

## The Beaver Dam *Fairy-tale*<sup>1</sup>



### The flow is disappearing

Once upon a time there was an expansive tract of forest populated by animals. The animals had lived there contentedly for many long years. But one day dark clouds appeared on the horizon. The river flow slowly started to dry up. There was no longer enough water for the hippopotamus to swim around in or for the elephant to spray himself. It would not take long anymore before even the pigs couldn't take their customary mud bath any longer. And even worse, within a foreseeable time, the animals would die from thirst. Not less rain was falling than in the past. The birds started to investigate what was the matter. The result was alarming. Up-river, there was a huge beaver dam being built that barely let any water trickle down-stream.



What could be done? King Lion called the animals out from the forest to meet and asked for advice. Something had to be done. But what?

<sup>1</sup> Text: Eelke Wielinga, illustrations Daan Spijker



### The hippopotamus

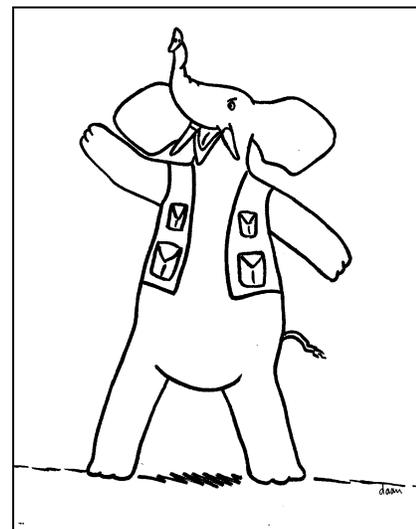
The first one to stepped forward was the hippopotamus. This animal knew everything about water; he was a hydraulic engineer. In his opinion, there had to be a technical solution to satisfy everyone. He proposed performing a thorough proper investigation to discover the best solution to the problem. This proposal could be used to convince the beavers to cooperate on a collective solution. The investigation had to focus on moving the dam from upstream to down-stream. The advantages were evident. Beavers and other animals could live in peace and harmony with each other and a reservoir would be created which, even in dry periods, everyone could drink from. The pigs could roll around in the mud, the elephant could happily squirt with his trunk and the hippopotamus could swim to his heart's content. That's how a

problem can be transformed into higher quality solution for everyone. Naturally, part of the investigation would have to include performing an environmental impact report to see who would be disadvantaged by the operation. Arrangements had to be made to relocate nests. If the advantages were quantified objectively by the investigation, high-level consultation could take place with the beaver captain about the conditions, for example, help with moving the dam, day care for the beaver babies etc..

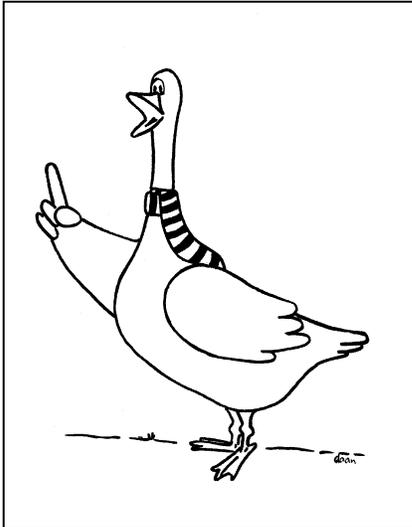
There were some mutterings of approval from some sides. "Good plan." "Many advantages." Technology has no limits. Little could be said against objective yield calculations. But there were also doubts. Had the hippopotamus considered that the beavers might not want to negotiate with the animals? Especially about a plan initiated by the counter party? How great was the chance of success and did this justify all the work this investigation would entail? What would it cost, all those project agencies for hydraulic expertise, transport, environmental measures, etc.?

### The elephant

The second one to raise his voice was the elephant. He said, "The beavers are intruders. They began this without taking any of the general interests of the forest into consideration. We have to make it clear to them who is in charge here. Building dams should be permitted, but within the societal preconditions; therefore, no dams in the major flow of the river." The elephant continued with: "Majesty, give me the assignment. I shall investigate the extent of the damage that the beavers are causing and which legal steps we can undertake against the beavers. If they don't agree, then I want a mandate and the necessary means to form a small brigade we can employ to forcefully set down our demands. The dam must go! We'll make it clear to them what can and cannot be done. If necessary, we will drive away the beavers and destroy the dam."



Once again there were some mutterings of approval. Tackle it right away, otherwise you'll set precedents and the damage becomes worse. "We have the oldest established rights here. Beavers don't belong here." However, there were serious considerations once again. Who knows the kind of trouble the beavers could cause if they got angry? Raging war on the beavers was an option, but not without risks.



### The goose

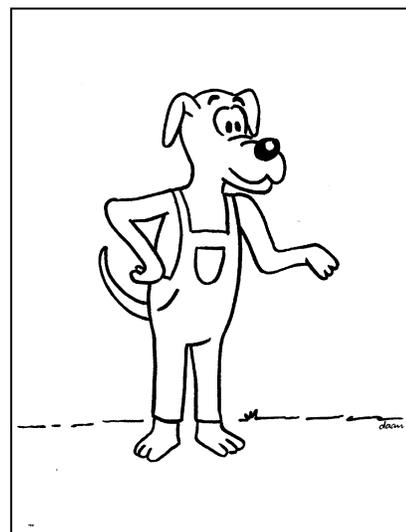
The goose was the third to come forward. Geese are, as you know, social animals. They are excellent organisers and happy to talk to everyone. The goose said, "Majesty, a participative investigation is the only thing that's appropriate. Give me the mandate and the means to have an open dialogue with the beavers. Perhaps the beavers don't even realise the suffering they're causing. There might be solutions we can discuss. Of course the beavers also have their own interests that the other animals must take into account. Beavers see their world differently to geese, pigs, hippopotami, elephants or lions. A perspective in which everyone can be comfortable can only develop when we enter an open search and learning process together. Then there shall also be solutions that do justice

for all. Who knows, the beavers might ultimately embrace the hippopotamus's idea, but then they themselves would have considered it too."

Once again there were some mutterings of approval. Peaceful approach. Perhaps the beavers aren't that bad at all. Who knows what could come of it? You have to at least give it a try. But the birds, who had investigated the entire situation, didn't entirely agree on this. The beaver captain looked like a tyrant. He incited a lot of fear. Not someone to enjoy a cosy cup of tea with or hold an open discussion. They had also seen several strongly muscled workaholics plodding away. The first impression wasn't of a communicative group.

### The young dog

As last, a young dog jumped forward. "There have to be some beavers who want to look beyond their own world, even if they are not involved at management level or don't yet dare to voice their own opinions. Majesty, give me the space, then I'll search for a group of other enthusiastic young animals and we'll go together to search for contact with young beavers who we can talk to and who will also listen to us. Perhaps we can start a scouting club. And then we'll investigate mutual understanding and creative solutions. By the time we have found enough enthusiastic supporters on both sides, you can go and negotiate with the beaver captain."



Once again there were some mutterings of approval. Those young dogs with their new ideas. But now problems also arose. How do you manage such an approach? You can't monitor this process.

What performance indicators can you use to evaluate the group? It's about serious matters, about life and death. There's no time for fun and games.

**What approach is most appropriate?**

King Lion heard the four proposals as well as the comments from the public. He retreated with his ministers to take a decision, the rhinoceros from public order and safety, the hamster from finance, the stork from land use and the bull (a Scottish Highlander) from integration affairs. Which of the directions should he choose for the solution?

*What choice would you make if you were king?*

### The tale unfolds

The king chose an integrated investigation approach. With the investigation proposal from the hippopotamus under his wing, the goose was sent to the beaver captain as the king's process facilitator. However, the negotiations didn't proceed smoothly. The captain was unwilling to cooperate. The goose was dispatched a second time, but now with the threat of the elephant. This didn't improve the situation. The beaver captain had an entirely different view of the matter and threatened in reciprocation with a beaver guerrilla if it came to a confrontation.



Ultimately, the young dog was allowed to form a group of young scouts. He would probably taken this course of action without permission anyway, because that's the kind of young dog he was. But now a steering group with whom they had follow-up meetings also started. The scouts found young beavers who were interested in intercultural contacts. They discovered that beaver families were experiencing problems with the rising levels of water in the reservoir. This meant they constantly had to relocate their nests. The construction of the dam actually stopped too much passage of water. However, the beaver captain, who was single and was indeed not particularly communicative, was unaware of these problems.

The young dog and his friends dug canals to channel the flow. After their first attempts were initially unsuccessful, they found help from both factions of animals who admired them for their courage and persistence. A rocky area was found that was suitable for a waterfall. Now that there seemed to be an acceptable solution for both sides, they could achieve a break-through in the negotiations. They dug the canal to the rocky area with unified strength. They created a barrier that kept the water level in the reservoir constant and directed the river flow evenly, even in times of drought.

*And so they all lived happily ever after...*