

Renewing ICMA and the Profession Through "Next Phase" Managers –Some Thoughts on the ICMA Strategic Plan–

This thought piece is about renewal. In the face of accelerating change and ever-morphing challenges, our local government profession and ICMA both need talent in order to innovate and renew ourselves. As ICMA begins a two-year strategic planning process, it is quite clear that the profession and our association face a demographic crisis that challenges our very viability. A whole generation of senior managers leaving full-time local government work has created the crisis. These same managers may also provide a vital response in their next phase of work and service.

Demographic Tsumami

The U.S. along with other advanced economies is confronted by an "age wave." Across the U.S. economy, 80 million baby boomers (born 1946-1964) are retiring and only 50 million Generation X'ers (born 1965-1977) are available to replace us. The largest "talent replacement gaps" are in administrative and managerial occupations. This demographic tsunami will hit the public sector even harder than the private sector, since there was a greater proportion of JFK-generation college graduates who joined government service than business careers.

The trend analysis undertaken by the ICMA Strategic Planning Committee has rightfully focused on the graying of the local government management profession. In 1971, 5% of all appointed managers were over 50 years of age. In 2002, 50% of all appointed managers were over 50.

Recognizing these demographics, ICMA will surely strengthen our support of "Next Generation" initiatives and devote more organizational resources in order to accelerate the development of Gen X'ers so they can take on the leadership of local governments and our association. I predict that "Next Generation" strategies will be a core element of the new ICMA Strategic Plan.

However, the local government management profession and ICMA cannot solely rely on developing the talent of emerging leaders. We must also figure out ways of utilizing the talent, capabilities, energies, and knowledge of "Next Phase" managers as they leave full-time employment. We simply cannot fore-go this seasoned talent just because they retire. The challenges facing the profession are simply overwhelming. In a white paper drafted for the Strategic Planning Committee by ICMA Executive Director Bob O'Neill, the Committee took note of global immigration, emerging technologies, instantaneous communication, environmental degradation, wealth disparity, distrust in government, the growth of the non-profit sector, economic globalization, and other looming changes that call into question and threaten the way we traditionally do business. We cannot simply rely on Next Generation managers as these waves of change sweep over our local government organizations and undercut the ability of our

association to assist us. Next Generation managers will be overwhelmed with the demands of their new leadership positions. Clearly, we must supplement new talent with seasoned talent. The profession and our association can no longer allow retiring managers to simply drift away and become marginalized.

Three Sets of Needs

As half the seasoned managers in local government and ICMA leave full-time employment in the next five years, we must focus on the issue of renewal. Renewal connotes "refreshing," "revitalizing," "re-energizing." Therefore, to successfully confront the daunting challenges at this historic juncture, we must explore three sets of renewal needs:

1. What are the needs of the local government profession as we face a "brain drain" and shrinking talent pool?
2. What are the talent and knowledge needs of ICMA as a support organization during these turbulent times?
3. What are the needs of retiring managers as they embark on their next phase of life?

Confronting Ageism

Traditionally, most managers have retired from full-time local government positions and soon become disengaged in their profession and our association. Our ageist prejudices promote this disengagement. Somehow we believe that overnight most retired managers have become too old, dried up, and of little use to those of us remaining in the trenches of local government management. While ICMA does continue with the Range Rider program, we full-time managers under-value and thus under-utilize the Range Riders even though they are highly skilled and have tremendous skills and knowledge.

A Liberating "Third Age"

In addition to actively looking at Next Phase managers as a resource pool for ICMA and the profession, we must help managers leaving full-time positions confront our mindsets about the future. All of us have uncertainties, anxieties, and fears that limit our vision and opportunities about our next life phase. As we baby-boomers approach our next phase, let us eliminate from our language the term "retirement" which means "withdrawal." Let us recognize that we are about to enter a new liberating "third age". During our first age, we learned full-time. During the second age, we worked full-time. Traditionally, we play full-time in the third age. However, as baby-boomers enter the third age, we now have the freedom and time to develop a portfolio of self-fulfilling experiences that can include working, serving, learning, playing, loving, creating, and exploring. True happiness in our next phase is not about material comfort or idleness, but rather about seeking further meaning in our lives.

Most of us have received great meaning through our service and our identity as local government managers. We have fulfilled many of our values and even our dreams in great measure due to our meaningful occupations.

Recently I conducted a training workshop for seasoned managers entitled “Crafting Your Next Life Phase – The Art of Self Renewal.” As part of my research for the workshop, I interviewed ten colleagues who had successfully transitioned into their next phase. While most wanted and needed to travel, re-invigorate key relationships, and explore their creativity and even spirituality in their third age, all of them told me that they would feel adrift if they did not stay connected and provide service to their profession.

So, as we craft ICMA’s new Strategic Plan, what are some meaningful roles for Next Phase managers that will renew themselves, the profession, and our association?

New Roles for Renewal

Through its new Strategic Plan, ICMA must develop and legitimize a menu of meaningful opportunities for members who are now leaving full-time positions. Here are eight preliminary ideas for ICMA to help Next Phase managers renew the profession and our association.

1. Change Our Language

ICMA leadership has successfully opened up our association to younger non-chief executives by raising our consciousness about the “age wave” crisis and changing our language. We have now committed to preparing the “next generation”, embraced “emerging leaders” and encouraged credentialed managers to become “legacy leaders.” This new language has helped us market ICMA’s Next Generation Strategy and transform our ICMA organization.

ICMA’s leadership now must create new lexicology and imagery to create an organizational readiness for opening up the association to “Next Phase” managers and providing opportunities and resources to engage them in “encore” work. We must banish the concept of retirement and talk about using the talent, capabilities, skills, knowledge, and energies of seasoned leaders who have left full-time employment yet want to maintain a connection to their vocation of local government service. Different language helps transform our mind-sets, our attitudes and ultimately our behaviors.

2. Provide Next Phase Life Planning

ICMA–RC does a good job in helping seasoned managers become financially secure and develop a financial plan for retirement. Recognizing our very decent pensions and RC investments, the biggest issue for seasoned managers is to develop a new life plan for their next phase which includes a mix of meaningful relationships, leisure, work, community service, education, and creative and spiritual pursuits. How can ICMA University take the lead in preparing managers for a fulfilling third age?

3. Focus on Legacy

As we are about to exit the “center stage” of our careers, we begin to think about legacy. Will our legacy be a new park or community center, a redeveloped downtown, affordable housing, or a renovated sewer system or other infrastructure? I suggest that preparing the next generation of managers will be key to our notion of legacy. In fact, the noted psychologist Erik Erickson emphasized that “generativity” (caring for and supporting younger people) is a key developmental task of mid-life.

ICMA has begun to help us focus on generativity tasks. Coaching is now an accepted activity to renew one’s ICMA credential. “Legacy leaders” is a new ICMA program that helps credentialed ICMA Managers coach and support Gen X professionals in the ICMA Emerging Leaders Development Program.

Let me suggest, however, that Next Phase managers should be the largest pool of legacy leaders. They have skills, experiences and time to serve as coaches. How is ICMA going to engage them in fulfilling their generativity needs?

In terms of legacy, we not only need to better prepare those already in the local government “pipeline,” but also attract young people into the pipeline. Therefore, the profession needs to reach out to university students and market local government management careers. However, full-time professionals do not have the time to design university outreach programs or attend career fairs or speak on a regular basis in college classrooms. How do we provide a program structure at the ICMA and State Association levels to engage “third-age” managers in these legacy-building endeavors?

4. Facilitate Interim Assignments

With more and more chief executives, department heads, and other senior managers leaving full-time employment, ICMA can play a mediating role between local governments desperately needing interim management at senior levels and Next Phase managers who would like to work on an interim basis. For instance,

ICMA could develop a website listing interested Next Phase managers, their resumes, and desired interim assignments and thereby help local governments find a suitable match with an interim chief executive or department head. The website could also provide support resources for both local government and interim managers. For a reasonable fee, ICMA could even provide some screening services for local governments and potential interim managers.

5. Enhance Peer Assistance

ICMA is in the business of providing peer assistance in a variety of areas, including environmental management, emergency preparedness and response, police and fire standards, and economic development. One of the problems is that ICMA sometimes finds it difficult to secure help from ICMA members who are too engaged in their full-time positions to provide the peer assistance. Next Phase or "Encore" managers again have the time as well as the skills and knowledge to provide a more robust peer assistance program for local governments across the country.

6. Expand ICMA International Work

The same issue confronts ICMA international development work – the need for more seasoned managers to engage in international aid work. ICMA has relied on retired managers and will continue to do so. I believe that the wave of Next Phase managers will allow ICMA to greatly expand and enhance its efforts in the international arena (assuming continued funding from U.S. AID, World Bank and other sources). A very positive sign is that international work is a natural for third-age baby-boomers. After all, we came of age during the JFK era (and the inauguration of the Peace Corp), joined local government because our values to serve and build community, and still want to make a difference. ICMA has recently retooled and better promoted its International Development Institute in order to prepare managers for overseas assignments. And, of course, there are "Doctors Without Borders" and now "Engineers Without Borders," why not "City Managers Without Borders?"

7. Open Up ICMA Leadership Roles

ICMA has done a good job in recent years opening up association leadership opportunities for Assistants and other Emerging Leaders. All our ICMA Committees include next gen members. The ICMA Board even has designated positions for Assistants. Why not do the same for Next Phase members? For example in terms of time and energy, who could better lead an Annual Conference Program Committee – an over-committed full-time manager or a Next Phase manager? Given the demographic crisis facing ICMA, is it time to create a slot on the ICMA Board for Next Phase managers?

8. Reconceptualize and Re-Brand Range Riders Program

Given that we do not fully utilize Range Riders, perhaps ICMA should reconceptualize the role of retired managers who provide pro bono services to full-time local government managers in their area or region. ICMA has begun to experiment with a few "Senior Advisors" which may become a better model. In any case, a program of Next Phase managers providing pro bono support services for full-time colleagues needs a new brand, professional legitimacy, and real work. In short, ICMA has a tremendous opportunity as this crucial turning point to identify and legitimize new roles, create support mechanisms, and provide new pathways for learning, enrichment, and even adventure.

Attention, Resources, and Partnership

ICMA's new Strategic Plan must not only focus on dramatically expanding our Next Gen effort but also emphasize the theme of self-renewal for senior managers, the profession, and ICMA itself. The "Next Phase Opportunity" is just as critical as the "Next Gen Challenge." They both stem from the same demographic threat.

After focusing attention on this need for self-renewal, the Strategic Plan can suggest a variety of implementation actions for ICMA:

- Develop an ICMA Board sub-committee to focus on responding to this renewal challenge (in the same way that the Board has created a Next Gen sub-committee)
- Reallocate staff resources to develop program resources responsive to the Next Phase issue
- Begin to develop and implement the menu of program opportunities discussed above
- Create a website (www.icma.org/nextphase) just like the nextgen website, featuring resources and publications as well as peer assistance, international development, and interim management opportunities
- Engage State Associations in providing meaningful opportunities for Next Phase managers
- Partner with other organizations that are natural allies. Given that the majority of its assets have been generated by baby-boomers in government service, would ICMA-RC have an interest in sponsoring some of the program ideas promoted in this thought piece?

A Personal Note

Like many of my ICMA colleagues, I too am a baby-boomer who has begun to think about (with much uncertainty and trepidation) life after full-time city management. Thanks to my retirement pension and ICMA-RC investments, I have the financial

security to leave full-time local government management. However, some big questions remain. As I leave the “center stage” of my career, how do I maintain connection to my identity as a local government manager? How do I enrich my next phase with fulfilling “encore” experiences that include new learning, service, contribution, and adventure? In the next season of my life, how do I continue to make a difference in this world?

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To provide feedback on this “next phase challenge” or the other big issues facing local government and our profession, go to www.icma.org/strategicplanning and click on “discussion forum.”

References

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Possible Pull-Quotes

"The profession and our association can no longer allow retiring managers to simply drift away and become marginalized."

"We believe that overnight most retired managers have become too old, dried up, and of little use to those of this remaining in the trenches of local government management."

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"How do I enrich my next phase with fulfilling 'encore' experiences that include new learning, service, contribution, and adventure?"