

Partnering:

Principles, Benefits, Approaches and Considerations

Department of Fisheries and Oceans Workshop

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Introduction

I'm very happy to be here this morning. I have had a personal connection with DFO. The Commissioner and I were colleagues in government for some time, and I know this is an area where he has already done a lot of thinking.

My topic is "*Partnering: Principles, Benefits, Approaches and Considerations*".

I want to use my thirty minutes to talk about how the concept of partnering is working across the government today. There are many things we can all learn from the experience of other departments about the risks and pitfalls in partnering.

I want to talk about what I think this new environment and these lessons mean for you in DFO.

To do this, I am going to be setting out a series of six propositions about partnering and partnerships that I think are important and true. If you agree, great. But even if you don't, keep them in mind and perhaps we can talk about them in the question period at the end.

Before I start, I will offer the following definition of partnering in the government context – it is any formalized arrangement for the conduct of public business, or the achievement of public goals, that is established between one government organization and another person or organization, public or private.

I say "formalized" because we need to restrict our discourse to the cases where there is enough clarity on goals, rules, results and accountability that this can be captured in a partnership agreement.

What this means, among other things, is that not every relationship is a case of partnering. Partnering is a special kind of relationship.

Partnering as a New Way of Doing Business

#1. Proposition number one is that we are in the midst of a fundamental change in the way the government does its business.

That's why the Clerk has been putting so much emphasis on the concept of Alternative Service Delivery. The federal government is ceasing to do things in the old-fashioned "departmental" way, and starting to look for new ways of getting the same kinds of things done.

Why the push for new ways of delivering services or carrying out the myriad of other governmental functions?

- **cost** -- often it's cheaper to do things differently
- **effectiveness** – local service providers are often closer to the client
- **nature of the issue** – problems today are inherently more “horizontal” than ever before – there are more players who want to be involved and who feel they have a right to be involved
- **opportunity** – the information revolution makes it much easier to keep people informed, to involve other players, even at a distance, etc.
- **political commitment** – for obvious reasons, the government is determined to show Canadians, and especially provincial governments, that it is prepared to work constructively with them in pursuit of common objectives

#2. My second proposition is that partnering is probably the most significant new form of ASD – far more important and more common than new organizational forms such as service agencies.

Why? Because:

- partnering normally does not require legislation
- it can be easily tailored to suit the requirements of both the government and the situation
- it is flexible – a partnering relationship can be adjusted to suit changing circumstances
- it is a known device – people are not afraid of innovation through the use of this mechanism. The novelty lies in how the government is using it, and in the range of activities that it is prepared to open to partnering.
- polls show that Canadians favour partnership arrangements – especially in energy, environment and transportation

#3. My third proposition is that partnering is just as important as an internal device – inside a department or agency -- as an external one.

- the concept of portfolio management, for example, is all about partnering within the domain of a Minister's responsibilities to achieve common objectives
- the term “management” is really a misnomer in these circumstances – what we are talking about is something more akin to “portfolio cooperation” – that is, internal partnering!

- and inside departments – between Sectors and Branches – the concept of partnering is just as alive and just as relevant to working effectively with fewer people and fewer dollars.
- Internal partnering relationships are as simple as a commitment to tackle cross-sectoral issues with cross-sectoral teams; and to use HQ staff just as you would regional people.

#4. Proposition number four is that partnering relationships require a lot of careful work.

It may sound trite, but a significant partnering relationship is a lot like a marriage -- you have to pick the right partner and then work hard at:

- being clear on the rules governing the relationship – especially who is responsible for what
- communicating
- solving problems when they come up and not letting them fester
- making sure that you are still sharing the same goals
- and, of it becomes clear that your goals are different, or your values aren't the same –you have to be prepared to end the relationship.

#5. Proposition number five is that partnering relationships place a much greater priority on horizontal skills (in people) and horizontal capabilities (in organizations) than on the “vertical” qualities that have traditionally been valued in bureaucracy.

- for example, the concept of authority changes dramatically when the people on whom you are counting for the delivery of a service are your partners rather than your subordinates
- the whole notion of “turf” – what I’m responsible for and you are not – changes as well. To partner you have to begin by acknowledging that you cannot do it all yourself – you need to work with partners.
- the idea that “knowledge is power” must be discarded. Knowledge is something to share. If you don’t believe that, you can’t be an effective partner.

The federal department that is farthest advanced on this notion of partnering relationships is probably DIAND. Their partners are First Nations and Northerners. They have found they have had to re-work their whole management style to inside DIAND make their “political” commitment to partnering a reality inside the department.

#6. Proposition number six – this is a permanent change. The government is never going to go back to the old vertical, policy-and-program-delivery model of doing federal business.

You can see this in many parts of DFO. You are partnering with the private sector in OceansTec Canada; the department has signed agreements for co-management of the fishery on the West Coast. there is an active agenda unfolding on the science side of the Department -- an agenda of new collaboration with universities and with the private sector.

What does this mean for DFO?

I will offer four suggestions:

First, if you want your staff and your potential partners to believe what you're saying about partnering, you have to show them you're serious. You have to start forging these new partnering relationships with the marine industry, with local governments and with other federal agencies.

Second, you need to put a lot of effort into getting the accountability arrangements right. The fastest way to ruin any partnering relationship is unclarity at the beginning on who is responsible for what, and then recrimination at the end over why things went wrong.

Third, be very careful about questions of equity, and the protection of the public interest.

Finally, don't be afraid to experiment. I don't mean experiment frivolously, or that you should just "test drive" an agreement with a province or a company to see what happens.

But it is worth thinking about trying, in a systematic way, several different kinds of arrangements. Then evaluate them after, say, three years, to see what has worked and what hasn't.

That's what the Chinese do, on a grand scale, and who can argue with them?

Thank you.