City Management Theory and Practice: A Foundation for Educating the Next Generation of Local Government Administrators

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

The abstract and dissertation of Scott Douglas Lazenby for the Doctor of Philosophy in Public Administration and Policy were presented July 14, 2009, and accepted by the dissertation committee and the doctoral program.

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ABSTRACT


Title: City Management Theory and Practice: A Foundation for Educating the Next Generation of Local Government Administrators

Due to the retirement of the baby boom generation, many individuals, in a relatively short period of time, will need to be trained and educated to step into local government senior leadership positions. Ideally, the education and training of this new leadership cadre should be guided by a well known and proven body of theory that helps us understand the competencies the next generation of public service need to possess in order to be effective in their work. The purpose of this research is to assess whether such a body of work exists and, if so, whether it is successfully addresses the challenges faced by the next generation of senior public service leaders.

The study uses a deductive process to identify important local government management competencies that are not supported by available public administration theory. First, the critical competencies needed by city managers are identified using existing data, supplemented by new data resulting from a Delphi study and a panel of top practitioners and scholars in the field. Second, these competencies are compared to the content of curricula of Master of Public Administration programs with a concentration in local government. Finally, critical competencies are evaluated against
available theory as found in the public administration academic literature.

This analysis identifies 118 individual competencies important to effective local government management. The majority of these competencies are similar to those that are important to business and federal agency managers. MPA programs with a concentration in local government provide good coverage of competencies associated with administration, legal/institutional systems, and technical/analytical skills. There is less coverage of competencies associated with ethics, interpersonal communications, human relations, leadership, group processes, and community-building. Academic journals address theory supporting some of the competencies that receive little coverage by professional degree programs, but a sample of 3,811 articles yielded only fifty-three addressing competencies directly relating to senior level management. These findings serve not only as a guideline for research and education, but ultimately to improved management of local governments.
CITY MANAGEMENT THEORY AND PRACTICE:
A FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATORS

by

SCOTT DOUGLAS LAZENBY

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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S.D.L.
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<tr>
<td>ASPA</td>
<td>American Society for Public Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief executive officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICMA</td>
<td>International City/County Management Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPA</td>
<td>Master's (degree) in Public Administration, or Master of Public Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>NASPAA</td>
<td>National Association of Schools of Public Affairs &amp; Administration</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study is motivated by a long-term interest in finding better tools and theories to use in managing cities. Over a thirty year career in local government I have often been confronted by challenges for which neither my formal education nor my previous experience fully equipped me. Professional colleagues provided helpful advice on the tools and theories they had found helpful in similar situations, but I often suspected their success was due as much to luck as to their practical management effectiveness and the theories that informed these practices. Surely, I thought, the scholars have the answers, because they have access to a rich set of research in a wide range of fields. I re-entered academia largely out of an interest in tapping this great undiscovered resource.

What I (and others) have found is that scholars in the field of public administration have done an excellent job describing the role of city managers. Much is known about what city managers do. There is, however, less research on how city managers can be most effective in doing their jobs. What can we learn from psychologists to better deal with a city council member who thrives on divisiveness? If—as public administration theory proposes—city managers do (and should) serve in a role of empowering neighborhood and community groups, where is the research that shows us the most effective group processes to use in a variety of situations for empowering these groups? Where is the research that shows us the most effective way of performing this role in a manner that ensures the confidence and support of the city
council? In some cases, the answers to questions like these are found in the public administration academic literature, but in many cases they are not.

The adequacy of a theoretical foundation that supports the practice of city management is an important question, because there is strong evidence that many individuals will need to be prepared to assume city manager positions, and this preparation will need to be done fairly rapidly, without the luxury of years of apprenticeship. Formal education, drawing on theory that supports the competencies that are essential to effective city management, will be a critical factor in the next generation of city managers. The next generation does not have the luxury of learning the theory from their superiors because many will have retired, and the next generation will have a short path to senior executive positions. Many will have to learn it as part of their formal education.

While the first baby boomers are only now reaching retirement age, the exodus of these individuals from local government is already being experienced. Professional organizations such as the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) suggest that several thousand individuals, in a relatively short period of time, will need to be trained and educated to step into local government senior leadership roles. Certainly city managers and placement firms that assist in hiring local governmental managers would argue that to be most effective, training programs and the theoretical framework they are based on should be closely aligned with practical needs. However, the ability to shape education and training for local government
administration through the use of theory assumes the existence of an adequate body of appropriate and applicable theory. In order to determine whether that body of work exists and is indeed adequate and appropriate is the focus of this research. Specifically, my goal is first to arrive at a fairly precise and complete description of the competencies that city managers need in order to be effective in their jobs, and then to evaluate the extent to which those competencies are addressed by research and theory development as evidenced by coverage in both graduate education (Master of Public Administration) and public administration academic literature.

In this study, the focus is on city managers as a special type of local government manager. There are several reasons for this focus. First, twenty-nine of my thirty-one years of local government administration experience have been in city management, and as a researcher I can draw on that experience. Second, the majority of public administration academic literature on local government focuses on city management (and specifically the role of the chief executive officer of cities). Third, most of the managerial skills used by administrators of counties and special districts are also used by city managers. Nevertheless, city management is a subset of local

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1 The term “city manager” typically refers to the chief executive officer of a city organized under the council-manager form of government. While the focus of this study is more limited than local government administration in general, I will use the “city manager” label to also include senior managers of cities, such as deputy city managers or management & budget directors, and chief administrative officers of cities organized under the mayor-council form of government.

government administration, and this study will include a discussion of the applicability of this research to county and special district management.

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. First, it will summarize the importance of the study and its contribution to theory and practice. Second, it will summarize the literature on the theory and practice of local government management, and the evidence in the literature both for a lack of a complete understanding of the critical competencies required for responding to city management challenges, and for a lack of research and theory that underlies some of these competencies. Finally, it will present the research question and the approach to the study.

The Need to Prepare the Next Generation of City Managers: The Value of the Study

Consider the following observations of the state of the professional workforce in the United States:

The proportion of older workers is expected to shoot up an average of 4% per year between 2000 and 2015. The proportion of younger workers is shrinking.\(^3\)

Among the broad occupational groups, the executive, administrative, and managerial occupations will experience the greatest turnover. Those 45 and older make up 41 percent of this group, and 42 percent of these older workers are expected to leave by 2008. That is equal to nearly 3 million job openings in

this field due to retirements, resulting in a significant loss of managerial skills and experience.\(^4\)

As the oldest baby boomers become senior citizens in 2011, the population 65 and older is projected to grow faster than the total population in every state. In fact, 26 states are projected to double their 65- and-older population between 2000 and 2030.\(^5\)

In most jurisdictions and agencies, the majority of managers and leaders will be retirement eligible within the next five years, if not already. Their inevitable departure creates a new urgency to develop potential successors, often on a faster track and with a shorter learning curve than ever before. In many organizations, the potential pool will be smaller than in the past.\(^6\)

The retirement of the baby boom generation is resulting in a shortage of workers, especially those with specialized skills. Young notes that the leading edge of this shortage will occur in the public sector, due to defined-benefit pensions and incentives for early retirement.\(^7\) In 1971, seventy-one percent of city managers in the United States were age forty or younger. By 2006, that percentage had fallen to only thirteen percent. During the same time period, the number of city managers over fifty years of age jumped from eight percent to fifty-nine percent.\(^8\) If those over the age of fifty retire in the next ten to fifteen years, this represents over 5,000 vacancies among the 9,000 current ICMA members. Since not all city managers—and relatively few

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\(^7\) Ibid.

city department heads—are members of ICMA, this number understates the total number of potential vacancies in executive leadership positions in cities.

Michael McCauley, Executive Director of the League of Oregon Cities, has assembled a task force of Oregon managers to help his organization address the sudden problem of a dwindling number of qualified applicants for city manager positions. McCauley noted that it is even difficult to entice department heads to apply for the city manager slot: they are often near retirement themselves. In early 2008, six major cities in California’s San Francisco Bay area were operating without city managers. “Cities are hiring executive search firms left and right, but those firms impart bad news.”

If the demand for city managers is higher than usual, the supply of applicants may be smaller than usual. The challenge of filling city manager positions in the Bay Area was attributed not only to the exodus of the baby boomers but also to “generation Xers [who] don’t go into public service with the same fervor as their parents.” The fifty-nine percent of city managers who are over fifty began their careers when government was compared to the halcyon age of Camelot and John F. Kennedy challenged Americans to “ask what you can do for your country.” In contrast, a news article quotes Palo Alto city manager Frank Benest who observes that “young people care about the social issues and ‘saving the world,’ but they turn to non-profits, not

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11 Ibid.
government, for employment...Many young adults view government as ‘bureaucratic, mind-numbing, mindless.’”

A study by the Brookings Institution confirms this observation: in a survey, college seniors rated the nonprofit sector higher than government in “helping people” and in “delivering services on the public’s behalf.”

Elizabeth Kellar, ICMA Deputy Executive Director, notes that:

> These results may not be surprising when one considers the constant messages that young people have heard throughout their lives. Since the late 1970s, most successful presidential campaigns have been run on an “anti-Washington” platform that suggested that there was substantial waste, fraud, and abuse in government, and that better results in services could be achieved by contracting-out more functions.

Two predictions can be drawn from these studies. The first is that there will be an urgent need to prepare a new generation for managing local governments in general and cities in particular. With the retiring of baby boomers goes the accumulated knowledge and skill base of thousands of years of on-the-job experience. This loss of experience will need to be at least partially offset by knowledge and skills that are learned through education and training, because new managers will have an accelerated career path and because there will not be a sufficient cadre of experienced managers to bring new people along in the profession.

There is reason for hope that there will in fact be increasing interest in local government on the part of pre-service students. The stated preference for the nonprofit sector noted above could be at least partly due to a lack of awareness of

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opportunities for public service in local government administration. Young people
drawn to non-profits may also find more openings with reasonable pay and benefits in
local government. They may be attracted because of the ability to see results fairly
rapidly, and to the more dynamic, less rigid character of local government
organizations (in comparison to larger nonprofits and state and national governments).
The anti-government public sentiment may also be lessening. For example, neither of
the two major party candidates in the 2008 presidential election engaged in the same
kind of government-bashing rhetoric that candidates like Ronald Reagan employed.
The sheer magnitude of local government employment opportunities, in comparison to
those of the states and national government, can make local government attractive in a
challenging job market.

A second prediction can be made from the demographic studies. While
vacancies at the top (CEO and department levels) will, in some cases, cause a chain of
vacancies that will manifest themselves in entry level positions, management positions
may also be filled by individuals moving into local government from the private and
non-profit sectors, or substantially different areas of public management, such as
military command positions or military base managers. This observation may seem at
odds with past trends in cross-sector career movement, in which city managers are
fired or suffer from burnout and transition into private sector careers. While that
pattern may well continue, the sheer size of the retiring city manager cohort could
cause a shift in the tide, and a net migration of individuals from other sectors into local
government management.
In addition to the demographic factors that influence a need to educate new local government managers, changes in the way individuals become city and county managers may also be increasing the need to educate individuals for these roles. To the degree that there has been a “traditional” career path for a city manager, it has typically followed one of two paths. The first is a progression within an organization, starting as a management assistant, budget analyst, or assistant to the city manager, and moving through assistant manager or department head positions. The second path is a progression from (typically) the CEO position of smaller cities and counties to larger organizations. The first path will be less reliable as a source of new city managers because, in many cases, the department heads and assistant city managers are also reaching retirement age. “Why would I want the stress of the city manager’s job when I’m about to pull the plug myself?” is a typical department head’s comment. The second path (a progression of smaller to larger organizations) will suffer from the same problem of the retirement of applicant pool, and it may be further threatened by two countervailing forces. First, the rise of dual career families makes it more difficult for one of the bread-winners to pick up stakes and move to another city. Compounding this is evidence that the physical place matters more, and that Americans may be picking their geographic location first, and their job second. Second, there appears to be an increased tendency for city managers to target a particular city size, and stay there through a career. The responsiveness and flexibility

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of a smaller organization is professionally fulfilling, and offsets the typically lower salaries of smaller cities. The relative political stability of smaller rural and suburban cities can lead to long tenures in a single city. At the same time, the higher salaries in the larger cities are a barrier to movement to a smaller jurisdiction. Thus, with a breakdown in the traditional city manager career path, non-traditional entry into the profession could be more common.

These trends will combine to create a substantial increase in both the quantity and quality of education and training to meet the demand for the next generation of city managers. Younger pre-service students will need an education that provides sufficient skills and applied knowledge to assist them in finding and filling entry level staff positions. They also need enough broad-based knowledge to equip them for career development and progression. Others, with more experience in supervising employees and dealing with organizational challenges will need training in the skills and areas of knowledge that distinguish local government management from other areas of public administration or the private and non-profit sectors.

*The Need for Education Based on a Foundation of Theory*

The International City/County Management Association, through its “Next Generation Initiative,” has stressed the urgency of preparing a new cohort of individuals to assume city and county management positions, and has urged its members to actively engage in profession-wide succession planning. According to

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ICMA’s report, *Preparing the Next Generation*, the demand for education and training is expected to be met through a variety of sources, and one of these sources will be formal education, typically at the graduate (master’s) level. The topics covered in a university-based master’s degree program may appear similar to those that appear in the programs of briefer professional seminars and on-the-job training, but there are differences. First, there is the obvious difference in length and format, and second, there is also a difference in approach and content. Even in an applied science like public administration, a graduate degree program can make accessible theory that helps prospective and mid-career practitioners understand the world of public management. For example, as a city manager once put it, “through experience, I’ve learned which buttons to push to make things happen. What I want to learn now is why those buttons work the way they do.” It is the theory behind public administration that provides the models and causal mechanisms that separate education from mere skills training. Skill in speaking and empathy are useful in union negotiations, but mastery of negotiation depends on knowledge of the processes that can move an impasse to a mutually satisfying agreement. Skill in using a spreadsheet has become almost indispensable in budgeting, but one cannot master a budgeting system without knowledge of the competing goals of the actors in the budget process, and the effects of budget rules on the behavior of managers.

One could argue that pre-service students seeking entry level positions need

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19 Personal communication, February 2007.
skills more than theory (for example, skills in use of spreadsheets and office technology, time management and communications skills). But pre-service students also need foundations for understanding the field and its challenges on which they can build their skills sets. Pedagogical principles also support the notion that even skill training is most effective when it is based on this kind of foundation. Wiggins and McTighe argue, for instance, that learning is most effective when practical exercises are sandwiched between explanations of the theory behind the practices.\textsuperscript{20}

For a multi-disciplinary field like public administration (and the sub-field of local government management), universities are in a unique position to draw on theory from a wide range of disciplines, whether from psychology, business administration, economics, political science, sociology, or public policy. But to educate a new generation of local government managers, the appropriate body of theory must in fact exist. Charles Liebman wrote, "We can't teach what we don't know," and he was specifically referring a mismatch between the needs of the practice of public administration and the theory that was (at the time) available in the university.\textsuperscript{21}

This discussion assumes there is a connection between public administration theory and the competencies that city managers need to be effective in their jobs. This assumption is central to this study, as we will see in a moment. It is explored more

\textsuperscript{21} Charles S. Liebman, "Teaching Public Administration: Can we Teach what we Don't Know?" \textit{Public Administration Review} 23, no. 3 (Sep., 1963), 167-169.
fully below, and the assertion that theory is important to the development of competencies is supported by the literature.

Research Question and the Value of the Study to the Development of Theory

The research question of this study is this: to what extent does existing theory on local government administration provide a foundation for a curriculum based in a well supported understanding of the current and emerging knowledge and skills required by senior city executives? Answering this question will not only ascertain whether there is in fact a gap between the critical competencies for city management and available public administration theory that provides a foundation for those competencies. It will also identify, if any, the specific bodies of theory that appear to be missing, and provide suggestions for directions and approaches for further theory development.

The literature review will indicate that there is a limited body of available theory within public administration that is specific to local government management, outside a well-studied topic of the city manager’s role in community politics and policy-setting (as compared to a purely administrative role). Woodrow Wilson, "The Study of Administration," *Political Science Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Jun., 1887), 197-222.
research has been on the national government$^{23}$ and it is possible that this focus has missed key aspects of the skills and knowledge needed by senior city executives. Those who hire and supervise local government managers are likely to suggest that there is a need and an opportunity to develop new public administration theory that more adequately addresses the senior management challenges of local government.

Beyond the immediate task of preparing a new generation of local government managers, the identification of new areas for research and theory development can benefit local government itself. The management environment has changed profoundly in recent decades with the advent of blogs, live streaming video of council meetings, globalization,$^{24}$ diminishing social capital,$^{25}$ increasing citizen ignorance of government and public policy issues,$^{26}$ and continued shifting of service responsibilities from the national government to states and local governments. There is reason to be concerned whether the development of theory has kept pace with these trends, and pinpointing these potential gaps will help guide research in these areas.

This work will also provide empirical data that can provide a foundation for theory development. The primary contributions of this study to the field of local government administration will be an improved understanding of the competencies that are critical for effective city management and the relationship of those

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competencies to contemporary MPA education and scholarship. There is a prescriptive element to this understanding, in cases where city managers should possess certain competencies in order to best respond to current and future management challenges, even if they do not in practice. But there is a descriptive element, too, in the case of critical competencies that current practitioners do possess. To the extent that these competencies are not accounted for in public administration literature, this study can provide an improved foundation for theory development.

The Value of the Study to Practice

Preparing the next generation of city managers will require not only an adequate body of theory upon which to base education, but it will also require that the theory provides a foundation for the skills and knowledge that will be essential for the local government managers of the future. This may seem obvious, but the concept that an education program should be designed around specific outcomes—as defined by a set of desired skills and knowledge—is not as commonplace as one would think.27 When preparing future city managers for their profession by providing them with a specific set of skills and a body of knowledge, it would be helpful if those skills and knowledge were useful in managing a city. Gloria Grizzles writes:

Both instructors and practitioners should commit themselves to designing curricula that provide the analytic skills that MPA students need. What seems most lacking is an appreciation among instructors of the skills that

27 Grant P. Wiggins and Jay McTighe, Understanding by Design.
practitioners deem essential coupled with an appreciation among practitioners of their responsibility to share with MPA programs on a continual basis, their opinions about the skills that MPA students need to acquire (emphasis added).\(^{28}\)

Whether current graduate programs are in fact providing a foundation in the competencies that city managers will need is very much an open question. Some excellent research has been done in the area, and it will be highlighted below. But the picture is not complete, nor is it up to date. The National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) is the accrediting body for Master's Degrees in Public Administration (MPA) programs. In an interview in May of 2008, Laurel McFarland, the Executive Director of NASPAA noted that research that answers the question, “What competencies do the best city managers possess?” would be valuable, not just for programs with a concentration in local government administration, but also as a source of guidance for the standards used to review MPA programs and the suggested common curriculum elements of those programs.\(^{29}\)

Public administration, of course, includes the administration of federal agencies, state agencies, and non-profit agencies, in addition to the administration of local governments. So why would an organization like NASPAA be particularly interested in the competencies of city managers, when the field of public administration is much larger? First, if public administration is a single field, there is presumably some overlap in the skills and knowledge required in managing


\(^{29}\) Laurel McFarland, personal communication, May 2008.
governments at any level (for example, in skills in supervising employees and knowledge of organizational theory). Second, there are many more job opportunities for graduates of MPA programs at the local level than at the state and national levels. There is one national government, fifty state governments, and over 87,000 units of local government. Some 63% of all civilian government employment is at the local level. While MPA students may choose among various professional paths, it is important to address the needs of the large percentage of those students who will find a career in local government. Third, those who do choose careers in federal and state service would be well-served through an understanding of the unique challenges of local government management, if for no other reason than to facilitate intergovernmental cooperation and partnerships. Thus, even where courses and curricula are not specifically focused on local government, the full integration of local government issues is important.

Almost two decades ago, ICMA convened a task force to identify the "practices" that are essential to local government management. The resulting list has been used to guide the subjects chosen for the Association’s training program and for its books and other publications. It has also served as a foundation for the city and county managers’ voluntary credentialing program, initiated in the past decade, which stresses continuing education and professional development throughout the manager’s

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career. But the list of "practices" identified in 1991 may not be complete, and it might not fully address the challenges that will confront local government leaders in the twenty-first century. For example, e-government as that concept is used today really did not exist in 1991. As another example, newspaper readership has plummeted since 1991, and citizens are arguably less informed about government than ever. Robert O’Neill, Executive Director pointed out in an interview (also in May, 2008) that three questions currently confront the local government management profession: “first, why does professional local government management matter? Second, how do we measure professionalism? And third, what do local government managers need to know?” A knowledge base for city management implies a deeper (educational) foundation for professional competency than simple skills training.

A primary goal of this study is to identify a potential research agenda for theory development that is missing and needed as a foundation for the critical competencies needed by city managers. To the extent the study actually leads to this kind of research, newcomers to the field who are trained through graduate education will be better prepared for assuming senior local government management positions. In addition, existing practitioners who are receptive to new ideas can become more effective managers, and the study can help academics who seek to enhance the

31 To be “credentialed,” a city or county manager first takes a self-assessment test that probes for areas of mastery and deficiency based on the list of practices for effective local government management established by ICMA in 1991.

32 Shenkman, Just how Stupid are we?: Facing the Truth about the American Voter
effectiveness of MPA education, particularly with respect to those students who are in or who seek a career in local government.

**The Literature: Evidence of a Gap between Theory and Practice**

Evidence for the possibility of a gap between theory and practice in city management can be found in the public administration literature itself, and it is manifested in three ways that will be explored in this section. First, research on city management has focused on fairly narrow aspects—primarily in the interface between administration and politics—of the city manager’s role, yet the literature itself shows that this focus misses critical elements of city management. Second, there is a lack of a common understanding of the intellectual foundation of city management. Because city managers administer public organizations, one might assume that the intellectual base of city management would be firmly fixed in the academic field of public administration. But the profession seems to have split its loyalties between public administration and business administration, and to some degree, the public administration field itself has not laid claim to city management. Third, the (historical) intellectual and theoretical foundation of local government management is the field of public administration, but the field does not appear to provide a strong connection between local government competencies and theory. To the extent that these competencies have been identified, initial research has found that many of these competencies receive little attention in public administration research.
The Focus of the Literature on the Manager’s Role in Administration and Policy is an Incomplete Foundation for City Management

The literature on local government administration focuses largely on forms of government,34 the council-manager system,35 the continuum between policy and administration,36 and the role of efficiency in public administration.37 These are important topics, but this literature is thin, not well focused, dated and has significant gaps. First, though, consider the question of why the research and literature have stressed these topics.

In the council-manager form of government, a single individual serves as the interface between the community—as represented by the policy direction of the city council—and the city organization (see Figure 1). This is true whether the city is the size of Phoenix, Arizona (population 1.5 million), or Phoenix, Oregon (population 4,200). It is a different interface than that represented by the nation’s president or the governor of a state. Those positions are elected and are expected to initiate policy; they share executive responsibility with commissions and—in the case of governors—several directly elected department heads; and they are physically remote from the citizens they serve. In contrast, the city manager is appointed by the city council to

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execute the council’s policy direction; executive authority is concentrated in the city manager; and the manager has an immediate physical proximity with the city and the people he or she serves.

John Nalbandian observes that the city manager is “a prototypical character in our society... [because] he or she operates at the interstices of political and administrative constellations of logic.”

Figure 1. The city manager: interface between the community and the organization

*Origins of the Council-Manager Form of Government*

The Council-manager form of government arose out of a combination of forces at the beginning of the twentieth century: the populist movement’s concern for

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removing corruption from government, and the progressive movement’s interest in “scientific” management and its commitment to a social conscience that would address the need for services not provided through the marketplace. Widespread corruption associated with the spoils system (granting of city jobs to politicians’ supporters) and kickbacks from city contracts prompted a search for a better way of governing cities. Removing the hiring authority from elected officials (and placing it in the hands of a professional administrator) was regarded as a more reliable solution to the spoils system. Professionalism in management (supported in short order by a formally adopted code of ethics) would lead to hiring and contracting decisions based on merit rather than political expediency. This normative aspect of the council-manager plan as a vehicle for “good government” continues to have a strong influence in the profession (adherence to the code of ethics is the only criterion for city managers to be part the professional association, ICMA⁴⁹), and thus has continued to be of interest in the academic literature.

At the same time, Taylorism and the “scientific” management of businesses resulted in the popular image of business administration as a way to bring efficiency to government. The council-manager form of government was strongly associated with a business model. In a larger business, a board of directors acting on behalf of the shareholders sets policy and general direction for the corporation. The board then appoints a CEO who is given the responsibility for carrying out the board’s direction, and doing so effectively and efficiently. Leonard White in 1927 describes this parallel,

⁴⁹ Along with timely payment of dues.
and indeed the comparison of the council-manager form of government to the board-CEO business model continues to this day in public discussions of forms of local government.

The opposition to bad government usually comes to head in the local chamber of commerce. Business men finally acquire the conviction that the growth of their city is being seriously impaired by the failures of city officials to perform their duties efficiently. Looking about for a remedy, they are captivated by the resemblance of the city-manager plan to their corporate form of business organization. They understand this type of organization readily and believe that what has contributed to the success of their business will make for the success of their city.40

Under the council-manager form of government, non-partisan elected representatives on a city council would continue to set overall policy direction for the city. But their direct access to hiring and contract awards was removed. Instead, a city manager (chief executive officer) would be appointed by the city council to administer the day-to-day operations of the city according to professional practices, free of the pressure to dispense political favors. The resulting council-manager plan is an experiment in government that has lasted nearly a century. Today more cities continue to adopt the plan than abandon it, and it is now the most common form of city government in the United States for cities of populations greater than 5,000.41

The plan has evolved over time, and many variations exist across and within regions. Rather than having council members choose a mayor (chair) from among themselves, many cities have gone to the direct election of the mayor. Council

40 Leonard D. White, The City Manager (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1927), ix-x.
members may be elected by districts (wards) rather than be elected at-large. Many counties and some cities retain legal executive authority with the elected commissioners or council members, but by their own choice delegate all or most executive responsibility to an appointed administrator. ICMA even grants full membership status to administrators who serve at the pleasure of the mayor in a "strong mayor" form of government (where the elected mayor has legal executive authority), recognizing that many of the elements of professional local government management are held in common, and transcend the particular form of government.

Due to the city manager's unique position (at least in the traditional council-manager plan) in the "interstices of political and administrative constellations of logic," there has been a great deal of research and theory development on the appropriate role of the city manager as a political agent or community leader. Major contributors to this body of literature include John Nalbandian, James Svara, and Richard Stillman. Many others have contributed to the topic. The overwhelming conclusion after several decades of research is that city managers do, in theory and in practice, play a policy role as community leader. They broker relationships among

42 John Nalbandian, Professionalism in Local Government: Transformations in the Roles, Responsibilities, and Values of City Manager. 108.
43 Ibid.
community groups, and they facilitate not only the city council’s effectiveness as political leaders, but also the council and citizens’ participation in the administration of the city government. This community leadership and facilitation role of city managers has dominated the literature on local government administration. But has this focus on the political and policy role of the city manager missed the essence of city management?

There is More to City Management than Policy Leadership

Rightly or wrongly, practitioners often complain that the city manager’s role in policy leadership and politics is overstated in public administration literature and in graduate education; comments to this effect will also emerge as part of this study. The assertion that policy-setting plays only a part (and possibly a relatively minor part) of the city manager’s role is not only the subjective impression of practitioners, but it is also supported by research and public administration theory. An investigation into how city managers actually spend their time by Charldean Newell and David Ammons found that while policy development is important, it only accounts for about fifteen percent of the managers’ time. Management of the (internal) organization accounts for over thirty-five percent of the managers’ time, even in the largest cities. Stillman, in a similar survey of time allocation, found that interacting with the external

47 B.J.D. Rove notes, “By far the bulk of the research on C-M government has focused on some aspect of the separation of politics and administration principle.” B. J. D. Rove, "Theory v. Reality with the Council-Manager Plan" In Forms of Local Government: A Handbook on City, County, and Regional Options, ed. Roger L. Kemp (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1999), 82-88. 83.

community (speaking with citizens, interacting with the city council, public relations and intergovernmental relations) accounts for less than half (forty-six percent) of the average city managers' activities.\textsuperscript{49}

Thus, the focus of research on the policy role of city managers does seem to miss key aspects of city management. There is good reason for this focus; it is one thing that distinguishes city managers from chief executive officers of other levels of government, and from mid-managers in public organizations. But in concentrating on this area, research and the development of theory on other aspects of city management may be lacking.

There is a Lack of a Common Understanding of the Intellectual Foundation of City Management

Since cities are governments and not private businesses, one would assume that city management would have its intellectual foundation in public administration rather than business administration. But this assumption might be wrong. The International City/County Management Association published in 2003 a report titled \textit{Preparing the Next Generation}.\textsuperscript{50} It states:

No consensus has formed on the preferred advanced degree for city managers or assistant city managers. Master’s degrees in public administration, public policy, and economics are well regarded, but several recruiters report that city councils also favorably consider master of business administration degrees. ‘The new philosophy of government-as-business gives the MBA more

\textsuperscript{49} Stillman, \textit{The Rise of the City Manager}
\textsuperscript{50} Benest, \textit{Preparing the Next Generation}
cachet,’ according to one.\textsuperscript{51}

ICMA as the professional association of city and county managers thus appears to be ambivalent about the type of graduate education that future managers seek. Relatively few city or county managers are members of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA). ICMA choices for conference keynote speakers often reflect business leadership research and popular writing: Tom Peters, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Stephen Covey, and Jim Collins. A content analysis of the ICMA conference programs for the years 1998 through 2007 found no keynote speakers who were public administration researchers (or practitioners, for that matter).\textsuperscript{52} This is not to say that the association shuns public administration scholarship; in fact several public administration scholars have been speakers on conference session panels, and have edited and written books that have been published by ICMA for its members. But these connections are certainly not limited to public administration, and ICMA regularly seeks help from scholars in areas such as interpersonal communications, conflict resolution, press relations, operational efficiency, leadership, human resources, information technology, and quality control, even if these scholars have only studied the private sector.

City managers enter the profession from a variety of academic and experience backgrounds.\textsuperscript{53} This may explain the practitioner’s lack of connection with the public

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 24-25.
\textsuperscript{52} Scott D. Lazenby, "Local Government Education and Training" (Unpublished paper, Portland State University, Portland, OR, 2008), 17.
administration (academic) field. But it is not clear that the public administration field itself has seriously asserted a claim as the intellectual foundation for city management. The focus of public administration literature has been on the national government rather than on local government. For example, research on the public budgeting process is almost exclusively devoted to the federal budget, even though hundreds of cities serve as laboratories for innovation in the use of the budget as a management tool. As another example, a recent issue of ICMA’s Public Management magazine included an article on evidence-based management. It was a reprint of an article initially published in the Harvard Business Review. The few articles on the topic in the public administration scholarly literature seem to be confined to health care administration (the evidence-based program concept originated in the field of medicine) and probation and parole case management. If the academic field of public administration were the intellectual home of local government management, one would expect it to be leading the way in pointing out both the potential benefits as well as the serious limitations of the application of evidence-based management.

Larson, in The Rise of Professionalism, emphasizes the importance of “a common and clearly defined basis of training...for the unification of a profession.”

54 Raffel, Why has Public Administration Ignored Public Education, and does it Matter?
56 One of the most serious limitations is that many public programs, such as the “war on drugs,” receive strong citizen support even in the face of evidence that the programs are ineffective.
is, he says, “the main support of a professional subculture.” But Larson is exploring the sociological phenomenon of professions as a way for groups of individuals to gain special status in society: as George Bernard Shaw said, every profession is a conspiracy against the layman. Using education (i.e., a specific type of degree) as a barrier to entry into the profession may be a key feature of professional cartels such as school teachers, college professors, lawyers, and medical doctors, but it does not characterize city managers. Green observes that this lack of a common and clearly defined basis of education (as well as a lack of certification and other barriers to entry) may cause one to question whether city management truly is a profession.

What is more critical to the present study, however, is the apparent ambivalence on the part of the city management profession (and possibly on the part of public administration itself) between public administration and business administration as the intellectual home of city management. If the profession does not necessarily look to public administration as the primary source of research and theory on improving city management capacity, then over time there could indeed develop gaps between city management practice and public administration theory.

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58 Ibid.
59 Green, The Profession of Local Government Management: Management Expertise and the American Community
There is a Lack of Connection of Competencies for Managing Local Government with their Intellectual and Theoretical Foundations

As noted above, researchers such as Ammons, Newell, and Stillman have explored how city managers spend their time, and by extension, the management activities that are most used or most important. ICMA has identified “practices” that are essential to effective local government management. To what extent are these management practices informed by theory that is being developed in public administration research?

The literature supports an assertion of a lack of research related to the competencies needed by city managers. Watson and Montjoy found a fairly high percentage (thirty percent) of articles in Public Administration Review over the period 1979 through 1989 dealt with some aspect of local government, even though most of the articles addressed public administration in general rather than local government specifically, and many of them addressed public policy issues rather than management techniques. Further, during the time period under review (1978 through 1990), the number of Public Administration Review articles dealing with local government issues showed a sharp decline.

Streib, Slotkin & Rivera performed an analysis of public administration academic journals similar to that done by Watson and Montjoy, but they used ICMA’s

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60 The terms “practice” and “competency” are being used somewhat interchangeably here, although they mean different things. The definition and use of the term “competency” will be addressed more fully below.

list of practices as the filtering mechanism.\textsuperscript{62} Over a fifteen year period from 1984 through 1998, the authors found that 266 of 901 (29.5\%) articles dealt in some way with one or more of the practices. But of these 266 articles, only thirty-four percent were specific to city and/or county government. After stating that “melding the best that academia can offer with the knowledge needs of practicing managers is the way to build a knowledge base that fulfills the traditional promise of the public administration field,” the authors found:

\dots a noteworthy disconnection between the published research and the knowledge needs identified by ICMA members. Some practices receive a great deal of attention, while others are largely ignored. Our examination of other journals suggests that this finding holds true across a wide variety of public administration journals.\textsuperscript{63}

These studies focused on treatment of local government management issues by \textit{Public Administration Review} on the assumption that the articles of the flagship journal of the American Society for Public Administration would be representative of the overall field of public administration. Streib et al did perform a more informal survey of other public administration journal, with similar results. A contribution of the present study will be to extend this kind of analysis to a much broader range of academic journals that are associated with the study of public administration.

\textbf{Summary}

This discussion demonstrates that we might expect to find a gap between the


\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 52.
competencies that are critical to managing local governments and the theory that is available in the field of public administration. But this does not in and of itself prove that this gap exists. More important, it does not identify exactly what these gaps are. This study is intended to do both. Answering these questions can in turn lead to a research agenda that will provide a stronger foundation for preparing future local government managers and in improving the effectiveness of current managers.

The Conceptual Approach Used in this Study

Up to this point, the terms “competency” and “theory” have been used without the benefit of a complete definition of the terms, and without a full examination of the relationship between public administration theory and the competencies needed for executive management of local governments. This section first explores the meaning of “competency,” especially as used in the literature on job performance. It then describes a conceptual model that links professional competency with theory developed in the (associated) intellectual domain of the field. Finally, it shows that theory is an important foundation for building competencies in local government management, and that theory can be closely tied to effective practice.

A Conceptual Approach to Professional Competency and Theory

In order to hypothesize a gap between available public administration theory and the competencies that will be critical to the next generation of city managers, we need to have a clear understanding of professional competency, and the relationship
between competency and theory. The terms “competence” or “competency” are used in the human resources literature, often in the context of individual performance appraisal in a work setting. This literature provides several definitions of the term “competency.” Dick Grote, in *The Complete Guide to Performance Appraisal* includes skills, abilities and behaviors in the definition. He writes:

Call them what you will: skills, knowledge, behaviors, performance factors, competencies, success factors, values, quality concepts. All of these terms have been used by writers on performance management and by companies in their performance appraisal forms to identify those attributes of the individual that are important in achieving the results desired and in being a good corporate citizen... Competencies is the term currently in vogue to refer to the broad area of skills, abilities, and behaviors.\(^6^4\)

A widely-cited text on professional competency is Spencer & Spencer’s *Competence at Work*. Competence has a direct link to the effectiveness of a professional in his or her work environment. The Spencers define competency in the following way:

A competency is an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation. Underlying characteristic means the competency is a fairly deep and enduring part of a person’s personality and can predict behavior in a wide variety of situations and job tasks. Causally related means that a competency causes or predicts behavior and performance. Criterion-referenced means that the competency actually predicts who does something well or poorly, as measured on a specific criterion or standard.\(^6^5\)

Some aspects of competency, such as motive, traits, and self-concept are tied to personality and are relatively difficult to develop (at least by the time a person


enters the workforce). On the other hand, “knowledge and skill competencies are relatively easy to develop; training is the most cost-effective way to secure these employee abilities.”

Most definitions of competency include in the words “knowledge” and “skills.” Knowledge, or “acquaintance with facts, truths, or principles, as from study or investigation” is a component of competency that is most closely related to the existence and availability of theory. It signifies an intellectual understanding of the world, as compared to an instinctive behavior in response to a situation. Theory, whether gained through education or through experience, is not the only contributor to knowledge. Knowledge also includes a grasp of facts that are relevant to professional effectiveness. But an understanding of theory is an important component of knowledge.

Theory is also necessary, though not sufficient, to the acquisition of many skills. Here the theory might be less abstract conceptualizations of reality and more a kind of theory-in-practice, but it is theory nonetheless. A manager skilled in employee motivation may have acquired this competency through practice and experience, but he or she must possess some kind of theory of human psychology (whether conscious or tacit) to be effective. This connection between theory and practical skills will be more fully explored below.

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66 Ibid., 11.
Professional competency thus includes several elements, and some of them (motivations, innate abilities and traits) may have little or no connection with theory. The elements that may be associated with theory are those of knowledge and skills. When we look for a connection between these elements and theory, exactly what is theory?

Elsewhere in this discussion we see that theory can be defined broadly. It includes Merton’s “theory of the middle range” that makes no claim to grand overarching systems of thought, but instead consists of “special theories applicable to limited conceptual ranges.” It includes theory-in-practice, and tacit understanding of cause and effect in the phenomena that managers encounter. But as used in this study, theory is not a simple list of best practices or procedures in the absence of a deeper understanding of causal mechanisms that allow the best practices to work. Theory must allow one to generalize beyond a single set of circumstances, and to have explanatory and predictive power; it must provide a framework for solving a range of similar puzzles. Granted, the predictive power of theory from the social sciences is often constrained in practice by a large number of independent variables and limited knowledge of many of those variables. But theory is still predictive when one can say, "ceteris paribus, this will happen" even if in real life everything else is never held constant. And theory, in contrast to best practices, must also be subject to falsifiability: it must hold up to challenge based on logic and internal consistency, and in evidence-

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based testing.

Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual link between theory and professional competencies. Competence is made up of several factors. Some of these factors, such as personality traits (e.g., achievement orientation, or creativity), self-concept, and motivation are not easily modified through formal training and education. Influences on these factors include heredity (genetics), life experiences, and long term work experiences.

Formal graduate education can build or strengthen professional competencies. This education draws on theory, which may itself be based on abstract principles or derived empirically from practice. In addition to theory, professional degree programs may be based on best practices, and may use guided experiences (internships, research projects) to aid in the students’ socialization into the profession, and to develop theory-in-practice.

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70 Spencer and Spencer, *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance*
Figure 2. A conceptual illustration of the relation between theory and competency.

The theory and other elements that make up the content of a professional degree program are thus critical to developing competence, but the availability of theory does not directly build competencies. Education that draws on theory to build professional competence is moderated by two mechanisms. The first is pedagogy, or the art and skill of teaching. The development of theory also influences this moderating mechanism: it shapes the training of academics who in turn produce and deliver most of the education and some of the training to practitioners, and who

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produce most of the text and learning resources for the field. The second moderating mechanism is the student’s own competence as a learner.

Note too that by the time an individual enters a graduate degree program, he or she has already developed a set of competencies, through prior formal education and training, life experiences, and innate abilities. For example, personal time management and the ability to multi-task should, one would hope, be fairly well developed after an undergraduate education. In some cases, competencies are further developed or honed in a professional degree program. In the case of public administration education, basic understanding of civics is, for example, extended through deeper knowledge of governmental systems. That said, and particularly with respect to pre-service students, it is not always clear what types and levels of competency or personal or professional development they may have attained.

To summarize, this study focuses on those elements of the competencies critical to local government management that are characterized as knowledge and skills, and on the availability or lack of availability of public administration theory related to those areas of knowledge and skills. While the term “competency” can refer to many factors underlying effectiveness in management, it is the knowledge and skill aspects of professional competency that are most closely associated with a theoretical (intellectual) foundation. All other determinants of an individual city or county manager’s competence—personality characteristics, life experiences, work experiences, the effectiveness of teaching methods and the individual’s own capacity to learn—are treated as independent variables and are beyond the scope of this study.
Does Theory In Fact Underlie Professional Competencies?

Practitioners often voice skepticism over the importance of theory. Concern over the extent to which theory is emphasized in a professional degree program, such as a Master of Public Administration, is a valid subject for debate. But the skepticism of practitioners may be at least in part due to a misunderstanding of what constitutes theory in the social sciences. Robert K. Merton notes that the word “theory” threatens to become meaningless: “Because its referents are so diverse—including everything from minor working hypotheses, through comprehensive but vague and unordered speculations, to axiomatic systems of thought—use of the word often obscures rather than creates understanding.”

To bridge a gap between grand theory and heuristics, Merton quotes economist T. H. Marshall, who put in a plea for sociological “stepping stones in the middle distance.” Merton calls these stepping stones the theory of the middle range.

Our major task today is to develop special theories applicable to limited conceptual ranges—theories, for example, of deviant behavior, the unanticipated consequences of purposive action, social perception, reference groups, social control, the interdependence of social institutions—rather than to seek immediately the total conceptual structure that is adequate to derive these and other theories of the middle range.

Whether they acknowledge it (or are conscience of it), local government managers use and apply this kind of “theory of the middle range” on a daily basis. They do this when they are deciding on the span of control for a supervisor, changing

74 Ibid., 51.
a compensation plan, sharing information with city council members, negotiating with a union, or establishing a regular meeting with the school superintendent. And they seek out this theory when they register for classes and professional workshops on subjects ranging from democratic dialog to employee motivation.

As part of a preliminary inquiry for this research project, a focus group composed of the board of directors of the Oregon City/County Management Association was asked to describe the skills and knowledge that are critical to a city manager’s success. They identified several key competencies, such as persuasion, leadership, technical skills, the ability to translate community values into action, strategic thinking, political sensitivity, and the ability to deal with peoples’ emotions. But their initial reaction was that most critical skills cannot be taught; they can only be gained through experience. Knowledge of theory is of limited use, they suggested, because practical skills do not rest on theory.

Again, this observation reflects a limited understanding of the connection between theory and professional competency. Donald Schon and Chris Argyris have extensively studied the limitations of the kind of “technical rationality” that is often associated with theory. Schon writes:

In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution. The irony of this situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or society at large, however

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Focus group discussion conducted on February 7, 2007 at Silver Falls State Park Conference Center, Oregon.
great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of
greatest human concern. The practitioner must choose. Shall he remain on the
high ground where he can solve relatively unimportant problems according to
prevailing standards of rigor, or shall he descend to the swamp of important
problems and nonrigorous inquiry?  

Schon and Argyris note that professionals and professional educators often see
skill learning and theory learning as different kinds of activities, and that “...theory
learning may be appropriately undertaken in one kind of place (school) and skill
learning in another (work).” But this observation depends upon an overly restrictive
definition of theory. Theory based on “technical rationality” may indeed be a
necessary but not sufficient foundation for professional competencies: this kind of
time is not the only kind of theory that is invoked to solve problems. Argyris and
Schon note that: “Theories are theories regardless of their origin: there are practical,
common-sense theories as well as academic or scientific theories. A theory is not
necessarily accepted, good, or true; it is only a set of interconnected propositions that
have the same referent—the subject of the theory.” Further,

Theories of professional practice are best understood as special cases of
theories of action that determine all deliberate behavior... ...A theory of
practice, then, consists of a set of interrelated theories of action that specify for
the situations of practice the actions that will, under the relevant assumptions,
yield intended consequences.

More recent work has continued to explore the connection between theory and

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77 Argyris and Schön, *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness*
80 Ibid., 4-6.
management competencies. Worren, Moore and Elliot, in “When Theories Become Tools: Toward a Framework for Pragmatic Validity,” acknowledge that “managers rely primarily on tacit, procedural knowledge, derived from direct experience and trial-and-error learning.” But if this is all there is to gaining management competency, the most efficient way to prepare public managers would be to immerse young individuals in organizations and let them figure things out for themselves. This, unfortunately, is what too many organizations do when they promote a high-performing line staff member to his or her first supervisory position. Those organizations find out, sometimes too late, that they should have sent the individual to supervisors’ school. Worren et al, while admitting to the value of experience-based tacit knowledge, argue that “this does not imply that academically produced knowledge cannot or should not be utilized, but rather that the outputs of academic research must be compatible with these practical reasoning processes. Only then can researchers engage in an interactive and reciprocating process with managers aimed at building useful theory.”

The participants of the focus group, noted above, at first denied that the most important competencies that city managers rely on can be learned. But after an evening’s reflection, one of the participants confessed that many of these competencies are indeed learned: through academic study, from observing other professionals and mentors, and through the “school of hard knocks”; i.e., by reflecting

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82 Ibid., 1228.
on experience and adjusting behavior to avoid repeating mistakes. This participant was describing Argyris and Schon’s concept of “theory of practice” or “theory in action.”

Schon argues that this kind of theory “is not inherently mysterious; it is rigorous in its own terms, and we can learn a great deal about it...by carefully studying the performance of unusually competent performers.” This is exactly what researchers like Jim Collins do when studying the actions and behaviors that appear to be critical to the success of business leaders. The theory that results from this research is grounded in empirical observations rather than on abstract concepts, but as Argyris and Schon argue, it is theory nonetheless.

Note that practitioners themselves may not be consciously aware of using “theory of practice,” and may have difficulty articulating or describing the theory. And when they do, their “espoused theory” may not accurately describe their actual “theory-in-use”; the practitioners may believe and state that they act based on their espoused theory, but they may in fact behave differently.

Theory-in-use often draws upon the kind of tacit knowledge first defined by Michael Polanyi in 1967. Morgan et al describe three kinds of tacit knowledge used by public administrators. The first is knowledge acquired through long practice. For city managers, this knowledge comes into play when dealing with an upset citizen,
when sizing up the politics surrounding an issue, or when sensing that an employee is having a personal problem. The second is a “feel for the whole.” The city manager draws on this knowledge when presented with an idea for a new service by a council member or citizen: how does it fit the capacity of the organization, and where does it fall in the overall priorities of the community? The third kind of tacit knowledge is a sense of when things are not quite right. This is almost a sixth sense; for a city manager, it happens when the warning bells start going off in his or her head when a council member innocently suggests, “Let’s look into reforming the fire department.”

Using words like “feel” and “sense” does seem to take us far from the intellectual domain of theory, but we must remember that, as Schon tells us, this kind of theory is not mysterious. The scholars’ careful and insightful identification of the practitioners’ tacit knowledge is a real contribution to theory, whether in business administration or public administration.

Should Research and Theory Development Benefit Practice?

To the extent that public administration is an applied science, the argument that the development of public administration theory can and should ultimately benefit practice is fairly straightforward. Streib, Slotkin and Rivera note that “practice is, in many ways, the very soul of the field” of public administration.88 Darrell Pugh traces the roots of the American Society of Public Administration to the municipal research bureaus, which operated on the assumption that city governments could be more

88 Ibid., 516.
effective and efficient through the application of scientific research.\textsuperscript{89} Guy Adams notes that the history of public administration as an academic field produces an assumption of, and bias toward, scientifically-based approaches to addressing public management challenges.\textsuperscript{90}

There is thus a historical connection between the practice of public administration and the academic field of public administration. This connection supports the proposition that a valid function of the public administration (academic) field is research and theory development that in turn build the competencies of city managers. This study takes as a base assumption the notion that city managers can be more effective by having access to research-based theory that informs the skills they use and the knowledge they possess. The burden of proof is on those who would argue otherwise. Nevertheless, opposing views should be acknowledged.

As early as 1938, the pages of \textit{Public Administration Review} contained a debate on the proper relationship between academic research and public administration practice. Robert Hutchins (at the time President of the University of Chicago) wrote:

I hold that it is impossible for a college to prepare men directly and specifically for public life. This is partly the result of the nature of public life and partly the result of the nature of a college. Public life is concerned with action adapted to immediate concrete situations. It is impossible to learn how to deal with immediate concrete situations except by dealing with them. It is impossible to


import these situations into a college curriculum.\textsuperscript{91}

William Mosher, Dean of the Maxwell School replied:

...in view of the large body of knowledge now available concerning administrative practices and methods it is possible for one to equip himself for an administrative career in much the same way as physicians and engineers are equipped for the practice of their professions. Practitioners in these fields must obviously learn by doing and can become adept in their calling only through doing. This would not, however, justify the argument that they should not acquaint themselves with approved techniques and methods before undertaking to practice in their chosen calling.\textsuperscript{92}

In view of the discussion above on the need for middle range theory and the validity of theory-in-practice, it could be that Mosher and Hutchins are both right. However successful we become at capturing and teaching the theory of the high ground as well as the swamp (to use Schon's metaphor), competency in dealing with the "specific and concrete" cannot be done without acting (working) in the swamp. In any case, Mosher's argument seems to have won the day, at least as evidenced by the rapid growth of MPA programs that exist to "prepare men [and women] directly and specifically for public life." But critics continued to find a forum. Robert Stallings argued that "letting the problems of practitioners set the intellectual agenda for a university-based faculty in the field of public administration, while perhaps an effective marketing and recruitment tool, seems more like followership than leadership."\textsuperscript{93} But Stallings, as a sociologist, has in mind research on public policy


\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 167.

problems, not on management effectiveness, and he belabors the obvious point that researchers use different skills than managers.

*Asserting a Need for Theory that Informs City Management Competencies Does Not Assume a Particular View of the Public Policy Arena*

There appears to be some confusion in the literature between the validity of the concept that management skills and knowledge can be improved through scientific research and a similar but separate question of whether public managers work in a setting that lends itself to rational decision making. Distinguishing between these two issues is critical.

Cooper summarizes a debate, in the formative years of the public administration field, between Robert Dahl and Herbert Simon.94 Dahl argued that a true science of administration, as advocated by Simon, was not an attainable goal, because public administration cannot divorce itself from public values, issues of individual personalities, and the social framework in which public policy is made.95 The problem may be at least partly one of precisely articulating the nature of the science, and whether messy and wicked problems are amenable to scientific inquiry. More recently, Cunningham and Weschler note that the concepts of modernism serve the analysts in government better than the senior managers.96 Modernism is associated

with "causality, determinism, egalitarianism, humanism, liberal democracy, necessity, objectivity, rationality, responsibility, and truth." These principles might serve an analyst well when, for example, establishing a pay classification system or determining the fiscal impacts of a development. On the other hand, the "postmodern view of the world—open knowledge systems in which truth is multiple and reality is subjectively constructed—matches the world that the line manager experiences."

There is truth to this. One can prove that there is nothing in human society that is completely rational, simply by challenging anyone to prove the null hypothesis (i.e., that there is, somewhere on earth, a policy, program, or institution that is completely rational). Nonetheless, one could also argue that professional public administrators should strive to enlarge the boundaries of rational public policy-making. The professional administrator could adopt a variation on the famous prayer: "give me the courage to advocate for rational policies, the patience to accept the situations where values or emotions prevail, and the wisdom to know when to push for rational approaches and when not to." But whether or not public policy ought to be rational, usually it is not.

The point that Cunningham and Weschler make—and one that is critical to the research study described here—is not that we should abandon any hope of giving managers useful theory in dealing with an irrational and complex world, but precisely

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98 Ibid. 106.
the opposite: there is an urgent need for public administration scholars to provide the theory and research that better equip public managers for dealing with this world.

They make the plea:

To serve the needs of the line manager and the public administration profession, should not scholarly journals address the problematic situations faced by line managers? Since most of the manager's time is spent on interpersonal issues, should not more space be allotted to human resources management, organizational behavior, leadership issues, and stories of exemplars?\(^99\)

In the case of city managers, the literature on the role of managers (noted above) also points to a need to address skills and knowledge in providing political leadership without threatening elected council members, accommodating council and public involvement in administrative decisions without compromising professional values, and techniques for resolving community conflict. The existence of an irrational and ambiguous management environment does not mean that that rational and logical research on dealing with this environment is not appropriate. On the contrary, even the irrational world faced by senior managers has theoretical underpinnings that can be captured and taught.

**Conclusion**

In summary, there is a real need to prepare individuals for senior management positions in local government. Local government accounts for the majority of public sector employees, and the retirement of the baby boom generation will escalate the

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\(^99\) Ibid., 108.
turnover in the local government management profession. Insofar as public administration literature has addressed local government, it has primarily focused on the city manager’s role as a community leader/facilitator, and specifically in the interface between the organization (administration) and the city council and community (politics and policy). This is a valuable contribution, but it neglects key challenges faced by local government managers, such as the challenge of leading and managing the internal organization. The administrative role might be covered, in a generic way, by the public administration field, but there is evidence of uneven coverage of local government management issues. Even in the well-researched area of the city manager’s role as a community leader, the theoretical emphasis has been on what city managers do, and not the theory behind how they can be effective in this role.

While experience is important in the development of professional competence, access to theory built on evidence-based research is also important. The literature supports the hypothesis that there is a gap between competencies necessary for local government management and the associated public administration theory. What is missing is a clear definition of the skills and knowledge local government managers need to be effective, and identification of the theoretical foundations for those skills and areas of knowledge. Addressing this gap is the object of this study.
CHAPTER 2: COMPETENCIES CRITICAL TO CITY MANAGEMENT—THE LITERATURE

Introduction: Identifying Professional Competency

The central goal of this study is to identify gaps, if any, between the competencies required by city managers for effective local government management and the public administration theoretical foundation that should underlie those competencies. A thorough understanding of these competencies is therefore a critical first step of the analysis. Available research and literature provides a good basis for this understanding, but there are some critical limitations. This chapter enumerates the local government management competencies that have been described in the literature, and identifies the limitations of research that has been conducted to date. The review of the literature will document the need for further research on the competencies necessary to be an effective city manager.

To place this chapter in context, the literature is drawn on in three ways in this dissertation. In the introductory chapter, relevant work in the public administration literature is cited as evidence of a possible gap between city management competencies and associated foundational theory. In this chapter, the focus will be on what the literature tells us about those competencies, and the deficiencies in that literature. In Chapter 4, the literature as represented by public administration academic
journals is used as a source of data to search for theory that underlies city management competencies.

In the sections that follow, the literature will be reviewed with special attention to identification of the current state of scholarly understanding of the skills and knowledge critical to city management. In some cases, research addresses this question directly, as in the analysis of surveys of city managers themselves. In other cases, we must infer the requisite skills and knowledge from theory on the roles that city managers play and the outcomes of their work.

This chapter is organized into the following sections. The first two sections separate the internally-focused (administrative) role of the manager from the externally-focused (policy, politics, and community leadership) role, beginning with the competencies associated with managing the (internal) organization. Especially in this context, there are some parallels between city management and business administration, and research on competencies needed by managers of private sector organizations will be explored. The second section summarizes research which has noted the importance of the city manager as a community leader and facilitator of community dialog, and discusses the competencies this role requires. The third section explores the effect of size of the jurisdiction on the role of the manager and the corresponding skills and knowledge. The fourth section describes survey research on the city managers’ opinions of the most critical management competencies. Due to similarities in the way three independent studies have been conducted, the results of these studies lend themselves well to a meta-analysis, which was performed in the
course of work on this dissertation. The methodology used for the meta-analysis and the key results are also presented in this section. The fifth section discusses work that ICMA has undertaken to identify the “practices” that are essential to effective local government management. The chapter concludes with a summary of the contributions these sources make to an overall understanding of the competencies required for effective city management, and points out deficiencies and limitations that remain to be addressed in this study.

Managing the Organization

The first city managers in the beginning of the twentieth century were predominantly business managers and engineers, and the early literature emphasizes the competencies they required (and which continue to be important today) in managing the city organization. This section will review that literature. In addition, these historical roots in business administration call for a brief review of the literature on business management competencies, as well as research that illuminates the differences between public and private sector management competencies.

The Early Years: The City Manager as Business Manager and Engineer

Scholarly research on the practice of city management began almost as soon as the profession was created. Twenty-one years after Staunton, Virginia, became the first city to adopt the council-manager form of government, Leonard White wrote The
City Manager. Based on personal visits to a few dozen of the first council-manager cities, he provided case studies of the characteristics of the city managers, the cities they managed, and the challenges they faced. He also shared general observations about the skills and character necessary for success, and the early results of the reform experiment.

White noted that the “engineers and business men combined hold 7 out of every 10 managerial posts.” These managers replaced the spoils system with merit-based hiring and promotion, established civil service systems, and implemented formal budget and accounting systems. Managerial skills were not the only assets that they drew on in reforming the city organizations. In many cases, the managers were subject to attack by disgruntled employees, the public, and the press, and these attacks were sometimes physical as well as verbal. Ossian Carr, city manager of Cadillac, Michigan “was attacked without warning by the city engineer and brought to his knees by a heavy blow from behind. Here his three years’ experience as a football player came into play; he tackled his assailant, threw him to the ground, and eventually beat him into submission.”

White describes many examples of the early city managers’ accomplishments in ushering in efficient government as well as clean government. This emphasis continued. In 1940, Harold Stone, Don Price, and Kathryn Stone published City Manager Government in the United States: A Review After Twenty-Five Years. They

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100 Leonard D. White, The City Manager (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1927).
101 Ibid., 130.
102 Ibid., 116.
described some of the operational improvements made by city managers:

...water meter readers planned new routes which they were to cover on successive days; plumbing and building inspectors developed a systematic way of keeping track of new buildings; the park superintendent laid out a grass-mowing schedule; the garage superintendent made a check list for regular inspection of the mechanical parts of trucks...  

This emphasis on efficiency in operations was more than a passing fad. Today, ICMA offers a training program on “Lean Thinking and Government,” adapting the efficiency principles initially developed by Toyota to the field of municipal services. Stone, Price & Stone’s work is an amazingly perceptive and prescient analysis of city management; other city management competencies they observed included (using today’s labels) marketing, management by wandering around, and performance measurement and benchmarking. 

Improved financial management allowed the first city managers to turn their attention to neglected public infrastructure, and here their engineering skills could be put into practice. Charles Ashburner, city manager of Staunton and Norfolk, Virginia, and Stockton, California, declared, “By God, I go into a town to build! When I can’t build, I get out!”

White summarizes the characteristics of the first city managers, admittedly based on careful observation with “no tested scientific validity.” These characteristics

104 Ibid., 159.  
105 Ibid., 133.  
106 Ibid., 154.  
107 White, The City Manager , 94.
include high personal integrity, willingness to assume responsibility, and action-oriented. And they were pragmatic:

The managers are ‘practical’ men, not even making allowance for the small minority who once were members of the academic profession... They can quote offhand the cost of twelve-inch cast iron pipe f.o.b. Waukegan; they know the cost of laying a yard of eight-inch concrete pavement; they can tell without hesitation the price of an American-LaFrance fire engine, the pressure maintained in the water mains, the number of gallons pumped per day, and the cost per gallon.\(^{108}\)

But the actual skills and knowledge of the city managers did not always match the ideal. White laments the city managers’ lack of interest in theory, and especially in the science of administration. City managers, in Professor White’s view, should have knowledge of research in the areas of management and personnel administration, even if they do not in practice. We should therefore add this to our list of inferred, but not necessarily observed, skills & knowledge.

\(\textit{City Managers as Business Managers: Business Competencies}\)

The city management profession has borrowed extensively from theory developed around business management, and administrative science derived from the private sector (the work of Barnard, Taylor, and others). This connection has probably weakened over the past century with the emergence of public administration as a field that is separate from business administration. There are good reasons for using caution in adapting some business practices to city management, or to try to run a government like a business. An affinity between city management and business management has

\(^{108}\) Ibid., 147.
led to criticism—whether warranted or not—that a consequence or intended result of adoption of the council-manager form of government was to make city governments more business-friendly rather than serving everyone. These issues will be discussed more fully below. But in trying to identify the competencies that are critical to the chief executive officers of cities and counties, it is helpful to know what the literature tells us about the competencies that are critical to CEOs of companies.

Spencer & Spencer summarize the results of extensive research on common competencies held by managers in the private sector. They include measuring performance, improving efficiency or effectiveness, setting goals, and calculating costs and benefits to both the organization and themselves, resolving conflicts, coaching, interpersonal understanding, team leadership, and conceptual thinking.

Dick Grote, in The Complete Guide to Performance Appraisal, describes research in which business managers identify major areas of responsibility. Seven areas emerged: Knowledge of the business, priority setting, problem solving and decision making, interpersonal skills, communication, people development, and achievement orientation. Within these broad areas, specific competencies were defined. For example, the “interpersonal skills” area includes these competencies: expresses emotions appropriately, initiates friendly interactions, provides positive and negative feedback, interacts effectively with superiors and senior managers, accepts

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109 Spencer and Spencer, Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance, 199.
110 Ibid., 203.
positive and negative feedback, and faces and resolves conflict.\textsuperscript{112}

What is striking about these competencies—and a feature in common with city management competencies—is that they emphasize the manager’s role as a generalist. Grote notes the importance of “knowledge of the business,” but beyond this, the particular industry or sector seems not to be a factor. This emphasis on the manager as a generalist appears to be consistent in the literature on business competencies. Davis et al summarize research done by Personnel Decisions International, identifying thirty-nine competencies (expressed as performance actions) that they found “to be critical to managerial success.”\textsuperscript{113} Only one of the thirty-nine, “know the business,” addresses substantive knowledge of a sector or industry. Their list of critical competencies, organized by nine factors, is listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Competencies critical to business managerial success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Factor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide direction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lead courageously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foster teamwork</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivate others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coach and develop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Champion change</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Interpersonal Factor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display organizational savvy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leverage networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage disagreements</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Communication Factor</th>
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</table>

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 294.

Prepare written communication  
Deliver presentations  
Listen to others  
Foster open communications  
Speak effectively

Thinking Factor  
Think strategically  
Analyze issues  
Use sound judgment  
Innovate

Motivation Factor  
Drive for results  
Show work commitment

Self-Management Factor  
Act with integrity  
Demonstrate adaptability  
Develop oneself

Administrative Factor  
Establish plans  
Structure and staff  
Develop systems & processes  
Manage execution  
Work efficiently

Organizational Knowledge Factor  
Use financial/quantitative data  
Use technical/functional expertise  
Know the business

Organizational Strategy Factor  
Manage profitability  
Commit to quality  
Focus on customer needs  
Promote corporate citizenship  
Recognize global implications


As we will see, these business management competencies align very closely with the city management competencies that emerge from the Delphi study. There are some notable exceptions, and most of these involve the manager’s interaction with the
external environment (city councils, community leaders, citizens as individuals and in groups, and other governments). In leading the internal organization, though, one might indeed expect to see many commonalities between private sector and public sector managers. Research on leadership of public agencies confirms this expectation.

Leading Public vs. Private Organizations: Similarities and Differences

Montgomery Van Wart, in *Dynamics of Leadership in Public Service*, provides an in-depth discussion of a wide range of literature and research on the competencies required for public administrators.\(^{114}\) His focus is on (internal) organizational leadership, and he acknowledges the long-standing debate over the differences between (and importance of) leadership versus management. He concludes that the distinction may be a false dichotomy: individuals cannot be effective leaders without strong management skills, and higher level managers cannot be effective without leadership skills.\(^{115}\)

Whether described as a leader or a manager, an effective public manager must draw on a very wide range of competencies. As in the private sector research described above, competencies are typically organized into groupings of related competencies. Different researchers group label the same competencies differently, and an important caveat in all this work is that the groupings are less important than the individual competencies that are contained within the group. Van Wart, for

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\(^{115}\) Ibid., 25.
example, uses broad categories of traits, skills, task-oriented behaviors, people-oriented behaviors, and organization-oriented behaviors. Within these categories, Table 2 lists the most important individual competencies.

Table 2. Public management competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits</th>
<th>Self-confidence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decisiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resilience</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Energy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Need for achievement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Willingness to assume responsibility</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A service mentality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional maturity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Influence skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analytical skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technical skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continual learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-oriented behavior</td>
<td>Monitoring &amp; assessing work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Operations planning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clarifying roles and objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delegating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing technical innovation and creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People-oriented behavior</td>
<td>Consulting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning and organizing personnel</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing staff</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivating</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing teams and team building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing personnel change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization-oriented</td>
<td>Scanning the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behavior</td>
<td>Strategic planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Articulating the mission and vision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Networking and partnering
Performing general management functions
Decision making
Managing organizational change
Assessment of the organization
Setting priorities

Source: Adapted from Montgomery Van Wart, Dynamics of Leadership in Public Service (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2005)

Note how similar this list is to the one provided by Davis et al in their assessment of private sector management competencies. When placing the two lists side by side, it would be difficult to ascertain which describes private managers and which one describes their public sector counterparts. Both lists include interpersonal skills, communications, developing and motivating employees, and management of work tasks, and organizational skills. Both include a (similar) list of traits, such as personal integrity and self-motivation.

What is as noteworthy is an element missing from the public manager list. One of the private manager’s competencies is knowledge of the business; there is no counterpart in Van Wart’s list of public manager competencies. Further, there is no mention of public policy development, or community leadership, both of which are noted in Chapter 1 as being critical to the success of city managers.

Van Wart acknowledges that his focus is on organizational leadership within the national government. His work draws extensively on a 1991 study performed by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management consisting of a survey of 10,000 federal
managers and lead workers. A federal agency manager based in Washington, DC, may have little or no interaction with an external constituency. A few of these managers, such as the special agent in charge of a local FBI office, might have extensive relations with the citizens of a local community, but this is the exception rather than the rule. In contrast with both private sector and federal sector managers, it is in the area of external interactions that one would expect differences in the competencies required for city management to be most apparent.

The Manager as Community Leader.

As noted in Chapter 1, the role of the city manager (both in practice and in theory) in community leadership and facilitation of community dialog has been a topic of great interest in the literature. For the present study, we can rely on this literature to acknowledge that this role exists, and it is important. The task now is to identify the competencies that are necessary to allow city managers to be effective in this role.

The first city managers often filled a leadership vacuum and took active roles as community political leaders. Their skills in oratory and strength of personality served them well in this capacity. Henry Waite, the first city manager of Dayton, Ohio, left the city to join the army in 1918, rising to the rank of colonel. A magazine article noted, "Big of bone, deep of chest, and keen of eye, he looks as if the terrific

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task of blazing a whole fresh city path would be bread and meat to him.\textsuperscript{117}

Teske and Schneider found that city managers take political leadership roles as "bureaucratic entrepreneurs" in order to fill a leadership vacuum when "political entrepreneurs" did not emerge.\textsuperscript{118} These researchers used surveys of city clerks to identify policy entrepreneurs (or innovators), and then performed a multinomial logit analysis on municipal characteristics (size, location, form of government, etc.) to find the conditions that lead to city managers taking on the policy entrepreneur role. Teske and Schneider note that "...citizens seek political entrepreneurship first. Indeed, even most city managers prefer that mayors take an active policy leadership role."\textsuperscript{119} When managers do act as policy entrepreneurs, they need skills at both moving the internal bureaucracy by motivating employees using interpersonal skills\textsuperscript{120} as well as mobilizing support in the external community.

Failure to acknowledge the city manager's role in policy and politics could not only impede the theoretical understanding of the city manager's role, but it could also lead to lack of formal preparation for this role, with potentially dire consequences.

Robert Golembiewski and Gerald Gabris, in a two-part series in 1994 and 1995, argued that the success of the council-manager plan (as a mechanism for ethical and

\textsuperscript{117} White, \textit{The City Manager}, 78. The quote is from the January 3, 1914 issue of \textit{Colliers}, "Business-Managing a City," pp. 24-25.


\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 335.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 333.
efficient government) could also lead to its failure.¹²¹ Rather than focusing largely on internal management issues, they argue that the profession should instead better equip managers for dealing with an often-volatile policy arena, and managers and councils should discuss often the assumptions and expectations they hold about their roles. In addition, Golembiewski and Gabris argue that the city management profession should stress effectiveness, rather than efficiency, of government performance, and it should recognize the intermingling of values and facts in community decision making.

Further theory-based support for the role of the city manager in policy and political areas has come from John Nalbandian, who provides the perspective of both a scholar of local government and a practitioner as council member and mayor in a council-manager city. In *Professionalism in Local Government: Transformations in the Roles, Responsibilities and Values of City Managers* (1991), Nalbandian notes that in contrast to the purely administrative roles that even current city managers profess, the manager is “deeply involved in policy-making as well as implementation, responds to a multitude of community forces as well as to the governing body, and incorporates a variety of competing values into the decision-making process.”¹²² Nalbandian focuses not only on the city manager’s role in setting policy, but also emphasizes the manager’s role as a broker of community power. He cites a time analysis of city managers’ work performed by M.L. Hale in 1989 which found that the largest amount

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of the manager’s time (37%) is spent in a broker role, “sharing knowledge, educating, negotiating or brokering among various groups, and instigating communication by linking people.”

The city manager exists in a political sphere, and is an active participant in the local political and policy-setting process, but as a professional rather than a politician. Hugh Heclo uses the phrase “neutral competence” in describing a way to distinguish the professional from the politician. A public administrator acting as a political advisor can be sensitive to political issues and still remain neutral. Heclo writes:

In the Anglo-American democracies, neutral competence is a relatively recent growth and corresponds roughly with the appearance of a higher civil service about a century ago. It envisions a continuous, uncommitted facility at the disposal of, and for the support of, political leadership. It is not a prescription for sainthood. Neutrality does not mean the possession of a direct-dial line to some overarching, non-partisan sense of the public interest. Rather it consists of giving one’s cooperation and best independent judgment of the issues to partisan bosses—and of being sufficiently uncommitted to be able to do for a succession of partisan leaders. The independence entailed in neutral competence does not exist for its own sake; it exists precisely in order to serve the aims of elected partisan leadership... The competence in question entails not just following orders but having the practical knowledge of government and the broker’s skills of the governmental marketplace that makes one’s advice worthy of attention.

Heclo primarily focuses on public administrators in the national government, but his comments could apply as well to local government managers. A city manager recently observed, “it is the city council’s right to run our cities into the ground—and

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124 Hugh Heclo, "OMB and the Presidency-the Problem of Neutral Competence," Public Interest 0, no. 38 (1975), 81.
our duty to help them do it."\textsuperscript{125} This is of course hyperbole—neutral competence does not require administrators to remain silent when the actions of elected officials might harm the community or individuals. The application of the "neutral competence" concept is applied in a slightly different way—as a \textit{complementary} relationship between politics and administration—by James Svara, specifically in the context of city management. He notes:

The complementarity of politics and administration is based on the premise that elected officials and administrators join together in the common pursuit of sound governance. Complementarity entails separate parts, but parts that come together in a mutually supportive way. One fills out the other to create a whole. Complementarity stresses interdependence along with distinct roles; compliance along with independence; respect for political control along with a commitment to shape and implement policy in ways that promote the public interest; deference to elected incumbents along with adherence to the law and support for fair electoral competition; and appreciation of politics along with support for professional standards.\textsuperscript{126}

The ideal of neutral competence forms the foundation of tenets five through seven of the ICMA Code of Ethics (Appendix C). For example, Tenet Five states, "Submit policy proposals to elected officials; provide them with facts and advice on matters of policy as a basis for making decisions and setting community goals; and uphold and implement local government policies adopted by elected officials."\textsuperscript{127}

The primary focus of the literature is on the city manager acting in a political or policy-setting capacity; less attention is placed on accommodating city council and citizen interest in the administration of the city organization. Craig Wheeland in \textit{City}

\textsuperscript{125} Personal communication, 2008.
Management in the 1990s: Responsibilities, Roles, and Practices proposes a theory of city management that specifically addresses the issue of political actors “interfering” in the administration of the city government. In Wheeland’s conceptualization, the city manager is a partner with the city council in the development of policy; is responsible in this policy role for reflecting the values of the broader community and not just the city council; and acknowledges and enables the city council’s—and community’s—legitimate interest in the execution and administration of policy. To do this, the manager takes on five different roles, each of which requires a different set of skills (and Wheeland suggests what some of these skills are).

The first role is that of educator. To accomplish this, the city manager would “provide information, advice, and recommendations to the council and the community.” No specific skills, however, are listed. The second role is that of listener (or learner). Here the competencies include surveying, focus groups, and democratic dialog in general. The third role is that of facilitator, with skills in the areas of team building, meeting facilitation, and self-knowledge. The fourth role is that of subordinate (to the city council and the broader interests of the citizens); again, no specific skills are listed. Finally, the manager continues to play a role as director, with skills in planning and allocating work, supervising employees, assessing performance and managing information.

Wheeland’s theoretical construction is normative, not descriptive; he proposes

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129 Ibid., 261.
the roles city managers should take to be effective in their communities. When he turns to actual data about city management practices, it is not to test his theory, but instead to explore how far real managers stray from the ideal. He looks to the results of surveys of city managers on their use of practices that contribute to these five roles, asking how consistently they used a practice. For example, a practice in the “listener” role would be to “hold town or neighborhood-based meetings specifically to solicit citizens’ input prior to developing the budget.” The survey analysis showed that seven percent of the respondents used this practice always. The managers did indeed employ practices in all five roles, but more often as a director and educator and least often as facilitator. Wheeland concludes with the observation, “Efforts to educate city managers about their responsibilities and roles and about the practices that help them perform their roles will need to continue if NHCM theory is to alter the practice of many city managers.”

Summary: The City Manager is a Community Leader

The overwhelming conclusion, after several decades of research, is that city managers do, in theory and in practice, play a role as community leader and facilitator of community dialog. They broker relationships among community groups, and they facilitate not only the city council’s effectiveness as political leaders, but also the council and citizens’ participation in the administration of the city government. Some

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130 Ibid., 271.
131 Ibid., 277.
of the research noted above does highlight competencies that city managers need in carrying out their policy role; an example is Nalbandian’s identification of the need for skills in brokering, negotiation, and sharing knowledge. In most cases, however, we must infer the relevant skills and knowledge from the description of the role the city manager plays. In some cases, as in the area of political involvement in administration, it is difficult—from the literature—to even infer the appropriate skills and knowledge; it remains an unanswered question.

**Size Matters, Sometimes**

In the discussion to this point, management competencies have been considered without regard to the size of organization that is being managed. But professional managers act as the chief executive officers of cities ranging in population from under 2,000 to well over a million, and population size can affect the characteristics of the community and how the manager interacts with it.¹³² Larger cities can be less homogeneous than small towns, and more powerful (and more active) in dealing with the state and federal governments. It is more difficult for the manager of the large city to interact with a sizeable percentage of the city’s population or to be intimately familiar with the geography of the place than it is for the manager of the smaller town. Larger cities have larger government organizations, and

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organization size can influence the way it is managed. James Svara has shown that in council-manager cities of more than 200,000 population, the line between policy and administration is especially blurred, with council members weighing in on administrative issues, and the manager taking an active role in initiating policy.

The question here is not whether size matters per se, but first, does it have a substantial effect on the competencies necessary to be an effective manager? Or put another way, if the literature does not take into consideration differences due to population size, there could be gaps in our understanding of the competencies required for city management in general. As an example, Charldean Newell and David Ammons, in *City Executives* examined the politics-administration balance by surveying city managers on how they actually spent their time. Not surprisingly, managers of the largest cities in the sample spent proportionally more time on external interactions than their smaller-city counterparts. But to limit the sample of cities to a manageable number, the researchers restricted the study to cities of over 50,000 people, possibly distorting the results since only three percent of US cities have populations this large. That is, their “small” city was in fact on the large size of the continuum of council-manager cities, and the study thus omits the practices of the

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97% of city managers that work in cities of under 50,000 people.

A reasonable approach to discovering whether the managers' skills and practices vary by city size is to analyze what the managers actually do. This has been done by a number of scholars through the use of surveys of city managers.\footnote{Richard J. Stillman II, *The Rise of the City Manager* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974); Ammons and Newell, *City Executives: Leadership Roles, Work Characteristics, and Time Management*; Roy E. Green, *The Profession of Local Government Management: Management Expertise and the American Community* (Praeger Publishers, 1989); Hale, *The Nature of City Managers' Work*} As a methodological note, asking managers to provide their estimate of how they spend their time might not be as accurate as direct observation or diary analysis. For example, an encounter with an angry citizen might take just five minutes, but the manager might recall later that dealing with citizen concerns took most of the morning. On the other hand, this potential distortion could be helpful, by emphasizing the importance of activities. Communicating with citizens is probably a more important skill than shuffling through e-mails and the other activities that consume so much of any executive's time, even if it employed far less frequently. And researchers like Ammons and Newell do flesh out their survey data with some case studies of how actual city managers spend their day.

Stillman compared the time distribution of small town managers with that of managers of larger suburban and central cities based on a 1971 survey conducted by the Maxwell School at Syracuse University; the results are summarized in Figure 3.\footnote{Stillman, *The Rise of the City Manager*} The time percentages for seven activities add up to 100, so these seven categories must completely describe the work that city managers do. Even if this is true, the categories,
such as “speaking with citizens by phone or in the office,” involve a number of skills. The typical manager of a large city spends more time on public relations (10% of the week) than the typical manager of a suburban city or small town (0%). On the other hand, the small town manager spends far more time inspecting or supervising municipal activities (40%) compared with the suburban (15%) and large city (5%) manager. It would thus appear that the manager of a small town needs to know more about the details of municipal services: why manhole covers are round, how to administer an election, the cost of a Crown Victoria police cruiser, and the pros and cons of activated sludge wastewater treatment. As Svara observed, the manager of the larger cities spend more time on political issues, as represented by “conferences with the city council.”

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139 Svara, *The Shifting Boundary between Elected Officials and City Managers in Large Council-Manager Cities*
While these activity categories do not directly correspond to skills and knowledge, some implications can be drawn from these data. First, based on the time devoted to them, communications skills (written and speaking) are very important. The “typical” manager spends between forty and sixty percent of his or her time in meetings, speaking to individuals, or writing. Of course, other skills and knowledge may be drawn upon when the manager is communicating. They might include such things as negotiation and persuasion; and knowledge of psychology. Exactly what these skills and areas of knowledge are, however, is an unanswered question.

Second, planning current and future activities occupy less than 15% of the time of the typical manager, regardless of size of the city. This category includes many subcategories, such as budget preparation, strategic planning, project management, and policy development. Skills in these areas may be important, but they are not used very often.

Ammons and Newell used five categories to describe how managers spend their time (Figure 4). Their survey found less difference between the activities of the manager of a small organization and that of the large organization. But as noted above, their size scale was substantially different than that of the Maxwell survey used by Stillman. The latter described as small those cities serving a population of less than

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\[140\] Ammons and Newell, *City Executives: Leadership Roles, Work Characteristics, and Time Management*
ten or fifteen thousand. Ammons and Newell described as small a city serving between 50,000 and 75,000 population, and a large city was defined as one having a population greater than 100,000. City managers do spend a lot of time in meetings. All told, verbal communications accounted for over sixty percent of the time spent by these managers, regardless of organization size. Again, communication skills, along with skills that managers draw on while they are speaking and listening, appear to be very important or at least used often.

![Diagram showing time spent by city managers](image)

**Figure 4. How city managers spend their time.**

*Source: Adapted from David N. Ammons and Chandlean Newell, *City Executives: Leadership Roles, Work Characteristics, and Time Management* (State Univ of New York Pr, 1989).*

In their exploration of the policy-administration question, Ammons and Newell also surveyed city managers on the focus of their executive work, regardless of the activities they were performing (Figure 5). Even for managers of the largest cities,
internal administration still accounts for over a third of the managers’ focus, about the same percentage as public relations and city council relations combined. Policy development accounts for less than a fifth of the focus of city managers’ work, at least in terms of time devoted to it. The managers of the largest cities indicated they spent slightly less time (thirty-nine percent) on internal administration than the managers of the smaller cities (just under forty-two percent). A possible explanation is that in the larger cities, this function is more often delegated to assistants. But Ammons and Newell found the same results for the assistants; that is, the assistant city managers in the large cities spent less time on internal administration than their smaller cities counterparts.\textsuperscript{141}

Figure 5. Focus of city managers’ time.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., Table A-9.

A similar survey was done by ICMA in 1987 and analyzed by Roy Green. While Green did not cross-tabulate the results by city size, the survey adds another perspective to the work done by Stillman and Ammons & Newell. The categories used in this survey once again add up to one hundred percent, so they (presumably) fully describe what city managers do. The city manager spends more time in the areas of negotiation, crisis management, and resources allocation (e.g., budgeting and project management). But Green notes that “the responses…demonstrate why local government managers are most often described—by themselves as well as by others—as being generalists.” As Figure 6 reveals, no single role accounts for more than fourteen percent of the manager’s time.

142 Green, *The Profession of Local Government Management: Management Expertise and the American Community*

143 Ibid., 98.
Figure 6. How city managers spend their time.  
(Source: Adapted from Roy E. Green, *The Profession of Local Government Management: Management Expertise and the American Community* (Praeger Publishers, 1989).)

David R. Morgan has also studied the role of the city manager in influencing policy, and the city manager's relationship with the mayor. In an article co-authored with Sheilah Watson, Morgan noted that managers in larger cities had less power than their smaller city peers, and that in most cities, the managers and mayors had a close working relationship, with managers playing the dominant role in smaller cities while the mayors seemed dominant in the larger ones.¹⁴⁴

In summary, differences between the activities of managers of small cities and large cities seem to be a matter of degree, rather than well-defined divergence of activities and practices. The career path of some managers in fact takes them through

cities of a variety of sizes, and they presumably draw on a similar set of skills in these cities. Out of necessity, managers of small towns need to have more knowledge of the details of municipal services. Managers of large cities seem to spend more time on external community affairs. But managers of cities of all sizes are generalists, and spread their attention over a variety of activities, both internal and external to the city government organization. A very large part of the manager’s time is spent in verbal and written communications, and specifically in meetings.

We can add some more skills and knowledge to our inventory thus far. But descriptions of the activities of the managers of small and large cities may not answer the question of the skills and knowledge they use in completing these activities. A meeting with department heads may be used to convey the policy direction of the city council or the overall mission of the organization, to gather information on the internal activities of the organization, to manage projects, to manage a current crisis, or to resolve a conflict between departments. To a large extent, the skills and knowledge critical to effective local government management remains an unanswered question in the research on allocation of time and attention.

The Practitioner Perspective: A Meta-Analysis

One method for gauging the critical skills and knowledge of city managers is, as we have seen, to analyze how they spend their time. Another approach is simply to ask their opinions on the subject. This could reveal different information, such as skills that are critical, but that are used relatively infrequently. It could also illuminate skills
that are being used during an activity but are not explicitly identified in a description of the activity itself. An example would be psychological skills that are used by a manager during the activity of attending a city council meeting.

Several surveys of practitioners have been done over the past four decades. Green analyzed data from ICMA surveys of its members in 1984 and 1973.\textsuperscript{145} In both surveys, city and county managers were asked, “How useful do you believe the following areas are for becoming a modern manager/chief administrative officer/executive director?”\textsuperscript{146} In this case, the choices were educational areas, and thus describe areas of knowledge rather than specific skills. Green noted that the most useful educational areas (as of 1984) were, in the opinion of the managers who responded, budgeting and finance, administration and organizational theory, public relations, and personnel management. The least useful educational areas were sociology, statistics, and political science. In comparing these results with the earlier (1973) survey, Green found that the relative ranking of the educational areas had not changed substantially, with the exception of political science, which had dropped two positions in rank between 1973 and 1984.

Hinton and Kerrigan conducted a similar survey, also of members of ICMA.\textsuperscript{147} Rather than exploring opinions on educational areas, they asked for opinions on

\textsuperscript{145} Green, \textit{The Profession of Local Government Management: Management Expertise and the American Community}
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 52.
knowledge needs for “tomorrow’s administrators.” Since knowledge can be gained from a variety of sources in addition to formal education, the choices of answers do not match precisely those analyzed by Green. Nevertheless, some comparisons can be made. Organizational theory and personnel administration were at the high end of the rankings in both surveys. The areas of “political institutions and processes” and “social characteristics, institutions and processes of urban areas” are ranked relatively low in the Hinton & Kerrigan study, but not as low as the similar areas of political science and sociology in Green’s survey. On the other hand, information technology was ranked higher in Green’s analysis than in that of Hinton & Kerrigan. The category, “urban economic development, including both public and private sector” was ranked most important in the Hinton & Kerrigan survey, and the field of economics was ranked in the top five educational areas in Green’s survey.148

Hinton & Kerrigan’s survey was done at around the same time (1987-88) as the second of the two surveys analyzed by Green (1984). Hinton & Kerrigan also compared their results with two earlier surveys (1977-78 and 1971), and found that the relative ranks had not changed substantially. This is important because it indicates the relative stability of the rankings over time, and with three independent samples yielding the same results, we can be fairly confident that the findings can be generalized to the population as a whole (i.e., all members of ICMA).

ICMA and NASPAA collaborated in 2006 on a survey of over 400 ICMA

148 Associating knowledge of economic development with the field of economics may not be appropriate, since it would be hard to argue that many local economic development activities have any basis in economic theory.
members. The respondents included both city managers (92%) and county administrators (8%). They ranked, on a five-point Likert scale, the relative importance of a list of skills and knowledge. In the area of internal management, the areas rated highest ("extremely important") were decision making/problem solving, communications skills, leadership, teamwork, budgeting and financial management, and staff supervision/personnel management. Of lowest importance were skills or knowledge in marketing and statistical analysis. A separate question asked for opinions on "public service knowledge and skills." Here ethics and integrity, and openness to citizen participation and involvement were rated most important, and knowledge of political/legal institutions was rated least important.

Meta-Analysis

The three studies described above all sampled the same population—members of ICMA—and all used a Likert scale to gauge the practitioners' opinion of the importance of knowledge and skills. It is therefore possible to combine the results of the three studies in a meta-analysis. There are, however, several methodological challenges in doing so. First, the surveys asked different questions. Even slight differences in wording or the description of practice could yield different results. There were, however, enough similarities in some of the descriptions of practices (e.g.,

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“budgeting and financial management”) to evaluate the comparability of at least some of the results. Second, responses may have been biased due to the range of choices given. Suppose, for example, that one of the surveys omitted areas of practice that were in fact more important than any of the areas included in the survey. Even though respondents were asked to rate areas of practice independently on a Likert scale (rather than ranking them in priority order), the respondent might have scanned the list of choices available and subconsciously ranked them. This would overstate the importance of practices in a survey that omitted more important practices, and understate the importance of practices in a survey the omitted less important practices. This, however, did not appear to be a problem in the meta-analysis: the ratings of both the higher-rated and the lower-rated practices lined up fairly well across all three studies. Pre-testing the survey instrument would have, presumably, identified missing practices, especially those that would be seen as more important than the practices included in a test survey.

Third, the three studies covered a total of six surveys, since both Green and Hinton & Kerrigan evaluated similar surveys that were done over a multiple year period. Because their analyses did not find substantial shifts in opinion over time, the meta-analysis includes only the results from the last (most recent) survey. Thus, it covers a two-decade time period from 1984 to 2006. Finally, the Hinton & Kerrigan surveys use a three-point Likert scale and the other two use a five-point scale. The meta-analysis adjusted the Hinton & Kerrigan ratings through the use of a simple scaling factor (i.e., multiplying the composite rating for each practice by 5/3). This
appeared to work well: the Hinton & Kerrigan results were distributed fairly evenly in the meta-analysis, with no evidence of bunching at either the top or bottom end of the scale. The labels of the ratings scales were also slightly different. Green asked respondents to rate areas of practice as “not useful” on one end of the scale, and “essential” on the other end of the scale. Hinton & Kerrigan used a range from “least important” to “most important.” The range used in the ICMA-NASPAA survey was from “Not at all important” to “extremely important.” These are nonetheless similar, and in practice, most professionals are very familiar with surveys that use Likert scales, and quickly scan the scale simply to verify which end corresponds to the “most important” or “strongly agree” response in order to orient themselves.

The first iteration of the meta-analysis is shown in Table 3. Here the composite ratings competencies from all of the studies are listed in rank order, with no attempt to aggregate the ratings. The results are remarkable. For many areas of practice—budgeting and financial management, organization principles, information technology—the ratings from the independent studies are very similar, yielding the same rank order in the meta-analysis. This holds both for high-rated as well as low-rated areas of practice. While the overall population is the same (members of ICMA), the three studies used different samples over a two decade time period. The stability of the results indicates that the surveys are doing a good job of representing the average opinions of ICMA members.

Table 3. Ratings from three studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skill/Competency</td>
<td>Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making/problem solving (c)</td>
<td>4.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics and integrity (c)</td>
<td>4.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation analysis (b)</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills (c)</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership (c)</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork (c)</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting and financial mgmt. (c)</td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting &amp; finance (a)</td>
<td>4.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing community needs (b)</td>
<td>4.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling interpersonal relations (b)</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff supervision/personnel mgmt. (c)</td>
<td>4.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to citizen participation (c)</td>
<td>4.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic development (b)</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bargaining, negotiating (b)</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegating (b)</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial analysis (b)</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration/org. theory (a)</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human relations (b)</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes underlying urban problems (b)</td>
<td>4.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audience-oriented communication (b)</td>
<td>4.23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic planning (c)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public relations (a)</td>
<td>4.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Values motivating citizens (b)</td>
<td>4.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public budgetary processes (c)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic/community development (c)</td>
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<td>Personnel (a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intergovernmental relations (c)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytical thinking (b)</td>
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<td>Negotiation (c)</td>
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<td>Organization principles &amp; practices (b)</td>
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<td>Organization and group behavior (c)</td>
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<td>Personnel admin, labor relations (b)</td>
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<td>Program evaluation/accountability (c)</td>
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<td>Urban planning (b)</td>
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<td>Public private partnerships (c)</td>
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<td>Economics (a)</td>
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<td>Cultural competence (b)</td>
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<td>E-governance (c)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written communication (b)</td>
<td>3.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political/legal institutions (c)</td>
<td>3.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical/information systems (b)</td>
<td>3.59</td>
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<td>Information technology (a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban/regional planning (a)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology (a)</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority &amp; disadvantaged group issues (b)</td>
<td>3.37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Systems analysis (a)</td>
<td>3.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specific municipal services (b)</td>
<td>3.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marketing (c)</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical analysis (c)</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political science (a)</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job analysis (b)</td>
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<td>Engineering principles (b)</td>
<td>2.54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Systems design &amp; operations analysis (b)</td>
<td>1.82</td>
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Note: Colors indicate groupings of variables used in the next phase of the analysis. In the second step of the meta-analysis, results for similar questions were aggregated. This was done only if the questions seemed to describe the same competency, and not if different wording of the question appeared to result in a substantially different rating. For example, the Green survey asked about skills in “budgeting and financial management,” and the ICMA-NASPAA survey asked about the importance of “budgeting and financial management” to the internal management of the organization. The ratings for these two questions were similar and were thus
combined in the next step of the meta-analysis. The ICMA-NASPAA survey, however, asked a separate question on the importance of “public budgetary processes” from a public service perspective. This question seems to shift the emphasis to public or political involvement in budget decisions, rather than internal budget and financial management; it was rated lower than the other two budget questions and thus was left as a separate area of practice.

In a meta-analysis results from samples of the same population are not simply averaged. They are instead weighted according to sample size and the inverse of the square of the standard deviation of the sample.\textsuperscript{152} In other words, larger samples with less variation in responses are given more weight in the summary of the study results. The weighting formula is:

$$\frac{N}{\sigma^2}$$

where $N$ is the size of the sample used in the study and $\sigma$ is the standard deviation.

Fortunately, each of the studies reported the sample size. Unfortunately, none reported the standard deviation of the results. But they did report the number of total responses for each point on the Likert scale. The standard deviation can thus be calculated as follows. The formula for calculating the standard deviation is:

$$\sigma = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N-1} \sum_{i=1}^{N} (x_i - \bar{x})^2}$$

where $N$ is again the sample size, and $x$ represents the results of each case (i.e., the Likert scale number corresponding to the response to each question). When results are limited to a five-point ordinal scale, this formula can be expanded to:

$$\sqrt{\frac{1}{N-1}\left(N_5(5-x)^2 + N_4(4-x)^2 + \ldots + N_1(1-x)^2\right)}$$

where $N_5$ is total number of respondents who chose the response that corresponded to number five on the Likert scale. Using this formula to calculate standard deviation, and then applying the weighting formula noted above, a total of seventeen variables (competencies) from the three studies were aggregated into eight summary variables. They are shown in Figure 7, along with the competencies from the three studies that were not aggregated.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill/Topic</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision making/problem solving</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics and integrity</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation analysis</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting and financial mgmt. (a,c)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing community needs</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling interpersonal relations</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff supervision/personnel mgmt.</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to citizen participation</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bargaining, negotiating</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegating</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic development (b,c)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial analysis</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration/org. theory (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human relations</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes underlying urban problems</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience-oriented communication</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic planning</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values motivating citizens</td>
<td>(b)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public budgetary processes</td>
<td>(c)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intergovernmental relations</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical thinking</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel admin (a,b)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization principles (b,c)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program evaluation/accountability</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy analysis</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social characteristics of institutions</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public private partnerships</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media/public relations</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance measurement</td>
<td>(c)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political institutions (b,c)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Political-policy interactions</td>
<td>(c)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>(a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural competence</td>
<td>(b)</td>
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<tr>
<td>E-governance</td>
<td>(c)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information technology (a,b,c)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban/regional planning (a,b)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority &amp; disadvantaged group issues</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific municipal services</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical analysis</td>
<td>(c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political science (a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job analysis</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems design &amp; operations analysis (a,b)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering principles (b)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Composite Ranking (5 = Most Important)
Several observations can be made from this meta-analysis. First, the practitioners seem to agree with scholars that some form of community leadership role is important. They rated very highly skills in assessing community needs, being open to citizen participation, and situation analysis. Nevertheless, internal management skills and knowledge are equally important, including budgeting and financial management, staff supervision, and administration/organization theory. Several skills cover both arenas: ethics and integrity, communications skills, leadership, teamwork, and negotiating.

Second, the practitioners seem to take a dim view of knowledge in broad areas of the social sciences, and rated among the lowest knowledge of sociology, political science, psychology and economics. On the other hand, specific application of research in these fields seems to be more appreciated: the practitioners rated somewhat higher knowledge of social characteristics of institutions, political institutions, and economic development. Many of the highest-rated skills, such as negotiating, human relations, and handling interpersonal relations have a theoretical

153 "Situation analysis" is further qualified by Hinton & Kerrigan as “sizing up” the community political milieu, organization and staff.
base in the field of psychology.

Third, with the exception of financial management, the more technical skills appear to be among the lowest-ranked; these include statistics, systems and operations design, engineering, and information technology. The samples from a predominantly male and white population also showed fairly low rankings for cultural competence and knowledge of minority and disadvantaged group issues. Policy analysis, the focus of many MPA programs, falls below the middle of the rankings.

This meta-analysis not only identifies skills and knowledge that are used in the practice of local government management, but also the relative importance of these areas of practice. A critical question in defining the practice is determining the cut-off point that should be used to decide which areas of practice are critical. Green points out that while practitioners ranked many academic disciplines as being relatively unimportant to the practice of local government administration, “all of the academic disciplines listed were rated by substantial majorities of managers to be of at least some usefulness (emphasis added). None of the areas included in the meta-analysis was associated with a composite score at the “not at all useful” end of the scale. Using a cut-off point of 3.5 on the five-point scale would eliminate the lowest fifth of the areas of practice, and none that are identified as being critical in other research.

154 Defined by Hinton & Kerrigan as “relating to and understanding minority, disadvantaged, and other culturally distinctive groups.
155 Green, The Profession of Local Government Management: Management Expertise and the American Community, 49.
In 1991, the ICMA Executive Board convened the Task Force on Continuing Education and Professional Development to identify the competencies required of an effective local government manager and to determine ICMA’s role in helping managers obtain those competencies. The Task Force was comprised of managers and assistants, as well as representatives from academia, executive search firms, and state municipal leagues. In January 1994, the Task Force presented its final report to the ICMA Executive Board. The report captured two years of discussions among the ICMA membership, including two surveys, thirty-five facilitated discussions at state and affiliate meetings, and progress reports at ICMA’s 1992 and 1993 annual conferences. The Board unanimously approved the Task Force recommendations to adopt the practices identified by ICMA members as essential to effective local government management, and to add two clarifying guidelines to Tenet 8 of the ICMA Code of Ethics. The guidelines require each ICMA member to first, routinely assess his or her professional skills and abilities and second, annually commit at least forty hours to professional development activities. The Board also established the “ICMA University” to identify and provide professional development tools and activities for members.

The term “practice” is not directly synonymous with “competency.” ICMA,

\[156\] The account of the development of ICMA’s “practices” was provided by Elizabeth Kellar, deputy director of ICMA, and Betsy Sherman, director of member services, in a personal communication on November, 2008.
however, qualifies the word “practice” with the phrase “for effective local government management”; the implication is that what are being described are best practices. Professional competencies are expressed as behaviors that lead to effectiveness, and these behaviors are used as evidence that an individual possesses a competency.157 In this case, a best practice (as applied to an individual) may be seen as a competency in action.

Regardless of the possible arguments about the distinction between practices and competencies, ICMA’s list (Appendix B) is consistent with, and similar to, the opinions of practitioners as noted in the meta-analysis, above. It includes skills and knowledge in the areas of team leadership, interpersonal relations, delegating, budgeting and financial analysis, strategic planning, and personal integrity. The final list was not based solely on a survey of members; it was vetted by a committee of experienced and well-respected managers, with the addition of some scholars. Therefore, in addition to reflecting the areas of practice the average practitioner thinks are important, it includes areas that should be important, either from a theoretical basis or from a normative basis.

The role of the city manager as community leader—so well described in the academic literature—is prominently reflected in the list of practices. They include the broad category of policy facilitation, with subcategories of facilitative leadership, facilitating council effectiveness, and mediation/negotiation. Strategic leadership is emphasized, which is exercised in both managing the organization and leading the

157 Spencer and Spencer, Competence at Work : Models for Superior Performance
community. Skills and knowledge in the areas of democratic advocacy and citizen participation are also listed.

A practice of “diversity” is highlighted in ICMA’s list, even though skill in interacting with and knowledge of different cultural groups was ranked relatively low in surveys of practitioners. This practice, which is defined as “understanding and valuing the differences among individuals and fostering these values throughout the organization and the community” has both theoretical benefit to the effective functioning of the organization and community, and it has a normative element, too. Regardless of the theoretical importance of this “practice,” ICMA clearly promotes the value that local government professionals should understand and value the differences among individuals.

Summary

We have seen in this chapter that research on private sector and public sector managers shows that they share many competencies in leading the internal organization: human relations and interpersonal communications skills, management skills ranging from strategic planning to organizational development, and innate traits such as personal integrity and self-motivation. A solid body of literature shows that city managers also need competencies in interacting with their surrounding community, but there is less research on exactly what these competencies are. Some are prescribed (for example, skill as a broker of information and community power) and others can be inferred, but the detailed enumeration of competencies that we find
in the private sector and public administration literature is lacking in research on the city manager’s role as a community leader.

A meta-analysis of surveys of city managers correlates with the research on private and public manager competencies. The top six rated competencies are decision making/problem solving, ethics and integrity, situation analysis, communication skills, leadership (an admittedly vague label), and teamwork. This research also highlights some competencies that may be more necessary for city management than other forms of management: budgeting, assessing community needs, citizen participation, and economic development, among others.

There are two primary limitations of the literature that forms the basis of the meta-analysis. First, the survey universe used in this research is typically all members of ICMA. The opinions of the average practitioner are important, but there is a possibility of bias due to professional myopia. Local government managers may argue that the most important areas of knowledge are the ones they happen to possess, and the most critical management skills are the ones they actually use. And by its very nature, the subjective or intangible dimension of local government administration is subject to a wide range of opinion. The city manager of Austin may think that the administrator’s sensitivity to community politics is the most critical aspect of local government management. The county administrator of Clackamas County may argue

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158 Hinton & Kerrigan used as a sample frame ICMA members who had received a service award, which simply means they had been in the local government management profession for at least ten years.
instead that building relations with a variety of different unions is key to effective local management.

   Statistical techniques can be used to find the most prevalent opinions, or average responses. But this information is not necessarily useful: the research goal of this study is to discover the fundamental competencies of local government management, not the average administrator’s opinion of it. This is not a criticism of local administrator’s knowledge of their field. Administrators may be very effective at what they do, while still having difficulty describing it in a way that directly relates to scholarly work on the development of theory.

   Second, the surveys noted above included fairly short lists of skills and knowledge, typically around a dozen compared to the more than fifty listed in ICMA’s practices for effective local government management. This was probably done to encourage a reasonable response rate from the fairly large samples that were used. In some cases, categories were grouped in ways that included several disparate skills, or that became ambiguous, such as “urban economic development, including both public and private sector” or “leadership.”

   To address these problems, this study extends the available literature by relying on a panel of experts in the field, using the Delphi technique to provide a richer and more complete understanding of the competencies essential to local government management than could be obtained through simple surveys. The study

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159 Hinton and Kerrigan, Tracing the Changing Knowledge and Skill Needs and Service Activities of Public Managers, 122.
design is discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3: STUDY DESIGN

The research question for this study is the following: To what extent does existing theory on local government administration provide a foundation for a curriculum based in a well supported understanding of the knowledge and skills required by senior managers of cities? The working hypothesis, based upon a review of the literature, is as follows.

H1: There is a gap between critical competencies necessary for city managers and the theoretical foundations for these competencies:

The existence of this gap will be documented using a deductive approach based largely on qualitative data. Further, the study will attempt to identify the specific bodies of theory that appear to be missing.

Overview of Approach

The heart of this research, and the source of new data that contributes to the understanding of local government management, is the formal analysis and distillation of the opinion of a panel of local government management experts in the field (both practitioners and scholars) using the Delphi method. This not only tests the description of critical competencies that is currently available in the literature, but also addresses some of the deficiencies of this literature. The outcome of this work is an inventory of
the range of skills and areas of knowledge that are drawn upon in managing local governments, and a ranking of the relative importance of these competencies. It provides a foundation for theory development by identifying the most critical roles played by local government administrators, and the skills and knowledge necessary for effective performance in those roles.

As part of the analysis of the results of the Delphi study, the identification of gaps between the skills and knowledge essential to practice and currently available public administration theory has been completed in two separate steps. First, areas of apparently adequate theory (and thus to be removed from further analysis) were identified by comparing the results of the Delphi analysis (identification of critical competencies) with the material that is typically covered by MPA programs specializing in local government, on the assumption that if material is being taught at the graduate level, there must be theory to back it. This may not be an accurate assumption (and it is discussed more fully below), and to the extent that it is not, the extent of a theory-practice gap is understated. Second, areas of practice not covered by MPA programs were compared to the public administration literature to identify any remaining gaps between theory and practice. This step identifies both a) areas where there appears to be adequate theory, but that are apparently missing from MPA curricula; and b) areas where theory needs to be developed or adapted from other fields.

The null hypothesis (that there is a theoretical foundation for all critical competencies necessary for effective city management) is confirmed if MPA programs
fully address the skills and knowledge that are critical to practice. Rejecting the null hypothesis, however, does not then prove there is a gap between theory and practice, because there could be reasons for a lack of relevant education at the graduate level besides a lack of available theory. These reasons might include a lack of interest in an area on the part of faculty (even if theory is available), or the availability of other learning environments (e.g., life experience, on-the-job training) that might be more appropriate for acquiring a skill or area of knowledge. Therefore, the literature needs to be examined to more fully isolate real gaps between theory and practice.

Figure 8 provides a schematic view of the research approach used in this study.

![Figure 8: Schematic view of the research approach](image)

**Step One: Identification of Critical Competencies**

As we saw in Chapter 2, existing research can take us most of the way, but not all of the way toward identifying the competencies that are essential to the practice of city management. Detailed studies of management competencies have focused on
private sector managers and federal agency managers. Research on the city management profession has demonstrated clearly that, in comparison to their private and federal counterparts, city managers need to be competent in interacting with both the elected city council and with the local community in a political environment, but there is less research on exactly what the associated competencies might be. Surveys of city managers, conducted several times over multiple decades, are helpful. But these surveys reflect the opinions of the average city manager, and not necessarily the most effective city managers. The results could be limited by professional tunnel-vision, and the surveys tend to include a fairly brief list of competencies (or fields of knowledge), so that categories are typically very broad or ambiguous.

To address these problems, this study supplements the existing data through a survey of a panel of experts in the field, using the Delphi technique to provide a richer and more complete understanding of the competencies essential to local government management than could be obtained through simple surveys. The panel was composed of the members of four key boards and committees that are part of the ICMA organization: the 2006-08 strategic planning committee, the advisory board on graduate education, a smaller committee hand-picked by Executive Director Robert O’Neill to explore the issue of critical practices in the profession, and the board of directors of the organization itself. These individuals have the respect of their peers as competent managers, and they have practice in thinking reflectively about the work they do.
To balance a possible source of bias due to professional myopia, two additional groups of experts were consulted. The first is the scholars who study and teach local government management. This sample is made up of the members of NASPAA’s local government committee, supplemented by selected scholars who have published extensively on local government management issues (as found through a literature search). The second source of independent observation on the critical issues handled by local government managers could also be found in the city councils and county boards that hire the managers. Given the demands on the board members’ time (they are almost always volunteers with full time jobs elsewhere), the response rate might be low, and some board members probably have only a vague idea of what their CEO actually does or should do. A potentially powerful secondary source of these data can instead be found in the executive search firms that work for governing boards when they hire their top managers. The individuals who work for these firms are skilled at drawing out from the board members the critical areas of knowledge, skill, and talent that the successful manager will require (and indirectly, the key characteristics of local government management). There are few enough firms that sampling is not necessary.

Analytic Design: Use of the Delphi Technique

Rather than using a simple survey, the opinion of the panel of experts was solicited and distilled using a Delphi technique, a method for “structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of
individuals, as a whole, to deal with a complex problem." Procedurally, a typical Delphi consists of these steps: a) an appropriate group of experts is identified and invited to participate; b) a researcher (and often a team of researchers) develop an initial set of questions for the experts; c) the group responds to the initial set of questions; d) the results of the first round is fed back to the participants, who answer a second set of questions; e) the rounds are repeated until the results settle into a fairly stable pattern. When results are fed back to the participants, they are always done anonymously (i.e., without attribution). This is one of the advantages of this method over other forms of expert feedback. In focus groups, for example, individuals can have a distorting affect on the group, leading to conformity, or in some cases, to polarization. Olaf Helmer, one of the pioneers of the Delphi technique, noted the possible drawbacks of face-to-face interactions:

These may include such things as the purely specious persuasion of others by the member with the greatest supposed authority or even merely the loudest voice, an unwillingness to abandon publicly expressed opinions, and the bandwagon effect of majority opinion. These psychological shortcomings gave rise to the development of Delphi in the first place, the contention being that the price paid for the anonymity of the Delphi procedure in terms of reduced ease of communication is well worth it if thereby the substance of what is being communicated is improved.

For the present study, this aspect of the Delphi technique is very useful. The panel of experts includes both local government chief executives and leading public administration scholars. These individuals do tend to be outspoken, and often skilled

at winning verbal arguments. A focus group approach might reflect this skill more than it measures consensus of opinion. Further, many of these individuals command the respect of their peers. The Delphi technique allows ideas and opinions to be viewed on their own without the subjective baggage of the author’s position in the professional community.

The importance of the anonymity of responses could just as well be achieved through a simple survey. The Delphi technique offers the further advantage of the feedback process. In the early use of the technique, the goal of the successive rounds was to achieve consensus, usually around some quantitative measure (number).

Another pioneer in the field, Norman Dalkey, described it like this:

The results of the first round will be summarized, e.g., as the median and inter-quartile range of the responses, and fed back with a request to revise the first estimates where appropriate. On succeeding rounds, those individuals whose answers deviate markedly from the median (e.g., outside the inter-quartile range) are requested to justify their estimates. These justifications are summarized, fed back, and counter-arguments elicited. The counter-arguments are in turn fed back and additional reappraisals collected. 163

Ideally, this process reduces data noise and outliers. Some of the initial responses might be revised if they were not strong opinions, or if on reflection (and seeing the arguments made by others) the participant simply changed his or her mind.

Over time, the Delphi technique began to be used in areas of value judgment and policy alternatives. Here consensus is not as critical: “The initial Delphis were characterized by a strong emphasis on the use of consensus by a group of experts as the means to converge on a single model or position on some issue. In contrast, the

explicit purpose of a Kantian [identification of alternative models] Delphi is to elicit alternatives so that a comprehensive overview of the issue can take place.”¹⁶⁴ In these processes, the researcher plays an especially critical role in re-framing issues and questions. This is, of course, a potential source of bias, only one of several potential problems with the Delphi technique.

Potential Problems and Limitations

The Delphi technique is a qualitative, not quantitative, research method. Many Delphi studies employ statistical analysis of results,¹⁶⁵ but this numerical analysis should not obscure the fact that the Delphi technique is simply a fairly systematic method for teasing out expert opinion. On the other hand, identifying it as a qualitative method does not exempt the technique from methodological rigor.

Selection of the expert panel is the first challenge. Qualitative researchers sometimes refer to this as sample selection, but the term “sample” implies a goal of generalizing research results to a larger target population. In the case of focus groups, Morgan notes that sample size is usually too small to be able to generalize to a large population using statistical methods; this same caveat would apply to the Delphi technique.¹⁶⁶ What is important, according to Morgan, is to acknowledge (and where possible, correct for) bias in the panel members. This cannot be done on an individual

¹⁶⁵ Linstone and Turoff, The Delphi Method: Techniques and Applications
¹⁶⁶ Morgan, Focus Groups as Qualitative Research
basis (every individual is biased), but systematic bias can be reduced by balancing possible sources of bias. Use of key ICMA committees for the source of (practitioner) panel members helps in this area. ICMA attempts to achieve balance in the makeup of their committees with regard to geographic region, government size, and gender and age of the individual.

Another source of bias is, as noted above, the researcher. Here, the principles of good survey practice must be employed, because each round of a Delphi exercise is a type of survey. The researcher should avoid leading questions or limiting the range of responses, and for this reason, the first round of a Delphi typically relies heavily on open-ended questions. Questions should not be double-barreled (for example, asking for an opinion and the reason for the opinion in the same question), and they should be pre-tested for clarity, and for the presence of either overgeneralizations or over-specificity. Using open-ended questions in the first round helps avoid leading questions, but it requires the researcher to code or summarize the responses in feeding the results back to the Delphi participants. One way to reduce bias here is to enlist the help of others in both pretesting the survey instruments and coding the results, to ensure that the results of the coding are reproducible. I have enlisted the help of three current and retired city managers and a faculty member at another university to serve as a sounding board for survey instrument and coding decisions (or as a “key

informant" panel). This method for quality control is often used in qualitative research in areas such as ethnography. Singleton and Straits state, “Researchers should constantly seek corroborating feedback for their observations from others in the setting. They should check for inconsistencies between informants and find out why they disagree.”

My thirty years of experience in local government management can be an asset in this research as a form of participant observation. I have some basis for being able to generalize from my experience: I have worked in three cities ranging in size from 4,000 to 150,000 population and one county, in four states in three separate regions of the country. Three of them have been professionally-managed council-manager forms of government and one was a large eastern county run by political hacks in a patronage system.

Kathy Charmaz emphasizes both the importance and validity of the researcher’s own experience. She states that “neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices.” This study is not intended to develop new theory, so the concepts underlying grounded theory might not fully apply. On the

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171 Ibid.
other hand, this research will identify competencies critical to city management, which provides at least a model of (rather than a theory of) city management. Strauss and Corbin identify professional experience as a source of theoretical sensitivity, or “the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t.”\footnote{Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, \textit{Basics of Qualitative Research : Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques} (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1990), 42.} Strauss and Corbin state:

> Throughout years of practice in a field, one acquires an understanding of how things work in that field, and why, and what will happen there under certain conditions. This knowledge, even if implicit, is taken into the research situation and helps you to understand events and actions…\footnote{Ibid., 42.}

This experience can also be helpful in translating theoretical concepts into questions that practitioners can relate to. If, for example, city managers asked if they felt that knowledge of contingency theory is necessary for making decisions on organizational structure, their eyes would glaze over. If they were asked, instead, if they agreed or disagreed with the statement that there is one best way to manage cities, they would probably provide an answer (i.e., they would answer “no”).

This research needs to explicitly address my own potential sources of bias. They include a preponderance of experience in (and affinity for) the council-manager form of government, experience primarily west of the Rockies in politically stable communities, and education and training that emphasizes quantitative and financial analysis. There may be a tendency to assume that the defining characteristics of local

\footnote{Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, \textit{Basics of Qualitative Research : Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques} (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1990), 42.}
government are the ones that I have personally observed, and that the knowledge needed to manage local government is the knowledge that I possess. This potential bias must be acknowledged, and it is at least partially offset by, first, consciously avoiding the tendency to filter data and to direct the response to questions; and second, by basing all conclusions of the research on data derived from other sources rather than any reference to personal experience or opinion.

Aside from issues of individual bias, the Delphi panel will of necessity reflect a (collective) opinion at a single moment in time. Since this study has been motivated in part to provide a contribution to the challenge of preparing a new generation of managers, it is important that the competencies identified through this process have application to the future (at least for a decade or two). To encourage them to take a long view, the panel members were asked to provide their opinions on competencies that might be useful “now and in the future” to top managers. Nonetheless, there is a risk that currently popular topics (e.g., performance measurement, downsizing) will be rated as more important than they might be rated in ten or twenty years. This could be especially true for ratings of the importance of familiarity with the provision of specific city or county services, since the typical service mix changes over time (e.g., municipal Internet service and community sustainability initiatives are relatively recent city services).

Linstone and Turoff note two additional potential problems that are
specifically associated with the Delphi technique. The first is "ignoring and not exploring disagreements, so that discouraged dissenters drop out and an artificial consensus is generated." This problem can be offset by respecting dissenting opinions when results are fed back, and by encouraging a diversity of opinion. The second problem is that the Delphi technique can place a high demand on the time of the respondents. They must have an incentive for participating; in this study, the panel members might be expected to be personally and professionally interested in the research results.

A good guide to the appropriate use and documentation of the Delphi technique is a doctoral dissertation by Emanuel Wald. He used the technique (in 1973) to develop a paradigm for the field of public administration into the future (to 1990). The area of inquiry was similar, and Wald's approach and method were supported in a heated debate over the future of public administration education in the pages of Public Administration Review. While criticizing a National Academy of Public Administration study on the subject (that also used the Delphi method), Lawrence Howard states: "This is in sharp contrast with the Delphi exercise conducted by Emmanual (sic) Wald, a graduate student, on the future of public administration, which pays close attention to participant selection, the projections of probabilities,

175 Linstone and Turoff, *The Delphi Method: Techniques and Applications*
176 Ibid., 6.
Step Two: Comparison of City Management Competencies and MPA Curricula

A reasonable approach to answering the research question at the center of this study would simply be to compare critical city management competencies (as identified through the Delphi analysis) with available theory, and identify the subset of competencies that is not matched by theory. Local government management, however, like the field of public administration itself, is a very broad, multi-disciplinary profession, and city managers draw on a very wide range of theory. Using the curricula of MPA programs specializing in local government management to filter out areas of practice that are founded in theory is an important step in bounding the scope of the analysis.

As part of a distillation process, the curricula of MPA programs specializing in local government is used to remove areas of practice from further study, on the assumption that there is adequate theory available to serve as a foundation for the competencies that are taught at the graduate level. The validity of this step of the analysis rests on the assumption that graduate level education is based on a foundation of theory.

Charles Liebman, in “Teaching Public Administration: Can We Teach What We Don’t Know” maintains that the practice of public administration is not suitable

for either public administration research or education.\textsuperscript{179} He notes that “the ‘how to do it’ courses that dealt with such subjects as budgeting, the proper role of line and staff, planning, and personnel administration, were giving way or are being revised to include material in organizational theory, decision making, the politics of administration, political theory, and social psychology.”\textsuperscript{180} Liebman does not claim that this is a useful trend, but he does argue that “such courses are all the university can do for those with vocational interests, if the university is to maintain a curriculum with intellectual content and requiring intellectual effort” (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{181} The reason for this is the lack of theory behind the practical skills that public administrators use. While there is general theory on psychology and social psychology, the public administrator is on his or her own in practicing the day-to-day skills in staff supervision. It would, according to Liebman, be presumptuous of universities to try to teach practical skills if there is no theory to back them.

Liebman is overly pessimistic. Examples of the tools he dismisses due to lack of relevant theory (in the personnel administration area alone) include “problems of position classification, pay plans, compensation, recruitment, employee evaluation, the civil service requirements, etc.”\textsuperscript{182} There may be no grand theory that connects all of personnel administration, but there are some less grandiose working theories, or the “theories of the middle range” described by Merton that shed light on these issues. The

\textsuperscript{179} Charles S. Liebman, "Teaching Public Administration: Can we Teach what we Don't Know?" \textit{Public Administration Review} 23, no. 3 (Sep., 1963), 167-169.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 167-168.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 168, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 168.
point here is that Liebman insists that graduate education be based on a foundation of theory. There has been a debate in the public administration literature on the adequacy of theory, and the match between public education and practice, but that debate has assumed as a given that the education would be based on theory. Without this assumption, the question, "can we teach what we don't know?" becomes irrelevant, or at least it can be answered with a ringing affirmative.

An assumption that all MPA teaching is theory-related is probably open to challenge. In the absence of available theory, some professors may fall back on lessons based merely on best practices, and some adjunct instructors might simply regale their students with war stories. Some skill-building instruction may not need any theoretical foundation, such as teaching students how to copy formulas in a spreadsheet or how to look up a court decision in the LexisNexis database. To the extent that this occurs, some critical gaps between theory and practice may be overlooked in this study (a problem of false negatives). But we are using in this research a fairly broad definition of theory, encompassing everything from "axiomatic systems of thought" to "special theories applicable to limited conceptual ranges."\footnote{Robert King Merton, \textit{On Theoretical Sociology: Five Essays, Old and New} (New York: Free Press, 1967).}

Thus, coverage of city management competencies in university courses will be treated as \textit{prima facie} evidence for the existence of theory coverage. As a practical matter, in instances where several courses are found to address a single competency, \textit{all} those courses must lack a theoretical foundation to produce a false negative result. And as
we will see, a problem of false negatives is countered, to some extent, by a problem of false positives, where the analysis of course descriptions misses some content that may actually be introduced in a class. Finally, if some MPA courses are erroneously assumed to be based on some form of theory, this means that it cannot be asserted that this study has identified all the instances of a gap between city management competencies and applicable theory. The identification of some (if not most) of the gaps will still be a valid outcome.

Analytic Design

To identify the program content of MPA programs specializing on local government, we can use content analysis based on two sources of readily-available public information (secondary data). The first is the description of required and elective courses that make up the local government concentration. This information was gathered as part of research completed in early 2008. Content analysis was done on forty graduate programs described by NASPAA as offering “state and local” or “urban” tracks. The source of these data is NASPAA’s database that is accessible on-line through the organization’s web site. The programs listed include (presumably) all Master of Public Administration (MPA) programs accredited by NASPAA as well as at least a sampling of programs not accredited by that organization (the NASPAA database includes both accredited and unaccredited schools). As a check on the

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completeness of this list, it was compared to the top eleven graduate programs specializing in city management, as ranked by U.S. News & World Report. Two universities, Cleveland State University and University of Illinois at Chicago, were among the schools ranked by U.S. News & World Report as specializing in city management but not indicated in NASPAA’s database as having a local/urban track. These were added, for a total sample size of forty-two graduate programs.

Using links provided by NASPAA’s database, the web sites of the programs themselves were reviewed, noting specifically the required and elective courses that comprised the local government track. These were almost all available, in either the MPA program’s web site, or in the graduate school’s or university’s catalog. These data were transferred to thirty-six pages of field notes, along with the associated web site URLs for citation purposes.

The programs were then summarized in a matrix, listing the university name, the label of the track, specialty or concentration, and the required and elective courses for the specialty. The course descriptions were cleaned up by stripping them of their course numbers and credit hours (most were associated with three or four credit hours). A small number of the masters programs were completely focused on city management (East Tennessee State University offers a Master of City Management Degree, and the University of Kansas’s MPA pre-service program itself concentrates on city management), and so their concentration courses were not separated from their core MPA curriculum. In this case, I noted required and elected courses that were not included among NASPAA’s “common curriculum elements” required for
accreditation.

This database provides at least summary descriptions of curricula. A second source of data—course syllabi—provides more detail on the content of these courses. Few universities provide syllabi on-line. There is, however, a good source of data that was used as sample curricula. As part of the accreditation process, NASPAA collects syllabi of all courses offered by MPA programs undergoing their seven-year peer review cycle. For the last few years, this material has been collected electronically (on compact disks). The sample size is small, but it is be helpful in describing the typical curricula and in verifying the results of the course content analysis.

Once these data were gathered, the courses were coded according to the list of competencies (skills and knowledge) identified in Step One (the Delphi study). This is a subjective process, and to help ensure that the analysis is replicable I have referred “close calls” to the four-person key informant panel.\textsuperscript{186}

\textit{Potential Problems and Limitations}

This analysis probably overstates the gap between curricula and critical competencies. Many of the skills and knowledge identified in step one of this study could be embedded in core curriculum courses, or in other course offerings. For example, classes that use a case study approach could give students practice in dealing with a wide variety of management challenges, drawing on skills ranging from presentation skills to supervision of work teams. Internships and capstone courses offer similar opportunities to acquire skills in a wide variety of management

\textsuperscript{186} Berg, \textit{Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences}, 5-8.
techniques. This is, however, not a serious deficiency in the overall scope of this analysis: it simply means that more areas of theory and practice need to be considered in Steps Three and Four. Again, the purpose of comparing key competencies with curricula is simply to remove from further consideration areas in which city management skills and knowledge appear to be based on a foundation of theory. Understating a match in this step does not mean that the theory associated with the competency does not exist; it means that the literature will need to be examined to ascertain whether the relevant theory can be found.

**Step Three: Identification of Remaining Gaps in Theory**

The Delphi study in combination with the analysis of MPA program content result in a list of competencies (skills and areas of knowledge) that could be covered in MPA local government programs but are not. The lack of coverage might be due to a lack of available theory, or it may be due to a variety of other reasons. This final step of the research approach is to examine the public administration literature to ascertain whether the apparently missing theory is in fact covered within academic journals.

Limiting this review to the public administration literature is justified on the assumption that public administration is the primary domain of theory relating to local government administration. Practitioners may claim that other fields, such as business administration, provide equally valid foundations for local government
management. Be that as it may, this dissertation is intended to address the development of theory in the field of public administration, not in other fields. This constraint is also necessary from a practical standpoint: there is presumably some form of theory behind every competency necessary to local government management. At one end of the scale is the popular and uninformed theory of writers of letters to the editor. In some cases, this theory is more similar to a world view or philosophy, such as “all governments are wasteful and inefficient.” But as Merton notes, the word “theory” is used to describe many things, and Schon states that “a theory is not necessarily accepted, good, or true.” At the other end of the scale is theory that has a strong foundation in scholarship and scientific study, but that has not been assimilated into the field of public administration. This is still a gap in public administration theory, since the job of extracting and adapting theory from other disciplines requires care. Much of the contribution of scholars such as Herbert Simon is precisely in the selection, modification, and occasional rejection of theory developed in other areas (e.g., private business administration) to its application in public administration.

A challenge remains in defining public administration academic literature, since the field is multi-disciplinary with no set boundaries. John Forester and Sheilah Watson, in attempting to address this challenge, note:

Identifying journals representative of the field is difficult because public administration is so eclectic. What makes a journal a public administration

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187 Benest, *Preparing the Next Generation*


journal as opposed to some other type of journal? This question has not been asked or answered, and the presumption seems to be that the field is not only eclectic but protean and boundless.\textsuperscript{191}

Forester and Watson answer this question by casting a broad net, and select thirty-six journals as representative of public administration literature, based on the criteria that the journals are “are refereed and directly address public administration or public policy in their mission statement.”\textsuperscript{192} Thirty-two of these journals are accessible through Portland State University’s on-line collection of journals. The four that are not accessible either did not appear to be a major loss from the perspective of city management (e.g., \emph{Municipal Finance Journal}), or they had similar counterparts in the university’s collection (e.g., \emph{Public Administration & Development} was not available, but \emph{Public Administration Quarterly} was). The list of journals that were sampled is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Public administration journals sampled

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administration &amp; Society (A&amp;S)</th>
<th>Organization Studies (OS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>\textit{American Review of Public Administration (ARPA)}</td>
<td>Policy Sciences (PS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Australian Journal of Public Administration (AJPA)}</td>
<td>Policy Studies Journal (PSJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Canadian Public Administration (CPA)}</td>
<td>Policy Studies Review (PSR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Evaluation Review (ER)}</td>
<td>Political Psychology (PP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Financial Accountability &amp; Management (FAM)}</td>
<td>Political Sciences Quarterly (PSQ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Human Relations (HR)}</td>
<td>\textit{Public Administration Quarterly (PAQ)}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{International Journal of Public Administration Review}</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>


\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 476.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Administration (IJPA)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Public Budgeting &amp; Finance (PBF)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>International Review of Administrative Sciences (IRAS)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public Finance Quarterly (PFQ)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journal of Accounting &amp; Public Policy (JAPP)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public Productivity &amp; Management Review (PPMR)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journal of Management Science (JMS)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Publius (Pub)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journal of Policy Analysis &amp; Management (JPAM)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Review of Public Personnel Administration (RPPA)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journal of Public Administration Research &amp; Theory (JPART)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Social Sciences Quarterly (SSQ)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journal of Public Policy (JPP)</strong></td>
<td><strong>State &amp; Local Government Review (SLGR)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Journal of Urban Affairs (JUA)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Urban Affairs Quarterly (UAQ)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Tax Journal (NTJ)</strong></td>
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</table>

The articles were coded for city management competencies (or if they did not address any of these competencies, for general descriptors such as public policy research or political science), following the technique used by Watson & Montjoy\(^\text{193}\) and Streib et al.\(^\text{194}\) The analysis included each article published in the three years 2006 through 2008. It also included all articles from one issue per year for the prior seven years (1999 through 2005), unless the journal had little or no content related to city management competencies. This resulted in a total article sample of 3,811 articles. The database included articles titles, as well as the article abstract in cases in which the article title did not convey enough information about the subject covered. Titles and abstracts were copied into a massive spreadsheet (which ended up at over 220,000 cells) for coding. The codes and journal information were then extracted to a

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\(^{194}\) Streib, Slotkin and Rivera, *Public Administration Research from a Practitioner Perspective*
Microsoft Access database for analysis.

Limiting the search for public administration theory to academic journals means that the study might miss theory that is contained in public administration books (texts) but not in the journal articles sampled. This is a real risk: the analysis of MPA course syllabi revealed texts that address city management competencies that are not otherwise addressed in the journal articles sampled. But it is a risk that is justified, and one that had to be taken, for several reasons. First, identifying the sample frame of all texts that represent public administration would be a difficult task: as with journals, there are no clear boundaries, and the problem is compounded because there are many more text titles than journals. Second, not all texts are refereed, so there could be more variation in academic rigor and quality, particularly in regard to the treatment of theory. Finally, there is the practical problem of access to content: in spite of the efforts of Google and other organizations, relatively few texts are available on-line, and the university library, as good a resource as it is, keeps relatively few of the titles in the stacks. Finally, the risk of limiting the analysis to journals may be minimized because texts often draw on work that is summarized in academic journals. An analysis of texts that are used in MPA course work could be a fruitful area for further research. This study, however, focuses on sources (journal articles) that are known to be peer-reviewed and that represent the general body of scholarly knowledge.

As with the Delphi process, the time period used for the sample could introduce error. In this case, a review of the content of journals—even if a ten-year time period is used—will miss elements of theory that might have been covered
extensively prior to 1999. To the extent that this happens, the study will overstate a gap between competencies and related theory.

Summary

The context for this study is the expected need to prepare several thousand individuals for chief executive officer and other top positions in local government management. This research is based on the hypothesis that there is a gap between the skills and areas of knowledge that are critical to city managers and the available public administration theory that provides a foundation for theses competencies. The study, through the use of the Delphi technique, will provide a new understanding of the competencies that are essential to effective practice. By comparing a description of these competencies with available theory as reflected in graduate course curricula and public administration journals, this will in turn highlight the specific areas that can benefit from the extension or refinement of existing theory, or the identification of new theoretical foundations for local government management.
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

This chapter summarizes the results of study, and it is organized into four major sections. The first section summarizes and analyzes the new data that resulted from the use Delphi technique and a panel of city management experts. The second section analyzes the content of MPA programs with a concentration on local government, and compares the competencies identified in the Delphi process with the course content. The third section further compares the identified competencies with the content of a sample of 3,811 public administration journal articles. The final section consolidates the results of these three sections and presents the competencies that are important for effective city management that appear to lack a theoretical foundation.

City Management Competencies Identified by the Delphi Panel

Invitations to participate were sent to 131 individuals (scholars, practitioners, and executive recruiters). The first round of the Delphi study consisted of a web-based survey. The response rate from the expert panel was high: a total of seventy-two of the invited panel members responded to the survey. The respondents were made up of forty-five practitioners, sixteen scholars, and eleven executive recruiters.

For all questions except a final open-ended question, panel members were asked to rate each of 132 different competencies on a five point scale, selecting
The legitimacy of performing statistical analysis on subjective data is discussed in Edgar F. Borgatta, "My Student, the Purist: A Lament," *The Sociological Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (Winter, 1968), 29-34.

between "not helpful," "sometimes useful," "useful," "important," and "essential."
The numerical value (between one and five) corresponding to the ratings were averaged for all respondents to arrive at an aggregated rating by the panel. The survey instructions provided the following definitions. "Essential" means a skill or knowledge that must be possessed by ALL city/county managers. "Important" means it is a skill or knowledge that makes any manager more effective. "Useful" is helpful but not critical to success.

The highest-ranked competencies included ethical traits (e.g., personal integrity), human relations skills (e.g., ability to build trust), interpersonal communications (e.g., ability to communicate with diverse groups), group processes (e.g., collaboration), and general personal skills and abilities (e.g., decision making/problem solving). The lowest-ranked competencies were knowledge of specific service areas (e.g., transportation planning), legal and institutional knowledge (e.g., history of government and government institutions), and technical skills (e.g., surveying and statistics).

The final open-ended question of the first round Delphi survey asked participants to list essential or important competencies (specifically, skills and knowledge) that might have been missing in the list of 132 competencies that were initially presented. This generated over sixty suggestions. With the help of feedback from the four-member key informants panel (plus the chair of the dissertation
committee), these were narrowed down to twenty-two competencies that seemed significantly different from the initial list (or at least different enough to warrant inclusion in a follow up survey). The second round survey asked participants to rate the importance of these twenty-two additional competencies.

Finally, the resulting list of 154 variables (competencies) was distilled down to 118. Two at the bottom of the ratings (sociology, and general understanding of civil engineering principles) were dropped. Others were combined where they appeared to describe different dimensions of the same competency, but only if their importance rating was similar. For example, the three variables, “understanding psychological needs of others,” “understanding the psychology of groups of individuals,” and “understanding of psychology of individuals” received average importance ratings of 3.81, 3.71, and 3.70, respectively, and were combined into a single competency, “Understanding psychological needs of others; psychology of groups and individuals.”

Categorization of Variables

Even in reducing the list of variables (competencies) to 118 from 154, the list is unwieldy to analyze. For this reason, when a list of professional competencies exceeds a dozen or so, researchers inevitably group the competencies into a smaller

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196 This process of combining similar competencies could have been done prior to completing the Delphi process. Some redundancy was intentional, as a check on the consistency of responses.
number of categories. This tendency to create structure and reduce complexity is not limited to competency research; it is common in, for example, biology:

**An Ancient Chinese Classification of Animals**

Animals are divided into (a) those that belong to the Emperor, (b) embalmed ones, (c) those that are trained, (d) suckling pigs, (e) mermaids, (f) fabulous ones, (g) stray dogs, (h) those that are included in this classification, (i) those that tremble as if they were mad, (j) innumerable ones, (k) those drawn with a very fine camel’s hair brush, (l) others, (m) those that have just broken a flower vase, and (n) those that resemble flies from a distance.¹⁹⁷

This putative ancient Chinese classification hints at some potential pitfalls of categorization such as overlap between categories and lopsided membership within classifications. One of the objectives of this study is to provide a more detailed description of city management competencies than is available through existing research. A danger of categorization, thus, is to lose the fine level of detail that the final 118 competencies provide. These 118 variables themselves constitute a summarization; they could probably be broken down into several thousand individual skills and areas of knowledge that are essential to city management. As an example, one competency of the list of 1-18 is “collaboration.” Heather Getha-Taylor further breaks this competency into nineteen behaviors (or outcomes) that lead to effective collaboration, such as “understands needs for power, affiliation, and achievement” and “adapts own strategies to motivate others effectively.”¹⁹⁸

With that caveat in mind, city manager competencies are grouped here into


four very broad categories that are consistent both with the literature and with the analytic framework of this study as described in Chapter 1. One group of competencies relates to the city manager’s role as manager of the (internal) organization. Another group relates to the manager’s role as a community leader and facilitator (an external focus). A third group is made up of foundational traits and skills that are important, regardless of the internal or external focus of the manager’s activity. The fourth group is the city management counterpart to the private management competency of “knowing the business,” and is labeled here as “service delivery.” This includes functional knowledge of the services cities typically provide, ranging from urban planning and economic development to police service.

These four categories are consistent with the literature and with the analytic framework of this study, but they over-simplify the problem of a long list of competencies. For example, the group “managing the organization” includes forty-eight individual competencies, and while they are all related to internal management, many of the competencies are markedly different (they include communicating the mission of the organization, contract management, knowledge of laws governing municipalities, and skill in using office technology, to name a few). Therefore these four broad categories were further broken down into a total of twelve subcategories, where the competencies within each subcategory seemed to be logically related. Foundational traits and skills include sub-categories of ethics, interpersonal communication, human relations, and personal traits and abilities. Managing the organization includes sub-categories of leadership, administration, human resources
administration, legal/institutional systems, and technical/analytical skills. Community leadership/facilitation includes the sub-categories of group process and community-building.

The importance ratings for competencies within these sub-categories were averaged as summarized in Figure 9. Ethics, community-building, and human relations competencies were rated, on average, as most important, and service delivery, technical/analytic skills, and human resources administration were rated, on average, as least important. Note, though, that the averages of the subcategories are grouped in a fairly tight range, between 3 ("useful") and 5 ("essential").

![Figure 9. Delphi results: average importance of competencies within sub-categories.](image-url)
Delphi Results – Individual Competencies

While the subcategories described above provide a way to summarize the results, the individual competencies and their importance ratings are a major result of the Delphi process. A consequence of the need to retain a high level detail is that it takes several pages to describe the research results. This is done in Table 5. In this table, competencies are organized by not only categories and subcategories but also by three broad importance categories: essential, important, and useful. The cutoff points are based on the five-point Likert scale used in the Delphi surveys: if the aggregate mean rating by the Delphi panel members was greater than 4.5, the competency is labeled as "essential." If the mean rating was between 3.5 and 4.5, the competency was labeled as "important." Mean ratings between 2.5 and 3.5 are shown as "useful." Because the aggregate importance ratings form a continuum, the mean of the individual ratings is also shown in the table.

Table 5. Delphi results: all city manager competencies and importance ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competencies</th>
<th>Rating (Mean)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Foundational Traits and Skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Ethics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essential</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal integrity</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Modeling ethical and public-service-oriented behavior</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Public service ethic</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Processes for resolving ethical dilemmas</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Important</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cultural competence; appreciation of diversity; promoting</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
diversity in the organization
• Ability to factor social equity in policy decisions 3.8

B. Interpersonal Communication Skills

Essential
• Interpersonal communication: one-on-one 4.5

Important
• Written communication 4.3
• Interacting with news media 4.2
• Formal presentation skills 4.2
• Speaking (extemporaneous) 4.1
• Ability to communicate complex technical information 3.7

C. Human Relations

Essential
• Ability to build trust 4.8
• Listening skills 4.7
• Ability to communicate among diverse groups 4.5

Important
• Interacting with individuals from different cultural or socio-economic backgrounds 4.4
• Ability to cope with difficult people 4.0
• Persuasion 3.9
• Understanding of personality differences 3.8
• Understanding psychological needs of others; psychology of groups and individuals 3.7

D. Personal Traits and Abilities

Essential
• Decision making/problem solving 4.8
• Judgment—knowing which issues to push and which to let slide 4.8
• Ability to find solutions to complex problems 4.6
• Initiative; self-motivation 4.5

Important
• Ability to anticipate issues and resolve them before they become problems 4.5
• Team-building 4.4
• Ability to acquire new knowledge and learn new skills 4.4
• Ability to multi-task 4.4
• Ability to accept constructive criticism 4.3
• Resiliency (bounce back from setbacks) 4.3
• Giving credit and accepting blame 4.3
• Clear sense of purpose 4.2
• Crisis management 4.2
• Continuing professional and personal development 4.2
• Personal time management 4.2
• Innovation, creativity 4.2
• Effective use of negotiation strategies 4.1
• Professional personal appearance 4.0
• Take care of one’s own physical and mental well-being 4.0
• Ability to set personal priorities 3.9
• Sense of humor 3.9
• Balance confidence with humility 3.8
• Interdisciplinary problem-solving 3.8
• Empathy and compassion 3.8
• Risk-taking 3.7

Useful
• Aesthetic sense: recognizing both beauty and ugliness (e.g., in urban form, building design) 3.2

2. Managing the Organization

C. Leadership

Essential
• Ability to translate council policies into action 4.8
• Council/manager role/relationship skills 4.8
• Developing and communicating the mission of the organization 4.6

Important
• Delegation; empowering employees 4.4
• Motivating employees 4.3
• Direct supervision of subordinates (e.g., department heads) 4.3
• Mentoring and coaching individuals in the organization 4.1
• Engaging employees during difficult economic times 4.0
• Professional development of employees 3.8
• Continuous re-examination of the core business 3.8
• Collaborative labor/management relations 3.7
• Effective handling of personal/emotional challenges faced by employees 3.7
• Ability to adjust management approaches in response to generational differences 3.6
• Entrepreneurial management 3.5

D. Administration

Important
• Strategic planning 4.4
• Using the budget as a management tool; budget preparation 4.3
• Project management: coordinating resources, staff, and schedules 4.2
• Ability to do more with shrinking resources 4.2
• Performance measurement 3.8
• Efficiency in operations; “lean” processes 3.7
Useful
• Contract management 3.5
• Risk management: general liability, employment law, insurance issues 3.4
• Quality assurance; total quality management 3.3
• Privatization—shifting former governmental responsibilities to the private sector 3.0

E. Human Resources Administration
Important
• Hiring employees 4.1
• Disciplining employees 3.8
• Establishing policies and procedures 3.8
• Training/educating other employees 3.7
• Organizational theory: what organizational processes and structures work best under different circumstances 3.7
Useful
• Labor negotiations; collective bargaining law and procedures 3.4
• Compensation systems 3.4

F. Legal/Institutional Systems
Important
• General knowledge of national, state and local laws governing municipalities 4.0
• Intergovernmental relations 4.0
• Development of intergovernmental partnerships 4.0
• Ability to be persuasive with state and federal government officials 3.8
Useful
• Forms of government 3.4
• Administrative law; knowledge of legal institutions and processes 3.3
• Managing relations with nonprofit organizations 3.3

G. Technical/Analytic Skills
Important
• Financial analysis of policy options 4.1
• Capital improvement planning & financing 3.9
• Using office technology (computers, PDAs) 3.7
• Financial forecasting 3.7
• Cost/benefit analysis 3.5
Useful
• Tax policies and strategies 3.4
• Setting prices of public goods and services 3.3
• Applications of technology—IT, web design, other Internet applications 3.2
• Trend forecasting 3.2

3. Community Leadership/Facilitation
C. Group Processes

**Essential**
• Ability to diplomatically disagree with elected officials and present alternative courses of action 4.5

**Important**
• Collaboration 4.4
• Ability to analyze and communicate public policy alternatives 4.4
• Developing consensus on community vision/mission 4.2
• Mediating and resolving conflicts between individuals and groups 4.2
• Facilitating group discussions and decision-making processes 4.1
• Civic engagement skill 4.1
• Educating and coaching elected officials and other community leaders to improve their effectiveness 4.1
• Strengthening council-mayor relationships 4.1
• Skill in appropriate accommodation of council and citizen interest in the administration of the organization 3.9

D. Community Building

**Essential**
• Political savvy—sizing up community politics; political sensitivity 4.7

**Important**
• Articulating community vision/mission 4.5
• Understanding and exploration of community values and needs 4.3
• Community-building strategies 4.0
• Methods for creating or enhancing the community's "sense of place." 3.6

4. Service Delivery

**Important**
• Effective implementation of programs and services 4.3
• Functional/operational knowledge of common municipal services: police, fire, public works, planning, etc. 4.1
• Public-private partnerships 3.8
• Knowledge of specific services: emergency management; sustainability & environmental protection techniques; economic
development; causes underlying urban problems

Useful

- Urban renewal and other redevelopment techniques 3.4
- Urban/regional planning 3.4
- Code enforcement & community beautification strategies 3.2
- Site development; urban economics 3.2
- Marketing 3.2
- Affordable housing strategies 3.1

Appendix A includes comments and interpretation of the meaning of these competencies. Because the comments are based largely on the researcher’s experience, they are subjective, and are thus included in an appendix rather than in the body of the dissertation.

The enumeration of competencies in Table 5, while more detailed, matches very closely the competencies that are identified in the literature for public managers in general and for business managers. As discussed in Chapter 2, Montgomery Van Wart identifies several dozen competencies that appear to be common to public sector leaders and managers, based primarily on surveys of federal managers. Davis et al summarize the results of extensive research on competencies necessary for effective management in the private sector. In most cases, these two lists tie very closely with the competencies identified through the Delphi process. Foundational traits such as personal integrity, listening skills, the ability to persuade or influence others, fostering teamwork, problem solving skills, judgment, resilience and adaptability are common to all three lists. In managing the organization, motivating others, developing staff, strategic planning, project management, knowledge of organizational theory, and technical/analytical skills are common to the three sectors. Each kind of manager
needs to be competent in group process including collaboration and networking, and conflict management. Table 6 provides a detailed list of the competencies needed by managers of cities (as determined by the Delphi process), public organizations in general, and businesses.

Table 6. Comparison of competencies needed by managers of cities, public agencies, and businesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DELPHI RESULTS</th>
<th>PUBLIC LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>BUSINESS MANAGEMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundational Traits and Skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>Essential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal integrity</td>
<td>Personal integrity</td>
<td>Act with integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling ethical and public-service-oriented behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td>Promote corporate citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public service ethic</td>
<td>A service mentality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes for resolving ethical dilemmas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural competence; appreciation of diversity; promoting diversity in the organization</td>
<td></td>
<td>Value diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to factor social equity in policy decisions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Communication Skills</td>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal communication: one-on-one</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>Prepare written communications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting with news media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal presentation skills</td>
<td>Deliver presentations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking (extemporaneous)</td>
<td>Speak effectively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

199 Van Wart, Dynamics of Leadership in Public Service
200 Davis and others, Successful Manager's Handbook: Development Suggestions for Today's Managers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Ability to communicate complex technical information</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human Relations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essential</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to build trust</td>
<td>Build relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening skills</td>
<td>Consulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to communicate among diverse groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Important</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal communication: interacting with individuals from different cultural or socio-economic backgrounds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to cope with difficult people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persuasion</strong></td>
<td>Influence skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of personality differences</td>
<td>Influence others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding psychological needs of others; psychology of groups and individuals</td>
<td>Social skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Traits and Abilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essential</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making/problem solving</td>
<td>Problem solving; decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgment—knowing which issues to push and which to let slide</td>
<td>Setting priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to find solutions to complex problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative; self-motivation</td>
<td>Drive for results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Important</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team-building</td>
<td>Managing teams and team building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to acquire new knowledge and learn new skills</td>
<td>Continual learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to multi-task</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to anticipate issues and resolve them before they become problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear sense of purpose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resiliency (bounce back from setbacks)</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving credit and accepting blame</td>
<td>Willingness to assume responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to accept constructive</td>
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<tr>
<td>criticism</td>
<td>Balance confidence with humility</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis management</td>
<td>Continuing professional and personal development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal time management</td>
<td>Innovation, creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective use of negotiation strategies</td>
<td>Professional personal appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to set personal priorities</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary problem-solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of humor</td>
<td>Empathy and compassion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk-taking</td>
<td>Take care of one's own physical and mental well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take care of one's own physical and mental well-being</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic sense: recognizing both beauty and ugliness (e.g., in urban form, building design)</td>
<td>Emotional maturity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need for achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decisiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Articulating the mission and vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delegating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide direction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Managing the Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Lead courageously</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to translate council policies into action</td>
<td>Council/manager role/relationship skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing and communicating the mission of the organization</td>
<td>Articulating the mission and vision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Delegation; empowering employees</td>
<td>Delegating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivating employees</td>
<td>Motivate others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct supervision of subordinates (e.g., department heads)</td>
<td>Provide direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging employees during difficult economic times</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring and coaching individuals in the organization</td>
<td>Coach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development of employees</td>
<td>Developing staff</td>
<td>Develop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative labor/management relations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective handling of personal/emotional challenges faced by employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to adjust management approaches in response to generational differences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Continuous re-examination of the core business</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>Performing general management functions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Important</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic planning</td>
<td>Strategic planning</td>
<td>Think strategically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the budget as a management tool; budget preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project management: coordinating resources, staff, and schedules</td>
<td>Operations planning; planning and organizing personnel</td>
<td>Establish plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance measurement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency in operations; “lean” processes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to do more with shrinking resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privatization—shifting former governmental responsibilities to the private sector</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Useful</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk management: general liability, employment law, insurance issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality assurance; total quality management</td>
<td>Commit to quality</td>
<td>Manage profitability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources Administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Important</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplining employees</td>
<td>Establishing policies and procedures</td>
<td>Develop systems and processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/educating other employees</td>
<td>Organizational theory: what organizational processes and structures work best under different circumstances</td>
<td>Managing organizational change; assessment of the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness</td>
<td>Legal/Institutional Systems</td>
<td>Structure and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor negotiations; collective bargaining law and procedures</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation systems</td>
<td>General knowledge of national, state and local laws governing municipalities</td>
<td>Managing personnel change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legal/Institutional Systems</strong></td>
<td>Intergovernmental relations</td>
<td>Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to be persuasive with state and federal government officials</td>
<td>Development of intergovernmental partnerships</td>
<td>Useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms of government</td>
<td>Technical/Analytic Skills</td>
<td>Technical and analytical skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative law; knowledge of legal institutions and processes</td>
<td>Use technical/functional expertise</td>
<td>Useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing relations with nonprofit organizations</td>
<td>Financial analysis of policy options</td>
<td>Use financial/quantitative data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical/Analytic Skills</td>
<td>Capital improvement planning &amp; financing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial forecasting</td>
<td>Using office technology (computers, PDAs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost/benefit analysis</td>
<td>Tax policies and strategies</td>
<td>Useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting prices of public goods and services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications of technology—IT, web design, other Internet applications</td>
<td>Managing technical innovation and creativity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trend forecasting</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Community Leadership/Facilitation</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Group Processes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Essential</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to diplomatically disagree with elected officials and present alternative courses of action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Important</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Networking and partnering</td>
<td>Leverage networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to analyze and communicate public policy alternatives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing consensus on community vision/mission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediating and resolving conflicts between individuals and groups</td>
<td>Managing conflict</td>
<td>Manage disagreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating group discussions and decision-making processes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic engagement skill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating and coaching elected officials and other community leaders to improve their effectiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strengthening council-mayor relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Skill in appropriate accommodation of council and citizen interest in the administration of the organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognize global implications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Building</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Essential</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political savvy—sizing up community politics; political sensitivity</td>
<td>Demonstrate organizational savvy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Important</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulating community vision/mission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding and exploration of community values and needs</td>
<td>Scanning the environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-building strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methods for creating or enhancing the community's "sense of place."

Service Delivery

Important

Effective implementation of programs and services

Functional/operational knowledge of common municipal services: police, fire, public works, planning, etc.

Public-private partnerships

Knowledge of specific services: emergency management; sustainability & environmental protection techniques; economic development; causes underlying urban problems

Useful

Urban renewal and other redevelopment techniques

Urban/regional planning

Code enforcement & community beautification strategies

Site development; urban economics

Marketing

Affordable housing strategies

Focus on customer needs

Manage execution

Know the business

There are some differences between the three lists. In some cases, the differences are probably not significant. Van Wart identifies some personal traits (e.g., emotional maturity and need for achievement) that may be useful traits for city managers, but were not included in the Delphi surveys because the focus of the study was on knowledge and skills, rather than innate traits. Similarly, Davis et al identify work commitment as an important personal trait, and this too would probably be helpful for city manager effectiveness.

In some cases, however, the differences may be significant. Both city
managers in specific and public managers in general need to have a public service ethic (Van Wart calls it “a service mentality”) as a foundational trait; this is missing from the list of business manager competencies. At the same time, business managers need to be competent in managing profitability; this competency is missing from the public manager and city manager lists. Neither general public managers (with federal managers being the typical case) nor business managers apparently require competence in civic engagement, articulating community vision/mission, or in community building. This is consistent with the principle—supported by the literature—that community leadership and facilitation is one of the things that sets the city management profession apart from public management in other levels of government.

Variations in Responses

One of the strengths of the Delphi process is that it can be effective in building consensus from divergent opinions. To gauge initial divergence in the opinions of the panel, the standard deviation was calculated for the responses to each of the 132 competencies included in the first round survey. For many of the variables, there was relatively little variation in response. For example, the majority of respondents rated personal integrity as essential, with a standard deviation of only 0.30. At the other end of the spectrum, knowledge of forms of government was rated as only useful, but the standard deviation was 0.99; familiarity with local charter and ordinances was rated as important, but with a standard deviation for the responses of 0.90.
In the tradition of forecast Delphi exercises, the second round survey fed back the results of the first round, but only for twenty-eight competencies for which the standard deviation of the responses exceeded 0.8. Participants were given the mean rating (i.e., “important” or “useful”) and were asked to indicate whether they were satisfied with this rating, or whether it should be increased or decreased one level.

The result was that the average standard deviation for these variables dropped to 0.52, and the largest standard deviation was only 0.65 (note that a value of 1.0 represents the distance between the individual importance ratings on the five-point Likert scale). None of the average ratings, as a result of this process, changed enough to move the competency into a different importance category. The only close call came in the reconsideration of the use of the budget as a management tool (an initial rating of 4.28 with a standard deviation of 0.81). Forty-four percent of the panel felt that this competency should be rated higher (“essential”) and fifty percent agreed with its rating as “important.” This nudged the average rating up (to 4.38 from 4.28), but not enough to push it into the “essential” category. No other variable had as many votes to change the rating. Due to this convergence in ratings, the research advisory team (and dissertation committee) agreed that the Delphi process could be ended at two rounds.

Panel members were invited to respond to an open-ended question asking them to give their reasons for disagreeing with the average rating yielded by the first round of the Delphi process. These help provide a qualitative dimension to the ratings. For example, in explaining why the use of the budget as a management tool should be given a higher rating, an executive recruiter stated, “the budget and its communication
is essential to getting anything accomplished - if you can't manage the budget, you are not managing.” A practitioner noted, “The budget is the means to accomplish the city council's strategic plan and vision for the community.” On the other hand, in justifying a *decrease* in the budget management rating, a practitioner noted that, in day-today management, psychological competency is more important than budget management competency:

The budget is important but a small function of the job. The bigger issue I have with the ranking is the day to day operations of the city. Daily we must use the skill and knowledge of understanding organizational behavior and understanding why people act and respond why they do. This includes staff, residents, and politicians. Without this as higher importance, academic programs will turn out accountants when the organizations they work for need managers with the skills to handle difficult personal issues among divergent ideas and needs. I think in an academic world it is easy to say budgeting is the most important (this year) but in most cases the job goes better if you understand people, what makes them tick, and why they think, act, and are motivated the way they are.

Another panel member (practitioner) noted, in the case of understanding the psychological needs of others and organizational theory, “While not unimportant, these items are really less important than some others. Our role is not to be psychologists.” This divergence of viewpoints among individuals is to be expected. In spite of it, the panel achieved fairly strong consensus on the ratings of competencies, as measured by the standard deviation of responses. And these responses demonstrate that the panel members were giving the exercise some thought. One, a practitioner, stated, “This is a well crafted question. It really made me think...I am having to dig deep here.”
Practitioners, Scholars, and Recruiters

Since this study is focused on the competencies critical to local government management, and not the characteristics of the panel members who participated in the research, investigation of variations in response primarily concentrates on the variables (competencies) rather than the cases (respondents). There are, however, two logical ways to group the respondents to explore any systematic variations in responses. First, the panel itself was selected from groups of practitioners, scholars (faculty members of universities), and executive recruiters. The latter two groups were reflected in the panel as a check against bias caused by professional myopia. Second, the literature includes research on possible differences in the competencies that are used in managing smaller versus larger cities. For the practitioner members of the panel, at least, it is possible to explore differences based on the size of the city that he or she is currently managing.

Based on anecdotal data from practitioners, scholars might be expected to place higher weight than practitioners on policy development, politics, and theory in specific functional areas such as urban problems and issues (e.g., poverty, housing, planning). Practitioners might place more emphasis on skills in leadership and management. Executive recruiters often mention the interest of city councils in experience in financial management and economic development. In spite of these perceptions, however, the expected result of the analysis of variations between the three groups of panel members was that there would be little significant difference
between the three groups. The scholars themselves tend to be very familiar with the practice of city/county management; some of them have held local elective or administrative office. The executive recruiters who specialize in city/county manager hiring processes are typically former managers.

The statistical software package SPSS was used to produce boxplots of selected variables to provide an initial visual representation of the variance in responses within and between the three groups. The mean values of the responses to each of the 132 initial variables (competencies) were compared, and any differences greater than 0.25 were highlighted. This is a low threshold for noting differences in response, since it is only a quarter of the difference between the ratings on the five-point Likert scale (e.g., the difference between rating a competency as “essential” versus “important” is 1.0). Finally, t-statistics were calculated for the differences in responses for each of the 132 variables, pairing first practitioners and scholars, and then practitioners and recruiters.

Table 7 summarizes the difference in opinions of practitioners and scholars. A competency is listed in the practitioner column if practitioners, on average, rated that competency more highly (by a margin of at least 0.25) than the average of the scholars’ responses.

The first important result is how few (thirty-five) variables appear in the table. For the majority (seventy-three percent) of the variables, the difference in ratings of competencies between practitioners and scholars is less than 0.25. Second, for most of the variables, the variation of response within each group is large enough that the
difference of mean responses *between* the groups is not significant. For only fourteen variables is the t-statistic less than 0.05, indicating that there is at least a ninety-five percent chance that the observed differences between the groups is statistically significant.

Table 7. Dephi results: variations in responses from practitioners and scholars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practitioners</th>
<th>Scholars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundational Traits and Skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to multi-task</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal integrity*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to set personal priorities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to balance work and personal life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of humor*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking (extemporaneous)*</td>
<td>Effective use of negotiation strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of personality differences*</td>
<td>Mediation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of psychology of individuals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using office technology (computers, PDAs)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing the Organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing and communicating the mission of the organization</td>
<td>Establishing policies and procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the budget as a management tool</td>
<td>Contract management*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplining employees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General knowledge of U.S. &amp; state laws governing municipalities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative law; knowledge of legal institutions and processes**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governmental accounting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms of government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to locate and successfully apply for a variety of grants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting prices of public goods and services*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to be persuasive with state and federal government officials**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax policies and strategies**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of government and governmental institutions**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Leadership/Facilitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educating and coaching elected officials to improve their effectiveness as community leaders</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public-private partnerships</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Service Delivery</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional/operational knowledge of common municipal services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General understanding of civil engineering principles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban renewal and other redevelopment techniques **</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site development; urban economics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable housing strategies **</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code enforcement &amp; community beautification strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles of transportation planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Difference significant at 95% confidence level  
** Difference significant at 99% confidence level

Where there are statistically significant differences, they are fairly small. The largest was the mean response to the importance of “history of government and governmental institutions.” Practitioners provided a mean rating of 2.84 (where 3.00 corresponds to “useful”) while scholars provided a mean rating of 3.56 (where 4.00 corresponds to “important”). This is a difference of only 0.72. On the other hand, surveys like this typically show results that bunch at the top of the scale; there was no mean rating below 2.60 for any of the variables, so differences at the top end of the scale are worth noting.

The observed differences are not surprising. The practitioners tended to rate more highly pragmatic skills such as use of office equipment, extemporaneous speaking, and understanding the psychology of individuals. The scholars tended to rate more highly knowledge of legal and political institutions (administrative law, history.
of government), inter-organizational knowledge and skills (contract management, public-private partnerships, intergovernmental lobbying), technical/analytical skills (setting the price of public goods and services), and functional knowledge of typical local government services and issues (urban renewal, affordable housing, and tax policies and strategies).

Table 8 summarizes the differences in mean responses between executive recruiters and practitioners. Here again, there are only thirty variables in the list; for the other 102 variables, the mean rating by the recruiters was within 0.25 of the mean rating provided by the practitioners. And of these thirty variables, only eleven show a statistically significant difference at the ninety-five percent confidence level.

Table 8. Delphi results: variations in responses from recruiters and practitioners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruiters</th>
<th>Practitioners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foundational Traits &amp; Skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional personal appearance*</td>
<td>Public service ethic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>Giving credit and accepting blame**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic sense: recognizing both beauty and ugliness (e.g., in urban form, building design)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to set personal priorities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of psychology of individuals*</td>
<td>Understanding of psychology of groups of individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics and processes for resolving ethical dilemmas*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Managing the Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct supervision of subordinates (e.g., department heads)**</td>
<td>Effective handling of personal/emotional challenges faced by employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project management: coordinating resources, staff, and schedules*</td>
<td>Establishing policies and procedures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Where there are differences between the responses of practitioners and executive recruiters, the differences are not surprising. The individuals who help city councils and boards of commissioners select their managers rate more highly the trait of professional personal appearance, and skills in listening and political savvy. They rate more highly project management skills, and direct supervision of department heads (city councils must rely on the city manager to oversee key positions such as police chief and planning director). They place a higher rating on knowledge and skills in urban renewal and other redevelopment techniques (a mean rating of 3.73 versus the practitioners’ rating of 3.20). Practitioners, on the other hand, rate more highly competencies in understanding the psychology of others, processes for resolving...
ethical dilemmas, and internal management knowledge such as compensation systems.

The table indicates responses in which the executive recruiters’ responses are more similar to those of the scholars (in bold type) and where there is greater divergence between recruiters and scholars than between recruiters and practitioners (in italics). There is, however, no competency for which the differences between practitioners and scholars and between practitioners and recruiters are both significant. Figure 10 illustrates this result, using a boxplot for one of the competencies that shows the greatest divergence between the three groups (knowledge of constitutional law). While the difference between the responses of recruiters and practitioners is significant (at the 95% confidence level), the difference between practitioners and scholars is not significant based on a t-test. Some scholars rated this competency more highly than did the practitioners, but some also rated it lower in importance.
Figure 10. Boxplot showing variation in responses for one variable.

In summary, as expected, there are few differences in the opinions of the members of the Delphi panel based on their classification as a recruiter, practitioner, or scholar. And it should be emphasized that where there are differences, this is a strength, rather than a weakness, of the study. Prior research in this area has focused on the opinion of a sample of members of ICMA. This study is intended to extend this base of knowledge first by seeking the opinion of an expert panel of city and county managers who—as reflected through their involvement in top-level ICMA committees—might be expected to think reflectively on the profession as a whole, and
second to gain a fresh perspective from outside the profession through the opinions of academics who study and teach local government management, and recruiters who help city councils and boards choose their managers. The two groups that are close to, but outside, the profession did not have a large effect on the overall ratings provided by the panel. But to the extent that they nudged the results up or down, this study has been enriched.

Population Size

The literature indicates that the commonalities far outweigh the differences in the management function of the CEOs of large and small cities. Out of necessity, managers of small towns need to have more knowledge of the details of municipal services. Managers of large cities seem to spend more time on external political affairs. But they are all generalists, and all spend the majority of their time in interpersonal communications with their staff and community members.

Using the same analytical techniques as in the comparison of the practitioner, scholar, and recruiter groups, the responses of managers of larger cities and counties were compared to the responses of managers of smaller cities. For the practitioner members of the panel, the median population size for the city or county managed was (according to the 2000 census) 33,784 people. This number was used as the dividing point for large and small jurisdictions, to produce two equally-sized groups. This number is reasonable: the National League of Cities defines a small city as one having a population of less than 50,000, and the League of Oregon Cities defines a small city
as one having a population of less than 5,000. A population of 33,784 is well within this range.

Table 9 indicates differences in responses in the rating of importance of competencies between the two groups, again using a difference of 0.25 or greater as the filtering mechanism. Even with this low threshold, the mean responses differed for only twenty-nine of the 132 competencies surveyed; for the other seventy-eight percent of the competencies, the mean ratings on importance of the competencies differed by less than 0.25. In general, managers of the smaller jurisdictions tended to rate all competencies slightly higher in importance than their larger jurisdiction colleagues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Smaller Cities/Counties</th>
<th>Larger Cities/Counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foundational Traits &amp; Skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving credit and accepting blame*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to learn new skills</td>
<td>Cultural competence; appreciation of diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic sense: recognizing both beauty and ugliness (e.g., in urban form, building design)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Managing the Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General knowledge of state laws governing municipalities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor negotiations</td>
<td>Effective handling of personal/emotional challenges faced by employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative labor/management relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective bargaining law and procedures**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial analysis of policy options</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using office technology (computers, PDAs, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Disciplining employees
Administrative law; knowledge of legal institutions and processes
Risk management
Setting prices of public goods and services
Governmental accounting

**Community Leadership/Facilitation**
Educating and coaching elected officials to improve their effectiveness as community leaders
Understanding and exploration of community values
Conflict resolution
Methods for creating or enhancing the community's "sense of place"

**Civic engagement skill**
**Assessing community needs**

**Service Delivery**
Functional/operational knowledge of common municipal services
General understanding of civil engineering principles**
Marketing
Urban/regional planning
Code enforcement and community beautification strategies

* Difference significant at 95% confidence level
** Difference significant at 99% confidence level

Where differences exist, they seem logical. Managers of larger jurisdictions rated more highly “cultural competency” and appreciation of diversity. They may tend to work in larger urban areas that could be more ethnically diverse, and the larger organization size might provide more opportunity for a diverse employee population. They also rated more highly skills in civic engagement and assessing community needs, consistent with the findings in the literature that they tend to be more externally-focused. Nonetheless, managers of smaller jurisdictions rated more highly
skills in the areas of exploration of community values and methods for creating or enhancing a community’s “sense of place,” indicating that these panel members also value the importance of working with the community beyond the government organization.

Managers of smaller organizations are less able to delegate managerial tasks and are more likely to engage personally in labor negotiations and other human resources functions. For the same reason, they are more likely to be involved in the details of municipal services such as planning and development. This analysis showed that the managers of smaller jurisdictions did indeed rate more highly skills and knowledge in internal administration and in functional areas.

Two caveats are necessary, however. First, due to the reduced degrees of freedom that results from a smaller sample size (practitioners only, excluding scholars and recruiters), only four of the competencies show a significant difference (based on a t-test at the 95% confidence level). This confirms the observation in the literature of the commonalities of local government management, regardless of the size of the jurisdiction. Second, the panel members were selected based on their positions as leaders of their profession, not as representatives of the particular jurisdiction they serve at the moment. It is not uncommon for managers of smaller cities to have served as department heads or assistants in much larger communities, or for managers of larger cities to have begun their career in smaller cities. They were all asked to rate the

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201 Three of the survey respondents (members of key ICMA committees) manage cities in the United Kingdom and Canada; they were also excluded from the jurisdictional size analysis due to the possible distorting effect of differences in the CEO roles in these countries.
importance of various competencies to the next generation of city/county managers regardless of population size or any other characteristic of city or county government.

Groupings of Variables

Although not a central issue in this study, the presence of some variation in responses to the survey questions presents an opportunity to probe for correlation in the ratings for related competencies. For example, if panel members rate highly skills in cost/benefit analysis, do they also rate highly skills in financial forecasting? If nothing else, the appearance of this kind of correlation (where competencies are indeed similar) indicates that the panel members were consistent in their responses, and took the time to reflect while completing the survey. It also indicates that individuals may differ in their view of the importance of classes of competencies, and do so in some consistent way. This is not surprising; it would be unusual not to see these kinds of trends among individuals.

Rather than an exploratory fishing expedition for correlations between variables, the presence of correlation was tested based on groupings of variables that were chosen a priori based on the literature or the researcher's own professional experience. These groupings cut the variables (competencies) along multiple dimensions; they are: a) analytical vs. human relations skills; b) competencies used in managing the internal organization vs. interacting with the outside community; c) policy-setting competencies vs. management competencies; and d) administrative vs. leadership skills. Table 10 gives an example of the variables that were selected to
represent analytical competencies as contrasted with human relations competencies.

Table 10. Analytic skills and human relations competency variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Analytical competencies</th>
<th>Human relations competencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial forecasting</td>
<td>Understanding psychological needs of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost/benefit analysis</td>
<td>Understanding of psychology of individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial analysis of policy options</td>
<td>Understanding of psychology of groups of individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation systems</td>
<td>Effective handling of personal/emotional challenges faced by employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology—office equipment, IT, web design, other Internet applications</td>
<td>Developing consensus on community vision/mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance measurement</td>
<td>Mediating and resolving conflicts between individuals and groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveying and statistical analysis of survey results</td>
<td>Interpersonal communication: interacting with individuals from different cultural or socio-economic backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governmental accounting</td>
<td>Group processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital improvement planning &amp; financing</td>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trend forecasting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both factor analysis and cluster analysis were used to test for groupings of variables based on the responses of panel members. Factor analysis identifies groups of variables ("factors") based on correlation between the coefficients (in this case, ratings based on the ordinal Likert scale) of variables; cluster analysis employs techniques of mathematical graph theory to identify clusters of cases (survey responses) within a multi-dimensional variable space. Cluster analysis is used more typically to identify groupings of cases rather than variables, and in this analysis it
seemed less likely than factor analysis to identify groupings of variables that made logical sense.

Table 11 shows the results of factor analysis on variables representing analytical skills and those representing human relations skills. Competencies that were grouped into Factor 1 (based on a correlation coefficient greater than 0.5) include compensation systems, financial analysis of policy options, surveying and statistical analysis, financial forecasting, cost/benefit analysis, government accounting, capital improvement planning and financing, and trend forecasting. This grouping, shown in bold print, does seem to represent variables associated with analytical competencies. The second factor groups variables, shown in italics, including understanding the psychology of individuals and groups, handling emotional challenges faced by employees, developing consensus on community vision/mission, mediating and resolving conflicts between individuals and groups, and conflict resolution in general. These variables appear to be associated with human relations skills, both interpersonal and in interactions with groups.

Table 11. Factor analysis: analytical and human relations variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Analytic</th>
<th>2 Human Relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compensation systems</td>
<td>.516</td>
<td>.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial analysis of policy options</td>
<td>.625</td>
<td>-.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveying and statistical analysis of survey results</td>
<td>.671</td>
<td>.132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding psychological needs of others</td>
<td>- .101</td>
<td>.716</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Not all variables fell neatly into groups. The use of office technology and performance measurement, two variables chosen for this analysis as one of the analytical competencies, was not strongly associated with either factor. Interpersonal communication with individuals from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and group processes in general—two variables chosen as part of the human relations variable set—also were not strongly associated with either factor.

Nonetheless, panel members appear to be consistent in their ratings of various
aspects of both analytical and human relations competencies, and there is some
division between those who see analytical skills as critical and those who see human
relations skills as critical. As a whole, the panel rated the human relations
competencies as more important than analytical skills. Competence in both broad
areas, however, is deemed by the panel members to be necessary for the next
generation of local government managers.

For several decades, the academic literature on city management has focused
on the city manager’s role as a community leader, and broker of power and
information among individuals and groups in the community. But studies of the daily
activities of city managers have found that the managers spend a large part of their
time dealing with administrative issues that are internal to organization. Variables
associated with internal management were combined with those associated with
interacting with the external environment in factor and cluster analysis. Here the factor
analysis showed a strong grouping of the “external” competencies, but not as clear a
grouping of the “internal” management skills. The former group includes (all with
correlation coefficients exceeding 0.63) coaching and empowering elected officials
and other community members to increase their effectiveness, developing consensus
on community vision/mission, civic engagement skill, and community-building
strategies. The second factor includes budget preparation and management and
disciplining employees. But two internal management variables—training employees
and handling emotional challenges faced by employees—were not strongly associated
with either factor. Cluster analysis, however, made a clear distinction between the two
groups, with all "internal" management competencies grouped in one cluster, and all but one "external" management competencies grouped in a second cluster. The exception was the variable, "coaching other community members to be more effective," which found itself grouped in the internal management cluster.

One of the panel members offered this observation: "While I'm respectful and appreciative of the importance of understanding the political science roots of public service and government, I think public administration as a discipline suffers significantly from over-emphasis on public policy making in a political science context." To explore whether variables could be grouped, based on correlations in panel members' responses, into policy-related versus management competencies, thirty-seven variables were selected for factor and cluster analysis. Policy-related competencies included such variables as causes underlying urban problems and ability to analyze and communicate public policy alternatives. Management-related variables included developing and communicating the mission of the organization and project management.

Factor analysis found the following groupings shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Factor analysis: policy and management variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1 - Management</th>
<th>Factor 2 - Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team-building</td>
<td>Urban renewal and other redevelopment techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct supervision of subordinates</td>
<td>Political science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing and communicating the mission of the organization</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegation; empowering employees</td>
<td>Causes underlying urban problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring employees</td>
<td>Affordable housing strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here the groupings do not paint a consistent picture. Factor 2 does seem to include many of the policy-related variables, but it also includes management competencies such as knowledge of compensation systems and collective bargaining law. Factor 1 generally includes management competencies, but it includes the analysis of policy alternatives. Many variables do not fall strongly into either group; these include professional development practices, financial analysis of policy options, tax policies and strategies, efficiency in operations, and organization theory. If anything, the factor analysis seems to illuminate a distinction between general management skills and knowledge of functional areas of local government services, rather than a distinction between policy and management. The panel as a whole tended to rate the management-related competencies higher (an average of 3.9 for the variables selected in this factor analysis, or “important”) than the policy-related competencies (an average of 3.5, or mid-way between “useful” and “important”).

Much of the city management professional literature—especially the literature based on private sector management—makes a distinction between leadership and administration (and there is a normative connotation, where leadership is better). Does
this distinction emerge in a grouping of variables? Examples of variables that were selected to represent leadership competencies include empowering employees, entrepreneurial management, and developing and communicating the mission of the organization. Examples of variables associated with administrative competencies include establishing policies and procedures, hiring employees, and efficiency in operations.

Table 13 shows two groups identified by factor analysis. Factor 1 does appear to include competencies associated with leadership, and Factor 2 tends to include administrative competencies. But Factor 2 also includes “developing and communicating the mission of the organization,” which the management consultants tell us is an important part of leadership and not administration.

Table 13. Factor analysis: leadership and administration variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1 - Leadership</th>
<th>Factor 2 - Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innovation, creativity</td>
<td>Effective implementation of programs and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk taking</td>
<td>Developing and communicating the mission of the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>Project management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial management</td>
<td>Establishing policies and procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delegation and empowering employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hiring employees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is more noteworthy is that most variables do not fall firmly into either factor. This is true both for administrative skills, including knowledge of compensation systems and collective bargaining law and procedures, as well as leadership skills, including mentoring and coaching individuals in the organization,
and team-building. Cluster analysis was even worse at identifying a grouping based on leadership versus administrative skills. While on balance the panel members rated more leadership skills as being essential than for administrative skills, both were rated high in importance. For this panel, at least, the distinction between leadership and administration is a false dichotomy.

In summary, some patterns can be seen in the variation in responses to the Delphi survey questions. There are some differences in the responses of practitioners, scholars, and executive recruiters, and in the responses of managers of larger and smaller cities. There is some correlation of ratings of importance of competencies that are related in a logical way. But overall, the consensus of the panel members on the importance of city management competencies is high, and the differences in responses are relatively small.

**Delphi Survey: Adequacy of MPA Programs**

The primary objective of the Delphi process was to develop a definition of the competencies critical to city managers based on the opinion of a panel of experts. But the Delphi survey offered an opportunity to explore the panel’s perception of the adequacy of MPA programs in preparing individuals in the various competencies. As a practical matter, in order to avoid over-taxing the participants, they were asked a simple binary question (yes or no) as to whether they felt MPA programs, in general, did an adequate job of preparing individuals in each of the twelve sub-categories of city management competency. They were also invited to qualify or explain their
answers through open-ended questions. The results are, of course, very subjective.

They do, however, serve as a qualitative backdrop to the more rigorous content analysis summarized in the next section of this chapter.

Overall, the panel felt that MPA programs do an adequate job of preparation in seven of the twelve sub-categories, as indicated in Table 14. The percentage responding “yes” (MPA programs are adequate) was highest for administration, legal/institutional systems, and technical/analytical skills. The programs were judged least adequate in the area of human relations and leadership.

Table 14. Delphi panel: Are MPA programs adequate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADEQUATE</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foundational Skills &amp; Abilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Traits &amp; Abilities</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Managing the Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources Administration</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal/Institutional Systems</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical/Analytic Skills</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Delivery</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| NOT ADEQUATE                     |     |
| **Foundational Skills & Abilities** |     |
| Interpersonal Communications     | 44% |
| Human Relations                  | 36% |
| **Managing the Organization**    |     |
| Leadership                       | 41% |
| **Community Leadership/Facilitation** |     |
| Group Processes                  | 43% |
| Community Building               | 50% |

*Note: Percentages reflect the proportion answering “yes.”*

An obvious way to break down the responses is according to practitioners, scholars (faculty members, typically of schools that offer an MPA degree), and
executive recruiters. Table 15 shows that all three groups rated MPA programs adequate in only three sub-categories: ethics, legal/institutional systems, and technical/analytical skills (percentages are shown in bold when they exceed fifty percent). Scholars felt that MPA programs are doing an adequate job in all of the twelve competency sub-categories, although forty-six percent responded that the programs are *not* doing an adequate job in the areas of interpersonal communications, human relations, and service delivery. Executive recruiters, on the other hand, felt that MPA programs are doing an adequate job in only three of the twelve sub-categories. Practitioners took the middle ground, rating MPA programs as adequate in half of the twelve sub-categories.

Table 15. Adequacy of MPA Programs by Scholars, Practitioners, and Recruiters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundational Skills &amp; Abilities</th>
<th>Scholars</th>
<th>Practitioners</th>
<th>Recruiters</th>
<th>Panel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Communications</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Relations</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Skills</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing the Organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR Admin</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal/Institutional Systems</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical/Analytic</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership/Facilitation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Processes</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Building</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Delivery</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Percentages indicate number of responses indicating that MPA programs are adequate; percentages over 50% are shown in bold.
The comments that accompanied these simple binary responses help qualify them. Several panel members noted that they did not have enough familiarity with MPA programs overall to judge their adequacy. Several noted the difficulty of building some competencies in a classroom setting. For example, a scholar noted (in response to competence in human relations), “I don't think this is addressed much at all, and figuring out how to do it would be tough.” Another faculty member stated that leadership competencies are “very difficult to teach in the classroom. Internships are the answer here for these skills.” Another, a “pracademic” (scholar with former practitioner experience) commented on the problem of grouping multiple competencies in a single subcategory: “There is so much to the question, a straight yes or no does not seem appropriate.” Another faculty member, responding to a question on competencies in group processes, observed, “Some do this better than others, not evenly distributed. The worst programs are those that have a public policy focus.” Another noted the practical problem of covering a wide range of competencies within the finite scope of an MPA programs: “Some classes touch on this subject, however, only so many electives and so little time.” In explaining the low rating for service delivery (including knowledge of typical municipal services), a scholar observed: “I don't think that most MPA programs have a local government track, and that those that do are not teaching to this (important) hands-on skill level.”

These comments underscore the fact that not too much emphasis should be
placed on the subjective, broad-brush reaction of the panel members to the adequacy of MPA programs. The panel participants do, however, represent considerable expertise and experience, and their insights are valuable. The scholars are probably more familiar with the content and approaches of MPA programs, but the practitioners as a group have substantial experience hiring MPA graduates, and are in that sense the consumers of the product of MPA programs.

Summary of Results of the Delphi Study

The consensus of the Delphi panel is that the most important competencies for effective city management are those in the areas of general management and leadership. In addition to innate traits such as personal integrity and initiative, the ability to be effective in interacting with individuals and groups is critical. Being effective means, in many cases, influencing individuals and groups to do things the manager wants them to do: important competencies include persuasion, negotiating ability, motivating, developing and communicating the mission of the organization, and lobbying. These could be manipulative skills and abilities, except that effective city managers also must possess ethical competencies, including modeling ethical behavior, appreciation of diversity, and a commitment to public service. They also need to be competent in listening, coaching and empowering employees, understanding the psychological needs of others, collaborating with other individuals in other organizations, understanding community values and needs, and translating city council policies into action.
The nuts-and-bolts tools of management are also critical: project management, budgeting, strategic planning, performance measurement and quality control, hiring and supervising staff, and organizational design. Some technical and analytical skills are necessary, including financial analysis and skill in using modern office technology.

Knowledge of laws affecting local governments, and organizational theory are important. Some functional knowledge of common municipal services is also necessary. The panel members believed the most important of these are emergency management, sustainability and environmental protection, and economic development. Of all the areas of knowledge included in the Delphi surveys, the importance ratings of knowledge of specific services are probably the most subject to change over time.
Content Analysis: Masters of Public Administration Programs

With a detailed identification of competencies that are critical to city management, the existence of related theory can be explored through an analysis of the content of Masters of Public Administration programs, as described in Chapter 3. A database was created for all 397 courses offered by forty-two universities that have a concentration in local government. Each course was then coded according to which of the 118 competencies identified in the Delphi study the course appeared to touch on. A single course could cover more than one competency, so the database allowed a many-to-one relationship between competencies and courses.

Overall, twenty-seven courses addressed foundational traits and skills, 260 dealt with managing the organization, twenty-two addressed community leadership/facilitation, and 109 dealt with competencies associated with service delivery. Within these broad categories, four subcategories: administration, legal/institutional systems, technical/analytical and service delivery—account for the majority (eighty percent) of courses dealing with city management competencies, as shown in Figure 11.
Within these subcategories, only sixteen of the competencies derived from the Delphi analysis account for seventy-five percent of the course-competency data. Budgeting courses accounted for almost half of the administration subcategory. Courses on competencies in general legal issues, administrative law, and intergovernmental relations account for seventy-four percent of the legal/institutional competencies. Courses on policy analysis, applications of technology (web applications and managing information technology), financial analysis of policy options, and capital improvement planning and financing account for ninety-five percent of the courses on technical/analytical competencies. Urban/regional planning and site development/urban economics alone account for almost half of courses on service delivery; the rest were scattered over a number of service areas. Table 16 lists the competencies that account for seventy-five percent of the course-competency data.
Table 16. Competencies most often covered in MPA courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPETENCY</th>
<th>NUMBER OF COURSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>REQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/regional planning</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional/operational knowledge of common municipal services: police, fire, public works, planning, etc.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General knowledge of national, state and local laws governing municipalities</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the budget as a management tool; budget preparation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to analyze and communicate public policy alternatives</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of specific services: emergency management; sustainability &amp; environmental protection techniques; economic development; causes underlying urban problems</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergovernmental relations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications of technology—IT, web design, other Internet applications</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial analysis of policy options</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political savvy—sizing up community politics; political sensitivity</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site development; urban economics</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital improvement planning &amp; financing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediating and resolving conflicts between individuals and groups</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective implementation of programs and services</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor negotiations; collective bargaining law and procedures</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative law; knowledge of legal institutions and processes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: “REQ” indicates a required course; “ELECT” indicates an elective; “TOT” refers to the combination of required and elective courses.

Competencies not shown in this table had six or fewer courses coded for coverage of the competency. In spite of the current popularity of the topic, only six courses appeared to explicitly treat performance measurement. Only one explicitly addressed project management; only four dealt with the related competencies of group processes and civic engagement skills.

As a whole, courses covered competencies that were rated lower by the Delphi panel than a random selection of competencies would yield. The average importance rating of all 118 competencies is 3.99. The average for MPA course coverage is
slightly lower in importance at an average rating of 3.87. The average is brought down largely due to the preponderance of courses on urban/regional planning, applications of technology, and site development, which were given relatively low ratings by the Delphi panel (although still acknowledged as useful). Figure 12 summarizes the ratings (as applied by the Delphi panel) to the competencies dealt with in the MPA courses.

![Diagram showing the importance of competencies covered in MPA courses]

Figure 12. Importance of competencies covered in MPA courses.

A majority (sixty-eight) of the 118 competencies identified in the Delphi process did not appear to be explicitly covered by any of the MPA courses. This result, however, overstates a lack of coverage, for two reasons. First, a full twenty-five of these missing variables are competencies associated with personal traits and abilities, such as judgment, initiative, creativity, and sense of humor. The literature on job performance supports the principle that while these are important to managerial success, they are difficult to instill in a relatively brief academic experience, and one
might not expect them to be included in MPA course content.

Second, it is highly likely that many competencies are covered in courses, but there was insufficient detail in course descriptions to code for an individual competency. Seventy-two, or eighteen percent, of the courses were coded with a competency subcategory code but no corresponding codes for the more specific competency. This occurred most often (fifty-eight percent of cases) for courses dealing with the subcategory of administration, but this subcategory does not include any of the “missing” competencies (i.e., all ten of the competencies associated with administration were coded as being covered by other courses). On the other hand, ten courses were coded with the human resources administration subcategory, and it is probable (but not certain) that at least some of these courses touched on the missing competencies related to hiring, discipline, and training employees. Six courses were coded as relating to the leadership subcategory, and again it is very possible that one or more of these courses touched on missing competencies in empowering and motivating employees, and communicating the mission of the organization.

Analysis of Syllabi

In order to probe for this kind of coding error, the complete syllabi for twenty-five of the forty-two sampled MPA programs were searched for words or phrases that would typically be associated with a missing competency. The initial coding resulted in only one (elective) course specifically addressing project management. The syllabi were searched for this phrase, and two courses were found to offer education in project
management as a component of a broader course. A course on “management systems” included a goal of providing students with tools “to plan and manage projects by using Gantt charts and PERT/CPM, including project management.” Another, on “management decision making,” stated that “the major models we will consider are PERT/critical path method” along with performance measurement and other techniques.

The MPA program sample consisted of all programs identified by NASPAA as offering a local government concentration. The element that should set these programs apart is treatment of community leadership and facilitation, which is a more important area of competency for local government managers than for their state and federal counterparts. This is true due to the local scope of city government and the physical proximity of the local government officials to their constituents. This distinction is supported by the research of Svara, Nalbandian, and other scholars who have focused their attention on city management. Several key words were used to probe for course content in this area: collaboration, community building, and community vision (or visioning). None of these competencies were associated with courses in the initial coding of MPA program content.

The analysis of syllabi showed that five courses had some coverage of collaboration as a skill used in community leadership. One, titled, “Strategic Leadership for Communities” included a session on leadership practices for successful collaboration, but no related texts or articles were listed in the syllabus. Another course on inter-organizational relations examined “the practice of building successful
collaborations with organizations." Texts used in the course included *Collaboration: Using Networks and Partnership*\(^{202}\) and *The Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey*.\(^{203}\) Another syllabus included a goal to "expand knowledge of various frameworks for analyzing leadership and different aspects of collaborations." It did not mention any specific exercises or assignments on leading collaboration efforts, but it did use as a text Jeff Luke's *Catalytic Leadership*.\(^{204}\)

Another course on leadership in organizations used case studies to analyze successful inter-organization collaborations, and used as a text Chrislip’s *The Collaborative Leadership Fieldbook*.\(^{205}\)

One course focused exclusively on “managing collaboration and networks.” Among the course objectives, students were to gain “various techniques and tools for improving the management of collaborative processes, and suggest courses of action for improving performance of collaborative processes and public management.” Texts included Agranoff and McGuire’s *Collaborative Public Management: New Strategies for Local Governments*\(^{206}\) and *The Collaboration Challenge: How Nonprofits and Businesses Succeed through Strategic Alliances*.\(^{207}\)


Courses dealing with developing and articulating community vision and community building were sparser. One course included a session on “Urban Governance II: Community Visioning,” using as a text a publication of the National Civic League titled The Strategic Planning and Community Visioning Handbook. Another course on community and citizen empowerment, explored “strategies intended to build a community’s social capital and ways in which community organizing strengthens broader community building efforts.” A text used was Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990’s. Another course on community organizing and development used as a text, Promoting Community Change: Making It Happen in the Real World. A course on community development theory, concepts and practice included a session on community building, using as a text, Building Community Capacity.

An excellent resource for building competency in group processes (specifically, the competency labeled “facilitating group discussions and decision-making processes”) is the Facilitator’s Guide to Participatory Decision-Making. All syllabi were searched for this title, as well as for the name of the lead author (Kaner). There was no evidence that any course in this sample used this text.

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Based on the syllabi, then, some of these courses address competencies that were not noted in the initial coding of MPA programs. How were they missed? The primary reason is that most of these courses were not included in the initial sample. The course content sample is based on an analysis of curricula as found on the web sites of MPA programs in early 2008. The syllabus sample, on the other hand, is based on NASPAA records collected as part of the self-assessment for MPA program accreditation. These have been collected on electronic media since 2003, so the sample represents the syllabi of the programs at the point they completed the self-assessment, ranging between 2003 and 2008. It is natural to assume that courses on community building or collaboration will come and go over time, depending on the interests of the faculty. They have not been part of the core curriculum recommended by NASPAA standards for accreditation.

The analysis of syllabi identified one course that addressed the community building competency, and this competency was missed in the initial coding for that course. The initial survey did, however, code for competencies in both the closely-related competency of “developing consensus on community vision/mission,” and in civic engagement skill.

Summary: MPA Program Content Analysis

In summary, it would be difficult to prove that there is a complete lack of attention by local government MPA programs to any single competency identified through the Delphi process. For every one of the competencies (with the possible
exception of innate personality traits), it is possible that somewhere, at some time, a course has touched on that competency, and in so doing, has drawn on theory in the form of text books or the instructor’s own knowledge.

On the other hand, the results clearly show that, for many competencies important to city management, coverage by MPA programs is rare. A student would have to attend a scattering of courses over many different MPA programs to be educated in the full range of competencies important to city management. The Delphi panel provided a subjective finding that MPA programs do not do an adequate job in the areas of interpersonal communications, human relations, leadership, group processes, and community-building (Table 14). This observation is supported by the analysis of MPA program content (Figure 11).

Nonetheless, the scholars that do build a curriculum for a course on one of these rarely-covered competencies must find themselves in a lonely outpost in the public administration academic field. At least as measured by the content of academic journal articles, there is very little research or scholarly writing on the competencies needed for local government management, as the next section will show.
Content Analysis: Public Administration Journals

A database was created containing records for each of 3,811 articles from thirty-two academic journals associated the public administration field. The articles were coded for several characteristics. First, if the article dealt with one of the competencies identified through the Delphi process, a code for that competency was recorded. Due to the large number of records (articles), no attempt was made to identify multiple competencies covered in a single article. This turned out not to be a problem: when articles did in fact deal with a city management competency, it was typically a fairly narrowly defined competency (e.g., the effective use of PowerPoint presentations) and could be easily coded. If, however, an individual competency could not be identified but the article dealt with an overall competency subcategory, it was noted accordingly. This occurred most often with articles dealing with developing competencies in ethics, leadership, and group processes, but for no subcategory did the number of articles so recorded (i.e., coded for a subcategory rather than an individual competency) exceed one percent of the sample of articles. Articles were coded as being associated with a city management competency regardless of whether the article had any immediate practical application. Articles summarizing theoretical analysis or research on very limited areas of management were coded as being associated with a competency as long as they had something to do with furthering the theoretical base supporting the competency.

Second, if an article was coded as being associated with a competency, it was
coded as having to do either with the activities of senior managers, or having to do with the environment that managers work in. This is an important qualification. While there may be subject matter that is relevant to a particular topic that is related to a competency, it was not counted as being directly related to a management competency if it would not address that competency when viewed from the perspective of a senior local government manager. In general, articles coded with the former used the individual (manager or supervisor) as the level of analysis, while those coded with the latter (the manager’s working environment) used the organizational unit, government, or other groups as the level of analysis. For example, one article dealt with managing emotional intelligence, based on a study of individual public managers in cities; this was coded as addressing the manager. Another focused on the role of self-designed teams in improving public sector performance; the emphasis was on the teams and not on the manager’s role in fostering or managing these teams and thus the article was coded as addressing the environment in which the manager functions.

As coding began, it became obvious that many articles had nothing to do with a competency (either directly applicable to the manager, or to the manager’s work environment), so it became desirable to identify, at least in broad terms, what these articles were about. Codes were used to classify these articles as dealing with policy issues, politics, research methods, technical/financial tools (not directly related to city manager competencies), research methods, and introspective articles on the field of public administration itself.

Finally, when it was apparent, the level of government that was used as the
setting or domain of the study was recorded. The categories for this code included local government, state government, national (federal) government, international (studies based on other nations), general governmental issues not specific to a single level of government, and other organizational settings (primarily private for-profit and nonprofit organizations, but also including education). Articles based on studies of cities in other nations were coded within the local government domain as long as they had general applicability to administration of local governments.

Of the 3,811 articles coded, fifty three, or less than two percent, addressed a competency identified as important by the Delphi panel, using a level of analysis of the individual manager. Five dealt with foundational traits and skills, twenty-three dealt with managing the organization, twenty-one addressed community leadership/facilitation, and four concerned competencies associated with service delivery. The majority of these articles (thirty-four) were not associated with a particular level of government, but twelve were specific to local government. Three articles addressed competencies rated by the Delphi panel as being essential; thirty-three dealt with important competencies, and seventeen addressed competencies rated as merely useful. The number of articles dealing with individual competencies is shown in Table 17.

Table 17. Competencies directly relating to senior managers and the number of associated academic journal articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foundational Traits & Skills

**Interpersonal Communication**
Formal presentation skills 1

**Human Relations**
Ability to build trust 2
Persuasion 1

**Personal Traits & Abilities**
Take care of one’s own physical and mental well-being 1

Managing the Organization

**Leadership**
Collaborative labor/management relations 2
Developing and communicating the mission of the organization 1
Entrepreneurial management 1
Motivating employees 3

**Administration**
Contract management 1
Efficiency in operations; “lean” processes 1
Performance measurement 5
Quality assurance; total quality management 1
Strategic planning 2
Using the budget as a management tool; budget preparation 2

**Human Resources Administration**
Compensation systems 1
Organizational theory: what organizational processes and structures work best under different circumstances 1

**Technical/Analytic Skills**
Applications of technology—IT, web design, other Internet applications 1
Financial forecasting 1

**Community Leadership/Facilitation**

**Group Processes**
Civic engagement skill 8
Collaboration 3
Facilitating group discussions and decision-making processes 5

**Community Building**
Community-building strategies
Understanding and exploration of community values and needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community-building strategies</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding and exploration of community values and needs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Service Delivery**

| Effective implementation of programs and services | 1 |
| Functional/operational knowledge of common municipal services: police, fire, public works, planning, etc. | 1 |
| Knowledge of specific services: emergency management; sustainability & environmental protection techniques; economic development; causes underlying urban problems | 2 |

What is of course significant about this table is, like the dog that did not bark, the competencies that are missing from the table. Only twenty-six of the 118 identified competencies appear to be the focus of a journal article in the 3,811 public administration articles sampled. The other ninety-two competencies do not appear to be addressed. Since the literature review has shown that competencies necessary for city management are often useful to public administrators in general, it is worth asking what public administration articles are about, if not the competencies that would make public administrators be more effective.

**Competencies Indirectly Related to Management**

As noted above, articles were coded as either being directly related to the activities of senior managers, or as having to do with the environment that managers work in. In general, articles coded with the former used the individual (manager or supervisor) as the level of analysis, while those coded with the latter used the organizational unit, government, or other groups as the level of analysis. The fifty-

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three articles identified above fall into the first group: they cover research or theory relating to competencies identified in the Delphi study, and in the context of skills and knowledge that senior managers might use directly. A larger number of articles (about a quarter of the sample, Figure 13) are indirectly related to senior level management: they address some aspect of city management competency, but in terms of the environment the manager operates in, not the activity of management itself. Many of these summarize descriptive work on trends in public organizations, such as the prevalence and manifestation of e-government, the extent of the use of performance measurement, turnover rates of public managers, the values held by public employees in general, numbers of women and ethnic minorities in public administration positions, or organizational issues such as the effects of humor in the workplace.

Figure 13. Competencies covered directly, indirectly, or not at all by the sampled academic journal articles.

Table 18 shows the number of articles associated each competency category
and subcategory. By far the largest category covered is managing the organization, and within this group, almost half of the relevant articles deal with human resources administration. About a tenth address group processes in the environment a manager might encounter. An example is an article titled “Jump-Starting Collaboration: The ABCD Initiative and the Provision of Child Development Services through Medicaid and Collaborators.” Another is titled, “The Importance of Trust in Government for Public Administration: The Case of Zoning.”

Table 18. Articles indirectly related to management competencies, by subcategory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundational Traits &amp; Skills</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Communications</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Relations</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Traits and Abilities</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing the Organization</td>
<td>687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources Administration</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal/Institutional Systems</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical/Analytical Skills</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Leadership/Facilitation</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Processes</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Building</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Delivery</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within these sub-categories, seventeen of the 118 competencies account for over seventy-percent of articles. Articles on organizational theory in turn account for over a third of them, with titles such as “Understanding and Managing Conversations
from a Knowledge Perspective: An Analysis of the Roles and Rules of Face-to-face Conversations in Organizations” and “Dialogism and Polyphony in Organizing Theorizing in Organization Studies: Action Guiding Anticipations and the Continuous Creation of Novelty.” Table 19 lists these seventeen competencies and the number of articles associated with each.

Table 19. Individual competencies most frequently covered in articles indirectly related to management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational theory: what organizational processes and structures work best under different circumstances</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance measurement</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications of technology—IT, web design, other Internet applications</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privatization—shifting former governmental responsibilities to the private sector</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic engagement</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract management</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating group discussions and decision-making processes</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the budget as a management tool; budget preparation</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation systems</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating employees</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax policies and strategies</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms of government</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative law; knowledge of legal institutions and processes</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediating and resolving conflicts between individuals and groups</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/educating other employees</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of specific services: emergency management; sustainability &amp; environmental protection techniques; economic development; causes underlying urban problems</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The coverage of competencies by journals varied widely. Simply because they are considered to be representative of the field of public administration does not mean that each journal’s editorial objectives include improving the competence of public administrators. Figure 14 shows the percentage of articles for each journal that address
city management competencies, either that directly relate to the role of the manager, or that indirectly relate to management by addressing the organizational or community environment of the manager. It also indicates the percentage of articles that do not relate to management competencies. Journal abbreviations are used in this figure; the full titles for these journals are provided in Table 4 of Chapter 3.
Figure 14. Competency coverage by journal

Note: see Table 4 for a key to journal abbreviations. “Manager” refers to articles that address competencies in the context of the activities of senior managers; “environment” refers to articles that address an important competency, but typically using a level of analysis of the organization or government, rather than the manager.
Importance of Competencies Indirectly Related to Management

The Delphi study not only identified city management competencies, it also provided an average importance rating for each competency. This makes it possible to evaluate the relative importance of the competencies that are covered by public administration journals. As noted above, the average importance rating (on a five-point scale) for all competencies identified in the Delphi process is 3.99. The average importance of the competencies in articles indirectly related to management is measurably lower at 3.87. The average is brought down by the large number (199) of articles on organization theory, and to a lesser extent, contract management, applications of technology, and privatization, all of which were ranked lower in importance by the Delphi panel. Only thirty-six articles dealt with competencies that exceeded an importance rating of 4.5 or above. Figure 15 summarizes the importance ratings of competencies in articles that address the organizational or community environment in which the manager works.
As indicated in Figure 15, approximately three quarters of the articles sampled do not directly or indirectly relate to the competencies needed by public administrators. What, then, are they about? Not surprisingly, over half of them deal with some aspect of public policy. Articles in this category were especially prevalent in the *National Tax Journal, Public Administration Review, and Social Science Quarterly*. The *Journal of Accounting and Public Policy* occupied the other end of the scale, but all journals devote some attention to policy research. Articles have titles such as “How Far to the Border?: The Extent and Impact of Cross-Border Casual Cigarette Smuggling” and “Working Toward a Just, Equitable, and Local Food System: The Social Impact of Community-Based Agriculture.”

The next largest category, representing a quarter of the non-competency-
related articles, summarize research and writing on politics. Typical titles include “Patron-Client Politics and Its Implications for Good Governance in Bangladesh” and “RATS, We Should Have Used Clinton: Subliminal Priming in Political Campaigns.” A catch-all category included articles that either did not relate to the public sector, or that otherwise did not fit any category. Titles here include, as examples, “Alliance Dynamics for Entrepreneurial Firms” and “Similarity, Familiarity and access to Elite Work in Hollywood: Employer and Employee Characteristics in Breakthrough Employment.” Articles on research methods, non-managerial technical tools, and on the field of public administration itself, make up relatively few of the 3,811 articles sampled. Figure 16 summarizes these “other” categories.

![Figure 16. Subjects of articles not related to management competencies.](image)

**Articles: Level of Government**

As noted above, when it was apparent, the level of government that was used
as the setting or domain of the study or article was recorded. For the majority of articles, the work had general application to government, whether the article related to a competency, such as employee supervision, or to a policy issue, such as preventing crime. Despite a perception that public administration scholarly work is largely focused on the national government,\textsuperscript{14} Figure 17 indicates that, at least in terms of management competencies, local government receives more attention than does the national government. This seems to be a surprising result. Both where articles directly address management competencies (chart B in Figure 17), and where they address the organizational or community environment (chart C), the setting of the research is more often the local government level than either the state or federal level. In the case of articles dealing with public policy (chart D), however, federal and international settings tend to be more prevalent.

Summary: Journal Content Analysis

Only one out of every seventy-two sampled articles in academic journals considered as being within the field of public administration appears to address research or theory directly relating to a competency important to city managers (i.e., specifically addressing senior manager competencies, typically with the individual manager as the level of analysis). A larger number address competencies identified as important by the Delphi panel, but in terms of the environment the managers operates in (typically using the organization or government as the level of analysis). The
majority of articles focus instead on public policy or politics. Some individual journals place emphasis on research describing the management environment, such as organizational theory research or the nature of intergovernmental collaboration, but based on this sample, no journal devoted more than six percent of the articles to research or theory on competencies that are directly used by city managers.
Overall Results: Gaps Between Theory and Practice

As diagramed in Figure 8 in Chapter 3, this study is designed to identify possible gaps between city management practice and theory using a deductive approach. City management competencies identified through the Delphi study were first compared with the content of MPA programs to identify competencies that do not appear to be covered in these programs. As noted above, this step identified sixty-eight such competencies. These competencies were then compared to the contents of a sample of 3,811 articles from public administration academic journals. This reduced the number of candidates for missing theory from sixty-eight to fifty-seven competencies. This is not a substantial reduction given the number of articles sampled. The journals do, however, cover some very important competencies that were apparently missing from MPA programs. These include the ability to build trust, persuasion, developing and communicating the mission of the organization, motivating employees, collaborative labor/management relations, collaboration (in community leadership), understanding and exploration of community values and needs, and community building strategies. Together these eight competencies have a relatively high importance rating of 4.27 based on the responses of the Delphi panel. On the other hand, there were only seventeen articles, or less than half a percent of the sampled articles, that addressed these eight competencies.

The remaining competencies that are neither covered in MPA programs nor in the sampled journal articles are listed in Table 20. The most important gaps are
clustered in the areas of human relations, leadership, and group processes. There are many personal traits and skills in this list (and many of them are important to city management effectiveness), but one could argue that theory is less important in the case of traits that are fairly well-developed by the time an individual reaches adulthood.

Table 20. Competencies apparently missing a theoretical foundation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency (rated important or essential shown in bold)</th>
<th>Importance Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOUNDATIONAL TRAITS AND SKILLS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethics</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal integrity</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling ethical and public-service-oriented behavior</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to factor social equity in policy decisions</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human Relations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening skills</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to communicate among diverse groups</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to cope with difficult people</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal communication: interacting with individuals from different cultural or socio-economic backgrounds</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of personality differences</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding psychological needs of others; psychology of groups and individuals</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Traits and Abilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgment—knowing which issues to push and which to let slide</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to find solutions to complex problems</td>
<td>4.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiative; self-motivation</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to anticipate issues and resolve them before they become problems</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team-building</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to acquire new knowledge and learn new skills</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to multi-task</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to accept constructive criticism</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resiliency (bounce back from setbacks)</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving credit and accepting blame</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear sense of purpose</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis management</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing professional and personal development</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation, creativity</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal time management</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Effective use of negotiation strategies | 4.1
---|---
Professional personal appearance | 4.0
Ability to set personal priorities | 3.9
Sense of humor | 3.9
Empathy and compassion | 3.8
Interdisciplinary problem-solving | 3.8
Balance confidence with humility | 3.8
Risk-taking | 3.7
Aesthetic sense: recognizing both beauty and ugliness (e.g., in urban form, building design) | 3.2

MANAGING THE ORGANIZATION

Leadership

Ability to translate council policies into action | 4.8
Delegation; empowering employees | 4.4
Mentoring and coaching individuals in the organization | 4.1
Engaging employees during difficult economic times | 4.0
Professional development of employees | 3.8
Continuous re-examination of the core business | 3.8
Effective handling of personal/emotional challenges faced by employees | 3.7
Ability to adjust management approaches in response to generational differences | 3.6

Human Resources Administration

Hiring employees | 4.1
Disciplining employees | 3.8
Establishing policies and procedures | 3.8
Training/educating other employees | 3.7

Legal/Institutional Systems

Development of intergovernmental partnerships | 4.0
Using office technology (computers, PDAs) | 3.7

Technical/Analytic Skills

Setting prices of public goods and services | 3.3
Trend forecasting | 3.2

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP/FACILITATION

Group Processes

Ability to diplomatically disagree with elected officials and present alternative courses of action | 4.5

Strengthening council-mayor relationships | 4.1
Skill in appropriate accommodation of council and citizen interest in the administration of the organization | 3.9
Educating and coaching elected officials and other community leaders to improve their effectiveness | 3.7

Community Building

Articulating community vision/mission | 4.5
Methods for creating or enhancing the community's "sense of place." | 3.6

Service Delivery
An interesting result is that there are no apparent gaps for any of the competencies in two of the sub-categories used in this study—interpersonal communications, and administration—and relatively few gaps in the sub-categories of legal/institutional systems and technical/analytical skills. This means that for competencies in these subcategories, there was at least one journal article or one MPA course that was coded as relating to this competency. Based on the conceptual model used in this study, therefore, there is some theory, apparently, to support competency development in these areas. There may well be theory within the public administration field to serve as a foundation for the other competencies listed in Table 5, but they were not manifested in an obvious way in the MPA courses and academic journal articles that were sampled in this study.

Triangulation of Results Using MPA and Journal Data Sources

The design of this study called for first using the content of MPA courses and then the content of academic journal articles as successive filters to identify—and remove from further study—competencies that appear to have some theoretical foundation, with the results shown in Table 20 above. The journal articles were coded, however, for any of the list of competencies identified by the Delphi panel, and not just for competencies that emerged from the MPA content filter (i.e., those that did not appear to be covered in an MPA course). This makes it possible to examine gaps
between competencies and theory from the two different sources of data, in a form of triangulation. To what extent are the observed gaps between competencies and related theory different between the two sources of data?

Figure 18 depicts a data map that was used to explore this question. The horizontal axis represents the 118 competencies identified in the Delphi study. The left and right vertical axes represent, respectively, the number of journal articles that addressed each competency, and the number of courses that covered the competency. Note that the scales have been normalized to take into account the significantly lower coverage of city management competencies in journal articles. Identification of the individual competencies in this chart would render it unreadable. Nevertheless, several observations can be made. First, neither source of data accounts for much coverage of competencies at the left end of the chart. These correspond to competencies associated with ethics, interpersonal communications, human relations, and personal traits/abilities (the latter accounts for the long stretch of zero coverage by both sources). This relative lack of coverage is to be expected, since many of these competencies are associated with innate traits rather than theory-based knowledge.
Figure 18. Coverage of competencies in journal articles vs. MPA course content. 

*Note:* Journal articles included here address competencies relating directly to senior managers.

Second, in many cases, the two lines do not overlap. This means that in these cases, a competency was associated with one or more MPA courses but not a journal article, or vice versa. This is evidence of the value of using both sources of data in this study; using either alone would have overstated the gap between theory and practice. Third, both lines are “spiky”; that is, they return quickly and often to the zero value (horizontal axis), meaning that coverage of competencies is fairly spotty. Some competencies are addressed in the literature or in MPA programs, but this does not mean that the “adjacent” competency in the list (as represented in Table 5) is also addressed.

At the risk of losing some of this detail, Figure 19 shows the distribution of coverage of competencies by journal articles and MPA courses, aggregated to the level of sub-categories of competencies. Consistent with Figure 18, neither source of data
provides extensive coverage of the first four sub-categories (i.e., those associated with the larger category of foundational skills and traits). A higher percentage of the journal articles (of the total number of articles that are associated with management competencies) address competencies in the leadership (three articles on motivating employees), administration (five articles on performance measurement), group process (a total of sixteen articles on collaboration, facilitating group discussions, and civic engagement skills), and community-building (four articles on understanding and exploration of community values and needs) sub-categories. Conversely, a higher percentage of the MPA courses address competencies in the legal/institutional systems (twenty-five courses covering general knowledge of laws affecting municipalities and eighteen on intergovernmental relations), technical/analytical skills (twenty courses on applications of technology and twenty-one on policy analysis), and service delivery (thirty-two courses on common municipal services, seventeen on the specific services deemed most important by the Delphi panel, and thirty-nine courses on urban/regional planning) sub-categories.
Figure 19. Percentage of all MPA courses and journal articles that address competency sub-categories.

Note: Journal articles included here address competencies relating directly to senior managers.

Two caveats are in order. First, the coverage of competencies within these sub-categories is very sporadic. Simply because both journals and MPA courses show a relatively high percentage distribution of articles/courses in the administrative subcategory, for example, does not mean there is broad coverage of the various competencies within this subcategory; competencies in performance measurement and budgeting account for most of the articles and courses, respectively. Recall that the perspective is not that of an academic field, but an assessment from the perspective of applicability appropriate to a senior local government manager. Second, normalizing the journal article coverage (to make it appear on the same scale as the courses)
overstates the coverage of city management competencies by public administration journals. If Figure 19 were re-drawn to indicate the number of journal articles that cover city management competencies as a percentage of all 3,811 sampled articles (and not as a percentage of the fifty-three articles that did address competencies), the articles would disappear from the chart.

Summary

The central thesis of this study is that there are in fact gaps between the competencies needed by city managers and their associated theoretical foundations. The results of the analysis support that thesis, based on evidence for the existence (or the lack thereof) of theory as found in the content of MPA courses and in public administration academic journals. The final chapter will discuss these results, and some of their implications for both practice and scholarship.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study contributes to the public administration literature in several ways. First, previous work on city management competencies—primarily based on surveys of practitioners—has been extended through the use of an expert panel consisting of many of the nation's top city and county managers, and many of the foremost scholars in the field. The participation rate was very high (over fifty-five percent), and the panel members provided consistent and thoughtful responses to survey questions. Through the use of the Delphi method, the panel members arrived at a consensus on the importance of the competencies, and they provided suggestions for additional competencies that were included in the study. The panel provided a much higher level of detail than was done in previous studies, identifying over one hundred individual competencies that are important for management of local governments.

Second, where previous studies concentrated on a single journal (*Public Administration Review*) to examine the treatment of local government management topics in the academic literature, this study included thirty-two journals over a ten-year time period, providing a sample of almost 4,000 articles. Finally, content analysis of MPA programs (offering a concentration in local government) provides another source of data, and allows triangulation on the existence of theory related competencies. The study found that scholars do bring into the classroom theory (primarily in the form of material covered in texts) that is absent in the academic journals.

The central purpose of this study is to ascertain whether gaps exist between the
competencies necessary for local government management and the associated theory that would provide a foundation for those competencies, and to identify any such gaps. This summary chapter, then, begins with a discussion of the contributions of this study in addressing this issue. The urgency of this research has been motivated by the need to prepare a new generation of local government managers to take over from a generation that is now retiring. But in addition to the issue of urgency, it is important that government managers have the benefit of the best relevant theories in guiding and informing their on-going efforts to meet the multiple challenges of their public service roles. The next section of this chapter therefore explores the implications of this study in meeting that challenge, particularly in the context of work that is now being undertaken in that area by the International City/County Management Association and the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration.

While not the only contributor to the preparation of future city managers, the professional degree program as represented by the Master of Public Administration is a significant source of education and skill-building. Indeed, the study found that most MPA programs provide education that supports many of the management competencies identified by the Delphi panel. Some important competencies, however, receive relatively little attention. Possible reasons for this are noted, along with suggestions for strengthening the ability of MPA programs to meet the expected spiraling demand for education in local government management.

One of the surprises that emerged from the study was the strong correlation between the competencies needed by city managers and those employed by federal
agency managers and business managers. The next section discusses possible reasons for this result, and how management in these sectors differs. It also addresses the question of whether the results of this study (focusing on city management) can be generalized to county and special district management.

Another surprise was the sparse attention to management competencies that the public administration academic journals provide. If public administration wishes to be the intellectual home for the practice of administering local governments, it will be important to ensure that the field, in its scholarship and pedagogy, actually engages the key management competencies as senior local government managers understand them. Another potential source of management theory—business administration—is briefly considered. The conclusion is that business administration academic field is probably also characterized by uneven coverage of some important management competencies, and a journal devoted to the theory underlying city management could meet a real need, and not just for city managers.

Finally, as with any study, a number of questions are left unanswered. The identification of specific areas of a disconnection between city management skills and knowledge and the relevant theory provides a research agenda for adapting theory from other fields, or where necessary, developing it anew. Drawing on the importance ratings provided by the Delphi panel, the most critical areas for further research are proposed.
The Gap Between Critical City Management Competencies and Their Associated Theoretical Foundations

The central research question of this study is this: to what extent does existing theory on local government administration provide a foundation for a curriculum based in a well supported understanding of the knowledge and skills required by senior managers of cities? This question was tested using a deductive process that first identified the competencies critical to city management, and then compared this list with sources of public administration theory as found in the content of MPA courses and in thirty-two academic journals associated with the field of public administration.

Figure 20. Summary of study design and results

Figure 20 combines the schematic of the study design as depicted in Figure 8 with a summary of the results. The Delphi panel identified a total of 118 separate city management competencies that are grouped here in four major categories. All but
sixty-eight of these competencies were found to be addressed in some way in courses offered by MPA programs with a concentration in local government management. A further eleven of these were addressed by a sample of 3,811 articles in public administration journals, leaving fifty-seven competencies that lack a theoretical foundation, at least as evidenced by both a lack of coverage in university MPA programs and a lack of coverage in public administration academic journals. Table 20 in the previous chapter identifies these competencies. Thirty-two of these were rated as important or essential by the Delphi panel. Many of these competencies are in the areas of human relations, leadership, and group processes. Almost half of these competencies relate to innate traits and abilities, and for many (but not all) of these, competencies are typically not developed through theory-based technical rationality.

There is a flaw, however, in the deductive process that leads to the conclusion that competencies do not have a foundation in associated theory. Content analysis of MPA programs was used as one indication of the existence or lack of available theory. This turned out to be a fairly blunt instrument, for several reasons. First, the analysis was primarily based on brief course descriptions of required and elective courses. Sampling of actual syllabi found that some management competencies were touched on in a course but not mentioned in the course description. Second, even syllabi do not describe all material taught in a course. A professor, for example, might explain the psychological foundations underlying the building of trust in a relationship as part of a class discussion, and this might never appear in the syllabus. Finally, the content analysis was done at a single point in time (early 2008), and curricula do change over
time. Courses added, dropped, or modified over time would be missing from the sample, and these might in fact address some of the apparently “missing” competencies.

For these reasons, it is impossible to state, unequivocally, that there is no available theory in the field of public administration for any of the 118 competencies identified in the Delphi process. Disproving the null hypothesis (no theory exists that informs a particular competency) in this case requires finding only one instance, somewhere, of theory being invoked in some way in some part of the field of public administration. Simply because it was not found in the rather high-altitude survey of MPA programs conducted in this study does not mean that closer examination would not uncover the apparently missing theory.

What the research results do show, however, is that some city management competencies receive a great deal of attention in the public administration academic field, and others are virtually ignored. Most aspects of human resources administration, law and institutions, technical skills such as analysis of policy options, performance measurement, intergovernmental relations, and use of information systems seem to be well-covered. Budgeting is, too, except it is studied mostly from the perspective of the decision-making (policy) process used to arrive at a budget and rarely from the perspective of using the budget in a way that will produce desired behaviors by operating staff (i.e., as a management tool).

Less well-covered are theories that would support competencies in listening, persuasion, informal communication, understanding the psychological needs of others,
project management, empowerment of staff and community members, collaboration, and facilitating participatory decision making. The phrase “team building” appears often in searches of MPA course syllabi, but mostly in the context of skills that students will learn by doing group projects, and rarely in the explicit application of theory that will help individuals make their teams function well.

Readily-available political science theory may help a prospective city manager understand the pitfalls of asking for the resignation of a fire chief who has strong support of both the local chamber of commerce and the local newspaper. But once the manager makes the decision to follow through with it, where is the theory that helps him or her decide which day and time to have the talk with the chief, and what not to say in that meeting? In many areas, it seems that the field of public administration provides good research and theory (solving urban problems, coordinating regional transportation planning, writing administrative rules, etc.) that a city manager can tap into once he or she has acquired the necessary knowledge and skills to be a good manager, but there is less on being a good manager.

Preparing the Next Generation: Implications for the Work of ICMA and NASPAA

Chapter 1 discusses ICMA’s Next Generation Initiative and the importance that ICMA places on preparing both pre-service and mid-career individuals for assuming senior management positions in cities and counties. A clear understanding of the competencies needed by these managers is necessary for the association’s
voluntary credentialing program, for guidance in developing in-service educational programs, and for development of texts and other educational media. ICMA’s Advisory Board on Graduate Education seeks, among other things, to work with the academic community to ensure that graduate schools are meeting the needs of the profession.

ICMA developed its list of “practices for effective local government management” almost two decades ago (see Appendix B for the list of practices). The competencies identified through the use of the Delphi method in this study can be used to evaluate the completeness and continued relevance of the list developed by ICMA. This list is divided into eighteen major categories and thirty sub-categories. These categorizes were initially used as an organizing scheme for the competencies that emerged from the Delphi process. This turned out not to be satisfactory, for three reasons. First, ICMA’s categories are lopsided: a category such as “policy facilitation” includes many individual competencies (nineteen, based on the Delphi results), while other major categories such as budgeting or strategic planning include relatively few. Second, the major categories do not reflect the true relative importance of groups of competencies. For example, the category of “staff effectiveness,” which encompasses many competencies associated with leading the internal organization, is given the same apparent weight as “media relations.” Third, some competencies are hidden in unexpected places. Competencies built upon organizational theory are put into the

\[215\] The count of sub-categories includes eleven major categories that are not further divided into sub-categories.
“performance measurement/management and quality assurance” category and not in the staff effectiveness or human resources management categories. Knowledge of local government law is placed in the “democratic advocacy and citizen participation” category and does not appear in the policy facilitation category.

These categories are a more recent re-formulation of the initial (1991) list, and it is obvious that some thought has gone into them. They show how a range of competencies can be brought together to achieve a management objective. But like a chef using a shelf of spices, managers combine competencies in many different ways (interpersonal communication is as commonly used as salt). Pigeon-holing competencies into “practice” groupings obscures the universality of many of the competencies. A more useful organization scheme, built around activities or practices, might be to create a matrix (N practices x 118 competencies, in the case of this study) to indicate, in cookbook fashion, which competencies are ingredients of different management tasks. This could be an interesting project for future research.

Aside from the issue of categorization, when the competencies specifically identified by ICMA are unpacked from the categories, there are approximately seventy individual competencies. An important result of this study is that it affirms the relevance of ICMA’s list. Almost all of the competencies in this list can be matched with competencies found to be important in the Delphi study. In some cases, the Delphi study provides more detail. For example, ICMA’s list includes “skill in leadership techniques,” while the Delphi study broke this skill into several competencies such as “developing and communicating the mission of the
organization." The Delphi panel also suggested additional important competencies that are not specifically enumerated in ICMA's list. These are shown in Table 21.

Table 21. Competencies from the Delphi Study not in ICMA's list of practices for effective local government management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundational Traits and Skills</th>
<th>Ability to build trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to cope with difficult people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding psychological needs of others; psychology of groups and individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing the Organization</td>
<td>Collaborative labor/management relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Labor negotiations; collective bargaining law and procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effective handling of personal/emotional challenges faced by employees</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entrepreneurial management</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Efficiency in operations; “lean” processes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Contract management</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Risk management: general liability, employment law, insurance issues</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capital improvement planning and financing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Leadership/Facilitation</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strengthening mayor-council relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skill in appropriate accommodation of council and citizen interest in the administration of the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing consensus on community vision/mission</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community-building strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Methods for creating or enhancing the community’s “sense of place”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Delivery</td>
<td>Public-private partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marketing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a fairly small list, and the competencies shown here are compatible with those that are explicitly enumerated in the ICMA list. The association has recently developed educational sessions and resources for many of them. This study
adds to the work that ICMA has done in identifying important city management competencies, but the overall conclusion is that ICMA has got it right.

Two other results of this study have a direct bearing on ICMA’s mission and activities. The uneven coverage of competencies by MPA programs underscores the importance of ICMA’s efforts to complement these degree programs through a variety of educational programs and resources. These are especially important in areas that the study has found receive relatively little attention by MPA programs, including competencies in the sub-categories of interpersonal communications, human relations, leadership, group processes, and community-building.

Further, the lack of observed coverage of management competencies in the public administration academic journals supports the need for texts and other resources produced by the ICMA Press. Many of them are written or edited by public administration scholars who draw on theory (where it exists) both within and from outside the public administration field, and provide it in a form that is accessible to the practitioner.

NASPAA

NASPAA is currently updating the set of standards it uses to provide accreditation of professional degree programs in public administration and public affairs. Current standards are somewhat prescriptive in specifying curriculum content that addresses sets of competencies. For example, to build competencies in managing the organization, the following curriculum components are required: human resources,
budgeting and financial process, and information management, technology applications, and policy. 216 The draft standards, to be formally considered in October, 2009, are less prescriptive, and allow programs more latitude in matching curricula with the mission of the program. The standards simply require that an accredited program build competencies in five broad “domains”:

- to lead and manage in public governance;
- to participate in and contribute to the policy process
- to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions;
- to articulate and apply a public values perspective;
- to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry. 217

In a draft set of instructions for these standards, examples of competencies that might be addressed in the domains are suggested, but for illustration only. 218 For instance, sample competencies associated with managing the organization include project management, leading and managing people, conflict resolution, and negotiation. These are certainly compatible with the competencies identified in this study. Depending on the program’s mission, however, these competencies may or may not be addressed, and thus NASPAA accreditation is no guarantee that management competencies will be covered in the curriculum.

A white paper prepared for NASPAA on new standards for curriculum components notes that a “minimalist” approach to curriculum standards will be attractive to many programs. But the paper cautions, “However, one respect in which this approach might not be attractive to member programs is the burden placed on them. Identifying curriculum competencies that are consistent with a program’s mission is not a trivial task for that program, at least if done correctly.” The use of the competencies identified in this study could ease the burden for those programs that adopt a mission of preparing individuals for local government management.

Master of Public Administration Programs

As Figure 11 in Chapter 4 shows, MPA programs with a concentration in local government management provide good coverage of some of the competencies associated with administration, legal/institutional systems, and technical/analytical skills. There is less coverage of competencies associated with ethics, interpersonal communications, human relations, leadership, group processes, and community building. Aside from any considerations of pedagogical effectiveness (which are beyond the scope of this study), it would appear that universities do not perform well in preparing individuals for some aspects of city management simply because they do not provide courses in those areas. The following discussion will explore reasons for

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220 Ibid., 3-4.
this apparent gap. It will also provide suggestions and observations on a number of issues relating to MPA programs, based on the findings of this study.

*We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*

There could be several reasons for a lack of coverage of particular management competencies in MPA programs. One could be a problem of “we can’t teach what we don’t know.” This problem in turn might have two causes. One would be a human resources problem, where the staff lack the required knowledge. A member of the Delphi panel (a scholar) in response to a question on the adequacy of MPA programs in the areas of community leadership and group processes commented, “There is typically little of this in the curriculum. Scholars themselves often don't know this stuff.” As a public management problem (on the part of managers of MPA programs), this could be solved with a change in staff, or additional training and education.

The other cause could be a lack of accessible theory. Another panel member (a practitioner) noted, “If there's not a book written specifically to these topics, it generally won't get taught.” The research results show that public administration academic journals constitute a fairly dry well for drawing theory on city management competencies (or any management competencies for that matter). But the review of MPA program syllabi found that instructors are often able to find books—many of them written by scholars in the field of public administration, or targeted at a public administration audience—that appear to be relevant to the particular areas of
knowledge and skills that are being taught. In other cases, the books are based on
theory developed in and for private business management (as in many of the books on
leadership) or on general skills and knowledge that are not specific to a sector (for
example, on negotiation, collaboration, and interpersonal communication). These texts
are thus drawn into and become a part of the body of public administration theory.

This does not mean that these texts are always a close fit to the competency
being taught. Instructors are frustrated, at times, with the lack of resources that directly
and completely relate to the topics covered in a course.\textsuperscript{221} Out of necessity, faculty
members must teach some courses that are outside their specialty or area of expertise,
and a lack of relevant public administration theory and resources (books or articles)
may well explain some of the gaps in coverage of important management
competencies.

Demand for new and better texts could lead to their production. ICMA, as
noted above, has in the past and continues to respond to gaps in available texts through
its “ICMA Press.” A market-based solution breaks down, however, if the necessary
theory is simply not available, or at least unknown to scholars in the public
administration field.

\textit{It Can’t Be Taught; It Can Only be Gained Through Experience}

In commenting on the adequacy of MPA programs, many members of the
Delphi panel (both scholars and practitioners) stated that some competencies simply cannot be taught in an academic setting. These comments appeared most often in the context of competencies in human relations, interpersonal communications, leadership, group processes, and innate traits and abilities.

There is certainly some truth to this. Spencer and Spencer, in their seminal work on competency in the work place, note that “knowledge and skill competencies are relatively easy to develop,” and that “core motive and trait competencies...are more difficult to assess and develop; it is most cost-effective to select for these characteristics.”222 The Spencers do not assert that innate traits are impossible to develop; it is simply difficult to do so. They quote a personnel manager: “You can teach a turkey to climb a tree, but it is easier to hire a squirrel.”223

This suggests that MPA programs could screen for innate traits and abilities that are critical to public management as part of the program admissions process. This is difficult to do, but public managers (including university managers) confront this challenge in every hiring decision. Some competencies are filtered through regular academic admissions standards such as GPA and GRE scores. These might include initiative and self-motivation, ability to acquire new knowledge, ability to multi-task, clear sense of purpose, personal time management, and ability to set personal priorities. Others, such as a public service ethic, personal integrity, balancing confidence with humility, innovation and creativity, and empathy and compassion

223 Ibid., 12.
could be appraised through other means, including assessment centers, interviews and reference checking. Whether universities should, however, play a role in screening candidates for relevant innate traits—rather than leaving this to the ultimate hiring authorities—is a valid subject for debate. None of the Delphi panel members in this study provided any comments suggesting that MPA programs should play this gate keeping role.

Beyond innate personality traits, however, it appears that MPA programs are far too willing to leave some key competencies—particularly in the “soft” skills such as persuasion, teamwork, and interpersonal communications—to work experience alone, depriving students of some excellent research-based theory that the university can offer. To become competent in any endeavor—whether in music, sky diving, surgery, parenting, or management—an individual must combine some measure of intellectual learning with actual practice. An apparently technical skill such as budgeting still requires experience to gain competence in the art of setting appropriate budget targets for operating divisions. A “soft” skill such as persuasion (or personal influence) can be improved by applying (and then practicing) principles that are derived from psychological theory.224

The Delphi study found that competencies used in leading the city organization are very important. Blanchard and Donahue, in How Should We Teach Leadership, allude to the “well worn nature versus nurture debate” in the preparation of leaders, and conclude that leadership competencies should be taught:

Are people born to lead, or can they be taught to lead? We submit that this question is moot for teachers in public administration/policy/affairs (PA) programs, particularly at the graduate level. Our graduates regularly find themselves in roles accorded substantial responsibility and authority. Yet prominent scholars of leadership have claimed for over two decades that our society faces a "crisis of leadership"...Therefore we must teach leadership; we can't afford not to! ...Leadership is an important part of PA curricula, and teaching it is one of the more difficult responsibilities that PA faculties face. Thus, a more appropriate question may be, "How should we teach leadership?" 225

Certainly there are innate personal traits that make leadership competencies come more easily to some individuals than others, and "book learning" alone will not make a great leader. But these facts should not deter graduate programs from teaching what they can in these "softer" human relations areas. Why do MPA programs throw students into project groups to somehow absorb team-building skills without at any point in their educational experience providing them with a theory-based foundation in effective techniques for working in a team, and building teamwork skills in others? This is a skill they will use continually (and, true, gain greater competence through use), both internally within the organization and externally when working with community groups. Amazon.com offers over 31,000 titles on the subject of team-building, and surely at least one of them is based on solid research in the field of social psychology.

So Many Competencies and So Little Time

It would seem to be impossible to treat adequately over 100 management competencies over the course of a typical two-year master's degree program. A

member of the Delphi panel wrote, in response to a question on community-building competencies, “Some classes touch on this subject, however, only so many electives and so little time.” To be most effective in preparing future local government managers, then, MPA programs concentrating on local government management would be well advised to eliminate from curricula courses on less useful competencies, and concentrate on the ones that are most important for managers. The results of the Delphi study can be helpful in distinguishing between them.

Pre-Service and Mid-Career Students

The question of whether MPA students should be prepared for an entry level job or for an ultimate leadership (CEO) position is thus beyond the scope of this study. If the former, a curriculum might place more emphasis on technical knowledge and skills, such as financial management, budgeting, and human resources. If the latter, it might place relatively more emphasis on leadership, group processes, and community building. The profession would probably be well served if different programs specialized in each.

Some exposure to theory underlying senior executive competencies could, however, be useful even to pre-service students seeking their first job, for several reasons. First, after obtaining a master’s degree, the only formal education an individual might receive is typically in-house orientation and training sessions, and at most one- or two-day workshops at professional conferences. They would thus miss out on a more in-depth treatment of senior leadership competencies that a university
setting is uniquely equipped to provide. Second, theoretical exposure to some of these areas of advanced knowledge and skill can provide a foundation that experience will build upon. Even in a role as a management analyst or assistant to the city manager, the individual will observe senior managers and can begin integrating these observations with, and building on, the more theoretical “book learning” of the classroom. Finally, with the expected high turnover in local government managers described in the introduction to this paper, pre-service students might find themselves in a senior leadership position fairly quickly. They will not have the luxury of years of building tacit knowledge through experience, and will have to rely more heavily on the competencies gained in a professional degree program.

State and Local Government Tracks

Some MPA programs offer a concentration in “state and local government,” and NASPAA’s on-line database on degree programs lumps local government administration with state government in its classification of specializations. Management of state agencies has far more in common with federal agency management than with management of local governments, as discussed below. If there is any grouping of public management by level of government, it should be a grouping of state with federal government management. A “state and local” concentration is either a signal that a program is a policy program rather than an administration program (and focuses on policy issues that are more typical of a region rather than the nation), or that the institution does not truly understand the nature of local government
Policy vs. Administration

Many of the Delphi panel members (particularly practitioners) criticized MPA programs for emphasizing public policy-setting and analysis to the detriment of management. A sample comment:

Academia has created the discipline of public administration as a derivative of political science. While I'm respectful and appreciative of the importance of understanding the political science roots of public service and government, I think public administration as a discipline suffers significantly from over-emphasis on public policy making in a political science context.  

This is not the place to weigh in on the debate as to the role of policy in the public administration field. But for a professional degree program that is intended to prepare individuals for managing public organizations, policy courses should be avoided for the simple reason that they take time and attention away from the critical competencies that prospective managers must obtain.

During their careers, city managers occasionally draw on research in public policy issues when helping city councils solve problems. But these issues are so varied that it would be futile to try to cover them in any meaningful way. Some MPA programs offer long lists of electives in issues such as regional planning, urban issues, housing, crime, and transportation systems. These may be interesting for students, but they will be long forgotten as their future city councils struggle with policy decisions.

Comment e-mailed by a Delphi panel member after completing the first round survey. Participants were promised that their comments and ratings would be kept anonymous.
on licensing cats, installing speed bumps in neighborhoods, regulating billboards, allowing beer in parks, banning the use of exhaust brakes, or using goats instead of herbicides to eliminate blackberry patches.

**City Management Competencies in Context: Comparisons with Other Managers**

The list of 118 individual competencies shown in Table 5 (Chapter 4) is long, but many of them would be included in a detailed profile for an ideal city manager candidate that an executive recruiter might develop. An important result, and one that was not expected, is how similar this list is to the competencies that are attributed in the literature as being necessary for federal agency managers and private business managers. There are some important differences, and certainly the context of management varies between these different sectors. To the extent the field of public administration emphasizes the differences, though, especially between business and government managers, the large area of overlap between the two may be missed, and the field risks becoming irrelevant to managers at any level of government. Further, theory on city management competencies could in many instances be adapted either from business management, or from public administration in general (encompassing state and federal agency as well as local government management). The success of adapting theory in this way is influenced by the type and degree of differences in managing the different sectors. The next sections will examine more closely the similarities and differences between city management and business and state/federal agency management, and the implications for associated management competencies.
The following discussion is admittedly subjective. This study did not include a literature search on differences in the management environment of cities, other governments, and the private sector. Many of the observations noted here are based on the researcher’s own experience working with managers in these sectors, and on material covered in general texts and other sources on public administration. This study, however, has found a strong match in the competencies required for managing these three sectors, particularly in the area of managing the internal organization. A number of managers make successful transitions between the sectors, providing some evidence that their skills and knowledge are transferrable. Some key similarities and differences between the sectors are suggested below (along with their implications for management), but certainly further research is needed to base these kinds of observations on a firm footing in the literature.

Business Managers and City Managers: Similarities and Differences

There is a great deal of evidence that private and public sector managers share much in common. As one of the Delphi panel members noted, “Daily we must use the skill and knowledge of understanding organizational behavior and understanding why people act and respond why they do.” Working with people is at the heart of what managers do, and with the possible exception of attitudes toward public service, people are the same whether they work in a government or business organization. The same individuals are simultaneously citizens of a variety of levels of government and customers of a wide variety of businesses. The field of public administration itself
draws heavily on organizational theory developed primarily from the private sector, from Taylor and Chester Barnard to Henry Mintzberg. Public administration pioneers such as Herbert Simon kept a foot planted in each sector, and much of their work was valid in both. The brief review of MPA course syllabi that was conducted as part of this study found many of the texts on leadership and management borrowed from the private sector, by such authors as Jim Collins, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, and Patton, Ury & Fisher ("Getting to Yes").

Competencies in delegation, empowerment, coaching, discipline and direction, developing and communicating the mission of the organization, project management, fine tuning the organizational structure, and quality control would seem to apply across the sectors, and these occupy a large amount of any manager's time. Some aspects of employee motivation apply in both a public and private setting, although distinctions such as attitudes toward public service can make a significant difference here. Communication skills—formal presentations, writing, and above all informal interpersonal communications—are critical to all managers, and again there is no reason to believe that these would be different skills in public and private organizations.

There are some important differences; a few are suggested in Table 22. First, in the absence of a profit goal, performance measurement is more complicated in government organizations than in private businesses. For many public agencies, it is difficult to even define what the goals of the agency are, let alone find ways to measure progress toward the goals. In the face of this kind of ambiguity in goals, a
private sector manager might have a difficult time articulating the mission of the organization, setting clear direction, and measuring performance and quality.

Table 22. Some possible differences between city and business management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Private Sector</th>
<th>Public Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Profit goal</td>
<td>Ambiguous goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business ethics</td>
<td>Public service ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little public involvement in administrative decisions</td>
<td>Large public interest &amp; involvement in administrative decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade secrets</td>
<td>Transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’m the boss”</td>
<td>Sovereignty and rule of law constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer relations</td>
<td>Citizen engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, the profit motive may be over-emphasized as a clean and unambiguous goal of all private businesses. At the corporate level, some companies must balance competing goals of making life better both for their customers and their own employees. And for divisions within a larger corporation, ambiguous goals may be fairly prevalent. Exactly what is the goal of the human resources office, and how is it measured? One of the goals of the marketing department is, presumably, to increase the “blue sky” value of the company, but exactly what is that, and how does the marketing manager know that he or she is making steady progress toward that goal?

Second, aside from organizational goals, the personal values of public managers may be different, in important ways, from their private counterparts. Only four of the twelve tenets of the ICMA code of ethics (Appendix C) might be reflected in a corporate code of ethics (personal integrity, continual professional development, fairness in personnel decisions, and avoidance of personal aggrandizement). The other
eight emphasize public service, respect for democratic processes, egalitarian service to all people, professional support of elected officials and obedience to their policy direction, giving city councils credit for their policy initiatives, staying out of politics, transparency, and resisting political encroachment on administrative authority.

Developing ethical competencies in prospective city managers must be done in the context of public service ideals; it is only through study and practice in resolving public service ethical dilemmas that an individual can approach mastery of this competency, regardless of his or her innate sense of personal integrity. Similarly, the Delphi panel rated as essential the competency of modeling ethical and public-service-oriented behavior. It is not just any ethical behavior that must be modeled, it is specifically the public service ethics exemplified by the ICMA code.

Some have argued that modern business managers would do well to adopt a code of ethics more similar to that of public managers, where service to, and respect for, the larger community are emphasized over personal or even corporate gain. There may also be a trend in which entrepreneurial public managers, in an era of declining support for public goods paid by taxes and a retrenchment to quasi-private goods paid by fees, think and act more like private managers. Aside from a possible blurring of ethical foundations, some competencies associated with ethics, such as processes for resolving ethical dilemmas, would draw on very similar skills and knowledge in the two sectors.

Fred Thomas, professor at the Atkinson School of Business, Willamette University. Personal conversation, February 2009.
Third, the active involvement of the public (both elected officials and citizens) in the administration of the organization is a clear difference between the private and public sectors. Recent events have shown that the CEOs of banks and auto makers have struggled with the concept that the public might want to have a say in their use of corporate jets or allocation of performance bonuses merely because public funds are being used to prop up the companies. In this arena, they lack a competency that is essential to public managers in general, and especially to city managers.

The reformers who created the council-manager form may have sold the neat concept that elected officials focus on the ends of government, and the professional managers take care of the means. As practitioners know (and scholars such as Svara have made clear), city council members and citizens are often not encumbered by ends-means distinctions. In many instances, how a service is provided is more important to the city council and citizens than why it is provided. Many of the most inefficient and ineffective municipal services (for example, responding to medical emergencies with a $500,000 pumper and three firefighters) have very strong public support.\textsuperscript{228} Tenet Ten of the ICMA code of ethics states, "Resist any encroachment on professional responsibilities, believing the member should be free to carry out official policies without interference."\textsuperscript{229} This seems to rest on outdated theory of city management, and clinging to this ideal leaves city managers unprepared to deal with the real (and legitimate) involvement of political actors in administrative functions.

\textsuperscript{228} Scott Lazenby, \textit{Playing with Fire} (Lincoln, NE: Writers Club Press, 2001).
\textsuperscript{229} \url{http://www.icma.org}, (accessed May 12, 2009).
The Delphi panel rated as important the competency, “skill in appropriate accommodation of council and citizen interest in the administration of the organization.” There appears to be a fair amount of theory showing why this competency is necessary, but far less on the more urgent question of how managers should manifest this competency. And we certainly won't find theory on this competency in a business school.

A closely-related city management skill that does not receive much attention in the literature is the ability to discern which services can be provided on a rational basis, and which must be provided according to community preferences or dictates, which may be based on emotion and personal values. This notion is expressed as the competency—rated as essential by the Delphi panel—of knowing which issues to push and which to let slide. Prospective city managers would be well-served by theory that produces easy-to-read signs of political quicksand, rather than leaving them to develop this theory tacitly through painful experience.

Another key difference between the private sector and city management (perhaps less so between business managers and state and federal managers) is the need for a set of competencies relating to citizen engagement and community building. Business leaders, like city managers, need to have skills in collaboration, conflict

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230 John Carver, *Boards that make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997). Carver has, for one, developed a theory that boards should take an additive approach to policy-making and a subtractive approach to administrative involvement: “we will do these things to make our world a better place; the CEO can do anything reasonable to carry out our goals except this.”

231 I have seen city council members recalled from office when they suggested to neighborhood associations that there might be better solutions to neighborhood traffic problems than speed bumps.
resolution, and group processes, so there are some several common competencies in this area. But where a business manager might use a focus group comprised of customers as a tool for product development or quality control, for a city manager, a citizen engagement process is an end in itself; civic engagement is a public good. Jack McGowan, former executive director of Oregon’s SOLV nonprofit, has stated that the primary benefit of the organization’s annual beach clean-up events is the act of bringing strangers together in public service; the reduction of litter is a secondary benefit.\textsuperscript{232} City managers need competencies in civic engagement, developing consensus on community vision/mission, understanding and exploration of community values and needs, and community-building strategies, and again, these would probably not be emphasized in the field of business administration. Finally, while the public manager’s requirements for transparency and adherence to rule-of-law constraints in governance may not require a different set of skills from those of their business counterparts, knowledge of these requirements and experience in working under them are critical to being competent as a public manager.

Certainly there are wide differences in services and products provided by cities and private firms, but there is large variation within the sectors as well as between them. Most city managers and managers of larger businesses must be generalists, because the functions their organizations provide are too varied and complex to be mastered by a single individual. Even a small city can provide police, fire, library, parks, senior services, transit, water, sewer, planning, economic development, building

\textsuperscript{232} Personal conversation, 2006.
inspection, and municipal court services to the public, along with internal services of finance, human resources, and information technology. Cities may also provide cemetery and crematory services, and operate Internet utilities and airports. Some knowledge of common and important municipal services is important, but probably more critical is competence in acquiring new knowledge in different functional areas. City managers have transitioned fairly easily to county administration (with its far greater emphasis on social and criminal justice services), in the same way that the CEO of a soft drink company transitioned to Apple Computer, and an executive with a film production company took over management of Disney’s theme parks.

Thus, there are differences between the private sector and city management that require a different set of competencies. This discussion has identified about a dozen of them. Even within these areas there are some commonalities. And beyond these, there remain over a hundred city management competencies identified in the Delphi process that appear to be closely aligned with competencies needed by business managers. The similarities are far greater than the differences.

City Managers and State/Federal Managers: Similarities and Differences

As shown in Table 6 in Chapter 4, the public management competencies identified by Van Wart—based primarily on research on federal managers—line up fairly closely with those for city managers as identified by the Delphi panel. As with the correlation between city management and business management competencies, this result is logical in view of the fact that any manager spends a good deal of his or
her time dealing with people, especially people within the organization. It can be shown, however, that state and federal management competencies are a subset of (wholly contained within) the set of city management competencies. In other words, due to the nature of the differences in the levels of government, there are competencies that city managers use that state and federal managers do not need, but few if any competencies needed by state and federal management that city managers do not use.

Table 23 summarizes some of the differences in the structure and characteristics of the levels of government that affect the nature of management. City managers have little in common with the heads of the executive branches of the state and national governments (governors and presidents). City managers typically have more executive authority; especially in the case of states, governors share executive authority with an array of commissions and elected department heads. While city managers serve as policy advisors and play an active role in policy-making, it is done in cooperation with the elected city council. Governors and presidents have a mandate from the electorate to act as an independent initiator of policy, often in opposition to the legislature. City managers are non-partisan professionals and are selected by city councils based on management competencies. Governors and presidents tend to be lawyers (or actors or professional wrestlers), they are partisan, and they are selected based on their ability to win elections. For all these reasons, if city managers are similar to any positions in the state and federal governments, it is to the professional agency and mid-managers who make up the majority of the public administrators in these levels of government.
Table 23. Some differences between local and state/federal levels of government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Local Government</th>
<th>State &amp; Federal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legislative body</td>
<td>Small, nonpartisan, volunteer</td>
<td>Large, partisan, paid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Responsible for most executive functions</td>
<td>Many executive functions controlled by commissions or separately-elected politicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Governments</td>
<td>Over 80,000</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of Population Served</td>
<td>Under 5,000 (average)</td>
<td>6 million (state ave.) to 300 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Scope</td>
<td>Small (typically less than 10 square miles), concentrated, and local</td>
<td>Large and dispersed. State average-74,000 square miles; US total 3.7 million square miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager’s Responsibilities</td>
<td>Budget process, personnel policies, union negotiations, purchasing and contracts, drafting legislation.</td>
<td>Most administrative functions managed by central agencies; e.g., OMB, GSA, Office of Personnel Management, State Dept. of Administrative Services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO Experience/Education</td>
<td>Management-oriented; typically with MPA or MBA</td>
<td>Politically-oriented; typically with law background.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But like the CEOs of corporations—and unlike state and federal agency managers—city managers play a major role in establishing organizational processes in areas such as the budget, purchasing and contracting, and personnel administration. They negotiate union contracts and buy and sell land. For state and federal managers, these processes and functions are typically handled by central administrative units. The supervisor of the Mt. Hood National Forest (a relatively high-level USDA manager) cannot choose to allow program managers to carry over budget savings, cannot establish dollar amounts for pay grades, does not negotiate union contracts,
cannot sub-lease space in the headquarters building, and has no supervisory authority over IT staff. Especially in the majority of US cities that have populations of less than 25,000, these are all responsibilities that rest with the city manager, and require competence in these areas.

Due to the size and compactness of cities, the nature of civic engagement is significantly different for city managers than it is for most state and federal managers. They need competencies in facilitating group discussions and participatory decision making by local citizens, educating and coaching community leaders to improve their effectiveness, articulating community vision/mission, community-building and creating a sense of place. These would not be as important to the typical state or federal agency manager.

Because of a need for fewer management competencies, state and federal managers may have more capacity for building knowledge and expertise in the specific functional areas in which they work (similar to mid-managers in cities). In contrast, city managers may be generalists not only because cities typically provide a very wide range of services but also because the job requires such a wide range of leadership and management skills and knowledge.

That said, the knowledge and skills used on a daily basis by city managers seem to be largely the same ones used by state and federal managers. Leading and managing a group of staff require similar competencies in all three levels of government. Professionalism and a public service ethic are common values. Working with groups, negotiation, and collaboration are all important competencies for
managers in all three levels.

Figure 21 gives a simplified representation of the relationship between competencies for city management, business management, and federal/state management, based on the results of this study. Most of the competencies required for day-to-day management of an organization are common to all three sectors. Business CEOs and city managers are responsible for the creation of major systems such as budget and personnel systems, which require additional competencies. In their roles as community leaders/facilitators, city managers require further competencies in group processes and community building. The area of common competencies is larger than the area of the differences.

![Figure 21. A schematic representation of a possible relationship between competencies for city management, business management, and federal/state management](image)

This study has shown the wisdom of the question that Laurel McFarland
(Executive Director of NASPAA) posed: "What competencies do the best city managers possess?" These competencies include most of the competencies that other public managers require, along with some others. And if state and federal management competencies are a subset of city management competencies, then any gaps in the theoretical foundation for city manager competencies will necessarily affect other public managers.

Implications for County and Special District Management

By now, the message should be clear that management competencies are broadly shared among all managers. Most of the competencies used on a day-to-day basis by city managers will also be used by county administrators and executive directors of special districts. Because they are active on ICMA boards, the Delphi panel included several county managers. Managers can and do move fairly easily between cities and counties, and between council-manager cities and mayor-council cities. This section will describe some of the differences in the organizational and community settings of county and special district managers that might lead to differences in required competencies. But again, the differences are less important than the similarities.

County Administrators

Many (but by no means all) county administrators work under a commission

233 Quoted in the introduction to the dissertation.
form of government, where the elected commissioners have, by charter or state law, executive authority, but delegate most of the executive authority by ordinance or policy to the professional administrator.\textsuperscript{234} The professional administrators often must contend with the fact that many key department heads, such as police chief (quaintly referred to as sheriff) are directly elected and are not supervised by the administrator. Interestingly, these organizational differences have no effect on the necessary competencies identified by the Delphi panel. The county administrator, like a city manager, must have skills in the appropriate accommodation of council and citizen interest in the administration of the organization. Council/manager role/relationship skills, collaboration, building trust, negotiation, mediation, persuasion, and team-building, are especially important competencies for a county administrator who may, on paper, have little formal authority. But these were all rated by the Delphi panel as important or essential competencies for city managers, too.

Services provided by counties typically differ from those provided by cities. Counties are more likely to provide social services, courts, and jail services, and cities are more likely to provide police, fire, parks and recreation, library, and utility services.\textsuperscript{235} But the Delphi panel rated knowledge of specific services as relatively less important than other management competencies. County administrators, like city managers, must be generalists. This is one area, however, that separates city and county managers from special district managers.

\textsuperscript{234} The primary source for facts on county and special district management is Scott D. Lazenby, "A Local Government Taxonomy" (Unpublished paper, Portland State University, Portland, OR, 2008).

\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 17.
Special District Managers

Special districts are often called “special purpose” districts, and they are typically limited by law to providing a single service (e.g., water), or a narrowly defined set of services (e.g., fire suppression and emergency medical response). Therefore, special district managers are often expected to possess expertise in the functional area associated with the service. That said, it is not unusual for city managers, lured by the typically higher pay of district administrators, to make a smooth transition from city management to special district management. The ability to learn new knowledge and skills is an important competency for any manager.

Like city managers, special district managers interact with a local community. This interaction can be fairly tame (as in the case of a sewer district), or more challenging (as in the case of a school superintendent), so the requirements for competence in group processes, civic engagement, and conflict resolution may vary widely. Competencies in community-building are typically not as important for special district managers, since this responsibility is usually left to the general purpose (city or county) government. Even here, though, the usefulness of these competencies should not be underestimated. In remote rural areas, the fire district is often the only local government, and the fire board chairperson can take on an unofficial role as the “mayor” of the community, thrusting the fire chief into the community-building role.
of the city manager. Thus, while there are some differences, the results of this study appear to have general application to senior managers at all levels of local government. Public service ethics, interpersonal communications, human relations skills, managing the organization, and competencies in group processes are important for all local government managers. Functional knowledge of specific services will differ, and some special district managers have less need of community-building competencies.

Public Administration Literature

It is conceivable that an academic field might exist that would provide research and theory development that would ultimately lead to better management of public (government) organizations. It would address questions such as these: should a city manager hire a generalist as police or fire chief, or hire a public safety specialist? In making hiring decisions, how can the manager articulate the (positive) values of the organization and select candidates based on those values? What exactly should a city manager do if a city council member is having personal problems that affect his or her ability to be a community leader? How should the manager, after the demise of the local newspaper, deal with an increasingly hostile and uncivil string of anonymous postings about the government in a prominent blog? When joining the local Rotary club for a lunch meeting, should the newly-hired manager dress more formally than

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236 This assertion is based on a great deal of (personal) anecdotal data; it might make an interesting subject for more formal research.
most of the participants? What should the manager do about a department head who seems more interested in a high salary and a nice office than in serving the public?

The academic field that explores questions like this could be multi-disciplinary, drawing on research from many other fields, but especially on branches of psychology and the sub-field of sociology that deals with organizational theory.

Since it would focus on the administration of public organizations rather than businesses, this field could be called, for example, public administration. But that label is already taken, by something else. As shown in Chapter 4, the public administration academic literature (at least based on the sample of 3,811 articles used in this study) gives very little attention to theory that directly bears on the knowledge and skills of senior level public managers. It provides somewhat more attention to descriptions and analysis of the manager’s environment: the larger organization, the government, or the community. But as Figure 16 shows, issues of public policy dominate the public administration literature.

This should not be a surprise. Over three decades ago, Emanual Wald (as part of his dissertation work) completed a Delphi process very similar to the one used in this study. Wald limited panel participation to scholars in public administration, and he used the Delphi technique to develop a consensus on the future direction of the field. He found that:

Public policy and policy analysis will be the main area of future research in public administration. It will be addressed to the questions of “who benefits” (emphasizing client values), economy and efficiency, and the normative
This emphasis on public policy and policy analysis is not a bad thing. There are certainly many unsolved public problems—the US criminal justice system, the war on drugs, the declining (relative to the developed world) performance of K-12 education, US foreign policy, and the accelerating obliteration of large numbers of species on the planet—that could benefit from research. Public administrators can also occasionally draw on this research when and where citizens are willing to accept rational solutions to problems.

There are two problems, however, with this policy orientation. The first is that many of these articles are presumably written by scholars who also teach public administration, including professional degree programs for managers of public organizations. Writing, studying, and receiving professional recognition for one area and then teaching something completely different could lead to cognitive dissonance. This could help explain the tendency for public policy courses to slip into public management curricula.

The second problem is the apparent lack of current research that would build the knowledge and skills needed by public administrators. This would not be a problem if everything we need to know about these competencies has already been studied and discovered. Challenges in effectively performing all the activities of public managers may have already been solved, and public administration has been

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237 Emanuel Wald, "Toward a Paradigm of Future Public Administration: A Delphi Exercise Aimed at Defining the Scope and Methods of Public Administration from 1973-1990" (D.P.A., Syracuse University), 204.
freed to move on to other pursuits.

There is evidence, however, that some opportunities for additional research on improving the management capacity of government still remain. For example, a skill as basic (and as often used) as motivating employees is indeed based on a strong theoretical foundation (with labels like Theory Y and Theory Z, among others). But it appears that some relevant research in the field of industrial psychology has had little exposure in the public administration literature. Management consultants continue to admonish managers that the way to motivate employees is to enrich their jobs, a concept that was introduced over forty years ago. But more recent research has shown that this works only for some individuals, and is actually de-motivating for others. Public managers appear to be receptive to learning about this research; this signals that they sense something missing in the theory that has thus far been available to them.

As another example, most texts on budgeting, even Professor Bland’s excellent guidebook on budgeting for local government managers, focus on issues such as setting budget priorities, public involvement, and performance measurement. But for over two decades, a small number of cities have experimented with variations on “Expenditure Control Budgeting,” an innovation designed to match budget rules with

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a management philosophy of empowering operating managers. There are very few scholarly writings on this concept, and the scholars urge that more research should be done to evaluate it.

Journal Opportunities

While it would probably be difficult to make a business case for any new printed journal (on any subject), the field seems open for at least an on-line journal specializing in academic research and theory development that would address public management competencies. ICMA's PM and to a lesser extent Governing magazine do address best practices for senior level public management, but their intended audience is the practitioner, and they are not subject to peer review or other academic standards. As Figure 14 indicates, of the academic journals sampled, Public Administration Quarterly, American Review of Public Administration, Public Productivity and Management Review and Administration and Society had the highest percentage of articles addressing research related to management competencies, but this amounted to only five or six percent for each of them. Public Productivity and Management Review had the highest percentage of articles (seventy-one percent) addressing some aspect of the competencies identified in the Delphi study, but typically from the organizational perspective (level of analysis) rather than the

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manager’s perspective. Not surprisingly, the majority of these articles focus on the internal administration of the organization, with a large number on performance measurement.

Other studies\textsuperscript{242} have limited analysis of articles on city management competencies to \textit{Public Administration Review}. Indeed, a journal that describes itself as the “leading journal in the field of public administration”\textsuperscript{243} might appear to be the likely source for research that would support the practice of public administration. But the journal is published by the American Society of Public Administration, which has itself evolved to a point where it serves a very broad range of membership constituencies, and not just those interested in senior level management of public organizations. Six of the sampled journals had greater coverage of management competencies than did \textit{PAR}.

\textit{Is Public Management Theory Covered in Other Fields?}

Given the overlap between private and public sector management competencies, if any discipline might be an alternative source of research on public management, it would be the field of business administration. This study did not encompass a detailed content analysis of business administration journals, but a brief survey was performed. Similar to public administration, business administration is an


unbounded multi-discipline field, so identifying the journals that represent the field is a challenge. Coe and Weinstock, based on a survey of business school faculty, identified sixteen journals that were the most respected within the business administration academic community.\textsuperscript{244} Administrative Sciences Quarterly topped the list, followed by Academy of Management Journal and the Harvard Business Review. A brief survey of these journals seems to indicate that a coding of these, similar to what was done for the public administration journals, would also find relatively few articles that relate to competencies used directly by senior level managers. Many of the articles appear to summarize research or theory development based on an organizational level of analysis, such those with titles like “Flow in Knowledge Work: High Performance Experience in the Design of National Security Technology” or “Organizational Identity Orientation: Forging a Link between Organizational Identity and Organizations' Relations with Stakeholders.”

Moreover, a content analysis of MBA program curricula, similar to the one done here for MPA curricula, might find similar gaps in coverage of key management competencies (whether used by private or public sector managers). Jeffrey Pfeffer and Christina Fong examine an apparent divergence between management competencies and the content of MBA programs:

A large body of evidence suggests that the curriculum taught in business schools has only a small relationship to what is important for succeeding in business. Porter and McKibbin noted that many critics felt that quantitatively based analytical techniques received too much attention, while there was too...

little attention given to developing leadership and interpersonal skills, and too little emphasis on communication skills. Not surprisingly, a survey conducted in 1982 by the Graduate Management Admissions Council came to the same conclusions regarding "perceived weaknesses in personal skills." Mintzberg and Gosling noted that "contemporary business education focuses on the functions of business more than the practice of managing." 245

The gaps noted by Pfeffer and Fong include the areas of leadership, interpersonal skills, and communication skills. This study has found a similar gap in the city management competency sub-categories of leadership, human relations, and interpersonal communications, while there was a much larger focus on technical/analytical skills and the functions of cities, or service delivery.

Again, it is beyond the scope of this study to examine the field of business administration (or any other field) as an alternative to public administration as a source for research and theory on city (or public) management competencies. But it does appear that the field of public administration could make a significant contribution to management practice in general by emphasizing research directly focused on the competencies needed by managers.

Opportunities for Further Research

This study set out to identify gaps, if any, between competencies necessary for effective city management and the theoretical foundation that supports those competencies. Gaps were in fact found, so the obvious next step for research would be to identify existing theory or develop new theory that would fill those gaps. The

following discussion suggests some of the more important areas for further research, based on the findings of this study.

Table 20 of Chapter 4 provides a starting point for identifying potential areas for theory development or discovery. The competencies which emerged from the study as not having a corresponding theoretical foundation may well have a base of readily-available theory. They are discussed here simply because neither the MPA course content analysis nor the academic journal content analysis coded them as being specifically covered by a course or an article. Clearly, many of them have some associated theory.

A number of human relations competencies appear to lack an associated theoretical foundation. The most important ones (as rated by the Delphi panel) are listening skills, the ability to cope with difficult people, and two aspects of “cultural competency”: the ability to communicate among diverse groups, and the related skill of interacting with diverse cultural or socio-economic backgrounds. There is surely existing psychological and sociological theory that informs these competencies. Due to the pace of globalization, it is likely that research in cultural competency will need to continue as different populations enter the global marketplace and as migration patterns shift.

Some innate traits, such as personal integrity and self-motivation, can be eliminated from consideration for theory development. It is probably possible for adults to improve on some of these innate traits, but it probably will not be through theory-based technical knowledge. Others, though, deserve consideration, where
theoretical work can in fact play a role in development or strengthening of competencies. As an example, a keynote speaker at the 2007 ICMA annual conference was Daniel Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind*. His message was that not only is the trait of creativity necessary to any manager’s success in the twenty-first century, but also that this trait can be nurtured through exercises based on psychological and neurobiological theory.

Another competency that appears to be an innate trait is described in this study as “judgment—knowing which issues to push and which to let slide.” For public managers, this competency is often brought into play when evaluating whether a rational approach to solving a problem (either internal to the organization, or a problem of public policy) will be futile or even dangerous to a career. Practitioners would probably assert this competency can only be gained through experience, and certainly experience is critical to skill development. As noted above, experience in this area is often gained by learning from mistakes. The development of theory that would provide guidance to managers could allow them to avoid some painful lessons. It could initially take the form of observing and articulating the “theory-in-practice” that good managers use in exercising judgment. Further research could test the hypothesis that, using the “once bitten twice shy” principle, managers may too often avoid potentially controversial issues, and thus miss windows of opportunity to implement rational solutions to problems. This research could in turn lead to more

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247 Argyris and Schön, *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness*
formal strategies for trial balloons (rather than gut instinct) to test the environment before either attempting an organizational or policy change, or dismissing it out of hand.

Some of the important leadership competencies that emerged as not having a theoretical foundation suffer from the false positive problem noted above. The competencies of delegation and empowering employees, and mentoring and coaching individuals in the organization, are almost certainly covered in some of the few MPA courses that address leadership skills. There should be some theory, probably developed in one of the branches of psychology, to back up the teaching. The business bestsellers of the past few decades have emphasized these competencies, although the quality of the research associated with these works is often questionable. Another competency, engaging employees during difficult times, is especially important in the current deep recession, and research is being done now to test theory against the empirical data that are being accumulated.248

The kind of theories discussed here are clearly the kind of “theory of the middle range” that Merton describes.249 They are “special theories applicable to limited conceptual ranges”250 and not grand sweeping theories of management in general. That is not to say, however, that there are no opportunities for fundamental breakthroughs in understanding that can have a major influence on how competencies

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248 Unknown author, “Managerial Attitude, Financial Condition and Downsizing Strategies in City Governments: An Assessment of Managers’ Perception” (unpublished manuscript submitted for peer review).
249 Merton, On Theoretical Sociology: Five Essays, Old and New
250 Ibid., 51.
are shaped. A competency that slipped through the “no theory” filter is hiring employees. This is certainly addressed in human resources classes, and in journals on personnel administration, so its inclusion in the “missing theory” list is simply because it was not coded as being the central topic of a course or article. But even here, there may be opportunities for tapping into “bigger” theory that could inform the more special case of hiring. For example, the field of psychology seems to have developed a consensus that there are five basic factors that describe personality traits (the “Big Five”).\footnote{They are openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. See for example Robert Hogan, John Johnson and Stephen R. Briggs, \textit{Handbook of Personality Psychology} (San Diego: Academic Press, 1997).} It would seem that these factors might be tied to a person’s success in different kinds of positions; for example, the specific personality traits of a good parks director might be different from those of a good police chief. It should also be possible to test for these factors as part of a hiring process. But this application of theory on the “Big Five” did not appear to be considered in any of the 3,811 articles sampled in this study. It could be an excellent opportunity for further research.

Two different group process competencies appear on the list of those with inadequate theory. One is the ability to diplomatically disagree with elected officials and present alternative courses of action (this was suggested by one of the Delphi panel members, and in the second round, ranked by the rest of the panel as being essential). The key phrase is “diplomatically disagree,” and this in turn implies the need for other, related competencies: judgment as to \textit{when} to disagree, listening skills, understanding psychological needs of others, and persuasion. In this area, many
managers fly by the seat of their pants, and lack of competence may help explain the relatively short average tenure of city managers. What exactly explains the success of those managers who have taken a fairly active policy leadership position, and yet have enjoyed a long working partnership with their high-ego city council members?

Another important competency—and one where it is safe to assert that there is little associated theoretical work—is strengthening the relationship between the city council members and the mayor. Scholars including James Svara have noted the importance of the city manager’s role in this area, but there is relatively little work on the theory behind success in this competency. The theoretical parts are probably all there—group dynamics, power in relationships, counseling and coaching, conflict resolution—but assembling these parts into a coherent whole would make a significant scholarly contribution to the profession.

Articulating the community’s vision or mission also emerged as an essential competency lacking a theoretical foundation. Some work has been done in this area, and so this is another case of a false positive, but nonetheless it seems to receive relatively little attention in MPA programs or scholarly literature. It is also one of the few that is characteristic more of city (and county) management than of business or federal agency management.

Figure 11 indicates the emphasis of MPA courses, by sub-categories of competencies. The areas that receive relatively little attention could signal

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252 See, for example, Daniel Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).
opportunities for research, if the lack of coverage is due to the lack of available theory. For example, the study found only two required courses and nine elective courses on competencies within the subcategory of group processes. There were some journal articles addressing this subcategory, but it does seem an area ripe for more research. As a specific case, sharp drops in technology costs mean that wireless remote polling units (like those used by game show audiences) are suddenly within financial reach of any government, for use by groups of a dozen to several hundred participants. Using these devices could improve the competency of city managers in facilitating group dialog. What can we learn from the subfield of group psychology that will inform the effective use of instant polling? Similar trends are taking place in on-line polling and forums, and here too there are probably excellent opportunities for research.

Finally, several factors that are important in the preparation of future city managers were left completely out of this study, and these areas may also be fertile ground for research. Figure 2 of Chapter 1 provides a conceptual diagram of the relationship between theory and the building of professional (city management) competencies. To the extent that theory influences competence, it does so through the moderating influence of pedagogy (how students are taught) as well as the learning skills of the student. The apparent lack of available theory (as gauged by the content of MPA courses) may not in fact be a lack of available theory but instead a problem of pedagogy or design of program content. To achieve an education that culminates in a masters degree takes at least twenty-four years of an individual's life, and a financial investment of well over $150,000. If most of the necessary theory is in fact available,
and if individuals emerge from this process lacking a foundation for many of the competencies they will need as managers, then perhaps a different approach is called for. Again, this question is outside the scope of this study. Since most schools and universities (at least those offering MPA degrees) in the US are public agencies, this is simply a public management problem, and the management competencies identified here could be used to solve it.


White, Leonard D. *The City Manager.* Social Science Studies, Directed by the Local Community Research Committee of the University of Chicago, no. IX. Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1927.


Appendix A: City Management Competencies Identified by the Delphi Panel--Commentary

The city management competencies identified in this study were found to be important by a panel of experts (practitioners, scholars, and executive recruiters who specialize in placing senior local government managers) using a Delphi process. The initial list of competencies was developed with the help of a four-person “key informant” panel (all seasoned practitioners, one of whom is now in his second career as a scholar). An additional twenty-two competencies were added in response to suggestions from the Delphi panel members.

Partly because many different people proposed the competencies (and their associated labels or wording) for the study, there is some overlap in the areas of skills and knowledge. Further, there is some variation in the level of detail or specificity within the list of competencies. For example, the “ability to translate [city] council policies into action” must surely depend on many other competencies (leadership, supervision, project management, etc.). Others, such as “disciplining employees,” are more specific.

There was no attempt to provide definitions for the competencies, but in some cases explanatory language was added. For example, the competency, “aesthetic sense,” was qualified by the words “recognizing both beauty and ugliness (e.g., in urban form, building design).” Organizational theory included the description, “what organizational processes and structures work best under different circumstances.”

The following comments are offered as a guide to the simple list of competencies that the Delphi panel identified as being necessary (or at least useful) for local government management. The comments are based partly on the literature on public administration and local government management. They are also based partly on the researcher’s thirty years of experience in the profession, and are thus subjective. For this reason they are included in an appendix rather than in the body of the dissertation.

The competencies are organized by four categories and twelve categories, and within the subcategories, by importance as rated by the expert panel. The aggregate mean ratings are shown in parentheses. A rating of five means the competency is viewed as being essential; four means it is important, and three means it is useful.
### Competencies

#### 1. Foundational Traits and Skills

**A. Ethics**

**Essential**

- Personal integrity (4.9)

  Appears near the top of the list of required competencies for managers of all sectors. It is manifested by behaviors such as honesty and following through on personal commitments.

- Modeling ethical and public-service-oriented behavior (4.8)

  Includes “walking the talk,” but also aspects of servant leadership, where serving the public is modeled by the manager’s interactions with staff and council.

- Public service ethic (4.6)

  Manifested especially in unhesitating service to individuals who are the most unpleasant or society’s outcasts.

- Processes for resolving ethical dilemmas (4.5)

  ICMA has for many years worked to give its members tools to resolve choices among competing principles, and to deal with the gray areas of public service ethics.

**Important**

- Cultural competence; appreciation of diversity; promoting diversity in the organization (4.0)

  Similar to competencies in the interpersonal communications and human relations subcategories, with an emphasis on personal values. Evidence for competence in this area is the manager’s words and actions that support and encourage diversity in the organization.

- Ability to factor social equity in policy decisions (3.8)

  Clearly a normative and active role for the city manager as a positive influence in social equity. Consistent with a public service ethic.

**B. Interpersonal Communication Skills**

**Essential**

- Interpersonal communication: one-on-one (4.5)

  Most training and education seems to focus on writing and formal presentation skills, although there exists a body of literature on effective informal one-on-one communications.
### Competencies

**Important**

- Written communication (4.3)  
- Interacting with news media (4.2)  
- Formal presentation skills (4.2)  
- Speaking (extemporaneous) (4.1)  
- Ability to communicate complex technical information (3.7)

**Comment**

- Especially business writing: staff reports, memos. Now professional use of e-mail and blogs must also be included.
- A number of best practices, if not theory, underlie this competency.
- Extensive resources exist for building this competency, although some managers still punish audiences with PowerPoint.
- Extemporaneous speaking with groups of people, which occurs far more often than formal presentations.
- "Technical information" can range from truly technical details—such as the most effective way to treat sewage—to solutions to complex public policy problems.

#### C. Human Relations

**Essential**

- Ability to build trust (4.8)  
- Listening skills (4.7)  
- Ability to communicate among diverse groups (4.5)

**Important**

- Interacting with individuals from different cultural or socio-economic backgrounds (4.4)
Competencies

- Ability to cope with difficult people (4.0)

Comment

A skill that is used often, with individuals in the organization, with citizens and other individuals outside the organization, and occasionally with individual city council members.

- Persuasion (3.9)

Comment

It has been over seventy years since the publication of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, and there are still principles that can be applied to develop this competency. It must be based on a foundation of public service ethics to avoid becoming mere manipulation.

- Understanding of personality differences (3.8)

Comment

Management consultants have made the rounds with variations on the Myers-Briggs personality type indicators, and managers have found them helpful. More can be learned from the field of psychology.

- Understanding psychological needs of others; psychology of groups and individuals (3.7)

Comment

The principle of walking in the other person’s moccasins. Differs from the preceding competency in the emphasis on psychological needs, as compared to basic personality differences.

D. Personal Traits and Abilities

Comment

In spite of repeated requests to focus on competencies limited to knowledge and skills, both the key informant panel and the group of experts in the Delphi process urged the addition of competencies that seem more akin to innate traits and abilities. The literature on private sector and general public administrator competencies includes these kinds of traits. Even if many depend on genes and experience, the application of theory can at least hone and extend most of these.

Essential

- Decision making/problem solving (4.8)

Comment

Analytic techniques are useful, but for local government managers, skill in solving problems in conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity is especially critical.

- Judgment—knowing which issues to push and which to let slide (4.8)

Comment

Includes the ability to identify the key values of the organization or community in order to be able to choose among values.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competencies</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to find solutions to complex problems (4.6)</td>
<td>Can include related competencies of innovation and creativity. Most complex problems faced by city managers involve people, not technical issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Initiative; self-motivation</td>
<td>Arguably an innate trait, but if so, why do self-help books sell so well?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Important</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to anticipate issues and resolve them before they become problems (4.5)</td>
<td>Includes an understanding of the clues that tell a manager that things aren’t quite right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Team-building (4.4)</td>
<td>A skill that the manager draws on under many circumstances: working with employees, with community groups, and as an advisor to the city council members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to acquire new knowledge and learn new skills (4.4)</td>
<td>Includes the ability to reflect on the things that are learned through experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to multi-task (4.4)</td>
<td>Especially important for city and county managers due to the wide variety of services provided and simultaneous projects that are managed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to accept constructive criticism (4.3)</td>
<td>A competency that should be fairly well developed by the time an individual enters a graduate program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Resiliency (bounce back from setbacks) (4.3)</td>
<td>Martin Seligman(^{253}) has shown us that even optimism can be a learned trait.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Giving credit and accepting blame (4.3)</td>
<td>The competency isn’t demonstrated when the manager is able to do this, but only when he or she actually does it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clear sense of purpose (4.2)</td>
<td>Requires several other competencies, such as public service ethic, and ability to identify and articulate the values and vision of both the organization and community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Crisis management (4.2)</td>
<td>Not just in the context of disasters or emergencies, but also in responding to shocks to the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Continuing professional and personal development (4.2)</td>
<td>Similar to ability to acquire new knowledge, but specific to the process of self-assessment and intentional seeking of education and training. The guiding principle of ICMA’s credentialing program.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Competencies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Personal time management (4.2)</td>
<td>Post-secondary education either builds this skill or filters for it, but it can be honed through the effective use of tools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Innovation, creativity (4.2)</td>
<td>Largely dependent on the way an individual is wired, but exercises and practice can be helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Effective use of negotiation strategies (4.1)</td>
<td>An often-used skill, both professionally and in life in general. Labor contract bargaining is an obvious application, but the manager exercises some aspect of informal negotiations almost daily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional personal appearance (4.0)</td>
<td>Local government managers are not expected to be fashion leaders. Poor skills in this area, however, can hamper the manager’s effectiveness in interacting with other people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take care of one’s own physical and mental well-being (4.0)</td>
<td>As with continuing professional development, requires self-assessment and a purposeful response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to set personal priorities (3.9)</td>
<td>Many researchers have written on both the importance of this skill and ways to build competence in it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of humor (3.9)</td>
<td>In a environment of mostly irrational people and processes, a well-formed sense of irony is helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Balance confidence with humility (3.8)</td>
<td>The Delphi panel member who suggested this competency (a veteran scholar of local government) put it this way: “Balance humility and confidence to be human: avoid being a gold-plated ass.” Competence in this area probably requires some amount of self-awareness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interdisciplinary problem-solving (3.8)</td>
<td>A component of this competency is being alert to new (or unfamiliar) disciplines that might hold answers to difficult problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Empathy and compassion (3.8)</td>
<td>Two separate traits, but related.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Risk-taking (3.7)</td>
<td>Includes not only the willingness and courage to take calculated risks, but the ability to identify the organization and community’s level of risk tolerance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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254 See, for example, Daniel H. Pink, *A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005)
Competencies

Useful

• Aesthetic sense: recognizing both beauty and ugliness (e.g., in urban form, building design) (3.2)

Comment

Managers can hire individuals who are skilled at designing the built environment, but it is helpful if the manager can recognize when they get it right.

2. Managing the Organization

A. Leadership

Essential

• Ability to translate council policies into action (4.8)

Comment

The central element of a city manager’s job description, and one that in turn depends on many other competencies (listening skills, council/manager relations, organizational leadership, direction, and project management, to name only a few).

• Council/manager role/relationship skills (4.8)

Comment

A rich body of literature underscores the importance of this competency, and suggests skills and tools that can be used.

• Developing and communicating the mission of the organization (4.6)

Comment

The importance of this skill has been clearly demonstrated in the case of private sector leaders. The challenge for local government managers is clear communication of the organization’s mission when it provides a wide range of services and functions to a wide range of citizens, customers, and stakeholders.

Important

• Delegation; empowering employees (4.4)

Comment

A management competency that has been known since the beginning of civilization. Empowering employees goes beyond giving them challenging assignments, but also equipping them with the tools to be successful.


256 Exodus 18:1-27
## Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competencies</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Motivating employees (4.3)</td>
<td>Includes awareness that different individuals are motivated differently, and skill in tailoring the motivational approach accordingly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Direct supervision of subordinates (e.g., department heads) (4.3)</td>
<td>A competency necessary for any supervisor. For city managers, the ability to accept and accommodate strong egos (often seen in police and fire chiefs) is critical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mentoring and coaching individuals in the organization (4.1)</td>
<td>One of the &quot;soft skills&quot; that appears to distinguish leadership from some of the more technical aspects of administration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engaging employees during difficult economic times (4.0)</td>
<td>The importance rating may reflect the fact that the Delphi exercise was conducted in the middle of the worst recession since the Great Depression. Always a useful skill, though, in view of the cyclical nature of the economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional development of employees (3.8)</td>
<td>Beyond simple training of employees, it includes attention to building career paths and providing work experiences that stretch the individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Continuous re-examination of the core business (3.8)</td>
<td>Related to performance measurement and quality control, this requires vigilance to ensure that the organization is moving with changes in the environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collaborative labor/management relations (3.7)</td>
<td>The emphasis is on the word &quot;collaborative.&quot; Often a challenge, since collective bargaining laws assume an adversarial, rather than collaborative, relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Effective handling of personal/emotional challenges faced by employees (3.7)</td>
<td>Does not suggest that the manager need be a counselor and fix all employees' personal problems. But skill in the appropriate response and awareness of resources that employees can draw on is used often.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to adjust management approaches in response to generational differences (3.6)</td>
<td>&quot;What do you mean I can't update my Facebook page at work??&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Competencies**

- Entrepreneurial management (3.5)

**Comment**

The relative rating of this competency may have slipped somewhat since the initial publication of *Reinventing Government.* Still an important competency in a continuing environment of low public support for taxes.

**B. Administration**

**Important**

- Strategic planning (4.4)

The relative rating of this competency may have slipped somewhat since the initial publication of *Reinventing Government.*

- Using the budget as a management tool; budget preparation (4.3)

- Project management: coordinating resources, staff, and schedules (4.2)

- Ability to do more with shrinking resources (4.2)

- Performance measurement (3.8)

- Efficiency in operations; "lean" processes (3.7)

**Comment**

- Applies both to the formal processes of strategic planning as well to the more informal "strategic thinking" (e.g., when to schedule a bond election, when and how to make an organizational change). Skills and knowledge in this area also apply to the process of community strategic planning.

- A great deal of the research on budgeting focuses on the role of the budget as a policy instrument (typically at the federal level). But a competent manager can use the budget as a tool to work with, rather than against, principles of empowerment and motivating staff.

- Includes both formal project management tools and practices, and more informal processes of direction and feedback.

- See comment above (on difficult economic times). Goes beyond downsizing and related staff issues to the creation of new processes and systems to increase efficiency.

- There has been much work in this area by both scholars and practitioners. Especially challenging for some municipal functions (e.g., operation of the municipal court, review of subdivision applications) with multiple objectives and stakeholders.

- More specific than the "ability to do more with shrinking resources." Includes skill in adapting principles from industrial engineering to governmental services.

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### Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Contract management (3.5)</td>
<td>An increasing challenge as governments are “hollowed out” and more functions are provided by contract. Initiating, maintaining, and terminating a contractual arrangement can be much more complex than most people realize.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Risk management: general liability, employment law, insurance issues (3.4)</td>
<td>All managers need some knowledge of these issues; in small cities, the city manager often serves as risk manager.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quality assurance; total quality management (3.3)</td>
<td>As with “lean” processes, managers have adapted, with changes, quality management principles derived from industrial processes to municipal services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Privatization—shifting former governmental responsibilities to the private sector (3.0)</td>
<td>Distinct from contract management in that it requires competence in sensing when formerly public goods can be provided by the private sector, and in successfully managing the transition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### C. Human Resources Administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Hiring employees (4.1)</td>
<td>For the CEO, hiring key department heads such as police chief or planning director is especially critical. This competency area extends to the establishment of hiring practices for the entire organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Disciplining employees (3.8)</td>
<td>The senior manager needs to be able to do this well, and to ensure that other supervisors are competent too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Establishing policies and procedures (3.8)</td>
<td>Requires a balance between meeting the demands of legal and risk management concerns and giving staff room to exercise judgment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Training/educating other employees (3.7)</td>
<td>Differs from the professional development competency above by focusing on formal training programs, including new employee orientation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organizational theory: what organizational processes and structures work best under different circumstances (3.7)</td>
<td>Covers a very wide range of theory on organization structure and processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competencies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Comment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Useful</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Labor negotiations; collective bargaining law and procedures (3.4)</td>
<td>Not as critical in some states and cities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Compensation systems (3.4)</td>
<td>Useful to know, especially in the face of uninformed public discussions of ideas such as pay for performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D. Legal/Institutional Systems</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Important</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• General knowledge of national, state and local laws governing municipalities (4.0)</td>
<td>Includes knowledge of constitutional law, state law governing cities, and municipal charters and codes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intergovernmental relations (4.0)</td>
<td>Includes competencies in collaboration and communications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Development of intergovernmental partnerships (4.0)</td>
<td>Similar to intergovernmental relations, but more specific to the formation of partnerships and crafting formal intergovernmental agreements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to be persuasive with state and federal government officials (3.8)</td>
<td>Not merely lobbying, but ability to interact with state and federal officials as partners in governing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Useful</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Forms of government (3.4)</td>
<td>Helpful to know, but city managers are rarely consulted on changes in the form of government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Administrative law; knowledge of legal institutions and processes (3.3)</td>
<td>An important distinction between local government and private business management. The ability for local governments and its officials to act is often based on rule-of-law principles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Managing relations with nonprofit organizations (3.2)</td>
<td>Increasingly important as governments contract with or shed service responsibility to nonprofits. Includes appreciation of the fact that nonprofits remain private, not public, organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E. Technical/Analytic Skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Important</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Financial analysis of policy options (4.1)</td>
<td>Includes several other competencies, including estimating budgets, forecasting, and cost/benefit analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Capital improvement planning &amp; financing (3.9)</td>
<td>Includes knowledge of the interaction between capital (one-time) and operating (ongoing) budgets.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>• Using office technology (computers, PDAs) (3.7)</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial forecasting (3.7)</td>
<td>Managers can no longer avoid this, when so many of their constituents, council members and staff are comfortable with personal technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost/benefit analysis (3.5)</td>
<td>Consultants can be used to establish complex econometric models (that will be only as good as the projections for independent variables). Managers need to master basic tools of graphical analysis and other techniques for making projections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tax policies and strategies (3.4)</td>
<td>Includes the ability to quantify the value of externalities and other costs and benefits that do not have a market value.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Setting prices of public goods and services (3.3)</td>
<td>Specifics vary by state, but knowledge of property, income, and sales taxes is often used by local government managers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Applications of technology—IT, web design, other Internet applications (3.2)</td>
<td>Increasingly important as entrepreneurial cities set prices for municipal Internet service, membership at the city fitness center, and library cards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trend forecasting (3.2)</td>
<td>Ability to keep up with technological advances is as important as knowledge of current IT systems.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. Community Leadership/Facilitation

#### A. Group Processes

| Essential |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------|
| • Ability to diplomatically disagree with elected officials and present alternative courses of action (4.5) | Includes many other competencies: judgment (when disagreement is appropriate), listening skills, policy analysis, ability to identify community values, political sensitivity, and persuasion, among others. |

| Important |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------|
| • Collaboration (4.4) | Useful in many areas of the manager's work. Competence in this area includes skill in leading others to collaborate. |
**Competencies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competencies</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to analyze and communicate public policy alternatives (4.4)</td>
<td>This competence is independent of any specific policy domain. A city manager will more likely be analyzing policy alternatives for dog parks or speed bumps than urban poverty or climate change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developing consensus on community vision/mission (4.2)</td>
<td>Competence includes the ability to “lead from behind” by being an effective facilitator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mediating and resolving conflicts between individuals and groups (4.2)</td>
<td>An (unfortunately) often-used skill. There is a good body of theory and excellent resources on building this skill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitating group discussions and decision-making processes (4.1)</td>
<td>Public hearings must be held to meet legal requirements, but they are notoriously ineffective for community decision-making. There has been good research on better alternatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Civic engagement skill (4.1)</td>
<td>Includes skill in using both traditional methods (e.g., advisory committees) and modern tools (e.g., web-based forums).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Educating and coaching elected officials and other community leaders to improve their effectiveness (4.1)</td>
<td>An important role for a city or county manager, but one that must be exercised with finesse: the council members are the manager’s bosses, and community leaders are often co-equals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strengthening council-mayor relationships (4.1)</td>
<td>Never in the city manager’s formal job description, but nonetheless a role that can make a difference in the effectiveness of the local government. Requires tact and the understanding of the psychological needs of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Skill in appropriate accommodation of council and citizen interest in the administration of the organization (3.9)</td>
<td>Citizens and council members are not often encumbered by concepts of policy-administration separation, or the difference between ends and means. Effective managers must learn to deal with that reality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**B. Community Building**

**Essential**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competencies</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Political savvy--sizing up community politics; political sensitivity (4.7)</td>
<td>Requires an understanding of dynamics of political processes and sources and uses of political power. The manager must avoid being a “political animal” while still being keenly aware that he or she works in a political environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Competencies

**Important**

- Articulating community vision/mission (4.7)

- Understanding and exploration of community values and needs (4.3)

- Community-building strategies (4.0)

- Methods for creating or enhancing the community's "sense of place." (3.6)

**Comment**

A subtle difference with "developing consensus" on community vision/mission, above. This competency emphasizes the ability to communicate an often ill-defined vision of the community's future.

Here the process itself—if it effectively engages citizens—can be a form of community building.

Tools range from modern forms of barn-raising (e.g., building playgrounds or homeless shelters) to development of civic institutions. There is some good recent research and experience in this area.

Especially important in times of rapid social change, and in the blurring of boundaries between suburbs.

**4. Service Delivery**

**Important**

- Effective implementation of programs and services (4.3)

- Functional/operational knowledge of common municipal services: police, fire, public works, planning, etc. (4.1)

- Public-private partnerships (3.8)

- Knowledge of specific services: emergency management; sustainability & environmental protection techniques; economic development; causes underlying urban problems (3.6)

**Comment**

A very general competency that requires many specific skills and areas of knowledge.

A local government manager is of necessity a generalist, but there is a set of services that most cities provide in common. The city manager should at least know why manhole covers are round.

Similar to contract management (above) and privatization, except the emphasis is on partnerships that are formed to provide a service.

The importance rating is a composite of ratings for individual services that were judged by the expert panel to be important rather than merely useful. These ratings would be subject to change over time; the term "sustainability" was not even in common usage two decades ago.

**Useful**

- Urban renewal and other redevelopment techniques (3.4)

Not an issue for some rural or suburban cities, or for many county governments.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competencies</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban/regional planning (3.4)</td>
<td>The relatively low rating is somewhat of a surprise. The competency is not as critical in low-growth or landlocked communities, and managers may see it as a technical (non-managerial) skill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code enforcement &amp; community beautification strategies (3.2)</td>
<td>Includes knowledge of when it is better to use a carrot (e.g., grants and volunteer projects), and when it is better to use a stick (e.g., enforcement of city &quot;nuisance&quot; codes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site development; urban economics (3.2)</td>
<td>Similar to urban renewal, above, but includes development of industrial and commercial sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing (3.2)</td>
<td>The relatively low importance rating might reflect the label’s connotations with private advertising. An important role for the manager is to help the government earn the trust and support of its citizens, and this is partly done through effective public relations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable housing strategies (3.1)</td>
<td>The importance of this competency depends largely on the location of the city (e.g., Vail CO versus a suburb of Detroit).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: ICMA Practices for Effective Local Government Management

1. Staff Effectiveness: Promoting the development and performance of staff and employees throughout the organization (requires knowledge of interpersonal relations; skill in motivation techniques; ability to identify others' strengths and weaknesses). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **COACHING/MENTORING** Providing direction, support, and feedback to enable others to meet their full potential (requires knowledge of feedback techniques; ability to assess performance and identify others' developmental needs)
- **TEAM LEADERSHIP** Facilitating teamwork (requires knowledge of team relations; ability to direct and coordinate group efforts; skill in leadership techniques)
- **EMPOWERMENT** Creating a work environment that encourages responsibility and decision making at all organizational levels (requires skill in sharing authority and removing barriers to creativity)
- **DELEGATING** Assigning responsibility to others (requires skill in defining expectations, providing direction and support, and evaluating results)

2. Policy Facilitation: Helping elected officials and other community actors identify, work toward, and achieve common goals and objectives (requires knowledge of group dynamics and political behavior; skill in communication, facilitation, and consensus-building techniques; ability to engage others in identifying issues and outcomes). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **FACILITATIVE LEADERSHIP** Building cooperation and consensus among and within diverse groups, helping them identify common goals and act effectively to achieve them; recognizing interdependent relationships and multiple causes of community issues and anticipating the consequences of policy decisions (requires knowledge of community actors and their interrelationships)
- **FACILITATING COUNCIL EFFECTIVENESS** Helping elected officials develop a policy agenda that can be implemented effectively and that serves the best interests of the community (requires knowledge of role/authority relationships between elected and appointed officials; skill in responsibly following the lead of others when appropriate; ability to communicate sound information and recommendations)
- **MEDIATION/NEGOTIATION** Acting as a neutral party in the resolution of policy disputes (requires knowledge of mediation/negotiation principles; skill in mediation/negotiation techniques)

3. Functional and Operational Expertise and Planning (a component of Service Delivery Management): Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **FUNCTIONAL/OPERATIONAL EXPERTISE** Understanding the basic principles of service delivery in functional areas—e.g., public safety, community and economic development, human and social services, administrative services, public works (requires knowledge of service areas and delivery options)
- **OPERATIONAL PLANNING** Anticipating future needs, organizing work operations, and establishing timetables for work units or projects (requires knowledge of technological
advances and changing standards; skill in identifying and understanding trends; skill in predicting the impact of service delivery decisions)

4. Citizen Service (a component of Service Delivery Management): Determining citizen needs and providing responsive, equitable services to the community (requires skill in assessing community needs and allocating resources; knowledge of information gathering techniques)

5. Performance Measurement/Management and Quality Assurance (a component of Service Delivery Management): Maintaining a consistently high level of quality in staff work, operational procedures, and service delivery (requires knowledge of organizational processes; ability to facilitate organizational improvements; ability to set performance/productivity standards and objectives and measure results)

6. Initiative, Risk Taking, Vision, Creativity, and Innovation (a component of Strategic Leadership): Setting an example that urges the organization and the community toward experimentation, change, creative problem solving, and prompt action (requires knowledge of personal leadership style; skill in visioning, shifting perspectives, and identifying options; ability to create an environment that encourages initiative and innovation). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

   - **INITIATIVE AND RISK TAKING** Demonstrating a personal orientation toward action and accepting responsibility for the results; resisting the status quo and removing stumbling blocks that delay progress toward goals and objectives
   - **VISION** Conceptualizing an ideal future state and communicating it to the organization and the community
   - **CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION** Developing new ideas or practices; applying existing ideas and practices to new situations

7. Technological Literacy (a component of Strategic Leadership): Demonstrating an understanding of information technology and ensuring that it is incorporated appropriately in plans to improve service delivery, information sharing, organizational communication, and citizen access (requires knowledge of technological options and their application)

8. Democratic Advocacy and Citizen Participation: Demonstrating a commitment to democratic principles by respecting elected officials, community interest groups, and the decision making process; educating citizens about local government; and acquiring knowledge of the social, economic, and political history of the community (requires knowledge of democratic principles, political processes, and local government law; skill in group dynamics, communication, and facilitation; ability to appreciate and work with diverse individuals and groups and to follow the community’s lead in the democratic process). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

   - **DEMOCRATIC ADVOCACY** Fostering the values and integrity of representative government and local democracy through action and example; ensuring the effective participation of local government in the intergovernmental system (requires knowledge and skill in intergovernmental relations)
   - **CITIZEN PARTICIPATION** Recognizing the right of citizens to influence local decisions and promoting active citizen involvement in local governance

9. Diversity: Understanding and valuing the differences among individuals and fostering these values throughout the organization and the community
10. Budgeting: Preparing and administering the budget (requires knowledge of budgeting principles and practices, revenue sources, projection techniques, and financial control systems; skill in communicating financial information)

11. Financial Analysis: Interpreting financial information to assess the short-term and long-term fiscal condition of the community, determine the cost-effectiveness of programs, and compare alternative strategies (requires knowledge of analytical techniques and skill in applying them)

12. Human Resources Management: Ensuring that the policies and procedures for employee hiring, promotion, performance appraisal, and discipline are equitable, legal, and current; ensuring that human resources are adequate to accomplish programmatic objectives (requires knowledge of personnel practices and employee relations law; ability to project workforce needs)

13. Strategic Planning: Positioning the organization and the community for events and circumstances that are anticipated in the future (requires knowledge of long-range and strategic planning techniques; skill in identifying trends that will affect the community; ability to analyze and facilitate policy choices that will benefit the community in the long run)

14. Advocacy and Interpersonal Communication: Facilitating the flow of ideas, information, and understanding between and among individuals; advocating effectively in the community interest (requires knowledge of interpersonal and group communication principles; skill in listening, speaking, and writing; ability to persuade without diminishing the views of others). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **ADVOCACY** Communicating personal support for policies, programs, or ideals that serve the best interests of the community
- **INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION** Exchanging verbal and nonverbal messages with others in a way that demonstrates respect for the individual and further organizational and community objectives (requires ability to receive verbal and nonverbal cues; skill in selecting the most effective communication method for each interchange)

15. Presentation Skills: Conveying ideas or information effectively to others (requires knowledge of presentation techniques and options; ability to match presentation to audience)

16. Media Relations: Communicating information to the media in a way that increases public understanding of local government issues and activities and builds a positive relationship with the press (requires knowledge of media operations and objectives)

17. Integrity: Demonstrating fairness, honesty, and ethical and legal awareness in personal and professional relationships and activities (requires knowledge of business and personal ethics; ability to understand issues of ethics and integrity in specific situations). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **PERSONAL INTEGRITY** Demonstrating accountability for personal actions; conducting personal relationships and activities fairly and honestly
- **PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY** Conducting professional relationships and activities fairly, honestly, legally, and in conformance with the ICMA Code of Ethics (requires knowledge of administrative ethics and specifically the ICMA Code of Ethics)
**ORGANIZATIONAL INTEGRITY** Fostering ethical behavior throughout the organization through personal example, management practices, and training (requires knowledge of administrative ethics; ability to instill accountability into operations; and ability to communicate ethical standards and guidelines to others)

18. **Personal Development:** Demonstrating a commitment to a balanced life through ongoing self-renewal and development in order to increase personal capacity (includes maintaining personal health, living by core values; continuous learning and improvement; and creating interdependent relationships and respect for differences).

ICMA Code of Ethics

The mission of ICMA is to create excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional local government management worldwide. To further this mission, certain principles, as enforced by the Rules of Procedure, shall govern the conduct of every member of ICMA, who shall:

**Tenet 1**

Be dedicated to the concepts of effective and democratic local government by responsible elected officials and believe that professional general management is essential to the achievement of this objective.

**Tenet 2**

Affirm the dignity and worth of the services rendered by government and maintain a constructive, creative, and practical attitude toward local government affairs and a deep sense of social responsibility as a trusted public servant.

**Tenet 3**

Be dedicated to the highest ideals of honor and integrity in all public and personal relationships in order that the member may merit the respect and confidence of the elected officials, of other officials and employees, and of the public.

**Tenet 4**

Recognize that the chief function of local government at all times is to serve the best interests of all people.

**Tenet 5**

Submit policy proposals to elected officials; provide them with facts and advice on matters of policy as a basis for making decisions and setting community goals; and uphold and implement local government policies adopted by elected officials.

**Tenet 6**

Recognize that elected representatives of the people are entitled to the credit for the establishment of local government policies; responsibility for policy execution rests with the members.

**Tenet 7**

Refrain from all political activities which undermine public confidence in professional administrators. Refrain from participation in the election of the members of the employing legislative body.
Tenet 8
Make it a duty continually to improve the member's professional ability and to
develop the competence of associates in the use of management techniques.

Tenet 9
Keep the community informed on local government affairs; encourage communication
between the citizens and all local government officers; emphasize friendly and
courteous service to the public; and seek to improve the quality and image of public
service.

Tenet 10
Resist any encroachment on professional responsibilities, believing the member
should be free to carry out official policies without interference, and handle each
problem without discrimination on the basis of principle and justice.

Tenet 11
Handle all matters of personnel on the basis of merit so that fairness and impartiality
govern a member's decisions, pertaining to appointments, pay adjustments,
promotions, and discipline.

Tenet 12
Seek no favor; believe that personal aggrandizement or profit secured by confidential
information or by misuse of public time is dishonest.

Source: ICMA web site at
http://icma.org/main/bc.asp?bcid=40&hsid=1&ssid1=2530&ssid2=2531 (accessed
June 30, 2009)