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**Final Essay**

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From my youth, there has never been a time in my life that I have not been actively involved in community service. I have volunteered in student organizations, community outreach groups, faith based organizations, and civic programs. I feel drawn to community endeavors because I am motivated by working for a cause. While I have always been drawn to public service, I never intended to make it a career. In fact, deciding to pursue a Masters of Public Administration was a very abrupt decision that pulled me out of another career path in so short a time frame that I really didn't have an understanding of the field and I had not even contemplated having a perspective on public administration. As a result, the academic training and practical experience of this program have been my municipal management training and have formed the very foundation for my philosophy of public administration.

I have always been interested in public service because I feel a passion for improving the lives of those around me. When I recognized that this passion could be focused into a meaningful career, I quickly decided to pursue a Masters of Public Administration. At the time, I felt motivated by efforts to improve societal problems. I recognized that these problems involved complex needs and difficult issues. I also recognized that in order to face those issues, I needed more education and experience. My goal was to gain the skills and experience that would allow me to direct a public organization in an area for which I developed a passion. I wrote in my application materials to the program that I viewed this program as "the opportunity to synthesize my previous education, volunteer, and professional experiences into a meaningful career in public service."

The Master of Public Administration program at the University of Kansas has indeed prepared me for a career in public service. The career for which I have developed a passion is city management. My academic training introduced the critical theories and schools of thought related to public management. It also developed a core of technical skills that would serve me well in local government administration. My education was complemented by work experience where I saw public administration in action. In addition, professional development opportunities provided

further training and consideration of concepts discussed with peers. The most invaluable part of my training has been working as a full-time intern while contemplating and looking back to the academic perspective to weigh the theories against my practical experiences. I found that the internship is where theory and practice met, where idealism was tempered by reality. Real issues are always more complicated and intricate than classroom case studies if for nothing more than the real emotions and personal investment that are involved. Policy looks different when it hits the street. Even from the beginning of the program to now, there have been interesting changes in my perspectives on public administration. This program has definitely changed and shaped me. Some ideas have been reinforced, some learned, some adjusted, and some completely altered. The process has been an organic, molding experience constantly tempered by new learning. Everything has coalesced into a two year experience that has been the very foundation for my philosophy of public administration. While forming this philosophy in the last two years, critical lessons stand out to me in managing people, managing a public entity in our democratic society, managing local governments as professional administrators in an increasingly complex environment, and the daunting challenge of being a City Manager.

**Management: Managing effectively through leadership**

I am convinced by observations I have made in the context of academic principles that it is critical to the success of public administrators to be effective leaders when managing their organizations and employees. The most effective leaders I have observed spend time developing important technical knowledge and skills such as strategic planning, critical thinking, decision making, data analysis, negotiation, performance management, change management, fiscal management, and personnel management. Effective leaders also consciously work at communication, self awareness, group dynamics, governance, and other interpersonal skills. But true leaders also develop the skills needed to use their knowledge effectively to lead their employees.

True leaders are skilled at managing by understanding their employees and knowing how to communicate to them in a way that inspires collective effort toward the vision of the organization. I have learned for myself and observed in others that individuals have very distinct motivations (Porter) and needs (McClelland) that influence their behaviors. It has also taken me longer to realize that because people are motivated in a way different from my own, it does not mean that their motivation is wrong or inappropriate, just different. Practical experience in my internship has also shown that human beings are very complex, and categorical assignments from inventories fail to give a full picture of an individuals' personality, but it is critical to understand that people have different perspectives. Effective leaders recognize that people have underlying motivations and perspectives and strive to understand the intentions and feelings of their employees. This understanding affects how the leader interacts with and encourages each employee as well as making work assignments suited to their strengths.

Effective leaders also understand the power and nuances of meaningful communication. The primary function of communication is transmitting accurate information. I have learned that there is always another side of the story that hasn't been considered. A wise manager assures that they have gathered all the necessary information, that the information is accurate, and then communicates their decisions based on that information. In addition to transmitting information accurately, leaders will provide supportive communication that develops and maintains interpersonal relationships. I have personally felt the value of supportive communication (Denhart) including increased openness, empathy, and focusing on problems and solutions rather than the individual. This type of communication leads to employee confidence, productivity, and problem solving as well as reduces defensiveness and conflict. By creating a supportive environment a leader can go beyond persuasive communication and foster meaningful communication that will build interpersonal relationships.

Leadership involves not only managing the organization but inspiring employees to a collective effort. Among the several theories of management, managerial control and group control are the two main approaches that are consistently taught and implemented in public service. Influenced by my past experience and my idealism, I personally identified with McGregor's Theory Y of group control. While I still identify with group control, I also realize from real world experience that in large and complex organizations, managerial control is valuable in establishing policies and procedures that assure a base level of performance and accountability. Increased consumer scrutiny demands greater accountability and encourages adoption of best practices such as performance management and benchmarking. I have come to believe that managers of the future will be challenged to deliver services in new and innovative ways. This will require a combination of the roles and tools of both managerial and group control that are developed into entirely new roles all together. Outstanding leaders will have to find the right people for the organization and give them the flexibility and information to provide innovative results. However, leaders will also have to inspire in their employees a vision of group control that works toward a common goal while providing assurance and accountability for tasks and assignments.

Effective leaders understand how people think, feel and work. They understand meaningful communication and know how to inspire their employees toward a common goal. This requires innovative approaches that take advantage of the positive aspects of the competing management philosophies. I have been personally influenced by the City Manager for which I work to adopt a management philosophy of co-creation and co-evolution. All employees, top to bottom, work together in collaboration to produce uncommon results. Beyond the employees, the organization works and evolves with the environment around them. Successful managers of the future will have to be dynamic, skilled individuals that can provide leadership for the organization.

**Public Management: The Price of Democracy**

Management in the public sector requires even more unique challenges to leadership because public entities exist in a democratic environment. The principle of democracy is that power lies in a body of citizens. In our representative democracy, individuals are elected to speak for the will of the community. However, in our increasingly complex and fragmented society there is a waning sense of community. The average citizen is detached from decision-making and gives little input as to how the affairs of the community should be run. I feel there is a need for stronger communities and community involvement, because I view the public as citizens. I have a desire to help citizens become informed and actively contribute to their communities. I hope to help individuals work toward a mutual public interest. I feel that members of a community will increase their quality of life as they participate in public service and strengthen their local organizations. However, I have also recognized during my internship that the public are customers. The public demands quality services for their investment of tax dollars. I have also seen in the past year that while it is important, it is very difficult to engage the public and meet their demands. The public is diverse and complicated, with many different interests. It can be challenging to distinguish between expressed interests and silent interests. Individual interest groups can be very vocal, while other interests benefit the silent majority. The true interest of the public can be illusive. However, I view it as my role to satisfy the greatest number of individual interests, while maintaining perspective of the best interest for the community as a whole.

Satisfying individual interests while striving for the best interest of the community is challenging because public opinion is made up of competing public service values. Democratic societies hold in varying degrees the traditional pro-government values of political responsiveness, efficiency, individual rights, and social equity (Klingner and Nalbandian). I have seen in Tacoma that there are advocates that promote each of these values in different ways. The constant pursuit of these values often leads to disagreement and conflict. It is through the political process of establishing ordinances, resolutions, and the budget that these values are expressed. I have seen the

dynamic equilibrium of the competitive political process as people react aggressively if any one value becomes underrepresented. This does put pressure on the City Council and brings a balance the conflicting values, but not without time, effort, anguish, and compromise. I have also witnessed several parties move toward compromise in order to press forward, but in the end none of the parties are completely satisfied. I can personally assure that the difficulty of balancing public interest among competing values is a real challenge for public administrators.

The competitive political process has also become more contentious because of progressively increasing anti-government sentiment. Politicians have campaigned against the inflexibility and inefficiency of government and bureaucracy. This has resulted in the emergence of the anti-government values of individual accountability, community responsibility, and limited and decentralized government (Klingner and Nalbandian). It is not unique to Tacoma that many citizens call for fewer taxes and less regulation, while others are crying for more services and increased restrictions. Individuals seem more concerned with their tax bill than the fate of the community or other citizens in need in the community. There is growing sentiment that certain services are not core to government and should not come from public revenues. An influence in economic perspective on public policy has also caused pressure to abandon traditional values and functions in order for public entities to perform more like businesses. Governments are facing pressure to conform to contemporary practices in order to be more competitive in an increasingly complex and responsive environment.

Managing in the public sector amidst the competing public service and anti-government values is made also challenging because of the high ethical standards by which public entities are held. Because public entities belong to the people, they are held to high ethical standards. The public expects transparency and accountability. This is appropriate, but it requires time and resources to make information available to the public and affects the speed at which government can make decisions. The City of Tacoma has adopted the values of service, integrity,

accountability, respect, stewardship, innovation, and teamwork. This is a difficult standard to live up to, but it is appropriate because we have been entrusted this stewardship by the public. In addition, because public administrators are given responsibility to carry out government in the interest of public good, they are faced with challenging ethical questions that are always under public scrutiny. In my academic studies, I felt a connection to the moral idealist ethical perspective, based on the principles of equity, integrity, and accountability founded in a sense of moral responsibility by which all public servants should abide. While I still believe in adhering to strong moral principles, I have learned during my internship that every situation is unique. Real life situations are rarely simple and compartmentalized and decisions can be heart wrenching. Recently, I have tended to consider the overall results and fairness for the outcomes of each individual situation. I feel that moral ideals as a foundation are subject to a bounded ethics. As suggested by Dewey, I feel that solving a problem is a process. I feel a responsibility to high moral principles as a foundation to ethics, but I approach each situation within its context.

Management in the public sector presents unique challenges because public entities exist in a democratic environment. Public managers have the challenging task of sifting through individual interests and competing values in an effort to serve the public interest. This should all take place in a transparent and open environment that is accountable to high ethical standards. When I first began my studies I wondered why there was so much criticism against the government. People complain about red-tape, slow timelines, and seemingly ridiculous policies or procedures. I have come to understand in the last two years that the reason that government is slow and inefficient is because it is governed by the political process of our democratic society. Democracy requires public education, public reporting, public input, and careful consideration. This all takes time and compromise. It can be difficult to get things done. For the staff it means time, anguish, being criticized on all sides by angry and legitimately concerned people. It is easy to become frustrated, but I have to remember that liberty and democracy are great blessings. When I began my studies I



also viewed politics negatively; I was about efficient administration. But I have come to realize that politics is how we make decisions democratically. I love liberty and freedom, and I love democracy. The difference now is that I understand the price of democracy and I am committed to helping frustrated citizens and employees understand that price and what it is really worth.

### **Municipal Management: The Public Administration Professional**

Beyond the complexity and challenges that public managers must face in a democratic environment, the local government setting is even more intricate and difficult because of the form of government, the level of interaction with the public, and the number of challenges facing communities. The Constitution of the United States outlines the separation of powers in the federal government, a pattern which has been adopted by state governments. In contrast, local municipalities take on a variety of different forms of government. Traditionally, local governments participated in a variety of the competitive political model of government. However, the majority of local government entities are smaller and elected officials participate more for civic duty than personal gain and although well-intentioned are usually inexperienced. This reality combined with a mid 19<sup>th</sup> century reaction to political corruption led to a reform movement promoting the council-manager form of government that championed professional administrators carrying out council determined policies with efficiency and equity. However, in recent decades cities are now taking on the most appealing characteristics of both forms of government. In the council-manager form of government citizens want government that is more responsive to and representative of the citizens while more political local governments call for greater efficiency and equity in the administration of their municipality. The result is a very complex local government environment that is difficult to navigate.

As a result of this complex environment, administrators often cross over the politics – administration dichotomy and participate in the political process. In fact, the unity of powers in the council-manager form of government tends to create a sharing of responsibilities between the

council and administrator and I have witnessed in my internships the duality-dichotomy model of power and responsibility (Svara and Protasel). The City Council relies in large part on the expertise and specialization of the City Manager and staff. In addition, I see the City Manager influencing policy as he makes important determinations regarding the implementation of Council direction. In fact, I agree with the suggestion that managers have slightly more influence in policy making than the City Council (Svara). I have been surprised at the amount of discretion administrators truly have. At the same time, it is surprising how political the role of the City Manager really is. The street level bureaucrat theory is also true; policy can be very different once it finally hits the street. At the same time, the city council shares in some of the administrative powers of city government when making decisions on key issues and sometimes take a more active role in certain projects or issues. I have seen some Council members champion a certain project or audit implementation. Power is given to the council members by their charter as well as the legitimacy of democratic representatives, but managers have the power of expertise and information.

This sharing of responsibilities creates leadership gaps in which important policy issues are not approached because of a difference in the degree of activity between the council and manager. In addition, the modern nature of policy making forces public administrators to bring some definition and direction to policies. Administrators often need to seek participation from the public or from interest groups to assure that a policy implementation direction will be supported. Administrators have to engage in this political process in order to make a clear and concise plan to implement policy that is both practical and politically feasible. Furthermore, administrators are faced with contemporary pressures relating to social equity, metropolitan governance, intergovernmental relations, and innovation and excellence in service delivery (Nalbandian). Historically, local government administrators were considered value-neutral implementers of public policy but contemporary municipals managers administrate in an environment in which they can not be value-neutral to the mission and goals of the jurisdiction that they work for. I have recognized

that as Waldo suggests, there are always values involved and modern managers participate in politics when they fill gaps with entrepreneurial leadership (Fredrickson). I have felt that it is all too true that “the greatest distinction between public administration and other administration is . . . to be found in the political character of public administration” (Stillman). Effective contemporary local governance depends more on connecting policy and administration than distinguishing them (Nalbandian). Managers are turning to the concept of governance that attempts to marry politics to administration through managerial effectiveness in delivering “public goods” within today’s complicated political context.

In addition to the difficulties that result from the unique political power structure of local governments, municipal managers are challenged by the proximity of public interaction and community challenges that they face. By their nature, all public entities interact with citizens. However, municipal governments work and struggle within their communities that they are located. The expectations and demands of the community are much more real. There is greater accountability for the public service values and expectations of the citizens. Local newspapers are lined up to report on everything that comes out of City Hall. The people that we have to compromise with, regulate, or disappoint are our friends and neighbors. Similarly, public administrators have a greater intimacy with the multitude of pressing future challenges of municipalities. Municipalities face the challenges familiar to most public organizations such as financial shortfalls, changing community and workforce demographics, changing expectations of citizens, modernization, specialization, anti-government sentiment, pressure to operate more like business, affordable housing, growth, technology, privatization, and more. But municipalities feel the effects of these challenges more intensely because of economies of scales in making changes. Furthermore, there are a number of additional challenges distinctive to local government such as local control, economic development, regionalization, community building, civic engagement, and the results of the financial burdens on other governmental agencies.

Because of the challenges and complexity that result from the form of local governments, the level of interaction with the public, and the number of challenges facing modern communities I am convinced that there is a need for professional local public administrators. Professional public administrators bring the management and technical expertise that are necessary to effectively operate an organization. The number of issues and challenges faced by local governments requires an expert with knowledge and skills of alarming breadth. But more importantly, they provide experience and expertise in facilitating interactions between professional staff, the public, and the elected officials and pose questions in public service values in order to achieve a balance between competing public interests. Managers may not have all the expertise necessary, but they know how to ask the right questions. A professional administrator becomes a community leader that builds consensus and works with the elected officials in a collaborative partnership. The role of modern managers has become more expansive to include civic engagement, community building, and intergovernmental relations. I have learned from the City Manager that I work for that professionals need to be able to mediate the environmental and organizational influences and then organize information about the current situation into effective definitions of strategic problems and opportunities. Managers also have experience with ambiguity, working dynamically toward accomplishment of goals with neither a certainty of the means or information available nor in the certainty of success. The evolution of city management as a professional field has aided in the creation of the standards and expertise that are necessary to be effective municipal managers in our challenging environment.

**City Management: Do I really want this job?**

Because managing with leadership is challenging, leading in a public context is even more difficult, managing a local government has even higher demands on professionals, and a

number of other reasons, I have had to ask myself after two years: “Do I even want to be a City Manager?”

I stated in while applying for an internship that my long term career goal was to become a municipal government executive. I recognized that communities and their governments are facing increasingly difficult challenges and that communities are faced with a diminishing sense of citizenship while governments are expected to deliver quality services with greater efficiency. I felt that I could make a difference as an executive by managing the innovative delivery of services and by building community. I aspired to be a city manager because I feel that I could help individuals and communities enhance their quality of life.

During my internship I have had to face some harsh realities that challenge my desire to be a City Manager. I entered public service because I wanted to make a difference. At the same time I didn't want to be involved in politics or high stress competition familiar to business executives. In my view of the role of City Managers they face considerable politics and competition. They are also exposed to public scrutiny and criticism from all sides. They are faced with gut wrenching ethical questions. There are challenging debates and gray areas when trying to decide what the best course of action is. The City Manager must make decisions and then justify them to the community. My view of the role of City Manager also requires serving the public interest by guiding elected officials and entire communities in balancing different values and expectations. The City manager is responsible for community awareness and community building in this increasingly complex and fragmented society. The City Manager must also face politics and resistance among their own employees. I have been astounded at the realization that for many people, this is just a job, and internal politics are powerful. Being a City Manager is going to be incredibly challenging. In recent journal entries I have been

overwhelmed by the scope of issues and problems that a community and City Manager have to face.

So, do I still want to be a City Manager? Yes. I pursued a Masters of Public Administration to gain the skills and experience to direct a public entity for which I developed a passion. I have developed a passion for city management, despite the numerous challenges I will face and I am confident that the University of Kansas program has given me both the skills and philosophical foundation of public administration to have a meaningful career in public service. I recognize that it will take effort and discipline, but I also recognize that I have a number of years to learn and prepare. I aspire to be a public servant because I feel that I can make a tangible difference in the in the daily lives of individual people. As an individual, I view the public as fellow man. I feel that as a public administrator, I can help people realize that we are all part of a community. As a community we can increase our quality of life as we work together to promote our common interests. I feel strongly that public education will be a mission throughout my career. I feel there is a need for people to return to a caring for or “caring with” their fellow man. In this pursuit I will face many challenges, but I look forward to the rewards that will come to my community and to myself as a result of my effort and diligence.