



AFOA/AAFA

Aboriginal Financial Officers Association of Canada
Association des agents financiers autochtones du Canada

AFOA CANADA 2008 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

OPENING PLENARY

Managing the Relationship between Elected leaders and Staff:
A Team Approach

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The Aboriginal Financial Officers Association of Canada (AFOA) is the centre for excellence and innovation in Aboriginal finance and management. We are the only organization in Canada that focuses on the capacity development and day to day needs of those Aboriginal professionals who are working in all areas of finance and management - today's leaders and those of the future.

AFOA was founded as a not-for-profit association in 1999 to help Aboriginals better manage and govern their communities and organizations through a focus on enhancing finance and management practices and skills. AFOA's premise is that effective management is key to building social and economic prosperity and essential to successful Aboriginal governance.

How do we achieve our mandate?

- Conducting capacity development research and developing programs and services aimed at enhancing competency in management and governance;
- Providing professional development training and certification programs
- Promoting best practices and providing a forum to share knowledge, experience and best practices;
- Encouraging Aboriginal youth to enter into the finance and management professions;
- Supporting Aboriginal accountability and governance efforts.

Additional information on our activities can be found on the AFOA website at www.afoa.ca. For further information please contact: Suzanne Seebach, Director, Programs & Services, AFOA Canada, 1066 Somerset St. W., Suite 310, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 5M3. Tel: + 1 (613) 722-5543; Fax +1 (613) 722-3467; sseebach@afoa.ca

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You will find additional information on our activities on the IOG website at www.iog.ca. For further information please contact: John Graham, IOG, 122 Clarence Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 5P6 tel: +1 (613) 562-0090 fax: +1 (613) 562-0097 info@iog.ca

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Managing the Relationship between Elected leaders and Staff: A Team Approach

Summary: The Critical Questions

1. Why is the relationship between elected leaders and their staff so critical to good governance and community well-being? What kind of problems can arise if the relationship is not sound?

- This paper suggests a number of potential problems: poor accountability because of blurred roles; services and programs delivered on partisan political grounds; possible law suits and rapid turnover of staff; inappropriate micromanagement; contesting agendas; community disunity

2. While the challenges in placing the relationship on a sound footing are universal, are there particular factors in Aboriginal communities that render them even more daunting?

- Among others this paper suggests the following factors: small size of communities combined with close family relations; lack of management and leadership capacity; the Indian Act and the legacy of colonialism; and the number and remuneration of leaders.

3. What should be the nature of the relationship between leaders and staff? Is it a hierarchy involving two parties with roles that don't overlap or is it a partnership with distinct but overlapping roles?

- This paper concludes that a clean split in roles is not possible. Rather it argues for a relationship built on distinct but overlapping roles where the grey areas or overlaps need to be constantly managed.

4. What tools and approaches are most effective in managing this partnership? Will one approach suffice or is a broad strategy called for?

- Policies and codes?
- Organization structures?
- Nurturing the Relationship through training, retreats?
- Engaging Citizens and Members?
- Other approaches e.g. individual or organization certification?
- The paper provides examples in each of these areas and argues that a strategy encompassing several of these approaches is required. One critical issue on which there is no consensus is whether an individual should be simultaneously a member of Council and a staff member.

5. How can improvements in capacity to better manage the relationship be sustained?

- The paper points to international and Canadian evidence that sustaining capacity efforts to improve governance is a critical challenge. Engaging the wider community in the process of developing and implementing governance changes and greater use of certification systems, aimed at both individuals and governments, might be part of the answer.

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Introduction

The principal theme of the AFOA Canada 2008 National Conference is “Aboriginal Management and Leadership – Working Together Towards Prosperity”. To help focus attention on the critical issues embraced in this theme, conference organizers commissioned the Institute On Governance to develop this short paper. It is organized around five key questions that co-facilitators will ask the distinguished members of the opening panel of the conference to address.

This paper is based on research conducted by the Institute on Governance in 2006¹ and on the experience of AFOA members, discussions at AFOA conferences, and previous AFOA research projects.

1. Why is the relationship between elected leaders and their staff so critical to good governance and community well-being? What kind of problems can arise if the relationship is not sound?

Getting the relationship right between political leaders and their staff has profound implications for democratic governance. Every democratic government - and not for profit organizations – face them. In earlier publications² the Institute on Governance has argued that there are five universal principles to good governance: legitimacy and voice, accountability, fairness, performance and direction. These principles are based on a larger set developed by the United Nations Development Program and some rest on an extensive body of international human rights law. As the box below illustrates the politician-staff relationship can affect each of these.

Good Governance & Critical Problems posed by the Relationship

- **Legitimacy and Voice** – community members may not view as legitimate unelected officials or boards making important decisions that affect the community; similarly many may view decision-making based solely on political factors (favouring political allies and not the broad public interest) as equally illegitimate
- **Accountability** – blurred role definitions between political leaders and staff may make holding leaders accountable a difficult task for electors
- **Performance** – many experts have long maintained that political considerations should not drive day to day business decisions - it may be the surest way to sink a business; in addition, the firing of staff for political reasons might lead to law suits; staff who perceive that political leaders are doing their jobs

¹ For the complete research report, see John Graham, “Managing the Relationship of First Nation Political Leaders and Their Staff”, March 2006, www.iog.ca/publications. The research involved a comprehensive literature search, in-depth interviews of some 30 individuals and a workshop that discussed tentative conclusions of the researchers.

² See, for example, John Graham, Bruce Amos and Tim Plumpre, “Principles for Good Governance in the 21st Century: Policy Brief No. 15”, www.iog.ca/publications.

(micro-management) will be poorly motivated to perform; the relationship between the senior staff and Council is critical for effective delivery of programs.

- **Fairness** – allocating program benefits (e.g. access to housing, post secondary education assistance, economic development assistance) on the basis of partisan political considerations will not meet the fairness test in the eyes of many community members.
- **Direction** – Political leaders who spend too much time on administrative issues may not pay sufficient attention to crafting a long term direction or vision for their community; moreover, a community will flounder if the agendas of staff and political leaders are different

2. While the challenges are universal, are there particular factors in Aboriginal communities that render them even more daunting?

Research suggests that the following factors make the challenge of getting the relationship on a sound footing in Aboriginal communities all the more demanding:

Small size combined with close family relations

According to some of our interviewees, the culture of First Nation communities has a primary influence on the environment of First Nation governments, and in particular, on the relationships between leaders, staff and the expectations of members. In some communities, for example, there may be an emphasis on responsibility and obligations to clan, family and extended family. Translated into the context of contemporary First Nation governance, this establishes a cultural basis for intervention by leaders in administrative matters, an intervention driven by the underlying cultural or familial obligation to ensure that everyone is looked after. This is often in contradiction with western norms of public administration. However, as noted by this observer: “The culture of some communities simply does not allow for a neat fit with western practices of public administration. Family, relationships, obligations and expectations all play a role in influencing and shaping the administrative responses of political leaders to inquiries and requests”.

Lack of management capacity because of insufficient education, training or low salary levels

When individuals are employed in positions for which they are either poorly trained or qualified, or in which they lack confidence, they will naturally seek both direction and validation of their actions from political leaders. They may also demonstrate a greater reluctance to make administrative decisions for fear of offending members or out of a concern that Council will not sanction them. According to some, part of the problem is that First Nations do not have sufficient revenue to offer salaries and benefits at levels competitive or commensurate with other employers off reserve. As a result, First Nations have difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified candidates, even from among their own membership.

Lack of capacity and experience among political leaders

When leaders are newly elected they face a steep learning curve and, particularly in this era of accountability, transparency and balanced budgets, feel tremendous pressure to ensure they meet their obligations to their community and funding sources. Many lack basic skills – for example, the ability to

analyze financial statements and the capacity to ask for the appropriate information on which to base their decision-making. In the words of one interviewee, “it’s like facing a tennis ball machine at full throttle with a hockey stick”. Leaders often take on a direct and interventionist role in matters more properly left to staff as a way to gain understanding of how things work and to gain peace of mind that they are meeting community expectations.

The Indian Act and the legacy of colonialism

One factor underlying the relationship between leaders and administration may be the lingering impacts of colonialism. Many leaders and staff today still remember the era of the Indian agent. There is some argument to be made that both leaders and staff, particularly of an older generation, may have developed learned behaviours that either emulate or view as “normal” a strongly interventionist and directive role on the part of persons holding positions of authority and real power in the community. Many staff and leaders learn ‘on the job’ and as a result may have absorbed practices and ways of doing business engrained during the period of colonial administration of First Nations. Most First Nation staff have had little or no exposure to theory, instruction, training and education on the relationship between political leaders and non-elected staff. As a result, they may have no basis upon which to even raise questions about practices that they may observe, or to develop solutions that have an appropriate cultural fit.

The large number of leaders and the manner in which they are remunerated

Compared to other governments in Canada, First Nations have a large number of political leaders relative to their population base. Furthermore many of these leaders work at their positions on a full time or near full time basis. The way in which First Nation leaders are compensated or remunerated may also encourage a more entangled relationship between leaders and staff. In some cases, for example, leaders are paid for their attendance at meetings held external to the community. This may result in their attending meetings that are more appropriately attended by staff. One First Nation administrator noted that, for their First Nation, it became a costly problem when a Councillor with portfolio responsibility consistently accompanied a competent, qualified program manager to technical meetings or “staff” meetings. The consequence was not only a drain on the First Nation’s administration and program budget, but also micro management – that is, the direct engagement by this leader in matters generally acknowledged to be within the purview of the duties of program and administrative staff.

3. What should be the nature of the relationship between leaders and staff?

Given the importance and universal nature of the relationship of political leaders to staff, it is not surprising that academics and practitioners have focused considerable attention on this issue.

Separating Politics from Administration – a Theory to Discard

One of the most durable of doctrines is the politics-administration dichotomy – the need to create a clean split between political and administrator responsibilities. This doctrine is central to a recently published

"First Nations Governance Handbook"³ and appears to be one of the ideas behind the First Nations Governance Act, introduced by former Minister Nault.

However, there is mounting evidence, both theoretical and empirical, that this doctrine is far too simplistic and should be discarded. The clean separation of politics and administration just does not hold up in practice. Politics and administration are "messily entwined" and for good reasons⁴.

Partnership Based on Complementary Roles

A more promising approach, one that is attracting a growing consensus both in the academic, local government and not for profit worlds, calls for a partnership between political leaders and their staff based on complementary roles. As one international study on local government involving 14 countries concluded:

"This study of the role of administration in the political process establishes more clearly than do previous studies that top administrators are partners in leadership with the mayor and other leading politicians. Leadership in government arises from and is conditioned by a relationship that is generally characterized by interaction, interdependency, reciprocal influence and mutual respect between politicians and administrators. Although there are differences in authority between the two sets of officials, they have a complementary relationship in which each needs the other and each makes unique contributions to the other in conducting both shared and separate tasks."⁵

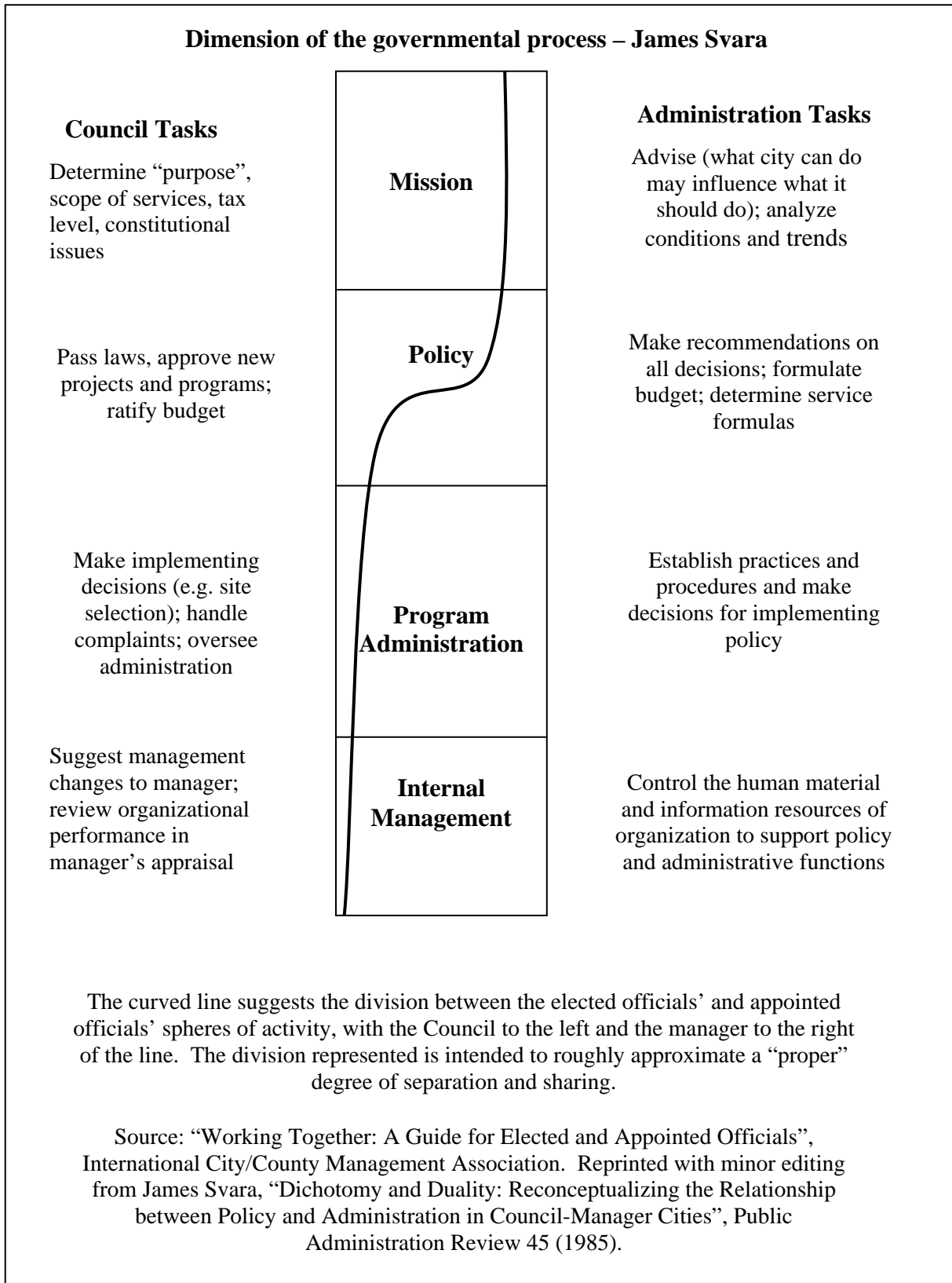
Rather than approaching public administration with a conceptual framework of dichotomy and looking for exceptions to it, it is more appropriate, according to many, to use a framework of complementary roles and examine variations within it. Nonetheless, there will always be a "grey zone of accommodation" to manage. Figure 1 illustrates this approach.

³ "First Nations Governance Handbook", published under the authority of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa, 2001, www.inca.gc.ca. While the Handbook has its flaws, it contains some excellent material.

⁴ For an elaboration of this argument, see John Graham, "Managing the Relationship of First Nation Political Leaders and Their Staff", March 2006, www.iog.ca/publications.

⁵ Poul Erik Mouritzen and James H. Svava, "Leadership at the Apex: Politicians and Administrators in Western Local Governments", University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002 P. 288- 290. The 14 countries were the United States, Australia, and 12 European countries including four in Scandinavian, England, Ireland, Belgium, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands.

Figure 1



4. What tools and approaches are most effective in managing this partnership?

What follows are five sets of approaches and tools that Councils, both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, have utilized to manage this important partnership.

A. Policies and Codes

Increasingly Aboriginal governments and organizations are developing their own instruments and authorities as a means to gain greater clarity and precision in the respective and complementary roles and responsibilities of elected and non-elected officials. These instruments and authorities, many of which do not necessarily find a legislative base – for example, in the *Indian Act* - include written codes or laws, and policies. Some First Nations have also made use of the by-law making power provided by the *Indian Act* to codify, for example, financial management and administration policies.

Within this general category of policies and codes it is useful to identify three sub-types or sub-sets of instruments. These are: governing codes and policies; administrative policies (related to for example, financial management and human resources); and program policies. For the purposes of this paper, we look at one of these – governing codes and policies.

Governing Codes and Policies

These policies are concerned with specifying the respective roles and responsibilities of Council, the Chief or Chair and individual councillors, the role of committees of Council, and the role of the person responsible for staff – referred to by a variety of titles, depending on the organization i.e. Director of Operations, Chief Executive Officer, Executive Director or Band Manager. They may also address a wide variety of other matters, such as Council meeting procedures, and, in addition, establish rules that speak directly to the relationship. For example, they may specify:

- the specific roles and responsibilities of Council as distinct from that of staff;
- that Council can act only collectively; and that individual councillors including the Chief or Chair can not give instructions or orders to staff, unless explicitly authorized to do so by Council as a whole;
- that only the Chief Executive Officer has the authority and responsibility to instruct staff;
- that any concerns Council may have with respect to individual staff members must be directed through the office of the Chief Executive Officer;
- that staff should not be prohibited from talking to members of Council, but the limits of such interaction are set out.

Election Codes are another instrument used by Aboriginal organizations to regulate the overlap between politicians and staff. Many First Nations, including several interviewed for this study, have adopted a rule that requires First Nation staff who are nominated to stand for public office to take a leave of absence during the election period. Where this type of rule is in place, either in written form in a custom election code or as practice, it is normally accompanied by the requirement that once elected, staff must either take a leave of absence or resign from any non-elected position they may hold. Election codes may also specify that no one should be able to order a staff member to engage in political activities, and that political leaders and staff may not use community property for electoral purposes.

Campaigning rules also can provide some direction in this area. Again, many First Nations follow a rule that prohibits staff from campaigning, either for themselves as candidates or on behalf of others, during

working hours. While this is a norm that is generally adhered to, it appears to be much less common that such rules are formally recorded in written codes or policies.

Many Aboriginal governments identify written codes of conduct, oaths of office and conflict of interest rules as important tools for ensuring that elected leaders don't overstep the boundaries of their political responsibilities and that staff conduct themselves in an appropriate manner. In some instances, organizations have seen fit to establish separate Codes for elected leaders and/or to require the public taking of an Oath of Office.

One First Nation interviewee described how the development of a new Leadership Oath accompanied the election of a Chief whose campaign platform centred on increased accountability and transparency in First Nation affairs. During the new Council's public inauguration ceremony, each member of Council was asked to sign the Leadership Oath. The Oath itself is prominently displayed and communicated throughout the community. Members are aware of its content, and as a result, are attuned to their role in promoting leadership compliance with the Oath.

B. Organizational Structures

A second set of tools and approaches for managing the relationship between politicians and their staff falls under the rubric of organizational and structural solutions. In this section we examine two such solutions drawing on examples from our research.

Arms-Length, Semi-Independent Structures

Some Aboriginal governments have established structures and organizations that operate at arms-length from elected leadership and their staff. These may be corporations or unincorporated boards and agencies whose directors handle certain functions within broad policies set down by Council, or as set out in separate bylaws. Examples include economic development corporations, housing authorities and policing authorities. One of the ideas behind this structural approach is to 'insulate' certain kinds of decision from inappropriate political interference.

One First Nation in our survey identified the establishment and operation of a Human Services Corporation as a success. In this arrangement, the corporation's board is primarily comprised of community members. While two Councillors also sit as non-voting members, their role is neither one of intervening nor making decisions but of ensuring there is some channel of communication established with Council. This First Nation indicated that, because the model was working so well and because it had received the support and recognition of the community, they intended to adopt it across a range of policy and program areas in the future.

Some First Nations have established treasury boards or finance committees that are, to varying degree, independent of Council and make large and small financial decisions, prepare budgets, manage budgets or provide general oversight of the financial affairs of the First Nation. One First Nation reported that they had established a treasury board comprised of a few members of Council and a few members of the financial administration staff. This board had responsibility to receive program budget proposals from staff and committees, prepare an overall budget for the upcoming fiscal year for recommendation to and approval by Council. The board also has responsibility to oversee the transfer and management of budgets by particular

departments and agencies of the First Nation. In this arrangement, the principle of primary accountability and decision making authority of Council is maintained, while the responsibility for interface with the First Nation's operational side rests with a body that itself embodies a balanced composite of political leaders and staff.

It is a common practice for First Nations to establish separate corporate structures and boards to oversee economic development projects and First Nation owned and operated businesses. One First Nation reported that, in pursuing an important economic venture in which significant First Nation resources were to be invested, they had established a separate board composed almost entirely of non-First Nation members, but persons with considerable experience and expertise, to guide the project through to the operational stage.

Dispute Resolution Bodies and Appeal Mechanisms

The political and administrative decision making processes of Aboriginal governments and organizations can be augmented and supported with the establishment of internal appeal mechanisms and procedures. These may be program-specific, or they may be established to deal with a wide range of appeals and complaints on a variety of matters.

Some First Nations have identified a group of Elders to mediate and sometimes arbitrate certain types of disputes among members, or between members and Council. The active engagement of these types of dispute resolution bodies can remove Council from decisions that otherwise may be susceptible to the use of partisan political calculus.

At this point in time, those First Nations addressing the need to establish avenues of appeal to a body other than the original decision maker, or to Chief and Council, seem more frequently to either insert a program specific advisory committee or the First Nation CEO into the process, or confirm the decision making authority of a program manager. Our interviews confirmed that the most common practice is for First Nations to specify that grievances, complaints and appeals must first be directed to a program manager, followed by a program Committee (if such exists), then to the First Nation CEO and finally to Council.

Interviewees also noted that codification of an appeal process is an effective means not only for managing grievances arising from staff decisions but also for increasing awareness among community members that they too must follow a set of rules when seeking to reverse a decision made by administrative or program staff.

One group with growing experience in the use of dispute resolution and appeal mechanisms are the Métis Settlements of Alberta. The Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal (MSAT) provides a quasi-judicial review of Settlement Council decisions and the regional government's policies. It represents a revival of community customs and non-adversarial dispute resolution processes that avoids the formality, costs and delays of court. The MSAT is independent of the executive and legislative branches of Métis Settlement Government. It has some powers analogous to a court but has some unique features including extensive alternate dispute resolution (ADR) jurisdiction, evolving jurisdiction, blending of law and Métis custom, location and procedure for hearings and community input. Since inception, it has handled over 160 cases.

In addition to this Appeals Tribunal, the Métis Settlements also have established an Office of the Métis Settlements Ombudsman, who has handled over 500 complaints since inception in 2003. (The Ombudsman can make recommendations to Alberta's Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs on redress measures.)

C. Nurturing the Relationship

The relationship between leaders and staff is dynamic and needs constant attention, development, evaluation and nurturing. Some Aboriginal organizations nurture the relationship in a variety of ways including: orientation and training; retreats; and performance evaluations

Orientation and Training

Our interviews confirm a wide-spread practice of facilitated orientation and training being provided to new Chiefs and Councils. These sessions appear to be of two types. In most instances they are geared towards familiarizing, or re-familiarizing, leaders with program and service functions, staff and organizational structure, economic and business development activities, committees, legal issues and other current issues which the First Nation is dealing with, and which will occupy the time and resources of Council and their staff during their term.

These types of sessions often involve briefings by and the active participation of staff. They provide an opportunity for Councillors who have been assigned particular portfolio responsibilities to learn more about these responsibilities and the specific activities of staff. Although they may encompass some training and orientation on the nature of the relationship between Council and staff, and appropriate ways of conducting and managing this relationship, this does not appear to be the primary focus of these types of sessions.

Other First Nations have taken the opportunity to provide orientation and training, either at the beginning of the term of office, or over the course of the term, to leaders and senior staff, on a wider set of governance matters. One First Nation reported they had made effective use of services provided by an independent facilitator. The new Council, together with senior staff, attended a three-day retreat outside the community, a retreat which included orientation on First Nation governance and the particular challenges that First Nations leaders face in operating within a constrained legal, social and financial environment.

Another First Nation reported their legal counsel had provided training and orientation to a newly elected Council. This orientation was based extensively on models and practices advocated by the Harvard Project on Indian Economic Development and that of the Native Nations Institute (at the University of Arizona). With its emphasis on general matters of governance, this type of training, according to some, is very effective in helping Council members and staff to enhance their understanding of their roles and responsibilities and of the government environment in which they work, including the politician-staff partnership. Interest in and a desire for this second type of orientation and training is increasing among First Nations in Canada.

Retreats

Retreats, either facilitated or un-facilitated, allow those involved in the management of First Nation affairs to take stock of what they have accomplished and directions they wish to pursue. These also provide an

opportunity for an assessment of the Council-staff working relationship, and the identification of adjustments that may be required to effect a more smooth, compatible, and complementary relationship.

First Nations reported they adopt different formats for their retreats. In some instances these are attended only by Council, in other cases by Council together with senior staff or, in the case of smaller First Nations, by Council and all staff. Their purposes may focus variously on annual or strategic planning, or on evaluation and assessment.

Performance Evaluations

An increasingly popular technique to allow politicians and staff to get a read on each other's performance is to employ a third party to undertake 360 degree evaluations, which allow Council to make comments about staff and vice-versa. The use of a third party allows frank and anonymous appraisals, thus reducing the fear of reprisals among staff.

In our research, we found no explicit examples of this technique being used by Aboriginal governments or organizations. However, given its growing popularity among bodies like school boards, it may be only a matter of time before it surfaces in First Nation country.

D. Engaging Citizens or Members

Appropriately used, citizen engagement is also an effective tool for creating a buffer between political leaders and the internal operations of their governments. At the same time such engagement enhances accountability and improves communications with the membership around important matters.

Aboriginal members and citizens can become involved in their community's affairs through a wide variety of means - for example, through regular meetings which are either "open" to community input, or organized primarily to provide information on critical matters, including financial statements, to the membership.

Another mechanism is to provide opportunities for community members to participate as members of committees, either as advisors or as decision-makers, and on boards of arms-length organizations such as housing or education authorities. Such involvement can improve transparency and accountability, not only by opening up the relationship between leaders and staff to wider scrutiny, but also by creating space or a "buffer" between these two parts of First Nation government.

Some Aboriginal communities are actively involved in comprehensive community planning processes as a means of engaging their citizens and rebuilding their governments. According to one interviewee, "We needed comprehensive community planning to comb out our own values, vision and principles. It's those values and principles that create standards and laws, and we recognized that those laws and standards create stability."

However, after having gone through that comprehensive process with its citizens this particular Nation realized just how ill-prepared it was to actually implement them. "We realized that we weren't properly structured to deliver our very own values and vision given the typical *Indian Act* system that was in place in our communities. Therefore, we set about to change it. It's becoming a "new" way completely of doing things. We are in this for the long term with 25-year milestones. This is holistic government".

E. Other Tools, Practices and Approaches

In terms of day to day practice, there are many tools and approaches that Aboriginal organizations can and do employ to manage the relationship among staff and leaders. Some of these include the following:

- Instituting a “one hour rule”, whereby a staff member, if asked by a member of Council to undertake a task that takes more than one hour to complete, notifies the CEO or head of administration, who will determine with the councillor whether the task should be carried out
- Institutionalizing conflict by having working sessions, prior to making a decision on difficult, value-laden issues, in which both staff and members of Council participate. At these sessions, participants have the opportunity for a full and open exchange of views to identify, explore and develop possible solutions, thus discouraging the manipulation of staff or making ‘end runs’ around managers
- The adoption by Council of a procedure whereby no decisions are taken in the month of December, when traditionally there are more requests from community members, especially for special or family needs.
- The physical separation of Council offices from those of administrative staff, preferably in different buildings.
- Increased recognition and reliance upon occupational and professional standards that may have application within a particular program or service areas or area of administration. Employees in First Nation administrations, particularly those who work in areas where occupational and professional standards have been broadly established (e.g. education, health, social work, accounting) should rely more or make greater use of these standards in mediating their relationships with political leaders, or “backing up” their individual decisions and actions.
- The unionization of staff so that they will be less susceptible to being ‘fired’ when a new Council take over.
- The use of an ISO standard that helps to define roles, responsibilities and decision-making processes among political leaders and staff. Several First Nations have ISO certification, and the use of a certification system is embedded in one of the newly adopted Acts relating to property taxation and financial management.⁶

5. How can improvements in capacity to better manage the relationship be sustained?

There is ample evidence both in Canada and abroad that many efforts to improve government capacity have not been sustained over time. The World Bank, for example, has concluded that, the world-wide average of a host of good governance indicators has not improved over the past decade despite significant investments from aid agencies⁷. In Canada, there has not been a similar, comprehensive effort to evaluate capacity building efforts to improve Aboriginal governance. Nonetheless, in our research, we heard of example after example of Aboriginal organizations making progress on their governance challenges only to

⁶ See *First Nations Fiscal and Statistical Management Act*, especially, sections 50 and 55.

⁷ World Bank, “Governance Matters IV”, <http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/pubs/govmatters4.html>

have these overturned when new players arrive on the scene. Sustainability, it would appear, is indeed as critical an issue in Canada as it is internationally.

Engaging the wider community in the process of developing and implementing governance changes may be part of the answer. Another might be to embed changes in certification systems so that they can not be rolled back without some clear penalty occurring through loss of certification.

Conclusions

Placing the relationship between political leaders and their staff on a sound footing is a critical issue for democratic governments. That the quality of this relationship affects all five good governance principles serves only to underline this point. But the issue is not only important, it is also universal. Aboriginal communities and organizations struggling with this relationship can take some comfort in the fact that all governments – and indeed most not for profit organizations – face similar dilemmas and conundrums.

The importance and universality of the issue also leads to this important conclusion: there are no easy solutions or magic panaceas that will resolve the difficulties posed by the relationship of politicians and their staff. As one study concludes, "...neither practitioners nor scholars have reached a consensus about how to achieve a proper "meshing" of politics and administration among elected and unelected officials to obtain "an optimal mix" that advances democratic governance."⁸

It is highly unlikely that any one tool or approach will adequately deal with the many issues posed by the relationship of politicians and their staff. Indeed, what is likely called for is a long-term strategy, one that employs a variety of approaches.

Perhaps the other sobering thought is that many of the approaches for managing this relationship may well be people specific, that is, personalities and individual capabilities may be important, especially in small organizations or governments. Thus, one approach - say a particular program policy – may suit the leadership styles of one Council but not another. Consequently, the overall regime for managing the relationship will never stay constant. Similarly new developments facing the community may demand the introduction of new approaches over time.

What should be constant, however, are the principles for sound governance. If solutions, tools approaches or changes meet the tests of legitimacy and voice, accountability, fairness, performance and direction, then leaders, their staff and their communities and organizations will know they are on the right track.

⁸ P. Edward French and David Folz, "Executive Behaviour and Decision-making in Small US Cities", *American Review of Public Administration*, Vol. 34 No. 1, March 2004, P. 52