

# Bridging the Gap: Leadership Challenges from the Midwest

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## Abstract

### ***Fundamental Governance Challenge***

How to bridge the gap between what is “politically acceptable” with what is “administratively feasible” in an environment where political compromise is unattractive while administrative practice and information is more complex.

### ***Leadership Challenge 1***

How to create and reinforce “bridge building” administrative roles and problem oriented approaches without becoming politically aligned or administratively compromised.

### ***Leadership Challenge 2***

How to link third party policy initiatives, cross sector partnerships, foundations, non-profit and other organizations with the breadth of public service values like representation, efficiency, social equity, and individual rights.

### ***Leadership Challenge 3A***

How to incorporate citizen engagement (planned and spontaneous, including social media) with traditional local government structures and processes.

### ***Leadership Challenge 3B***

How to embrace internal organizational networks while respecting traditional lines of authority.

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# Bridging the Gap: Leadership Challenges from the Midwest

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## *The Context and Overarching Challenge*

The relationship between political and administrative spheres of action endures as a central theme in public administration theory and practice. Originally, the relationship was conceptualized as a dichotomy—separate arenas of action (Ingraham, 1995). While this notion never accurately described the relationship in practice (Moynihan and Ingraham, 2010; Nalbandian, 1999), it fit nicely with normative theoretical issues of accountability (elected officials make policy and administrative officials implement it, and the one is accountable to the other) and also with the separation of legislative and executive powers which characterize the structure of federal and state governments. However, in council-manager government where formal legislative and executive powers are not separated into independent branches and the goal of the structure is not checks and balances, the relationship more accurately is described as a partnership. In fact, over time we have come to recognize one of the major functions of the city manager is facilitating the connection or partnership between the two arenas—sometimes with the manager being a strong, rather independent force advocating policy and protecting administrative thinking and at other times more of an ameliorating force, attempting to balance the two spheres leading to action (Svara, 2008).

In council-manager government during the past several decades, the relationship between politics and administration has most often taken the form of dialogue and debate over the city manager's role—particularly focusing on his/her involvement in politics/policy making (Nalbandian,

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2000). An unofficial consensus among experienced and thoughtful local government professionals suggests that city managers must be political sensitive, aware and involved but without becoming political aligned. Today, stimulated by the fiscal imperatives facing so many local governments, the manager's role once again has gathered attention, but with a twist. Contemporary city managers find their "bridging" role taking on more challenges. The salient question or debate is less about the manager's advocacy role in policy making and more about the basic leadership challenge of simply connecting the worlds of contemporary politics and administration so reasonable action can occur.

The manager increasingly is being called upon to articulate the fundamental relationship between politics and administration and to serve as a "bridge" between these spheres. In this paper, we conceptualize that role as "bridging the gap between the 'what' and the 'how'--what is politically acceptable and what is administratively feasible." *This imperative—which prominently shapes the contemporary manager's role--becomes in our view the fundamental leadership challenge.*

While the "go between" role of the city manager is not unfamiliar, the contemporary challenge requires adapted roles and responsibilities because it is occurring in a dynamic context where the two arenas (political and administrative) are growing farther apart. In some measure this increasing separation is inevitable. Today's professionals throughout local government functional areas like budgeting, human resources management, public works, public safety, etc. benefit from increasing levels of formal professional education, enhanced analytical tools, and continuing technical training reinforcing a disciplinary and technical mindset. Reputations are built and reinforced by one's professional/technical peers within disciplines that extend well beyond a local jurisdiction.

It does not seem a stretch to argue that today's professional administrators are more capable of doing their work than their predecessors if only because of the tools at their disposal. In contrast, one can ask whether today's local elected officials are more capable of doing their work than their

predecessors? Today's jurisdictions are more diverse as are councils, and there is no accepted way of one generation of elected officials to learn systematically from their predecessors.

At the same time these trends are taking place, the gap is accentuated by contemporary politics with an ideological, uncompromising bent which in some places seems to be filtering down to the local level of government. Contemporary politics that is framed by ideology and driven in large part by the search for identity is susceptible to the allure of the "confirming mind," an intellectual predisposition that seeks confirmation of its views rather than challenges (Festinger, 1957; Finkelstein, S., Whitehead, J., and A. Campbell, 2008). On the administrative side, enhanced analytical capacity means more data which reveals more complexity. Problems which formerly might have been seen in relatively simple terms/options, now gain nuances and equivocal alternatives. Thus, the simplistic themes and symbols contained in today's political stories and campaigns are undermined by the increasing complexity of the real world of problem solving—and the gap increases.

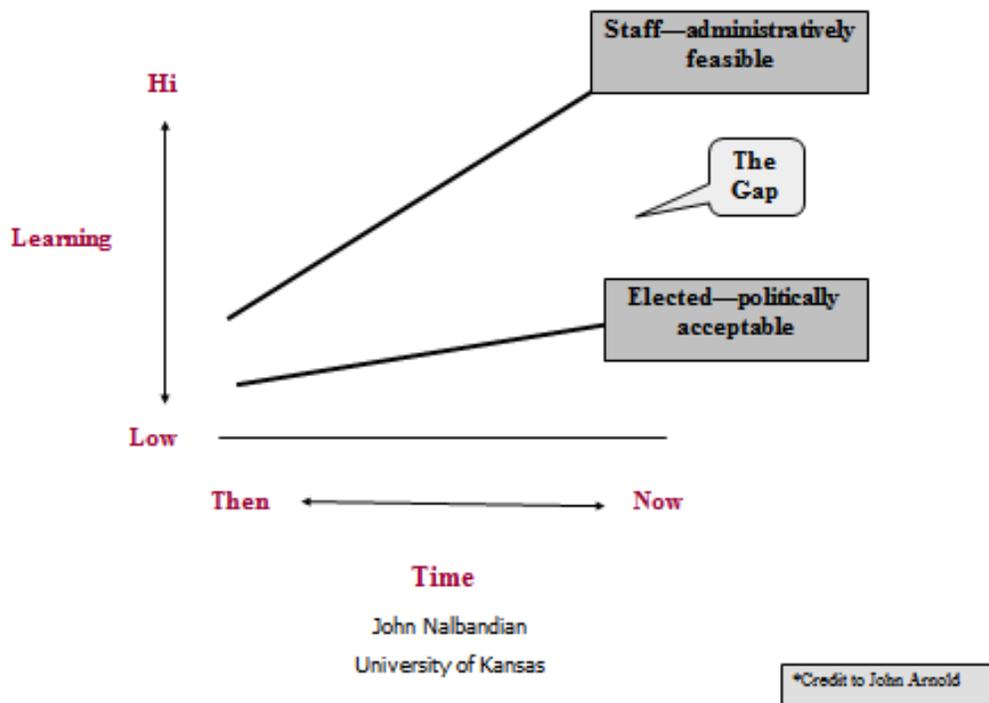
The recent Standard and Poor's downgrade of the United States credit rating provides poignant testament to the challenge of bridging the gap between political acceptability and administrative feasibility. The summary of recommendation states:

The downgrade reflects our opinion that the fiscal consolidation plan that Congress and the Administration recently agreed to falls short of what, in our view, would be necessary to stabilize the government's medium-term debt dynamics.

This statement suggests that the administrative feasibility of the proposed solutions, while appearing politically acceptable, lack credibility. In other words, the policy choice to reduce the debt has a low probability of working. The next paragraph speaks to the failure of politics and the ability to bridge the gap:

More broadly, the downgrade reflects our view that the effectiveness, stability, and predictability of American policymaking and political institutions have weakened at a time of ongoing fiscal and economic challenges to a degree more than we envisioned when we assigned a negative outlook to the rating on April 18, 2011.<sup>4</sup>

The challenge we are conveying can be visualized in the following graphic.



***Overarching Leadership Challenge:***

***How to bridge the gap between what is “politically acceptable” and administratively feasible where political compromise is unattractive while administrative practice and information is becoming more complex.***

<sup>4</sup> <http://tpmdc.talkingpointsmemo.com/2011/08/sp-downgrades---full-ratings-agency-statement.php>. Accessed 2011-09-04

In our view, this overarching challenge results in three consequences, each of which contains its own leadership challenges.

***Leadership Challenge One:***

***How to create and reinforce “bridge building” roles and problem oriented approaches without becoming politically aligned or administratively compromised.***

New roles and responsibilities are emerging for local government professionals. These facilitative roles and responsibilities are adaptations designed to “bridge the gap.” City managers find themselves spending increasing time with elected officials, attempting to understand, to convey information, to cajole, and to convince. But, they also find themselves at times challenged by an administrative cadre that 1) has become more specialized and discipline oriented, and 2) at times is not ready to accept that a reset in local government is occurring. Disciplinary thinking can be reflected in a function as simple and basic as building inspection. The more complex a building project, the more it makes sense to employ inspectors who are specialized. But, as we know, specialization comes at a cost, and that cost is seen in coordination and “relationship building” with clients. At the level where the city manager confronts public problems, specialized thinking and disciplinary responses can be detrimental to connecting with the political arena.

As the city manager’s role as a “bridge builder” is accentuated, he/she is likely to spend more time with governing body members than in the past and less time translating political thinking into administrative problems to be solved. One consequence is that department heads who used to earn respect for “running their departments efficiently and effectively and producing policy related information and recommendations” are now expected to move into the gap and to understand the concept of “political acceptability.” Once in the gap, they are expected to broaden their mental maps to focus on problems like economic development, education, public safety, and quality of life, requiring an

interdisciplinary, interdepartmental approach that may extend beyond the organization itself. Those who add value are not the ones who simply accept “politics” or who in the past have worked the gap to their department’s advantage; those who meet challenge one understand the values tradeoffs that are taking place, and they increasingly find themselves involved in the world of politics—which the manager can no longer shield them from—hopefully becoming sensitized to political dynamics without being captured by them.

While political capture is one risk, the department head working the gap faces another—appearing to his/her staff as abandoning administrative and professional integrity. We can see that working the gap is partly talent and art; it remains to be seen whether the skills can be taught. In sum, we have leadership challenge one.

***Leadership Challenge Two:***

***How to link third party policy initiatives, cross sector partnerships, non-profits and foundations with the breadth of public service values like representation, efficiency, equity, and individual rights.***

The second challenge associated with the widening gap is stimulated in part by the erosion of legitimacy of governing institutions coupled with the proliferation of policy oriented organizations (Rosenau, 2003) and alternative service providers which enter the gap. In other words, as the gap widens, third parties can seize an opportunity to exercise influence formerly reserved for those operating within formal governing structures and processes. The proliferation of third parties like foundations, non-profits, private sector conveyors of services, and ad hoc advocacy groups has become commonplace as have terms like “shared services” and “cross sector partnerships.” The concept of “policy entrepreneur” suggests networks of both government and third party interests. Examples of the challenges of expanded policy networks and independent actors can be seen in the Kresge Foundation’s urban renewal initiative in Detroit. The fundamental question which has been raised by some in Detroit is “who is running our city?” (Dolan, 2011) with the implied question “whose values will prevail?” The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s efforts to reform elementary education with an increased emphasis

on pay for performance and related initiatives effectively is acting as if it were a school board (Banchemo, 2011).

The increasing emphasis on third party governance raises issues of accountability to public values and government institutions and processes and also increases the challenge of coordinating multiple independent initiatives in the absence of formal community wide coordinating mechanisms.

***Leadership Challenge Three A:***

***How to incorporate citizen engagement (planned and spontaneous, including social media) with traditional local government structures and processes.***

In some ways, the third challenge is a direct consequence of the gap as well as a contributor to it. The difficulty of bridging the gap in part results from skepticism about the role and effectiveness of government and a consequent lack of trust and credibility stimulates the need for local governments to go directly to the original source of legitimacy—citizens themselves. Access to information about local government, community issues, and government operations has exploded, enabled by new communication technologies and outlets. And every citizen has become a potential blogger/journalist. Some engagement with citizens is planned and some unplanned. One of the greatest challenges is finding ways to successfully merge new avenues of engagement and access to multiple sources of information and communication through social media with traditional governing structures and processes.

***Leadership Challenge Three B:***

***How to embrace internal organizational networks while respecting traditional lines of authority.***

Interestingly, while the thrust of engagement has been focused most visibly on citizens, parallel work is occurring within local government organizations. The effort to bridge the gap between political acceptability and administrative feasibility has impacted disciplinary administrative hierarchies. For some years we have seen “interdepartmental teams,” “innovation groups,” “employee committees,”

which are attempts not only to create informal problem solving groups and temporary structures within organizations, but also initiatives formally to “bridge” disciplinary thinking. It is not farfetched think of a time in the future when the metaphor of the organization as a “community” will become more commonplace increasingly guiding adjustments in administrative structures and decision making processes and organizational cultures themselves.

## ***Methodology***

Utilizing the overarching and three resultant challenges as a framework, we drew upon the experiences of the Olathe, Kansas, leadership team to develop a more specific leadership agenda. The leadership team consists of department heads, some division directors, and others who operate just below the city manager level. There are about 25 people on the team in this city of some 125,000 which is located in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Olathe is a suburban community with a history of growth. It is accustomed to professional government, has a stable council, and is regarded among local government professionals and academicians as an innovator in the region. In the last decade, the city has seen significant growth in its immigrant population, and like other local jurisdictions has found itself in a retrenchment mode for a couple of years.

To identify their challenges, we engaged the leadership team on three occasions. We posed the challenge presented by the “gap” as the fundamental leadership framework and then suggested they focus their challenges in terms of altered roles, third party governance, and engagement. The actual text of the overarching challenge and three resultant challenges as presented above were drafted following our consultation and subsequent communication with the leadership team as well as other research. Following a brief description of the gap and associated three challenges, we asked small groups of the leadership team to think about the departmental, organizational, and community challenges they face in the contemporary environment. Once they had identified the challenges, we

asked each member of the leadership team to join with another and describe the challenge more fully and to provide an Olathe example, if possible.

The authors gathered the data—each piece of data contained the text of a leadership challenge and a contextual elaboration reflecting the Olathe experience. We attempted to categorize each challenge according to either the overarching challenge or one of the three described in the previous section. Then, we further attempted to categorize according to whether the challenge was experienced at departmental, organizational, or community level. The last step proved ineffective with too much uncertainty over which level particular challenges resided. So we eliminated that step.

In our next section, we list the challenges according to our framework. Each is described in more detail in Appendix A.

## ***The Leadership Challenges***

***Overarching Challenge: How to bridge the gap between what is politically acceptable with what is administratively feasible where political compromise is unattractive while administrative practice and information is becoming more complex.***

### ***Overall 1***

How do local governments develop long-term, generational thinking, given the presence of shorter-term politics?

### ***Overall 2***

How to develop/craft/temper alternatives and recommendations to what is politically acceptable while maintaining administrative and professional integrity and standards?

### ***Overall 3***

How do communities with a history of rapid growth face the challenge of dealing with expectations rooted in the past and developing alternatives for future growth that respect but are not dictated by the past?

***Leadership Challenge One: How to create and reinforce “bridge building” administrative roles without becoming politically aligned or administratively compromised.***

***Roles and Responsibilities 1***

How do emerging roles and responsibilities for bridging the gap affect confidence that elected officials and administrative staff have in the city manager and department heads? Specifically, as department heads begin to move into the gap and gain more understanding of political acceptability will their role undermine confidence of those who work for them? Will credibility be questioned by elected officials, and what implications could this have on the level of confidence placed in the organization's leaders?

***Roles and Responsibilities 2***

As top-level employees move further into the gap, how can line staff be empowered to accept a more diverse set of responsibilities?

***Roles and Responsibilities 3***

As a large percentage of the workforce becomes eligible for retirement, the organizational challenge of retaining knowledge and organizational culture and values arises. How do local governments face the challenge of developing and implementing a values based succession plan?

***Leadership Challenge Two: How to link third party policy initiatives, cross sector partnerships, non-profits and foundations with the breadth of public service values like representation, efficiency, equity, and individual rights.***

***Third Party 1***

What kind of leadership can/should local governments exercise in a third party relationship?

***Third Party 2***

How should local governments address challenges posed by the presence of third party services that may be in the interest of the greater metropolitan public good, but contrary to what is politically acceptable within the jurisdiction?

***Third Party 3***

How should local governments respond to cultural differences involved with cross-sector partnerships?

***Third Party 4***

How can local governments support a more diverse and capable workforce that is representative of those who are being served when it does not control training and education of potential employees?

***Leadership Challenge Three A: How to incorporate citizen engagement (planned and spontaneous, including social media) with traditional local government structures and processes.***

***Community Engagement 1***

How can organizations produce valid and relevant information, given the prevalence of online media sources and other easily accessible information sources?

***Community Engagement 2***

There is a growing gap between the haves and the have-nots. How should this challenge of equity be addressed by local governments?

***Community Engagement 3***

Resource and staffing challenges are projected which may result in services being delivered below expectations. What is the resulting role of elected officials? What is the role of advocates and social media?

***Leadership Challenge Three B: How to embrace internal organizational networks while respecting traditional lines of authority.***

***Organizational Engagement 1***

As an organization expands departmental boundaries and becomes more collaborative internally through ad hoc teams, committees and other arrangements, the challenge of assigning responsibility arises. How does added responsibility coalesce with lines of formal responsibility and authority?

***Organizational Engagement 2***

In an environment of scarce resources, local governments are more at risk of developing a “winner-loser” mentality within their organizations. It is important for the jurisdiction to understand how its culture reinforces or ameliorates this view.

***Organizational Engagement 3***

Organizations are faced with the challenge of encouraging risk-taking among employees and incorporating flexibility into formal job duties, as traditional boundaries shrink. This challenge is intensified by uneasiness caused by the current economic climate, which can cause employees to retreat to a ‘bunker mentality.’

***Organizational Engagement 4***

Is there a tipping point at which it is more likely for a non-union organization in a right-to-work state to be influenced by public sector unions?

***Discussion and Conclusions***

The concept of the gap resonated with the leadership team as it has with city managers in other professional development settings. That said, the more an administrative staff member’s work brings

him/her in contact with council work, the more salient the concept seems to be. In our case, the exercise of developing the challenges appeared educational, with those who frequently interact with the governing body more quickly grasping the relevancy of the concept.

The exercise reflects and also stimulated thinking about the city of Olathe's strategic future. Yet to be determined is if the results of this exercise in one jurisdiction will be helpful to others. And if it is helpful, what is it in the challenges that carry the most value—is it the framework of the gap? The specific challenges? The illustrative applications? The answer to the question is important because it conveys information about the relative value of conceptual tools versus single application case studies or leadership experiences. We suspect that conceptual frameworks are more valuable for the manager and jurisdiction facing broad, undefined problems that will not be solved in one fell swoop (Heifetz, 1994). Therefore, what will be of particular interest to us at the Big Ideas conference are answers to the following questions:

- 1) What in this paper is most transferable across jurisdictions?
  - a) The framework of the gap?
  - b) The specific challenges?
  - c) The snapshot descriptions of how Olathe is dealing with some of the challenges?
- 2) If the framework turns out to be transferable, what is the role of case studies as opposed to conceptual work in framing Big Ideas?

## **APPENDIX A LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES DESCRIBED**

### **Overall Challenges**

#### **Overall 1**

**How do local governments develop long-term, generational thinking, given the presence of shorter-term politics?**

Local governments must recognize the full cost of ownership for its assets; while projects have a beginning, middle, and end they are only a part of a larger ownership model. As resources diminish, local governments are forced to live off the investments of prior generations with diminishing value, without addressing current needs, or making investments for the needs of future generations. This model is not sustainable and must be changed if a community is to continue to provide a high quality of life for its citizens. In other words, we need to face the challenge of sending a nuanced message in the age of a “bumper sticker culture.”

*The City of Olathe uses a business plan model during its budget process that enables it to focus departmentally on long-term thinking. The concept of the business plan is to bring the same long-term approach to operational issues, as has traditionally been placed on the Capital Improvement Plan. Each department completes a five-year business plan, which includes an environmental scan, identification of key issues and challenges, and strategies for implementation that meet the Council’s goals, and are aligned with the organization’s Balanced Scorecard.*

#### **Overall 2**

**How to develop/craft/temper alternatives and recommendations to what is politically acceptable while maintaining administrative and professional integrity and standards?**

Elected officials are often approached by constituents who are seeking a particular solution or outcome that may not be reasonable or feasible from a City staff standpoint. Moreover, a general community view on a particular issue can, at times, be contrary to the view of an elected official whose motives are sometimes unknown. The dilemma for staff becomes how to develop or craft recommendations or alternatives that temper the political environment without altering a strategic solution to the issue at hand.

*Olathe is characterized by a conservative governing body elected by a largely conservative electorate. That political reality has led over time to a governing body that is opposed to any increase in the mill levy for general fund operations. While this was not necessarily challenging during the high growth times of the early to mid-portion of the last decade, a changing economy has brought that challenge home because they have been slow to adjust service level expectations. While other communities all around us have responded to the downturn in the economy with tax increases that option was not in our “tool box”. Staff has had to adjust budget requests to governing body expectations challenging staff’s perception of community service expectations.*

#### **Overall 3**

**How do communities with a history of rapid growth face the challenge of dealing with expectations rooted in the past and developing alternatives for future growth that respect but are not dictated by the past?**

In today's economic context, government organizations are changing not only the way they deliver services, but also changing the services they deliver. Service expectations are not only a product of contemporary context but also of expectations nurtured in past experience. Communities must confront the tension between growth that follows comprehensive plans versus growth determined solely by the market place. While a balance may have been reached historically, the new economic environment creates uncertainty and challenges previous commitments.

*Olathe has the benefit of a new Comprehensive Plan to help address questions regarding future growth. It is important that the plan continue to be used as the policy tool to address scenarios and alternatives for the future. In other words, the City plans to use the tools it has, and to use them correctly. The issue is how immediate pressures and uncertainty in the future will affect political commitments to the plans.*

## **Challenges to Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Roles and Responsibilities 1**

**How do emerging roles and responsibilities for bridging the gap affect confidence that elected officials and administrative staff have in the city manager and department heads? Specifically, as department heads begin to move into the gap and gain more understanding of political acceptability will their role undermine confidence of those who work for them? Will credibility be questioned by elected officials, and what implications could this have on the level of confidence placed in the organization's leaders?**

*There are really two different facets to this issue. One would be the obstacle for the CM when the political will to do something doesn't meet the professional experience/expertise of the bureaucracy. An example of this would be a Council that will not support a mill levy increase regardless of the demand/needs/wants as determined by the bureaucracy. The other would be the obstacle for the CM when the political will to do something conflicts with professional experience/expertise of the staff. An example of this would be a Council wanting a local preference procurement policy contrary to the recommendations of staff. Both of these facets create potential obstacles for the CM from both the political side (the will) and the departmental (ability) sides of the gap.*

### **Roles and Responsibilities 2**

**As top-level employees move further into the gap, how can line staff be empowered to accept a more diverse set of responsibilities?**

As the city manager and department heads dedicate more time working in political roles, they spend less time on administrative activities; this can result in the creation of an administrative leadership void. Departments must rely more heavily on line staff to continue providing services and accomplishing their missions.

*The City of Olathe found that engaging and informing its supervisors has solidified a critical link between department heads and front line employees. The City recognized an information gap in its internal communications, with staff in supervisory roles across the organization not being adequately informed or engaged. To close this gap, Olathe invested in two programs. The first was a partnership with the University of Kansas Public Management Center to provide a customized Supervisory Leadership Training program to all City staff with supervisory roles. This three-day training incorporated the City's vision, mission, and values, to establish a shared supervisory framework for supervisors to employ as they*

*manage their line staff. The Quarterly Supervisors Forum is Olathe's second program dedicated to developing its supervisors. The forum provides supervisors an opportunity to discuss organizational issues, and promotes the exchange of information across the organization.*

### ***Roles and Responsibilities 3***

**As a large percentage of the workforce becomes eligible for retirement, the organizational challenge of retaining knowledge and organizational culture and values arises. How do local governments face the challenge of developing and implementing a values based succession plan?**

As the knowledge and skill expertise of the employment base continues to increase, succession planning has to shift to something focused not only on the challenge of the meeting the “knowledge” portion of the recruitment, but now more importantly, the “cultural” aspect. In other words, as organizations look to replace retiring workers, getting people that “fit” with the organizational culture becomes more important than finding the person with the “right” skill set. For the most part, talent is easier to find than someone that fits the culture. While the loss of organizational knowledge and skills can be a “speed bump” to a high performance organization, the loss of momentum due to the lack of fit with culture and values can set the leadership and direction of the organization back significantly.

*The City of Olathe meets this challenge from two directions. The first is in recruitment from outside the organization. When recruiting from outside, we first try to convey our values and our culture through our job announcements thereby giving the potential applicant an idea of the culture that they would be coming into (See Appendix B for a recent job announcement). During the selection process, we use several different teams to interview the candidate, giving us several different perspectives on “fit”. Finally, we have several different tools we use, such as the Kolbe assessment, that helps us match up “best fit” for the positions that we are looking for.*

*In terms of nurturing talent internally, we have implemented an Emerging Leaders Program. Two sets of employees are identified for this program: those that might assume a key leadership role in the organization within five years, and those that may assume key leadership positions beyond a five-year period. This program is intended to prepare these employees in previously identified leadership competencies. The City also invests in its emerging leaders through a Mentor Program, providing targeted development to certain individuals, by pairing them with mentors within the organization. Success of this program depends upon retention of the most promising employees.*

## ***Third Party Challenges***

### ***Third Party 1***

**What kind of leadership can/should local governments exercise in a third party relationship?**

When contracting for services with a third party, a local government must determine how much flexibility to permit the third party and the level of accountability. Political predispositions may favor contracting out, and calculated decisions must be made regarding the utilization of private contractors to perform technical work when staff may already have the technical competency to do that work, or when the local government may have traditionally provided those services. Local governments must also be cognizant of the political dynamics involved when considering the abandonment of certain services, with the assumption but not guarantee that a non-profit provider will step in to fill that service need. Local governments must also be concerned with the ability of non-profit organizations to

demonstrate the capacity to provide services, while also assessing what the jurisdiction's role should be in cultivating the capacity and development of the third party provider.

*The City of Olathe contracts with the Olathe Chamber of Commerce for economic development and Convention and Visitor's Bureau services. Citywide transient guest tax is remitted to the Chamber as part of the annual budget process so that they may perform these services on the City's behalf. The new contract, put into place this year, requires enhanced reporting, performance measurement, and accountability. The City must ensure the Chamber meets these requirements; to do this, it is important for the City to understand the Chamber's needs for training, its technological capacities, and its available staff resources. The City must also be cognizant of how implementation of these requirements will impact future budgets and how to set reasonable goals to measure the Chamber's performance in successfully achieving the City Council's service objectives.*

### **Third Party 2**

**How should local governments address challenges posed by the presence of third party services that may be in the interest of the greater metropolitan public good, but contrary to what is politically acceptable within the jurisdiction?**

Local governments may be providing services that are also provided by other non-profit or private organizations in the same metro area. The challenge facing local governments is to understand whether a duplication of service exists, and if so, to determine whether the level of service that can efficiently be provided metro wide through an economy of scale, should be accepted in an individual jurisdiction which may actually have higher service expectations. Not joining the metropolitan consortium may have political consequences for the jurisdiction in the future.

*The City of Olathe is the only municipality in Johnson County that provides refuse and recycling services in-house. The other Johnson County municipalities are under an agreement for provision of these services by private sector providers. The City experiences efficiencies in its refuse and recycling services and does not foresee a benefit in getting out of the business and turning to a private provider. While a third party option is not a viable solution for Olathe, it works well for the other municipalities within the County. An issue could be the perception of Olathe as a "team player" in the metro area.*

### **Third Party 3**

**How should local governments respond to cultural differences involved with cross-sector partnerships?**

The goals and objectives of the partners are not always what they seem to be and local governments must be able to adjust and adapt their own goals in order to meet the necessary "win-win" that helps all to advance. Other groups may also come along and take advantage of an existing partnership to advance their own agendas. Leadership within the jurisdiction must decide how such issues are addressed; are late comers allowed to "piggy-back," and possibly take undue credit or should the local jurisdiction push back?

*The City of Olathe's governing body had goals to create higher quality, higher wage jobs in the community, and to create opportunities for higher education. To meet these goals, the City developed a partnership with Kansas State University and the Kansas Bio-Science Authority to provide a place where the world's foremost academic minds in the fields of animal health and food safety could partner with the State agency responsible for promoting the bio-sciences in Kansas. The City donated 100 acres of*

*land (divided between the two groups) for the advancement of these goals. Both agencies are now operating buildings on this land, but many parties not part of the original partnership have sought to advance their own interests opportunistically and not necessarily to the direct advancement of the partners' goals. Many issues have arisen potentially affecting the original partnership. The leadership challenge is trying to determine whether or not to entertain late entry initiatives and how to evaluate their value in light of the original goals.*

#### **Third Party 4**

**How can local governments support a more diverse and capable workforce that is representative of those who are being served when it does not control training and education of potential employees?**

In many service areas, having staff that is representative of the community it serves is vital. However, creating a departmental workforce that is prepared and capable with a similar demographic composition as those it serves is a challenge. Traditional job requirements and preparatory education may limit access to a diverse applicant pool. The areas of Public Safety and Parks and Recreation, where staff interact directly with the public, could benefit in particular from having such representation. The challenge is that the city is not responsible for workforce development and must rely on educational programs it has no control over.

*The City of Olathe's Fire Department is only experiencing turnover through retirements. The typical hiring requirements demand qualifications that are obtained from college-level programs; however, these programs are not producing a diverse pool of candidates. This hiring model, used in many mid-sized suburban municipalities, places the financial burden of preparation on the candidate, rather than the municipality—this lower-cost model can be particularly attractive when faced with limited funding. However, it may not result in the diverse applicant pool desired.*

## **Engagement Challenges**

#### **Community Engagement 1**

**How can organizations produce valid and relevant information, given the prevalence of online media sources and other easily accessible information sources?**

Those seeking to educate themselves on a topic find a breadth and depth of information that was impossible to compile only a decade ago. The challenge in reviewing the information available is discerning its validity and quality. In an era that prides itself on data-driven decisions, much of the information most easily available via the internet is not always factual, relevant and reliable. Amidst communication channels like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, local governments must establish a presence as *the* reputable and credible source. Local governments must also be prepared for the potential challenge of a governing board influenced by federally charged political ideologies.

*The City of Olathe approaches the challenge of focusing community discussion on relevant, reliable data in various ways. The City uses both an annual citizen perception survey called DirectionFinder and the Balanced Scorecard as performance metric systems. Both of these tools are reported to council and community annually and results are included on the city's website (<http://www.olatheks.org/Council/Accountability>). The utilization of both of these tools allows for data driven policy debates and priority setting. Citizens are given the opportunity with these tools to let their voice be heard in terms of how money is spent and what the priorities of the community are. An example of data based conversation with citizens is found in our snow operations efforts this past*

winter. *DirectionFinder* citizen survey results show that snow removal is a priority item in the community. Based on estimates of more snow fall during the winter, we used social media and our website to inform citizens of what our policies and practices would be with regard to snow removal in neighborhoods as well as arterial streets. And, at the start of winter, we put into place a global positioning based system that allowed citizens to view our snow plow trucks real-time on-line and to estimate how long it would be until snow in front of their driveway would be removed.

### **Community Engagement 2**

**There is a growing gap between the haves and the have-nots. How should this challenge of equity be addressed by local governments?**

Local governments face the challenge of adapting to the ever-changing needs of its citizens, while continuing to offer core services. Additional problems arise in determining what those core services are today and what they will be in the future, and whether the services fill a void or can be more effectively delivered by an outside organization. A growing socio-economic gap within the community has materialized in many ways over the past several years--increased code enforcement demands, tax delinquency, non-payment of special assessments, and rampant foreclosures. It is important for relationships to be forged that address and respond to such issues in a timely, systematic, and fair manner. Populations that have barriers to technology access strengthen this growing gap between the haves and the have-nots. While it may be convenient for organizations to utilize social media, equity problems result.

*The gap between the haves and the have-nots in the City of Olathe is evident in its central core. The demographics of this area are fairly different than those in the surrounding, more suburban, portions of the City. The core is comprised of older, more rooted generations of citizens that often prefer alternative methods of communication. The residential and commercial building stock of the central core is also much older than that of the surrounding areas of the City.*

### **Community Engagement 3**

**Resource and staffing challenges are projected which may result in services being delivered below expectations. What is the resulting role of elected officials? What is the role of advocates and social media?**

Reduced staffing and resource levels may result in services not meeting citizen expectations. The role of the elected officials will be to continually monitor the feedback of those they serve. Not only must they monitor it but they need to be proactive in receiving it. Many times the average citizen may not become vocal until it impacts them personally. For instance, an elderly couple with no children may not be impacted by the reduced mowing of city parks since they don't use the parks; however, a younger family moving into the same neighborhood may see parks that are not kept up and assume that the city is not taking care of basic services important to them. Elected Officials are under pressures that they did not experience before, and they may feel the need to get deeper and deeper into the daily operations of city work due partly to the feedback they receive. This then creates the elected officials becoming part of daily decision making when in the past it was the City managers and department directors making these same decisions.

*In terms of advocates and social media, in Olathe these voices seem to be heard much more than before, especially if advocates have financial and political resources. Social media and advocates also do not have some of the imposed filters that elected officials and city employees must adhere to. Legitimate*

*concerns about service delivery can and are being raised; the issue is whether responses will reflect consistency or political favoritism which has not been a part of our culture.*

### **Organizational Engagement 1**

**As an organization expands departmental boundaries and becomes more collaborative internally through ad hoc teams, committees and other arrangements, the challenge of assigning responsibility arises. How does added responsibility coalesce with lines of formal responsibility and authority?**

Domains of exclusivity lead to fragmentation across the organization. Such domains do not lend themselves to a collaborative environment. As organizations become more collaborative, formal lines of responsibility can become blurry. It is important for project leaders to be skilled at facilitation, effective at communication, and able to understand the relationship between the influence in networked arrangements and influence through position power. Project team members must be open-minded, capable of consensus, and share a common goal.

*With the retirement of the directors of public works and municipal services the city manager was presented with an opportunity to consolidate two departments. While the result would save significant money, the cultures of the two departments were very different, and they were not characterized by collaboration within departments, let alone between the two departments. A new Director that fit the desired organizational culture was hired to consolidate the departments, blend the cultures and build collaboration throughout the department. One of the keys to this effort was the way the new director approached this task. Employing a process that lasted over a year, the director utilized input from departmental staff and outside stakeholders to organize the new department based on broad skills-based teams along with a “matrix-based” or cross-functional team responsible for strategic thinking, innovation, employee development and other functions across the “silo” delineations of the department. The intent is to allow a very large, complex, multi-functioned department to be nimble in its reaction time for change and decision-making.*

### **Organizational Engagement 2**

**In an environment of scarce resources, local governments are more at risk of developing a “winner-loser” mentality within their organizations. It is important for the jurisdiction to understand how its culture reinforces or ameliorates this view.**

It is important that an effective leadership model is in place within the organization to appropriately address the challenge of the “winner-loser” mentality. This model does not develop overnight, but rather is anchored in the department’s culture. Leadership which stresses collaboration across departments rather than defining issues according to departmental boundaries can ameliorate the permanence of the win/lose mentality. The “department head winner” vs. “department head loser” perception results from a transactional leadership model, defined by what the department head receives in resources from the city manager, and where the department’s sense of worth comes from hierarchical approval. A transformational culture emphasizes internal motivation and responsibility and nurtures a sense of collaborative investment.

*The City of Olathe works to avoid the “winner-loser” mentality by providing transparency in its decision-making. The City utilizes data collected from Direction Finder, its annual citizen satisfaction survey, to inform decisions. The city has longitudinal data which provides perspective on citizen satisfaction, and it has become common for policy discussions to result from an analysis of the survey results. Connecting policy decisions and then budget decisions to the survey results provides a data based decision making*

*approach to budgeting which can affect the perception that some departments are favored by the city manager.*

### **Organizational Engagement 3**

**Organizations are faced with the challenge of encouraging risk-taking among employees and incorporating flexibility into formal job duties as traditional boundaries shrink. This challenge is intensified by uneasiness caused by the current economic climate, which can cause employees to retreat to a ‘bunker mentality.’**

As the city manager and department heads move upward to bridge the gap between the administrative and political worlds, supervisory and line staff in the organization are given more latitude in fulfilling their job duties. However, the unstable economic climate, where layoffs are not uncommon, is a barrier to staff taking initiative and risking failure. At a time when innovation is most needed, leaders must find a way to encourage staff to think creatively and take risks.

*The City of Olathe experienced a major reduction in its force—approximately 17% since 2008. Many remaining staff throughout the organization—both vertically and horizontally, have attempted to stay below the radar and not take risks that they feel may jeopardize their job security. As an example, the Police Department had 15 positions eliminated when dispatch was consolidated and transferred to the Sheriff’s Department. This raised concern among other employees, particularly in the civilian ranks, about the security of their respective positions. Although several of the remaining employees inherited new responsibilities after the consolidation, the feeling of uneasiness and the fear of making mistakes that could bring them negative attention was still present. Olathe wants to face this challenge by focusing on results from an organizational perspective; it wants to promote a culture, (with less restrictive job guides), that rewards creative and innovative thinking that contributes to the excellent provision of service and the accomplishment of organizational goals. The challenge is whether organizational actions towards these ends can overcome issues of security for employees.*

### **Organizational Engagement 4**

**Is there a tipping point at which it is more likely for a non-union organization in a right-to-work state to be influenced by public sector unions?**

If we assume that the current economic climate has fostered the perception among many public sector employees (both in public safety positions and in general civil service positions) that their voices are not being heard by their administrative and political leaders and that their rights and entitlements of employment are being eroded, does this discontent foster an environment conducive to the proliferation of unions in right to work states? How do the political dynamics change within departments, among administrative leadership, and with elected officials when certain employees form a union? How do newly unionized employees relate to their non-union colleagues, especially if, for example, firefighters working for a city unionize while police officers do not?

*Over the last two decades, Olathe has seen both of its public safety departments (police and fire) have a rise and then fall in union-forming activities in response to what line-level employees perceived as unfair discipline practices and/or a lack of competitive benefits and salary. These uprisings have resulted in picketing in front of city hall and at council meetings. The most significant challenge for leadership is managing these employees’ entitlement mentality while still maintaining and retaining the administration’s rights and obligations to develop work rules, regulations and policies to effectively provide public services.*

## ***APPENDIX B OLATHE, KANSAS, VALUES-BASED JOB ANNOUNCEMENT***

Resource Management Director

Employer: Olathe, City of

Title: Resource Management Director

Description: At the City of Olathe, Kansas we are “Setting the Standard for Excellence in Public Service” and we have the results and the awards to prove it! We have received national recognition for everything from Legacy and Advocacy awards, to LEED Certifications and Certificates of Excellence in Financial Reporting. Our customer service results lead the public sector, and our city has been recognized by Money magazine in 2008 as a “best place to live”.

Our award-winning Resource Management department drives organizational progress through innovative management of people, finances and policies. Through the efforts of this talented team we received the highest honor given to a city government for its efforts in performance measurement and management with the 2011 ICMA CPM Certificate of Excellence. Our highly successful Wellness Program enjoys a 5:1 ROI and has become a model for programs nationwide, earning the City of Olathe mention in the 2011 Fast Cities issue of Fast Company magazine.

To continue this trend of excellence, we are recruiting for a Director of Resource Management. In this role, you will lead a team in developing and implementing an innovative business plan that optimizes our resources. Your scope will include accounting, budget, procurement, human resources, risk management and the city clerk’s office. You will also collaborate with the City’s Leadership Team to make strategic visionary decisions that ensure Olathe continues to lead the nation in values-driven performance.

If our values of customer service, learning, communication, teamwork and leadership through service align with yours, and you have proven success in leading a team of professionals to ever higher levels of performance, we would like to speak with you!

Experience: At least 10 years of experience in municipal government, including at least 7 years administrative and/or supervisory responsibility, and demonstrated political acumen.

Education: Masters Degree or above from an accredited college or university with major course work in Finance, Human Resources, Business, Public Administration, or related field. Proven ability to manage human resources, finance, accounting, budgeting, risk management, procurement and the city clerk’s office directly or through subordinate managers.

We offer a highly competitive total compensation package and opportunities for your growth and development.

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