Working Paper

Political management in Australian Local Government: Exploring Roles and Relationships between Mayors and CEOs

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Abstract

The working relationship between the Mayor as the leader of the council and the chief executive officer leading the council organisation is one of the most important relationships in local government. Mayors and CEOs recognise that the breakdown in this relationship can have long lasting, negative impacts on the capacity of a local government to deliver value for money services to its community. In this working paper we explore the dimensions of this relationship asking: how much should it be structured via rules and guidelines and how much should it rest on the integrity and common sense of the people involved? Drawing on research carried out by the authors and a consideration of the literature on the nature of this relationship, which occurs in one form or another at all levels of government, we draw conclusions and make recommendations about how elected councillors and appointed staff can best assist individuals in these roles to establish a successful and effective working relationship.

Introduction

Australian popular culture has found favour presenting the leading characters in Australian local government with mirth and often, sadly, disdain. Frank Hardy's 1971 classic, *The Outcasts of Foolgarah,* based on the epic confrontation of 'the lurk men versus the lurk detectors' of a council on Sydney's northern beaches was a great laugh, but not for some who held its publication up in the courts for many years. And who could forget Bill Hunter's classic role as Muriel's strict father and corruptible President of Porpoise Spit Council in the 1994 movie, *Muriel's Wedding*. A more realistic, but equally dramatic 1996 documentary, *Rats in the Ranks,* follows the lead up to the annual mayoral election in Leichhardt City Council, an inner Sydney suburban council. As Councillor Larry Hand tries to get the numbers for another year we see the political manoeuvering that goes on for this position when councillors elect one of their own each year to be Mayor. More recently in the comedic ABC series, *Grass Roots,* Mayor Col Dunkley attempts to control all comers while his bungling General Manager Greg Dominelli is always telling the Mayor to 'leave it with me Col' as he deals with the trail of corruption and disruption in the council and the community caused by the Mayor's wheeling and dealing. Even a cursory glance of reports from state government integrity agencies like ICAC in NSW and the CMC in Queensland[1] suggest that in some councils, at least, fact is not too far from fiction. However, media coverage typically highlights the failures of the local government sphere, although when examined closely, these 'failures' represent a small proportion of the 560 plus councils and the 180,000 employees engaged in delivering local services to their communities.

While the image of local government should be a matter of concern for councillor associations, especially those asking the community for Constitutional recognition, and for the professional officer

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[1] Independent Commission Against Corruption and Crime and Misconduct Commission respectively.

associations responsible for implementing council policy, this public image does not bode well for reform in local government. The key players – as we see in the depictions outlined above – are the Mayor and councillors and the chief executive officer and staff. How the former work with each other to achieve the goals on which they ran for office or the latter pursue the professional careers they choose is crucial to the success of local government as a whole. We recognise that the two leaders are required to work closely together, often dealing with pressing and potentially controversial issues when they may not have known each other before they are drawn together. The importance of the Mayor-CEO relationship was identified by the sector in a recent survey undertaken by the ANZSOG Institute for Governance. The results of this survey and follow-up discussions showed that the local government sector was concerned that there was insufficient data about the Mayor-CEO relationship and respondents rated further research as one of the highest priorities to be addressed by the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) (Evans, 2010). This has been a key driver for our current research project.

In this first working paper we focus on the roles of and relationships between the two leaders of the council: the Mayor and the CEO or General Manager. In particular, we wanted to see if there were differences in these roles and relationships when Mayors are elected at large or when the councillors elect one of their fellow councillors to be the Mayor.

We have a number of research questions that we see as significant in illuminating the Mayor-CEO relationship; for example, how important is the leadership style each chooses? Do the different modes of mayoral election impact on the relationship? How much of the relationship is determined by the roles that each chooses to play, or is required to play? By focusing our attention on the relationships between them we expect that this research project may provide some guidance to councils, and state governments, which are considering ways of redesigning and redefining the roles of their two local leaders. We also offer some comments on the importance of preparing people for these roles and to the individuals themselves such that they can make the most out of their time serving councils and their communities across Australia.

The paper is structured around several key themes. First, we examine the current literature to determine what is already known about Mayor-CEO relationships which we use to develop a model of effective political management. Second, we outline the research approach that we used. Third, we summarise the data and develop recommendations for further action to strengthen the relationship.

Literature Review

According to Weber, the relationship between democracy and bureaucracy created one of the most profound sources of tension in the modern social order (Giddens, 1995: 22).

Although Weber wrote more than a century ago, the tension that he identified between politicians and public administrators remains, compounded by the situation in which the relationships between them are constantly in some state of flux. 'Because government and the governing agenda do not stand still, neither do the relations between bureaucrats and politicians' (Aberbach and Rockman, 2006: 978). In the Australian context, since the 1990s there have been persistent demands from state governments that enhanced local government would only come from larger, regional councils. These claims for better local government have typically been argued on the basis that council

amalgamation would generate economies of scale, although recent research indicates that far from yielding economies of scale consolidation in its various forms is more likely to generate economies of scope or enhanced strategic capacity (Aulich *et al*, 2011). Not only has this Australian policy context imposed pressures on councils, it has also often divided leadership at council level with more CEOs favouring larger units and Mayors typically preferring to explore other consolidation options, if at all (Aulich *et al*, 2011). Other pressures which add tension to the Mayor-CEO relationship include increased mobility and opportunity, the physical ability to move for employment and lifestyle choices. What is clear is that context matters and the way local government leaders understand the implications influences the ways in which they work with each other.

Roles and relationships

In the arena in which tensions can be played out, much of the literature on political management suggests that the roles of leader of the council and leader of the council organisation are reciprocating or complementary. There are normative models (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002) or 'images' (Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman, 1981) of the relationship affirming a complementary relationship. The dominant question seems to be about how much each party can overlap the other party's domain? The ideal is the cosmopolitan relationship where roles overlap in a synergistic way providing effective leadership to the council without apparent conflict between the two leaders. This is the 'sweet spot' of local government leadership when coordination and effort come together to generate productive council performance. CEOs recount these times, but also bemoan that such times are rare. Without the structure, roles and relationships can be chaotic.[2]

In relation to defining the roles that Mayors and CEOs have to play, some of the literature focuses on the issue of choice that individuals may exercise. The goal of making such choices is often assumed to be to minimise the overlap and duplication between administrators and politicians. Aberbach *et al* (1981) develop the notion of 'images' of the policy-making relationship between bureaucrats and politicians. They describe the first image as *policy/administration* where politicians make policy and civil servants administer. This is the classical bureaucratic view now well recognised as a fundamentalist view for introducing neophytes into the workings of modern government. The goal of role separation also underpins most local government legislation across Australian states and territories. However, the relationship between these roles is typically much more complicated than covered in the local government Acts involving an inevitable intersection of the roles. Svara argues against the simple interpretation of clear role delineation which he argues 'weakens the legitimacy of city managers as comprehensive leaders' (Svara, 1998: 51).

The second image is what Aberbach *et al* (1981) call *facts/values,* which suggests that both politicians and bureaucrats make policy but in different ways: 'Civil servants bring neutral expertise and facts to the enterprise; politicians bring political sensitivity and political interest and values' (Ingraham, 2003: 103). In local government, this process is played out via the preparation of 'political neutral' reports by the CEO and staff to council for their consideration. This consideration will examine the reports from particular value positions or perspectives before making final decisions.

The third image of *energy/equilibrium* is where 'both politicians and bureaucrats make policy and are concerned with politics but on different levels ... politicians provide a broader, more partisan

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[2] There are many reports into local governments by state departments of local government that confirm this.

view, while bureaucrats represent ... narrower program or clientele interests' (Ingraham, 2003: 103). Baddeley and James (1987) recognise this aspect of working in local government in their classic article on political skills for managers. They argue that both politicians and managers are called upon to exercise political judgement. Wise decisions are made when decision makers are politically aware of the issues at hand and show integrity in their actions.

In the fourth image, the *pure/hybrid,* 'the line between policy making and administration essentially vanishes, producing a seamless partnership between the elected and appointed representatives of the citizenry' (Ingraham, 2003: 103). To Aberbach et al this was the ideal type: 'In a well-ordered polity, politicians and bureaucrats each do what they are best able to do: politician's articulate society's dreams, and bureaucrats help bring them gingerly back to earth' (1981: 262).

Mouritzen and Svara (2002) have also built on the work of Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman with their analysis of the findings of an international study of CEOs in western local government, undertaken in cooperation with the Association of European Local Government Chief Executives (Union des Dirigeants Territoriaux de L'Europe or UDiTE), the International City Managers Association in the US and the (then) Institute of Municipal Management in Australia[3]. They frame four models of political administrative relations. The first is *separate roles* with clear subordination of administrators to politicians and separate roles and norms. This fits with the Aberbach *et al* first image of policy/administration separation. The second model identified by Mouritzen and Svara is the *autonomous administrator* where there is equal or greater influence for administrators and separation of politicians from the administrative role. Under current employment practice of CEOs employed on fixed term contracts it is rare that such a relationship will be found in Australian local government.

The third model from Mouritzen and Svara is the *responsive administrator* where subordination of administrators to politicians and dominance of political norms over administrative norms prevails. Apposite to the employment arrangement of CEOs in Australian local government, this is a more common political management relationship where CEOs have an eye to their contract renewal or possible move to another council.

The fourth model in the Mouritzen and Svara schema is that of *overlapping roles* where there is reciprocal influence between elected officials and administrators and shared leadership roles as in the *pure/hybrid* image of the political management relationship offered by Aberbach *et al*.

The Mouritzen and Svara research and resulting models of political administrative relations provides a framework to assess the respective roles and relationships in a council. Importantly it provides footholds for both parties as they attempt to scale the leadership challenges in local government. The legislative reality is that both roles are tethered and if one should slip the other is there to support them. This system is designed this way and aims to be a built in safety measure for effective local governance. When both parties recognise their respective roles in this way they have enormous potential to negotiate effective change in their community (Ostrom, 1990).

In their more recent writings Aberbach and Rockman (2006: 979-980) reflect on their learnings from two decades of research into political-administrative relations. Analysing the social background of

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[3] The book, *Leadership at the Apex: Politicians and Administrators in Western Local Government* is an excellent text for any student of local government who wishes to explore the dimensions of political management leadership in local government.

US administrators they found that administrators 'were significantly better educated than those drawn from the public.' This was not unexpected given the selection process to become a senior bureaucrat in the US government (and in Australia as well). They also concluded that 'bureaucrats and politicians did live in distinctive worlds. And these differences very much reflected the different demands of each role' (Aberbach and Rockman, 2006: 980). Their conclusion about the politics in each role is worth quoting at length:

> we noted that each actor lived in a world of politics and was cognizant of that world. If both were political, the main difference was in the political game they had to play. Politicians dealt with the politics of parties, mass publics, and broad ideas; bureaucrats dealt with the politics of balancing interest groups, negotiating with interests, advising ministers, and so on. The differences, on the whole, had little to do with whether or not politics, per se, was involved and more to do with the kind of politics with which each actor was involved.

Clearly both politicians and bureaucrats have to manage the exercise of power in their respective domains. It is when they operate in the other party's domain that the political management relationship becomes strained and is subject to breaking down. How they negotiate their respective roles and manage the overlap is part of the art and craft of leadership, and we argue that it is difficult to prescribe this in legislation, rules and guidelines.

These images outlined above progress can be seen as a development from more basic to more sophisticated working relationships between elected and appointed officials. The baseline relationship has initially defined basic roles identified in the respective local government Acts in the Australian states and territories. However, as with any professional relationship (nurse/doctor, solicitor/barrister), as the individuals assert themselves and test the relationship their efforts gather pace in a virtuous circle of accomplishment that builds on itself. Of course parties can also develop a vicious circle of blame and counter blame leading to a failure of leadership and performance. Leadership is a function of the characteristics of the individuals and the commitment and collective effort of both parties to work together and one can never claim to be completely exonerated if they are one half of a leadership failure in local government.

Few of the papers that we examined discussed the concept of resolving role uncertainty between Mayors and CEOs by merging the two roles. However, we are aware of current discussions in some UK councils which are examining the possibility of merging the roles, referred to by Stevens as 'doppelspitze' or dual leadership. The term refers to the former system in several German länder, prior to introducing elected mayors in the 1990s, 'when it became apparent that an elected politician didn't need to share power and prominence with a costly salaried chief executive' (Stevens, 2011). Although very much at early discussion stage, the idea reflects practices that have been used in some Japanese local governments since the end of World War II. As elected city chiefs, Japanese Mayors can act as both political leader and head of the administration and are required to appoint one or more Vice Mayors, who can either come from within the local civil service or be seconded from a central government ministry on request by the Mayor. These approaches may be worth examination should they develop into wider practice.

Facilitative and authoritative leaders

Svara has been researching the role of the Mayor in US local government for the last two decades. He challenges the conventional wisdom that strong Mayors with enhanced formal powers and

political independence are in the best position to provide effective leadership. He notes that 'persons selected to the top elected office in their cities bring a number of personal characteristics to the position that interact with the formal features of the office' (2009: 4). He argues that this is expressed through particular leadership styles: authoritative vs facilitative. The authoritative leader leans on formal power and government structure while the facilitative leader is collaborative and focused on the accomplishment of common goals.

Svara recognises that the facilitative leadership style is well known in the management literature. He refers, for example, to Collins' 'Type 5' leaders who 'combine selflessness and focus on making the right decisions that will advance central goals' (Svara, 2009: 11). He further identifies facilitative leaders in top elected positions in local government by 'their attitude to other officials, kinds of interactions fostered, and, their approach to goal setting' (2009: 11). These are manifested in a number of particular characteristics which are listed in Table 1 below. Svara concludes that facilitative leaders are more likely to be successful and effective *regardless of the structure in which they work*. The two types of council structures that he identifies are the City Manager or Executive Mayor model where the Mayor is elected at large; and the City Leader model where the Mayor is elected by council, that is, by peers.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Facilitative Leader in Local Government

Attitude toward other officials:
• The leader does not attempt to control or diminish the contributions of other officials.
• The leader empowers others by drawing out their contributions and helping them accomplish their goals.
• The leader values and maintains mutual respect and trust.
Kind of interactions fostered:
• The leader promotes open and honest communication among officials.
• The leader seeks to manage conflict and resolve differences in a way that advances the mutual interests of all officials.
• The leader is willing to share leadership and form partnerships.
• The leader fosters understanding of distinct roles and coordinated effort among officials.
Approach to goal setting:
• The leader fosters the creation of a shared vision incorporating his or her own goals and the goals of others.
• The leader promotes commitment to the shared vision.
• The leader focuses the attention and efforts of officials on accomplishing the shared vision.

Source: Svara, 2009: 12

Svara's broad framework may be outlined in a 2x2 matrix (see Figure 1), mapping the organisational arrangements for the election of Mayors against preferred leadership styles. This provides a starting basis for analysis of the question of Mayor-CEO relationships.

Svara argues that modern leadership styles tend to favour the facilitative approach; demographic changes, financial stress and increased diversity in local government all point leadership towards the facilitative model. Indeed, Svara concludes that strong Mayors of the authoritative kind are generally being replaced by collaborative, visionary leaders of the facilitative type which are more appropriate to

contemporary arrangements in local government. He notes (1994: 32) that 'the facilitative approach fits the norms and distribution of resources in [City Leader] cities, and it is an option in [Executive Mayor] cities'.

Figure 1: Leadership Styles and Types

LEADERSHIP TYPES

1	2	Authoritative
3	4	LEADERSHIP STYLES Facilitative
Executive Mayor (elected at large)	City Leader (elected by council)	

In this working paper we recognise that there are different styles of leadership evident in the Australian situation but note that robust mechanisms for making comparative assessments of leadership style are difficult to find. The challenge we have as researchers is to find ways of measuring leadership styles to see whether or particular styles might yield better performance in certain circumstances. Svara (1994, 1998, 2009), Mouritzen and Svara (2002) attempted this by examining the narrative around local government leaders in US local government, namely Mayors from the two different types of council structures as noted above: Executive Mayor and City Leader models. Svara interviewed council members and other senior managers who were able to report on their observations of the working relationship between Mayors and CEOs.

In this working paper we have had to modify this approach through our observations of Mayors and the CEO, interviews with these people and through their participation in workshops on the political management relationship in Australian Local Government[4].

In re-examining models of mayoral leadership Svara (2009: 4) underlined the connection between the leadership style of the Mayor and their sense of vision. He added that

> *other personal factors are as important as well, such as the mayor's ability to communicate in a variety of settings and the mayor's level of energy and commitment ... we will assume mayors who are effective in the other two areas – style and vision – are also capable of getting their message across and devote sufficient energy to the position. ... Style and vision differ in*

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[4] Conducted by Baddeley and Martin for local government associations and Local Government Managers Australia state and territory organisations over a three-year period from 2008-10. This involved several hundred people from local government including both elected members and appointed officials.

> *how they are impacted by structural features. Mayors can be highly visionary even if they lack formal powers, just as formally strong mayors can lack vision.*

Svara's research on the political administrative relationship in US local government is relevant to Australian local government which is broadly similar in structure to its US counterparts. An important question we now turn to is the structuring of the working relationship within councils, and over time as the relationship develops.

Australian public sector managers

There has been little Australian research on the characteristics of senior public service managers especially as it relates to style and vision. One exception is Michael Pusey's study of senior government officials in Canberra in the 1980s[5].

In his role as government adviser, Pusey developed an appreciation of the nature of the bureaucracy responsible for the formulation and implementation of the reforms instituted by successive Hawke Labor Governments. He reports on the findings from his semi-structured interviews with 215 Senior Executive Service (SES) officers, which represented approximately half of all SES officers. Interestingly, when he begins his description of these people he also refers to the findings of Aberbach *et al* (1981) who documented the nature of the senior administrative class in the US government and six other western governments in the late 1960s, early 1970s. Pusey cautions the reader 'that the total experiential and educational baggage of the individuals who work in this "social location" [for our purposes the top Canberra bureaucracy] is the product of a continuing process of socialisation' (1990: 45). While we know of no similar type of study of senior managers in Australian local government there has been research on the complementary nature of leadership styles between Mayors and CEOs. The interest created by Pusey's research was his proposition that the SES had selected individuals whose values closely aligned with the developing neo-liberal agenda and associated managerialism reflected in what was to become known as the New Public Management. Elsewhere this is described as homosocial reproduction, the tendency to 'clone' those qualities which dominate power positions (Kanter, 1977).

Martin and Simonds (2002: 73) found that Mayors and CEO pairs 'are more likely to perceive an effective working relationship when they have different but complementary managerial styles'. In this research, Mayor-CEO pairs were asked to assess the effectiveness of their relationship using metaphors such as '"Ours is a recipe for disaster", "We see eye to eye" and "We work like clockwork"'. Martin and Simonds related these responses to Quinn's Management Skills Assessment Instrument which contrasts flexibility versus stability with an internal versus external focus giving four styles: clan (facilitator and mentor); adhocracy (innovator and visionary); hierarchy (monitor and coordinator); and, market (competitor and producer). They concluded that for the CEO wanting to establish an effective working relationship with their new Mayor there are implications for the way in which they structure the working relationship with the Mayor. Knowing their leadership style and engaging the Mayor in a discussion about the way in which they prefer to lead would be an important first step in getting off to a good start in their working relationship.

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[5] Pusey's book *Economic Rationalism in Canberra: A Nation-Building State Changes its Mind* (1991) was ranked by the Australian Sociological Association as one of the ten most influential books in 40 years of Australian Sociology.

Martin and Simonds' (2002) research is helpful in our consideration of how best to manage the relationship between the two key leaders in a local government council. It is one of the few studies that incorporate a behavioural component into this analysis. However, we have not incorporated a behavioural component in the research reported on in this paper rather we acknowledge this earlier work given Martin was involved in the earlier study.

Our literature review confirms that the roles of politician and administrator are different yet complementary. The challenge for individuals in local government is to recognise both their primary role and the role of the other party if they are to negotiate an effective working relationship. Svara's extensive research confirms that the characteristics of the individuals involved are the turning point on which they both succeed. Having a vision and being prepared to facilitate toward this outcome is what primarily defines effective leadership. If leadership styles are similar or complimentary we suggest that this enables leaders to more effectively negotiate their working relationship.

Our observation of Mayor-CEO pairs supports the proposition that successful CEOs introducing a new Mayor to the leadership role of council recognises their unique individual characteristics yet and ensures they are aware of the structural requirements of the role. Notwithstanding that many individuals elected to be Mayor would be aware of these process issues.

Our method of enquiry

We employed a multifaceted method of enquiry combining the experience of the two authors, who have worked for Local Government over the last thirty years as officials, consultants and researchers, as well as several deliberate approaches as part of our research focus. The deliberate approaches began with a literature review and a review of local government legislation across several Australian states to identify basic provisions governing the Mayor-CEO relationship. Our approach also included a brief survey of participants on the inaugural Executive Leadership Program run by ACELG and ANZSOG in 2011 and observations from a series of workshops conducted by Martin on the political management relationship.

Review of local government legislation

An important consideration in our research was how the legislation under which local government operated across Australian states influenced the political management relationship, and if so in what way[6]. Considerable attention in these Acts is given to the election and replacement of the Mayor (should they leave office for whatever reason). In Victoria, Mayors are elected by councillors during an open council meeting for a period of one or two years. By contrast, in Queensland, a Mayor is elected 'at large' through the whole local government area; in NSW the Mayor can be elected either by the councillors from among their numbers or a council may make a decision to elect the Mayor at large if it is decided by the electors through a constitutional referendum. There are variations with the way in which Mayors are elected. For example in the Northern Territory the President is elected by the councillors for a period of four years (for the duration if his or her term). The Deputy President is elected for a two year term and the councillors have a further election after two years for another or confirmation of the Deputy President. All councillors are up for election after four years. In Tasmania

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[6] We are grateful to Meg Lithgow for her work in identifying those parts of the local government Acts in NSW, Victoria and Queensland which specified the Mayor-CEO roles and relationships.

and Western Australia the Mayor is elected biennially by the council. Apart from Queensland the predominant pattern in all states and the Northern Territory is that the Mayor is elected by the council.

Importantly, the provision for the election of the Mayor, either by popular vote at a general election of the council or by a vote of the council revealed no differences in the way Mayors and CEOs in these two types are required to approach their roles and relationships, beyond the fairly obvious condition that the Mayor takes precedence at all municipal functions and proceedings within the municipal district and represents the local government in ceremonial and civic functions. What is clear, however, is the appointment of the CEO, the conditions of appointment and performance assessment are determined by the council as a whole.

A survey of local government leaders

At the inaugural Excellence in Local Government Leadership Program, Martin administered a short questionnaire to participants (primarily CEOs, senior and managers a several elected councillors). The purpose of the questionnaire was to ascertain whether the selection of the CEO and their performance review process was any different under councils where the Mayor is elected at large compared with election by peers. We also asked about delegations given to elected councillors, who speaks to the media and on what issue, what roles Mayors, councillors, CEO and senior management team play in identifying key strategic issues and in determining strategies to address them.

This survey confirmed that regardless of whether the Mayor is elected at large or by their peers the selection and review of the CEO involves the whole council, notwithstanding the typical use of a select sub-committee to prepare the final report and recommendations for council.

Political management workshops

Over the last three years Martin and Baddeley (2008) have, through a series of workshops sponsored by the LGMA and state local government associations focussed on understanding and developing strategies to improve the political management relationship in Australian local government. Typically marketed as 'Negotiating the Overlap: Political Management in Australian Local Government' these workshops centre on video interviews of Mayors and CEO discussing the nature of their working relationship, covering a period of more than 30 years. More recently, Martin has also videoed interviews with Australian Mayors and CEOs on the same theme. Seeing and hearing two people discuss their working relationship is a very powerful way of showing others how they might negotiate their respective roles.

Baddeley's early work, reflected in his classic paper with Kim James, 'Owl, Fox, Donkey, Sheep: Political Skills for Managers' (1987) in which they frame these four styles based on the individuals political awareness (about the exercise of power) and the degree of integrity shown in their response to the inevitable surprises of being a councillor or senior manager in local government is accepted by participants as having face validity for them. It certainly creates discussion about how best to improve understanding about the political issues in local public policy.

Through a highly interactive workshop process local government councillors and senior managers were able to explore their behavioural responses around these four ideal types: the inept donkey; the innocent sheep; the clever fox; and, the wise owl. The learning being that in hindsight we all find ourselves at one time or another playing anyone of these roles. The skilled leader is one who

recognises what role they are playing and adjusts their behaviour accordingly. Having a useful cognitive framework and being able to change roles to adapt to the context and outcome is a very powerful negotiating strategy that enables leaders to facilitate great outcomes.

Through a series of role plays, constructed from ICAC and CMC cases, and from their own stories, participants on these workshops were able to explore the communication and behaviour surrounding each role and afforded the opportunity to play a different role – even to be inept or innocent as they recognised that in some (rare) circumstances these might be the most appropriate political response.

These workshops afforded Martin the opportunity to observe how easily local government leaders were able to change roles to suit the outcomes they were trying to achieve. Being conscious of the Baddeley and James framework they were able to do this. The question always is, in the heat of the local government negotiation, do they have the presence of mind to realise they have choices about the way in which they respond, given the desired outcome, and to change their approach? We argue that such consciousness raising is a powerful ally of local government leaders and considerations about process should always be part of any discussions on strategic negotiations in local government.

Summary of findings and recommendations

The success of the political management relationship at the top of a local government organisation – council and administration – is central to the ongoing effectiveness of this level of government. If the two people filling these roles cannot work together there will be change, and from our observations, the CEO is usually the one to leave the council. The cost to the council, and ultimately the community, of any impasse is high. Typically, the council staff becomes more concerned with their job in the council, are much more risk averse and can take their focus away from innovation and development in favour of focusing on ongoing work and the internal machinations of the council organisation. Recruiting and appointing a new CEO is also costly in time and money (estimated by the HR profession of at least the salary of the position being replaced). In addition the council's overall credibility and reputation can suffer as the community come to learn about the sagas that surround the CEO leaving. So every effort needs to be made to ensure the right person is recruited to the CEO position in the first instance, to ensure the parties get off to a good start, are able to maintain good working relations, can focus on the tasks at hand while keeping an eye on how they work together. We also add that it is important to celebrate successes. What has emerged from our research is that these mechanisms for enhancing Mayor-CEO relationships are highly consistent with the eight steps for successful large-scale change, identified by Kotter and Cohen (2002:7). It is to these processes that we provide practical solutions before discussing several case studies that show how the Mayor and CEO can work together to address the issues facing their council.

We have outlined below the processes at work in councils that establish and manage effective working relationships between the Mayor and CEO. They are well supported by a set of corporate governance structures, procedures and processes. Candidates for the position of CEO are well aware of these, as are most people elected to council. But one cannot assume that this is always the case and an induction process for all councillors, the CEO and senior managers should be a matter of course, if only to confirm what they assume is in fact 'the way the council works around here'. How often have we seen in state government reports on councils that have become unworkable that basic structures of information and sharing and reporting were not established or used appropriately? It is a cornerstone

of our system of democratic government that we work by a set of rules which those running for, and seeking employment in, local government, sign up to. Councillors and officers will all benefit from periodic discussions about procedural matters, especially when they are facing issues that require them to follow such procedures as they move to resolution.

Recruiting the right person

Recruiting the right person is regarded in the management literature as one of the most important decisions a board of management, or council in our case, can make (Fombrun *et al,* 1984; Mello, 2011). The question should always be, 'are we giving enough attention to this task?' and 'do we have a valid process that will give us the best person available for the position of CEO?' In order to do this the council with the help from the senior management team, and possibly third party consultants practised in this process, needs to review the requirements for the position such that the person requirements match the position description. Is this a rapidly growing urban community with high demand for housing and infrastructure development? Or is it, for example, a coastal council with fluctuating demand for services over the year? Going through this process of thinking about just what type of person a council requires is an important strategic process that is the role of the elected councillors. Notwithstanding the style of facilitative leadership we highlighted earlier in this working paper, regardless of council type, there will be technical considerations and work experience which is important in the person leading the council organisation.

While a council will typically establish a selection committee from its ranks, led by the Mayor, it is important that the vision the council has for its community is on display. The Mayor shows leadership by ensuring that this vision is reflected in the material prepared to advertise the position and used to recruit candidates. Chairing the selection committee is also a key role for the Mayor as he or she will have to report back to the whole council seeking its endorsement of the candidate recommended for the position.

Getting off to a good start

Most CEO appointments will have a settling in period. In fact some councils formally recognise this and agree a probationary period during which the incumbent is provided feedback on their performance, usually at times set out well in advance at the time of their commencement. This is the opportunity for both parties, the Mayor (and possibly some other councillors from the selection committee) and the CEO to discuss their performance including the working relationship with the Mayor. Having other councillors present for this discussion make it much easier for both the Mayor and the CEO.

We mentioned above the need celebrate successor in local government, no more so, we would argue, than at the outset. There are often reasons to criticise the council organisation, and the council for work not done, but in these early stages of the working relationship it is important to acknowledge and celebrate successes or to deliberately structure 'short-term wins' (see, for example, Kotter and Cohen, 2002).

Maintaining good working relationships

Our observations of effective Mayors and CEOs include the way in which they use the services of the council organisation to plan and manage their work. Both are typically busy roles and appropriate delegation is a defining characteristic of a leader, political or administrative.

In large councils it is common place for councillors to take on particular roles with a portfolio or chairing a committee, or simply developing a watching brief on an issue of interest to the council. This mirrors what occurs within the council organisation. A senior manager, for example, may assume operational management over a major project, such as a main street upgrade or building a new asset such as a pool or a community hall. These are projects delineated by time and space requiring cooperation from across the organisation's divisional structure which allows the responsible officer to grow in their role taking the appropriate leadership to implement and complete such projects. While the roles delegated to fellow councillors are typically not about projects, rather they are functionally oriented (for example the finance portfolio or the planning portfolio), or focus on interest groups (for example, youth or senior citizens) or sectoral interests (for example, economic development) they can provide councillors with fulfilling roles – the reason most councillors run for office, to contribute to their local community. Providing that the system of delegation and reporting back are adhered to progressive councils can aim to include councillors through program and project oversight giving a stronger sense of common purpose. As we have highlighted earlier in this paper it is through effective facilitation that the Mayor and CEO will be seen to be successful leaders.

Focussed on the task with an eye on the relationship

In the preceding section we have discussed how the Mayor and CEO can delegate roles and responsibilities to fellow councillors and to senior managers. The evidence from the management literature is overwhelming that teams focussed on tasks with role and relationships defined and agreed are both effective and successful in their endeavours (Heifetz, 1994; Katzenbach, 1996; Quinn, 2004). Strategic and corporate planning are now common place in Australian local government and serve to give direction to the council organisation and to inform the community what council aims to do for them and when. The evidence from those councils who are sacked by state governments is that they have generally not been clear and open about the task at hand. We have provided examples in the (hypothetical) case studies below of councils that have agreed clear roles and responsibilities. Experienced local government councillors and CEOs and senior managers would be able to construct similar scenarios for their council. The diversity within these three is sufficient to make the point that while there are over 560 councils across Australia each is living its own story.

Case Study One

You are the Mayor of a rapidly developing coastal city dealing with the growing pains of being a port city for the resource development industry in your hinterland. The recent history of the region is that several councils were amalgamated into one regional council. You also have a major sugar industry in your region with a number of mills and adjacent communities. The people in these communities have been feeling the impact of declining commodity prices. Many have transferred their skills to the resource industry, but not everyone has been so fortunate.

As the Mayor elected at large for a four-year term your vision is to ensure the long-term benefits from the booming resource industry are realised by the regional community. You are acutely aware of the shift from agriculture to the resource industries and have asked councillors to work with you on your vision. To this end you have encouraged councillors to take on portfolio roles such as Finance and Technology; Rural Places; Roads and Infrastructure; Water and Waste Water Services; Planning and Development; Community Services and Facilities; Economic Development; Health, Sport and

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This example of having to manage a rapidly growing council on the back of a new resource industry is common place in Australian local government. Having to simultaneously deal with the legacy of industries in decline are also familiar. Of course industry, scale – of time and place – and many other characteristics will be different across councils. What we see here is leadership which recognises what the region and its diverse communities are dealing with, and responding accordingly.

Case study two

You are the Mayor, elected by your fellow councillors in this the first year of the council's four year term. Things have been tough in your rural community over the past decade. First a nine year drought and then devastating summer storms dumping torrential rain across the catchment and especially in the headwaters of rivers converging on an already brimming Murray River. Disaster management has been high on your agenda in this your second term as Mayor. When first elected your concerns were with the emotional state of farmers coping year are after year with drought and financial pressure on them to survive.

Your vision for the region recognises the need to work with other levels of government to ensure that citizens are cared for in this period of environmental extremes and that other levels of government are aware of the plight of your community and our providing reasonable assistance to them. As the Mayor you need to be in two places at once: in the community providing leadership; and, in the capital city meeting with politicians from both the State and Federal Government. This is difficult which is why you articulated this vision to your fellow councillors and the community at large. Importantly you recruited fellow councillors to delegate for you on important local committees with these organisations being fully aware of the rationale for this delegation.

The CEO is a vital ally in the strategy. She works with her senior management team to provide you, and the council via the normal channels of reporting, information related to your vision of supporting the local community while you are negotiating with key external stakeholders.

Here we see the champions of rural Australian communities. First recognising that they have to be at home to work with people who are feeling the pressure from environmental impacts while, second, working hard to represent the interests of your community to other spheres of government. With the support of fellow councillors and the CEO and senior management team the Mayor is able to address local needs and lobby effectively elsewhere knowing that they have full support of the council team.

Case study three

You are the newly elected Mayor in this the third year of your Council's four year term. Business is booming in your city, largely result of state government investment in health education and transport links to the capital city, and the immigration of people from small towns in the region. But not all of them. Quite a few of these small towns persist, several in fact increasing in number. People love living there and create much local media interest as they claim the same standards of services provided their cousins in the city. These two issues, a booming economy in the major centre and indifferent attitudes to the surrounding small towns have frustrated the previous two Mayors during the life of this council. Your vision is that council must attend to both issues and have outlined your plans before the annual election which sees you as the Mayor.

The CEO and his senior managers have been focused on managing the orderly development of the city. The pressure from the land development industry has been intense and council staff has worked under challenging circumstances to comply. The senior management team are cognisant of the tensions between city and country and the challenges of insuring equity in service delivery are demanding. Fortunately yours is a ward-based council. All the other councillors have worked well in the early years of the life of the council to develop and implement a strategic plan for the whole council, yet parochial political interests means they keep a close eye on their wards. The hinterland ward has two councillors; the other seven represent three wards covering the city. Research in the surrounding small towns highlights the lack of public transport for senior citizens and young women to and from the major centre.

For your one year as Mayor you had chosen mobility to and from these towns to the major city as one of your key priorities for action.

This type of situation is now more common place as state governments have created larger 'regional' councils creating significant challenges to address the needs of all citizens across the council area. Importantly, the Mayor has chosen to address an issue that he feels he can address in his twelve month term. Choosing to lead on an issue one needs to recognise the time scale they have to ensure its completion. This is one of the limitations of the Mayor being elected annually. Many issues take much longer, certainly the whole term of a council, and beyond for most.

Conclusions

These three cases highlight the fact that Mayors and CEOs working together with their councillors and senior management team can have a positive and long lasting impact on the community they serve. For some it will be counterintuitive that strong leadership comes via the articulation of a vision and facilitation, or delegation as we have also referred to in this paper. However, it is clear from our observations that councils are well aware of the importance of due process in matters relating to the appointment and review of their CEO and that this represents good governance practice.

Svara's characteristics of the effective leader include comments that facilitative leader demonstrates strong performance in relation to three areas of their activities: 'attitude to other officials, kinds of interactions fostered, and, their approach to goal setting'. Of course these have to be negotiated and to do this there needs to be consciousness raising at the start of every new council, or appointment of a new CEO. Effective local government leaders, both elected and appointed, need to be cognisant of this process and initiate and engage in appropriate discussions to this end.

Leadership at the top of our local governments is – as Mayors and CEOs have both told us - both an honour and a challenge. Those that are effective very quickly focus on the challenge and share the honour with others such that together they achieve their goals for the communities they represent. Having a sense of purpose, a clear and well articulated vision, one which is engaged via a facilitative leadership style and roles well defined and negotiated will ensure local government is at its very best in serving the communities they represent.

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