

Moving Away from Bricks and Mortar

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Evolving since it was first implemented in Sumter, South Carolina, in 1912, the council-manager form of government has been examined continually to understand the uniquely American aspect of governance it provides. Purviews of the profession have highlighted the way managers view themselves with regard to their primary objective of implementing the policies of their councils.

The changing needs of communities are inherently linked to the evolving council-manager form of government. As needs change, the roles of a manager often change as well. And as the 1990s begin, the issues of human infrastructure will top the list of priorities of communities around the nation. As managers find themselves addressing human infrastructure issues within their communities, the specific roles they find themselves in will reflect this new orientation.

Surveying Managers' Roles

A 1987 ICMA survey analyzing the organizational structure and decision-making components of the mayor-council and council-manager forms of government highlighted specific roles that managers and chief administrative officers articulate as being important in order to carry out their daily duties. Eau Claire, Wisconsin, City Manager Eric Anderson, in a 1989 article, summed up the responses to the survey and shared some interesting discoveries with regard to the assumed traditional role of managers.¹

While the survey does not examine specifically the role managers play in dealing with human infrastructure problems, it does shed some light on how managers view themselves overall as they deal with either capital or human infrastructure problems. These generic roles can help one to understand that being

involved with human infrastructure issues, although a difficult task, does not necessarily mean managers must reorient themselves to new roles. Managers have the orientation and managerial experience to respond to problems that are placed upon the human element.

When asked on the survey about the most important roles a manager plays, managers listed policy director, facilitator, and financial administrator. For chief administrative officers, the roles of coordinator, facilitator, and financial administrator were chosen as the most important. Without delineating the philosophical differences behind the duties of managers and chief administrative officers, it is sufficient for purposes of this article to examine these four roles—policy director, facilitator, coordinator, and financial administrator—and how they are exemplified when dealing with human infrastructure issues.

Bridges of Human Infrastructure

While a bridge may suffer from physical decay and be fixed with exact and absolute precision by an engineer, the problems that are inflicted upon the human condition are inherently harder to solve. Managers are realizing that the "bridges" of human infrastructure are not necessarily separate problems to be fixed one at a time; rather, each bridge often depends on another for support. Human infrastructure problems, whether child care, housing, or drug abuse, are interrelated, as are the roles managers find themselves in.

Local governments are on the frontline of community demands for social well-being and economic potential. Managers know that equally important to the development and maintenance of the physical infrastructure is the creation of a healthy social environment. Policy director, an important role listed by managers, reflects a commitment to creating a healthy human infrastructure.

Under the role of policy director, managers bring an unbiased, level-headed viewpoint to human infrastructure issues. As Anderson states, the manager is "one who can link policy formulation with the technical and managerial know-how necessary to develop consistency and control in the service delivery system."

As policy directors, managers must evaluate all aspects of a policy issue and recommend the "best" solution, based on their technical expertise and managerial experience. Managers bring a unique element to the policy process, as they represent its key component: implementation. Elected officials conceive solutions; managers can ensure success through their expertise of implementa-

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tion know-how. Considering the complexity of human infrastructure issues, the ability for managers to articulate managerial know-how in this field is of paramount importance.

The role of facilitator is to assist and make easier. Considering that managers serve at the pleasure of the council, facilitator was ranked as the most important role for managers. Managers have the primary task of keeping council informed and assisting in the formulation of policy. Tangential to this is the ability for a manager to be aware of human infrastructure issues facing the community.

The problems of individuals often are not visible to everyone in the community. While the visible extremes of gang warfare, poverty, homelessness, and the neglect of children are highlighted on the evening news, they are not the problems that most communities face each day. A community nevertheless might face drug abuse in the high schools, at-risk families who might fall into poverty, and latchkey children.

If one individual does know the pains of a community, however, it is a local government manager. Each day a human infrastructure issue will cross the manager's desk exclaiming, "Do something about me!" How appropriate then that a manager realizes that the most important role is as a facilitator.

Ahead: The Coordinator Role

Inextricably linked with the facilitator role is the coordinator role. If a survey is done again at the end of the decade, perhaps coordinator will be ranked as the most important role for managers and chief administrative officers. The issue of cooperation is increasingly receiving preeminent importance because of the complexity of problems faced by communities. The National Civic League, in its recently adopted Metropolitan Governance Statement,² stated:

No single municipality, however well governed, will be able to handle such mounting problems as traffic congestion, air pollution, inadequate mass transit, or solid and industrial waste. Nor can society's mounting social dilemmas—homelessness, inadequate housing, rising racism, the abandonment of children—be effectively addressed on anything less than a comprehensive, region-wide basis.

Of the programs highlighted in this *PM*, coordination between various organizational entities stands out as a major component of success. Managers who are coordinators foster

cooperation by ensuring that schools, non-profit organizations, counties, other cities, and even the private sector are brought into the decision-making process.

A manager can foster cooperation internally. An internal task force can be created to look for avenues of cooperation between departments, examining how local government departments can contribute to the development of a solution together. A primary function within the role of coordinator is to highlight the positive ramifications of cooperating on problems that have linkages beyond the boundaries of one jurisdiction or department.

Today as in the past, the role of financial administrator is ranked as a priority for local government managers. Now more than ever, local governments must seek out resources to fund the various solutions that are to be implemented. Seeking out funding, diversifying funds, and accounting for funds spent through the evaluation of programs are synonymous duties in capital as well as human infrastructure.

Not Just Brick and Mortar

The major challenge for local government managers in the 1990s is to realize they are no longer just "brick and mortar" practitioners; rather, they are managers who work continuously in roles that can encompass the "human elements" of the community. While creating programs to solve human infrastructure problems, managers ironically do not necessarily articulate an image of themselves that reflects involvement within human infrastructure issues.

As the various programs highlighted in this *PM* show, however, managers are incorporating human infrastructure issues into their daily duties by creating innovative and coordinated solutions. The image of managers who work to create these programs reflects a sense of duty to the human problems in their communities. In improving the human infrastructure of a local government, managers do not necessarily need to make major structural changes within their roles. Rather, managers must view the actions they take within these roles as reflecting a personal challenge to them to bring a unique perspective to issues regarding human infrastructure. **PM**

¹Anderson, Eric, "Two Major Forms of Government: Two Types of Professional Management." *The Municipal Year Book*, 1989. ICMA, Washington, D.C.

²The Metropolitan Governance Statement, which recommends a regional approach to solving increasing urban problems, was adopted by the Board of Directors of the National Civic League on October 29, 1989. For more information, contact the League at 1601 Grant Street, Suite 250, Denver, Colorado 80203, 303/832-5615.