

OPTIMIZING THE RELATIONSHIP

City Council and its City Manager

(Board of Supervisors and its County Administrator)

- Quick Background Context
- Specifics Matter but Same Principles Apply
- 1988 – The Individual Relationship
- The Fundamentals – Mutual Respect and Teamwork
- The Big Picture – The Lens of Dr. John Nalbandian
 - The Model Relationship
 - Understanding Political Values in Action
- Techniques That Were Successful for Me
 - Quarterly One on One Individual Meetings
 - Weekly Correspondence Package
 - Praise in Public Scold in Private
 - Special Role of Mayor/Board Chair
 - Encourage Burden Sharing with Senior Staff
 - The Policy Venn Diagram
 - Strategic Retreat
- Final Reflections
 - It's a Very Weird Job
 - Everyone Makes Mistakes – Don't Crush Risk Taking
 - Trust and Forgiveness

Neil Morgan June 2024

Table 2

The Model Relationship Between Council and Staff

What the governing body expects from the staff	What the staff expects from the governing body
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No surprises • Communicate in lay terms • Be conscious of community values and sensitive to them • Make sound recommendations (reliable, professional, factual, unemotional) • Demonstrate commitment to the organization and the community • Understand the value of citizen trust of our local government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad policy direction as opposed to involvement in day-to-day decisions • Respectful consideration for professional judgment and the staff personally • Trust that staff's motives are oriented towards the public good • Provide freedom and resources to carry out our mission • Speak as a body
Obligations of the governing body to the staff. What will the governing body contribute to the staff?	Obligations of the staff to the governing body. What will the staff contribute to the governing body?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Back up the staff • Trust staff's recommendations • Respect staff expertise, training, and knowledge • Provide latitude in carrying out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do our job skillfully and with integrity • Provide the best professional recommendations • Encourage community input

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POLITICAL VALUES

Frequently, when we think of values, qualities like honesty, reliability, love and sincerity come to mind. These are values--deep-seated beliefs that lead to judgments about right and wrong--but they have to do with individuals and how we lead our lives individually.

Political values influence public policy development as opposed to the lives of the individuals who make policy. The primary political value in our culture is *responsiveness* of governmental officials to public wants and needs. The value of responsiveness is reflected in demands for *representation, efficiency, individual rights, and social equity*.

Representation. This is the deep-seated belief that government answers to the will of the people through elected representatives. The wishes of citizens should be represented in governing bodies. If a public policy is going to have an impact on a group of citizens, that group should have the opportunity to be heard. This value is attenuated by the notion that elected officials are "trustees" of the public will. But, that notion does not negate the idea that regardless of the elected officials perceived role--representative or trustee, citizen expressions of preferences are to be acknowledged. And, citizen involvement in the governing process is essential for legitimacy of governing processes.

Efficiency. Citizens expect government to be run prudently. This is achieved through cost-consciousness and rational, analytical decision making and through an emphasis on expertise and professionalism, planning and merit. As such, this value goes beyond financial sensitivities. The decision rule of "the greater good for the greatest number over the long haul" grows out of respect for this value.

Social Equity. Frequently, citizens are treated as members of groups rather than individuals. Sometimes we classify people as veterans, disabled, African American, female and senior citizen rather than as Jose, Mary, Rita, and Jacob. As group members they expect treatment equal to members of other groups. And, they compare their treatment with that given to members of other groups. For example, people living in one neighborhood expect to receive a level of government service similar to that received in other neighborhoods; older neighborhoods might expect more service.

Individual Rights. Citizens are granted legal rights like due process that protect them from arbitrary decisions by majorities: those who govern--both elected and appointed

officials. These rights may be expressed in ordinances, statutes and laws, and the constitution. Property rights and civil rights fall into the broader value of individual rights.

While we cherish each value, it is a common observation that one cannot optimize all four values simultaneously. Thus, politics focuses not only on desired policy, but also upon ways of accommodating the four values in order to connect what is politically acceptable with what is administratively sustainable. One's political philosophy can be expressed as preferences for one value over another.

EVERYDAY EXAMPLES OF VALUES IN PUBLIC POLICY

Representation

- Homeowners say, "We have a petition signed by 20 residents on our block requesting a stop sign at 4th and Elm."
- A group of citizens who supported you in your last election remind you, "You pledged to hold the line on taxes and now you are talking about raising taxes. That's not what we elected you for."
- A group of citizens says, "The city ought to be paying more attention to the welfare of its children. We've heard teenagers say they have no place to go at night. For their well-being and that of the city as a whole, we should build a teen center."

Efficiency/Professionalism

- Staff says to the council, "At your request, we now have available a comprehensive parks and recreation master plan, and for your consideration we would like to develop a five year capital improvements budget to implement it."
- A budget shortfall leads the chief administrative officer to consider layoffs. One of the alternatives presented to council is to make any layoffs based on job performance of the employees.
- The public works director is having a difficult time with the city's director of neighborhood development on a road project. The public works director argues that according to the engineering consultant's design, the best route will take the road parallel to 11th street. The director of neighborhood development argues that the preferred route will split an existing neighborhood.

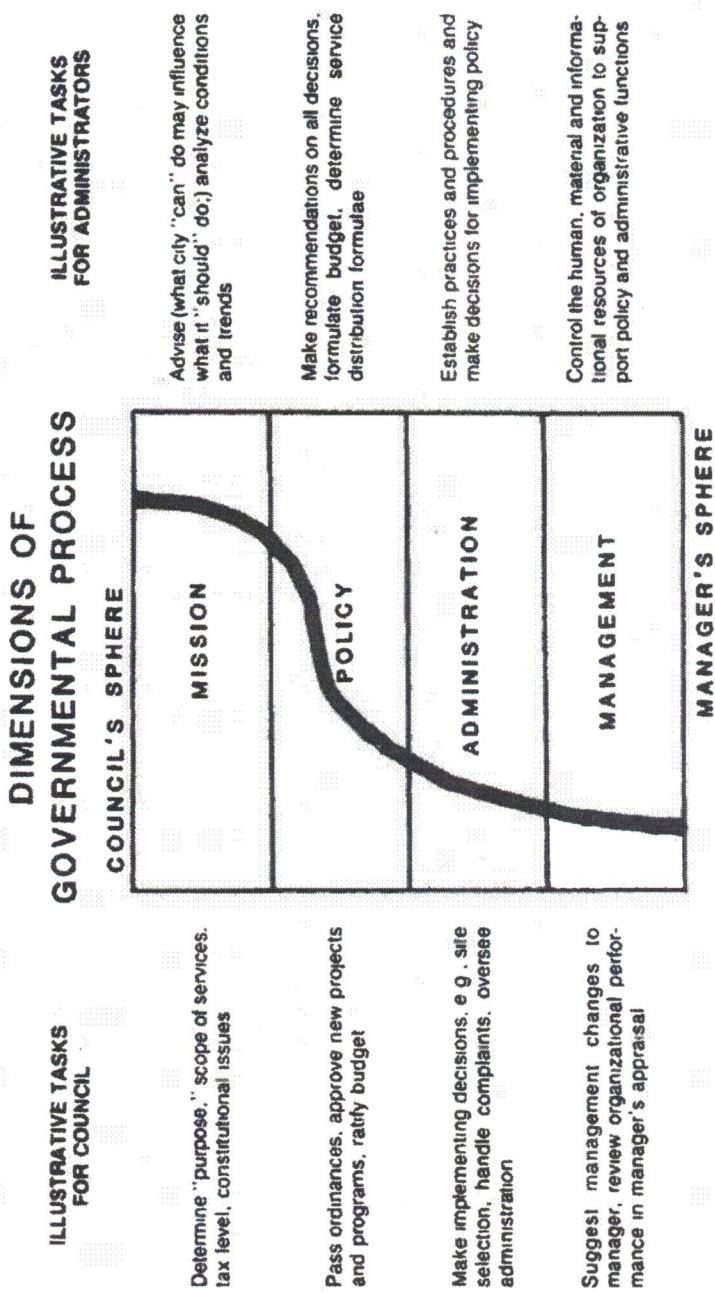
Social Equity

- A representative of the neighborhood association argues that the city wants to build an addition to its motor pool on the east side of town because that's where the poor people live. The representative says, "You wouldn't think of putting it on the west side of town."
- The affirmative action officer reminds the city manager that a layoff policy based on "last hired, first fired" will have a disproportionate effect on minorities who were hired as part of the affirmative action program.
- The city council, elected at-large, wants a report from the city manager on the distribution of funds for infrastructure repair. There is some concern in town that more money is going to new development compared to the older parts of town.

Individual Rights

- A new road is being built and an environmental group argues that to preserve green space the city ought to require a significantly greater setback than it presently does. The land owners along the route indicate their displeasure saying, "If the people want my land for green space, they should buy it."
- The fire fighters union objects to layoffs based on performance because it gives too much discretion to supervisors who it contends will play favorites. Union spokespersons argue that employment decisions should be based on seniority.
- An angry group of parents confronts the city commission and says, "The city should put a crossing guard at 9th and Kentucky. Our children have a right to cross the street safely on their way to school."

FIGURE 2
Mission-Management Separation with Shared Responsibility for Policy and the Administration



The curved line suggests the division between the Council's and the Manager's spheres of activity, with the Council to the left and the manager to the right of the line

The division presented is intended to roughly approximate a "proper" degree of separation and sharing. Shifts to either the left or right would indicate improper incursions