Effective Mayoral Leadership in Council-Manager Cities: Reassessing the Facilitative Model

James H. Svara

To understand the kind of leadership that the chief elected official in a council-manager government can provide requires rethinking standard assumptions and models. Americans are accustomed to looking for strong executives in Washington and state capitols, who put their own stamp on government; many presume that mayors are supposed to do the same thing. This approach is common in scholarly thinking as well. The common presumption in the political science literature is that mayoral leadership is dependent on the acquisition of power and its skillful use. The innovator or entrepreneur, as the prototypical type of mayoral leadership is labeled in this model, is adept at pyramiding power to overcome the checks on the mayor’s authority in a governmental form based on separation of powers.

These standard assumptions overlook a fundamental characteristic of the council-manager form of government: it does not have separation of powers. It is based on a unitary model of governmental organization: all authority is lodged in the legislative body that delegates authority to a city manager selected by and accountable to the city council. There are two important features of council-manager government that have an impact on mayoral leadership. First, the mayor and council are “constitutionally” checking and balancing each other; they are part of a governing body. Second, the mayor does not execute or directly promote the accomplishment of tasks. Thus the mayor can and should exert a different kind leadership. The mayor leads by empowering others—in particular, the council and the manager—rather than seeking power for himself or herself, and the mayor accomplishes objectives through enhancing the performance of others.¹ The characteristics of council-manager government both permit and require another kind of leadership on the part of the chief

This article is adapted from a chapter in George Frederickson and John Nalbandian (eds.), The Future of Local Government Administration: The Hansell Symposium (Washington, D.C.: International City and County Management Association, 2002), which includes a collection of articles on the current conditions and future development of government in cities, counties, and regions.
elected official who is not the executive officer in the government. Power is not a precondition to effective leadership in this setting.

The council-manager form supports a model of mayoral leadership that stands in contrast to the standard power-based model. The alternative found in these governments is a facilitative model of leadership. The ideal mayor in council-manager cities is a facilitator who promotes positive interaction and a high level of communication among officials in city government and with the public, and who also offers guidance in goal setting and policy making. This type of leadership is well suited to the conditions of the council-manager city for two reasons. First, cooperative relationships among officials are common; the mayor is not primarily a leader who overcomes resistance and exchanges favors for support. Second, the city manager provides professional leadership in city government, and the manager supports the elected officials in accomplishing their goals. The city manager is accountable to the council rather than being a bureaucratic force whose resistance must be overcome. These characteristics do not mean that city managers are passive or unsubstantial figures in city government; rather, they reflect the fact that managers accept the ethical obligation to use their leadership in the service of elected officials and the citizens of the community. Elected officials recognize the important leadership contributions that city managers make and give them high marks for helping the council fulfill its responsibilities.

In this setting, the mayor does not have to confront a council that is defending its own powers, or seek to establish control over the city’s administrative apparatus. The mayor can work on improving the sense of purpose and the interaction between the council and a city manager who wants to work with elected officials. Describing the context for leadership in this way is not intended to ignore that there can be divisions within the council—indeed, they may be growing—or conflicts in the community that may have to be overcome for the city to develop coherent approaches. Still, effective leadership by the mayor can improve working relationships among officials, make the form of government function more smoothly, and increase the focus of elected officials in setting goals and policy.

The Facilitative Model of Leadership

It is possible to conceive of leadership in government as collaborative and focused on the accomplishment of common goals, as I argued in my book *Facilitative Leadership in Local Government.* The facilitative model presumes that relationships among officials are essentially cooperative—a condition commonly produced by the integrated authority of the council-manager form.

The characteristics of the facilitative leader can be divided into three categories: attitude toward other officials, kind of interactions fostered, and approach to goal setting. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the facilitative leader.
The leader who uses the facilitative approach is committed to helping other officials accomplish their goals. He or she promotes open communication among officials. The approach to managing conflict stresses collaboration in which the interests of the leader and others are mutually satisfied. The leader shares leadership and seeks to coordinate efforts among officials. Finally, the leader seeks to create a shared vision that incorporates his or her own goals and the goals of others, promotes commitment to that shared vision, and focuses the attention and efforts of all involved on accomplishing the vision.

Described in this way, the practice of facilitative leadership is not confined to a particular official. Other members of the council and the city manager can and frequently do use the same style in their own behavior. The connection between this style and the chief elected official has been stressed for two reasons. First, it is the approach to leadership that is best suited to the nature of the mayor’s office in the council-manager form of government. Second, without effective facilitative leadership from the mayor, it is more difficult for other officials to sustain a collaborative approach to achieving goals on their own. Consequently, the facilitative model is integrally—but not exclusively—linked to the chief elected official.

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

Typically, the mayor in the council-manager city is dismissed as a ribbon cutter or ceremonial head of the government. Close examination of these mayors, however, indicates that they play a range of roles, which fall into three categories. The first set of roles are traditional, or “automatic” in the sense that they are built into the office, and all mayors will fill them unless they are inept or make an effort to avoid them. The mayor performs ceremonial tasks and acts as a link to the public, a presiding officer, and a representative or promoter for the city.

A second set of roles involves active coordination and communication, active in the sense that the mayor must recognize and choose to fill them. In these roles, the differences between more and less active mayors are likely to emerge. The mayor is an articulator or mobilizer for the city, promoting liaison and partnership with the manager and acting as team relations and network builder. In this role, the mayor works to coalesce the council into a cohesive team and establishes a positive “tone.”

Finally, there are three additional roles that deal with policy leadership and guiding the work of the council:

1. In the goal-setter role, mayors engage in activities to create a sense of direction or a climate for change.
2. As delegator or organizer, the mayor helps the council and manager understand and maintain their roles, including helping the council members understand their responsibilities.
3. Finally, in the policy initiator role, the mayor develops programs and policies to address problems. If active in this role, the mayor is instrumental in shaping the city’s or county’s policy agenda.

These roles are mutually reinforcing; success in one enhances success in others. Further, they go on concurrently. In performing all the roles, the mayor benefits greatly from a mutually supportive relationship with the city manager. Still, the performance of the mayor varies from city to city in two respects: how many roles are filled and how well.

Resources

Facilitative leadership does not depend on a superior power position. There are resources available in the council-manager form and within the incumbent as a person to develop leadership in the areas of coordination and policy guidance. The mayor operates at the intersection of communication channels to the council, the city manager and staff, and the public. This location sets the foundation for effective leadership. Mayors with a clear conception of the job—its possibilities, interdependencies, and limitations—are likely to be able to take advantage of this resource.
The formal powers assigned to the mayor are limited in council-manager cities. Mayors usually do not appoint staff, develop the budget, or control the manager. Rather than emphasizing powers to understand the bases of leadership, it is more appropriate to examine the range of interactions by mayors and the quality of their ideas. John Kotter and Paul Lawrence have analyzed mayoral behavior in terms of processes: agenda setting, network building, and task accomplishing. They argue that the “scope of the mayor’s domain”—those areas in which the mayor “behaves as if he has some responsibility”—is determined more by the nature of the mayor’s agenda-setting activities than by the assignment of formal responsibility. Also, mayors can establish a broad network of relationships regardless of formal powers. There is a great deal of potential for mayors to promote communication and cooperation, starting with the close relationship to the manager. Task accomplishment occurs through coordinating the efforts of other officials.

A range of personal characteristics affects the level of leadership. Willingness and ability to commit time can give the mayor a relative advantage over other officials, but this does not mean that the amount of time per se determines effectiveness. Mayors must use time well to convert it into other resources, such as knowledge or networks. They also need such personal qualities as energy, resourcefulness, positive attitude, contacts and connections, ability to communicate, a clear sense of purpose, and the capacity to keep sight of broad goals while making specific choices. Interpersonal skills, such as inclusiveness and the ability to share responsibility and information, promoting the expression of divergent views, and resolving differences, are important traits the mayor needs to have in his or her dealings with the council and the manager.

The mayor has extensive opportunities for facilitative leadership by virtue of the attributes and duties of the position. As ceremonial head and spokesperson for the council, the mayor has much more extensive public and media contact than other council members. As presiding officer, the mayor can guide the conduct of meetings and have some impact on the flow of debate and the timing of resolutions. As liaison with the manager, the mayor links the two major components of the system—the legislative body and the administrative apparatus—and can foster communication and understanding between elected and appointed officials. As official representative, the mayor has extensive dealings with officials in other governments and may serve as a key participant in formulating agreements with state or federal officials, other local governments, developers, and anyone who seeks a joint venture with city government.

By performing these activities, the mayor occupies a strategic location shaped by his or her special and close relationship with the council, manager, and public. The mayor’s distinctive interaction with the participants constitutes a network that is readily available if the mayor chooses to use it. All the major interactional channels pass through the mayor. Because of this favored position, the mayor is able to tap into various communication networks among
elected officials, governmental staff, and community leaders. Although those people can and do interact with each other independently, the mayor can transmit messages better than any one else in the government because of the breadth of knowledge and range of contacts he or she is likely to have. The mayor is a “broker”—trading not power but information and ideas. In so doing, the mayor has a unique potential to expand the level of understanding and improve the coordination among participants in the governmental process.

The issue of whether the likelihood of mayoral leadership can or should be enhanced by being assigned additional functions and powers is examined in this article, but it is clear already that the potential for leadership is present in the basic council-manager form.

Types of Leadership

There is variation in the nature and scope of leadership depending on how well the roles that make up the office are filled (see Table 2). A mayor who does not fill even the traditional/automatic role, as in being an ineffective presiding officer who allows the council to flounder in meetings, could be called a caretaker, whereas one who fills the role well but attends to no others is a symbolic head. Both the coordinator and director create an atmosphere that promotes cohesion and communication among officials and strengthens the capacity of the council to identify problems and make decisions. Coordinator mayors, however, are not strongly associated with a policy agenda of their own, even though they contribute to fashioning and acting on an agenda as a member of the council. Director mayors do have their own policy agenda, although it reflects to a greater or lesser extent the views of other officials as well. This is a subtle distinction in the sense that neither type is a solitary leader and both have broad goals for their cities. The coordinators are effective at developing a sense of cohesion and purpose in their cities and strengthening the policy-making process. They are not themselves, however, active policy initiators. They are more process-oriented than policy-oriented. The director type creates an agenda in the sense that the mayors have originated it (at least in part)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Mayor</th>
<th>Roles Filled Effectively</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caretaker</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic head</td>
<td>Traditional or automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>Traditional or automatic, coordination or communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Traditional or automatic, coordination or communication, policy guidance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and put their imprint on it, and they are recognized by other officials and the public for this contribution.

In sum, although council-manager mayors lack formal powers over other officials, they occupy a strategic location in the communication channels with the council, the manager, and the public. A facilitative leader must manifest a commitment to full involvement of members of the governing board through inclusiveness, sharing of information, supporting expression of divergent views, and accepting the initiative of other members, as well as having respect for the authority of the city manager. Mayors can impart leadership in two dimensions. First, the mayor contributes to the coordination of effort among officials and raises the level of communication among them and with the public. Second, the mayor guides the formation of policy. Mayors can attend to both the process of interaction and the purpose toward which efforts are directed. The moderately active mayor goes beyond ceremonial leadership to foster coordination and communication. The highly active mayor also helps to develop a common set of goals with wide council support.

Having developed a distinctive model for leadership in council-manager cities, it is possible to examine how common such leaders are in American cities and what impact they have. These topics are addressed by reviewing survey results from the 1980s and presenting a new approach to measuring the leadership types of mayors on the basis of a 1997 survey of city managers.

Evidence of Mayoral Leadership from Earlier Surveys

In *Facilitative Leadership in Local Government*, I examined several data sources to establish some parameters of the quality and effectiveness of the leadership provided by council-manager mayors. A survey of city managers in North Carolina and in Ohio in the late 1980s included measures of the performance of mayors in filling the roles described in the previous section. On the basis of ratings of the extent to which the mayor engaged in an activity and his or her effectiveness at it, a scale was developed. Ratings for the separate roles described in the previous sections were combined into two broader categories that represent the two dimensions of leadership in the facilitative model: coordination and policy guidance. When the ratings for the roles in these two facets of the job are combined and grouped into four categories, we find that mayors vary widely in their performance; 27 and 28 percent of the mayors fell into low and moderate leadership categories, respectively. These mayors may handle the ceremonial and traditional aspects of the position well, but they do not get very involved and are not very effective at coordination and policy leadership. Approximately 20 percent ranked moderately high in their leadership. Finally, one quarter were highly active and effective at bringing the council together, promoting communication and a strong working relationship, monitoring and adjusting the division of responsibility.
within the council and between the council and the manager, setting goals, and offering direction.

On the basis of these measures, it appears that a large minority of mayors provide moderately high to extensive leadership in council-manager cities. Therefore, the widespread perception that all council-manager mayors are merely figureheads was not substantiated. There are, however, shortcomings in the mayor's leadership in more than half of the council-manager cities in the coordinative and policy dimensions of the position.

When effective leadership is present, the performance of local government officials improves. When mayors carry out greater leadership, council members are more likely to work well together, give direction to city government, and understand their roles in administration. When leadership is weak, councils are more likely to have difficulty making decisions, focus on immediate concerns to the neglect of long-term planning, react rather than initiate, seek special services and benefits for their constituents, dabble in administrative matters, and make poor use of time. When mayors are uninvolved and ineffective, the performance of city government suffers. Thus, mayors make a difference in the performance of their governments. The difference is positive or negative depending of the strength of leadership.

It has been argued by some and assumed by others that a high level of leadership from the mayor diminishes the position of the manager, even if no powers are given to the chief elected official. Effective mayors, however, need not supplant the city manager. Strong facilitative leadership can be extended along with that from the city manager. In fact, surveys of city managers show that the working relationship is better as mayoral leadership improves, particularly the relationship between the mayor and manager. Extensive and effective leadership, therefore, does not necessarily mean that the mayor interferes with the administrative process in the city.

Finally, the mayor has an impact on the level of council involvement in goal setting and policy making. With more effective mayoral leadership, city councils are more active in goal setting and policy making but not more involved in administrative or management decisions. The manager's involvement, on the other hand, is not significantly related to the level of the mayor's leadership. There is no indication that an active mayor suppresses the manager's level of involvement in activities across the board, from setting mission to managing the internal affairs of the city.

In sum, greater activity by the mayor improves the council's performance. The differences across cities indicate that when mayoral leadership is high, councils are actively involved in setting the direction for the city. The lower the level of mayoral leadership, the more reactive and less involved the council is. The results from these earlier studies indicate that the mayor as facilitator focuses the council's attention on these activities and leads the council and manager to accomplish them. Thus the mayor can strengthen representative democracy while reinforcing the contributions of professional staff.
New Measure of Mayoral Leadership

A 1997 national survey of city managers from cities with a population of twenty-five hundred or more is another data source for assessing mayoral leadership. The measures included in the survey do not match most of those used previously but include some new ones that potentially offer new insights into the nature of leadership. Managers were asked to what extent their mayor had these characteristics:

- The mayor helps the council adopt policies.
- The mayor promotes communication within the city council.
- The mayor is a visionary person who initiates new projects and policies.

The responses were made on a five-point scale that ranged from “to a very high extent” to “not at all.” These measures address the coordinative and policy dimensions of facilitative leadership and also add a measure of the quality of leadership. In the model of effective facilitative leadership, the mayor not only improves process and policy making but also brings visionary leadership to the position. To classify the mayors rated by their managers in terms of these three criteria, cluster analysis was used. This method finds a specified number of groupings based on how their responses cluster in distinctive combinations. The mean values for each indicator in the four groups are presented in Table 3.

The four clusters have been labeled with the leadership types specified earlier in Table 2. The types match reasonably well with the four groupings. The caretaker has low effectiveness ratings in all the dimensions. This mayor does not help the council adopt policies, does not promote communication, and does not display visionary leadership. Put simply, this mayor minimally fills the position. The second type is moderately engaged in each activity. Although there is no direct measure of how this mayor fills the ceremonial functions of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To What Extent Do You Agree with Each Statement?</th>
<th>Symbolic Head</th>
<th>Coordinator</th>
<th>Director</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The mayor promotes communication within the city council.</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mayor helps the council adopt policies.</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mayor is a visionary person who initiates new projects and policies.</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage (number)</td>
<td>21.7 (97)</td>
<td>37.4 (167)</td>
<td>19.7 (88)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1 = to a very high extent; 2 = to a high extent; 3 = to some extent; 4 = to a little extent; 5 = not at all (N = 447).
the office, we presume that this “symbolic head” handles the basic elements of the mayoral position but offers only modestly effective leadership in other aspects of the job. The coordinator and director clusters are clear expressions of the distinction between the mayor who is effective at process but offers little policy leadership on the one hand and the mayor who is both a process leader and helps chart the course for the community on the other. The two types have equally high scores on promoting communication and helping with policy making, but the coordinator has a moderately low score on acting as a visionary whereas the director has a high rating.

Slightly more than two fifths of the mayors are in the combined caretaker and symbolic-head categories that offer a low level of leadership. The coordinators are the most common, representing 37 percent of the council-manager mayors. One mayor in five is a director—the complete type of leadership, according to this approach. Approximately the same breakdown is found in very small, small, and medium-sized cities, but the distribution of the mayoral types is slightly different in large cities. As indicated in Figure 1, in cities with a population under 100,000 there are roughly the same percentages of the mayoral types as found for all cities. In large cities, however, the director type is more common. This type is identified in 29 percent of the large cities compared to 20 percent for all cities. Symbolic head mayors are also found more often; they represent 33 percent in the large cities but only 21 percent overall. The coordinator type seems to get squeezed out in the large cities; they are only 19 percent in large cities. The mayor is more likely to be either a symbolic head or director than in smaller cities, but it is harder to be a coordinator-type mayor in this setting. The explanation for this finding may be that mayors who focus primarily on process do not appear to be effective in large cities. If they bring vision to the

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**Figure 1. Distribution of Mayoral Leadership Types in Council-Manager Cities (1997)**

![Bar chart showing the distribution of mayoral leadership types across different population size categories.](image-url)
position, they help the council work together more effectively. Otherwise, they are more likely dismissed as symbolic heads of their governments.

The contributions of the mayor vary with type both outside the governmental arena and within. City managers were asked in the survey to rate the extent to which the mayor has close relations with the public and knows what concerns citizens have. The combination of excellent and good ratings for the mayor on citizen relations was caretaker 31 percent, symbolic head 55 percent, coordinator 75 percent, and director 85 percent.

The director is generally recognized as a public leader who is in touch with citizens, as are most coordinators. This public support is presumably both a contributor to and a consequence of more effective leadership. The characteristics that lead to more extensive and effective interaction with other officials carry over to dealings with the public.

To a limited extent, it is possible to estimate the impact that the various mayor types have on the city council along the lines taken in studies summarized earlier. The city managers surveyed were asked to indicate the extent to which city councils place importance on a number of functions. Among these are key activities that contribute to the governmental function of city councils—that is, how they act as a board of governors to establish goals, set the parameters for policies, and establish specific objectives. What is of interest here is whether the mayor’s type of leadership has any impact on the importance assigned by council members to these tasks. The results are presented in Figure 2, in which the amount of importance is measured on a 100-point scale (with 100 as very high emphasis). There are differences, although not

![Figure 2. Mayoral Leadership Type and Extent of Council Emphasis on Functions](image)

Note: 100 = very high emphasis.
necessarily dramatic ones. Across the types of leadership from low to high effectiveness, the extent to which the city council is involved in each activity increases. The differences are particularly pronounced in creating a vision for the city and establishing the principles on which policies are based. The more effective the mayor, the more the council emphasizes these functions in policy making. In addition, cities with director-type mayors are somewhat more likely to give importance to setting exact goals and priorities than cities with other types of mayor.

It is obvious from Figure 2 that the type of mayoral leadership does not make a black-and-white difference in the orientation of the council. The city council as a whole, with inputs from city managers, is moderately involved in governance activities even when the mayor carries out limited leadership. Still, mayors with visionary leadership appear to make a difference in enhancing the council’s performance as a policy-making body.

One final aspect of the policy-making process can be examined that has not been covered in previous studies. This is the relationship between the mayor’s type of leadership and the influence of the mayor in the budgetary process and in economic development. City managers were asked to rate the level of influence of a range of actors, including the mayor (and themselves). The ratings were converted to a 100-point scale, from no influence (zero) to very high influence (100). With this approach, it is possible for many actors to be assigned high or low influence; that is, one does not presume that an increase in the influence of one actor necessarily decreases the influence of another. Figure 3 presents the influence ratings for the mayor divided by type of leadership and size of their city.
city. Two tendencies stand out. First, there is a slight tendency for the mayor’s influence to increase as city size gets larger. The mayor assumes a larger role with more clout in a larger city. Second, there is a pronounced variation within each city size category between the type of leadership and the level of influence. The caretakers always have the lowest influence. In cities under 100,000 population, symbolic heads and coordinators have similar levels of influence at an intermediate level, although in large cities the coordinators actually have the highest influence by a slight margin. The directors have very high influence in each of the size categories. Whether influence flows from the style of leadership or helps to reinforce it, the two clearly go together.

The presence of the director-type mayor with very high influence does not displace the city manager. The manager’s ratings of influence were uniformly very high across cities with the four types of leaders. The average influence rating was 87 for city managers, and it was essentially the same in the cities with directors (a self-rating of 86). This finding is consistent with a general conclusion across cities in fourteen countries in which this same survey was conducted. Higher influence for the mayor does not lead to lower influence on the part of the top city administrator within different forms of government for cities. The general finding for all countries is that the two influence ratings are positively related; their influence tends to rise and fall together. In the U.S. council-manager cities as we see here, the influence of city managers is consistently high regardless of the mayor’s influence. There is no support for the common assumption that more influential mayors weaken and displace the city manager.

Thus, this recent study is the basis for reconfirming the findings from earlier surveys of city managers. Mayors can be categorized into types that distinguish their contributions to improving communication among officials and focusing the policy process as well as the extent to which they offer visionary leadership. Measured in this way as before, many—perhaps most—mayors do not provide a high level of effective leadership, although a sizable proportion do. The ideal—visionary facilitative leadership demonstrated by the director-type mayor—is somewhat rare. It is found in only one-fifth of all cities and three-tenths of large cities. Mayors who strengthen the process and in addition are innovative leaders guide their councils to give more emphasis to their governance tasks. Finally, the coordinators, and especially the directors, are more influential officials who work with equally active and influential city managers.

Conclusion

Cities with the unitary form present the setting in which a facilitative rather than a power-oriented approach to leadership can be used. Council-manager mayors who provide facilitative leadership can enhance the performance of their governments and increase the influence of elected officials. The position does not need to be a pale imitation of the elected executive’s office in mayor-council
cities and should instead be seen as a unique leadership position that requires
distinctive qualities. On the basis of the various kinds of questions used in sur-
veys of city managers, we can estimate that 40–60 percent of the mayors are
capable leaders who are moderately to highly effective.

The resources and skills needed for effective performance can be derived
from the form of government itself, from the personal resourcefulness and
drive of the mayor, and from a commitment to enhance the position of other
participants in the governmental process. The recent survey of managers sup-
ports the importance of the ability to articulate and help fashion a vision and
to spur the city to innovative action. The lesson for mayors is that effective
leadership is built upon combining their vision with strengthening the other
participants in the governing process rather than controlling or supplanting
them. This attitude, along with emphasis on developing a shared commitment
to goals, is the essence of the facilitative leadership model.

A major issue is how to promote facilitative leadership and the emergence
of visionary chief elected officials. There is a widespread feeling that strength-
ening the political leadership of the mayor is important to improving the
performance of council-manager government. Indeed, direct election of
the mayor, which enhances the political leadership of the position, is now
common. In a small number of cities, there is concern that the council is frag-
mented to such an extent that the potential benefits of representative democ-
racy are not being fully realized. Where this condition persists and becomes
endemic, some argue that the mayor should be given special powers that ele-
vate the mayor's position vis-à-vis the rest of the council and the city manager.
Cincinnati is an example of this kind of change. In this approach, powers are
established that give the mayor additional leverage over the council, such as a
veto and the authority to appoint council committees. The mayor may also be
given additional empowering provisions in the charter that increase the mayor's
ability to focus the city manager's attention on key priorities, such as a formal
and distinct role in the budget process and the authority to nominate the city
manager to the council.10

The question that may be raised about these changes, as Craig Wheeland
has observed in his contribution to the Hansell Symposium, is whether the
assignment of powers and special provisions can undermine facilitative lead-
ership.11 The potential negative consequences of these changes should be rec-
ognized. Cities face a difficult dilemma in empowering the mayor. On the one
hand, the mayor can be a force for promoting cohesion. Empowering the
mayors can give them more tools to work with and encourage a wider range
of candidates to seek the office. On the other hand, making mayors different
and more powerful can both encourage them to go their own way and ignore
other members of the council, as well as weaken the council and produce
resentment among other council members. One could argue that enhanced
authority for the mayor within the council-manager form should not be nec-
essary, but it may be an insurance policy in unusual circumstances, permitting
an internal remedy for dealing with a very fragmented council. Even empowered mayors, however, should develop their skills as facilitative leaders and not rely on their special powers. The powers should be used only in an emergency and as a last resort.

The evidence presented here indicates that mayors can be effective by developing the potential of the basic position and by offering innovative leadership and maintaining close ties with citizens. Only a handful of cities have given mayors substantial extra powers, yet a large segment of mayors already show the capability of providing full and effective leadership. It is important to recognize that effective facilitative leadership does not depend on empowering provisions. There is, however, another consideration. The reality is that often the mayor does not offer visionary leadership in council-manager government or display all aspects of the facilitative model of leadership. The empowering provisions may enhance leadership by giving the mayor additional tools to use in assembling a coalition of supporters where it does not naturally emerge and, perhaps more important, by attracting more assertive leaders who are put off by the perceived limitations of the mayor's office. What we do not know is whether empowering provisions have a positive or negative impact overall. On the positive side, enhancing the position may make mayors better leaders or attract better leaders to be mayors. On the negative side, assigning powers to the mayor could have no positive effect on leadership or weaken the council and the manager.

Mayors can be effective leaders in the council-manager form by being visionary facilitative leaders. Incumbent mayors, potential candidates for the office, and other elected officials can improve their prospects for leadership by understanding this model and developing the attributes and skills needed to pursue it. More attention should be given to increasing the likelihood that mayors realize the potential for leadership inherent in the position and in the council-manager form of government rather than to tinkering with the powers of the office itself.

Notes

2. For a review of previous research on alternative approaches to leadership in government and facilitative leadership in the private sector, see Svara, J. H. “Redefining Leadership in Local Government: The Facilitative Model.” In J. H. Svara and Associates, *Facilitative Leadership in Local Government.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994, especially chapter one. This article summarizes the main arguments from that chapter.
3. In the mayor-council form, separation of powers is supposed to lead to conflict as one official checks the power of another.
8. Data for this analysis come from a national survey of city administrators conducted in 1997 as part of a fourteen countries study of appointed chief executives in local government. The respondents to the survey in the United States include 485 from council-manager cities and 172 from mayor-council cities with a population of twenty-five hundred or more, along with thirty-nine administrators in cities with some other form of government. The overall response rate was 59 percent in the United States. Only the responses from city managers are included in the analysis for this paper.
10. The provisions that have been recommended, most of which were included in the charter change in Cincinnati, are as follows:

- Delivery of state of the city address
- Power to veto legislation
- Appointment of council chairs and committee members
- Authority to assign all agenda items to committees
- Nomination of city manager to council
- Sole authority to initiate the removal of manager with the approval of council
- Greater weight in vote to retain city manager
- Review and comment on budget of city manager or authority to revise the manager’s budget before it is submitted to the council
- Setting level of mayor’s salary compared to council members
- Staff support for mayor and authority to select staff

13. The North Carolina League of Municipalities offers an orientation program for new mayors within two weeks of the November election in odd-numbered years when municipal elections are held. This program focuses on leadership roles and conducting effective meetings. A complete orientation for new mayors and council members covering all aspects of city government is held starting in January. That state’s Association of County Commissioners sponsors a similar program for new county commission chairpersons, who are usually selected by other commissioners.

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