

Perspective

A newsletter for widening your point of view

1999

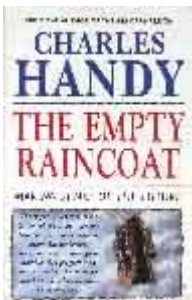
Issue 1



Richard Bach, in his book *Illusions*, states a handy aphorism: **Perspective – use it or lose it**. Every six months, this periodical will share amongst recreation and tourism management professionals, such as yourself, several tools and concepts which will help exercise your perspective. These concepts are at work in fields within which we do not normally stand – such as physics and ecology. However, you will find them strangely useful. By understanding the broad perspectives that enhance other disciplines, we can only improve our own ways of seeing and doing things.

Perspective is distributed by **Rob Greenaway & Associates** as a service to the recreation and tourism industries.

Reverse Delegation



Reverse delegation is a very effective means of gaining respect as a manager, keeping sane and keeping your staff. This is a concept discussed by Charles Handy in his book *The Empty Raincoat*¹.

Handy first describes our traditional approach to delegation. We take a piece of work that is our responsibility to see completed. We divide it into tasks and allocate those tasks down the ladder of responsibility to those whom we

believe can do them. The completed work comes back up the ladder and we compile the result. That process of delegation is based on a set of assumptions about the skills of our support team – that there are certain jobs that we believe they cannot do, and so we delegate only the easy tasks and keep the hard ones for ourselves.

Reverse delegation removes the need to make those assumptions. The support team or individual is given the entire job, and is asked to delegate the work they cannot do upwards. This allows the team to develop and expand their skills and to understand the entire scope of the project. It means that you are actually being a manager, maintaining the strategic overview, and keeping an eye on quality – and not getting bogged down in minutiae. It is also, apparently, 'moral' (read Handy's book). ❖

Regression to the Mean

Those four words - regression to the mean - are incredibly familiar, aren't they? If you were like me, before I read Peter Bernstein's book on the history of risk management², you would have heard those words a thousand times, but might have had little idea of what they meant, or how important the concept of regression to the mean is.

As a resource manager, you are constantly aware of trends. Regression to the mean is a general principle that suggests that in any trend, a deviation from the norm will inevitably return to that norm, or thereabouts. This principle is from where we get the normal distribution curve.

Here's the story. Francis Galton, who was born in 1822, spent some years measuring peas. He discovered that if he planted a set of small peas, the size of the offspring were closer to the size of an

average pea. If he planted large peas, the offspring were also closer in size to that average pea.

This might not sound very exciting, but Bernstein accurately describes the finding as 'dynamite'.

"Galton," Bernstein writes, "transformed the notion of probability from a static concept ... into a dynamic process in which the successors to the outliers are predestined to join the crowd at the centre. Change and motion from the outer limits towards the centre are constant, inevitable and foreseeable.... The driving force is always towards the average, toward the restoration of normality.

"If this narrowing process was not at work – if large peas produced ever-larger offspring and if small peas produced ever-smaller offspring – the world would consist of nothing but midgets and giants."

This is equally a social issue. If you are a fan of the British comedy



Absolutely Fabulous, you will immediately feel familiar with regression to the mean. The pendulum of conservatism and liberalism swings from 'Gran' to Edina and back to Saffron.

Overvalued shares in the stock market will inevitably swing back in price towards a more realistic value.

Of course, the trick with predicting trends is knowing when the regression will commence – when will the pendulum begin to swing back – and will the mean be in the same place as before. Because, if you try hard enough, you can actually breed larger peas. ❖

Occam's Razor

If you are given the choice between two explanations for a phenomenon, Occam's Razor might come to the rescue. Occam's Razor is a philosophical principle that suggests, when you have two competing theories which make exactly the same prediction, the one that is the more simple is the better. Physicists use it.

Jack Cohen and Ian Stewart in their book *The Collapse of Chaos*³ take this rule to mean we shouldn't make unnecessary assumptions, or that our assumptions should not be made unnecessarily complicated. This is an uncommon version of the

¹ Handy, C. (1995) *The Empty Raincoat*, Arrow

² Bernstein, P.L. (1996) *Against the Gods*, Wiley

³ Cohen, J., Stewart, I. (1996) *The Collapse of Chaos*, Penguin

KIS principle (Keep It Simple). It's very handy if you happen to be interpreting data and making subsequent assumptions. When the data are not perfect, any resulting assumption must be very simple.

The principle is attributed to a 14th century Franciscan Friar, William of Occam. He used it to support such statements as 'God's existence cannot be deduced by reason alone,' which didn't make him very popular in the Vatican. He was excommunicated.

While purists prefer to consider Occam's Razor to apply only when there are two competing hypotheses, there's no harm in extrapolating from a principle that may often, in fact, lead you in the wrong direction (that is, just because one explanation is easier to understand than another, that doesn't guarantee it is right). ❖

The Red Queen Hypothesis



If you feel you've been working harder and smarter and never seem to get much further ahead, don't feel so bad. At least you're still here.

A business manager once complained to me that the company he helped run had invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in computers, but it was still no more profitable than previously. The ideas behind the computer purchase

included increased efficiency, better communication and more sophisticated outputs. The assumption was that the company would be more competitive and also more profitable.

This is a classic example of the *Red Queen Hypothesis*, which is used to discuss how species diversity reaches a constant in a stable environment⁴. The basic premise is, you have to keep evolving very fast to keep ahead of other species that could occupy your niche and make you extinct, and to keep ahead of predators and pathogens. Basically, you have to keep running to stay in the same place, as Alice discovered in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*:

'Now! Now!' cried the Queen. 'Faster! Faster!' And they went so fast that at last they seemed to skim through the air, hardly touching the ground with their feet, till suddenly, just as Alice was getting quite exhausted, they stopped, and she found herself sitting on the ground, breathless and giddy.

The Queen propped her up against a tree, and said kindly, 'You may rest a little now.'

Alice looked round her in great surprise. 'Why, I do believe we've been under this tree the whole time! Everything's just as it was!'

'Of course it is,' said the Queen, 'what would you have it?'

'Well, in our country,' said Alice, still panting a little, 'you'd generally get to somewhere else - if you ran very fast for a long time, as we've been doing.'

'A slow sort of country!' said the Queen. 'Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!' ❖

For Your Interest

The penultimate year of the millennium has been an exciting one for RG&A. Projects have included: ongoing asset management work for several local authorities (the majority of what I currently do); working with Boffa Miskell on a pre-feasibility study for an exciting proposed tourism development in Waitaki; work on national park concessions for a helicopter operation; the completion of a feasibility study for a proposed community hall; an analysis of the performance of a visitor centre with Key Research and Marketing Ltd; and a little journalism. It has been great to work with an excellent range of professionals.

Currently, we're keeping occupied with: a reserve management plan in Dunedin; beneficiary and general financial performance assessments for a number of community and heritage facilities in Nelson; assessments of recreation and heritage values for long-term financial planning for reserves in the Bay of Plenty with Boffa Miskell; further asset management work; and more tourism and recreation-related journalism.

RG & A Scholarship

The most exciting development of the year for me is the **Rob Greenaway & Associates Scholarship** at Lincoln University. There's a story behind this. I had the pleasure of a nine-week personal research project in France and England just before winter, and also had a good look at a number of recreation and tourism resources in both countries, as well as Central Park in New York. It is stunning to see how well – and how abysmally – these resources can be managed. It is also interesting to consider the differences between privately and 'community' owned sites. This includes Versailles, the Lakes District in England, the very many small and large parks in Paris and London, internationally renowned gardens, and of course the horrifying state of the South of France (why the Riviera is considered a holiday destination is totally beyond me).

I realise fully that my concept of a preferred social carrying capacity is far more sensitive to crowding than that of your average Parisian. However, it made me think a lot harder about New Zealand's long-term status as a tourism and recreation resource (since this country is an incredibly wonderful spot to live). As a result I have decided to establish an annual scholarship at Lincoln University for a post-graduate student. The focus is broad, covering any aspect of Masters-level research into sustainable futures for recreation, tourism and conservation resources. I look forward to keeping you up to date about the scholarship recipient and their research during the year 2000.

⁴ Putman, R.J., Rattan, S.D (1985) *Principles of Ecology*, Croom Helm