

MAMP received more good news in May 2019, when the program was awarded the **2019 Tereo Ambassador Award** by the Canadian Network of Asset Managers (CNAM). The award recognizes FCM's commitment to enable the adoption and improvement of asset management practices across Canada. Visit the CNAM website to read the full statement about MAMP and to learn more about other award winners.

Upcoming: FCM will be issuing an RFP to partner organizations to provide local training opportunities. Local government staff and elected officials in BC can learn more about our existing partner organizations and sign up for online asset management training today.

Interested in how start the asset management journey today? Visit FCM's resource library to find tools and guides designed to offer practical asset management advice for communities of all sizes. Sign up for the FCM **Connect e-newsletter** to stay informed about ongoing asset management training, new resources and funding, and the latest program news.

Opportunities to Share Information – AM Communities of Practice

Sharing resources and knowledge is what our Communities of Practice, such as [Asset Management BC](#), is about. **Atlantic Infrastructure Management Network (AIM)** has just published their 3rd edition of the asset management newsletter, with many interesting cases studies and articles. We encourage you to access these at www.aimnetwork.ca/aimnewsletters

AIM and **Asset Management BC** are part of the network of Communities of Practice across Canada serving our communities, local governments and First Nations. Information and resources are shared by regular conference calls, informal information exchange and periodic group meetings. All Communities of Practice can be accessed from the **AM Canada** website (www.assetmanagementcanada.ca) by clicking on your geographic region.

Reflections on Intergenerational Learning, or Not?

*Wally Wells, Asset Management BC
Kim Stephens, Partnership for Water Sustainability
Cory Sivell, YourCity*

CONTEXT: This article elaborates on challenges that the co-authors identified in their previous Op-Ed, published in the September 2017 Newsletter. Thoughts are by the 'old guys', Wally Wells, Asset Management BC and Kim Stephens, Partnership for Water Sustainability, and the 'young guy', Cory Sivell, YourCity.

Asset management for sustainable service delivery and water sustainability, they wrote, are both top priorities for local governments. But the primary challenge is 'integration' and getting every discipline within an organization to recognize the contributions of the others plus get the organization working together on a common path. The major challenge today is communicating and understanding the message. The work environment is changing with time as are the methods of communicating and the form of the messages.

BC is progressing. Yet, persistent challenges for practitioners to adopt, change or evolve standards of practice means there is still a substantive disconnect between UNDERSTANDING (knowing what to do) and IMPLEMENTATION (doing it).

So, if 'asset management for sustainable service delivery' is so simple and logical, why are we not getting it?

Words like 'collaboration' and 'integration' are being tossed around loosely and we all buy into them ... or do we?

Now that British Columbia is in Year 5 of our 'new reality' of a 'climate emergency', collaboration and integration of efforts have never been more fundamental to the long-term wellbeing of British Columbians. Given the urgency to start adapting to a changing climate now, not years from now, intergenerational 'sharing and learning' around a whole-system approach to asset management is a lynchpin for concerted action.

No longer do we have the luxury of time to do nothing. Rather, time is of the essence. Yet turning around the practices that caused the climate emergency is not a sprint. It will take time and sustained commitment by



everyone. Will asset management professionals rise to the occasion so that sustainable service delivery actually leads to integrated solutions? **DO, LEARN, ADAPT AND DO BETTER** – this must be every professional’s mantra. The challenge for successive generations of practitioners is to hand off the baton to the next, without dropping it.

Two very mature, meaning ‘old guys’, got discussing this moment of truth at length. We were fortunate to have a young guy join the conversation with a whole bunch of fresh new ideas and thoughts. Yes, all three of us are engineers but we come from quite different generations. We quickly realized that, while we need to understand the same things, the way we traditionally communicate is quite different. Therefore, the interpretation or understanding of the result can be quite different without really even realizing it.

See us old guys looked for a career, not a job. We tended to stay with the same employer, not move around five or six times during our career. We, us old guys, were not raised with social media and instant communications and ‘tweets’. But our young guy grew up with social media, cell phones, e-mail, instant communications, mobility and a different understanding of both the content and the form of the message, not to say anything of the instantaneous potential for the timing of the message.



Wally Wells

Kim Stephens

Cory Sivell

Recently there was a news item about bad science and what should we really believe. Testing of older, accepted but poorly researched theories has challenged the validity of the science behind theories which are supposed to be absolute. Yet today, we can ‘tweet’ a message in an instant and we all supposed to believe every word. How can we balance instant information with information accuracy, especially if it is action-oriented?

This led us into musing about what it means to be a professional engineer. Historically we have been trained to be applied scientists. This meant that the essence of being a good engineer is whether we have the ability to observe and deduce, and can then apply what we have deduced. This is the foundation for creative thinking and informed problem-solving. This requires that we ask the

‘right questions’ and we solve the ‘right problems’. But these are acquired skills. Today, how does any young professional truly learn his or her trade when so much of daily life revolves around the use of ‘apps’ for instant answers or solutions? And how does he or she know if they have solved the wrong problem or arrived at a wrong answer? We, the old guys, remember the dawn of the computer age. We quickly learned the meaning of GIGO – ‘garbage in, garbage out’ and a ‘mouse’ does not necessarily have four legs and a tail!

The conversation with the young guy took an interesting twist when we old guys recounted what the world was like at the beginning of our careers. We were called junior engineers and we were mentored by senior engineers. In that era, we explained, the accepted wisdom was that it took 5 to 10 years of on-the-ground experience to develop professional judgment and mature into a fully rounded ‘project engineer’. As the young guys, we were the sidekicks. This supporting role gave us ample and varied exposure to real-life situations that allowed us to observe and learn on the job, take on increasing responsibility, and bring forward new ideas. And we had confidence that our mentors would be there to back us up or bail us out, as needed. Organizations invested time and effort in us, the young guys, because we were there for the long-term. The outcome of the process was that we grew as professionals.

After we old guys painted this picture, which is centred on the notion of ‘serving your time’, the reaction of the young guy was immediate. “That is not appealing, it is not exciting,” he stated. Is the nature of your response a reflection of the *instant gratification* ethic that characterizes society today, we queried? Yes, he acknowledges, partly, but also being listened to and appreciated. New ideas and changing times need to be reflected. After all, us ‘old guys’ were not raised with cell phones, instant messaging and ‘fake’ news. All good points!

The conversation continued. The young guy told us that his peer group changes jobs frequently because, he explained, old men are running organizations and their prevailing mentality is old school. Yet, he emphasized, his generation does aspire to a work environment that inspires, enables and stimulates.

What insights does this anecdote provide? What questions does it raise?

- What caused the apparent change in focus from career to job? Have employees responded to a

change in attitude on the part of employers, or was it vice versa?

- If a priority for young professionals is recognition and inclusion, does this indicate either an impatience vis-à-vis long-term and intergenerational learning (mentoring) in the work environment?
- If a prevailing view of the world is based on short-term thinking and a need for instant gratification, then how would it be possible to build long-term trust that is at the heart of true collaboration?
- And in the different view of a long-term commitment to a shared vision, how do we create a work environment that inspires, enables, stimulates and is inclusive?

To provide a starting point for addressing these and other related questions, we can look to and learn from our ancestors. It is all about perspective and time. The grand creations of antiquity were not designed and built with instant gratification, a quarterly report or a 4-year election term in mind. The builders of great cathedrals in medieval times thought in terms of multiple generations carrying out their work, to complete a dream that would not be realised until long after the originator's death. This is known as 'cathedral thinking'. In an Op-Ed published several years ago by the Manchester Guardian newspaper, the late Stephen Hawking observed that;

"a shift in behaviour inspires some ground-breaking new ideas. Termed 'cathedral ideas', these are the modern equivalent of the grand church buildings. These ideas are started by one generation with the hope a future generation will take up these challenges. Cathedral thinking means collaborate, with a shared vision and cooperative endeavour."

The foundation for cathedral thinking is a far-reaching vision, a well-thought out blueprint, and a shared commitment to long-term implementation.

The reality today is a very different work environment than what we 'old guys' grew up in. That leads to a required dialogue of what communicating really means and how the message is received and interpreted by different generations. Maybe, just maybe, we take too much for granted based on what we individually know in trying to communicate asset management. So, if asset management is so simple, why are people not getting it. We need to think very hard about the way we carry the

message with, we would suggest, more thought to the perception of the listener.

We can and must learn from history that is still part of our living memory. Fifty years ago this June, the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland caught fire. This was the spark that galvanized the North American continent to take action to tackle unfettered pollution. The 'decade of the environment' followed. Two months before the river fire, publication of **Design with Nature** by the legendary Ian McHarg revolutionized how designers and planners think about ecology. His legacy matters now more than ever.

On the 50th anniversary of these two defining moments, and in the spirit of intergenerational learning AND ACTION, we close with this quotable quote from a reflective piece written by staff with the Ian McHarg Center at the University of Pennsylvania:

"As much as our work around this anniversary has been about what it means to design with nature now, we've already turned our focus to what it might mean to design with nature next, in the near and distant future," the authors wrote in their concluding remarks.

"This required us to look back, again, at the moment and the movement that gave rise to McHarg—one that was led almost entirely by young activists. And we cannot help but see the parallels between his era and ours, and we cannot help but believe that this rising generation of designers and planners, increasingly and rightfully radicalized, will do what our presiding and retiring generations could not: to design a better, more just, and more sustainable planet."

In 2019, the current climate emergency is the context for a call to action. Asset management for sustainable service delivery is a foundation piece for a more resilient British Columbia. So, what will you the reader do differently after reading and reflecting upon this 'think piece'?

We close with a question to ponder. The core message is that different generations have different perspectives because of the way they grew up which formed beliefs and thinking patterns. This message really brings to light that different audiences will resonate with different messages in different ways. Good messaging is what provides an opportunity to change a perspective which in turn aspires action. So maybe the question is:

Are you considering your different audiences and 'generational ways of thinking in your messaging process and content?' If not, why not?