E PLURIBUS UNUM

Workshop on Board Governance

The general meaning of each Latin word is clear:
Pluribus is related to the English word: "plural"
Unum is related to the English word: "unit"

E Pluribus Unum describes an action: **Many uniting into one**

An accurate translation of the motto is "**Out of the many, the One**" – a phrase which elegantly captures both the symbolism and the reality of local governance.

WORKSHOP MATERIALS

Presented by

ALTA MESA GROUP LLC
A public agency consultancy

No man is good enough to govern another man without the other's consent.

Abraham Lincoln

Government is a trust, and the officers of the government are trustees. And both the trust and the trustees are created for the benefit of the people.

Henry Clay

The government is us; we are the government, you and I.

Theodore Roosevelt

E Pluribus Unum

Governing Board Effectiveness

Presented by

ALTA MESA GROUP LLC

A public agency consultancy

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Bill Chiat is Dean of the California State Association of Counties Institute for Excellence in County Government and President of Alta Mesa Group, LLC. His expertise spans over 40 years in local and state governments. He served as County Executive Officer of Napa County and Director of Organizational Effectiveness for Santa Barbara County, along with executive positions in city and special district governments. At the state level, he served as Executive Director of the Arizona Governor's Office for Excellence in Government and served on the Cabinet, and as executive director of the California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions.

Bill provides organizational development, executive development and facilitation services for local governments throughout the West, and is an instructor in the UC-Berkeley Goldman School of Public Policy executive programs.

Bill has a B.S. from the University of Minnesota, a M.S. from the University of Michigan and is a graduate of the Senior Executives in State and Local Government Program from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He has research and taught a wide range of courses in public agency leadership, structure, governance and operations.

Leadership – Agility – Resourcefulness
Bill works to expand leadership capacity and capabilities of those in public service so they may better serve their communities and advance their personal and agency goals.

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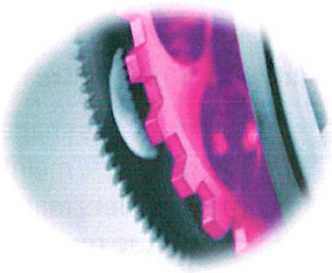
Moving from 'Out of Many' to 'One'



Building Blocks of Effective Board Governance

1. Unity of Purpose
2. Role of the Board
3. Board Culture
4. Board Structure and Process

Effective Boards do Eight Things Well

- Have a clear unity of purpose
- Are focused on task and consistent
- Operate with integrity and trust
- Treat each other with dignity and respect
- Govern within Board policies, standards and ethics
- Take collective responsibility for the Board's performance
- Ensure multiple voices from the community are heard

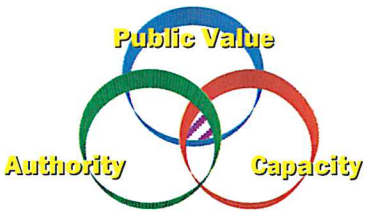
> "Exemplary boards ... are robust, effective social systems."
>
> - Jeffrey Sonnenfeld

Three Realities for Board Members

1. You campaigned as an individual but serve as a member of a team.
2. You do not have the authority as an individual to fix the problems you campaigned to fix.
3. Your success as a Board member is inextricably tied to the success of your Board.

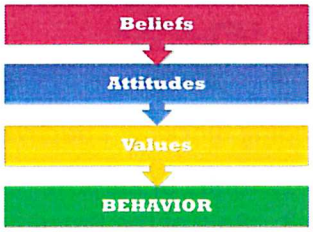
A Unity of Purpose

- Finding common ground
- How the Board wants to be known by the community
- What the Board believes; stands for as a governance team
- What the Board wants to accomplish



Building a Culture of Trust and Respect

- The members shape the culture
- The members maintain the culture
- The members may shift the culture
- Trust is the result of understanding and respect; it is not agreement

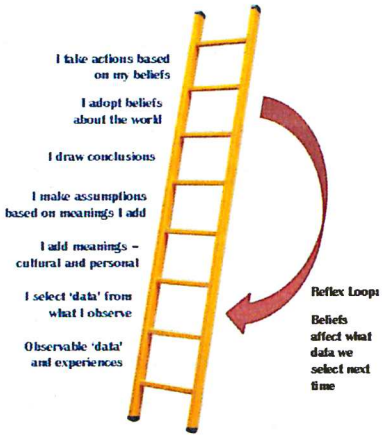


Crafting a Sustainable Culture of Trust and Respect

- Based on beliefs, values and attitudes
- How members want to act towards each other to live the desired unity of purpose
- How members want to communicate

The Ladder of Inference

- What we see is colored by what we believe
- Effective Board members understand how assumptions affect beliefs
- Question the Reflex Loop
- Are actions based on all data?



The Ladder of Inference

The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook

Communication

- Practice effective communication at all times
- Listen actively, empathetically
- Ask questions for clarification
- Avoid imputing motive
- Use 'I' messages
- Pay attention to non-verbal messages

Board Governance

Working Together to Accomplish Good

Foundations of "Policy"

- Values
- Perspectives

Categories of Board Policy—A Model for Governance

- **Ends** to be Achieved
- Executive Limitations to **Means**
- Board-Executive **Relationship**
- Board **Process** of Governance

Focus on Results

- Reasons for organization's existence
- Clarifying and sustaining mission
- Results = Ends = Outcomes = Impacts

- **Product** Benefits to be produced
- **Recipients** For whom
- **Efficiency** At what cost

- *What **good** is to be accomplished for which **people** at what **cost**?*

Core Board Products

- Linkage to Ownership
- Explicit Governing Policies
- Assurance of Executive Performance

E Pluribus Unum

- Pursuing ***Pluribus***
- Achieving ***Unum***

Adopted from: Carver, J. 1997. *Boards That Make a Difference: A new design for leadership in nonprofit and public organizations.* Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.

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Building Blocks of Effective Governance

1. Clear Sense and Unity of Purpose
2. Common Definition of Roles and Relationships
3. Culture of Team Success Based on Integrity, Trust and Respect
4. Structure and Process Focused on Ends

Sense and Unity of Purpose

A common focus on the difference the organization makes in the lives of its stakeholders. The core values and key goals the council members hold in common about the community and the services the organization provides. The clear sense and unity of purpose helps board members transcend their differences to fulfill a greater purpose.

The Reality

- *You were appointed as an individual, but serve as a member of a team.*
- *You don't have the authority as an individual to fix the problems you want to fix.*
- *Your success as a board member and organization is inextricably tied to the success of your board and your staff.*

Roles and Relationships

The Board's responsibility for itself: A common understanding of how the individuals will work together to accomplish the unity of purpose. Boards should have a well-defined definition of their function. The performance of that role and the relationships among members must be defined through conversation, mutual definition of those behaviors and practices expected of the members and the chief executive, and mutual responsibility for the board's performance.

Strong Governing Boards work effectively with their executive and staff: Recognition that the role of the board and that of the chief executive and the professional staff are truly separate. With the complexity of governance in today's organizations, the balance is less one in which there are firm boundaries to roles, and more one in which stakeholders, board members and professional staff view themselves as mutually supportive partners in the unity of purpose, problem solving and the delivery of agency services.

Board's Focus on Ends

- *Goal setting – retreats*
- *Exploration and analysis – committees*
- *Disposition and policy – regular meetings*
- *Stakeholder relations – stay in touch with the community 'owners' as well as constituents*
- *Resource stewardship – effective direction to staff*

Culture of Team Success

How the board leads as a team: How collectively and individually the board models and practices behaviors which inspire others, drives performance, shares authority and responsibility, and demonstrates to stakeholders and employees a caring about people, the community and the unity of purpose. Board members value differences while recognizing the importance of finding common ground. Trust is built around understanding and respect, not necessarily agreement. Successful boards appreciate the profound influence of interpersonal practices on governance and strive to develop expected norms.

Focus on Ends

Bifocal vision – The board is forward thinking both on immediate ends and the creation of policies with a long-range perspective. Immediate ends are aligned with long term priorities.

Strategic agility – The board manages political diversions to avert detours and focus its efforts and those of the staff on the immediate ends and collective goals. It guides these "means" through clear and consistent expectations of outcomes.

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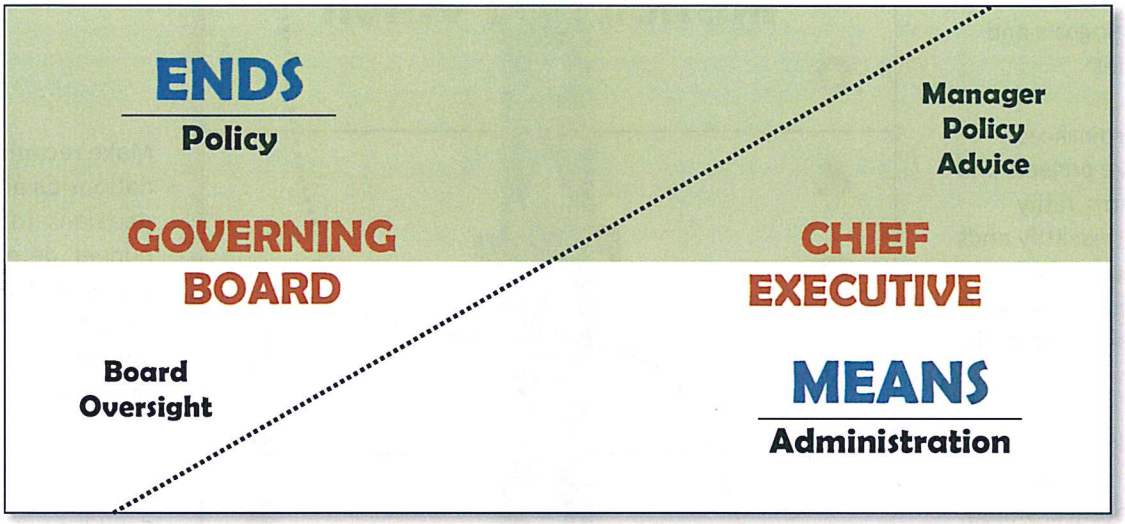
Division of Responsibilities in Local Government Board-Executive Relations



A Conversation for the Board and Executive

- What expectations does the governing board and governing board members have of the executive?
- What will the governing board contribute to support the executive?
- What will the executive contribute to support the governing board?
- What expectations does the executive have of the governing board and governing board members?

A Model for Governance in Local Government

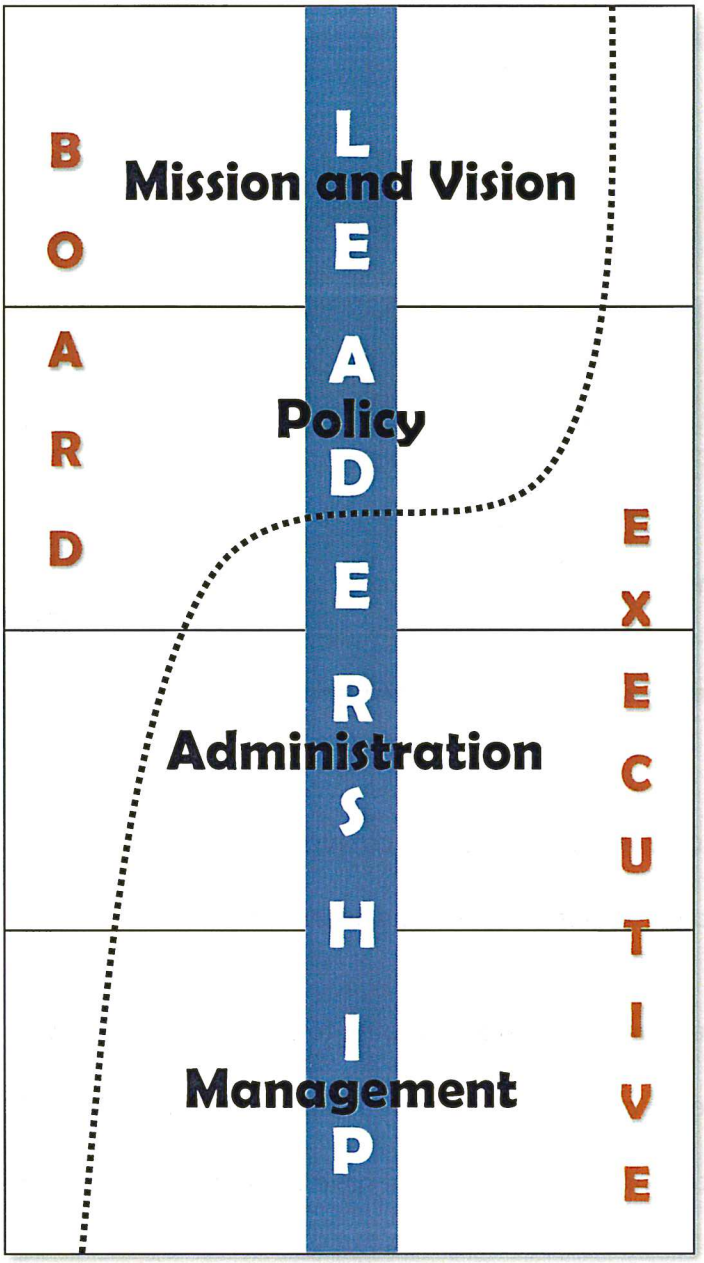
Typical Tasks

Determine purpose of organization, establish long-term vision, determine services and service levels, set strategic goals and priorities

Pass ordinances, approve projects and programs, ratify budget, identify ends and outcomes, establish values and perspectives in policy

Make key implementation decisions (i.e. siting), handle complaints, oversee administration, set decision boundaries, review performance measures

Suggest management changes to manager, approve labor and other major contracts, review performance of organization in manager review



Typical Tasks

Advise, options, past practice, analyze conditions and trends, identify constraints

Make recommendations on all decisions, formulate budget, determine service distribution formulae, create implementation plans (means)

Establish practices and procedures, make decisions for implementing policy, monitor performance

Control human, financial, material, and informational resources of organization to support policy and administrative functions

Adopted from: Svara, J.H., 1985. *Dichotomy and Duality: Reconceptualizing the Relationship between Policy and Administration in Council-Manager Cities.* In: Public Administration Review 45:228, **and** Carver, J., 2006. *Boards that Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations.* Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.

10 Habits Of Highly Effective Councils

Carl H. Neu, Jr.

Local government operations directly affect our daily existence and experiences and the quality of life that we perceive we have within our communities. No local government deserves, nor should its citizens tolerate, a council or governing body that isn't extraordinarily effective and competent in leading the community.

Thomas Cronin, a recognized authority on public policy, defines leadership as "making things happen that might not otherwise happen and preventing things from happening that ordinarily might happen. It is a process of getting people together to achieve common goals and aspirations. Leadership is a process that helps people transform intentions into positive action, visions into reality."

The quality of leadership effectiveness demonstrated by a governing body and its ability to be a highly effective council are not attributes bestowed upon it by a swearing-in ceremony. They are the results of disciplined adherence to a set of fundamental principles and skills that characterize highly effective governing bodies. Here, then, are 10 "habits" of highly effective councils, based upon the author's observations of hundreds of governing bodies over the past 20 years.

1. Think and Act Strategically

A council's primary responsibility is not just to make policy or to do its "Roman emperor" routine (thumbs down or thumbs up) on agenda items at public meetings. It is to determine and achieve the citizens' desires for the community's future. Councils and their administrative teams must accept responsibility for shaping the future of their communities by expanding their mental horizons to identify and meet the challenges that must be addressed through decisive leadership and through shared goals for the attainment of that future.

A strategic leader always comes from the future and takes you "back to the future" from the present. This leadership adventure starts with a vision and evolves into a definition of the strategic issues that must be mastered to achieve the vision. The next step is the development of long-range goals that address these strategic issues and that provide a decision-making and budgetary basis for the successful implementation of these goals. Living from one annual budget to another and from one council meeting to the next condemns your community and its future to happenstance and to the type of thinking that often befuddles national governance and policy.

For this reason, polls show that an overwhelming majority of citizens want important issues affecting their lives to be decided at the local, home town level. Here, they expect leadership, sound thinking, and decisive action. In spite of this citizen expectation, a 1996 survey conducted by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), "Survey of Current Practice in Council-Manager Governments," indicates that fewer than 40 percent of all councils set long-term strategic goals to guide their semimonthly forays into decision making.

2. Understand and Demonstrate the Elements of Teams and Teamwork

By law, councils exist and have authority only when their members convene as bodies to do business. They also are components of corporate beings that must speak, act, and fulfill their commitments with one voice and in a mature, effective, and reliable manner. Councils are collections of diverse individuals who come together to constitute and act as an entity, and only when operating as an entity can they exercise authority and perform in fulfillment of their purpose.

This is a classic definition of "team." Carl Larson and Frank LaFasto, two preeminent authorities on teams and teamwork, define a team as an entity comprising two or more people working together to accomplish a specific purpose that can be attained only through coordinated activity among the team members. In short, a team exists to fulfill a specific function or purpose and is made up of disparate, interdependent people who collectively achieve a capacity that none of its members could demonstrate individually.

Teams always have two components that we might call their S components: *systemicness* and *synergy*. All teams are systemic by definition, being made up of interdependent parts (people) who affect each other's performance and that of the team. Synergy is the ability to achieve an effect, when working together as a team, that is more than the sum of the team members' individual efforts. While all teams are systemic, relatively few are genuinely synergistic unless their members understand, master, and demonstrate the fundamentals of teamwork, which are:

- A clear sense of purpose.
- A clear definition of the roles and relationships that unite individual talents and capacities to achieve team performance.
- Integration of members who have basic technical, interpersonal, and decision-making competence.
- A commitment to team success and performance excellence.
- A climate of trust, openness, and mutual respect.
- Clear standards of success and performance excellence.
- The support, resources, and recognition to achieve success.
- Principled and disciplined leadership.

Highly effective councils spend time building their sense of being a team and enhancing their skills in productive teamwork.

3. Master Small-Group Decision Making

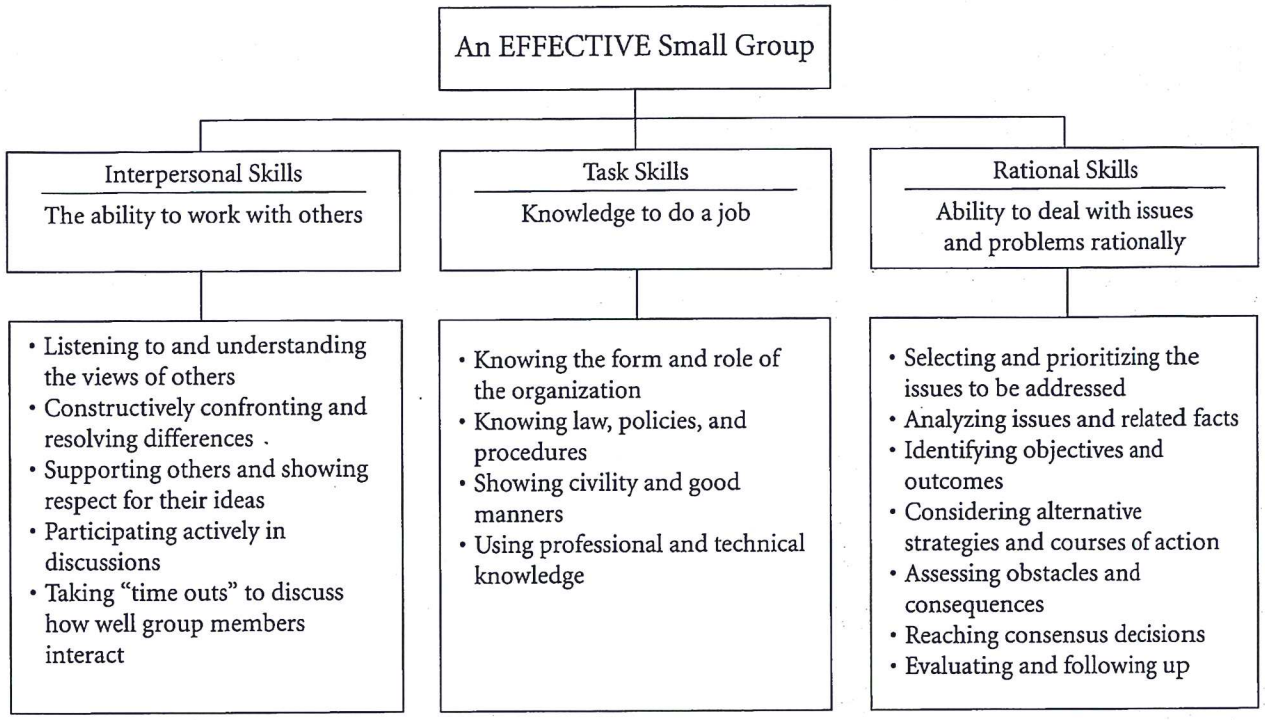
Most councils are classic small groups, with fewer than a dozen people. Small groups demonstrate certain skills and behaviors that link their members together. They also have knowledge of the processes they must follow to make decisions in fulfillment of their purpose. Figure 1 summarizes the skill sets essential to small-group effectiveness.

4. Clearly Define Roles and Relationships

Each team member, whether mayor or councilmember, makes a contribution to and has a relationship with the team. Contributions and relationships must be defined in terms of the role to be assumed and how that role is to be carried out through the behavior of the person in the role.

A role has two elements: *function*, the specific responsibilities of that role, regardless of incumbency; and *performance*, the behavior of the person occupying the role in fulfilling his or her responsibilities. Councils, through charter, statute, or ordinance, have a clear definition of their function. The perfor-

Figure 1. Effective Small-Group Decision Making



mance component must be defined within the team through discussion and mutual definition of those behaviors and practices expected of the mayor and councilmembers in the conduct of their duties and interactions.

Vince Lombardi, when asked what made a winning team, replied, "Start with the fundamentals. A player's got to know the basics of the game and how to play his [her] position. The players have to play as a team, not a bunch of individuals. The difference between mediocrity and greatness is the feeling the players have for each other," that is, their relationships. Teams talk about and define expected roles and relationships and give constructive feedback to their members on the degree to which they are fulfilling these expectations.

5 Establish and Abide by a Council-Staff Partnership

We have all heard the saying "Council makes policy, staff implements policy." Well, this is a total misconception of reality. Policy making and policy implementation are not distinct and separate functions. Policy making/implementation is a continuum of thought and relations that transforms ideas and abstractions (visions, policies, goals, and plans) into defined, observable ends or outcomes (results, programs, buildings, streets, deliverable services). Council and staff share this continuum as partners ensuring each other's success. Each person plays an important role in making sound policies and in ensuring their effective implementation through reliable administrative practices and performance. Figure 2 depicts this partnership and continuum.

John Carver, a widely acclaimed author who writes about boards that make a difference, discusses this partnership as one in which councils define the needs to be met and the outcomes to be achieved. He believes that councils should allow staff, within council-established limits, to define the means for achieving these ends. He sees a council-staff linkage that empowers staff to do its tasks and to be evaluated on the results produced.

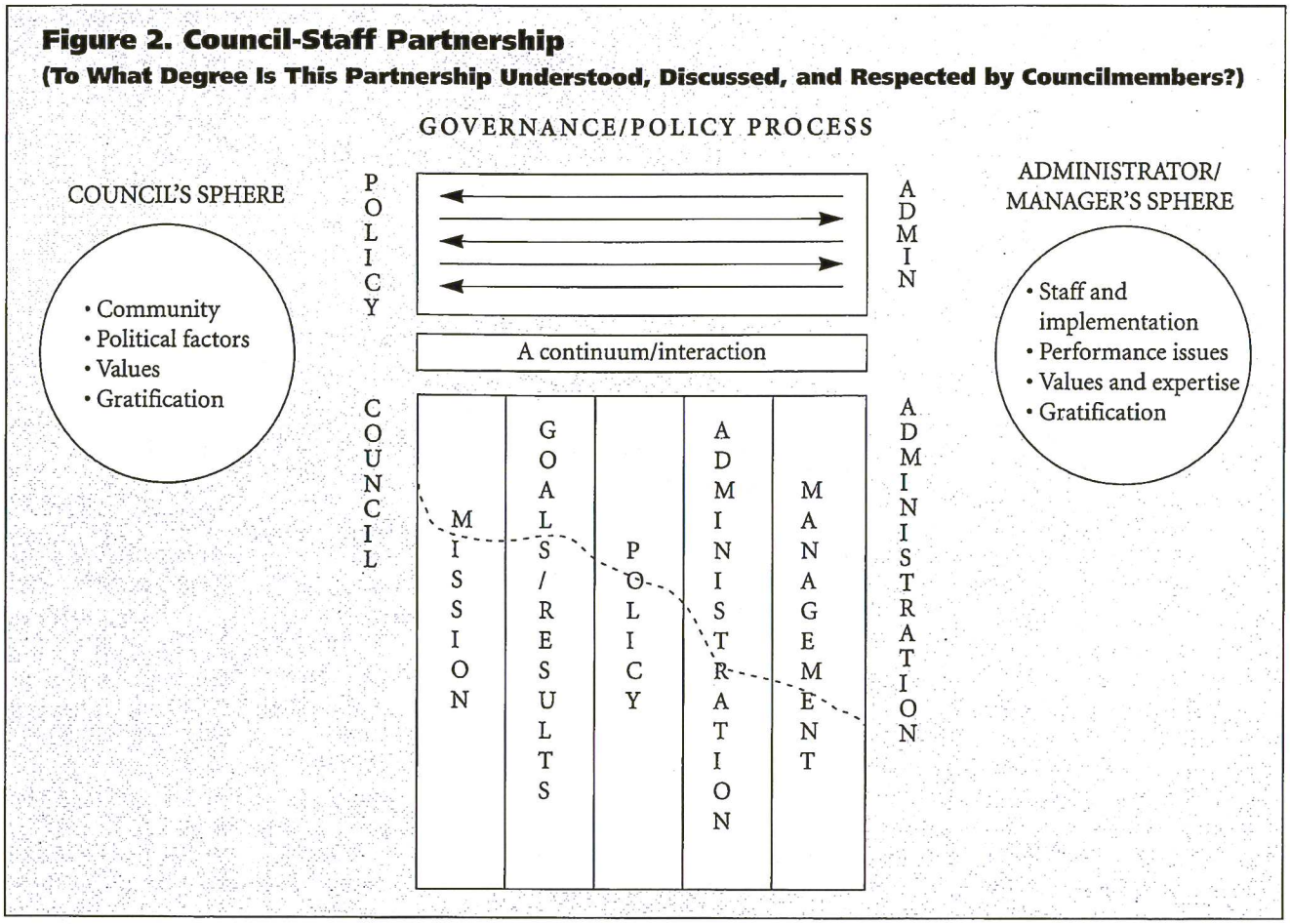
Councils that accept and abide by this partnership focus their energy on establishing vision, goals, and good policy and on empowering effective staff performance. Councils that do not do this will frequently fall into micromanaging, that is, they will perceive a need to become involved in, or retain approval over, even minor staff activity and plans.

A critical element and important council task in this partnership is evaluation of the manager or administrator, based upon clearly defined goals, policies, and established guidelines on executive performance. According to the 1996 ICMA survey, only about 45 percent of all councils formally evaluate their managers' performance.

6 Make a Systematic Evaluation of Policy Implementation

Councils, like most legislative bodies, frequently exhibit the Jean Luc Picard syndrome (*Star Trek II*) and simply tell their staffs: "Make it so." They assume that council action equates to policy and program implementation. The next time the council hears about policy is when a problem or crisis arises.

In contrast, highly effective councils



expect periodic feedback on policy results and on possible policy amendments that may be required. This feedback can be provided through progress reports, status memos or newsletters, and policy reviews.

7 Allocate Council Time and Energy Appropriately

Councils, like other teams, play in a number of settings or arenas to achieve overall, peak performance. There are four council-staff arenas, and each must be appreciated for its purpose and for its contribution to a council's effectiveness:

- Goal setting (retreats or "advances").
- Exploration and analysis (study sessions).
- Disposition/legislation (regular public meetings).
- Community relations (interactions with constituents and with other agencies).

Figure 3 shows the purpose, typical setting, focus, and key characteristics of each arena. All four arenas are essential to highly effective councils' fulfillment of their leadership, policy-making, goal-setting, and empowering responsibilities.

A highly effective council will hold at least one goal-setting retreat or "advance" annually. It also will hold two study sessions monthly, usually between regularly scheduled public hearings. Here, councilmembers will confer with staff and other experts on significant items under consideration that will eventually require official actions.

While these meetings should be open to the public as observers, the public should not participate in the council-staff dialogue. Many councils short-change this arena, pushing the opportunity for learning into the formal public hearing, which is not designed to promote much in-depth analysis of complex issues. The arena of *disposition/legislation* is designed to get to a vote, not to promote careful analysis of complex issues.

The fourth arena, *community relations*, is becoming more important. It is rapidly transforming the role of the council and how it spends its time. Communities today are more dependent upon sophisticated alliances and partnerships among groups, both public and private entities. Jurisdictions are subject to multiple, profound changes in how public officials operate. Today, the community arena requires more time spent in interactions outside city hall and puts greater time pressure on mayors and councilmembers.

8 Set Clear Rules and Procedures for Council Meetings

Council meetings exist for the purpose of doing the council's business. Literature on how to conduct effective and productive meetings specifies the need for an adherence to clearly defined rules and procedures.

Figure 3. Arenas for Governing Body and Staff Performance

Arena	Goal Setting	Exploration and Analysis	Disposition/ Legislation	Community Relations
Purposes	• Establish vision • Explore potentials • Set goals • Set direction/ priorities -Community -Services -Staff action -Budgets	• Understanding the issue(s) • Problem identification • Selecting "best options" • Building commitment	• Taking official action • Voting on items -Resolutions -Ordinances • Gathering public input • Mobilizing support	• Interacting with constituents/citizens • Building alliances • Doing outreach and liaison • Coordinating with other entities
Typical Setting	Retreat or advance—informal off-site workshop	Study session—conference room	Public—formal council meeting in chambers	Numerous—diverse formats
Focuses	• Future of community • Evaluation of -Needs -Trends -Strategic issues • Community desires and values • Leadership	• Developing knowledge for decision making • Sorting of options • Examining consequences • Setting strategies • Making competent and informed decisions	• Going through the agenda (formality) • Showing authority • Ratifiying/adopting • Dealing with political pressures • Identifying psychological needs	• Communicating • Problem solving • Collaborating and coordinating • Forming partnership(s) • Acting as a community
Key Characteristics	• Informality • Sharing of options • Open dialogue • Creative thinking • Humor and adventure • Face-to-face/group interaction	• Starting council-staff dialogue • Questioning and testing ideas • Exchanging information • Negotiating and consensus building • No voting • Face-to-face/group interaction	• Meeting formally • Setting and following rules and procedures • Encouraging public input and involvement • Gaining high visibility • Dealing with pressure/advocacy from groups • Voting • Interacting as groups	• Being "outside" city hall • Responding to requests • Starting joint ventures • Facilitating interagency activity • Using multiple interaction modes and communication techniques

Many councils, however, drift from these rules and procedures in pursuit of informality, collegiality, and "just being nice." They let their meetings drone on with a lack of focus, redundant comments, and endless discussion.

Rules and procedures do not preclude citizen input, courtesy, or sensitivity to public concerns and viewpoints. They respect all these elements and the necessity to conduct business in an orderly, disciplined, and productive manner.

9 Get a Valid Assessment of the Public's Concerns and an Evaluation of the Council's Performance

Elections are contests among individuals vying to become members of the council. They are not valid, objective assessments of the public's feeling about the quality of the council's performance as a governing body and about whether or not it is addressing issues effectively.

Highly effective councils seek feedback through a number of market research tools such as focus groups, surveys, and questionnaires. Typically, the phone calls a councilmember receives or the comments made in public hearings are not valid or accurate reflections of the entire community's sentiments about issues and about the council's performance. "Market research feedback" should be ongoing and should be included in the annual goal-setting retreat or advance.

10. Practice Continuous Personal Learning and Development as a Leader

Leaders read, attend workshops, and constantly seek information, understanding, and insight. Highly effective councils are composed of members who honestly know they don't know it all. They take advantage of the myriad of opportunities to learn and to perfect their skills by reading, going to state and national municipal league workshops, and attending every forum that can expand their skills to lead and govern well.

A highly effective council also learns as a council. It works closely with the manager to improve its leadership skills and the council-manager relationship, assessing objectively its performance on each of the 10 habits. This assessment should include the observations of councilmembers, manager, department heads, and selected members of the community who have occasion to work and interact with councilmembers. The effective council should decide where gains can be made, then set up the opportunity through council workshops to learn the skills needed to make these gains.

In 1990, Mayor Margaret Carpenter and City Manager Jack Ethredge of Thornton, Colorado, began a process with Thornton's council to increase the council's leadership skills and effectiveness that incorporated the 10 habits described in this article.

First, the council conducted a careful reexamination of the city's mission and the role that it had to assume to ensure fulfillment of that mission. Then, in discussions with the city manager, councilmembers made a commitment to leadership innovation and excellence that focused on long-term and strategic issues vital to the community's future. The process involved advances, close attention to community feedback through focus groups and surveys, and frequent self-evaluation of both council's and staff's performance and sense of partnership.

Now, the council holds multiple advances each year to define and validate its strategic perspective and policy leadership. Skill development workshops accompany these advances and focus on defined needs that are identified by councilmembers. Specific "time-outs" are taken to evaluate how the council is functioning as a team, as well as how it functions with staff and with the community. The continuous quest for effectiveness always begins with the question "Is there more we should be doing to improve our leadership performance and to ensure a quality future for our community?"

As Jack Ethredge observes: "The entire process has helped Thornton's council to identify the issues that are essential to achieving our community's goals and to building collaborative relationships with citizens and with staff to agree about the goals. Thornton now is a community of partnerships, all focusing on a vision and using our combined resources to become the city we want to be in the future. There has been a real breakthrough in the amount of creative energy that is moving Thornton forward."

The last, and probably most important, point: Keep your sense of humor. Governance is a serious business dealing with the vital issues affecting our communities and the quality of life we experience within them. But humor reduces friction and stress, lets others know that we and they are human, and brings a pause that refreshes our insight and commitment. It is essential to forging and maintaining good relationships.

Every community deserves nothing less than a highly effective council that embraces accountability for the community's performance in creating its future and in effectively addressing, in the present, those challenges vital to attaining that future. That is what is at stake: our communities' future. With few exceptions, every council can be highly effective and can provide strong leadership, but to become effective will require a good governance model and disciplined adherence to the fundamental habits of effectiveness. PM

The Manager's Role in Building a Highly Effective Council

- Focus the council on leadership and achieving a quality future for the community.
- Select a time and place to conduct a facilitated discussion about factors affecting the council's effectiveness. It is recommended that the manager be involved in this discussion.
- Invite the council to assess candidly and objectively its performance relative to the 10 habits of highly effective councils included in this article and other effectiveness indicators that councilmembers feel are appropriate.
- Have the council identify where significant gains in effectiveness are desired.
- Develop specific strategies and opportunities with the council to achieve desired goals.
- Schedule specific skill-building workshops for the council. Include key staff members when the focus is on council-staff relationship issues.
- Establish a process with the council to evaluate gains that have been made and to target new opportunities for improvement.
- Remember: peak performers constantly seek to improve their performance. They know they are on an endless journey of growth, performance effectiveness, and achievement.

Carl Neu, Jr., is executive vice president of Neu and Company, Lakewood, Colorado.
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Worksheet for Creating Council Protocols

Structure and process agreements about how we operate and do business

	Is this an issue or concern?	Do we need a council protocol?	Rate 1-3 1=low/3=high priority
Developing the meeting agenda			
Structure of the council agenda			
Placing items on the agenda			
Agenda questions answered before a meeting			
Sticking to the agenda			
Using meetings as political tools			
Informal councilmember reports at council meetings			
Allowing majority vote to set the direction			
Preparation for meetings			
Civility in discussions amongst council members			
Treating each other with respect			
Treating staff with respect			
Treating public with respect			
Bringing agenda items back for further discussion			
Explaining 'no' votes			
Council meeting management, length of meetings			
Sharing expertise			
Bringing up new ideas or issues			
Re-voting on issues			
Seating arrangement at the council table			
Placement of city manager and staff in the council chamber			
Requesting information from staff by the council			

	Is this an issue or concern?	Do we need a council protocol?	Rate 1-3 1=low/3=high priority
Individual council member requests for information			
Individual council member requests for action or directing staff			
Handling complaints from the community			
Handling complaints from the staff			
Addressing concerns of the community			
Role of the mayor			
Use of committees			
Use of study sessions; scheduling of study sessions			
Confidentiality of closed sessions			
Council member role in the community			
Council/council communications			
Council/city manager communications			
Council/staff communications			
Self-monitoring of governance team effectiveness			
Council member assignments to commissions, advisory committees, external agencies			
Others:			
_____			
_____			
_____			
_____			

Rate your sense of the trust level amongst the council members:

LOW ● ● ● ● ● HIGH

1 2 3 4 5