The so-called customer orientation of many parks agencies was a well-intended attempt to enhance quality of service, but has been almost totally counter-productive. If the metaphor of private business was pursued accurately, then the people who visit parks are shareholders, not customers!

But in particular, the new patterns of social and economic policy and of workplace management are combining to continually widen the gap between rich and poor.

This is especially tragic for those parks (including many cave parks) expected to raise revenue from visitor fees. At least 30% of the Australian population (including most of the children living in single parent or foster households) are now excluded from visiting the caves and many other sites that are such an important part of their natural and cultural heritage!

This is perhaps the most important moral / ethical challenge facing park and cave managers. Few land management agencies have been able to resist the demand for fee-charging, but it is truly interesting to note that the poor are often over-represented in the population who do visit those lands.

Although not generally a direct responsibility of park and cave managers, we need to recognise the extent to which work-place managerialism and the social isolation of the new liberalism come together and lead to career

unpredictability, the growth of casualised and other forms of non-career work, erosion of expertise, excessive stress ('running up the down escalator'), mid-life redundancy, violence and suicide (Rees and Rodley 1995).

Conclusion: Forms of Resistance

In focussing upon the new issues and problems that will face managers in the new millennium, I have inevitably pointed to many of the negative aspects of new liberalism and globalisation. Many of these can only be effectively responded to by governments, and in Australia, that has hardly even begun. Kerr (2001) argues for a powerful return to much more democratic and transparent procedures. Soros (2000) also argues for a return to the open society ideal (but even he expresses real doubts about the future). The United Kingdom has tried to face the problems with what has been termed the 'Third Way' (Giddens 1998, 2000) but instead finds itself entangled in the bureaucratic nightmare of the European community on one hand and regular diversions into moral panics (paedophilia, foot and mouth disease, etc.) and community unrest on the other.

While there is no question about the need for a very strong political response, it is also important to recognise that globalisation also creates opportunities and that people must utilise these to generate a ground level response. Some of these arise simply from the fact that sectors of our society are much more affluent than ever before. Others arise out of the very nature of the human response to globalisation. Here we must turn back to Friedman's (1999) ideas of the *Lexus and the Olive Tree*. Parks can and do provide some very

important olive trees, and we can help people to develop many more olive trees. In particular, people are now looking to opportunities for re-developing their sense of identity, community and social identity.

[This of course has its downside for the poor – not only do they have less hope of achieving these things, but they are all too often in the position of the ten monkeys in a cage only being given six bananas – we constantly see the horrifying outcomes in the Balkans, some of the former Russian republics and most of the African continent! Just think of the fact that the world's 15 richest men control more wealth than the whole of the African continent.]

Park managers can respond with various new patterns of management (again, see McCarthy 1998, also Borrini-Feyerabend 1996, RAMSAR Convention Bureau 2000, McCool et al. 2000). The focus must be upon quality, not wasting our scarce resources, and on opening up better opportunities for the Olive Grove. This means more devolution to parks themselves, and more opportunities for people to become genuinely involved. Park products should be much more involving and co-operative in character – we must re-invent tour experiences to lessen the emphasis upon the current guide-centred programs. Friends Groups provide a wonderful opportunity – providing they are not just seen as a supply of unskilled labour and/or funds raising. They should provide an opportunity for genuine sharing in resource management

So, there is a great deal managers can do to develop a positive response to change – for most of us, this is the major challenge of the present time.

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