

## **Tourism Development as Greek Tragedy: Implications for Tourism Development Policy and Education.**

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### **Abstract**

Although tourism has been used as a development strategy in many parts of the world for several decades, there is little evidence that it is an effective tool for improving the wellbeing of destination communities. It is not uncommon to find cases where tourism development has resulted in extensive negative impacts on destination. Despite considerable academic concern over these issues there has been little change in tourism development policy or practice. This suggests a need to try innovative approaches to analysing and thinking about tourism development policy and planning processes. This paper reports on a study that explored the value of using classical Greek tragedy as a metaphor to guide analysis of the political context of tourism development. The study conducted a qualitative analysis of 10 case studies where a proposed tourism development had both significant negative impacts on the destination and failed as a commercial enterprise. This analysis highlighted a consistent pattern of events and characteristics that mirrored those central to Greek tragedies. The evidence suggests that the recognition of the tragic nature of tourism decisions could be an important step in changing tourism development policies. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of both the analysis and taking a tragic vision in tourism development policy, for education to support more sustainable tourism.

### **Introduction**

Without careful planning and management tourism development can, and often does, result in negative outcomes, especially for the destination community. There are many cases where the community conflict generated by a proposed tourism development has been so intense and protracted that they can rightly be called tragedies. Despite these truisms tourism policy and planning appears to have changed very little, if at all, as a result of these cases. This paper seeks to directly address the question of what, if anything has been learnt from the numerous examples of “tourism gone bad”? The paper reports on an examination of 10 cases of tourism development associated with significant negative impacts on the

destination community and tourism business failures using the characteristics and elements of classical Greek Tragic theatre as an analytic framework.

The paper will firstly briefly review the characteristics and elements of Greek Tragedy and the use of this form of theatre as a tool to understand contemporary aspects of politics, power and planning in other contexts, before outlining some of the major policy issues that have to be addressed in order to move towards a situation where tourism can make more consistent contributions to sustainability in destination regions. It will then provide a description of the case study methodology used and details of the major themes emerging from the qualitative analysis. It will conclude by examining the implications of these results for tourism development policy and planning and education to support more sustainable approaches in tourism governance.

### **Greek Tragedy, Politics and Development**

The use of Greek tragedy to analyse aspects of politics, power, planning and development has numerous precedents (see Harrison, 2001 & Rocco, 1997 for reviews) and it was chosen for two main reasons. The first is that it offers an alternative framework to the more rationalist and positivist approaches typically used in policy and planning analysis (Brown, 2012; Euben, 2012; Harrison, 2001). The second is that Greek Tragedy can be linked to discussions of tourism politics and planning at three levels:-

- As an analytic framework where the form of classic Greek tragedy is seen as a metaphor for understanding power and conflict in political decisions (Brown, 2012; Lebow, 2003; Mearsheimer, 2001);
- As an example of a way to effectively engage a wide range of stakeholders in tourism development debates and decisions (Goldhill, 2000); and
- As an educational tool in the area of politics (Euben, 2012).

While contemporary popular use of the word tragedy links it most closely with events that are exceedingly sad, according to Brown (2012, p. 75) originally “tragedy was a politico-aesthetic term to refer to a bad situation that grew out of moral dilemma”. Although Greek tragedies are typically based on mythological stories of gods and heroes, more detailed analyses suggest that their defining characteristic is a plot constructed around a central dilemma faced by the main character or protagonist (Cartwright, 2013). Aristotle argued that a good Greek Tragedy provided mimesis, or the imitation of current human affairs, balanced by catharsis, or the transformation of negative emotions (Harrison, 2001). Nietzsche expanded on this argument claiming that Greek tragedies presented a dialectic between the passion and pleasure associated with the god Dionysis, whose festival was the catalyst for the development and presentation of Greek Tragedies (Cartwright, 2013), and the wisdom and justice represented by Apollo (Rocco, 1997). The challenge presented to the hero in each tragedy was to decide between two conflicting obligations and a failure to resolve this conflict lead to nemesis, or divine punishment (Lebow, 2012). This mimicry of public affairs, exposition of the dilemmas faced in many political decisions, and recognition of the strong

emotional responses to these decisions supports the use of Greek tragedy as an analytic framework in contemporary critical research into politics and planning (Euben, 2012). According to Forrester (1993, p. 186) “literature and drama, and tragedy most of all, can teach us about action, about ethics and politics, in a way that more traditional analytic writing cannot”.

A review of the literature using Greek tragedies to examine aspects of politics, planning and development suggests five characteristics of this form of theatre as particularly relevant to improving understanding of contemporary issues:-

- A focus on conflicts;
- The contribution of hubris to the downfall of key characters;
- The importance of honour and the acknowledgement of suffering;
- The use of the chorus to highlight contrasting values and perspectives; and
- The importance of the tragedy and its presentation for civic participation and education.

As noted previously the single most common theme in Greek Tragedies was the dilemma faced by the protagonist. This was typically a choice between two different sets of responsibilities, each with its own moral and ethical imperative (Brown, 2012; Euben, 2012; Harrison, 2001). For example, in the play *Antigone* by Sophocles, the heroine the play is named for must choose between her duty to her family in retrieving and burying the body of her brother and her civic duty to leave his body outside the city walls as commanded by Creon the king who knows her brother to have been a traitor (Brown, 2012; Grene & Lattimore, 1992). Similarly in *Agamemnon* the hero must sacrifice his daughter in order to save his country (Brown, 1992; Grene & Lattimore, 1992). Like many other protagonists in Greek tragedies, *Antigone* and *Agamemnon* do not set out to do the wrong thing, nor are they selfish. But they are given a choice where either option can be seen as morally and ethically correct and suffering and negative consequences are unavoidable (Brown, 2012). According to Euben (2012) this mirrors many of the decisions faced by policy makers and planners.

Although *Antigone* and *Agamemnon* both face a moral dilemma and both suffer for their choices, with *Antigone* being executed for burying her brother and *Agamemnon* sacrificing his daughter and winning the war, only to be killed by his wife on his return from battle, each is presented differently by the respective playwrights. *Antigone* is an honourable heroine with Creon the king who orders her death cast as the villain, while *Agamemnon* is portrayed as a villain and chastised by the chorus for his decision (Grene & Lattimore, 1992). This difference can be explained using the concepts of honour and hubris. In Greek tragedies honour was associated with acknowledgement of the suffering of others and taking responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions, whether intended or not and including those that could not have been foreseen (Brown, 2012). *Agamemnon* is criticized by the chorus because he fails to acknowledge the sacrifice made by his daughter and to recognise the suffering her loss causes his wife. According to Brown (2012) this failure to accept

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responsibility for, and honour those harmed by a decision is a characteristic of many modern decisions-makers both in business and government.

Antigone, on the other hand, is an honourable heroine especially in contrast to Creon who, in addition to being presented as a tyrant who wields power through violence, is guilty of the sin of hubris (Euben, 2012). For the ancient Greeks hubris was a trap for the clever and successful and was characterised by over-confidence, excessive pride, the overestimation of one's own competence and capabilities and a loss of contact with reality (Goldhill, 2000; Lebow, 2012). Oedipus the King is the tragedy most closely associated with hubris. After solving a riddle to save Thebes he becomes king but begins to overestimate his intelligence and ability to avoid fate (Greene & Lattimore, 1992). Lebow (2012) describes a cycle where success is rewarded by power and the seductive qualities of power contribute to hubris which in turn leads to a miscalculation and catastrophe. Characters such as Creon who are guilty of hubris often begin to reorder the world into a dichotomy of those who are with me and those who are against me 'impugning the motives of anyone who disagrees' (Euben, 2012, p. 90) further removing themselves from the reality of others and the consequences of their actions.

In each of the examples described it is the chorus that provides critical information about the actions of the protagonists (Brown, 2012; Greene & Lattimore, 1992). The chorus was an essential element of a Greek tragedy and was a group who spoke, sung and often danced before, after, and in between the scenes providing a commentary on the action and the characters (Foley, 2003). The members of the chorus were carefully chosen by the playwright to provide a contrast to protagonists and often included members of groups who were otherwise marginalised in society such as women, slaves, foreigners, youth and older citizens (Foley, 2003). The chorus could either present an alternative view to that of those who held political power, and/or the consequences of decisions for ordinary people (Goldhill, 2000). The chorus was thus a mechanism for presenting dissent and recognising the variety of perspectives on a dilemma (Foley, 2003; Goldhill, 2000).

All these roles meant that the chorus was simultaneously a tool for civic education and an opportunity for public participation in democracy (Foley, 2003; Goldhill, 2000). Goldhill (2000) argues that the whole festival at which the plays were presented was an act of public engagement and political education. Wealthier citizens paid for the staging of the plays, members of the public could be selected for a chorus, the audience voted on different aspects of the plays and virtually everyone in the relevant city attended and discussed the plays (Cartwright, 2013; Goldhill, 2000). The festival of plays offered an opportunity for open discussion of complex political decisions and legitimised emotional responses to difficult choices (Goldhill, 2000; Harrison, 2001).

## Challenges for Tourism Development Policy

Effective public engagement in tourism policy and planning is one of many issues that have been identified as limiting the sustainability of tourism development. Moscardo (2011a) provides a review of 100 cases of tourism development that identified 12 issues or barriers to the effective use of tourism as a sustainable development option. These 12 issues, which have been consistently reported in the tourism literature as challenges for tourism policy were:-

- Dominance of external agents in the development process (cf., Cheong and Miller, 2000);
- Limited market analysis; (cf., Briedenham and Wickens, 2004);
- Failure to effectively connect to tourism distribution systems ( cf., Forstner, 2004);
- Limited awareness of the negative impacts of tourism (cf., Reid, Mair and George, 2004);
- Community conflict over tourism proposals (cf., Jones, 2005);
- Overly optimistic expectations of tourism benefits (cf., Blackstock, 2005);
- Lack of effective coordination of destination stakeholders (cf., Beames, 2003);
- Lack of leadership within the destination community in relation to tourism development (cf., Manyara and Jones, 2007);
- Poor infrastructure development (cf., Rogerson, 2007);
- Gaps in human and social capital within the destination community (cf., Okazaki, 2008);
- Limited involvement in the tourism planning and management by destination residents (cf., Marzuki and Hay, 2013); and
- Limited or no formal tourism planning at the destination level (Ruhanen, 2004).

Although these analyses suggest that having some form of tourism planning at the local destination level is important for effective tourism development, critical reviews of common tourism planning processes suggest that this may not be the case. Ruhanen (2004), Hall (2011) and Moscardo (2011b) all provide critical reviews based on analyses of existing tourism planning models, processes and/or plans. Consistent issues identified in these reviews included a narrow focus on economic aspects, a lack of opportunities for public or community participation, and a failure to adequately address sustainability issues.

These reviews examined a range of case studies which are the most common method of analysis in this area. Case studies of tourism development can be placed into two main categories. The first are studies that focus on a single dimension of tourism development or use specific development examples to demonstrate the value and applicability of a particular concept or theory. Examples of this approach can be found in Lee, Riley and Hampton's (2010) study of collaborative advantage and conflict, Okazaki's (2008) analysis of community participation in tourism planning and social capital, and Yamamoto and Yamamoto's (2013)

use of community resilience to examine a specific tourism proposal in Japan. The second category are papers that describe the sequence of events in detail often connecting them to specific policies with the aim of determining policy or planning failures. For examples from a variety of places and styles of tourism the reader is directed to Brooks (2005), Cousins and Kepe (2004), Liu (2006), Pforr and colleagues (2006) and Ying and Zhou (2007). Both categories share the common assumption that with a better understanding of the tourism development process it can be fixed to avoid negative consequences and create “win-win” outcomes.

Harrison (2001) notes that this assumption that rational scientific or systematic examinations of political decisions can eventually contribute to error-free processes is also common in the wider literature on planning. Arguably this is a type of hubris, albeit well-intentioned. The use of Greek tragedy as an analytic framework directs us to consider that there may never be win-win situations in political decisions and that attempts to impose a rational scientist approach is a misdirection that avoids questions of ethical and moral judgement. This paper sought to explore the possibilities of using Greek tragedy as an analytical framework to critically examine cases of tourism development failures.

### **Case Study Method**

Wesley and Pforr (2010) argue that case studies are a particularly useful analytical approach in research into tourism policy and governance because case studies incorporate the context and complexities of real world situations. The present study used standard guidelines for case study analysis (Patton & Appelbaum, 2003; Reige, 2003; Yin, 2009) and selected 10 examples from a database of more than 300 cases of tourism development in peripheral regions and emerging destinations. The case selection began with a search of this database using three criteria. The cases had to describe a tourism development proposal that was associated with significant community conflict and opposition, generated substantial negative impacts for the destination and was not successful as a tourism business. Using these criteria the first stage of the search generated more than 30 cases, which presented a major challenge for detailed qualitative analysis. So a further purposive sampling frame selected cases that provided variety in locations, styles of tourism and diversity in the type of person or organisation who initiated the development concept and formal proposal. This resulted in 10 cases for further analysis and the key features of these cases are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1: Key Features of the 10 Cases**

Location Region	Type of Tourism	Tourism Initiator	Concept	Formal Proposal
Asia (6)	Large scale	Individual entrepreneur		External private
Africa (2)	enclave/resort (4)	(2)		investment group (4)
Australia (2)	Cultural/heritage tourism (3)	National/regional government (6)		National/regional government (4)
	Nature-based/eco- tourism (3)	Community group (2)		Community group (2)

Note: governments are classified into three groups – local, national, and regional, which includes all those levels between local and national variously referred to as regional, provincial or state governments.

## Results and Discussion

Once the sample was finalised, information was gathered for each case from news and other media coverage, relevant websites, published papers, and publicly available reports and documents. The various papers and reports used included a variety of data collection techniques including participant observation, interviews, and archival analyses of relevant documents. The material for each case was subjected firstly to a qualitative exploratory analysis seeking to identify consistent patterns and key themes emerging from the data (DeCrop, 2004).

This first round of thematic content analysis identified a consistent pattern of events across the cases despite considerable variety in the size and nature of the proposed tourism development and the person or organisation initiating the proposal, the style of government and the nature of local politics. In the present 10 cases the initial concept was generated by individuals, private companies, community groups and governments at the national and regional levels, and the style of tourism proposed included large scale resort complexes through to very small ecotourism enterprises. Regardless of the style of proposal or who generated the initial concept in all cases the concept was taken further by a group that often included organisations or people from outside the destination region. In addition some or all of these external players sought to, and often did, exert power over the decision-maker. It was these actions that particularly contributed to growing opposition and a polarisation of the community. This polarisation combined with limited experience of tourism by the relevant decision-maker marked the start of a downward spiral with increasing conflict, accusations of corruption, legal challenges and active opposition that ultimately resulted in the failure of the enterprise.

Six key themes were associated with these events. The first of the themes was the protracted nature of the conflict over the proposed tourism developments with time frames ranging from 10 to 28 years and with only two being completed according to the original

proposal. These lengthy conflicts were typically associated with increasing polarisation of views, as well as ongoing environmental damage associated with partial construction of facilities and infrastructure, and considerable public and private sector expense. In many of the cases a number of local businesses invested in some form of expansion expecting an increase in tourism to accompany the proposed development but were unable to gain any return on these investments because of the length of the conflict and/or the failure of the venture. A second key theme was that many of the proposals were supported by neo-liberal development policies at the national or regional level often imposed in situations where there was a lack of any formal tourism plans at the local destination level and a lack of experience with tourism in other key government agencies. The lack of formal tourism plans and faith in external entrepreneurial innovation embedded in the existing neo-liberal policies contributed to the third theme which was a consistent failure to engage in systematic critical analyses of the commercial viability of the proposed tourism events. Much of the conflict concentrated on environmental impacts, social impacts and disputes over who would benefit the most financially from the proposed development. In all the cases all sides assumed that the proposal would be successful at attracting tourists despite the lack of any evidence to support this.

The fourth theme was the lack of public participation or community involvement in the planning or decision process. Even in cases where legislation included a formal requirement for some public comment there was only limited attention paid to these requirements and public participation opportunities were often undermined by the release of only limited information about the proposal. The fifth theme was the consistent exclusion of locals from the development process and key decisions based on the claims of their inexperience of tourism or lack of technical expertise when compared to external experts or government planners. The final theme was the extent of the negative consequences for all those involved and the high levels of emotional response to the events. These negative consequences existed beyond the negative environmental impacts and loss of tourism and other business opportunities and were borne by the project developers, whether individuals, companies or government agencies, opponents and activists and the destination residents. Each case was associated with significant financial costs for developers, governments and opponents with bankruptcies being a common feature of many of the cases. All but one case was associated with widespread destruction of social capital in the destination communities with several cases reporting families split and family members no longer in contact because of their opposing perspectives on the proposal. Reports of violent confrontations and sabotage were not uncommon, nor were claims and investigations of government corruption. All cases reported a widespread loss of trust by citizens in government and in tourism enterprises in general. All the cases were associated with high levels of emotion and passion.

It would be easy to label each of the 10 cases as tragic in the more modern and popular use of the word as being very sad. The events unfolding from the proposal of a tourism venture clearly resulted in widespread suffering and the downfall of a wide range of protagonists.

But are they tragic in the classical Greek sense? The second stage of the analysis addressed this question and re-examined the material collected for each case guided by four defining characteristics of Greek Tragedy as identified in the literature review. More specifically the cases were examined to determine the principal decision-makers and the nature of the choice they were presented with, evidence of hubris, the extent to which the negative impacts or consequences of different choices were examined, and the applicability of the concept of a chorus.

In Greek tragedy it is an individual who is confronted with the dilemma and in several of the cases studied there were individuals, typically entrepreneurs, described as the main protagonists, usually cast as villains. In a classical tragedy, however, the protagonist is the one responsible for the decision. Thus we need to distinguish between those who first put forward the tourism development concept and those responsible for the decision to approve or reject the proposal. In the examined cases the tourism development concepts were generated by individuals, government agencies and community groups, but the decisions were usually made by either local governments and/or government agencies. Typically the decision required approval from multiple government agencies. While the ability, or often inability, of these agencies to coordinate their decisions added time and confusion to the process, ultimately each agency faced a choice between approving or rejecting the proposed tourism development. It is this choice that is most like the dilemmas addressed in Greek tragedy. These agencies had to make a moral or ethical choice between multiple competing interests, although it was never overtly described as that. While each of the competing groups within the cases believed themselves to be “right” either because they were seeking to provide expanded opportunities for the destination community or because they were protecting that community from various potential negative impacts, in all but one case there was no clear majority supporting any one faction. In all the cases the destination community included advocates and opponents of varying degrees and all the proposed developments had the potential for both positive and negative outcomes. In all the cases the destination regions faced numerous challenges in terms of finding resources to support the maintenance of basic services and infrastructure and in no cases were there any serious alternative options being considered for employment or infrastructure. So the decision-makers faced a dilemma between supporting a proposal that offered some hope of providing the resources that many regions needed, but that carried risks of negative impact. No matter what their choice, in all cases someone would have to live with negative consequences. Someone would suffer and it was not always clear that this suffering would be limited to a minority or to a group able to cope with these negative consequences. So it was not possible to use a ‘greatest good’ principle to guide the decision.

Although the choice facing these decision-makers was a moral one and was between positions favoured by groups with competing values, the decisions were never overtly recognised as that by these decision-makers. Instead the decisions were usually reliant on technical reports, expert advice, scientific analyses and presented as a logical, linear

processes in which technical information and a rational analysis were seen as the only way to provide an answer. Many decision makers presented their decision as based on these technical considerations rather than on some moral judgement and often critiques of the decisions process focussed on the lack of breadth, depth or quality of this technical advice as the source of poor decisions. There was a very common assumption that with enough technical analysis it would be possible to predict the outcomes of the proposed development and therefore act accordingly. In some cases decision makers also fell back on interpretations of existing legislation arguing that they didn't have a choice, their hands were figuratively tied by choices made by previous legislators.

This reliance on technical scientism is one manifestation of hubris, the second key element of Greek tragedies. Hubris was evidence in all the cases in multiple ways and often served to distort and extend the decision making process. It could be seen as a feature of governments, especially those above and outside the local government, in their assumptions that destination residents were not capable of making their own decisions and lacked the ability to see a bigger picture and/or to appreciate what things would be good for them. Hubris was also evident in the actions of many external consultants and experts who believed that they were capable of predicting the likely outcomes of what were very complex situations. It was displayed by entrepreneurs and politicians who represented themselves as champions of innovation and individual activists who similarly represented themselves as champions of the environment or some other aspect of the destination. All these individuals routinely impugned the motives of opponents and organised the world into those with them or against them.

Hubris was also evident in the avoidance of all parties of serious considerations of the risks and nature of the potential negative consequences. This avoidance or minimisation of the potential harm to others resulting from the choices being supported was evident both in those who favoured the proposal and those who opposed it. Hubris was also evident in the lack of real opportunities for destination residents and stakeholders outside government and tourism to be involved in the decisions. If a Greek tragedy was to be written in contemporary times focussed on tourism it would include a chorus and it is likely such a chorus would be the destination residents, especially those who would not otherwise be connected to tourism and/or who were most likely to be affected by the decision. But in all the cases there was either no attempt at all or only limited attempts to provide for real public involvement in the decisions. The role of the chorus was usurped by those with power – experts, local elites, external investors and government agencies outside the local level.

### **Implications for Tourism Development Policy and Education**

Many of the themes identified in the first round of the analysis have been identified in previous academic analyses of tourism development. For example, the issues of external agents and power have been explored by Mbaiwa (2005), concerns over who is responsible for the public interest in planning conflicts have been addressed by Dredge (2010), the

limitations of current approaches to public participation have been documented by Simpson (2010), the challenges of working across multiple government jurisdictions discussed by Dredge and Jenkins (2003), the problems of lack of tourism experience by key decision-makers and communities have been acknowledged by Aref (2010) and the negative consequences of protracted conflict have been described in numerous locations (cf., Nunkoo & Smith, 2013, Park, Lee, Choi & Yoon, 2012). Despite the issues and problems being well-documented, there has been little change in tourism development practice.

The use of Greek tragedy as an analytical framework suggests some of the reasons for this failure to change practice. Firstly, the existing research and practice paradigms assume that where there are negative consequences from tourism development it is because of ignorance, incompetence or wilful abuse of power on the part of business, government and/or local elites and that the imposition of a better, more rational process will avoid these outcomes. Secondly, the research in this field has tended to examine the consequences for some but not all stakeholders involved. It is uncommon to find details of the negative consequences of tourism development conflict for the individual entrepreneurs, private investors or politicians involved, especially if they have been seen as responsible. Despite the attempts of many academic analyses to avoid a moral element, the underlying narrative in many papers includes moral judgement. Making a moral judgement is not the problem per se, rather it is the failure to recognise that tourism development decisions are moral judgements based on ethical dilemmas, that leads to inappropriate recommendations. The use of Greek tragedy as a metaphor for tourism development decisions offers a way to explicitly acknowledge the emotional, moral and ethical dimensions of political decisions.

The analysis of the 10 cases of “tourism gone bad” presented in the present paper demonstrates the value of Greek tragedy as an analytic framework and directs us to take a tragic vision or sensibility. At the core of a tragic vision is the explicit recognition that political and planning decisions are not technical or rational choices, but rather are moral dilemmas, that it is not possible to resolve them in a way that avoids all negative consequences, and that we should not be overly confident that we can always predict the consequences of decisions (Euben, 2012). Brown (2012, p. 83) describes it as an awareness that ‘ought to cause us to act modestly, to be aware of our limitations and to be suspicious of grand narratives of salvation which pretend that there are no tragic choices to be made’. But a tragic vision does not mean passive acceptance of the inevitable, instead it directs us to seek to improve decisions made in tourism development by

- Including a chorus, or ways to hear the voices of those that can provide alternative perspectives to those in power;
- Concentrating on identification and assessment of risks associated with different choices;
- Recognising the inevitable negative impacts of tourism development; and
- Acknowledgement of the ethical dimensions of tourism choices.

Both the case study analysis presented and the taking of a tragic vision direct attention also to matters of education about tourism. Three key implications for education to support tourism sustainability can be offered. Firstly there is a need to get beyond the formal classroom and outside tourism focussed programs. Discussions of tourism education are dominated by either considerations of technical training to support a tourism workforce or elements and approaches used in tourism specific higher degree qualifications. In none of the cases examined were any of the protagonists tourism degree graduates. Further, in many cases the potential negative consequences of tourism and the risks associated with tourism development choices were not considered because those making the decision had very little understanding of tourism. We need to seriously address how to educate people beyond university tourism degrees about the nature of tourism. Secondly, within these tourism education initiatives we need to challenge existing planning practices and paradigms not merely repeat them. Finally, we need to talk and teach more about ethics, moral character and difficult decisions.

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