THE FUNCTION OF LEADERSHIP STYLES AND PERSONALITY TYPES AMONG CITY MANAGERS: AN ANALYSIS OF “FIT” AND TENURE

by

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This dissertation investigated the problem of short-term tenure of city managers as an indicator of the appropriate “fit” between the personality types and leadership styles of city managers and the city councils they serve.

Moving from theory to practice in public administration, this research presents findings, not offered to date, based on a rigorous, nation-wide study of city managers. The study focuses on years of service - tenure of city managers as a function of the city managers’ personality types, leadership styles, and perceptions of support from their city councils.

Results of the study were generated through an analysis of data collected in a national survey of city managers, endorsed by the Executive Director of the International City/County Management Association (ICA), using three self-administered instruments: a general demographic city manager questionnaire, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicato
Form G (MBTI® Form G), and the Leader Behavior Analysis II®-Self (LBAII®-Self).

A theoretical model, “Fit,” was created and tested, and the variable relations were found to be statistically significant. The findings revealed that “Fit,” measured as years of service - tenure, is a function of the manager’s leadership effectiveness and personality compatibility with the orientation and expectations of the city council as indicated by the annual performance evaluation. The findings were tested through predicted values and were confirmed through three case studies of city managers, with long tenure, and their city councils in small, medium, and large cities.

Independent variables found to significantly affect, positively or adversely, the dependent variable, years of service - tenure, were: leadership effectiveness scores; personality type dimensions, Introverted (I) and Perceiving (P); and city council perceptions measured by city- council-conducted performance evaluations of the city manager. Other statistically significant independent variables include: experience of the city manager; total number of cities the city manager has served; the manager’s age and race; and demographic information of the city in which the city manager serves, such as median household income, cities with a predominant white population, and the percentage of population not born in the United States of America.

The “Fit” Model provides a meaningful tool for present and future city managers to become conscious of their respective personality type and dominant leadership style in relationship to the culturally heterogeneous cities they lead and manage. Armed with such awareness, city managers can be empowered with the knowledge of whether they are “appropriately fitted” with the city councils and the citizens they serve.
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The nucleus of any ethical program must be driven by leadership. It is the leader that sets the tone and conveys the public image of the agency (Lewis, 1991, p. 180).

This study investigated the problem of short-term tenure of city managers as a function of the appropriate “fit” or match between the personality and leadership styles of the manager and the city council he or she serves. It has provided empirical support that “Fit,” as an indicator of years of service - tenure of city managers, is a function of the appropriate “fit” of the manager and the city council he or she serves through six categorical perceptions or perspectives. This is done by identifying: a) the perceptions of city managers, b) their leadership styles, c) their personality types, d) and the perceptions of the city councils the city managers serve, e) demographics of city managers, and f) demographics of the cities the managers serve.

Characteristics of the Profession

The city management profession continues to be dominated by white males, well educated and middle-aged. Of the 242 valid surveys, ninety-six percent of the city managers responding are white, one percent black or African-American, and one percent Hispanic, with a half of a percent American Indian and Asian respectively, and one percent refusing to respond. In addition, ninety-one percent are male, eight percent female, all have completed high school; twenty-three percent have a Bachelor’s degree, seventy-two percent have a master’s degree, and three percent have a doctorate.

Given the increasing diversity of American cities, one may conclude that the profession will be faced with the need to diversify its professional ranks in order to provide leadership to city councils that will become increasingly diverse. This can and
must be done without sacrificing professional competence.

Only fifteen percent of the city managers responding were under the age of 40 and seven percent were over the age of 61, leaving the city managers’ profession a relatively middle-aged profession with approximately seventy-eight percent between the ages of 41 and 60. However, when age is cross tabulated with the size of the community, it is even more interesting to note that the older city managers are in the larger cities.

Almost fifty percent of the city managers surveyed have served as a manager in only one city. Of those city managers that have served in only one city, seven percent are 25-40 years old, seventeen percent are 41-50 years old, fifteen percent are 51-60 years old, and two percent are 61-70 years old. Clearly, the greatest transitory ages are 41-60 year old category, which is not too surprising; however, what is surprising is the dearth of city managers under 40 years old.

The conclusion drawn from these findings is that the profession must not only cultivate a more diverse population of future managers but must also open up opportunities for younger managers, perhaps the cultivation of younger assistant city managers to gain critical experience early on in order to move into a manager’s position at an earlier age, perhaps at least the age that the U. S, Constitution requires for members of the U.S. Senate, 30 years of age. Moreover, since the professional labor force is being expanded by the entrance of females, the profession should consider an active recruitment of females interested in city management.

An additional thirty percent, or a cumulative percentage total of more than seventy percent, have served in just two cities, and a cumulative percentage of eighty-five percent have served in three cities, including the one in which they are presently located. The
mean for the number of cities a city manager has served is 2.15, with a median of 2, and a mode of 1. Consequently, the conclusion drawn from these data is that even though there is the perception that city managers go from city to city, and other national statistics show that the city management profession is a transient one, the descriptive statistics of this study do not support the prevailing perception or the extant data.

What is even more surprising, as previously mentioned, is that in a profession that is known to be volatile in the area of job security, ninety-five percent of the responding managers felt that their personality type appropriately “fitted” with the expectations of a majority or all of their city council members. Likewise, ninety-five percent felt that a majority or all of their city council members valued their leadership style, and ninety-three percent felt that their personality type was positively correlated with the personality type of their city council members. The conclusion drawn from these findings is that there exists a level of incongruence between the perceptions of city managers and the national mean data on tenure, unless, however, the low mean tenure is a function of voluntary turnover among managers.

Perhaps the ethic of the profession has evolved so that to move up (to a more challenging city and higher pay) one must move out within the mean years of tenure; however, this contention was negated by the research in this study. Therefore, I must reject such a contention of voluntary separation, and restate the concept as a perception more than reality. Alternatively, one can conclude, although with some caution that some managers may have little or no clue as to how their personality styles are inconsistent with those possessed or valued by the members of the city council, thus they have a false perception of what is their real relationship with the council. Possibly, because city
managers tend to be optimists, most managers continue to look at tenure through “rose colored glasses” as opposed to considering the reality of the average tenure of city managers nationally and as demonstrated in this dissertation.

Performance evaluations conducted by the city councils, as reported by the city managers, seem to support the managers’ perceptions of extremely good working conditions throughout the country. Based upon their responses, for evaluations during the last five years, more than ninety percent reported that they had received evaluations greater than satisfactory. Eighteen percent reported that they had never received any formal evaluation.

A conclusion one can draw from these findings is that while the above assessments portray positive reports from the city managers of their formal annual performance evaluations conducted by their city council, and performance evaluations were statistically significant in their relationship to positively affect years of service - tenure, a word of caution should be expressed. As noted in Table 5.1, the unstandardized coefficient for this variable was 1, meaning that the better the performance evaluation of the manager conducted by the city council, the more likely it will be that the manager will have a longer tenure by one year. Recognizing the relationship of other variables on the dependent variable, years of service - tenure, one should not rely too strongly on the positive reports from the managers of their performance evaluations. Some of the finest managers in the country have been fired when they thought everything was going well with the city council and the citizens of the city they served. Clearly one can conclude that this is a paradox that needs further exploration and study.
Personality

A review of Table 5.1 reveals that the JP and EI personality dimensions are the only two statistically significant personality dichotomous dimensions affecting tenure, with a positive Beta for JP and for EI. Because of the positive Beta of both dichotomous personality dimensions, it is the P (Perceiving) and the I (Introverted) dimensions that positively affect tenure.

The largest single personality group of the city managers reporting is the ISTJ (Introverted, Sensing, Thinking, Judging) personality type with approximately twenty-two percent of all personality types in this manager group. The second single largest personality type of the city managers responding, representing approximately fourteen percent of all the manager personality types, is the ENTJ (Extroverted, iNtuitive, Thinking, Judging). The third largest single personality category, representing approximately thirteen percent of the city managers responding, is the ESTJ (Extroverted, Sensing, Thinking, Judging). The INTP (Introverted, iNtuitive, Thinking, Perceiving) personality type was fourth in concentration, approximating eleven percent of the personality types of the city managers responding. Finally, the fifth largest concentration of personality type of the city managers responding, representing approximately ten percent of the personality types, is the ENTP (Extroverted, iNtuitive, Thinking, Perceiving).

These findings are quite similar to the findings of Lynch for studies of top local officials from 1980-1983 with the major difference between the findings of Lynch’s studies and the present study of managers being the dominant personality types are ISTJ, ESTJ, and ENTJ. All studies, including studies of the male population in the United
States, emphasize the dominance in the combination of the TJ (Thinking, Judging) personality dimensions in the managerial circles and among males in general.

In the large cities both ISTJ and ENTJ were the dominant personality types with twenty-two percent of the respondents, followed by ENTPs representing approximately sixteen percent of the personality types in large cities. Clearly, the TJ (Thinking and Judging) characteristic dominated the large cities with forty-seven percent of managers falling in this category.

Although the ENTJ only accounted for approximately fourteen percent of the personality types of the city managers responding within all city sizes, the ENTJ accounted for twenty-two percent of all the personality types of managers responding in large city categories, eleven percent in the medium sized cites, and thirteen percent in the small cities. The evidence seems to suggest that large city management is dominated by managers with a thinking, judging personality bent who are also extraverted, although other personality types are present in large cities.

In the medium sized cities ISTJ was the dominant personality type of the managers responding representing twenty percent of the personality types; INTJ personality types represented fourteen percent; and ENTJ personality types represented eleven percent. The TJ types among the medium sized cities represented a total of forty-five percent of all the city managers responding. Although the thinking and judging dimensions are also prominent among the medium sized cities, one can also conclude that this category of cities seems to be managed by a wide range of personality types among its city management corp., with greater infusion of the introverted type personality.

The ISTJ is the dominant personality type in the smaller cities representing
twenty-three percent; fourteen percent are ESTJs; while ENTJ and INTP each represented eleven percent of the personality types of the city managers responding. Again, as in the other size cities, the combined dimensions of TJ (Thinking and Judging) were dominant in the smaller cities representing fifty-seven percent of the respondents.

Without question, the combined personality dimensions of the TJ characteristics dominated the personality types in any sized city representing more than fifty-five percent of city managers responding. Analyzing the individual dimensions of the combined TJ (Thinking and Judging) characteristics in all cities, the T dimension represented eighty-six percent and the J dimension represented sixty-two percent of the respondents.

Among the Sensing (S) and iNtuition (N) dimensions, the iNtuition (N) dimension definitely dominated the large sized cities, while it shared representation in the medium sized cities with Sensing (S) types, almost by fifty percent, the small cities weighted slightly toward the Sensing (S) dimension representing a majority of the SN dichotomous type dimension.

The 25-40 year old group of city managers responding to the survey and the 61-70 year old group were predominately the Sensing (S) dichotomous dimension, while the 41-50 year old group and the 51-60 year old group were predominately the iNtuition (N) dimension. Consequently, the older (61-70) aged city managers and the younger (25-40) managers responding to the survey shared S (Sensing), or the preference for gathering information by using the five senses, while the middle aged (41-60) city managers responding preferred N (iNtuition) - using their intuitions, or letting “the mind tell the eyes” (Lawrence, 1999, p. 1), as their means for gathering information.

The conclusion one can draw from all of the personality dimension analyses is
that contemporary leadership requires the combination of the thinking and judging
dimensions of personality types augmented by both intuition and sensing among both the
introverted and extroverted leader. Yet, although sixty-two percent of the city managers
have J as their personality preference, it was the opposite of the J dimension, the P
(Perceiving) or more adaptable dimension and the I (Introverted) dimension, that
positively affected tenure. It is somewhat paradoxical when one combines this
information with the confirmation from this research that city managers overwhelming
feel that they do not have to move and that their personality and leadership styles are
valued by their city councils. Obviously, much more research on city managers and
personality types is necessary.

Leadership
The overwhelming majority of city managers (seventy-eight percent), are in the
S3, or style 3 Primary Leadership Style defined as “High Supportive and Low Directive
Behavior.” The other three leadership styles are S1 - “High Directive and Low
Supportive Behavior,” S2 - “High Directive and High Supportive Behavior,” and S4 -
“Low Supportive and Low Directive Behavior.”

The secondary leadership style of behavior embraced by forty-seven percent of the
city managers responding was S4 or style 4 - “Low Supportive and Low Directive
Behavior.” Thirty-two percent of the managers responding reported S2, sixteen percent
reported S3, and five percent of the managers reported S1.

Fifty-eight percent of the city managers reporting were in the Normal Flexibility
range as defined by The Blanchard Companies, Inc., while seventeen percent were in the
Low Flexibility range. Finally, twenty-five percent of the city managers scored in the High Flexibility range.

The Effectiveness Scores, the most important according to The Blanchard Companies, Inc., recorded by the city managers, resulted in approximately the same percentage falling within the Normal Effectiveness range - fifty-eight percent - as they scored in the Flexibility Scores; however, only twelve percent were ranked in the High Effectiveness range, and a large percentage - thirty percent - were ranked in the Low Effectiveness range.

There was only one city manager, less than one half of one percent of the managers responding, whose primary leadership style was the S1, High Directive and Low Supportive Behavior, with a personality type of ENTJ. All of the personality types with an S3, High Supportive and Low Directive Behavior leadership style had an F (Feeling) dimension in their personality types - ENFP, ISFJ, ISFP, INFP. No other personality type came close to having all of their types in one leadership style. Although most - seventy-nine percent of all the Myers-Briggs personality types - fell within the S3 Leadership Style - High Supportive and Low Directive Behavior, thirteen percent were in the S2 Leadership Style - High Directive and High Supportive Behavior, and eight percent were in the S4 Leadership Style - Low Supportive and Low Directive Behavior.

Statistical Model of “Fit”

Fit,” for purposes of this study, is the dependent variable, and is measured by years of service - tenure. It is affected by independent variables such as the city manager’s perception of the acceptance of his or her leadership style or styles by the city
council, the manager’s perception that the city council’s personality type is positively correlated with his or her own, the manager’s own personality type, and the city manager’s performance evaluation conducted by the city council. Other variables affecting “fit” would be the demographics of the city manager such as the number of years of experience the manager has demonstrated as a chief executive, the number of cities he or she has served as the chief executive, the manager’s educational background, and other demographic variables of the city manager such as gender, race, and age. “Fit” is also influenced by the demographics of the city the city manager serves such as median household income, percentage of residents not born in the United States of America, and the city’s racial mix.

A predictive linear regression “Fit” Model was created, statistically examined, and empirically supported. The “Fit” Model supports the hypothesis that the identification of a city manager’s personality type and leadership style, the manager’s perceptions of the city council and the city council’s performance appraisal of the city manager, demographics of the manager, and the demographics of the city the manager serves, will determine the manager’s tenure in today’s culturally heterogenous society.

The personality dimensions of I (Introverted) and P (Perceiving) were found to be statistically significant in relation to tenure. I (Introverted) was significant at the alpha level of .01 where p=.000, and P (Perceiving) was significant at the alpha level of .10 where p=.054. Total performance evaluations were found to be statistically significant (p=.000) in relation to years of service - tenure in the present city at the .01 level. In relation to tenure, experience, years of education beyond high school, and the city manager’s age were found to be statistically significant (p=.000) at the .01 level. The
manager’s leadership effectiveness score was statistically significant (p=.001), and the impact the total number of cities served by the city manager in relation to tenure was also found to be statistically significant (p=.001) at the .01 level. Also, the city manager’s race was statistically significant with respect to tenure (white: p=.001, black: p=.002) at the .01 level. The relationship of years of service - tenure to percent of population not born in the United States who live in the city the manager serves, was statistically significant (p=.009) as was the median household income (p=.001) of the city the city manager serves at the .01 level. Finally, the predominant race of the cities surveyed, white (p=.000) was found to be statistically significant at the .01 level with respect to tenure.

Although experience, leadership style effectiveness, the predominant race of the cities surveyed, and percent of population not born in the United States were statistically significant at the .01 alpha level, they have a negative influence on tenure, while the other variables discussed have a positive influence.

The model was tested by constructing a predicted values table (see Table 5.2). In an effort to see how the negative relationship of the leadership effectiveness variable affected tenure, the maximum leadership effectiveness value was inserted into the formula while all other variables were set at constant (mean) value, the results was a predicted value of 1.83 years of service - tenure.

A negative influence on tenure, identified by the regression model “Fit,” such as the Leadership Effectiveness Score, was then set at a constant (mean), and a positive influence on tenure such as the EI personality type dimension, was executed at its
maximum value. The results were that the EI personality type dimension produced a predicted value of 4.94 years of service - tenure. This positive influence of the EI personality type dimension is supported when compared to the predicted value of 1.83 years - tenure, for the effectiveness score.

A conclusion one can draw from these findings is that while it is perceived that a goal oriented, high achieving, action oriented, vision driven, chief executive may be described as the preferred “transformational” leader in the literature (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985, 1998; Conger, 1989; and others), it is the inwardly driven, perceptive leader or city manager, adaptable to change and chaos, and without high effective ratings, who receives the longer tenure. In short, the old adage comes to mind: “If you want to succeed in this organization, don’t bring attention to yourself and don’t make waves.”

A qualifying word, however, comes from the literature concerning this person with an “adaptable personality” who has a positive influence on tenure. Myers and McCaulley (1985) warn, “If not balanced by judgment, P may be correlated with undependability” (p. 208).

One of the city managers who communicated with me during the research supporting the finding that it is personality, not leadership effectiveness, that positively affects tenure. The manager stated:

I have long believed that personality, communication and interaction skills were the key components to success as a City Manager. I have noticed that more managers lose their jobs because of personality differences, ... [not]
because of technical incompetency. In fact, because of personal differences councils will search for errors, whereas, if you are liked, everyone understands that mistakes can happen. (Confidential, personal communication, August 23, 2000)

**Implications of the Research**

What are the implications of this research? In order to adequately respond to this question, it must be viewed from several perspectives: a) the academic literature, b) the profession, c) the public policy makers, and d) the practitioner.

From the perspective of the academic literature, this research adds a quantitative dimension of study not offered to date on one of the most itinerant professions in local government – city management. Scholars such as Chemers (1997), Bennis and Townsend (1995), Badaracco and Ellsworth (1989), Fiedler (1967), Aldrich and Pfeiffer (1976), Hannan and Freeman (1977), Aldrich (1979), Carroll (1988), and McKelvey (1983) have been espousing descriptively for years whether leaders and organizations must have an appropriate “fit” with those they lead and with their environment.

In addition to supporting and promoting the existing literature taught in public administration, this research focuses on the confluence of personality and leadership, which one could refer to as the concept of the psychology of leadership. The research affirms the need to place emphasis on personality traits as well as leadership styles effectiveness as a component and complement to the literature. It also continues to emphasize the importance of blending theory and practice in order to improve
relationships and understanding between diverse groups and heterogeneous communities. Knowledge of this model by the academician will prompt more research and enable its precepts to be taught in the classroom in order to improve the literature and assist potential, or existing, chief executives.

From the perspective of the city management profession, the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) will profit from this research if they promote its findings and continue to use its format, or a similar format, for future studies. Revisiting this subject, possibly every three to five years, would enable ICMA to establish valuable historical data, that would be beneficial to its members, establish trends, or changes over time, of personality types, leadership styles, and tenure of city managers. In addition, further empirical investigation would improve the predictability of the “Fit” Model. During its annual conference, ICMA could offer sessions on personality type, leadership styles, their relationship to performance evaluations, and how tenure can be improved by reviewing the “Fit” Model.

From the perspective of the public policy maker, it would be advantageous for city councils to familiarize themselves with this model and its related variables when they are seeking a new manager or exploring ways to improve communications with their existing city managers. In order for the council-manager plan to function as designed, it requires unencumbered communication, trust and confidence on the part of the city council and its manager and visa versa.

The model examines “fit,” consequently it is not just one dimensional. In order to be “adequately fitted,” one dimension must work coterminously with the other. City Councils, engaging in the task of hiring a new city manager, or evaluating an existing
manager would be in a better position to understand the type of personality to complement their own, if the city council would require the applicants for the chief executive’s position to take the personality inventory, as well as themselves. If the City Council employs the aid of an professional executive search firm to provide candidates for consideration, it should employ such a consultant on the proviso that the consultant provide the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Inventory® (MBTI®) and Blanchard’s Leader Behavior Analysis II® (LBAII®) to all candidates as a complement to any other exercises a city manager candidate would undertake.

The hiring process is always a difficult and to some degree a risky process, however, the hiring of a city manager is one of the most important functions a policy maker will undertake. Having all the tools available possible will reduce risk and will improve the knowledge of the City Council in order to make a truly informed choice. By following the procedures I have outlined and by employing the “Fit” Model, the City Council would be provided with the tools necessary to find the most “appropriately fitted” candidate to the personalities of its members.

One of the many communiques I received from city managers during the data gathering and research aspects of this dissertation, one specific communication speaks directly to this positive correlation:

I require all my staff to take it [MBTI®] within the first week they are hired. We all know each other’s types and use it to great advantage in our day-to-day work and communication. In addition, I have arranged for all
Council Members to take the same MB [Myers-Briggs] diagnostic. They, too, know each other’s styles and types.

We’ve discussed this at council Retreats and I would say they mostly have found it helpful....I have been manager here at the Town . . . for 6.5 years....Council just renewed my contract for another two years. (Confidential, personal communication, August 17, 2000)

From the perspective of the practitioner, the city manager does not have to rely on intuition to determine when it may be time to either leave a community or to entertain applying for a city manager position in a new city. The “Fit” Model provides a meaningful tool for present and future city managers to become purposefully conscious of their respective personality type and dominant leadership style in relationship to the culturally heterogeneous cities they lead and manage. Armed with such awareness, city managers can be empowered with the knowledge of whether they are “appropriately fitted” with the city council and the citizens they will serve.

The “Fit” Model will facilitate a way for the city manager to develop and improve his or her interpretative skills related to the personalities of others. It will facilitate communications that would foster the understanding of different opinions and beliefs to establish workable agreements and mutual accommodations between different groups and individuals. In order to develop such interpretative skills, the city manager will have to engage in open dialogue, critical analysis, and an understanding of the complex relationships between personality types and leadership styles of others and themselves.
The person that occupies this position must maintain a delicate balance or “fit” between the demands of responsiveness from a democratically elected body he or she serves and the expectations of a complex professional organization awaiting leadership and vision.

The “Fit” Model confirmed that the I (Introverted) and P (Perceptive) personality can have a positive impact on tenure, while the higher the leadership effectiveness scores, the shorter the tenure. In addition, although age, race, experience, and the number of cities the city manager has served, had a positive influence on tenure; the greater the percentage of white population and the larger percentage of citizens that were not born in the United States in a city the manager served had a negative influence on the manager’s tenure.

The spontaneity and adaptability of the P personality allows for acceptance of an “open-minded” attitude and the resistance of closure in order to obtain more data. This personality trait is quite the opposite of the J personality, which sixty-two percent of the city managers surveyed exhibit. The J personality type is goal oriented, organized, and wants closure, even when data is incomplete. The I personality type is reflective and focuses on ideas and inner impressions while finding stimulation inwardly. Its dichotomous personality type, E, is an active person who uses trial and error with confidence and focuses on people and things while “scanning the environment for stimulation” (Lawrence, 1999, p. 1).

The evidence seems to suggest that although the J (Judging) personality type dimension is predominate in sixty-two percent of the personality types exhibited by city managers responding to the survey, it is its opposite, the P (Perceiving) personality type
dimension, that has a positive effect on tenure. In addition the evidence suggests that the more I (Introverted) personality type dimension, representing fifty-four percent of all managers responding, has a significant positive influence on tenure as compared to its dichotomous personality type, E (Extroverted).

A word of caution, however, is in order. Although the statistical examinations provide empirical support to some of the hypotheses and the model, one must remember that these results are based on a finite sample population, regardless of it randomness. We can profit from what the results tell us only if we realize that the model is not a substitute for practical applications of good judgment, and it should not be reified.

Although the I and P personality type dimensions had a positive correlation to performance evaluation, that does not mean that city managers whose personality type does not include an I or an P cannot benefit from this model. To the contrary, any manager with any of the other personality type dimensions would be able to benefit from this model by surrounding themselves with individuals of personality types that would complement their own.