
Managing on the edges

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Many of the most interesting things, say the biologists, happen on the Edges – on the interface between the woods and the field, the land and the sea. There, living organisms encounter dynamic conditions that give rise to untold variety. Scientific studies of bird populations reveal that “forest edge” species are generally more abundant than those which confine their territory to the interior of the forest. The inter-tidal zone, meanwhile, that thin ribbon which separates the land from the sea, supports a plurality of life uniquely adapted to both air and water ... Variety, perhaps, but there is tension as well. The flora of the meadows, as they approach the woodlands, find themselves coping with increasingly unfavorable conditions: the sunlight they need might be lacking, and the soil no longer feels right. There is also the problem of competition with alien species of trees and shrubs. The Edges, in short, might abound with life, but each living form must fight for its own (Raphael, 1976, pp. 5-6).

When I asked Gord Irwin, late in the day I spent with him, about a most curious division of labour – the separation between the “front country” that he manages in Canada’s Banff National Park and the “back country” that a colleague of his looks after – he laughed. They tried to pin that down in Ottawa, he said, designating the dividing line as 50 metres off the road. In fact, the back country people look after the trails right from the road, while his responsibility for emergency response includes the entire park.

This story serves, not only as a wonderful illustration of what one observes in the management of parks these days, but as an apt metaphor as well, perhaps best described as managing on the edges. For here, ironically, despite the ambiguities in pinning down this physical edge, it is, in fact, crystal clear compared with some of the other, more symbolic edges – administrative and political – encountered in these surroundings. Going out to a mountain park, thinking about nature and forgetting about human nature, sets one up for quite a surprise!

This observation was part of a larger research study, designed to flesh out a new model of managerial work. So far, 29 different managers have each been observed for one day, including several chief executives in business, a range of managers across health care (see for example Mintzberg, 1994b on the head nurse of a hospital ward), three managers in “non-owned” organizations (Greenpeace and Médecins sans Frontières), and a number of managers in the Canadian public service (including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Department of Justice as well as Parks Canada).

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One day is obviously a very short time in the life of a manager. But the intention of this research has not been to describe definitively that life or that job. Rather it has been to get a sense of the variety of ways in which managerial work is practised. In other words, this is best thought of as a sample of 29 managerial days rather than of 29 managers for a day.

This particular report provides a bit of an exception, however. It involved three managers of Parks Canada in hierarchical succession on three successive days: on 12 August 1993, Sandy Davis, Western Regional Director of Parks Canada at her headquarters in Calgary; on 13 August, Charlie Zinkan, Superintendent of the Banff National Park, at his headquarters in Banff; and on 14 August, Gord Irwin, Park Warden in Banff (for the front country) at the operations office near Banff. Together these three days provided a fascinating insight, not only into management in this particular sphere of government operations, but into what seems to be a pronounced form of the pressures that face every public sector manager.

A model of managerial work

In 1973, I published a book entitled *The Nature of Managerial Work*, one chapter of which specified a set of ten roles that all managers seem to perform. Unsatisfied with this for a number of reasons, including the fact that (like most other descriptions of managerial work), it constituted a decomposed list rather than an interactive model, I developed a new framework, closer in form to a model, based on a review and integration of the various roles described in the literature of managerial work. This model has been written up in a paper entitled "Rounding out the manager's job" (Mintzberg, 1994a; see also 1991).

Figure 1 shows the core of the model. At the centre sits the person who comes to the job, bringing a set of values, experiences, knowledge and competences. The person in the job creates a frame, which includes the purpose of the job, a perspective on what needs to be done, and a specific set of strategic positions for doing it. This frame can range from vague to highly specific and from self-selected (by the manager) to externally imposed. The frame is manifested by an agenda of specific issues and work schedules. Together, all of this can be thought to constitute the basic core of the job of managing.

Figure 2 places this core in context, in two respects. First, surrounding the core are three concentric circles that represent three levels through which managerial work can take place, labelled information, people and action. From the inside out, beginning with the most abstract level, a manager can process information, in the hope that this will drive people to take action. More tangibly, a manager can work with people, to encourage them to take action. And at the most concrete level, a manager can manage action more or less directly. Second, managerial effort can be directed inside the unit being managed, or outside of it, to the rest of the organization or to the external context of the organization.

As shown in Figure 3, we can overlay different managerial roles on this framework – in the core and at each of the three levels, inside and outside the unit. Shown in the core are the roles of conceiving the frame and scheduling the

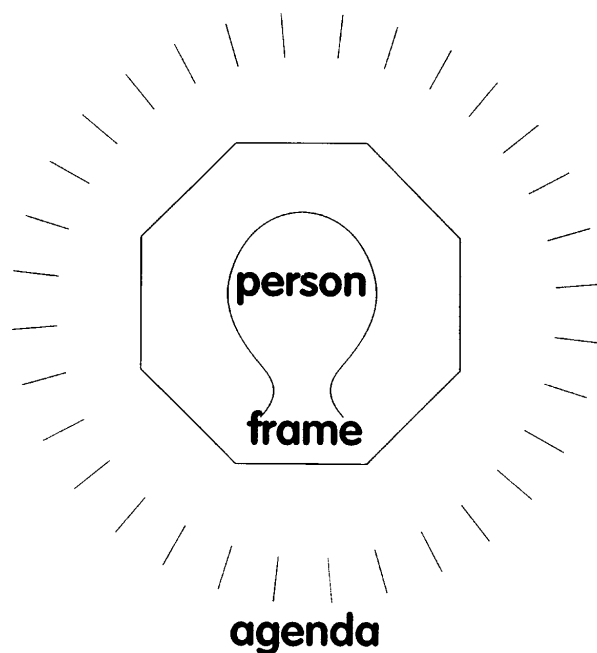


Figure 1.
The core of the
manager's job

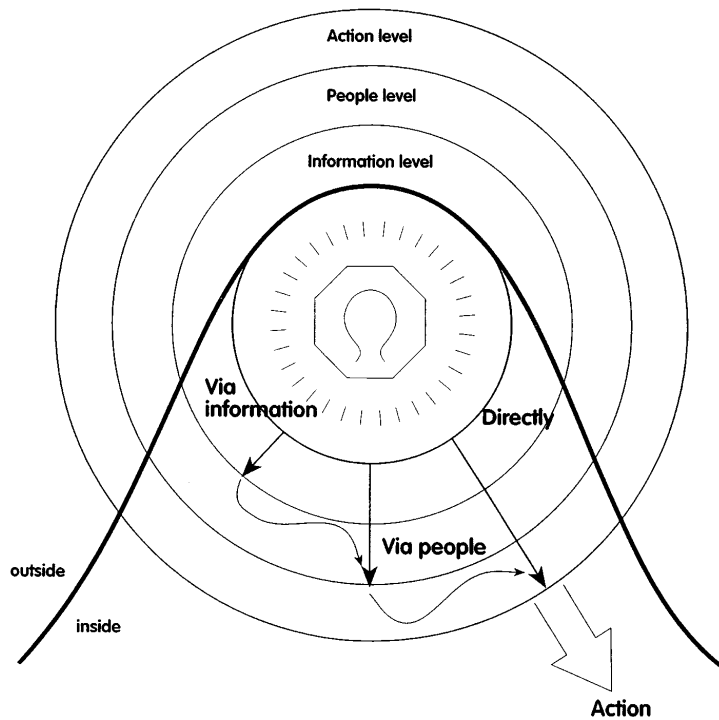


Figure 2.
The core in context

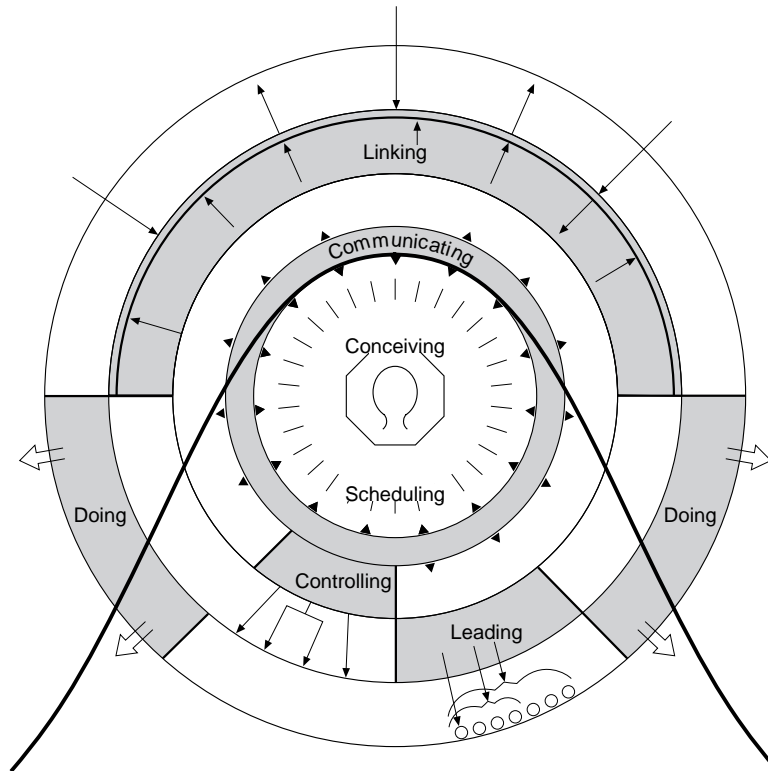


Figure 3.
A model of managerial
work

agenda. Five other roles are shown in the three outer circles, two at the information level, two at the people level, and one at the action level:

- *Communicating* concerns the seeking and receiving of information, and the sharing of it with others, whether internally as disseminator or externally as spokesperson.
- *Controlling* means using information to control the work of others, whether by the issuing of specific directives, the designing of organization structure, or the development and application of formal systems and procedures.
- *Leading* is encouraging and enabling people within the unit to take effective action, whether by focusing on the individual (mentoring and rewarding, etc.), on the group (team building and conflict resolving, etc.), or on the whole unit (culture building).
- *Linking* relates to people outside the unit by the establishment of a network of contacts, which is used to represent the needs of the unit and to transmit its influence externally, and also by the receipt of influence transmitted to the manager by these people.

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- *Doing* concerns the supervision of the taking of action more or less directly, including directing projects for change internally, handling disturbances and crises, and negotiating and executing external agreements (“doing deals”).

This observational research has been designed to assess the usefulness of this model and to elaborate it in various ways, especially with regard to the various contexts in which managers practise management and to the styles they exhibit. The observation of these managers of Parks Canada provided special insight into the influence of social and political factors in managerial work.

Politics on the edge

Gord Irwin at one point mentioned a “bear jam”. “What’s that?”, I asked. “A traffic jam caused by a bear!” A bear sometimes ambles down to the road, the tourists stop (some even get out of the cars to get better pictures!), and that breeds confrontation with the truckers and other motorists who depend on the same road to cross the continental divide. This is only the most physically evident form of conflict between factions who compete for different uses of the park. My observation of other officials in the Canadian public service, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Department of Justice, simply did not prepare me for the intensity of the political situation faced by the managers of the parks. Far from the federal capital, in or near these superb natural settings, politics seem to come out much more sharply and overtly. Perhaps the edges are clearer out here.

The most politically evident battlefield during these three days and for many years, has been the conflict between the developers and the environmentalists. Both, of course, have their agendas – one to use the parks for their commercial purposes, or, perhaps as they might put it, to make it more easily accessible to tourists (or consumers of wood products, or workers in need of employment, etc.), the other to preserve the natural state of the parks. These can be competing agendas, of course, but what has turned natural friction into almost overt war in recent years has been the propensity of both sides to view this as a zero-sum game. So some of the environmentalists, at least, are continually taking last stands against the developers, looking for any pretence to stop any further development, while some of the corresponding developers get their glee out of slipping something past the environmentalists.

Sitting between all this are the managers of the parks, monitored closely by the press looking for good stories, the politicians wishing to accommodate their supporters while minimizing political fallout, and the public servants in the national capital intent on avoiding scandal. Watching it all unfold in the field can get one thinking about whether the real “civilization” is not in the back country!

The burning issue at this time was a proposed new parking lot for a ski hill in Banff National Park. Its owner was a rather aggressive businessman, well connected to the (then) ruling Progressive Conservative Party as well as the

(then) sitting member of Parliament from this area, herself also with a reputation for aggressiveness. The parking lot was being hotly contested by environmental groups that claimed it would block a major traverse used by several species of animals as well as add to the accumulating loss of old growth forest. The issue began in the front country – Gord’s unit worked on an initial report and made recommendations – but it quickly escalated, not just past the front country and even the park itself, but beyond Sandy’s region to the whole parks service, and then into the national headquarters of the Department of the Environment (to which Parks Canada then reported), and from there to the political level. Finally the whole “file” was managed in Ottawa. All this over a tiny plot of land in a country of ten million square kilometres!

Not that this freed these three managers from the issue. Quite the contrary; it was a central concern in both the park and regional headquarters on these days of observation. So one begins to get an idea of just how convoluted managing on the edges can be, between the developers and environmentalists, the politicians and the public servants, the department and the Parks Service, the Parks Service headquarters in Ottawa and its regions, and this particular region and its parks, leaving aside the truckers and the tourists in the front country and the tourists from the front country and the bears from the back. (Let alone the edges within ourselves: on a hike a few days later with the owner of a rustic lodge in the back country of a nearby provincial park – five-hour hike from the nearest road – as a helicopter whirred overhead he commented sarcastically on people who “have a nice lunch at the Banff Springs Hotel and then take a little tour of the Rockies in the afternoon”. Yet I was there, and his lodge functioned, because those same helicopters shuttled in his guests. The edges can get thin indeed at these high altitudes!)

Sandy Davis, Regional Director-General of Parks Canada (at the time), had 18 parks (with nine million visitors annually), a staff of 2,200 people, and a budget of \$110,000,000 (Canadian) under her authority. She worked in a modern government office building in Calgary, holds an MBA, and had worked in the Corrections Service in Ottawa before joining the parks service in 1988. She was considered as a person who gets things done and as being sympathetic to the legacy of the parks. Charlie Zinkan heads up of one of these parks, Banff, perhaps the best known internationally and, in fact, the origin of the whole Canadian parks system. (In 1885, two years after some railway workers chanced on some hot springs near what is now the town of Banff, the government of Canada set aside an area around them as a park reserve.) Charlie works in an impressive stone building, a landmark that looks down on to the main street of the town of Banff and then out to the mountains beyond. He still wears his warden outfit to work, having spent his career in the parks he knows intimately. Gord Irwin, as Park Warden in Banff National Park, works in a prefabricated-type building on the outskirts of the town of Banff, part of a small complex that houses some of the park’s equipment (such as trucks and snow removal machines).

These three managers sit in an hierarchical relationship. The days of observation of each of them will be described in turn, chronologically and then conceptually, before we consider a conceptual interpretation and comparison of their common context.

Regional headquarters

I arrived at Sandy Davis' Calgary office at 8:30 a.m. for what she called a fairly normal "in the office" day. We chatted for about 20 minutes while she described the running of the parks: these are municipalities of sorts, a good deal of whose work involves the daily routine of removing the garbage, ploughing the roads, and ticketing the speeding motorists.

Her daily briefing followed at 8:50 a.m. with her own reports, with the discussion ranging from information sharing to scheduling to making certain decisions. It proceeded briskly, with Sandy taking a rather hands-on posture of advising and sometimes directing. She briefed the others on her recent contacts with Ottawa, followed by discussion of some brewing problems of staff appointments, and a protest in one park that could turn violent. "Any other 'hot' issues?", Sandy asked at one point, to which she received the reply that "There's a couple of lukewarm ones", including a letter that went to a minister about the rents paid by the wardens for their housing in the parks, a railways spill, and a trail closure in a park (the goats come down this time of year, followed by the bears who might menace the people), about which the owners of a nearby lodge had written hoping this would not be permanent. They also discussed links with the heritage people in Vancouver (Parks Canada had recently been shifted from the Environment Department to the newly created one of Heritage Canada). The meeting ended at 9:50a.m.

After some brief encounters in the hall, a more formal meeting was convened with Sandy and the region's two planning people as well as the Director of National Parks Operations who arrived later. There were four items on the written agenda. The first concerned the construction of a new facility, and again Sandy factored in the political dimension, expressing concern about the level of the expenditure just before an election. The next item seemed even more delicate: the need to approve the draft of a newsletter announcing a government-native band agreement on a new wilderness site. Sandy was concerned that it be checked carefully. She also suggested they try to get the minister to make the public announcement.

Item 3, "my favorite topic", said Sandy, concerned the "Four Mountain Parks Planning Program", another newsletter announcing a five-year review of the plans that guide the major parks and inviting public participation. Sandy was clearly trying to pre-empt problems here, insisting that she be kept very closely briefed, and suggesting some specific changes (including mention of the "heritage" aspect, which, given the new ministry of the parks, "I think is absolutely critical"). Sandy also expressed "my own feeling – and I'm strictly from a political standpoint here – to meet with ... and show [the draft newsletter]

to the caucus first before it goes out". (The caucus refers to the meeting of all the sitting members of a party (the Progressive Conservative Party in Parliament.)

Item 4 concerned the "Strategic Plan: Program Update". A 20-page draft was handed out called "Defining Our Destiny – Leadership through Excellence", which included sections on the mandate, the mission, a vision statement and ten "values" (ranging from pride in heritage to respect for "strategic thinking linked to strategic action"), and eight "strategic priorities and objectives" described at some length (including "effectively managing protected areas", "commemorating and protecting cultural heritage" and "organizational excellence").

The meeting ended at 11:03a.m., at which point Sandy turned to me and said "Henry, let's go for a walk!" The building was being renovated in an open, cheerful way, and as we walked, Sandy greeted many people and introduced herself (and me) to the ones she didn't know. We were back in the office in about 15 minutes and then a call came through that she had placed earlier to the new Assistant Deputy Minister, her boss. She welcomed him to his job, suggested a trip to Ottawa to brief him on the issues, and commented on a number of them, including the parking lot. She mentioned the plan for the four western parks as well as the meeting with the caucus later in the month, and she told him about a possible court challenge.

This was followed by a conference call among her people, including Charlie Zinkan at Banff, about the parking lot. They discussed location and a report being prepared. At one point, Sandy turned to me and said, "If you want to know what the biggest waste of a manager's time is, it's this sort of thing", referring to the level of detail of the conversation. Sandy intervened at one point to reiterate how contentious the issue was, and how the minister might react to it, and what was her own preferred course of action. "As soon as a final recommendation is made, both sides are prepared to go to war." At 12:30 p.m., we were off to lunch, with the group that had attended the early morning meeting. "A lot of my job is mediating", Sandy said over lunch, and when I drew the model of managerial work, she pointed to the centre and said "I'm that point in the hourglass".

Back at 2:25 p.m., including ten-minute drives each way and discussions over lunch, Sandy turned briefly to her mail, signing bills and letters, etc. "The only things I sign are the things only I can sign", she said. "The amount of mail I see is quite small", and estimated that she spent about 40 per cent of her time dealing with issues, half of it outside the unit, and considerable time with her own staff, including about 30 per cent visiting the parks. A few minutes later, Sandy went into an "open forum", which she chaired, of whoever wished to come from the regional office. Nine people showed up, mostly new, younger members of the staff, a few of whom Sandy had not yet met. She introduced herself to them and announced, "This is your session. Ask anything you like. No repercussions", and then turned to their questions as well as commenting on the specifics and the values of the operation. "How do you new guys like working for Parks Canada?", she asked at one point. "Great", "like the atmosphere" and

from one person who wanted to work in a park itself, “The closer you get to the parks, the more relaxed people are”. Someone asked her “I’m not sure what you do. Heard there is supposed to be a clash of thunder behind it. So what do you do and how much power do you have?” Sandy talked about being a Civil Servant in a line job of delivery programme operations, and about her responsibility for budgets, staffing and development, etc. She ducked the second question by saying “it depends how you want to define power!” She was not at all rushed, and after an hour, as the questions petered out, she thanked everyone, expressed her availability to them, and said goodbye to each by name.

At 3:45 p.m., we went into a meeting of all the region’s directors, ten people in all, called, it turned out, to give them an opportunity to meet me (the Heizenberg Principle at work!). I raised the issue of managing in the middle, between the parks’ operations and the Ottawa headquarters, and a number of people pointed out that they began at the base of parks operations and have subsequently moved back and forth between there and the regional headquarters. (Sandy was the only one to have moved from Ottawa to the regional headquarters.) I also asked a question about “empowering” versus controlling, and Sandy talked about “a foundation [in the strategic plans, etc.] that creates a common understanding”. That reduces the need for direct controlling, she said, although frustration was also expressed with the “paper trail” required in government operations. When I expressed my surprise at coming out to study the fresh air of the parks and finding the extent of the political conflict, commenting that this was perhaps reflective only of that particular morning, one of the senior directors said “That’s pretty well it!” The discussion lasted for about 25 minutes, before Sandy briefed everyone on a few other issues for another few minutes.

Back in her office at 4:30 p.m., Sandy tried to call back the Member of Parliament for Banff, who had left a message, and then three of her staff people came in to review budgets. With a mention of a park that was running over budget, Sandy said “You call him and tell him that if he wants to be working for the Parks Department next year, he had better do something. This is a first warning; if I call, he’ll be in my office”. Meanwhile a call came in from a senior official in the Heritage Department in Ottawa, whom Sandy briefed for about five minutes on a meeting that was held, including the “animosity” that was expressed during it. They then turned back to the budget review, with Sandy also commenting on the call, and at 5:00 p.m., they left and the regular day ended, although we stayed and talked for some time.

When I mentioned her sensitivity to the political dimension and how she seemed to overlay that dimension on the administrative process, Sandy said “That’s my value added”. But could not the broad view become the disconnected view, I asked. “I work very hard at that. I know the parks and I know the issues. I’ve been to every one of the parks numerous times.” The difficulty, of course, is the “dichotomous mandate of protection and preservation”, which she and her people try to make into one continuum through the concept of “sustainability”. But as this day and the next two made clear, that is no easy task.

Interpretation in terms of the model

While leaving the broader issues to the final conclusions, it is appropriate to interpret here Sandy's managerial work in terms of the model.

On this day, Sandy appeared to be a "linker" above all, overlaying the political dimension on the issues and operations of her region. She was certainly sensitive and astute about these issues and highly informed with regard to them. In this sense, she could be described as "managing up" (in terms of conventional notions of hierarchy) to the senior levels of her service and department in Ottawa and then on to the political level. Her focus could thus be described as a kind of horizontal edge hovering over her region.

Networking and communicating, especially outside her unit (notably keeping Ottawa informed), seemed to be the critical functions for her, used to strengthen and protect her unit but also to help it deal with the highly contentious issues that bombard it. The parks are places where certain opposing forces square off, and the people who run the parks necessarily become the mediators, as Sandy pointed out.

But this did not seem to translate into a great deal of external "doing," *per se*. Clearly there has to be some of this in the negotiations with forceful outside interests (although I saw only indirect evidence of it this day), but perhaps not all that much doing of self-initiated deals, *per se*. Linking would seem to be more of a reactive activity here, although the way Sandy did it could hardly be described as passive! In fact, when I asked her if she saw herself as a "referee" in these disputes, she preferred the label "objective intervener" instead, an advocate for scientifically-based sustainable development, which she saw as a reconciliation of the competing interests.

With regard to managing *into* her unit, according to what I saw and had indicated to me, Sandy seemed to be less a "doer" than an indirect "controller" and "leader". The controlling role was clearly evident in the budget discussions, both at a general systems level and a specific level, and in the clear directives she issued on numerous occasions throughout the day. She knew what she wanted, and how she wanted it done, and she was certainly not shy about expressing these intentions. Yet she herself seemed to place more emphasis on the systems aspect of the controlling role. For example, she claimed that a tool such as the systems plan gives people a basis for consistency and so reduced her need to control more directly. Yet, as I saw it, there was still the considerable issuing of specific directives.

Leading came through most clearly, and in rather pure form, in that meeting with the new staff – an impressive exercise in how to bring people on board – as well as in her encouraging comments to a number of the regional people during the day.

Yet, at times Sandy came close to inside "doing" too. For example, when expressing herself on a new problem brewing in one of the parks, the line between issuing directives of how she wanted something done and actually taking charge of the doing of it seemed to become rather thin. And as the main person who factored the political dimension into the handling of issues –

thereby connecting governmental politics to administrative process – she came rather close to internal doing as well. But controlling and leading still seem to describe her inside style of managing more than doing; in other words, functioning more on the information and people levels than on the action level *per se*.

Figure 4 shows a matrix of styles associated with the frame of a manager's job, based on who selects the frame and how clear it is. A style that is clearly defined and externally imposed is labelled "driven", one that is clearly defined but self-selected is called "determined". A vague frame that is imposed leads to a "passive" style and one that is self-selected is called "opportunistic".

	Frame vague	Frame sharp
Frame imposed	Passive style	Driven style
Frame selected	Opportunist style	Determined style

Figure 4.
Matrix of styles
associated with a
manager's job

Sandy is evidently a highly determined woman, and rather driven in her work, with a sharp frame in her mind, with regard both to her purpose in general and to specific issues in particular (each of those issues themselves being rather sharply delineated). This frame was imposed partly by the nature of the job itself and partly it was selected by Sandy to reflect her own view of the job.

In overall style, Sandy Davis would seem to be rather close to the true "professional manager". Her determination suggests more of a deliberate, deductive approach to the conceiving of strategy than an emergent, inductive approach (Mintzberg and Jorgensen, 1987; Mintzberg and Waters, 1985), likewise a rather cerebral orientation.

The clearest evidence of this appeared in the "strategic planning" activities of the day, obviously championed by her, with its mandate, mission, vision, etc. The irony of this, however, is the fast-moving political context in which all of this is embedded, which forces people to be so dependent on soft data, quick impressions, rapid moves and good contacts – all of which seem antithetical to these formal systems and statements. Sandy Davis would likely argue that these are complementary, yet it is far from obvious how one reconciles "Our mission: To sustain the integrity, health, diversity, majesty and beauty of Western Canada's Cultural and National Heritage" (Parks Canada, 1993, point 2.1) with a knock-down, drag-out battle over a parking lot at a ski hill.

Banff Park headquarters

The headquarters of the Banff National Park sits just beyond and above the heart of the town of Banff, in the impressive building originally built as a spa and recently restored. Charlie Zinkan occupied a large office that looked down

Banff Avenue. But belying that image was a low-key atmosphere, easy, friendly, and very much giving the impression that one was now in the parks. Charlie was in a park's uniform, but some of the other people there wore jeans.

Charlie suggested I come in at 8:00 a.m., when his daily one-hour French class began. Since it was required for his bilingual position, he thought it could be considered part of his managerial work!

The class ended at 9:05 a.m., and we continued to chat (in English). He expected a light load this day, although "Some days it is almost impossible to escape this place". There used to be seven layers of management in the park, he said, but now, with a budget of \$10,000,000, including 270 people full-time and another 500 in the summer, and about 30-50 managers, it was down to three levels, sometimes four. There were a series of units dealing with central administration (finance, human resources, planning, communication) and others with park services (leases, roads, campgrounds, law enforcement and public safety, conservation, and the front and back country services).

At 9:20 a.m., in the midst of going over the chart, the man in charge of programme services came in for about five minutes. He talked of a conflict (with a developer), referred to "licking our wounds" and "just wanted to let you know" what had been done, with which Charlie agreed, and that "better we did it than you". They also discussed a problem with the accounting system.

Then a call came from a manager of a power company, concerned with environmentalist efforts to stop an energy supply project, and requesting a meeting. Charles explained some of the concerns of the environmental groups and suggested that early September might be best for the meeting. The manager continued, referring to the role of his company as not trying to involve itself in the management of the park but rather as providing services within the park. He also referred to a colleague's tendency of sabre rattling, who tries to come in at the top, intervening politically at the federal level. The call lasted 21 minutes, during most of which Charlie listened politely while his caller said what he wanted to say.

In between other calls (scheduling mostly), we chatted. Before the reorganization, morale was a serious problem in the park, Charlie said. It was a struggle to get the managers to be less directive, especially given the political pressures to centralize decision making and the fact that science is not really up to the ecological questions that get raised. Charlie believes that classic top-down argued control of government was just incompatible with the highly-educated people attracted to work in the parks, even those doing simple jobs with the hope of moving on to more interesting ones. You "have to be careful when talking 'empowerment' to these people", he said. "We have mechanics reading the *Harvard Business Review!*" The people in the field are committed to their own values: "these are the lone rangers in the organization".

He described the Banff Park as especially sensitive, given its history and visibility. Here, particularly, is where everything comes together – tourists, developers, a transcontinental highway, etc. Charlie described three parks, two in the USA – Yellowstone, Yosemite – and Banff as "lightning rods" for these

concerns, the ones that have influenced world development policies. “There will be weeks and weeks when issues drive my life.” The ecological interests of the Bow Valley (of the Banff Park) may be impossible to manage, he suggested. He referred specifically to the conflicts between the Alberta Members of Parliament, all from the Progressive Conservative Party at the time, and the ENGOs (environmental non-government organizations), especially concerning the parking lot but also the proposals to “twin” the Trans-Canada Highway so that it could carry more traffic (and so avoid those “bear jams”).

At 10:30 a.m., Charlie began to sign leasehold documents, a required formality, and Sandy Davis called at 10:40 a.m. about a conversation she had with the local Member of Parliament, asking Charlie to speak to that person too, which he did immediately. “I’m just following up”, he said, telling the woman about a consulting firm that had been hired by Ottawa and about a meeting with the ski hill owner and their “very positive working relationship”. They also discussed arrangements between the town of Banff and the federal government (on whose land the entire town sits). That call ended just before 11:00 a.m., followed by another, also of about 15 minutes, from the head of operations at the ski centre. He expressed concerns about the environmental report and explained his boss’s position. He discussed different possible alignments for the road, asking about Charlie’s concerns.

Charlie then met with the head of a bungalow camping ground about Indian land claims near the facility. The tone of this encounter was quite different, with the visitor mostly listening quietly as Charlie explained the claim and the government’s position very carefully, trying to alleviate the man’s anxieties.. Twenty-six years earlier, a lawyer had told him about the claim and that he could eventually be ousted, but no one had ever come back to discuss it, nor had he sought anyone out. He was grateful to Charlie for taking the initiative to explain it, clearly expressing relief. He raised one final issue, about another edge. The railroad crosses the continental divide in this area, and their engineers tend to blow their whistles as they do, even during the night. “We’re supposed to be providing a wilderness experience and here we have this noise pollution!” Could Charlie do anything about this? Charlie talked about having to discuss this with the railroad people. “Maybe I’ll find out who the vice-president for public relations is and offer a gift certificate of a free night to listen to the whistles”, he joked.

After a brief lunch ourselves, we headed off to the park’s ranch at the far end of town for Charlie to arrange to do some riding to get into shape, as he was to go on a five-day trip into the back country. (That part of the park is regularly patrolled on horseback.) Charlie wanted to have a look at that part of the park and to be visible there. But this was not just “management by riding around”; he was taking along some wardens, two RCMP people, and a businessman, as an opportunity to exchange ideas. Back at the office just after 3:00 p.m., after stopping briefly at the operations headquarters (where I would spend the next day), the regional specialist in public safety came in, to talk about cost recovery for emergency services (search and rescue). He had spoken with other groups

(such as the coast guard) about this, and had some ideas. One was to impose a surcharge on all the vehicles entering the park (a kind of compulsory insurance), although it would be preferable, if much more difficult, to charge the actual recipient of the service. He wanted Charlie's approval to "pitch" the idea to others.

After another brief meeting on space for equipment storage, we took a break in the meetings to look at Charlie's schedule in a broader sense, first his agenda of scheduled meetings for the rest of that week (this was Friday). Every day began with French. Monday there was a briefing on training and a team-building session, plus discussion of a problem a manager was having with some of his people. A Japanese attaché at the Washington Embassy came in to discuss some issues (such as Japanese commercial ownership in Banff village), which Charlie saw as a kind of VIP visit. (It might be noted that Lake Louise, within the Banff Park, is a site revered by the Japanese.) Charlie also met with the owner of the ski hill, and with his own managers on real property management. On Tuesday there was a conference call on the future of "hot pools", a "zero-based budgeting" review exercise, more attention to the parking lot; a telephone interview on a survey with the Auditor-General's Office in Ottawa, a meeting with a local organization about a space exchange and, in the evening, a Heritage Department meeting. Wednesday included Word Perfect training and lunch with Sandy in Calgary (about an hour and a half drive) on the parking lot, with another evening concerning the Heritage Department. Thursday included that conference call on the parking lot ("You can see how one issue can dominate chunks of my time"), and meetings in Lake Louise (almost an hour drive the other way), on union issues, and with a hotel owner concerned about pedestrians crossing his property.

The next week's scheduled meetings included an "agenda driven" executive meeting, on planning; a meeting with the ski hill owner and a consultant hired to look at different possible alignments of the parking lot; a visit by Sandy with a reception at the Banff Cultural Centre; plus a follow-up call from the Auditor General's Office, lunch with a US Congressman on national parks conservation, and a parade at a cadet camp, where Charlie had a ceremonial role to play.

We then chatted about his job, and a reactive role with regard to some of the projects initiated by the developers but also some other project initiated by the park's people themselves. With layering, Charlie found that his job had become heavier, with many more people reporting to him. As he put it in comments to me later, "Perhaps the problem is empowerment down to some managers who lack skills and confidence and consequently try to delegate upwards".

At 4:45 p.m., a consultant to the region came in. They chatted about management in the service until 5:25 p.m., when Charlie's day ended.

Interpretation in terms of the model

At one point, Charlie said that he saw himself in the same hourglass as Sandy, with the outside pressures flowing down from above and passing on to the

park's operations below. But while this edge was no less evident in Charlie's day – in fact, more pointedly so – there seemed to be a rather different one at play here. Sandy was more focused on factoring in the political dimension from above, namely from the parks headquarters, the ministry and the rest of the government in Ottawa. Charlie, in contrast, was much more involved with the specific conflicts in the park – on either side, if you like: between a campground and an Indian band (as well as a noisy railroad), between the truckers who want the road twinned and the ENGOs which do not, between the injured climbers who receive the rescue services and all the park's visitors who might be asked to pay for it, and, of course, that famous parking lot sitting between the ski hill operator and the ENGOs. These conflicts may be political, and some can easily escalate to the formal level of governmental politics, but a number (such as that between the campground and the railroad) hit tangibly and directly on Charlie as the manager of the park.

Thus “linking” loomed large indeed in this job this day. Charlie was not “doing” externally, in the sense of negotiating final settlements (although there were hints of all kinds of these in progress). Rather he was representing his unit to the outside world, transmitting to others in the unit the information and influence that he received. Charlie took a proactive stance, at least with regard to informing, when he met with the campground operator, and more of a reactive stance of listening on some of the other issues.

As Charlie implied, the amount of linking required probably pre-empted some attention to the other roles. Thus, I saw a bit of controlling here, but little internal leading *per se* (although some leading came out in the agenda of the other days), and most of the communicating he did was tied to the external linking activities (namely acting as the park's spokesperson).

The frame of Charlie's job seems clear enough here. He pointed to the strategic plan as a guiding force, within which he sought to handle the external pressures. But frame and plan are not necessarily easily reconcilable. At one point, Charlie said that the problems of managing some of the ecological concerns made the technical execution of the official mandate difficult and so subject to external challenge.

If a single word was required to describe Charlie's management style this day, *mediating* might well be best. He sat between all these interests, necessarily responding to many (as delicately as possible) although taking a proactive stance on some as well. Charlie certainly appeared lower key than Sandy, less inclined to impose a strong stamp on what he passed through the system (or maybe doing so less overtly). But that might well have been in the nature of his job too, even within his unit. He complained when signing leasehold documents that the system should allow for more delegation. This came up just after our discussion of the nature of management in government, especially with regard to the high levels of education in the parks and the “lone ranger” quality of the operating staff. In a sense, the park superintendent takes the heat for his people, much as I found in a hospital where the medical chiefs do so for the doctors so that they can concentrate on their specialized work (Mintzberg, 1995). Thus

Charlie's sideways edge converts into a horizontal edge too, between management and the operations.

Banff operations headquarters

Gord Irwin came in on Saturday, not to accommodate me but because weekends are key working times in the summer. (Corresponding to that arbitrary line the Ottawa people wanted to impose between front and back country, Gord said he found working 9:00 a.m./5:00 p.m. strange in a way, claiming he needed to access people at odd hours.)

The focus of this job was clearly different from the outset (8:30 a.m.). Gord was just back from a mountain rescue course and spent the first half hour putting ice axes, cords and crampons, etc. into their respective boxes. Finally the mountains! (Well, almost.)

During this, he talked proudly of the worldwide reputation of this search and rescue team, and discussed the leadership aspect of the course, especially how, in this context, leadership is not a fixed position but a function of who has particular skills at particular times. Search and rescue is viewed as an élitist group, he said, but in life and death situations, the level of expertise and knowledge, as well as trust, responsibility and camaraderie, is that much more important. Ultimately, leadership here is a team building exercise, he felt.

Walking back to the office, Gord chatted with a couple of his people, briefing the wildlife specialist on the dart, the dose and the procedure he and others used to tranquillize elk and so get them out of town and into the back country. They also discussed the trapping of grizzly bears, and his experience in the training school. "It's that public expression we have to think about", Gord said with regard to the animals, raising, this time in a general sense, the edge between his work and the public.

Between Gord's comings and goings out of his office, to chat informally with people, we discussed his job. It had been reorganized since February, although he had only come into it in June. Before that, Lake Louise had a parallel structure (its own front and back country managers, etc.). The new structure used "product lines" instead of geographical areas, so that now he had to look after the Lake Louise area as well as Banff (although each still had a supervisor for the four busy months of the year). That meant 23 people reporting to him, which he thought difficult, given that a lot of the work involved the settlement of disputes and the assignment of tasks.

Much of this, Gord said, was based on budgets, which are a "moving target" that make it difficult to plan realistically. The intention was to flatten the organization, but here, where this impacts most tangibly, he felt it did not work well in practice: people need someone to turn to for help, such as for a second opinion, a kind of accessible mentor. Power over decision making is, in effect, decentralized managerially, but then usurped politically, which makes things difficult for the operating staff. Gord mentioned the parking lot here. He noted another set of edges in this regard too, in and near the town, which upset the local residents: the problems that arise for them when the bull elk rut in the fall,

and become aggressive, and the cow elk calve in the spring, sometimes doing it so near town to be relatively safe from predators who are less comfortable around people (an edge for the elk!).

At 10:15 a.m., Gord turned to his e-mail, commenting that once you become a manager, your names goes on mailing lists and it becomes “difficult to get meaningful work done”. (“Someone in Ottawa can hit a button and get on the e-mail of every staff person in Canada!” Once he came back after six days to 176 new messages!) This time (five days away), he had 40 new messages. They comprised some direct material, including a question about how to divide people for an upcoming teamwork training seminar, a request for information concerning a film-making project, and several messages about scheduling. Then eventually Gord began scanning the messages quickly, until “this one is a bit of a timebomb” – about a problem in the campgrounds between animal habitation and human drinking. Others dealt with patrol staff availability, a housing allocation problem for staff in Lake Louise, “a meeting I dread, a free-for-all”, and training in hoof care and the shoeing of horses. It was now 11:26 a.m., and the 40 messages had been reduced to ten.

A call then came in from the supervisor at Lake Louise. They chatted for a couple of minutes about various things, including the search and rescue school. Then Gord turned to his PC for a few minutes, until a staffer, full-time on mountain rescue came in, and they reviewed some technical rescue systems in comparison with what appeared in the manuals. He left at 12:15 p.m., and we talked about management issues.

Gord felt that mission statements, if substantial and not just buzzwords for Ottawa, can be a helpful guide in dealing with the difficult trade-offs, while policies are not – they tend to be too tight and can go out of date quickly. (Ironically, a few minutes earlier, while Gord was on the telephone, I overheard a conversation in the hall about “gearing up for a new mission and a new vision and all this and that. All they do is just crank this [stuff] out. It makes it look like they’re doing something..We have our little mission – it sure keeps a few people busy! ... Anyway, I’ll leave you to your e-mail.”) We discussed the hierarchy of the parks and some of the currently popular buzzwords at its higher levels – “win-win”, “empowerment”, “flattening the organization”, “stewardship” and, of course, “heritage”. (Two days earlier, at regional headquarters, I heard someone say: “Did you go back through [the planning document headed for Ottawa] and write down the word ‘heritage’ everywhere you could?”) Over lunch, we also discussed leadership, with Gord describing a form in his job quite different from that of the formal hierarchy, revolving around work teams and being informal as much as formal.

At 1:30 p.m., Gord placed a call to a consultant about setting up the groups for a teamwork exercise. Then he put on a video of horse use in the park, especially concerning environmental sensitivity in the back country. (When there was a mention in the film about how nice some of the old equipment was, but that the new equipment was lighter and so more environmentally friendly, Gord quipped that with “environment” out and “heritage” in, maybe the film

would now have to be redone to favour the older, heavier equipment!) Gord was the producer of the film – a project left over from when he was a back country supervisor – and this was a rough first cut that he had to review. The film was being made to send to people applying for permits to ride in the park.

That ended at 2:30 p.m., and it was back to the PC, sending detailed written comments on the film. Then Gord went through the paper mail, reviewing mostly routine things that had to be signed, budget documents and time sheets. Someone went by and Gord asked “Glen, were you guys out after that bear this afternoon?” No, Glen had been experimenting with a new tranquillizer dart, and he told Gord of the optimal distance to shoot one into a elk (22 yards) and what the size of the syringe should be. “We could do a big bull with one dart.”

Glen left at 3:10 p.m., and it was back to the mail – a couple of visitor complaints about traffic, about wildlife, and about a logging truck that pushed a sheep off the road. (They were addressed to Charlie Zinkan and had been forwarded to Gord.) A memo from accounting concerned the cost of refilling the oxygen bottles used in first aid and rescue. A call for papers for a geographical information system conference was forwarded by Gord to other people. (All the while, the park’s radio was playing in the background, and the dispatcher – nearby in the building – had just handled a call concerning an accident on the road.) There was also a series of bulk items for information, including one on guidelines about a “bear management” plan.

At 3:55 p.m. Gord heard his name on the radio, and someone came to ask if he was available to talk to two climbers. So Gord went out to the front desk and met a couple of Australians who needed advice about climbing a particular peak. (Gord knew the routes well.) When they left, two other men presented themselves, having returned from the back country, and told Gord about the condition of the trails.

At this point, Gord informed me that he had planned to do a boat ride on the river to look for a dead body, but that now it was too late in the day to go. (Some days earlier, a visitor got drunk and persuaded someone else to go over Bow Falls in a raft with him. No one had ever done so successfully. At the last minute, the other fellow jumped clear, but the first one disappeared. The initial search was unsuccessful, but it could take several days for a drowned body to float to the surface.)

On other such days, Gord said he would spend more time talking to supervisors. But on weekends there were fewer calls for information from staff people in the headquarters and regional offices, so it was easier to get his paperwork done. He also tended to have more committee meetings on those weekdays. Gord said he tended to spend time on other days going out with the staff to patrol campgrounds, picnic areas and trailheads, chasing bears off the roads, talking to visitors, and just maintaining a park presence. For example, he said that on another day, he might have gone out to test the new darts. In a typical week, he said he might make two trips up to the headquarters administration building to discuss personnel or financial issues, and he spent a day a week at Lake Louise.

At 4:30 p.m., one of the staff members dropped in to discuss the rewording of a sign about firearm control at the entrance to the park, and left shortly after.

It was at this point that Gord explained to me about the 50 metre definition to distinguish his “product”, as they called it, from that of his back country colleague. So we began to talk about the edges, and he explained to me that his people had worked on the initial study of the parking lot but the ski hill operator did not like it and so took it to the political level. He talked about the wide variety of concerns that had to be dealt with here – law enforcement, wildlife, public safety, forest fire management, etc. In effect, he and his colleagues were managing a full community, even if a rather particular one.

We chatted to 5:15 p.m., and on my way back to the centre of town, just a few minutes from Gord’s office, I photographed elk grazing on the front lawns of private homes.

Interpretation in terms of the model

This was not a typical day, or, more to the point, it was typical of a quiet, in-house day. But even if only by suggestion and through discussion, this day also indicated quite clearly how close Gord was to the operations. This probably reflects two characteristics which are difficult to separate. One is that Gord had been in the job for only a few months, and so retained some of his earlier operating activities (such as producing the film and doing mountain rescue). And the other is that this is first-line supervision, and so “doing” remains a natural and significant part of the job.

In fact, it would seem that the other managerial roles – controlling, leading, communicating, even linking – revolved largely around doing. In other words, the focus seemed to have been on action more than on information or people *per se*. When discussing leading, for example, Gord described it as teamwork, with the leader very much a part of the operating team. Or, in the case of controlling, it seemed to take the form largely of the issuing of specific directives based on his knowledge of and involvement in the specific situation. The more formal aspects of controlling, especially regarding systems (such as budgets), seemed to reflect controls imposed on him which he in turn had to impose on the people in his unit.

“Conceiving” was not evident here this day, possibly because Gord was new in the job or perhaps because the frame was simply assumed: the park must be run and a myriad things must be done to maintain it – from finding a body in the river to making a film that explains good horseback riding behaviour.

And again, the edges were evident, in fact here most sharply. Gord and his people are the ones who have to chase the bears away, before they hurt the tourists or anger the truckers. Otherwise people will battle with each other (“literally as well figuratively”, Gord added) and then the problems move from the tangible edges of the front country operations to the political edges of park and regional administration.

Gord’s frustration with some of the management jargon and procedures – those abstractions in contrast with his unit’s actions – seems to reflect the

nature of his job as well as his newness in it. His response to this strange phenomenon called "management" is captured nicely in Linda Hill's (1992) book *Becoming a Manager*. There she describes how she tracked for a year salespeople who had just become sales managers, and the difficulties they encountered. Management in the formal sense (compared with Gord's view of leadership) must be a curious thing for anyone who has to cope with very tangible operating problems, and doubly curious when first encountered, especially in a mountain park. It suggests that organizations should give special attention to the training of new managers, something all too rare today.

What perhaps magnifies this frustration is the nature of the edge on which Gord (or any other front line supervisor) sits. He finds himself between the operations and the administration.

On one side are all the tangible problems of managing this natural setting, including the host of naturally occurring edges there – between the truckers and the tourists, the residents and the elk, even the elk and the bears. Of course, except for the last, these are not really "natural" at all, but rather occur by virtue of our imposition as human beings on *our* "natural environment". Indeed, the very phrase "managing the natural setting" has to be a kind of oxymoron: that setting managed itself just fine for millennia without our "management". Now we have "bear management plans"!

And on the other side are the abstractions of administration as well as the peculiarities of politics (which themselves form an edge – hence Gord's frustration in finding the promises of "decentralization" and "empowerment" usurped by the political manoeuvring).

The truly natural edges (such as between the elk and the bear) elicit the tangible people-imposed edges (such as between the bear and the tourists and, in turn, between the tourists and the truckers), which in turn elicit the more abstract political edges (such as between the ski hill operators and the environmentalists). As this happens, the issues become more pervasive and more ideological, and they leave the domain of Gord's operations, which actually leaves him caught in the middle. And so we find his response to this strange work called management.

We believe we have developed all kinds of fancy procedures to manage things, yet we have barely begun to come to grips with these kinds of problems; real problems, in real operations. Our procedures work wonderfully well in the administrative offices, where we rearrange boxes on charts (for example, parks reporting to heritage, whatever that means, instead of environment), and formulate all kinds of well-intentioned plans that have little to do with the deer and darts of daily life. There, most of these procedures seem to be quaint at best, counterproductive at worst. And so the managers are left to manage in a vacuum.

Of course, all of these edges are really mirror images of the same thing, all of them contrived in one way or another. People establish themselves in a natural setting in such a way that an animal ambling into a valley, or even drawn to it for the convenience of finding food, becomes an imposition. And the more

people come, and the greedier their demands, the more these problems magnify, and so the more “political” the whole situation becomes. Politics, of course, is the way we fight with each other figuratively, over our self-assumed right to “manage” the natural environment.

A model of the edges

Edges abound in the management of Parks Canada. Edges, of course, abound everywhere, if you want to see them. But here you cannot possibly miss them.

The three managers I observed all dealt with some of the same edges. After all, that parking lot came up in all their work. But they dealt with them differently, on different levels of abstraction, and these various issues tended to manifest themselves on different sorts of edges.

As shown in Figure 5, in the terms of conventional hierarchy, with ground at the base and government at the top (or the parks at the bottom and the politicians at the top), Gord especially manages the edge between the operations and administration, which can be referred to as the *operating edge* and is shown horizontally across the bottom of the figure. He connects action to administration. Charlie’s is especially the *stakeholder edge*, shown vertically to either side of him, as various outside players bring tangible pressures to bear especially on him. He connects influence to programmes. And Sandy’s job is to manage especially on the *political edge*, shown horizontally above her, particularly between the authorities and politicians in Ottawa and the parks in western Canada. She connects politics to process.

As one moves “up” this hierarchy (which in reality is really down – off the mountains, into the plains, and then on to the low country of the east where the capital is found), as the horizontal operating edge gets turned into vertical stakeholder edges and then into the horizontal edge of politics, the issues get more abstract and less nuanced as the positions get blunter and more ideological. And so the system gets tied increasingly into knots and cohesive management becomes all that more difficult to effect.

This is not to imply that any one of these three managers is free of the edges faced by the other two. That is why the lines have been rounded on the figure. Gord and Sandy clearly receive stakeholder influences too, while Charlie and Sandy have to face some of the operating issues, and Gord and Charlie feel some of the political pressures. But there does seem to be this difference in focus, manifested especially in the nature of these three jobs. Gord seems to be largely a doer, who leads, controls and links in terms of action. Charlie seems to be largely a linker outwards, a mediator between the different members of the park’s community. And Sandy seems to be mainly a linker upwards, to the political context of Ottawa, whose concerns she conveys back into the system, especially in the role of controller.

Each of them is a manager in his or her own right. Yet they could also be placed in different spots on the concentric circles of our model of Figure 3, in a sense sharing the same management process. If Gord manages especially downwards, from the outer circle of action, then Charlie manages especially

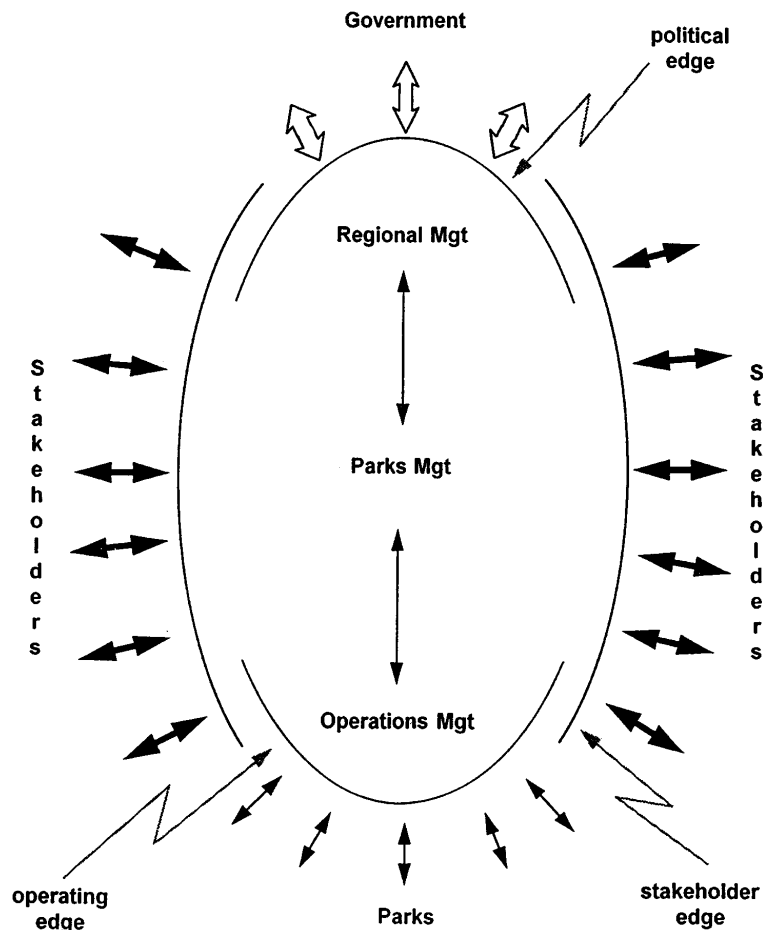


Figure 5.
A model of managing
on the edges

outwards, from the middle circle of people, while Sandy manages especially upwards, from the inner circle of information. In these respects, Gord knows the details, Charlie the pressures, Sandy the politics. Somehow, together they have to factor all this into a coherent decision-making process. How they do so – indeed whether they really do so – remains a mystery. Certainly the planning systems do not explain it. They may help, or perhaps they just represent some kind of rite (Gimpl and Dakin, 1984), another of those things that has to be done in the hope that *something* will work (or else that at least something is being done).

Charlie sits in the middle of all this – not just in our diagram – and so he is perhaps the one who gets hit the hardest. Sandy has her escape route to the power structure of Ottawa while Gord has his into the operations of the park. But Charlie gets pulled both ways, as well as pushed from all sides, with no easy place to hide.

There is a great advantage in being able to manage something as real and beautiful as a mountain park. People care, they are naturally motivated. There is much to do and a wonderful setting within which to do it. The trouble is that people get motivated about different things, and they sometimes care too much. There remains that “discontinuous mandate of protection and preservation”. Planning documents can articulate lofty ideals, which, as noted earlier, some people find helpful. But such documents can never specify the very difficult trade-offs that have to be managed constantly.

“Many of the most interesting things, say the biologists, happen on the edges.” That is where the “living organisms encounter dynamic conditions that give rise to untold variety”. But “there is tension here as well”, including “competition with alien species”. If you really want to see the edges – the real guts of government, coping with the impossible trade-offs of conflicting parties and alien species – then you would do well to get down on the ground where the elk graze on the front lawns and the truckers battle with the tourists. Then maybe you can work “up” from there, to the abstractions of management that so mesmerize us – where people earn larger incomes ostensibly because their work is more important but perhaps really because they have to cope with all that much more nonsense, no small measure of it imposed by some of their own formalized systems. Supposedly necessary to deal with the complexities, perhaps all of this is really just a conceptual smokescreen for a species out of control, alien to its own environment. The bears know that the real problem is “people jams”.

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