

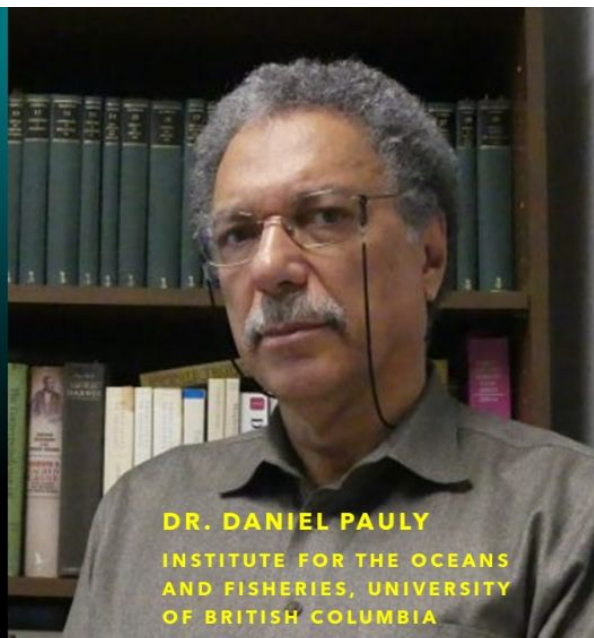
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Generational Amnesia: The Memory Loss that Harms the Planet

"We transform the world, but we don't remember it. We adjust our baseline to the new level, and we don't recall what was there."

"You can have a succession of changes. At the end you want to sustain miserable leftovers."

"And the question is, why do people accept this? Well, because they don't know that it was different."



SHARE INFORMATION; INFORM DECISIONS

Share information; inform decisions - this soundbite lines up nicely with the mission of [Waterbucket eNews](#) which is to help our readers make sense of a complicated world. Storylines are presented in a layered fashion to accommodate a range of reader attention spans - ranging from 30 seconds to 2 minutes to 5 minutes. **Read the headline and move on, or take the time to delve deeper - it is your choice.** Either way, you will be aware of good work by someone, somewhere.

Readers also have the option to download a PDF document version of this article for reading at a more convenient time and/or sharing with others:

https://waterbucket.ca/wcp/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2021/11/PWSBC_Living-Water-Smart_Generational-Amnesia_Nov-2021_v1.pdf

Each new generation lacks direct knowledge of the historical condition of the environment, and how this lack of understanding plays out as a **'failure to notice change'**. Every generation is handed a world that has been shaped by their predecessors – and then seemingly forgets that fact.

There is another more subtle form of amnesia, the kind that happens when projects and programs are handed off from one work group to another. Is it **"organizational amnesia"**, **"mandate amnesia"**, or perhaps even something else?

Organizational amnesia is a phrase used to describe a situation in which organizations lose their memory of how to do things. The world is rapidly losing expertise through retirement. And this is compounding the consequences of failure to notice environmental change.

When someone with expertise retires, often their managers **'don't know what they have lost until it is gone'** and even then, they might not know. That person has left with all their knowledge and understanding.

The climate is changing, and the risks are real. Extremes follow extremes. We do not have the luxury of time to implement solutions. And we certainly cannot afford to reinvent the wheel due to generational and/or organizational amnesia.

Context and history really do matter because it takes a career to develop perspective and understanding of what works and what does not. It is one thing to pass the intergenerational baton. It is another to accept it and embrace the experience and wisdom that goes with it.

Click on the cover image below to download a copy of the document and learn much, much more:

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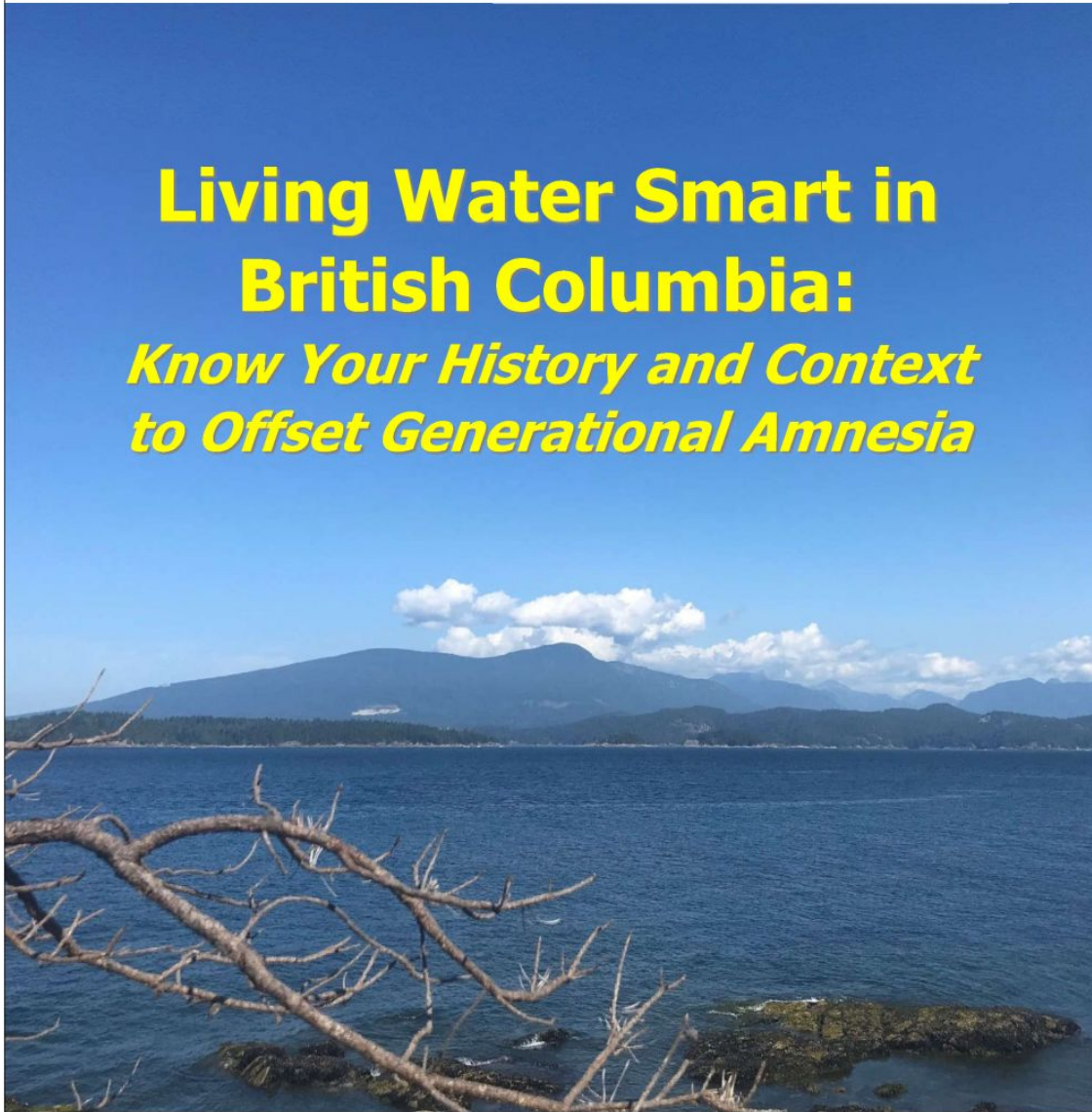
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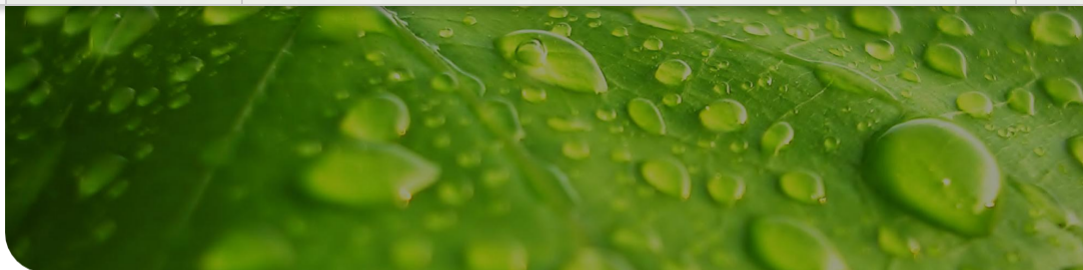
Living Water Smart in British Columbia:

Know Your History and Context to Offset Generational Amnesia



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[Waterbucket eNews](#) celebrates the leadership of individuals and organizations who are guided by the vision for [Living Water Smart in British Columbia](#) to build greener communities and adapt to a changing climate; and embrace “design with nature” solutions that reconnect people, land, fish, and water in altered landscapes. Downloadable versions of the Partnership's weekly e-newsletters are available on the waterbucket.ca website at [Living Water Smart in British Columbia: The Series](#).

CONTEXT FOR BUSY READER (allow up to 2 minutes to absorb)

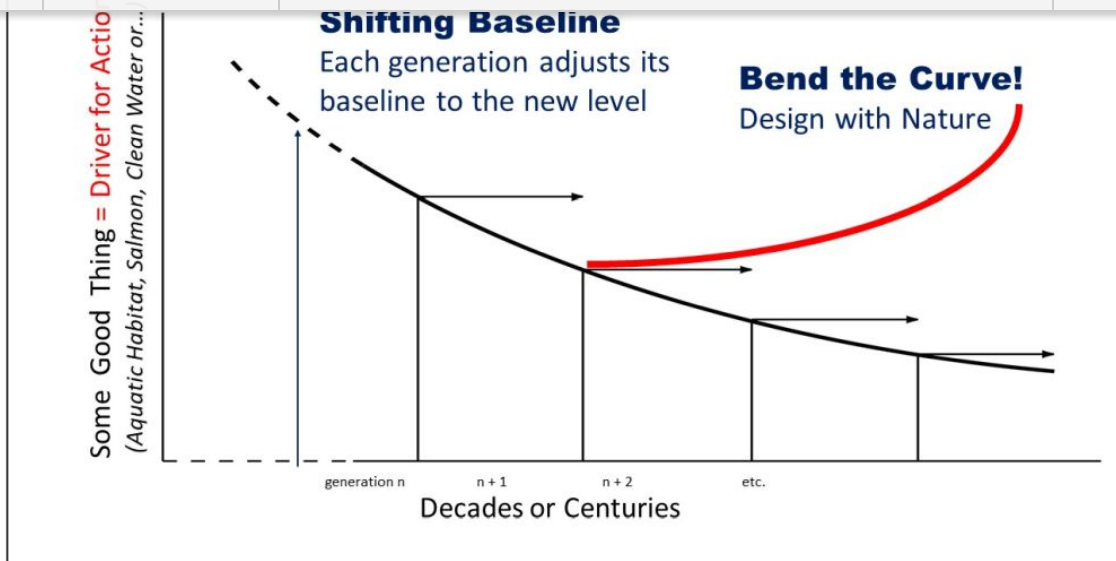
In 1995, UBC's Daniel Pauly coined the term **Shifting Baseline Syndrome** to explain why and how ecological decline is incremental and imperceptible over multiple generations. [In a 2003 interview, the NY Times described Daniel Pauly](#) as “an iconoclastic fisheries scientist at the University of British Columbia who is so decidedly global in his life and outlook that he is nearly a man without a country”.

Daniel Pauly has had a profound influence on the work of the Partnership for Water Sustainability. He has been a source of inspiration for the past decade. While communities cannot restore lost diversity, the Partnership believes that communities can halt ecological decline and consciously direct efforts into bending the trend-line in an upward direction.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT: This graphic is from Daniel Pauly's TED Talk in 2010 when he told the story behind The Shifting Baseline. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hui5YH-D6Go>

Create a Climate for Change and Then Adapt

Bend the curve through science-based understanding! This statement captures the essence of what guides the work of the Partnership. Look at the system as a whole. Understand what the science is telling us.

Then apply common sense. Reconnect people with nature. Implement "design with nature" standards of practice. Strive for water-centric communities that are in balance with a changing water cycle.

This visionary view of the future is the Partnership's motivation for developing resources and tools that would help communities **"create a climate for change and then adapt"**. It requires a sustaining commitment to intergenerational collaboration over multiple generations. This is the only way to overcome **"generational and organizational amnesia"**.

Time, commitment and perseverance - these are basic ingredients for intergenerational success. By pulling threads of understanding from the past through to the present and future, it would help communities reconnect people, fish, land and water in altered landscapes.

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Inter-Generational Mission of the Partnership for Water Sustainability

Policy or technical knowledge alone is not enough to resolve the water challenges that face BC, now and in the future. Creating a climate for change requires an appreciation and understanding of human behaviour, combined with a knowledge of how decisions are made in the real world. It takes a career to figure this out.

When each generation is receptive to accepting the inter-generational baton and embracing the wisdom that goes with it, the decisions of successive generations will benefit from and build upon the experience of those who went before them.

Whether and how we deal with uncertainty, manage risk, and adapt to droughts and floods will depend on how effective we are in encouraging a spirit of inter-generational collaboration among decision-makers at all levels within government and with community.

"INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY ARE INCUBATED WHEREVER YOU HAVE THE RIGHT COMBINATION OF EXPERIENCE, ENTHUSIASM, AND CURIOSITY, AND AN INTERGENERATIONAL TEAM IS A PERFECT WAY TO FOSTER THE PERFECT MIX."

"MY EXPERIENCE IS THAT COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS IS EASIER THAN MOST PEOPLE THINK, AND THE GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES ARE NOT THAT WIDE. ALSO, INTERGENERATIONAL TEAMS ARE MUCH MORE INNOVATIVE."

KATE RUSHTON

COMMUNITY STRATEGIST, UNITED KINGDOM



EDITOR'S PERSPECTIVE

on Know Your History and Context to Offset Generational Amnesia

In September, [Greystone Books](#) published [The Ocean's Whistleblower](#). It is the first authorized biography of Daniel Pauly, a truly remarkable man. Daniel

*Because of his profound influence on the guiding philosophy for the Partnership for Water Sustainability, featuring Daniel Pauly in this edition of Waterbucket eNews was a no-brainer. Among his many contributions is the **Shifting Baseline Syndrome**. This is a foundational concept. And it goes to the heart of the vision for intergenerational collaboration.*

To know where you are going, you need to know where you have come from. Otherwise, as Daniel Pauly observed in 1995 when he published it, baselines shift when successive generations of practitioners do not have an image in their minds of the recent past. Know your history. Know your context. These are keys to overcoming generational and organizational amnesia.

*When the Partnership delivered a [National Rainwater Management Workshop Series](#) in 2014, referencing the **Shifting Baseline Syndrome** helped us explain to our audiences (in Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax) why we think differently in British Columbia. Because we do! How we think in this province is shaped by our topography and geography.*

When we travelled across the continent, we realized just how crucial the stewardship ethic is in British Columbia. Yet, British Columbians as a whole may only be a generation or two away from becoming disconnected from nature. This means we are in a race against time to inspire an intergenerational collaboration ethic in the local government setting. This is the intergenerational mission of the Partnership.

As Daniel Pauly said during his TED Talk in 2010, we can recreate the past. Seeing examples of what the past looked like enables people to re-set their baseline, he stated. In BC, a learn-by-doing process is opening minds and building confidence that we can re-set the baseline. For the champions in many regions, the journey to date is decades-long. It is hard work. Yet there is hope. And that is why Waterbucket eNews celebrates and showcases those who are beacons of inspiration.

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Environmental Generational Amnesia refers to people accepting the degradation of the local environment across generations because it is thought of as the new normal.

"As each new generation inherits the world, vital knowledge is forgotten. Generational amnesia has profound effects on the way that we see the world."

Richard Fisher, BBC Future



Generational Amnesia

REFLECTIONS BY BBC FUTURE'S RICHARD FISHER

"Can a generation be forgetful? It's certainly true that older generations can fail to remember what it was to be young. With age, there comes a predictable derision of youth that seems to afflict almost every demographic cohort over the age of 35 years or so," [wrote Richard Fisher in a June 2021 essay for the BBC's Wise Words series.](#)

"There's actually a scientific term for this: the '**kids these days**' effect, which can be traced all the way back to the writing of the Ancient Greeks. One reason, the researchers say, is that people tend to forget that they themselves have changed over time, and so assume that the maturity, attitudes and behaviours of the young are also fixed."

There are consequences when "They Don't Know What They Don't Know"

"However, that's not the only kind of forgetfulness that happens as the generations pass. There's another type that is less obvious, called '**generational amnesia**', which has profound effects on the way that we see the world. And unfortunately, all of us come to suffer from it no matter how young or old we are," continues Richard Fisher.

particular type of generational amnesia was observed was back in the 1990s."

"What this blindspot meant, Daniel Pauly argued in a [short-but-influential paper](#), was that the scientists were failing to account fully for the slow creep of disappearing species, and each generation accepted the depleted ocean biodiversity they inherited as normal. He dubbed the effect '**shifting baseline syndrome**'."

"Since then, the shifting baseline effect has been observed far more widely than the fisheries community – it takes place in any realm of society where a baseline creeps imperceptibly over generations."

Intergenerational Collaboration: Pass Experience Forward

"As each generation ages, it may be tempting to lament a lack of awareness among the 'kids these days', just as the previous generation did when we were young. But when it comes to ensuring that our best memories of the world are not forgotten, it seems at least some of that energy might be better spent passing forward experience, rather than passing judgement," concludes Richard Fisher.

To Learn More:

To read the complete article, download a copy of the article by Richard Fisher titled [Generational amnesia: The memory loss that harms the planet](#).

"Know Your Context and History", the downloadable version of this story in the Living Water Smart Series, is two stories in one

The second one is brought forward from 2014 to provide historical context regarding a vision for re-setting the baseline through implementation of a whole-system approach that integrates the site with the stream, watershed, and groundwater aquifer.

The 2014 story is an essay that connected the dots between Daniel Pauly's work and the goals of Resilient Rainwater Management. It served to inform audiences across Canada

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Originally published in 2014 to inform the
National Rainwater Management Workshop Series



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Are you curious to learn more about UBC professor Daniel Pauly? Described as the most-cited fisheries

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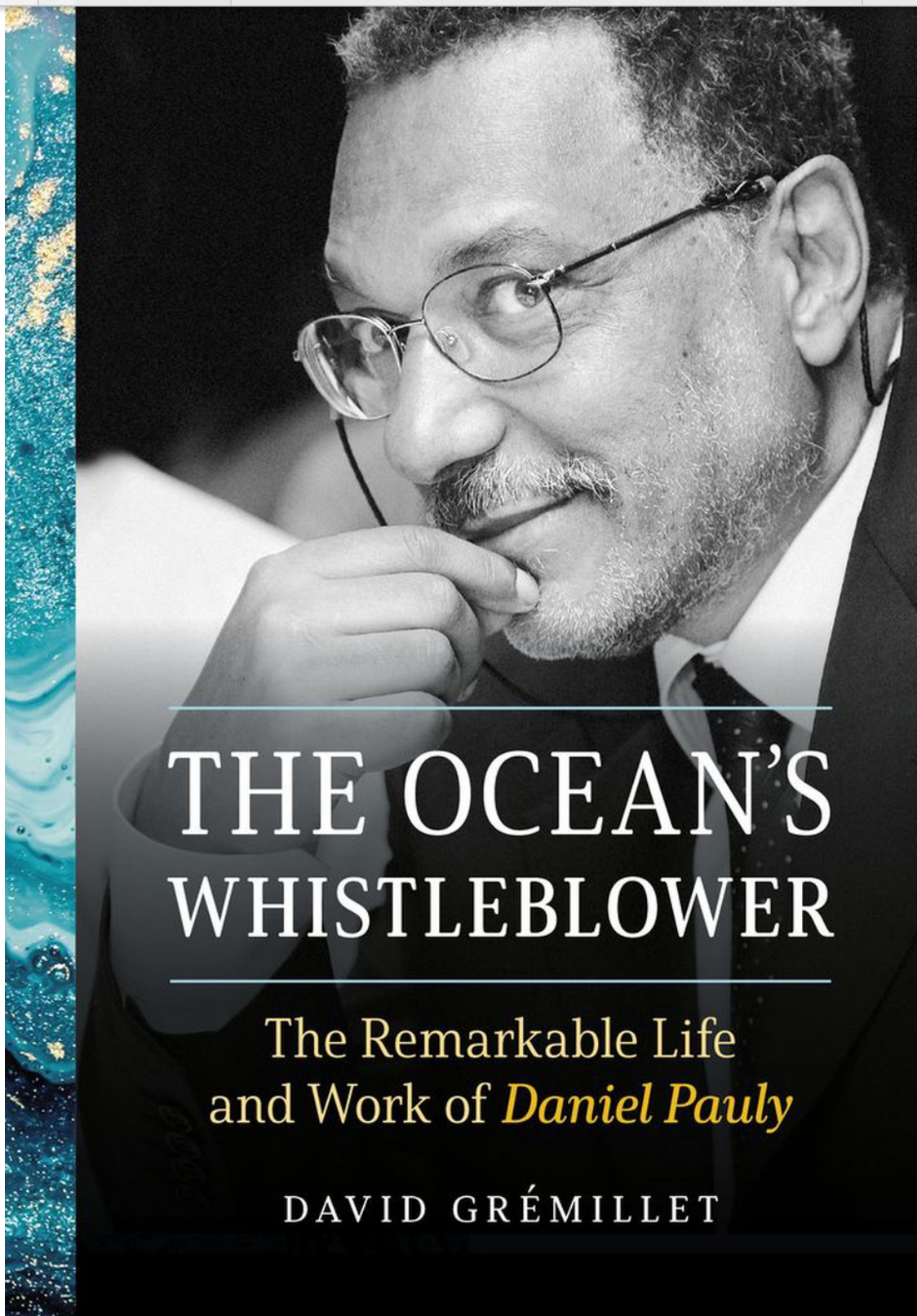
scientist on the third of the planet not covered by
saltwater, he is the subject of a new biography.

**Click on the image below to read an interview in
Scientific American, published in September.**

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**About the Partnership for
Water Sustainability in BC**

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Incorporation of the Partnership for Water Sustainability in British Columbia as a not-for-profit society on

November 19, 2010 was a milestone moment. Incorporation signified a bold leap forward. The Partnership evolved from a technical committee in the 1990s, to a “water roundtable” in the first decade of the 2000s, and then to a legal entity. The Partnership has its roots in government – local, provincial, federal.

The umbrella for Partnership initiatives and programs is the [Water Sustainability Action Plan for British Columbia](#). In turn, the Action Plan is nested within [Living Water Smart, British Columbia's Water Plan](#). Released in 2008, Living Water Smart was the provincial government's call to action, and to this day transcends governments.

Water as a Metaphor for Collaborative Leadership

“Water is a great metaphor for collaborative leadership. It is life giving. It nurtures. It flows and changes shape. It can be liquid, ice or steam. It overcomes obstacles with its constant presence; moving over, around or wearing down. One drop among many. Today our world is facing some big challenges. An opportunity exists in the space between what was and what will be. What will this be for us in British Columbia? Well that depends on every one of us.

Dr. Kathy Bishop
Royal Roads University
June 2020

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“THE GITXSAN
ELDERS HAVE A
SAYING THAT
YOUR GENIUS
IS REACHED AT
THE AGE OF 75”

CHIEF HANAMUXW (AKA DON
RYAN) OF THE GITXSAN.
NEGOTIATOR/FACILITATOR FOR
STK'EMLUPSEMC TE SECWEPEMC



Conceptual Framework for Inter-Generational Collaboration

Technical knowledge alone is not enough to resolve water challenges facing BC. Making things happen in the real world requires an appreciation and understanding of human behaviour, combined with a knowledge of how decisions are made. It takes a career to figure this out.

The Partnership has a primary goal, to build **bridges of understanding** and pass the baton from the past to the present and future. To achieve the goal, the Partnership is growing a network in the local government setting. This network embraces collaborative leadership and **inter-generational collaboration**.

**Intergenerational collaboration
is the key to saving the world –
Now more than ever!**

*“Our world is in desperate need
of both the experience and
knowledge of older generations,
and the energy and social
mindedness of today’s youth.”*



Rachele Focardi
global thought leader, public speaker and author

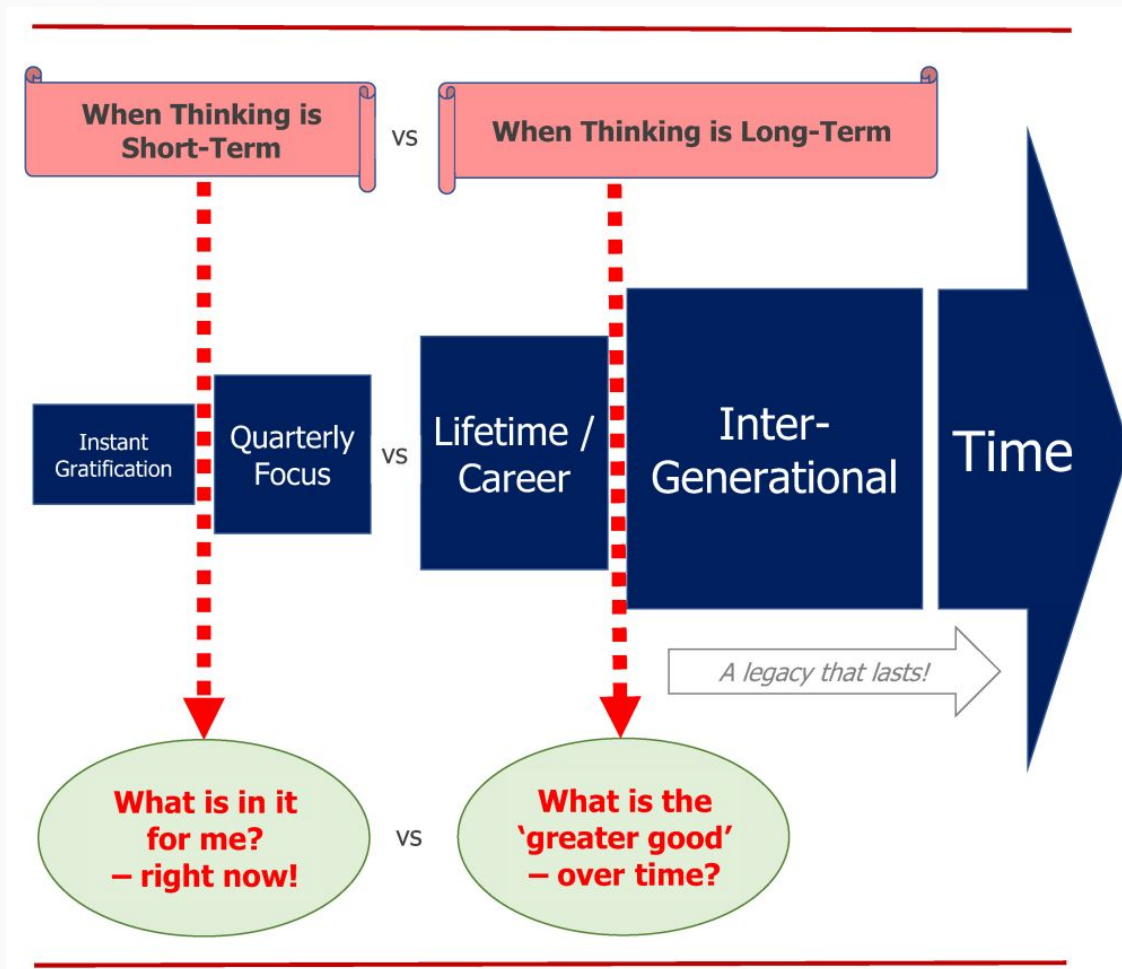
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The Partnership believes that when each generation is receptive to accepting the inter-generational baton and embracing the wisdom that goes with it, the decisions of successive generations will benefit from and build upon the experience of those who went before them.

The Partnership leadership team brings experience, knowledge, and wisdom – a forceful combination to help collaborators reach their vision, mission, and goals for achieving water sustainability. When they are successful, the Partnership is successful.



The **Time Continuum graphic** (above) conceptualizes the way of thinking that underpins the inter-generational mission of the Partnership for Water Sustainability. Encourage collaboration across-generations. Influence choices of decision-makers and advisors. Capitalize on the REACHABLE and TEACHABLE MOMENTS to influence those choices.

TO LEARN MORE, VISIT: <https://waterbucket.ca/about-us/>

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Celebration of Our Story: Genesis / First Decade / What Next

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