

Understanding the Mayor's Office in Council-Manager Cities

James H. Svara

In November of odd-numbered years, cities throughout North Carolina hold elections to choose their mayor. Nearly a third of them—virtually all cities with over 5,000 population—use the council-manager form of government. The office of mayor in those cities—that is, council-manager cities—is probably the most misunderstood leadership position in government. Some of us may think of a mayor in North Carolina as being comparable with mayors of cities in certain other states, who occupy a true executive office (most visibly, the big-city mayors of the North). Others of us may dismiss the mayor as a figurehead. North Carolina's nonexecutive mayors are commonly perceived either to be doing less than they actually are or to have more power to act than state law and the municipal charter give them. Mayors in council-manager cities are not mere ribbon-cutters and gavel-pounders, nor are they the driving force in city government. What they are—somewhere between

the two stereotypes—is an important leader who can strongly influence how well city government performs.

It is difficult for voters to know how to assess candidates for mayor. Those who seek and hold the office may also need to know more about the position and the realistic potential inherent in it. Mayoral candidates, borrowing a page from the campaign book of the executive mayor, often present themselves as the leader who will take charge of city government and propose bold solutions to the city's problems. Once elected, however, they will have difficulty in following through. Although he or she has the title of mayor and some of the popular expectations for leadership associated with the title, the North Carolina mayor has no powers on which to base true executive leadership and must depend on other officials, elected and appointed, for most of what he accomplishes. He lacks both the ability to initiate policies on his own and the legal authority to implement those policies.

Let's look at the office of council-manager mayor in order to help voters know what qualities to look for in a candidate and to suggest to officeholders and candidates how they can best fill that post.

The nature of the office

The council-manager mayor is analagous to a company's chairman of the board, important but not crucial to the organization's operation. The government may operate adequately with minimal leadership from the mayor, since the plural executive organization provided by the council spreads out the responsibility for policy initiation. In addition, the manager has considerable informal influence, based on expertise and staff support, over the generation of proposals, and he has formal authority to direct implementation. Still, the "chairman" mayor can have an impact on governmental performance through contributions to the governing process that, though different from those of the "executive" mayor, are still important.

The elements of leadership can be organized in two categories. One category is a coordinative function in which the mayor is more or less active at pulling together the parts of the system to improve their interaction. The parts are the council, manager/staff, and public; the mayor has a special and close relationship with each. By virtue of his favored position, the mayor can tap

The author is a member of the Political Science Department faculty at UNC-Greensboro. Financial support for this project was provided by the Research Council at UNC-Greensboro.

into various communication networks among elected officials, governmental staff, and community leaders. Although they can and do interact with each other independently, the mayor—if he has done his homework—can transmit messages better than anyone else in the government because of his broad knowledge. He therefore has a unique potential to expand the level of understanding and improve the coordination among the participants in city government.

The second element is guidance in the initiation of policy, which may be done as part of the coordinating function or separately. The mayor not only channels communication but may also influence and shape the messages being transmitted. He can also use more dramatic techniques to raise issues and put forth proposals, but these must be used cautiously because he runs the risk of alienating the council, whose support he needs to be effective.

Variety of roles

It is a testament to the diffuseness of the mayor's job that there is such variation in how the job is perceived, once one goes beyond formal responsibilities.¹ In a series of interviews with and about the mayors of North Carolina's five largest cities (Charlotte, Winston-Salem, Greensboro, Raleigh, Durham) the mayors, council members, and community leaders were asked to describe the mayor's responsibilities and roles in their city. The responses revealed ten roles, which can be grouped into four dimensions of leadership—i.e., major areas in which a mayor may contribute to the functioning of city

Table 1. Dimensions and Roles of Mayoral Leadership in Council-Manager Cities

—Roles are identified by letters A-J.

—Dimensions are indicated by numbers I-IV.

- I. Ceremony and Presiding: the typically perceived type of leadership
 - A. Ceremonial tasks
 - B. Spokesman for council
 - C. Presiding officer
 - II. Communication and Facilitation
 - D. Educator: informational and educational tasks vis-a-vis the council, manager, and/or public.
 - E. Liaison with manager: promotes informal exchange between the council and the manager and staff.
 - F. Team leader: coalescing the council, building consensus, and enhancing group performance
 - III. Organization and Guidance
 - G. Goal-setter: setting goals and objectives for council and manager; identifying problems; establishing tone for the council.
 - H. Organizer: stabilizing relationships; guiding the council to recognition of its roles and responsibilities; defining and adjusting the relationship with the manager.
 - I. Policy advocate: developing programs; lining up support for or opposition to proposals.
 - IV. Promotion
 - J. Promoter: promoting and defending the city; seeking investment; handling external relationships; securing agreement among parties to a project.
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government. Whether he engages in the roles and how well he handles them are questions that provide the basis for distinguishing among types of mayoral leadership, which are addressed in the next section. The dimensions and roles of leadership are listed in Table 1.

Ceremony and presiding. The *ceremonial* function is the dimension of leadership that observers of city government typically see. The mayor is in heavy demand for appearances at many and various meetings, dinners, and other special occasions. He also serves as *spokesman for the council*, enun-

ciating positions taken, informing the public about coming business, and fielding questions about the city's policies and intentions. In these two activities, the mayor builds an extensive contact with the public and the media, which can be a valuable resource. In addition, the mayor *presides* at meetings. In so doing, he sets the tone for meetings and may exert mild influence over outcomes by guiding the debate, by drawing more from some witnesses and limiting the contributions of others, and by determining the timing of resolution of issues. Councils often face difficult choices and, like

1. David M. Lawrence and Warren J. Wicker, eds., *Municipal Government in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: Institute of Government, 1982), pp. 51-52.

Table 2. Performance Levels in Various Leadership Functions by Types of Mayors in Council-Manager Cities

Type	Ceremony and presiding	Communication and facilitation	Organization and guidance	Promotion
Caretaker	Low	Low	Low	Low
Symbolic leader	High	Low	Low	Low
Coordinator	High	High	Low	Low
Activist/Reformer	High	Low	High	Variable Low
Promoter	High	Low	Low	High
Director	High	High	High	High

small groups generally, depend to some extent on the resolve of the leader either to decide or to delay.

Communication and facilitation. Beyond simply transmitting council views to the public, the mayor may also serve as an *educator*. In his relations with the council, the public, the media, and/or the manager and staff, the mayor identifies issues or problems for consideration, promotes awareness of important concerns, and seeks to expand citywide understanding by providing information. In this activity, he is not primarily promoting an idea, as in the activities discussed below, but informing and educating. For example, the mayor who systematically speaks to the press and groups about the increasing imbalance between needs and revenues helps to prepare the public for a tax increase at budget time.

As *liaison* person with the manager, he links the two major components of the system—the legislative body and administrative apparatus—and can facilitate communication and understanding between elected and appointed of-

icials. The mayor increases the manager's awareness of council preferences and can predict how the council will react to administrative proposals. Although the manager must maintain positive relations with each member of the council, the mayor-manager interaction is an efficient way to exchange information. For the mayor to hold up his end of the relationship, he must be sensitive to the concerns of all council members, accurately convey their sentiments, and share with them what he learns from the manager.

Finally, as *team-builder* the mayor works to coalesce the council and build consensus. In this regard, he promotes cohesion without trying to guide the council in any particular direction. Council members do not automatically work well together, and the larger the council the less harmony there is likely to be. The goal here is not agreement or likemindedness, but rather to approach city business as a common enterprise. The mayor as team leader seeks to promote full expression, help the council work through differences expeditiously, and en-

courage it to face issues and resolve them decisively.

Organization and policy guidance. In the roles considered so far, the mayor has stressed communication and coordination, whereas the group of roles to be discussed here involves influencing the direction of city government affairs and the content of policy. As *goal-setter*, the mayor establishes goals and objectives for council and manager, identifies problems, and sets the tone for the council. Some mayors keep track of a set of key objectives so that the council and the manager orient themselves to accomplishing these priority items.

The mayor may also be active as an *organizer* and stabilizer of the key relations within city government. He guides the council to recognition of its roles and responsibilities. He helps to define the pattern of interaction between council and manager, monitors it, and makes adjustments. The sharing and separation of responsibilities between the council and manager in this form of government is a complex relationship.² The mayor is uniquely situated to control it and better able than any other official to correct it, if change is needed. For example, the mayor may advise the manager to bring more matters to the council or fewer; he may intervene with a council member who is intruding into operational matters; or he may seek to alleviate tension between the council and staff before a serious rift develops. The mayor often handles these efforts in organization and stabilization privately. Indeed, his ability to make such adjustments out of the spotlight is one of his greatest advantages.

2. James H. Svava, "Dichotomy and Duality: Reconceptualizing the Relationship Between Policy and Administration in Council-Manager Cities," *Public Administration Review*, 45 (January/February 1985), 221-32.

Finally, the mayor may be a *policy advocate*. As an active guide in policy-making, he develops programs and lines up support or organizes opposition to proposals. In these activities, the mayor most closely resembles the executive mayor's public persona as the city's problem-solver. The chairman mayor has a potential for policy leadership that is not sufficiently recognized.³ Still, the mayor should be aware that advocating policies must be balanced with the other roles, not pursued to the exclusion of others. He must proceed subtly and more indirectly than the executive mayor, who can launch a new proposal with a press conference and has extensive resources for building coalitions. Still, the chairman mayor can influence the perspectives and decisions of the council and the manager. Especially if he is a mayor elected directly by the voters rather than a member of the council who has been elected to the mayorship by his council colleagues (as some mayors are), the mayor has a vague mandate to lead, but he must take care not to alienate the council and isolate himself by moving too far away from it as an assertive advocate of new policies.

Promotion. Conceptually distinct from the functions already discussed is the mayor's role in promoting and defending the city. He may be involved in external relations and help secure agreement among parties to a project. For some mayors, the *promoter* role is a simple extension of ceremonial tasks. Others are active initiators of contacts and help develop possibilities for the city. As official representative, the mayor has extensive dealings with officials in other

governments and may serve as a key participant in formulating agreements with state or federal officials, developers, and others who seek joint ventures with city government. The mayor may also take the lead in projecting a favorable image of the city and seek to "sell" others on investment in it.

Types of leadership

The kind of mayoral leadership an incumbent provides depends on which roles he performs and how well. The combinations of activities pursued by individual mayors is varied, but certain general types are clear.⁴ Mayors develop a leadership type for themselves by the way they combine the four dimensions of leadership. (See Table 2.)

The mayor could invest so little in the office and define its scope so narrowly that he is simply a *caretaker*—a uniformly underdeveloped type of leadership. For most mayors, the presiding and ceremonial tasks are inescapable because they are legally required or inherent parts of the job. Mayors who perform no other roles may be called *symbolic heads* of their government. Such narrowly defined leadership will not meet the needs of the modern governmental system. Although he serves as presiding officer, ceremonial head, and spokesman, such a mayor makes no effort to unify the council members, keep them informed, communicate with the public, intervene between the council and manager, and so forth. As a consequence, the council is likely to be divided, confused, and disorganized, and the manager's influence will expand.

If he does undertake the unifying, informing, communicating and intervening tasks, the mayor becomes a *coordinator*. Pursuing these activities effectively is essential to a smoothly functioning council-manager government with strong elected leadership. Council members do not always work together well; nor do the council, manager, and public necessarily interact smoothly. The coordinator is a team leader; he keeps the manager and council in touch and interacts with the public and outside agencies in order to improve communication. He helps to achieve high levels of shared information. But since he is weak in policy guidance, he contributes little to policy formulation (at least, no more than any other member of the council.) The coordinator is not a "complete" type of leader, since the organizing and guidance roles are not part of his repertoire.

There are two other incomplete types of leader. One of them has two variations—the activist and the reformer. This type emphasizes policy guidance and advocacy but neglects coordinative activities, especially team-building. The *activist* wants to get things accomplished quickly and succeeds by force of his personality and the presence of a working majority on the council. Although influential, the activist is viewed by some members of the council (perhaps even his own supporters) as abrasive and exclusionary in his leadership. The tenure of this type of mayor is marked by successful policy initiatives along with friction and disgruntlement among the council members. The *reformer* launches noble campaigns that have little prospect of success because he has limited support on the council. The reformer is more concerned with enunciating ideas about what the city should do than working with the council and maintaining coordination. As a result, he is likely to be ineffective as a policy leader

3. Nelson Wikstrom, "The Mayor As a Policy Leader in the Council-Manager Form of Government: A View from the Field," *Public Administration Review* 39 (May/June 1979), 270-76.

4. A review of the literature and typology of roles in mayor-council and council-manager cities is presented in James H. Svara and James W. Bohmbach, "The Mayoralty and Leadership in Council-Manager Government," *Popular Government* 42 (Winter 1976), 1-6.

because he is isolated from the rest of the council.

Another incomplete form of leadership found occasionally is the mayor who specializes in promotion. The *promoter* role may be combined with any of the other types and is becoming increasingly important for all mayors. The mayor who is excessively involved in promotion, however, may devote so much time to traveling and selling the city that he gives little attention to other aspects of the job. This type of leader may be more successful at negotiating agreement among developers, financial institutions, and government agencies for a major project than he is at welding a majority within the council. The specialized promoter leaves a vacuum of responsibility for tasks involving coordination, organization, and policy guidance, and others must try to fill it.

The *director* is a complete type of mayor who not only contributes to smooth functioning but also provides a general sense of direction. A primary responsibility of the council is to determine the city government's mission and its broad goals. The director contributes significantly to consideration of broad questions of purpose. One mayor suggested that "my toughest job was keeping the council's attention on the horizon rather than on the potholes."

This type of mayor stands out as a leader in the eyes of the council, the press, and the public, but he must use that recognition as a source of leverage rather than control. He can enhance the influence of elected officials by unifying the council, filling the policy vacuum that can exist on the council, and guiding policy toward goals that meet the community's needs. Furthermore, he is actively involved in monitoring and adjusting relationships within city government to maintain balance, cooperation, and high standards. No one else can attack the causes of friction between the council and

manager (which may be produced by failings of either party) or promote the constructive interaction that is needed for effective performance. This mayor does not usurp the manager's prerogatives or diminish his leadership. In fact, in the organizer role, the mayor seeks to enhance the manager's ability to function as the chief executive officer. In sum, although the director does not become the driving force as the executive mayor can be, he is the guiding force in city government.

Conclusion

The council-manager form of government needs certain contributions from the mayor in order to function smoothly. At a minimum, the mayor should accept the coordinator type of leadership in order to facilitate exchange of information among public, council, and staff and to help the council operate more effectively. This attention to the internal dynamics of city government and relationships with the public is crucial for complete leadership. If a mayor is to shape both the process and the direction of city government, he cannot ignore the coordinative dimension; he can achieve victories over the short run but may become an isolated reformer. The mayor who defines the job as simply symbolic leadership is ignoring many important roles that are needed for effective city government.

Voters will have difficulty assessing whether a candidate has the qualities and intentions needed to be a good mayor for their city. In meetings with candidates, it is important to find out how they conceive the office and how they would relate to other officials. Priorities and ideas about policy are important, because they are likely to be manifested in the intricate details of interaction handled by the mayor. It is also important to know how the

prospective mayor will work with others to accomplish his policy goals. The media should try to find out how the candidates perform as leaders in small groups. The performance of incumbents can be assessed against the checklist of roles outlined in Table 1. The standards for assessing performance must be grounded in the conditions of that community and in what kind of mayor the city needs. Given the ambiguous nature of the mayor's office, these efforts by citizens to learn about candidates take on a special importance. In the process, voters not only assess the candidates but also help shape expectations for the office itself.

For candidates and incumbents, it is time to abandon the notion that the mayor's office is "what one chooses to make of it." This oft-heard statement is misleading in two important respects. First, the activities of a good mayor are not matters of choice. The increasing demands on city governments mean that these governments need strong leadership from the mayor, at least as a coordinator and preferably as a director. If the mayor does not undertake these activities, a serious vacuum exists in council-manager government. Therefore, a good mayor *must* perform certain roles.

Second, the statement fosters the misconception that mayors who seek to define the responsibilities of their post broadly are on an "ego trip." They could, it would seem, just as well "choose" to be the first among equals on the council rather than make a big deal of being the mayor. That position is not consistent with this study's analysis of leadership in the large North Carolina cities. The nature of the office in council-manager government requires that the mayor be prepared to accept certain responsibilities reflected in the ten roles. He does so not because of inflated self-esteem but because the position calls for assumption of responsibility. Indeed, the mayor who provides

complete leadership has accepted restraints on his freedom and the obligation to be an invisible leader within the council as well as a public advocate. The same logic applies to similar positions, such as the chairman or chairwoman of the county board of commissioners or the school board. Whoever occupies

such offices should be expected to assert leadership across a wide range of roles and should not be faulted for doing so.

In conclusion, the council-manager mayor can contribute substantially to the performance of his government and the betterment of his community. The position is

not a pale imitation of the executive mayor's office in mayor-council city but rather a unique leadership position that requires distinctive qualities. Council-manager cities ask the mayor not to run the show but to bring out the best in council and staff and to foster a common sense of purpose.

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Sharing the Load of Governance: The Manager's Responsibilities

James H. Svava
Associate Professor of Political Science
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

The roles and responsibilities of the local government manager are subjects of continuing fascination to practitioners and scholars. In recent publications from ICMA, there is increased recognition that the manager's role is broader than that of an administrative technician, yet the boundaries of that role are not clearly identified. The local government management profession is exploring new territory in its search for effectiveness, excellence, and ideals.¹ The effort falls short, however, because of a tendency to cling to the simplistic view that policy and administration are the separate spheres of the council and the manager. In order to better understand the responsibilities of the manager in American cities, we must find an alternative to the "dichotomy" model.

One example illustrates the problem. The recently announced City Management Declaration of Ideals is a challenging statement of the high aspirations of the profession. The first ideal is to promote the "existence and effectiveness of representative local government." An interpretation of the declaration (*Public Management*, August 1984) from the perspective of Peters and

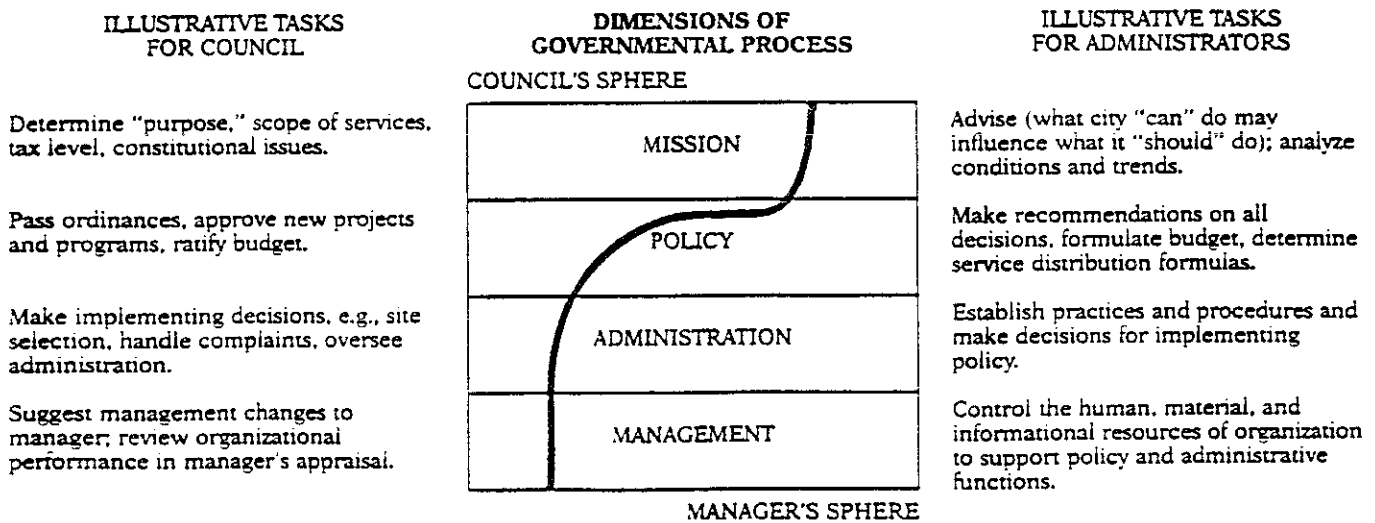
Waterman's principles of excellence suggested that managers could accomplish that ideal by "simple form and lean staff." How can an administrative strategy be sufficient to achieving the broad-ranging ideal of making "representative democratic government work"? The answer is to fall back upon the dichotomy model of responsibilities. As William H. Hansell put it,

"Elected officials perform the task for which they are best qualified—making policy and moderating the level and the standards of service and commitment in the community. A professional manager is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the government and for the delivery of services."

A realistic and workable outline of the manager's responsibilities must recognize that the chief executive officer is a full-fledged participant in the governance of his or her community and not simply responsible for the administration of its services. Furthermore, like it or not, the council is far more involved in administration and even in day-to-day operations than the simple dichotomy model would suggest. The facts belie the di-

Figure 1. Dichotomy-Duality Model

Mission-Management Separation with Shared Responsibility for Policy and Administration



The curved line suggests the division between the council's and the manager's spheres of activity, with the council to the left and the manager to the right of the line.

The division presented is intended to roughly approximate a "proper" degree of separation and sharing. Shifts to either the left or right would indicate improper incursions.

From "Dichotomy and Duality: Reconceptualizing the Relationship between Policy and Administration in Council-Manager Cities," *Public Administration Review* 45 (1985).

chotomy model, and neither the manager's policy role nor the council's administrative activities are necessarily inappropriate.

In order to better understand how responsibilities are and should be divided, the first step is to revise our conceptualization of council-manager relations. This is not an exercise in iconoclasm. A city manager observed to me in a recent interview that the mythical symbols of council-manager government are important, and that harm could be done by "exposing" the deviations from them. On the contrary, the proposed revision builds upon the traditional divisions and incorporates the symbols of this form of government, while at the same time acknowledging the realities of official interactions in the governmental process. Put simply, the approach recognizes that some responsibilities are separate and some are shared.

The Dichotomy-Duality Model

After extensive interviewing with councilmembers and administrators, I became convinced that the root of the problem in assigning responsibilities is an inadequate definition of the major governmental functions. It is commonplace to divide the work of government between policy determination and policy execution, yet each of these can be further subdivided. The determination of policy involves defining purpose and setting broad goals—the formulation of mission—as well as the specification of detailed middle-range policy, such as the content of the budget or formulas for service delivery.

Execution involves the implementation of policy, i.e., the transition of policies into operating programs, which shall be referred to as administration, and the creation and maintenance of personnel, budgeting, informational, and other systems, which sustain but are independent of policy and administration. These latter activities are management. There is a conceptual dichotomy between mission and management, which represent activities that come close to being "pure" policy, on the one hand, and "pure" operations, on the other. Policy and administration, in contrast, are a duality, distinct but inseparable aspects of the process of developing and delivering government programs.

The division of responsibility for these functions, illustrated in Figure 1, is based on typical patterns observed first in the five cities over 100,000 in population in North Carolina and since confirmed through research in a number of large manager cities outside the state. Furthermore, it is normatively tenable because it provides both for democratic control and for insulation of staff from inappropriate political interference.

The council dominates mission formulation, although the manager plays a major advisory role through administrative planning, analyzing conditions and trends, and developing proposals. The principle of political supremacy is protected by the control of elected officials over decisions that create the framework for specific policy choices, whether these choices are made by council or staff. In policy, the manager has a slightly larger space than the council because of the large amount of policy advice and policy setting by administrators, but the greater "quantity" of managerial policy making does not alter the council's ultimate responsibility for all policy.

The staff has the much larger role in administration, although the council makes a substantial contribution to this sphere. The most common form of intervention in administration accompanies councilmember handling of citizen complaints about services. In addition, councils frequently make specific decisions that serve to implement general policies or programs. Although the congressional veto of administrative actions was prohibited by the courts, city councils, especially through their committees, commonly step in to check and alter program implementation. Councils may also engage in formal and informal administrative oversight.

Management is the sphere of the manager, with the council's role limited to approving management "policy," such as the nature of the pay plan, suggestions about management improvement, support of managerial initiatives, and assessment through appraisal of the manager. The manager presumably has final authority over most operational questions, and, therefore, the insulation of administrators from interference by elected officials is secured. Unlike the details of administration, in which councilmembers take an active interest, the details of management are usually handled by the manager. This interpretation of management is not intended to diminish its importance. This function encompasses the development and operation of the organization that does the work of city government. Good management is a precondition for effective governance.

To summarize, the dichotomy-duality model is based on the separation of responsibility for mission and management and shared responsibility for policy and administration. There is an unavoidable mixing of authority and activity in policy and administration that coexists with the more clearly divisible responsibilities for mission and management, although in these latter functions the manager and council, respectively, fill a supportive role.

The Manager's Responsibilities

The dichotomy-duality model can be used to develop a list of the manager's responsibilities that encompasses his extensive contributions to the governance of the community and provides the basis for effective interaction with the council. A working relationship obviously involves two parties, but the manager can induce a positive response from elected officials by adopting roles that enhance the position of the council while protecting his professional prerogatives. The manager, in his relationship with the council, must be both assertive and supportive at the same time. Assertiveness is required to clarify his role and to tell the council what it must do, and supportiveness is needed to help the council discharge its responsibilities.

With regard to mission, the council needs help with decisions that it must make. The manager should conduct comprehensive administrative planning in order to identify trends and emerging problems and to frame issues for the council. Ironically, the most important task of councilmembers is probably the hardest and least natural for them, given a tendency toward short time perspective and piecemeal solutions to immediate problems. Professional administrators, on the other hand, by temperament and training, tend to adopt a proactive stance to community problems. Studies of council decision making, as reported in *The Effective Local Government Administrator* (page 61), conclude

that major choices about future development constitute 80 percent of the importance among decisions but account for only 5 percent of the time spent by the council. The manager should provide councilmembers with the information and encouragement they need to chart a course for their jurisdiction.

If mission is clear, the manager can more easily fill his policy function. As Henry Mintzberg (*The Nature of Managerial Work*, page 95) has observed about private sector chief executive officers, the basic reasons why organizations need managers are to ensure, first, that the organization "serves its basic purpose," and, second, that it "serves the ends of those persons who control it." The public manager can be expected to operate according to the same premises, keeping in mind that the public indirectly controls the organization, and provide policy leadership that is consistent with basic purpose.

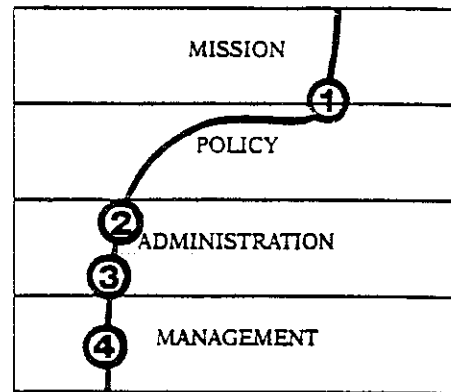
In administration, managers can be more supportive in responding to the council and providing information for oversight. Increasingly, councilmembers see themselves as ombudsmen and are very interested in constituent complaints. The manager can respond to this concern by regularizing the process of complaint handling, as several managers in the study cities have done. A designated staff member, acting for the manager, receives complaints from councilmembers, refers the matter to the appropriate office, and provides a follow-up report to the councilmember of the action taken. The manager should insist that response to inquiries or complaints coming directly from citizens be equal to that given to councilmember transmitted complaints. A method of tracking complaints and using them to measure responsiveness and to identify systematic problems in service delivery also can be established, with periodic reports given to councilmembers to lessen their fear that they will miss out on important indicators of staff performance. Despite administrative procedures for complaint handling and reporting, however, the manager should recognize that elected officials need to provide constituency services and will continue to be involved in administration in this way.

The other major change in this area is to help structure and provide the information required for systematic oversight. As administrators incorporate more objectives and performance measures in their work plans and budgets, they are creating elements that will be useful in an oversight process that examines accomplishments in terms of objectives. Most cities, however, need to further develop effectiveness measures, such as those proposed by The Urban Institute and the ICMA (*How Effective Are Your Community Services*), and to strengthen their capacity to conduct evaluation research.

The whole approach to oversight will need to be developed in consultation with the council. This may appear to be a formidable new task for practitioners, yet improved oversight can be defended not only on the grounds of improving performance and promoting comprehensive assessment of services, but also as a process that will lessen burdens in other areas. With formalized oversight, need would be reduced for specific inquiries into administrative performance and for pursuing individual complaints. Therefore, the existing workload created by council checking activities would

Figure 2. Key Points in Interaction in Council-Manager Relations

COUNCIL'S SPHERE



MANAGER'S SPHERE

- 1 Goal setting activities
- 2 Council oversight of administration
- 3 Complaint handling by staff with reports to the council
- 4 Council appraisal of the manager and organizational performance

ideally be lessened, and the attention of council and staff alike would be directed toward the general rather than the random specifics of administration.

The manager should insist on the freedom to manage the organization, while helping the council to organize its appraisal activities more thoroughly and systematically. The manager is obligated to protect the staff from arbitrary or callous actions that impair performance and damage morale. The extent of the manager's control over council behavior is, of course, limited, unless he resorts to potentially self-destructive threats. It seems, however, that the likelihood of disruptive council actions is minimized if the manager has maintained the highest standards of management practice and if the council is fully aware of the quality of management. The council that raids departmental budgets to make cuts or threatens job reductions to wring out more savings presumably does not believe that the manager has maintained adequate control over budgeting or personnel. Therefore, it is in the interests of the manager to promote appraisal of the whole organization and to encourage the council to provide critical review, so as to expand support for improved management and to strengthen his prerogatives.

The changes are summarized in Figure 2, with the key points of interaction superimposed on the dichotomy-duality model. Managers need to help the council with (1) goal setting, (2) oversight, (3) complaint handling, and (4) appraisal of the manager and the organization. Doing so strengthens the manager's hand as a policy maker, implementer, and manager.

The Likelihood of Change by Managers ... and Councils

Is it realistic to expect city administrators to behave in the ways described? These responsibilities are consistent with two major streams in thought about

professional standards, both of which have received support in the past. Put together, the ethical requirements can be called the Neo-Traditional Public Administration. The approach recognizes the role of the manager as a policy shaper who is concerned about equity, openness, participation, and responsiveness—qualities stressed in the New Public Administration movement of the late sixties and early seventies. In addition, the standards implicit in the responsibilities reassert the importance of the longstanding values of efficiency, economy, and respect for the political authority.

The Declaration of Ideals asserts the same ethical imperatives. Strengthening representative government requires that administrators help elected officials meet their responsibility to determine the direction of community development and provide accountability to the public. Support for citizen participation, integration of the community, equitable service delivery, and a responsive and productive organization are all present among the ideals. The declaration advances the proposition that strong, conscientious professionals strengthen rather than threaten democratic government, a conclusion consistent with the dichotomy-duality model.

It is a bigger question whether the council will want or be able to change its tendencies, particularly a predilection for the particular over the general and for short-term over long-term action. As a collective body of equals, a council does not readily make rational choices concerning organization or behavior. Perhaps there is hope for change, however, if councilmembers realize that they are not the only policy makers and that their interest in administration is legitimate but can be satisfied in more constructive ways than is commonly done.

Using the dichotomy-duality model as a guide,

councilmembers can better recognize their unique roles and responsibilities. Interviews with councilmembers sometimes reveal a sense of malaise that they are not accomplishing anything in spite of (or because of) the sometimes frantic pace they maintain. They should feel more positive about what they contribute, especially as the formulators of mission for the organization. They can ease their anxiety about the activity and influence of manager and staff in policy by accepting the legitimacy and necessity of staff contributions, as long as they make decisions within the framework of goals set by the council. Furthermore, the council can acknowledge its interest in administration and move toward more systematic, rather than specific and episodic, involvement in it. Finally, the council can organize and broaden its appraisal of the manager and organizational performance. By so doing, it is in a better position to support the manager in making management changes, on the one hand, and to answer citizen queries about organizational efficiency, on the other.

The manager will benefit as well from a closer match between the council's perception of the manager's role and his actual behavior. The manager will have a stronger, more aware council with which to work. He will also have a clearer and broader mandate of responsibilities with expanded discretion, greater accountability, and more freedom to manage. The result can be higher involvement by both council and manager and more effective governance and administration in council-manager cities.

¹See *The Effective Local Government Administrator and Public Management* in April and May 1984 for applications of *In Search of Excellence* to local government; *PM* in August for the City Management Declaration of Ideals.

Supreme Court Expands Antitrust Protection for Local Governments

STATE GOVERNMENTS and their officials have long enjoyed immunity from antitrust liability in connection with many of their official activities. Under the so-called "state action" doctrine, such immunity was available at least where two tests were met: (1) the government or its officials acted pursuant to a clearly articulated state policy to displace competition in favor of other considerations, and (2) the

Philip C. Larson
Hogan & Hartson
Washington, D.C.

governmental conduct remained subject to active state supervision. Local governments and their officials, as well as private parties dealing with the state or local governments, also have this immunity under some circumstances.

The cases interpreting the "state action" doctrine did not make clear whether the conduct being challenged under the antitrust laws

must be *compelled* by the state in order to have been taken pursuant to a "clearly articulated state policy." They also were unclear on the issue whether "active state supervision" was necessary where a government or its official (as opposed to a private party) sought the protection of the state action doctrine. The United States Supreme Court recently issued two decisions that resolved these issues in a way that will benefit local governments, their officials, and private parties

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And the hardworking women, who are all too often relegated to clerical positions: How much are the good solid jobs they do day in and day out worth? What about the police dispatcher who tries to calm a screaming mother who has panicked about her choking child, and won't give her address? And the librarian who teaches a child to use the reference files? The secretaries who must cope with irate citizens who need someone to vent their wrath on?

We count so much on these people to handle emergencies, like resuscitating heart attack victims and putting out fires, and to do undesirable work such as cleaning pens in an animal shelter, opening clogged sewer lines, and making next-of-kin calls for traffic fatalities. Yet why do we perpetuate the myth that they are second class? One needs to ask, "What would we do without them?"

City hall workers are neither lazy nor stupid. They are the same as the rest of the world, susceptible to pressures, anxieties, motivations, fears, and whatever else affects the behavior of all working people. But most of all, like the rest of us, they are good people who work hard.

Still, the question remains: "Why can't the public give these people their due?" Is it ignorance, stereotyping, callousness, or some combination thereof? Is it bitterness, or simply a feeling that by virtue of paying taxes we "own" a cop or street maintenance worker? I don't believe it is any of this. My theory is that it is the myth. America is a country of researchers and writers, but I have yet to read any legitimate empirical data that support the idea that front-line workers at city hall aren't willing to work as hard as other folk. When I do, I'll concede my argument. Until then, I hope the critics of city hall workers will withdraw theirs. PM

—William E. Kirchoff
City Manager
Arlington, Texas

WORKSHOP

Clear Expectations Are Key to Successful Council/Staff Relationships

Serving as an effective link between the council and staff may be the most important role of a local government manager. Councils and staff often have legitimate but divergent views, which are a natural consequence of the perspectives from which each group views the world. The manager often serves as a translator and facilitator, ensuring that the council and staff work as a team and that natural differences of perspective don't detract from common goals.

Realistic and appropriate mutual expectations are fundamental to the success of council/staff relations. While the guidelines that follow are neither new nor earthshaking, they can serve as a broad basis for the review and discussion of council/staff relations.

What councils can (and should) expect from professional staff
Complete staff work. The staff is paid to analyze information and to make policy recommendations to the council. The council isn't obligated to agree with each staff recommendation, but it is entitled to the benefit of one. (Exceptions to this rule are areas considered strictly council prerogative.) The council, manager, and staff should all understand when a recommendation is expected and what constitutes complete staff work.

Making hard decisions easier. "A problem clearly stated is half solved." The staff has the time and expertise to wade through the vast detail that surrounds a complicated matter; it is the staff's job to analyze complex problems and identify issues and alternatives.

Communication. Councilmembers have a right to know

about important issues and events before they read about them in the newspapers. Staff should communicate regularly and systematically, providing all councilmembers with an equitable and consistent level of information.

Implementation of council policy. Staff should faithfully implement the council's intent, following through on all instructions and reporting back progress and results.

Performance and professionalism. Local government professionals are highly trained; the council should be able to expect professionalism, good manners, serious effort, and high-quality work from staff. Because their behavior reflects on the agency, staff members should conduct themselves with dignity on and off the job. Public service professionals should feel and demonstrate dedication.

Creativity. The staff should be resourceful and innovative in its approach to problems. To thrive in the eighties, local governments need energetic and creative people in leadership positions. The council should not only expect innovation from staff but should also applaud it.

The policy-making prerogative. Staff should be able to distinguish between what is policy and what is not. Policy matters should be brought to the council for consideration, and the resulting decision should be conscientiously implemented. If it is unclear whether a matter is a policy issue, it is best to assume that it is and bring it before the council.

Loyalty. The staff works for the council and should support the council in every reasonable way in dealing with other agencies, employees, the press, etc. Negative comments can seriously damage the trust on which good council/staff relations are founded.

Long-term planning. The daily brushfires of local government call for quick, pragmatic responses, but time must be made for strategic management. The staff should give adequate attention to long-term planning, par-

ticularly in areas such as financial management and capital facilities.

The council/manager plan.

Both the staff and the council must respect the lines of authority laid out in the plan. Staff members hold a strategic position, from which it is possible to undermine council's policy prerogative, but to do so fosters mistrust.

Responsiveness to citizens. Local government exists to serve the public, and staff can reasonably be expected to be responsive to citizens' needs. Just as the staff communicates regularly and effectively with the council, it should communicate with citizens and solicit their views. Complaints should be handled quickly and systematically.

What the staff can (and should) expect from the council

Hiring—and keeping—top-quality employees. The council should be willing to pay a competitive wage so that the best possible staff can be hired and retained. Stinginess in compensation usually proves to be "penny wise and pound foolish." The council should also support open and competitive recruitment when it is clear that quality would be compromised by a strict policy of promoting from within.

Clear policy direction. The intent of council policy should be stated clearly and unambiguously. Staff members cannot properly implement policy unless they fully understand it, and it is the responsibility of council to be sure that they do. Once policy has been set, administration should be left to the staff. Although it may be tempting to get involved in administration, councilmembers should take the "high road": set broad policy direction, leave implementation to staff, and confirm afterward that the intent of policy has been fulfilled.

Instructions to staff. The council should give instructions to the staff in a manner that accords with the principles of the council/manager system. For example, as-

signments should be directed to the manager and should originate in a consensus of the council, not with individual councilmembers. Councilmembers should contact staff directly only when the purpose is to communicate information—e.g., to report on conditions or describe a problem. Individual councilmembers should not contact staff with special requests.

Setting priorities. When the council barks, the staff jumps—but only so much work can be undertaken at one time, and the council should bark only when it is important. When the volume of work exceeds available staff time, the councils should set clear priorities—and authorize outside assistance if necessary.

Teamwork. The council should work as a team and should view itself as part of a team that includes staff. Councils should support and encourage team-building activities, perhaps including the use of an outside facilitator to conduct team-building sessions.

Performance goals and evaluations. Expecting and rewarding high performance is contagious; staff members are more likely to perform well if they feel that excellence is what is expected of them—and if the council notices and supports achievement.

The council should periodically evaluate its own effectiveness, communication, roles, expectations, and teamwork. Self-evaluation may be difficult, but it can make for a more effective council. Creative and positive confrontation can be useful in overcoming unstated difficulties that can obstruct a good working relationship.

The council should also periodically evaluate the manager; criteria for such evaluations should be made clear from the beginning, and the result should be specific suggestions from the council about performance.

Respect, honesty, and constructive criticism. The council should show personal and professional respect for staff; trust is essential to good council/staff relations. A

staff member should never be reprimanded in public; if a problem arises, the council should alert the manager, who can then handle the situation quietly and privately.

The council should also respect the staff's administrative and technical expertise. Although it may not choose to accept a staff recommendation, there is no need to be harshly critical of the recommendation in order to justify selecting another course.

The council and the staff will function best as a team if the council is forthright in dealing with the staff, creating trust and cooperation.

Councilmembers should try to be problem solvers, not just critics. Although criticism is sometimes necessary, it should be placed in a constructive context.

Responsiveness to new ideas. Creative staff work should be encouraged and supported by the council. As long as new ideas have been carefully thought through, the council should not be afraid to try innovative suggestions from staff.

Leadership. The behavior of councilmembers—both in public and in private—should reflect the trust placed in them as leaders of the community. In dealing with staff, councilmembers should keep in mind that they are dealing with employees who look to them for guidance and support.

Saying no. Councilmembers need to be able to say no, whether it's to citizens or to staff. Being too indulgent exacts a big price tag in the long run.

Although this list does not cover every possible contingency, it can serve as a basis for defining expectations. Reviewed thoughtfully and regularly, it can lead to better understanding between councils and staff. PM

—Terrence L. Ellis
City Manager
Kirkland, Washington and
Kevin C. Duggan
City Manager
Campbell, California