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cover story



**MEGA
ISSUES
DRIVE LOCAL
CHANGES**

Managers Tackle
Future Challenges
With Resolve

Elizabeth Kellar,
WASHINGTON, D.C.



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This issue of *PM* is available online
at icma.org/pm January 1, 2011.

BY MARTHA PEREGO, ICMA-CM

PROFESSIONAL FOULS

As serious as illegal conduct?

“You are putting me in the same category as those criminals? Those embezzlers? Sex offenders? Thieves? Unbelievable!!”

This is a common reaction to hearing the news that you are subject to a public censure for conduct that violated the ICMA Code of Ethics. The conduct didn't violate any law. But the ICMA Committee on Professional Conduct, having reviewed all the facts and the member's response, concluded that, because what

The city manager didn't resign from his position in order to run. In responding to the ethics complaint, the manager questioned how his conduct could be wrong given that his entire city council not only supported his candidacy but agreed to amend his agreement so that he could work part-time in order to free up time for campaigning, plus he could return to his full-time position if unsuccessful.

Even some colleagues privately



you did was such a serious ethical breach of the profession's standards, ICMA needs to issue a public statement.

What professional foul could be so bad that it warrants the same censure as illegal conduct? Is there really such a thing? And why go public? Under what circumstances is such a serious response justified?

This is not an esoteric debate for the ICMA Committee on Professional Conduct; it is front and center in committee deliberations of complaints filed against members.

Political Foul

Consider the recent case of the city manager who agreed to join the ticket of a candidate seeking the governorship.

supported the effort in the hopes that his financial expertise and knowledge of state and local government would be beneficial to local governments as they sought to bring about change in financial policy at the state level. Given this support, what rationale does ICMA have for objecting?

In making the recommendation for public censure, which was upheld by the ICMA Executive Board, the committee noted that political neutrality is a hallmark of the local government profession. It's a line in the sand that professionals shall not cross.

The principle dates back to that very first code that said no city manager should play an active role in politics. Times have certainly changed.



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But the challenges of the current political environment, coupled with the lack of clarity in the public's mind about the role of professional managers, lend more, not less, credence to the principle of political neutrality.

Do you want to be viewed and function as that independent, qualified, and objective source of advice on policy and operational matters? Such a status happens only when professional local government managers stay out of politics.

The last critical detail in this case was the fact that the city manager announced his candidacy days before the council took an official vote to grant his leave. This timeline certainly made it look like the votes had been locked in before the public knew about or could consider the merits of the proposal. The behind-the-scenes negotiations that evidently took place in this case violated the profession's commitment to transparency.

Integrity Foul Out

If political neutrality is one key hallmark of the local government profession, the other must certainly be the integrity of one's word. It's disheartening to see the number of instances in recent years when ICMA members agreed to accept a position but then failed to keep their commitments.

They don't show up for work, opting to either remain in their current positions or accept a preferred offer elsewhere. Or they take the position but fail to serve the recommended two-year tenure. And, to be clear, these are not instances of the governing body failing to uphold its end of the bargain.

Some of these cases received more media coverage than others, given the profile of the community. That said, the impact is extraordinary, regardless of size or wealth of the organization or the incident's notoriety. Elected leadership looks inept, the public can be left wondering about the value of recruiting outside the community, and the organization spends critical time in a holding pattern.

WHAT PROFESSIONAL FOUL COULD BE SO BAD THAT IT WARRANTS THE SAME CENSURE AS ILLEGAL CONDUCT? UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES IS SUCH A SERIOUS RESPONSE JUSTIFIED?

One community hiring its first manager was highly disappointed when the individual withdrew without any explanation and then accepted a position at a higher salary in another city. This could have led the community to abandon all plans for bringing professional management to the organization. Under the mayor's leadership, the community stayed the course, restarted the search process, and eventually recruited a manager.

For Violations, There Are Consequences

Every true profession has a set of core, defining, and fundamental principles. They are nonnegotiable. Violate the principles and expect consequences. After all, there is little point in having a code of ethics for the profession if the profession is reluctant about speaking out when the conduct of its members fails to adhere to the highest standards. **PM**



MARTHA PEREGO, ICMA-CM
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WHAT DO YOU THINK IS YOUR MOST IMPORTANT ROLE—PROBLEM SOLVER, CHANGE AGENT, TEAM BUILDER, RISK TAKER, STRATEGIC THINKER, COMMUNITY BUILDER, OR ANOTHER NOT LISTED—AND WHY?



PATRICK ZAVORAL
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At some point in your career, or for that matter during the course of a workday, an effective public administrator needs to undertake one or all of the suggested roles.

Balancing the need to look 10 to 50 years into the future for vital infrastructure planning—public safety and public works or community development issues—with current concerns requires a local government manager or administrator to play many roles.

Add to this the role of adviser to elected officials and staff members, which is also important.



C. JACK HORTON, ICMA-CM
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In North Carolina, the legal authority and responsibilities of the county manager are the same for all 100 counties, but how the manager exercises that duty varies from county to county depending on the individual personality, ability, experience, and skill of manager and elected board.

It has been said that the role of the manager is to be “the eyes, ears, and legs of the board.” I would generally agree but would stress that managers cannot assume they always “speak” for the board. I have learned in 30 years of public service that it is important to make sure the public understands that the manager works for the board and not the other way around.

Perhaps the most important role the county manager has is what I call the “county connector.” You gather the facts, research the issues, receive information, make recommendations to the governing board, and then you communicate and coordinate the board’s policies and priorities to the employees and the public.



KEVIN CARRUTH, ICMA-CM
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I have found that my most important role as a manager is that of communicator. We have all known talented, intelligent people who have failed at something because they did not match their communication method and style to their audiences or simply did not understand what was being communicated to them.

A successful leader has to be adept at both sending and receiving information and also must be able to make adjustments to fit multiple audiences, including elected officials, employees, citizens, media, businesses, and persons with diverse backgrounds.

Success in any other role is dependent upon your ability to accurately interpret verbal and nonverbal messages from your audience and also precisely transmit your thoughts and ideas to others while hopefully adding value to the discussion.

The dynamic nature of public service requires nothing less.



MAUREEN GODSEY VALENTE, ICMA-CM
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I think my most important role is being a catalyst. Massachusetts towns are extremely decentralized, and authority is shared among many individuals and committees.

All services, including public schools, are funded by and included in the budget of the town government. I have the unique ability, through my position, to reach out through this diffuse power structure to kick-start and nurture the development of overarching townwide goals and encourage the commitment to achieving the goals. **PM**

BY PAULA DOHNAL, ICMA STAFF

1

A NICE, WARM SWIM

The Richmond Plunge, a recently restored swimming pool in Richmond, California, uses 3,500 square feet of solar hot water panels to heat 324,000 gallons of nonchlorinated saline water in the 60 by 160-foot public pool.

► icma.org/richmondplunge



SMALL SUCCESSES = CRITICAL MOMENTUM

Newcastle, Australia's environmental stewardship programs have reduced electricity consumption by 40 percent compared with 1995 projections for electricity use, and its long-term efforts promote community sustainability.

► icma.org/newcastleenergy



CLEAR WATER

Local water supply departments in Afghanistan are undergoing a transformation into self-supporting commercial enterprises that will eventually cover their operating costs without a subsidy. ICMA's Commercialization of Afghanistan Water and Sanitation Activity project is helping four cities improve their ability to provide safe, reliable drinking water and also collect revenue.

► icma.org/afghanwater



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Join a group on the Knowledge Network to discuss energy efficiency and renewable energy ideas and best practices, learn from peers, get information from experts, and learn about programs and resources from ICMA.

► icma.org/en/icma/knowledge_network/groups/group/1149



MEGA ISSUES DRIVE LOCAL CHANGES

**Managers Tackle
Future Challenges
With Resolve**

TAKEAWAYS

- › Times are tough but the author found that local government managers still have the “can do” demeanor.
- › Finding, developing, and retaining talent is one of the most important legacies a local government manager can leave behind.

What are some of the driving forces that are shaping local governments in the years ahead? Five mega issues emerge from conversations with national and local leaders:

- Long-term economic outlook.
- Strained relationships with state governments.
- Demographic changes.
- Resource challenges.
- New media and technology.

One might expect local government managers to be daunted by these issues. Instead managers interviewed for this article conveyed resolve and a sense of mission about what they can do to help their organizations and their communities adapt to these challenging times.

Economic Realities Squeeze Employees and Benefits

The economic recovery has been slow, and unemployment remains high. In 2009, most local governments adjusted to the downturn in revenues by imposing hiring freezes and holding the line on employee pay and benefit costs. During 2010, however, more local governments have had to lay off employees and make changes in benefit packages.

According to September 2010 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, local government employment, excluding jobs in education, is down 167,000 jobs, or 2.6 percent, compared with November 2008.

Analysts do not expect state and local revenues to return to 2008 levels until 2013.

In writing about the National League of Cities (NLC) annual survey, “City Fiscal Conditions in 2010,” in October 2010, authors Christopher W. Hoene and Michael A. Pagano found that “the declines in 2010 represent the largest downturn in revenues and cutbacks in spending in the history of NLC’s survey, with revenues declining for the fourth year in a row.”

Local governments also face serious challenges because of funding losses in pension plan assets. The downturn in the stock market in 2008 dramatically reduced the value of equities in public and private retirement plans alike. Aggregate funding of state and local pension funding levels has declined from a respectable level of 84 percent in 2008 to 78 percent in 2009.

Because public pensions typically “smooth” upturns and downturns over a period of three to five years, the full impact of the 2008 equity losses will not be evident until 2013. A recent study published by the Center for State and Local Government Excellence found that in the United States the ratio of pension assets will decline, on average, to between 66 and 76 percent of liabilities by 2013, depending on stock prices.¹

There is, of course, considerable variation in funding levels. Some plans have no financial issues at all while others have a major unfunded liability. In 2009, for example, 11 percent of the

126 pension plans studied were funded at the 40–59 percent level, and 10 percent of plans were 100 percent funded.

Future funding levels will depend on many factors, including increases in contributions and how well the stock market performs. The authors at the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College examined three scenarios for stock market returns to see what pension funding levels would be if stock prices are flat, grow modestly, or grow robustly. No one can predict future stock returns, but most analysts urge governments to be conservative in their estimates.

Because of the funding issues and an intense media focus on employee benefits, many local and state plans are undergoing changes. Typically, there are reduced benefits for new employees and higher contributions from both employers and employees.

Michigan and Utah have replaced their defined-benefit plans with a hybrid plan for all public employees. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) reports that more states have enacted significant retirement legislation in 2010 than in any other year in memory.

As Ronald K. Snell, director, State Services Division, National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), explains, “The economic recovery alone won’t solve the funding issue. There are structural issues that have to be addressed that were adopted during more optimistic times.” California’s decision in 1999 to reduce the retirement age from

age 60 to age 55 for general government employees and from age 55 to age 50 for public safety employees is often cited as a key factor for that state's large unfunded pension liability.

Strains with State Governments

Because of the loss of revenues, some state governments have looked to local governments as a place to shift responsibilities they struggle to pay for. But perhaps no state has as difficult a relationship with local governments these days as California.

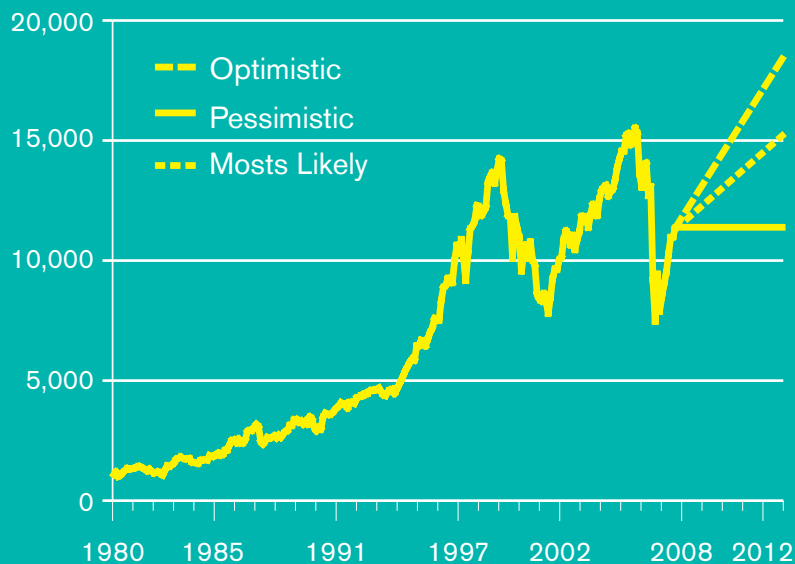
Chris McKenzie, executive director, League of California Cities, wrote in *Western City*, September 2010, "How a state government can say on the one hand it is serious about job creation (and the attendant revenue benefits it brings to the state) and on the other hand kill jobs in the private and public sectors by raiding and borrowing local government funds is beyond local officials' comprehension." The voters in California agreed. They passed Proposition 22 in November 2010, which prevents state lawmakers from tapping local fund to plug state budget holes.

Scott Hancock, executive director, Maryland Municipal League, said at the 2010 ICMA Annual Conference in San Jose that local governments "cannot count on states to be a benevolent parent anymore."

Leon Churchill, city manager, Tracy, California, noted that, although state government has lost considerable credibility, residents in Tracy recently approved a local sales tax increase as a vote of confidence in what the city is trying to do. Tracy's experience is not unique. From California to Oregon to Michigan, substantial majorities are voting to support local ballot measures.

Daniel Gilmartin, executive director, Michigan Municipal League, sees an opportunity for local governments to reinvent the way they do business. "There's sustainability about what local governments do, he said. "Those cities and regions that focus on quality-of-life

PROJECTED STATE AND LOCAL PENSION FUNDING RATIOS UNDER THREE SCENARIOS, 2008-2013



Sources: Wilshire Associate (2010) and author's projections.³

issues and have a strong education system and workforce will have the greatest opportunities."

Churchill and Gerald Newfarmer, president and CEO, Management Partners, Cincinnati, Ohio, have spearheaded a discussion of state-local relationships within ICMA's Government Affairs and Policy Committee.

They would like to see the state-local partnership restored with some core principles in mind, including a respect for local government autonomy. They also see opportunities for local governments to help shape the future by promoting shared services and more regional strategies.

Older, More Diverse Demographics

Our communities and our workforces are aging. The millennial generation, including those age 14 to 32, is larger and more diverse than the aging baby boomer population that is starting to retire. These realities are prompting many organizations to look at planning for succession, training to help retirees

update their skills so they can return to work, and using technology more creatively to improve productivity and increase flexibility.

James Ley, county manager, Sarasota County, Florida, says he has brought in retired managers as "roving resources" to tackle issues that need attention throughout the organization. Sarasota County has increased flexibility by creating a separate system for hiring employees for particular needs.

Kim Welsh, chief strategist, San Jose, says it is important to engage residents in their 20s and 30s as they often feel left out. Social media and wiki planning are good tools to reach them. She notes that younger residents are often more diverse than others and that this cohort includes entrepreneurs and immigrants, the "secret sauce to Silicon Valley's success." At the same time, she observes that immigration into the United States is expected to plateau.

An increasing number of local government employees are eligible to retire in the next five years—about 30 percent

nationwide. What are managers doing to ensure that employees are ready and able to meet the needs of our communities in the future? Here is the landscape in three different communities, some of which are undergoing major change.

Elgin, Illinois, Faces the Future with a Plan

“One of the best things for Elgin may have been the rising cost of energy,” muses Sean Stegall, city manager, Elgin, Illinois. “During the housing boom years, the city acted more like a suburb and created developments with cul-de-sacs. The pain of the Great Recession changes behavior. In the past year, we’ve reached a consensus that we should act like who we are.”

Elgin is a city of 106,000 where many residents commute to jobs in Chicago. Its website boasts that it embraces newcomers and long-term residents alike. Among Elgin’s assets are three train stations, a bus station, a rural sector, and a historic downtown.

The city recently adopted a comprehensive plan that takes advantage of those assets and outlines a way forward. The plan seeks to connect all of the cul-de-sacs that sprang up with the housing boom with the city’s traditional urban street grid. To capture the city’s new direction, there’s even a slogan: “We are the city in the suburbs.”

Elgin strives for a balance of housing options and prices to meet the needs of residents at all stages of their lives. Recreational facilities, commercial structures, and higher-density housing are planned around transportation corridors and located near employment centers. The downtown is viewed as the “heart of the community,” with plazas and parks and improved access to the riverfront.

The Congress of the New Urbanism (CNU), an organization that promotes walkable, mixed-use neighborhood development, sustainable communities, and healthier living conditions, has seized on Elgin’s initiative to make it a pilot for the nation.² Working with city leaders, CNU identified barriers to the city’s goal of strengthening a sense of

place in neighborhoods.

The priorities of the Illinois Department of Transportation, for example, have been to improve vehicle flow and to build highways. The interests of local businesses and pedestrians have not been as important to the department. As a result, highway development blocked many residents from walking to parkland or other amenities that were just blocks away.

Even when Stegall contemplates the serious challenges ahead, he maintains a positive attitude. “It’s our job as managers to keep cities moving as our county goes through this transition.” Like most cities, Elgin has been hard hit by the



MEGA ISSUES

IT IS IMPORTANT TO ENGAGE RESIDENTS IN THEIR 20s AND 30s AS THEY OFTEN FEEL LEFT OUT. SOCIAL MEDIA AND WIKI PLANNING ARE GOOD TOOLS TO REACH THEM.

economic downturn.

The city had to lay off 80 employees and cut \$15 million from its general fund budget of \$70 million in the first year after the recession. Unions also have agreed to make concessions in their compensation and benefits.

Despite the cutbacks, Elgin has doubled its budget for employee education and training. With fewer employees, Stegall says it is essential that they are well educated, well compensated, and well prepared. They also need good technology tools. Elgin has an in-house technology group that is supplemented by consultants. The group is using technology to help departments work together more seamlessly in the field. Instead of tweaking private sector software for their needs, they are examining

work flow processes and writing their own code. The goal is to make it easy for any employee to use the software for required reports.

The aging of the community has not gone unnoticed, either. Stegall says that many retirees want to return to work to replenish their savings. Others want to do something meaningful in retirement. Elgin is creating an office of volunteer services to leverage this untapped resource.

Elgin recognizes that competition for water will be a major issue in the decades ahead, not only for Elgin but also for surrounding communities. It draws water from the Fox River, a tributary of the Illinois River, a source that is reliable and less costly than either Lake Michigan or aquifers, the primary

sources of water for most other Chicago area cities.

Hennepin County, Minnesota, Provides Flexibility to Employees

Like the community it serves, the Hennepin County, Minnesota, workforce is aging. Some 30 percent of its employees are eligible to retire in the next five years. County Administrator Richard Johnson says that the pace of retirements has slowed since the economic downturn. This gives the county some breathing room to focus on succession planning and to prepare the workforce that will be needed in the future.

One initiative that has worked well for Hennepin County's human services employees is the results-only work environment. Employees have laptops, control their own schedules, and come and go as they please, using a hoteling office space as they need it. Because social workers and others need to be out in the community to do their jobs, it makes sense to provide this

flexibility, Johnson says. The program may be expanded to other employees selectively.

While technology has driven some changes, Hennepin County anticipates that the state's continuing economic difficulties will be the dominant factor. As a new governor and several new state legislators take office, they face a state budget deficit of \$5-\$7 billion. Johnson says that a deficit of that size is unlikely to be closed without both tax increases and spending cuts.

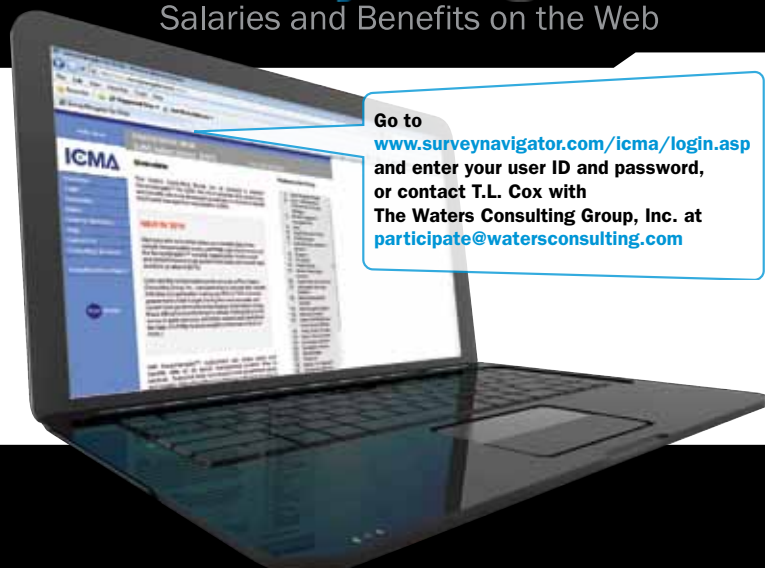
Johnson reflected on the growing tensions between local and state governments over the past 10 years. Where there once was a partnership and a distinction of roles, it is now common for the state government to shift responsibility to local governments without providing a source of revenue to pay for the service. Local governments have been forced to squeeze operations and raise property taxes. Cutbacks have reached the point where residents will experience such

service reductions as longer wait times and delays in processing applications.

Hennepin County continues to enjoy a relatively good relationship with its 1.2 million residents. Unlike some states, there has been little backlash against public employees in Minnesota. That may be because Minnesota has managed its pension funding issues in an assertive way, raising contributions for both employers and employees and reducing the cost-of-living adjustment for current retirees.

Water management is a significant issue for the county because there is fragmentation caused by many different water and soil conservation districts. Some of these entities can raise revenues while others cannot, so one part of the county will have costs and service levels different from another part. Hennepin County is large enough to bring the groups together to clarify who is in charge and to address issues of equity, stream management, and lake management.

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New Media Tools Fuel False Information in Cape Elizabeth, Maine

Michael McGovern, town manager of Cape Elizabeth, Maine, notes that community engagement has been affected by technology. Certain community groups use a software program that makes it easy to collect e-mail addresses. A taxpayer group made up of mostly wealthy individuals was established two years ago and more than once has spread false information.

Group members often apologize privately for spreading the false information, but then they put out the same false information again. Some individuals have, for example, criticized Cape Elizabeth for having a generous pension plan when, in fact, 15 years ago it switched to a defined-contribution plan for all employees except police.

Four weekly newspapers and one daily cover the community, which has fewer than 9,000 residents. One of the weeklies signed on a blogger who writes negatively about the town. Most town staff members have stopped reading the blog as it was demoralizing to them.

Fortunately, Cape Elizabeth has an excellent town council that sorts through the issues thoughtfully. In one case, some residents have called for a regional or consolidated fire service even though the change would actually increase costs in Cape Elizabeth as the neighboring community has higher costs for its fire service. Cape Elizabeth's current fire service consists of a call company with one full-time employee, the fire chief, and a total budget of \$150,000.

State and local relationships are always challenging, particularly during times of economic constraints. The amount received through revenue sharing from the state of Maine is exactly what it was 10 years ago because there is less money in the pool and the state has changed the formula. What this means is that revenue from property taxes increased 70 percent during the 10-year period, yet Cape Elizabeth's

total revenues have remained flat for three straight years.

The revenue squeeze last year required the city to lay off employees for the first time. The only upside to the recession is that the bidding environment has been competitive so the city has benefited from lower prices, particularly in the construction area.

Energy issues. McGovern says, "Water has never been an issue in Maine, but energy is. When we look at the need to replace the boilers in the high schools, for example, we consider the possibility of a boiler that can use either oil or wood chips. We also consider options for solar panels to heat water in the summer months.

"The U.S. Department of Energy gave the state of Maine a grant for energy efficiency improvements that required some of the dollars be shared with local governments. Cape Elizabeth received an \$85,000 grant to make lighting upgrades that improve energy efficiency. The project is already finished, and we expect the investment will pay for itself in two years."

Aging Workforce and Talent Challenges

Cape Elizabeth has 50 employees, and 20 percent of them have 25 years or more of service. Because of the recession and investment declines, no full-time employees have left the town voluntarily in the past three years.

Cape Elizabeth's workforce demographics may be younger than many others. Typically, state and local government employees are five to seven years older than their private sector counterparts. They also are more highly educated. The recession has prompted most local government employers who are eligible to retire to work longer, but in California, retirement-eligible employees have been retiring in greater numbers.

Most Americans are not thinking about future workforce gaps when



MEGA ISSUES

unemployment is running close to 10 percent. But managers are increasingly looking at succession planning issues, knowing they soon will have critical vacancies that must be filled. Finding, developing, and retaining talent is one of the most important legacies that a local government manager can leave behind.

As ICMA Executive Director Bob O'Neill recently wrote in a "Management Insights" column for *Governing* magazine, "The future is coming fast, start preparing now." For a profession that likes to fix problems, the opportunities have never been greater. **PM**

ENDNOTES

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LEADE

TAKEAWAY:

A career in public management teaches us that the secrets of leadership for women in the public sector are the same secrets we all need to be effective, successful, and healthy people.

Top 10 LEADERSHIP LESSONS of Effective Women Leaders

By Katy Simon, ICMA-CM

Describing what matters most in leadership

As I prepared recently to present “Leadership Secrets of Effective Women Leaders” to a group of elected women leaders from throughout the United States, I pondered these fundamental questions: What do followers need leaders to be? Is leadership different for men and women? Has the current economy and its repercussions affected what women leaders are called upon to do and to be in their organizations? What is the role of ethics in leadership? Is leadership different for us in the public sector?

To answer these questions, I want to give credit to a group of women I admire greatly, whom I e-mailed in preparation for the presentation—women leaders ranging from the former president of Gannett Publishing Worldwide, to a highly successful chief executive officer of a public relations firm, to a city councilwoman, to a state legislator, to a college president, to the chief executive officer of an international airport.

I asked them to tell me the first thing that came to mind in answer to the question, What do aspiring women leaders need to know? What follows is

a culmination of what they told me, and their responses were, coincidentally, especially consistent with what research tells us matters most in leadership.

What Are the Secrets?

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn once said, “If you want to change the world, who do you begin with, yourself or others?” My answer? Yourself. The first secret, then, is to **be self-aware**. The admonition to “know thyself” goes back to the oracles at Delphi and has been attributed to no fewer than six Greek philosophers, including Socrates.

We need to understand what we know and what we don’t know. We need to know our strengths and be honest about our weaknesses and not be unnecessarily critical of ourselves, but we should get busy fixing the weaknesses. Remember that you can really only change yourself. It’s easier to overcome other people’s judgments of you than to overcome your own self-judgment.

So learn how to use your strengths to build on them and to address what you need to change in yourself. Knowing yourself and your values gives you confidence, and that confidence is contagious.

The second secret flows from the first: **be competent**. Always try to be the best-prepared person in the room. Don’t take things on if you don’t have the capacity to do them well. My mother used to say that you can do anything and everything—you just can’t do it all at the same time.

And remember that communication skills—especially listening—are the most important competencies you need to master. Seek out and accept feedback that will help you to become ever more competent at the things that matter.

The third secret is: **be curious**. You cannot grow if you don’t make room for what isn’t already part of you. Curiosity about people, about issues, about things you don’t know leads to better understanding, which makes you more powerful. And your genuine interest in and curiosity about other people make them feel special and make you more likable, more memorable to them.

The fourth secret, then, is **be kind**. Plato once said, “Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.” How you treat everyone matters to everyone else. They learn a lot about who you are by how you treat people at all levels. They decide how much

they can trust you based on how they see you treating others.

Do you know your employees and constituents? Their stories? Their heartbreaks? Their dreams? They will follow you to the extent that they feel they matter to you. And remember that nobody ever gets too much encouragement. Be unselfish in your praise, in your listening, in your thoughtfulness.

Send handwritten notes. (Some of Washoe County's 3,000 employees have tacked up on their walls notes that I sent them five, eight, 10 years ago. It matters.) Seek first to understand, then to be understood, as author Stephen Covey says. Empower others, and they will follow you. And be kind to yourself, too. Remember to put the oxygen mask on yourself first, then help others!

The fifth secret is to **be purposeful**. Be intentional. Demonstrate your integrity, honesty, ethics, and consistency every day. The ends *never* justify the means. You are only as strong as your commitment to your personal mission and purpose in life, and that's the same for your organization.

Don't be afraid to speak your mind, but do so with respect, honoring the differing views of others. They will respect you more if you are committed to their right to disagree with you. Being purposeful also means being decisive. Indecision is worse than making a bad decision, which you can usually go back and fix.

Be accountable for all that you do, and be transparent. As we all know, that old warning, "Would you want to see this reported on the front page of the newspaper?" is really *true* for leaders like us!

Five More Secrets

The sixth secret, then, is **be resilient**. Grow a thick skin. We all have to keep relearning not to take things personally. People are going to misunderstand us, reject our ideas, and attack us, and we have to hold up our heads and keep going.

We always have to ask ourselves whether the criticism we're getting is

justified—if it is, acknowledge it and do something about it. If it isn't, shake it off and recognize that you aren't going to make everyone happy. A year or two or 10 from now, whatever this thing is will have paled in importance.

Whether you like her or not, Hillary Clinton has often been named one of the most resilient leaders of our time. She has been knocked down personally and publicly but has managed to get back up, get on her feet, and keep going time and again. Because of this, she has been able to contribute in ways that could never be possible otherwise.

The seventh secret is to **be optimistic**. It is said that optimistic people live considerably longer, make more money in their lifetimes, have a better health status, reportedly have more successful marriages and family lives, and have higher educational attainment—all other things being equal.

In other words, no matter where you come from, an optimistic nature pays off for you. This doesn't mean to be foolishly and naively cheerful in the face of crisis. It means that, whether things are going well or poorly, understand the negatives but try to refocus on the positives.

As the saying goes, "What I think about, I bring about." Our thoughts and expectations—of ourselves and others—

are extremely powerful and are contagious. Enthusiasm gives people energy to face the difficult tasks we all share.

The eighth secret is **be connected**. Surround yourself with smart, talented people who will be honest with you—good or bad. Nurture and pay attention to relationships. They are the machinery of how everything good gets done.

Find a mentor whom you respect, and learn from your mentor. Get to know people in diverse networks—being open, inclusive, and tolerant of differing views gives you insight, knowledge, new perspectives, and solutions.

Know and practice the value of teamwork—the demands on us to know more and more make it virtually impossible to come up, by ourselves, individually, with solutions that are even half as good as the ones we can come up with by involving a team, not to mention that the sheer number of ideas a team can come up with increases exponentially over ideas of a single individual.

Reach out and meet people you think you should know. Don't wait for them to call you because they may not, but nine times out of 10, they'd love to hear from you and are extremely flattered and willing to give you some of their time.

And, speaking of time, the ninth secret is **be present** wherever you are. As my daughter's preschool teacher used to say, "Today is the day we have." I loved that phrase so much that when my daughter turned 16 I wrote a book of all the lessons I wanted her to know that maybe I hadn't fully shared with her, and that was the title I gave it. Today is the day we have. Let go of worrying about the future. If you can do something about it, do it; but stop the worrying. It robs you of productive energy.

And, likewise, let go of regrets about the past. There is nothing you can redo now. If there is a correction you can make, *make it* and free yourself of regrets. Focus on what you can do today, right now, in this minute, to carry out the change that you want to see in the world, as Gandhi said.

And being fully present wherever you

10 LEADERSHIP LESSONS OF EFFECTIVE WOMEN LEADERS

- Be self-aware
- Be competent
- Be curious
- Be kind
- Be purposeful
- Be resilient
- Be optimistic
- Be connected
- Be present
- Be passionate.

are means putting down the PDA when you are in meetings and being fully engaged in what is in front of you. When you aren't, people lose respect for you.

Finally, the tenth secret is to **be passionate**. Have an inspired vision of what can be, and share it with others. One of the most highly correlated attributes that successful people share is that they are passionate. Whether they are corporate CEOs, or teachers, or world-class kayakers, or software developers, or the first person citizens meet when they come to your offices, it is people with enthusiasm, energy, passion, and a sense of joy who do more for the world and are more successful than their peers who lack those qualities.

In our organization, a fellow who works on the facilities management team stopped what he was doing to help an elderly lady who was obviously struggling to walk to her car. When I sent him a note to thank him and praise him for it, he said simply that he appreciated the chance to help and that it was actually our contract female security guard who noticed that the woman needed help and asked him to do it.

Both those people are passionate about what they do, and they remind us all and set an example of what a passion for service is all about. Public service is difficult, noble work, and despite all the attacks and criticism we sometimes take, we have to be passionate to keep going. Public service demands all that we have to give it.

Pertains to Everyone and Everything

In truth, these leadership secrets are no different for men than for women, for public sector or private sector leaders, for leaders in 2010 or leaders in 1950. To the extent that we all honor one another, we honor the work that we do and the people we serve. Make today another opportunity for greatness. **PM**



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Hiring 2.0:

23 Creative Ways to Recruit and Keep Great Staff

TAKEAWAYS

- › **Web-based technology** can streamline recruitment practices.
- › Emerging leaders can learn new skills and **discover hidden talents**.
- › **Competition** for hiring the best people will be tough.

Hiring and keeping talented employees is requiring more creativity. It's especially true in these times of budget cutbacks and reduced staffing. With our organizations challenged to get the work done with fewer staff, we need to make sure we have talented people to do the job.

There is no single answer to how to attract and retain local government employees. Even as local government agencies cut back, retirements are increasing, and the need remains to recruit people who can do even more than may have been expected in the past. This means it's critical to use approaches that will enable you to keep and attract bright, hardworking, competent staff.

The wide range of approaches described here can be added to your toolkit to help your organization get the talent you need and keep the talent you have. Many of these practices can be implemented inexpensively.

23 Ways

Many traditional ways of hiring staff are not working, and organizations are changing their practices so that:

- People feel sought after.
- Candidates easily understand the jobs being advertised, how to apply, the qualifications and skills needed for the job, and the timeline for the process.
- People interested in a job get quick responses to their questions and applications.
- Departments can hire the best person for the job.

The approaches listed here are being used in local governments. To learn about other tools and to find resource people who can provide more information about these approaches, visit the website at icma.org/hiring2.0."

1. Website Marketing. Today's job seekers look on Facebook, Monster.com, jobs.icma.org, CALOPPS.org, and even YouTube. Web-based technology can streamline your practices to cut recruitment time by 50 to 70 percent.

2. Simplified Position Descriptions. Communicate an exciting and positive message early in the description, avoid jargon and exclusive language, and fully explain all benefits (for example, what exactly a 9/80 is) and how they relate to organizational values (for example, work-life balance).

3. Branding. Use consistent messaging to describe what the organization does and why. Public service, if communicated clearly as contributing to the broader community, will resonate with younger candidates.

4. Map Your Hiring Process. To streamline your hiring process, create a map of the process—from initial request to fill a vacancy to the start date of the new employee filling that job. Identify all of the steps, figure out how long it actually takes at each step, look for bottlenecks, and find ways to cut out steps and time.

5. Create a Hiring Plan. Create a plan for each step in the process of filling a vacancy—from recruitment and

outreach, to candidate assessment, to keeping in touch with candidates, to background checks, final offer, and first day on the job. Use the hiring plan as a way to move the process along quickly and keep the candidates in the forefront.

6. Employee Referral Program. Give recognition or a bonus to staff for referring a candidate who is ultimately hired into a designated hard-to-fill position.

7. Electronic Requisitions and Applications. Speed the approval process by allowing required position requisition signatures to be done electronically, using online applications, and distributing eligibility lists via the Internet.

8. Career Pathways. Provide examples on your Human Resources Department website of possible career pathways in local government.

9. Cal-ICMA Coaching Program. Engage your staff in the coaching program. Make opportunities available to them to participate in mentoring, webcasting, and other programs offered through Cal-ICMA.

10. Strategic Workforce Planning. Forecast your talent needs on the basis of turnover trends and expected vacancies.

Analyze changes in tenure, age at resignation and retirement, and other trends. Color code your organization charts to show staff ages to illustrate expected workforce turnover and opportunities for promotion for younger staff.

11. Talent Readiness Assessment. Use assessment tools for employees who are interested in moving up in the organization to help determine their readiness for leadership positions.

12. Refine the Role of Senior Managers. Require senior managers to be responsible for fostering the professional development of their staff members. Evaluate and reward your senior managers for their success in enhancing the skills and capabilities of their staffs.

13. Conduct "Stay" Interviews. Interview members of your staff, just as you would interview potential new employees, to ask about their goals and aspirations. Determine how the organization can help them stay interested and motivated to prevent them from moving on to other organizations.

14. Management Assistant or Fellowship Program. Hire recent master's degree graduates from a public administration, public policy, or urban studies program. Place them into a



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rotation-based program in the organization, give them challenging and inspiring work, provide mentors, and assist them in finding permanent jobs at the end of the program. If you are not able to hire someone full time, consider sharing the position and expense with a neighboring community.

15. Management Talent Exchange.

Partner with another local government to exchange professionals for a three-month period to expose staff to new ways of doing things.

16. Mentoring and Early Career

Experiences. Pair an employee with a senior manager as a mentor to provide career advice. Enable younger staff to attend conferences and regional events, make presentations to the governing body, job shadow, take on larger projects, and have other experiential learning opportunities. These “stretch” assignments provide staff members a sense that they are making contributions early in their careers.

17. Action Learning Teams.

Engage emerging leaders in your organization in cross-departmental teams to address important problems. This enables emerging leaders to learn new skills and discover hidden talents.

18. Transfer of Institutional

Knowledge. Create ways to document and impart knowledge of retiring employees to others. This can include creating an internal local government wiki.

Forecast your talent needs on the basis of turnover trends and expected vacancies. Analyze changes in tenure, age at resignation and retirement, and other trends.

19. Life-Work Balance. Provide a variety of flex scheduling options (for example, 9/80, 4/10), depending on the needs of employees and their work groups. Allow telework opportunities and provide appropriate technical support. Offer resources (such as info-referral) and encourage self-help support groups to employees who are concerned about child care, elder care, grief support, and other family support needs.

20. Employee Orientation or “Onboarding.”

Use the new-employee orientation to immediately describe the values and expectations of the organization as well as professional development and promotional opportunities.

21. Preventive Health Care Programs.

Individuals respond positively to organizations that embrace the total health and well-being of employees. Create preventive care programs to not only reduce

cost but also result in more healthy and productive employees.

22. Ethics Standards. Communicate the organization’s ethical culture and expectations for all members. Emphasize the expected values and behaviors for employees, in doing the right things, along with the positive and negative consequences of walking the talk of the standards.

23. Environmental Responsibility.

Show a commitment to the environment and sustainability by creating programs to address these issues.

End Note

Even though public agencies are struggling to fund services and are cutting back on staff because of fiscal constraints, the need for talented employees will remain. Competition for the best people will be tough—particularly with the continuing pace of retirements. Re-recruiting the best employees you have now as well as finding ways to attract top talent from the outside will be essential to successful service delivery. **PM**

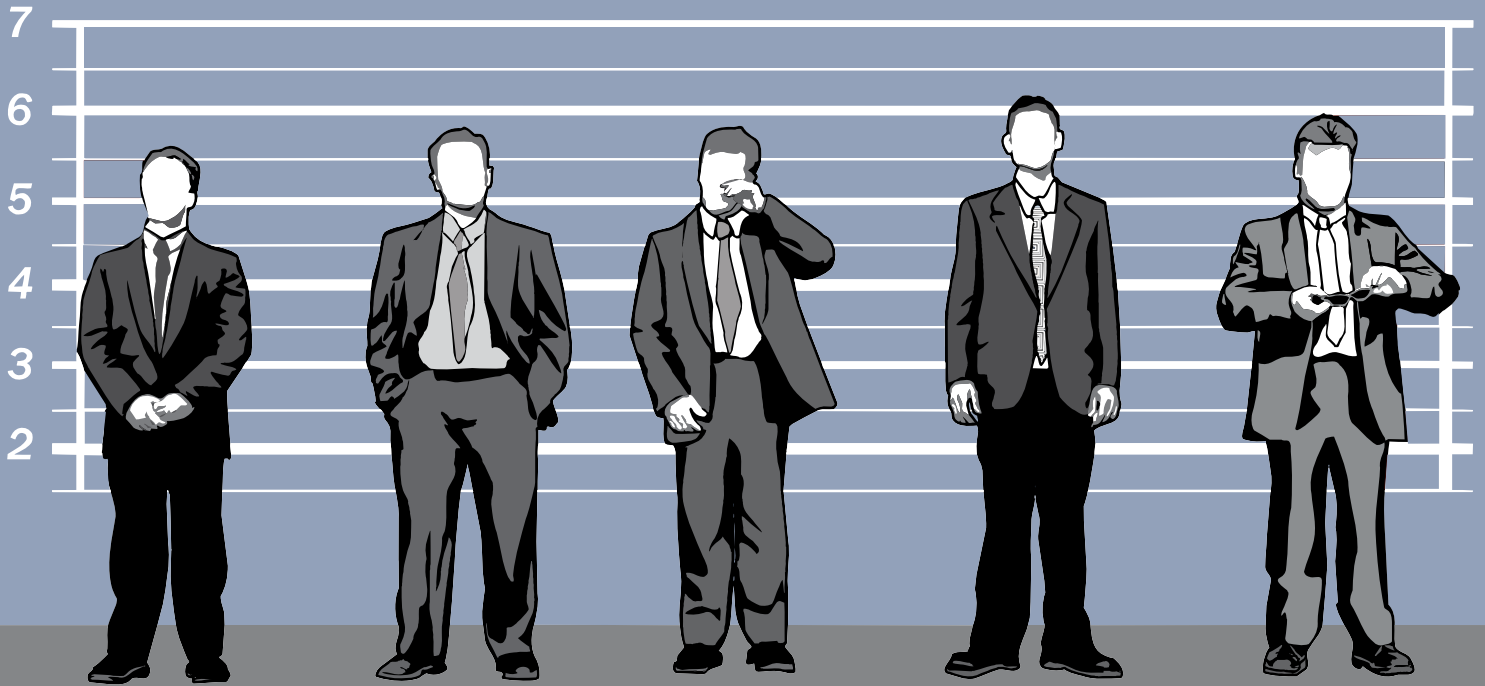
FURTHER READING

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By Sheryl Sculley



Reducing Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in Local Government

On top of the loss to taxpayers, crimes are being committed

The state of our economy has organizations looking for ways to reduce waste and increase the public trust. The city of San Antonio, Texas, has been aggressively working on this issue for nearly 25 years. By creating the office of municipal integrity (OMI), we established a team to investigate and prevent fraud, waste, and abuse.

OMI Then and Now

In 1985, city leaders became concerned about contracts that possibly were fraudulent and personnel issues that required

internal investigating. In response to these concerns, they created OMI that year and modeled it after similar programs in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Phoenix, Arizona. By creating OMI, the city took a proactive approach to prevention of fraud, waste, and abuse and, in the process, inspired renewed confidence in local government.

On August 1, 2006, we strengthened OMI by creating Administrative Directive 1.75, which clearly delineated roles and responsibilities across the city for combating fraud, waste, and abuse. Since a later adaptation of Directive 1.75, OMI now reports directly to an executive

committee known as the OMI Committee. It comprises representatives from the city manager's office, the human resources office, the police department, and the city attorney's office.

The OMI Committee meets monthly and carefully reviews each investigation for thoroughness and completeness. Executive review at that level enables management to make real-time assessments of fraud, waste, and abuse; to track trends; and to craft appropriate interventions.

Currently, OMI consists of two investigators and a third senior investiga-

By creating OMI, the city took a proactive approach to prevention of fraud, waste, and abuse and, in the process, inspired renewed confidence in local government.

tor who supervises all investigations and acts as liaison to city executive leadership. Although all OMI investigators are civilian, two of them have extensive law enforcement backgrounds and the third has a professional background in federal substance abuse programs.

The most crucial responsibilities of the OMI staff are interviewing witnesses and determining the subjects of the investigations. Daily tasks for OMI investigators include data collection, analysis, and surveillance.

Ethics and Fraud

Research shows that high ethical standards play an important role in how employees conduct themselves at work. With this in mind, in March 2006 we implemented mandatory ethics training for approximately 10,000 city employees. Employees received written material as well as a specially produced video that was designed to illustrate real-world scenarios where employees made decisions concerning common ethical situations.

Economy's Role in Fraud

There is evidence that fraud appears to be growing nationwide.¹ It's difficult to determine whether this is a result of recent economic downturns or the fact that in recent years more focus has been placed on fraud. In response to this trend, the San Antonio directed increased fraud prevention training for city departments that OMI identified as being at risk.

At-risk departments were identified as those with extensive cash handling, contract procurement, and regulatory functions. By the end of fiscal year 2008, OMI provided tailored fraud training to more than 1,000 employees citywide. This training continues today as investigators are commonly asked by department heads to provide fraud prevention and fraud awareness training to their personnel.

Curbing Fraud, Waste, and Abuse

OMI investigates employee misconduct ranging from misuse of position and misuse of city resources, to more serious cases of theft and fraud. In 2009, OMI saw a 40 percent increase in cases investigated and resolved. The conclusion rate of these investigations ranged from a one-day turnaround to several months of intensive data tracking as well as surveillance within the community.

In a recent investigation, OMI investigators identified a fraudulent billing scheme being carried out by two employees. The scheme involved the receipt of payments being made by citizens toward brush collection fees. After the investigation was closed successfully, not only did the two employees resign but deficiencies in the on-site payment register, weight scale system, and security video were identified and corrected.

Moving Forward

The need for internal investigations within the public sector is an issue that should be taken as seriously as the budgets that organizations use to fund daily operations. San Antonio was at the forefront of fraud prevention and investigation decades ago.

Today, OMI investigators continue their mission of curtailing fraud, providing awareness, and increasing public trust and transparency within our local government. With new ideas and insight, OMI is the gold standard that other organizations can follow as all of us continue to uphold the public trust. **PM**

ENDNOTES

¹ "Occupational Fraud: A Study of the Impact of an Economic Recession" (Austin, Texas: Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, 2010), www.acfe.com/occupational-fraud/occupational-fraud.asp.



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BY JOAN MCCALLEN

SMART SAVING STRATEGIES TO START IN THE NEW YEAR

Strategies to help kick-start your retirement goals



I am always excited when the new year comes around. It is a time of reflection for me—of the year past and the one that lies ahead. Keeping tabs on my retirement savings is something I do—and encourage others to do—year around.

The first of the year is always a good time to revisit and rethink your retirement planning strategy. If you anticipate setting out a few new year's resolutions for yourself, here are five

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savings strategies to help kick-start your goals.

- Create a budget and plan to stick to it. Monitoring your expenses will help you see exactly where your money is spent and give you a starting point for deciding which areas can be cut back. In the long run, budgeting will give you tighter control over your money, allowing you to invest or save as your needs require.
- Pay off your debts. Maintaining a balance on high-interest credit cards and loans can cost thousands of dollars over time. To decrease the amount of debt you owe, pay more than the minimum monthly balance on the loan or credit card bills that have the highest interest rates. In this manner, you can systematically reduce your debts.
- Establish an emergency fund. Having money available for long-term or short-term emergencies means you won't have to take out high-interest loans or credit cards to cover them. Start small. It will add up over time and save you fees and interest in the

event that something unexpected does occur.

- Set manageable savings goals. One important thing you can do as you set your savings goals is to figure out how much in savings you will need after you retire. You can get a rough figure by adding up the amounts you will receive from Social Security and how much you currently have saved. Subtract this amount from how much you expect you will need to maintain your standard of living in retirement. This will give you a starting point.
- Most important of all, remember to save for the long term. As you invest, make sure to keep a long-term perspective while applying sound strategies. For more information on long-term investing strategies, visit the InvestSMART section of ICMA-RC's website (www.icmarc.org/investsmart). **PM**



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BY KAREN THORESON AND JAMES SVARA

INVESTING IN INNOVATION FROM WITHIN

Innovation can be an ambitious undertaking

The pursuit of innovation is popular, but success can be elusive.

From companies to nonprofits to governments, everyone wants to be tagged as innovative! A good number of local governments have initiated new approaches to innovation, but their approaches can sometimes be haphazard.

Discovery and creativity cannot be mandated, but they do not need to be left to chance or good luck. Across the country, local governments and managers are adding focus to the process by creating teams of employees and others to work on encouraging innovation in the workplace. The new approach is being stimulated by the terrible economic conditions we all have been experiencing and also spurred by change in the challenges we face, the conditions in our communities, and the technologies available.

It is neither possible nor desirable to accomplish the organization's mission the way we have always done it. Managers are forced—or are embracing the opportunity—to look at alternative strategies for maintaining service delivery or coming up with new ways of delivering services. Stimulating innovation reflects a commitment to be proactive and systematic in seeking new ideas from inside and outside the organization. The approaches can differ, but there are important similarities across these initiatives.

Examples of Success

Olathe, Kansas. To continue the city's commitment to build an organizational culture that embraces innovation, the city manager's office formed a group called **Team Innovation**. The eight-member



team was selected through an application process that included both a written application stating interest and a Pecha Kucha presentation (20 slides, each shown for 20 seconds) showcasing innovation.

The selection committee asked applicants to be innovative in their presentations, and they were. This final team of eight is made up of all levels of employees. In addition, two department directors serve as sponsor-mentors who provide leadership guidance and influence internal support with department leaders.

Team Innovation has multiple roles: members serve as innovation scouts who capture ideas and promote cross-pollination of ideas, generate innovative ideas on current and future issues facing the organization, create Olathe's best practice solutions, triangulate ideas generated from multiple sources, guide implementation of ideas and actions, and serve as Alliance for Innovation Ambassadors for the city.

Mastering innovation is becoming a competitive imperative for Olathe in order to continue to meet and

exceed the expectations of citizens. Team members have also spent time on various leadership discussions as well as critical thinking and teamwork within the group. Currently, the team is completing the design of a creative room for use by all departments as they continue to emphasize critical thinking and innovation.

Glendale, Arizona. The **Innovate Team** was created in 2008 by the city manager who wanted to encourage employees to make innovations in the workplace that would benefit the organization and the community. By using lean process improvement tools and a robust employee suggestion program, Innovate Team has been able to look at business processes and determine which tasks don't contribute to efficiency or customer service.

The group is made up of 25 employees from 17 departments along with subject-matter experts, depending on the topics they are studying. New members are recruited annually. Employees have to apply and be interviewed to be selected.

To date, the team has achieved such remarkable outcomes as revising the police property evidence review process, saving 15 staff hours a week and reducing the evidence inventory; updating the library circulation check-in process and saving 7,200 staff hours annually; and improving the sales tax business processes.

Sarasota County, Florida. The **Challenges, Solutions, and Innovations Alliance (CSI Alliance)** was developed by the county in response to the economic crisis and through a desire to have employees at all levels participate in solution generation and decision making. The intent of the program was to actively engage a large, cross-functional team on enterprisewide challenges through innovative thinking and no- to low-cost solutions.

The CSI Alliance consists of 150 to 200 employees, many of whom are graduates of Sarasota's leadership development program. The entire organization was invited to suggest what initiatives CSI should work on. The eight initiatives selected focused on improving organizational culture and creating workplace solutions, and CSI work groups were organized around those topics.

Each initiative delivered measurable results during the first year. The employee wellness and benefits group developed a 2010 plan to influence employee behavior and control health costs for employees. The employee pay group created an interactive computer model that showed employees how various budget scenarios impacted pay. Other groups worked together on parking solutions, eWork, rightsizing, and internal communication—all with improved results.

Albemarle County, Virginia. The county is undertaking an ambitious two-phase program to prepare the organization for new practices that foster innovation and to identify high-performing employees for future leadership roles. Started in the fall of 2010, the first phase focuses on using Alliance for Innovation

materials, e-trainings, and the Innovation Leaders Institute.

Groups meet to discuss innovation and best practices and work together on team building. The second phase of the project will begin in early 2011 and emphasize an Innovative Leaders Institute that will bring selected individuals into an intensive program that is part of the organization's succession-planning effort.

Albemarle County integrates three different elements in its innovation effort: best practices and innovation, succession management, and efficiency and performance measurement. This helps the organization deal with its new reality and ensures a forward-looking culture.

Downers Grove, Illinois. The village established **The Innovation Team**, an interdepartmental group that offers recommendations on creative opportunities for operational improvements and quantifiable cost-saving initiatives across

the organization. This team is made up of representatives of every department, and it works with project-specific task forces on more precisely targeted projects.

Those include the fleet team, the park operations group, the lighting team, the phone team, and the dispatch consolidation team. To date, the team has worked to decrease fuel consumption by 15 percent, eliminated 10 percent of the fleet, and reduced maintenance costs for fleet operations.

With team members working together, the village also obtained grants to retrofit lighting in the village hall and parking facility, reducing consumption by 40 percent, and has received outside funding for the installation of solar- and wind-powered streetlights. Beyond saving money, the team's work has helped create a sense of optimism even during these difficult financial times and helped employees pursue innovative solutions to local challenges.

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Los Angeles County, California. The **Quality and Productivity Commission** was created in 1982 by the county board of supervisors to oversee policies and support implementation of programs that enhance the quality and productivity of county services. The commission appraises the board and the chief administrative officer of its activities, and it works in conjunction with all county departments and the quality and productivity managers' network to help implement and ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of these policies and programs.

The 17-member commission and four staff members are guided by nine strategic goals that include such measures as strengthening the fiscal capacity of the county and measuring cost saving and cost avoidance; measuring productivity and quality improvement; sharing best practices across county departments through meetings, newsletters, and training; and providing loans and grants to county departments for innovative endeavors. In its 2009 annual report, the commission reported more than \$100 million in cost avoidance or new-revenue generation for the fiscal year.

Phoenix, Arizona. Phoenix, with a population of 1,600,000, is the largest council-manager form of government in the United States. It is also located in one of the regions hit hardest by the 2008 fiscal crisis. The city manager, with council approval, created the **Innovation and Efficiency Task Force** in the early months of 2010.

The task force is made up of approximately 30 members—primarily department heads with diverse portfolios, representatives from labor, and four public or citizen members. The goal is for the task force to—at a minimum—identify ways for the city to generate \$10 million in new revenues or reduce costs in the general fund through June 30, 2011.

Cochaired by two department heads, the task force has focused on four areas: consolidations, right sourcing and service cuts, revenue enhancements,

MAKING AN INTERNAL COMMITMENT TO INNOVATION IMPROVES THE CLIMATE FOR EXPERIMENTATION AND STRENGTHENS THE CULTURE OF CHANGE.

and cost recovery and process improvement and efficiency. During the first quarter of the fiscal year, the task force recommended and saw implemented \$7.1 million in changes to general fund activities and accumulated \$13 million in savings for other funds.

Although initial projects mostly concentrated on savings, the focus is increasingly moving to such innovations as creating a comprehensive volunteer program, partnering with local businesses, and undertaking a full organizational review to improve work processes and streamline reporting relationships.

Encouraging Innovation

What can be learned from these organizations that have chosen to focus on getting better and smarter?

Be deliberate. Innovation rarely just happens. Organizations that make sure there is time for employees to think creatively are much more likely to develop improved processes and innovative solutions and enjoy better outcomes. The team should have a platform where the work can take place—a place that they know is safe for new thinking.

Seek and encourage collaboration and diversity. Accelerate the demolition of the silos and promote active collaboration between departments. Don't wait for staff to find each other; bring them together. The more diverse the people are—horizontally and vertically—the better. Mix gender, ethnicity, age, cohorts, and worldview advocates liberally, and

look for ways to involve citizens in the process. This diversity generates more ideas and more approaches to problem solving and decision making.

Raise risk tolerance and reduce fear of failure. Nothing stifles new ideas more than fear of failure or ridicule. An innovation team must have the liberty to explore crazy ideas and have ample get-out-of-jail passes if an idea doesn't pan out.

Culture of choices. The organizations highlighted earlier know that expanding innovation requires generating more options and then making decisions to choose best alternatives. In both phases, practicing can improve skills and ultimately improve outcomes.

Measure results. Being a member of an innovation team may sound like fun and games, but in the end it is all about results. Each organization we've identified had a clear purpose for starting its team and desired results articulated.

The difference between these teams and regular work groups is that members of the innovation team get to plan their route to the results; they don't have to follow typical procedure. And in their journey toward the intended results, they often find new solutions to problems that weren't even on the stated agenda, which expands the impact and reward.

Making an internal commitment to innovation improves the climate for experimentation and strengthens the culture of change. But innovation teams do not just wait for new ideas to percolate up through the system. They generate the ideas and encourage the connections that make change happen. **PM**



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BY MIKE CONDUFF

THE COUNCIL JOB DESCRIPTION

8 critical components for high-level performance

Virtually every employee hired in the public sector—from the most senior executive to the newest entry-level individual—has a job description. In essence, that description articulates what qualifications and characteristics the employee is expected to possess and what tasks the person is expected to perform.

Most of these employees are also subject to various rules and regulations generally encapsulated in some sort of personnel manual. This collection of policies describes acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, and it articulates an evaluation process to allow for feedback about how the employee is complying and performing. This reality is so accepted that we cannot envision using even a part-time worker without it.

Recognizing the value of this type of arrangement, top-flight councils—the term *council* is used here to refer to any type of governing body—are debating and developing their own council job descriptions and operating policy manuals. These are always community specific and customized, and they reflect the values of the elected officials as well as the community that elected them. With values firmly and clearly articulated, along with acceptable and unacceptable

behaviors delineated, the council is free to focus on visioning and defining outcomes for the community.

Following extensive research in multiple board environments on three continents, my Canadian colleagues, Catherine Raso from Hamilton, Ontario, and Carol Gabanna from Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, and I have distilled eight common behaviors of these best-practice councils that can serve as the basis for effective council governing manuals:

1. Act on Behalf. In this arena, the council examines whom they represent and the best way to fulfill the expectations of these constituencies. A conversation about owners and customers and the difference in their issues—even when they are the same person—is helpful for focusing council behavior.

2. Know Their Job. Representing owners on ownership matters allows council to concentrate on the long-term and big-picture items. Governing is not managing on a higher level but rather directing the aim of the community.

3. Set Targets. By articulating outcomes and not methodologies, the elected officials say what they want, when they want it, and how much money they are willing to spend to get it. Few folks would start a trip without some sense of the destination, the price they are willing to pay, and the length of time they are willing to travel. Give a local government manager a clear target, and that individual will hit it virtually every time.

4. Identify Risk. Every community and organization has a few key risk factors. What things would be fatal for the community or organization? If council can articulate these, then staff members can avoid them.

5. Delegate the Work. Great elected officials understand the outstanding value of

professional management. Empowering a staff through a trained, talented manager by setting clear boundaries is the key to high performance by the organization's members.

6. Assess Performance. Is acceptable progress being made toward the targets? Is the council operating as it has agreed? Have staff stayed within their boundaries? Regularly considering these questions allows midcourse correction and avoids upsets and crises.

7. Practice Discipline. Maintaining good governance is not easy. For councils, it is always tempting to dive into minutiae or help solve a customer service issue; however, only the council can govern, and councilmembers should do it with excellence.

8. Report Back. In this leadership loop, the council develops, finds, or expands opportunities to tell the community what the council heard and what it did as a result, and then it asks for feedback.

My good friend Jim Hunt is a past president of the National League of Cities (NLC) and recently celebrated 25 years of being continuously elected. He says, "In my several years of traveling the country on behalf of NLC, I have seen some amazing cities.

Upon examination, in virtually every case these cities are well served by elected officials who not only understand their critical role in the governance process; they have gone to the trouble of examining it in detail. They focus on the big picture and do what only they can do and delegate the rest to their management partner, generally a city or county manager or administrator."

If your council has not yet developed its own job description and operational rules, it is likely that it is not operating at the highest level possible. **PM**



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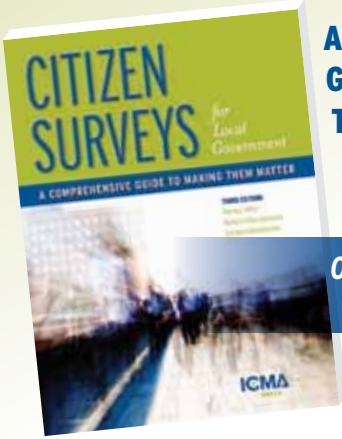
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BY LEE GARRITY, ICMA-CM

LIFE IN THE FISHBOWL

It's that part of the manager's job that isn't much fun

Several years ago, when I was an assistant city manager, I enrolled in a leadership program at the University of North Carolina's School of Government. I remember one evening discussion program led by the retired city manager of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Calvin Horton, and University of Kansas professor John Nalbandian. As an assistant, I thought I already understood the scrutiny of the media and the public, but I've always remembered Cal's statement that he and his wife chose to attend church in an adjacent county.

Fast forward to today, and I am all too aware of the public life that local government managers live. Our office is our entire community. For me, that means 235,000 residents and 3,000 employees. Everywhere you go, you are likely to run into someone who knows you or knows "of you." My wife has learned that the reason I do not always introduce her to people who approach us in public is because they know me and my name immediately, but I cannot remember their names.

Unfortunately, this notoriety can spread to family members. My 19-year-old daughter is a student at a local university. Last year she had a hard time finding a roommate from her sorority because the girls were afraid of me. But, then again, one night she did wake me to tell me that a party was being shut down by Winston-Salem police, and she wanted to know if I had sent them!

It has been equally hard on my 16-year-old daughter. Until last year, she had managed to keep her friends from knowing who her dad was. But then she encountered her high school civics teacher. He told the class that her dad ran the city and that the mayor was just a figurehead like the queen of England! (ICMA had best not hire this civics teacher to promote the council-manager form of government.)

Within this fishbowl, we try to do our jobs. This year, Winston Salem, like almost every community in the country, faced the most difficult budget in recent history. Every decision we made in order to close a horrendous budget gap involved negative impacts on someone. As I struggled to decide on proposals to recommend to the city council, it became clear that there were not any win-win solutions. In the end, I recommended a budget that spread the pain to everyone: employees, taxpayers, customers.

When I released my recommended budget, I expected that I was going to experience the fishbowl as I never had before. I braced myself for comments from off-duty police officers working security at the grocery store. I prepared for snide comments from my neighbors about taxes and services. But, despite Cal Horton's wise advice, I was not prepared for the encounters at church.

One Sunday, an elderly leader in my church marched up to me in the fellowship hall and announced that people wanted to "tar and feather" me for raising taxes. I had to work hard to feel spiritual grace that Sunday morning.

Looking back on the budget process, I realize now just how critical it is for a manager to be in the fishbowl. First, we work for elected officials who are also in the fishbowl and have to periodically ask the residents permission to stay in the bowl. As a manager, one of our



most important tasks is to translate between elected officials and professional staff members.

In addition, we should always have to experience firsthand the decisions we make. These decisions are carried out in a public setting, and it is important that we experience the impacts and hear directly from the residents. Last but not least, we need to stay in touch with employees.

As I went through the budget this year, I was struck by how often employees approached me and told me that they understood why we could not afford pay raises, and they just hoped we could avoid layoffs. These are appreciated sentiments.

All in all, living in the fishbowl is just part of the job, but as managers we should try to leave town occasionally for rejuvenation and maybe we should go to church in another state! **PM**



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