

The background of the cover is an abstract, vibrant composition. It features a large, colorful, swirling vortex or tunnel-like structure that draws the eye towards the center. The colors transition from warm oranges and yellows at the bottom to cooler blues and greens at the top. In the lower-left foreground, a silhouette of a person is walking up a set of wide, colorful steps that lead towards the center of the vortex. The overall mood is one of upward movement, progress, and hope.

PM

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT



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ICMA

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A *Global* Commitment to Ethics

Our professional standards strengthen local government.

BY MARTHA PEREGO, ICMA-CM

The opportunity to learn how peers from different countries do their work is an amazing experience. Whether it's at an ICMA conference, fellows exchange program, or as part of an economic development venture, I would wager that encounter would leave you convinced that what we have in common is far greater than what divides or differentiates us. After all, what local government manager doesn't want to provide clean water and a safe environment for their residents? Or create an economically viable community so that people can thrive where they live? Or be assured of personal safety and freedom? Regardless of the country they work in, local government staff and leaders across the globe share a common commitment to provide safe, sustainable, and viable communities for their residents.

That commonality of interest and purpose is balanced by the reality that we work in democracies of varied levels of stability and maturity, with different forms of government and access to resources. We also share one predilection that can torpedo the best of intentions and efforts: corruption.

Corruption is an unfortunate, shared human condition that, especially at the local government level, inflicts much misery and harm. In its worst form, it deprives the most vulnerable of their very basic human right of basic services and personal freedom.

Imbedded into the structure and culture, pervasive systemic corruption undermines civil society, the development of good public policy, and where it exists, democracy.

As Patricia Moreira, former managing director of Transparency International noted, "Corruption chips away at democracy to produce a vicious cycle where corruption undermines democratic institutions and, in turn, weak institutions are less able to control corruption."

Combating Corruption with Professionals Leading the Way

Strategies to combat corruption focus on lowering the opportunity while raising the associated risk and penalty of getting caught: create more stringent laws, support an independent judiciary for enforcement, maintain a free press to unearth and report on corruption, and build strong institutions.

It's on that last component of the strategy where local government professionals, in all roles and at all levels, can make a significant contribution. Strong professional standards for all the jobs performed in the organization guide people to do their work the right way. That in turn strengthens internal capacity which reduces the opportunity for corruption.

In place for 99 years, the standards and values of the ICMA Code of Ethics are now a defining characteristic of



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ICMA

Creating and Supporting Thriving Communities

ICMA's vision is to be the leading association of local government professionals dedicated to creating and supporting thriving communities throughout the world. It does this by working with its more than 12,000 members to identify and speed the adoption of leading local government practices and improve the lives of residents. ICMA offers membership, professional development programs, research, publications, data and information, technical assistance, and training to thousands of city, town, and county chief administrative officers, their staffs, and other organizations throughout the world.

Public Management (PM) aims to inspire innovation, inform decision making, connect leading-edge thinking to everyday challenges, and serve ICMA members and local governments in creating and sustaining thriving communities throughout the world.

the profession here in the United States. Consider, for example, the standard of political neutrality. U.S. law does not require that local government managers stay out of campaigns for elected officials or refrain from other political activity, but the Code does. A value espoused, practiced, and reinforced by practitioners over time is now a hallmark of the profession. It's a behavior that is also embraced by elected officials and residents. They have come to see the value of nonpartisan professionals and will hold them to the standard when they think it has been violated.

The principles of the Code are also reinforced with elected officials when they hire their chief administrative officer whose employment agreement voluntarily holds them accountable to those high standards.

Those planning to enter the profession are now introduced to the Code as part of their graduate education. It's as fundamental to their success as mastering finance, personnel, or strategic planning.

We are thankfully not alone in this effort to advance ethical practices in our local government institutions. The ethical standards of U.S. local government are reinforced by the work of other professional associations. The American Planning Association (APA) adopted Ethical Principles in Planning back in 1992 to guide the ethical conduct for all who participate

in the process of planning as advisors, advocates, and decision makers. It presents a set of principles to be held in common by certified planners, other practicing planners, appointed and elected officials, and others who participate in the process of planning. Expertise in ethical standards is incorporated into APA's certification process. The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), which sets a standard for both the U.S. and Canada, adopted a revised set of ethical standards in 2019, to reinforce the important role that finance officers play in building trust with the public.

ICMA is not alone in promoting ethics at home or on the global stage. The professional associations in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, and Denmark, to name a few, have all developed codes to guide their members and other dedicated public servants in related professions.

Common Themes

These codes use different approaches and different language, but they are based on remarkably similar principles that align with the tenets of the ICMA Code of Ethics.

Some of the common themes:

- Personal integrity, honesty, and accountability.
- Openness and transparency.

- Impartiality and evidence-based decision making.
- Respect for the democratic process, the law, and the respective roles of elected and appointed officials.
- Neutrality in partisan political matters.
- Reporting ethical violations.
- Stewardship of public and community resources.

In 2019, ICMA worked with its newly affiliated partner, Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA), to provide ethics training for 30 Palestinian city managers. One of the exercises was to define the core values of public service from their perspective. They defined the six most critical values as commitment, equity, integrity, transparency, responsibility, and loyalty.

A Code for Senior Public Managers

The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) in the United Kingdom worked with colleagues from nine other organizations of senior managers in local government to create Local Public Services Senior Managers: Code of Ethics. It is applicable even to individuals who are bound by separate professional codes

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of conduct. The principles on which the SOLACE code is based are selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership, and democracy. Sound familiar?

Values and Rules of Conduct

Taituarā, New Zealand's association for professional local government managers adopted a Code of Ethics outlining the values of honesty and integrity, transparent stewardship, valuing diversity and respecting others' rights, and continuous learning. The code includes rules of conduct that closely parallel those in the ICMA and SOLACE codes: provide impartial, politically neutral advice by not participating in activities that may interfere or appear to interfere in a member's professional accountabilities and responsibilities; avoid conflicts of interest; do not use the position for personal gain; address ethical lapses by other members; and work within the law.

Dialogue and Duties

The Code of Quality and Ethics in the Public Administration prepared by Local Government Denmark sets forth seven standards, each with "themes for discussion" to encourage dialogue. The standards are legality, truthfulness, professionalism, party-political neutrality, responsibility and management, development and cooperation, and openness about errors.

To help individuals relate the standards to their day-to-day work, the document presents questions centered on several "inspirational themes." They explore the basis, framework, and support of the political work and the professional's role in policy development, external relations, implementing political goals and decisions, and handling the media. Finally, the document sets forth specific "obligations," which are concrete examples of a professional manager's duties.

We see the impact that professional standards have made to strengthen local government institutions across the world. That said, given the proliferation of unethical and corrupt conduct it's easy to get cynical and be dismayed about the future. Perhaps the caution Machiavelli offered about the nature of the world seems more realistic: "Yet the way men live is so far removed from the way they ought to live that anyone who abandons what is for what should be pursues his downfall rather than his preservation."

Let's not give in to cynicism nor lower our ethical standards. Imagine the state of the profession today if the original authors of the ICMA Code of Ethics back in 1924 caved to the standards of the day? Associations supporting local government staff across the globe have a critical role in preventing corruption. They do so by setting high, often aspirational, ethical standards. They train staff on those standards, imbed those standards into the operations of local government, hold people accountable for their conduct, and strengthen the ethical resolve of those working in local government to do what is right. **PM**

IS EVERYONE AT YOUR ORGANIZATION USING THE SAME PLAYBOOK?

The ICMA Ethics Center provides training and technical assistance services for creating and maintaining an ethical work environment for staff, leadership, elected officials, boards and commissions.

Contact Martha Perego,
Director of Member Services and Ethics,
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Integrating Mental Wellness into Your Strategic Planning Process | BY MARC A. OTT

A healthy local government workplace requires normalizing conversations about mental health, creating a safe space for sharing, and anticipating the psychological impact of business strategies.

One of the most important leadership principles that I have adopted is the power of encouraging people to bring their whole selves to work each day—not just their specific skill sets, but all of their experiences and passions. The benefits of this leadership practice have transformed both the projects and services we deliver and the individuals themselves—myself included. It struck me recently that while we enjoy the productivity gains and positive outcomes from this practice, we haven't really been applying it when it comes to mental health and employee well-being challenges. We have treated employee mental health more like “self-help”—almost a “don't ask, don't tell” mentality.

It is encouraging to see over this past year the emphasis on pulling the cover off the mental health aspect of our total health. Examples are everywhere, from celebrities promoting safe spaces for students to seek mental health support¹ to a U.S. senator publicly seeking treatment for depression.² However, when it comes to the workplace, we as leaders are just beginning this journey. As the full emotional and psychological repercussions of the pandemic were being quantified last year, I joined with other CEOs in calling for a workplace culture shift to address the mental health stigma and support employee well-being. Our partner organization, the American Psychological Association, shares data on this initiative in this month's *PM* magazine and outlines basic steps that leaders can take to foster a culture of well-being at work.

Getting Ahead of the Trends

Looking ahead at the trends that will impact local government performance, leaders can begin to integrate employee mental wellness into the strategic planning process. As Ms. Abrams points out in the article, local government employees have been subjected to verbal and even physical attacks by residents during the pandemic

and these behaviors don't seem to be going away. In this uncivil environment, it will become even more important to ensure that there is adequate support for staff, as well as ample opportunity to share the impact of these interactions and methods for coping. That goes for frontline staff all the way to the CAO.

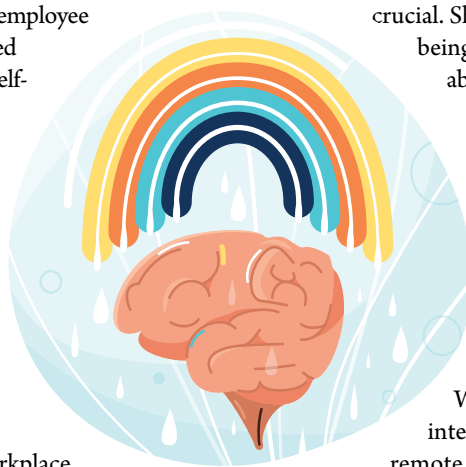
The inevitable adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) is another example of how local governments need to prepare for staff well-being. First, transparency is crucial. Sharing the AI strategy even as it is being formed and generating discussion about potential impacts can ease fears and stress about job loss. Employees can be upskilled to help develop and implement the technology and can experience for themselves how automating tasks can help decrease burnout.

Preparation, too, can be made to combat the isolating effects that AI will have on the workplace. We are already experiencing less interaction as we moved to more remote work because of COVID-19.

As we build out AI, it's important to build in opportunities for connection. It will also be necessary to look at other tools to help ground staff as we embark on this new era; for example, adjusting ethics and HR policies.

Support for Managers

An important question for local government leadership teams to address is how we reimagine the roles of manager and supervisor given these changes. In a remote workplace and one that may be augmented by AI, the traditional notion of a “command and control” mindset makes little sense. It becomes vital to equip managers with the training and tools that they will require to support their employees' evolving needs. When managers see the value in accessing the whole person, they can find solutions that they might not have



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thought of before. For example, a manager might offer staff a proactive time-off period before an intensive work project begins. Managers and supervisors can be goaled differently as well, for instance making sure employees use their PTO.

Importance of Empathy

Many local government colleagues have discussed the benefits of empathy as a key leadership trait and as it applies to employee well-being, its importance can't be underestimated. CAOs particularly exist in a fishbowl and by extension local government employees do as well. As a city manager, I was embattled at times (for example, when the media reported a negative story about me and speculated that I might be fired). Those scenarios may have taken a toll on me, but they also had a significant impact on my staff. Often, they might be so distracted that it would be difficult to get our immediate tasks done. By addressing these concerns right up front, by knocking the elephant right out of the room and getting discussion going in meetings or one-on-one, I could feel the anxiety dissipate. Left untended, these unexpressed feelings could have led to more serious employee well-being issues. A key component of empathy is truly listening and offering

a safe haven to voice concerns, as well as words of reassurance.

To transparently tackle the mental wellness of our staff, as well as ourselves, will take courage. These issues for too long have been hidden and stigmatized. Normalizing conversations about mental health, creating a safe space for sharing, and factoring in the potential mental health impact of business strategies into our planning processes are crucial steps leaders can take now to ensure a healthier organization for the future.

I would ask that you take one other step today. If you haven't already, please join ICMA and 175 other organizations in making a public commitment to strive for mental health and excellence in your city, county, or town organization.³ It will send a strong message to your team, as well as to your partners and residents, that the mental health of local government staff members is an organizational priority. **PM**

Demonstrate your commitment to changing the culture around mental health in the workplace. Join us at icma.org/apa.

ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ <https://borislhensonfoundation.org/>

² <https://time.com/6261386/mental-health-congress-john-fetterman/>

³ <https://www.apa.org/topics/healthy-workplaces/mental-health>

PROFILES OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN ACTION



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ICMA Continues to Equip Leaders and Act as the Go-To Resource on Essential Local Government Topics, Including DEI

BY TROY BROWN, ICMA-CM

A summary of engagement efforts exploring member needs at this stage of our DEI journey

One of the things I admire most about ICMA is our commitment to evolving as an organization while simultaneously equipping local government professionals with the tools they need to run communities. We do this with a shared intent to provide services and opportunities for all to succeed and to make the world a better place for people no matter where they live. A cornerstone principle of ICMA is to engage its members and then move forward in a way that reflects a balanced approach, especially when it comes to tackling issues that may be considered divisive.

In many ways, it mirrors our work as city, county, and town managers as we do our best to engage residents in upfront discussions, as well as in crafting solutions. Since the 1960s, ICMA has been producing content on the topics of racial and gender equity, social unrest, and the changing urban landscape and the implications of these issues for the role of local government leader. Professional development and resources on diversity and equity have been available from ICMA for more than six decades.

Strengthening Membership Diversity

The association has long looked at ways its members and the profession could become more diverse and inclusive. In 1974, for example, the first Task Force on Women in the Profession was created, and in 1989, a Task Force on Workplace Diversity was formed. As a result of these and subsequent member-driven initiatives (for example, a 2013 Task Force on Women in the Profession), the membership-approved ICMA Strategic Plans in 2008 and 2017 that codified our commitment to equity and inclusion into the organization's operations.

In our most recent past, the ICMA Executive Board turned its focus to the board itself. In 2014, the Executive Board formed the Task Force on Strengthening Inclusiveness in the Profession, kicking off its work at the 2014 ICMA Annual Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina. Further, a board subcommittee on diversity was established in 2018, and after an intensive period of member engagement, recommended several changes aimed at expanding eligibility for voting and for board service. These included extending voting eligibility and board service to affiliate members and expanding participation in regional nominating committees.

Preceded by an expansive outreach effort among the membership that included input, data gathering, and more importantly, listening, a substantial majority of ICMA members voted yes on all of these amendments in 2020.

The board took up the issue of diversity and inclusion again in 2021, in response to feedback from some members. The purpose was to examine whether ICMA was placing too much emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in producing and delivering

content to members. I shared the results of the listening tour and focus groups on this topic in a *PM* magazine article in December 2022.¹ As I noted then, the qualitative comments we received provided a good sense of direction for the organization. They helped to form the basis of a survey that was sent to members in February 2023.

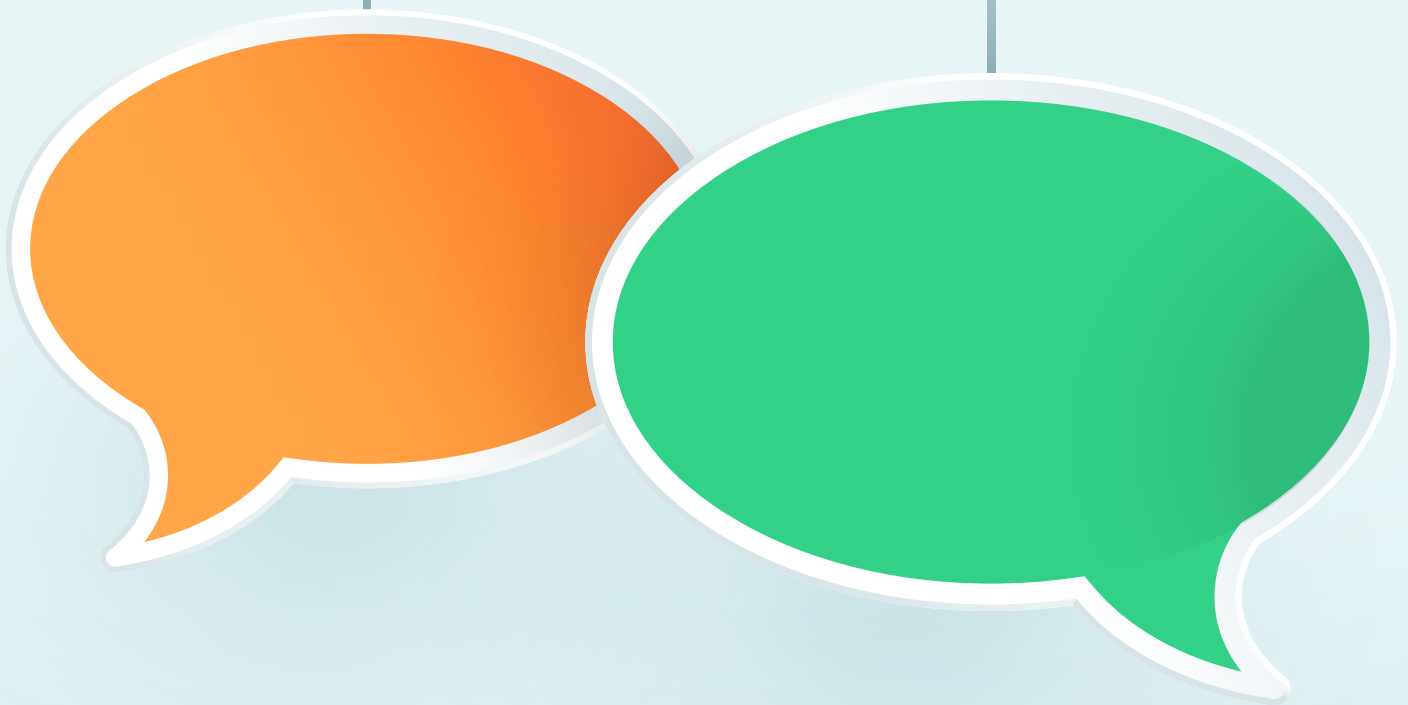
Key Survey Takeaways

Nearly 1,000 members responded to the survey, with 80 percent of those respondents being full and affiliate members in service. We learned that 70 percent of respondents believe that ICMA should be the go-to resource for members and their communities on DEI

Like many hard conversations, this process presented an amazing opportunity to learn from each other as members felt able to express their feelings in a safe space.



TROY BROWN, ICMA-CM, is city manager of Moorpark, California, and past president of ICMA (2021–2022).



issues affecting local government. Fewer than 20 percent of members felt that this work was out of step with ICMA's mission and Code of Ethics. Members are, however, divided on whether ICMA is "too focused" on DEI. So, while content on this topic is important, our members indicate DEI is clearly not the most important topic and ICMA must continue to offer a breadth of resources to address the many challenges local governments confront every day.

Moving Forward

I can say with confidence that there is no chance that ICMA will ever lose its way from the core mission of helping local government professionals identify and adopt leading practices to improve the lives of residents. The most popular topics according to member data continue to be leadership, ethics, finance and budgeting, emergency management, and public safety. DEI represents a central part of managing public services and distributing them in a fair way across our communities. It will continue to be a slice of what ICMA offers, but will not be dominant. For example, the topic of DEI represented less than 15% of the content at the most recent ICMA Annual Conference. Like many other topics, DEI issues may not be as pervasive in some communities as they are in others, but we want members to be confident that they can find useful and relevant DEI information through ICMA.

**Even though we
don't always agree,
our members are
willing to come
together and shape
a path forward
even on the most
sensitive of topics.**

As we continue this journey, we remain extremely grateful to all of you who took the time to share your thoughts, whether in person, via email, or through the survey. This won't be the last time we come up against difficult conversations. Our profession is changing and community dynamics are changing. Like many hard conversations, this process presented an amazing opportunity to learn from

each other as members felt able to express their feelings in a safe space. It demonstrated to me once again that even though we don't always agree, our members are willing to come together and shape a path forward even on the most sensitive of topics. That's what makes a great local government leader, and that kind of visionary leadership is what we want for our organization.

I really want to thank you all for this journey. I was admittedly struck by the response and engagement we've had over the past three years.

While these are difficult conversations to have, I was impressed by your passion and civility in this process. Fortunately for us, we all have something very important in common, which we can lean on in times of need—that is each other and our love for ICMA. **PM**

ENDNOTE

¹<https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/inside-icma-creating-new-dei-tools-local-government-begins-member-engagement>

ChatGPT: The Future of Government Communication?

BY JASON GRANT AND ChatGPT

A powerful **artificial intelligence tool** to assist with public engagement

In planning for the 2023 ICMA Annual Conference, which (shameless plug) will be held September 30 through October 4 in Austin, Texas, one topic that emerged as an area of interest was the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for developing written content. Local government has long relied upon AI such as Google Translate to help interpret web content into a variety of languages. And we all have relied upon spell-check's red lines and grammar-check's blue lines to improve correctness. But one tool that has gotten a lot of attention lately is ChatGPT.

I was unaware of ChatGPT until it was brought up during the planning meeting. In speaking with my colleagues who are chief communication officers, communication directors, and public information officers around the country, there seems to be limited use and understanding of ChatGPT. So, if you are unaware of ChatGPT, you're not alone!

I logged onto ChatGPT (chat.openai.com/chat) with my Google account and began prompting it to produce content. I asked it to draft a press release announcing the hiring of a new department director. I asked it to write a three-minute speech congratulating the graduating fire and rescue recruit class. I asked it to write an op-ed explaining why the council-manager form of government is preferred over a mayor-council form. Much to my surprise (and perhaps a bit crushing to my ego), the prose was pretty good. Many of the claims were ones I would make myself. What would have taken me most of the day to write was on my desktop in a matter of minutes. But rather than explain what all ChatGPT can do, I thought it would be interesting to demonstrate what ChatGPT can do to help me produce this article.

For comparison, typing at 100 wpm, these first 500 words have taken me 20 minutes to produce. I asked ChatGPT the following prompt: "Can you provide a 500-word article in AP style that argues how ChatGPT can benefit local governments in producing written content to engage the public?" I also asked if I could use the content if I listed ChatGPT in the byline. ChatGPT gave me permission as long as I also noted that "this content was generated by OpenAI's ChatGPT language model." So, here's what Chat GPT gave me in two minutes and 32 seconds.

"As the world becomes increasingly digital, it's important for local governments to find new ways to engage with their constituents. One powerful tool that local governments can use to engage the public is written content. However, producing quality content can be a time-consuming and challenging process. Fortunately, ChatGPT can help local governments create engaging written content that resonates with the public.

ChatGPT is a cutting-edge language model that uses machine learning to produce human-like language. This technology can be harnessed by local governments to produce written content for a variety of purposes, from social media posts to blog articles and press releases.

One of the key benefits of using ChatGPT is that it can help local governments save time and resources.

With the help of this

technology, local governments can produce high-quality written content in a fraction of the time it would take to do so manually. This means that local governments can produce more content and reach a wider audience without having to spend a lot of time and money on content creation.

Another benefit of using ChatGPT is that it can help local governments produce more engaging content. This technology is capable of producing human-like language that is easy to read and understand, making it more likely that the public will engage with the content. By producing content that is both informative and engaging, local governments can build trust with their constituents and foster a sense of community.

Moreover, ChatGPT can also help local governments personalize their content to better meet the needs of their constituents. This technology can analyze data from social media and other sources to determine what topics are most relevant to the local community. Based

What would have taken me most of the day to write was on my desktop in a matter of minutes.



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on this information, ChatGPT can produce content that is tailored to the specific needs and interests of the community, making it more likely that the content will be read and shared.

However, it's important to note that ChatGPT is not a replacement for human writers. While this technology is capable of producing high-quality content, it still lacks the creativity, critical thinking, and empathy that human writers bring to the table. Therefore, local governments should view ChatGPT as a tool to enhance their content creation efforts, rather than a replacement for human writers.

In conclusion, ChatGPT can be a powerful tool for local governments looking to engage with their constituents through written content. By using this technology, local governments can save time and resources, produce more engaging content, and personalize their content to better meet the needs of their constituents. However, it's important to remember that ChatGPT is not a replacement for human writers and should be used as a tool to enhance content creation efforts. By leveraging the power of ChatGPT, local governments can build trust with their constituents and foster a stronger sense of community."

As a professional writer and writing scholar, I never really thought that my work would ever be at risk of automation. And maybe perhaps it is hubris that makes me feel as though there will always be value for my own writing skills. But one thing is certain: ChatGPT is definitely a tool that allows me to produce content much more quickly.

Although ChatGPT doesn't write with a human voice, it mimics it very well.

You will notice that ChatGPT is rather formulaic. There is a clear thesis, a few main points, and a conclusion. Most of its articles are written this way. But much of government communication is formulaic—speeches, press releases, board reports—they often are genres with consistent

expectations. And although ChatGPT doesn't write with a human voice, it mimics it very well.

I've always said it is much easier to edit a piece than to write the initial draft. We can certainly take some of the points from ChatGPT and expand upon them or eliminate others. We will have to be diligent about investigating data to ensure validity of claims—ChatGPT cannot do that. And we should take the content as a draft rather than a final product. Like ChatGPT says, the tool is not a replacement for human writers. But it certainly can reduce the amount of time those human writers need to spend producing initial drafts and working toward final copy to distribute for public consumption. **PM**





What I Learned During a YEAR AWAY

Don't wait until your tank is empty. Take small steps to refill your tank and restore yourself along the way.

BY ED ZUERCHER

In October 2021, I retired as city manager of Phoenix, Arizona, the largest council-manager city in the United States. After serving eight years as the city manager and a total of 28 years in Phoenix government, I was exhausted—physically, mentally, and emotionally—and needed time to restore myself. To those who asked about my decision, I said I've still got tread on my tires, but I don't have any fuel left in my tank.

My 28 years felt like a sprint up a mountain. I began working in the Phoenix local government almost literally in the mailroom. As a management intern in 1993, I responded to letters and phone calls to the city manager, worked on budgeting projects, staffed citizen committees, and took minutes at council sessions. I took on positions of increasing responsibility and 20 years later, in 2013, was named interim city manager. In 2014, the city council made it permanent, placing me as chief executive of an organization with 15,000 employees and a \$5.6 billion budget.

The lingering effects of the Great Recession were still felt in 2014, and I worked with the council to close a \$39 million budget deficit. Over the next eight years, we restored services and employee pay

that had been cut to balance the budget. We wrestled to better fund our pension system, participated in the national reckoning on race and policing, renovated our NBA arena, and responded to the pandemic—all while serving 1.7 million residents. The responsibility was constant and the problems to solve were exciting. Phoenix was named America's most innovative city by *Governing* in 2017, and the only city in the *Forbes* 500 list of best places to work in 2020.

By 2021, we had a \$30 million surplus and were positioned to ask the voters for the first new general obligation bond capital program in 17 years. Five years past my retirement eligibility date, I had accomplished most of what I had set out to do and it was time to leave the work to the team I had built.

Before doing anything else, I knew I had to take time to refill my tank. The constant drumbeat of people, challenges, and solution-finding left me dry. So here's what I did:

Engaged an executive coach. I signed on with an executive coach to help clarify my move into the next season of life. Previously I had viewed executive coaching only as a salvage mission for failing managers and executives. Was I wrong! My coach opened my eyes to the power of personal work in leadership improvement and the importance of professional guidance. She helped me face my fears and hopes, strengths and weaknesses, and blind spots and vision. I could identify more clearly why I love leadership and how to continue stretching my skills.



To those who asked about my decision, I said I've still got tread on my tires, but I don't have any fuel left in my tank.

Hired a strength trainer.

I had always been active—running, playing basketball, doing the stairmaster at the YMCA—but never any serious weight conditioning. And particularly during my time as city manager, I found myself less active than I liked. I found a trainer and learned to lift weights and build flexibility correctly.

Attended a leadership seminar. I was the sole government professional at the week-long event, and I found that mixing with people from outside government was energizing. I learned that challenges of city management are similar to those leaders face in other businesses, although some issues—like public involvement, elected politics, and public salary disclosures—are truly

baffling to non-government leaders. We talked about life, inspiration, and leadership, not government minutiae. I gained a new appreciation for the important work of confronting the issues that prevent us from bringing our whole selves to leadership.

Learned to meditate.

At the suggestion of my executive coach, I downloaded an app and began a regular practice of mindfulness every day. Working on breathing, intentionality, and setting purpose became a regular way to start each morning. The app made it easy and always accessible.

Read widely. I went well beyond my typical government reading routine. *Hamnet*, a fictional imagining of William Shakespeare's family life, took me back to my early career as an English teacher. I read *Dopesick* after watching the TV series. From there, I picked up *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism* and the fictional *Demon Copperhead*. These books filled in the gaps in my knowledge about the epidemic of opioids, corrupt policymaking, and ineffective public health resources that have left us with an ongoing national drug crisis. I dove into the leadership writings of Henry Cloud and John Townsend, books on racial equity, and detours with Malcolm Gladwell and a biography about Tom Petty. (I also got mildly obsessed with his music). It was a break from three decades of city council packets and public policy briefs and it was fun.

Explored my city. I hiked Phoenix's amazing mountain preserves to peaks and desert vistas I never knew existed. I

As city manager, I found myself constantly distracted and distant from those closest to me. Even on vacation, the stress of the job was always a low hum in the back of my brain.

enjoyed sporting events at the downtown arena for which I had negotiated a remodel. I went to concerts in the park and took day hikes to the most beautiful parts of the city that I hadn't made time to enjoy.

Re-engaged with family and friends. As city manager, I found myself constantly distracted and distant from those closest to me. Even on vacation, the stress of the job was always a low hum in the back of my brain. So I reconnected. I went to breakfast and lunch during the week with friends and acquaintances. I called up former colleagues to talk about how they were doing. I spoke to new city managers and facilitated seminars, sharing about my experience and encouraging others to talk about theirs. I took time to actually be present for weddings and funerals to honor and celebrate people in my community. The connection with others' lives, hopes, and dreams was a refreshing reminder of the goodness in the world and the joys and sorrows of everyday life that I had detached from with the stress of managing a city.

Reflecting on this list, it's easy to see now that each of these were accessible while I was a city manager. The fuel these experiences gave me would have been sustaining. I can't pretend that I could have done all of them, of course. The unstructured time of retirement is a luxury that working city managers don't have. But making any one of these activities a higher priority would have raised my quality of life. What I learned in retirement is that these activities can be additive, not subtractive, to my days, and that they can

take relatively short periods of time. They can't all be done simultaneously, but the key is to start doing something that refills the tank.

After taking this time to refill my tank, I went back to work, first as an advisor in a private sector firm and most recently as an executive director of a metropolitan planning organization. But I have continued many of these adopted practices, working with a personal trainer, meditating, reading more broadly, and talking to people all over the country. I prioritize my family engagement and getting out on the weekends. I even take an occasional 4:00 p.m. hike on a weekday.

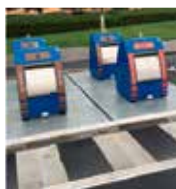
With the perspective gained during a year away from being a city manager, I encourage local government managers and

young professionals to look for small steps to create time for mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual growth. Yes, these jobs are incredibly demanding and doing them well takes lots of time and energy. But the practice of finding one thing you want to learn about or invest time in can greatly enhance your quality of life and increase the fuel in your tank. As the saying goes, a wise person learns from the experience of others. My hope is that something from my experience can increase the wisdom of those working in the profession every day. **PM**

ED ZUERCHER is executive director at Maricopa Association of Governments. He retired as city manager of Phoenix, Arizona, in October 2021.







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How ICMA Is Using Psychological Science to Boost Mental Health in the Workplace

BY ZARA ABRAMS

Cities, counties, and towns of all sizes can take steps to support their employees, who have been recent targets in battles over health, racial, economic, and political issues.

Eight in 10 local officials—and many of their employees—have faced harassment, threats, or violence on the job, according to the National League of Cities (NLC).¹

Public health officials have come under fire for mask and vaccine mandates—80% of those surveyed in Colorado were threatened since the pandemic began.² Meanwhile, teachers and school board members are targeted for book bans and lessons about race and sexuality, city managers are facing backlash for budgetary cuts amid a flagging economy, and

one third of local election officials polled in 2021 said they feel unsafe at work.³ Some workers encounter antagonism and hate speech at public meetings; others receive death threats by phone or see their children harassed at school.

The attacks have left many local government workers feeling overwhelmed at work and stressed at home.

To help build supportive workplaces for municipal employees, as well as other workers across the country, ICMA partnered with the American Psychological

Association (APA) to launch the Mental Health in the Workplace initiative in 2022.⁴ More than 150 groups, including nonprofit organizations, for-profit companies, universities, and local governments, have now joined the effort to redefine how employers approach mental health.

“The most challenging obstacle to making significant progress is erasing the stigma attached to mental health treatment,” said Marc A. Ott, ICMA’s CEO and Executive Director. “As leaders, our responsibility

is to demonstrate that it is not a sign of weakness to ask for help but in fact a sign of strength.”

A Tough Spot

Compounding stress—left unaddressed—can cause problems at both the personal and the organizational level. U.S. workers say that stress on the job has negatively affected their work performance, leading to low motivation, trouble focusing, and a lack of effort, according to APA’s 2022 Work and Well-being Survey.⁵ Over time, it can also increase absenteeism and employee



turnover and cause other organizational challenges.⁶

Returning to “business as usual” after the pandemic has been a lingering challenge often involving backlogs, burnout, and budgetary restrictions. At the same time, many staffers are still dealing with ongoing personal stressors related to COVID-19, such as mourning the loss of a family member.

For example, a recent study in the journal *Psychological Trauma* found that law enforcement and justice workers are experiencing

“As leaders, our responsibility is to demonstrate that it is not a sign of weakness to ask for help but in fact a sign of strength.”

—Marc A. Ott, ICMA CEO and Executive Director

psychological distress related to the loss of social support and a lack of work-life balance.⁷

On top of the mounting workload, municipal employees report facing more incivility, harassment, and threats. That hostility affects not only prominent elected officials, but also public servants at the local level who weren’t elected or appointed by a politician.

In response, some workers have started taking medications to manage their anxiety or have sought support from a therapist,

according to the NLC.⁸

Others report feeling waning motivation and productivity at work and seeking stronger security measures to protect themselves and their families, according to research published in the *American Journal of Public Health*.⁹ Some have simply resigned.

“People in the U.S. are gearing-up for a big 2024 election year. Political polarization may get worse before it gets better,” said Dennis Stolle, JD, PhD, APA’s senior director of applied psychology. “This puts added stress on CAOs, city

and county managers, and their staffs. These workers may become the target of unjustified, politically motivated incivility. So, supporting their psychological well-being and building their psychological resilience becomes more important than ever.”

Shifting Workplace Culture

More than 80% of workers said in APA’s 2022 Work and Well-being Survey that mental health supports—including flexible hours and onsite professionals with mental health training—are important when choosing a new job.

“Our aim is to give leaders the tools to be more supportive of their workforce’s mental health,” said APA CEO Arthur C. Evans Jr., PhD. “Empowered with strategies grounded in psychological science, leaders can do many things to create work environments that are psychologically healthy, normalize mental health issues, and support workers’ overall well-being.”

Here are some of ICMA’s recommendations for how employers can foster a culture of well-being at work:

1. Prioritize mental health.

Embracing psychological well-being as something that’s safe to talk about should be a priority for organizations, said Ott. ICMA hosted eight events related to mental health at its 2022 annual conference, including a panel discussion focused on emotional exhaustion and its effect on the chief administrative officer, with more on the docket for 2023.



2. Practice listening in the workplace.

Listening to employees and using their feedback to improve workplace culture is another key way to bolster mental health. The mechanics will likely differ from one organization to the next, Stolle said, but could take the form of a daily check-in email or a monthly company-wide well-being survey.

3. Audit mental health benefits.

Organizations should ensure that health insurance policies cover adequate mental health care services—and that employees know how to access them. If such services aren’t being used, workers may need more information about what sort of help is available and where to find it.

4. Train leaders to promote well-being.

Even just three hours of mental health awareness training can improve attitudes toward mental

health at work, according to research published in the *International Journal of Stress Management*.¹⁰

“Leaders need to be self-aware because our mental health affects the entire organization,” said Ott. “We have to change the climate within organizations and CAOs are in the perfect position to help make that change.” **PM**

This article was developed in partnership with the American Psychological Association (apa.org).

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

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¹⁰ <https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2Ftra0001221>

ZARA ABRAMS is a freelance science writer based in Los Angeles. She writes about psychology, neuroscience, and health.



Resources

ICMA, APA, and other nonprofits have partnered to supply employers with free resources that provide concrete tips and strategies for implementing these recommendations and many others. All local government employers are welcome and encouraged to take advantage of these resources by signing on to the Striving for Mental Health Excellence program at apa.org/workplace-mental-health. Find additional mental resources on the ICMA website at icma.org/topics/mental-health.



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Addressing MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS Through Organizational Culture

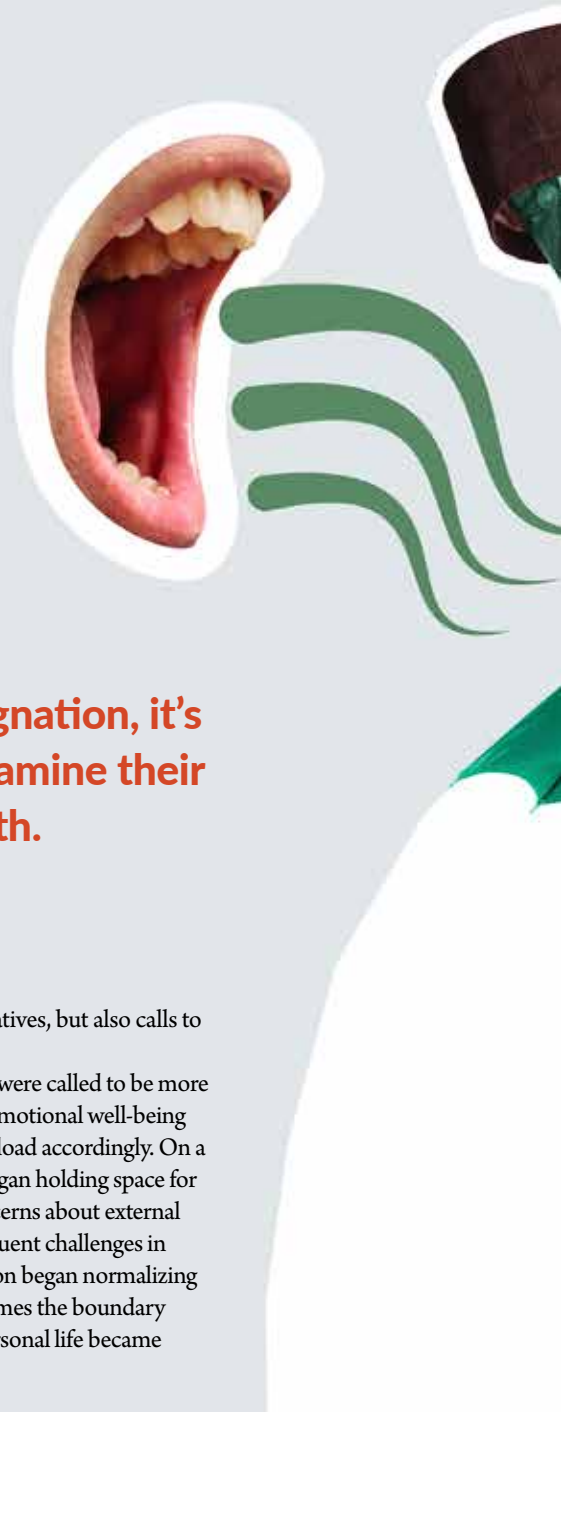
In the wake of the pandemic and the Great Resignation, it's incumbent upon local government leaders to examine their workplace culture through a lens of mental health.

BY POOJA BACHANI DI GIOVANNA AND ALEXANDER DESANTIS

Historically and today, there are many myths and misconceptions associated with mental health.¹ These misconceptions led to widespread acceptance of wellness as defined by physical health, overlooking the critical significance of mental and emotional aspects of health. The pandemic forced us to consider mental and emotional health as key factors of overall well-being as we collectively navigated unprecedented times. This renewed focus and emphasis on mental health manifested itself at workplaces through not only employer-provided

mental health programs and initiatives, but also calls to shift organization culture.^{2,3}

On a macro level, team leaders were called to be more aware of their team's mental and emotional well-being and needs, and to adjust the workload accordingly. On a micro level, many team leaders began holding space for team members to share their concerns about external impacts on their work and subsequent challenges in maintaining the workload. We soon began normalizing and accepting that during these times the boundary between our work life and our personal life became





Stay interviews are a simple and effective way to take a litmus test of your organization.

more blurry than it was before. This called for greater awareness of the impact that the pandemic and the Great Resignation had on organizations and their team members' mental and emotional wellness.

The Great Resignation

After a mass exodus of local government employees, many municipalities were left to reflect on how and why they should focus on their workplace

industries, and local government is no exception.⁵ The unique public-facing role of local government, coupled with staff shortages and exhaustion on the part of the community, has exacerbated this situation. Research shows that burnout is one of the leading reasons why local governments are struggling to retain employees and maintain operations.⁶ William Resh, associate professor at American University, says,

The last three years have not only exhausted the workforce but changed the psychology of the work culture and environment.

experience and culture to retain high-quality employees that will serve their community and support the organizational mission.⁴ National surveys of public sector employees tell us that local government employees are frustrated with a lack of recognition, training and development, change management, work-life balance, flexibility, equity and inclusion, and pay.

The Great Resignation left many organizations short staffed, which led to burnout and fatigue for the team members that remained. Simply put, local governments did not have the resources, begging the question—how can we adjust the workplace culture to meet staff needs and retain team members?

Burnout and Fatigue

Recently, burnout and fatigue have been widespread across

“Local governments must understand that many citizen-facing jobs do not simply require ‘hard’ skills, like speaking another language. They require ‘soft’ skills, like being able to interact with frustrated members of the public for hours at a time.”

What exactly is burnout? Psychology Today defines burnout as “a state of emotional, mental, and often physical exhaustion brought on by prolonged or repeated stress.”⁷ The signs of burnout, while recognizable, exist along a continuum, differing based on the degree and the individual. Dr. Bourg Carter highlights that the symptoms of burnout stretch across physical, emotional, and mental well-being. We all have experienced burnout at one point in our lives, and you may, in fact, be experiencing it right now as you read this or know of someone on your team going through it.

It is important to recognize signs of burnout early on in yourself and in your team for individual well-being and organizational function. It is important to create and maintain a work culture that values emotional and mental health. “Managers need to get better at listening, shifting, and pushing for their organizations to transform in progressive ways that support the new needs of the workforce.” Craig Cowdrey of the Harvard Business Review calls for team leaders to become agents of change in their organizations and to set the precedent that we need to focus not just on employee performance but employee well-being as well.

Stay Interviews: One way to do this is by conducting *stay interviews*.⁸ Stay interviews are a simple and effective way to take a litmus test of your organization and see where your employees need more assistance and support to be satisfied in their position. This special type of check-in gives you the opportunity to connect with your team members, learn how they are feeling, get an insight into their emotional and mental well-being, and identify signs of burnout and fatigue. These conversations can help illuminate areas where you or the organization can provide resources and support to help your team members.

By conducting one to three annual stay interviews and asking key questions, a supervisor can get valuable feedback from the organization and better address the needs of employees to retain talent. Important questions to ask include:

- Why do you stay in your position?

- Which aspects of your job do you enjoy most?
- What are your toughest challenges and could you use assistance in these areas?
- What can your supervisor do to support you?
- When did you think about leaving the organization and why?

While this dialogue must be followed up with real action, it can be a powerful tool to retain an organization's most talented employees.

Debriefs: Another helpful check-in is to host post-project debriefs designed to assess how employees feel following projects or initiatives that are heavily front-facing. It is important to understand the challenges team members are facing during public engagement processes to find ways to not only mitigate those challenges, but also have team buy-in for future public engagement. Team buy-in and support is a significant component of effective public engagement.

Support Networks: An additional way to navigate burnout is by building and maintaining personal and professional support networks.⁹ This network should include peers as well as team leaders who can understand the challenges you are facing, hold

space to listen, and provide support. A diverse network of trusted friends and colleagues can help alleviate some of the symptoms of burnout and improve overall emotional and mental well-being.

One factor of burnout is apathy and cynicism toward work, leading individuals to retreat into themselves and only focus on that which is absolutely necessary for their role. However, research shows that by doing the exact opposite, they reduce the impacts of burnout.¹⁰ Dr. Jaclyn Margolis of Pepperdine University found that “being nice, in the form of generosity, support, and kindness, can help employees succeed... from improving their mood to reducing burnout.” In other words, helping others can improve mental and emotional well-being! Team leaders can help by creating workplace cultures focused on gratitude and kindness.

So much of local government is front facing that sometimes we overlook the mental and emotional impact of that on our team members. Recognizing burnout and finding ways to help team members navigate can not only improve overall emotional well-being, but also improve staff retention rates.

Trauma-Informed Workplaces

Shifting workplace cultures to reflect an increased awareness of mental and emotional well-being also includes creating trauma-informed workplaces. The last three years have not only exhausted the workforce but changed the psychology of the work culture and environment. We need workplaces and cultures to account for and prepare

to address the aftereffects of the last three years; we need workplaces that are trauma informed.¹¹

A trauma-informed workplace is “one that operates with an understanding of trauma and its negative effects on the organization’s employees and the communities it serves and works to mitigate those effects.” In practice, this looks like building a culture that supports psychological safety within an organization. Psychological safety can look like a team environment in which it is okay to make a mistake or express that you don’t know something. Psychologically safe organizations create and hold space for team members to express their struggles without fear of job security. A trauma-informed workplace can help meet employee needs for emotional and mental well-being and create a workplace environment that retains team members.

The San Francisco Department of Public Health learned firsthand how successful a trauma-informed workplace can be. “As in the general population, departmental staff previously experienced withdrawal, decreased motivation, and lacked trust in the organization and their supervisors. Diverse and mission-driven employees felt disempowered, thus sapping their initiative and feeding into an “us versus them” mentality. For that reason, SFDPH’s Trauma Informed System (TIS) initiative is aimed at transforming the health department’s organizational culture into one that proactively empowers people, nurtures and respects their engagement, and is employee-led and self-sustaining.”¹²

Psychological safety can look like a team environment in which it is okay to make a mistake or express that you don’t know something.

SFDPH has sought to incorporate mindfulness techniques into a variety of day-to-day operations. They use three- to five-minute check-ins before starting meetings to perform breathing exercises and other mindfulness activities that help improve focus and clarity on the job. They also embed trauma-informed systems trainers within their organization to serve as content experts that support an internal team of TIS champions who “plan, implement, and support activities that promote organizational healing.” Consistently evaluating the effectiveness of these efforts allows SFDPH to further fine tune and enhance its approach.

An Opportunity for Change

The Great Resignation and the pandemic have provided us with an opportunity to carefully assess the health of our workplace cultures. Burnout is happening across the country, impacting all local governments in all departments. Prioritizing mental and emotional well-being at work by changing the workplace culture to be more mindful and trauma informed is just one way in which we can help our team members not only do well in their work but also enjoy it. **PM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

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Vitality Fuels a Healthy Workforce

BY SANDRA DIAZ-CASTILLO

By better understanding vitality and the factors that impact it, local government organizations have a path to more deeply understand the unique needs of their employees.

Higher vitality is linked to a more motivated, connected, and productive workforce. Yet many employed adults are operating with low levels of vitality, jeopardizing their ability to engage and contribute, and increasing the likelihood of poor work quality, employee absenteeism, and turnover.

By better understanding vitality and the factors that impact it, employers can help fuel a healthier workforce and drive business and economic growth. The Evernorth Vitality Index benchmark study found that U.S. adults who work for pay (“workers”) have higher levels of vitality than those who are unemployed. The research indicates a number of potential reasons, including access to health benefits, care, and services. The vast majority (95%) of workers with high vitality say they have health insurance, and 51% indicate they obtain it through their employer. In addition, 77% of workers have a primary care provider, and 69% had an annual physical within the past year. Overall, people who are employed are more likely to consider themselves in excellent health than people who are not employed (20% vs. 9%), with significantly more workers reporting excellent mental health (23% vs. 10%) and excellent physical health (17% vs. 8%). The research indicates workers are more likely to eat well (44%), exercise (78%), and have better sleep quality (15%). They are also less likely to experience chronic pain (25% vs. 46%).

Sixty-four percent of workers report having a chronic condition such as high blood pressure (21%),

high cholesterol (19%), depression or anxiety (19%), asthma (13%), diabetes (11%), or arthritis (11%), and 22% of workers have at least two chronic conditions. However, those with chronic conditions believe more strongly than non-workers with chronic conditions that they can manage their health (48% vs. 28%). Among those who are not employed, 73% reported having at least one chronic condition, and 25% strongly agree they have “good medical care” for their health condition. This is in contrast to the 28% of workers with at least one chronic condition who feel the same. People who are employed often demonstrate a level of competence in other areas of their life as well. They are significantly more likely to feel confident in their ability to complete difficult tasks compared with those who are not employed (53% vs. 41%). More workers than non-workers say they are able to adapt when changes occur and tend

to bounce back after illness, injury or other hardships.

Gig Workers

Autonomy and choice drive vitality levels for workers, including independent contractors and gig workers. The majority of these workers have medium vitality levels, but there are distinctions between high and low levels. The top two age groups of gig workers are 18 to 34 (38%) and 45 to 64 (33%), but gig workers with low or high vitality levels are more likely to be 35 to 44 years old. They also are more likely to work multiple jobs and to be seeking other work. Those with low vitality are likely to have trouble finding a job working for an employer or say they need to develop marketable skills. In contrast, high-vitality gig workers are more likely to have chosen their path because it lets them decide how, when, and where to work. They earn more than their low-vitality counterparts and have greater confidence in their ability to keep up with

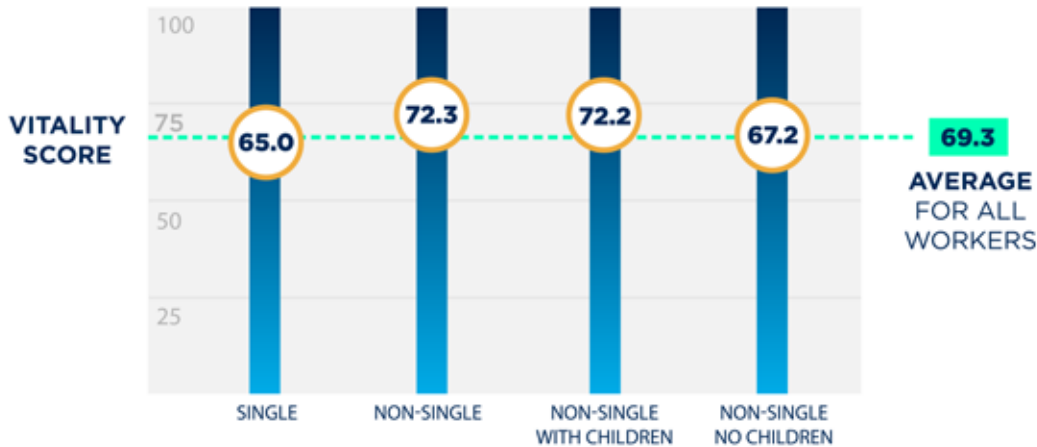
their expenses. They also are more likely to work more than 30 hours a week, while low-vitality gig workers tend to work less.

Work Culture and Vitality

Vitality also helps quantify the relationship between work culture and employee wellness. We learned that workers tend to have higher vitality levels when they feel their employers prioritize their wellness, enable them to maintain strong work-life balance, and communicate clearly. Workers with high vitality are more likely to agree that their employer provides adequate opportunities to care for personal health (71%) and shows focus on wellness in actions and communications (62%). While many workers feel supported by their employers, sizable minorities do not, and 29% of all workers say that work causes their personal life to suffer.

 WORKERS WITH HIGHER VITALITY LEVELS	 WORKERS WITH LOWER VITALITY LEVELS
 Better overall health	 Struggle to manage their health
 Higher occupational confidence	 Demonstrate higher absenteeism and turnover
 Feel supported at work	 Feel less competent in their role
 Access and trust health care more	 Are less productive at work
 More likely to stay with current employer	 Feel less satisfied with their jobs overall

AVERAGE WORKER VITALITY BY FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS



39% of low-vitality workers. However, employees with high vitality are less likely to miss work due to illness or stress. Only one in four missed a day in the last month due to stress, compared to 35% of low-vitality workers, while a third (32%) with high vitality missed a day of work due to illness in the past month, compared to nearly half (47%) of low-vitality workers.

Interestingly, however, high-vitality workers are as likely, or more likely, to feel stress as their low-vitality counterparts in several areas:

- 24% vs. 17% report they often or very often have unreasonable deadlines.
- 28% vs. 29% say they often or very often have too much work.

Vitality Differs Across Industries

Industries that skew white collar tend to have the highest vitality, with finance and technology workers maintaining some of the highest levels. Relatedly, 64% of high-vitality workers report having a white-collar family, compared to 34% of low-vitality workers. Still, people in the manufacturing industry

Internal communication is key in demonstrating employers' priorities and enabling a sense of autonomy for employees. Workers with high vitality are distinguished by a near-universal sense that they are kept informed about what is going on in the company (93% vs. 52% of low-vitality workers). Interestingly, we found that many workers with high vitality are at a transitional period. They are more likely to be in the 35 to 44 age bracket, representing a large share of working parents and professionals who may be experiencing positive life shifts, such as engagements, pregnancy, and new parenthood. Their families and relationships lend themselves to positive social well-being; we found that 92% of high-vitality workers make time for relationships.

This group also illustrates that thriving at work is possible within a supportive work culture, with 72% saying that their work environment enables their family and personal commitments, compared with just 13% of low-vitality workers.

Work Relationships and Vitality

While work culture is critical for fostering wellness and boosting vitality, personal relationships at work also play an important role. Employed people with high vitality overwhelmingly "feel connected with people" at work (79%) compared to 36% of medium-vitality workers and 12% of low-vitality workers.

In addition, those with high vitality report strong relationships with their managers and are more likely

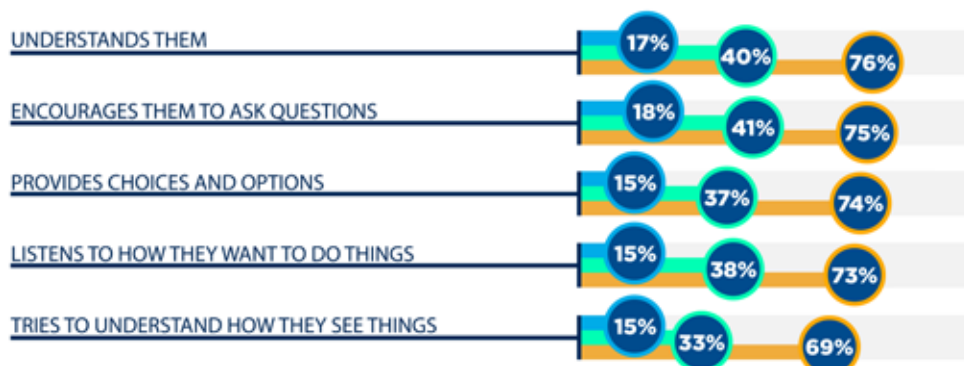
to feel they can easily express their opinions or feelings about their job conditions, agree that their manager tries to understand how they see things, and feel encouraged to ask questions.

Stress and Vitality

Among all workers, 25% often feel stress because of work and an additional 42% report that they sometimes feel stress from work. Digging deeper reveals that 20% of employed people with high vitality feel stress often or very often because of their work, as do

VITALITY & RELATIONSHIP WITH MANAGER

% OF WORKERS WHO AGREE THEIR MANAGER...



RESPONSES GROUPED BY LOW, MEDIUM & HIGH VITALITY

(blue collar) have higher than average levels of vitality.

Industries with lower levels of vitality (e.g., hospitality, restaurants, utilities, retail) tend to have the youngest, most recently hired workers and are least likely to offer a standard 9-to-5 work day. Their workers tend to face more difficult economic circumstances, with many reporting that their income doesn't cover their living costs. It is not surprising that as a result these workers generally lack autonomy and a feeling of connectedness:

- Among those who have been at their jobs for less than a year, 54% say they are confident they can do their job well (vs. 66% for all workers).
- Short-tenure workers are more likely to be lonely (73% vs. 55%), feel left out, and lack companionship.
- While 50% of short-tenure workers rate their mental health as good or excellent, they over index on measures of stress, panic, and depression.

They fall behind in other areas as well:

- 43% of night-shift workers say they have time for relationships vs. 59% of day-shift workers.
- 43% trust their health care provider vs. 61% of all workers.
- Far fewer night-shift workers have seen a doctor in the past year than all workers (56% vs. 69%).

Workforce Vitality Matters

The Evernorth Vitality Index study confirms that vitality levels are associated with key workforce engagement measures. By better

understanding vitality and the factors that impact it, employers have a path to more deeply understand the unique needs of their people, make meaningful investments in workforce health, and grow.

Workers with High Vitality Demonstrate Strong Performance

- 90% feel confident they can do things well at work, compared to just 28% of those with low vitality.
- 31% have taken on additional responsibilities at work in the past year, compared to 23% of low-vitality workers.
- 69% feel they receive appropriate recognition and rewards, compared to 21% of their low-vitality counterparts.
- 38% received a raise and 19% received a promotion last year, compared to 27% with low vitality who received a raise and 9% who received a promotion.

Workers with High Vitality Are More Satisfied at Work

- People with high vitality are almost universally satisfied

with their jobs (97%) and report greater chances for advancement at work (92%). In contrast, 71% of those with low vitality are satisfied with their jobs and 49% are satisfied with their chances for advancement.

- 65% have been in their current job for more than a year, compared to 44% of low-vitality workers.
- 88% would like to be working for the same employer in three years, compared to 50% of those with low vitality.
- Just 11% of high-vitality workers applied for a new job in the past year.

Conclusion

High vitality also correlates with positive personal experiences. Among workers with high vitality, 90% enjoy the people they spend time with, compared to 16% of those with low vitality, and 89% can identify places that bring them a sense of peace, compared to 10% of their low-vitality counterparts. The data suggests that

vitality is a catalyst for growth that can help people achieve the healthiest versions of themselves, inspiring a ripple effect that can fuel healthier, more engaged families, workplaces, and communities. **PM**

SANDRA DIAZ-CASTILLO, MSPH,

is a principal at the Evernorth Research Institute where she leads the Health Equity and Vitality Research programs.



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Promoting **EMPATHY** as a Leadership Skill and Debunking Some Myths

THE MOST
EFFECTIVE LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
LEADERS
UNDERSTAND
THAT EMPATHY
IS A STRENGTH,
NOT A WEAKNESS.

BY DR. NICOLE PRICE



P

people who lack empathy, as I once did, share the belief that they can get a ton accomplished when they don't concern themselves with "people issues."

They think that lacking empathy just might provide the buoyancy to results rather than the barrier. But the tragedy is that sometimes we need to take a subjective view. We need to humanize the people in front of us. We need to step into situations and ask: "What would I want to happen if it were me?" "What does this person need most right now?"

The challenge is how do you get leaders to start prioritizing empathy if they don't believe it belongs in their toolbox of leadership characteristics? The evidence that empathy in the workplace is a boon for business is quite convincing: 87 percent of CEOs believe a company's financial performance is tied to empathy in the

workplace, as do 79 percent of HR professionals.¹

But I understand why some well-meaning, logical, reasonable, results-focused leaders find it hard to comprehend why people simply cannot do their jobs. After all, they've committed themselves to these roles, so why would they need coaxing, cajoling, or hand-holding? It used to frustrate the heck out of me, too, until I recognized that commitment works both ways: employee to employer and employer to employee. If the employer is not committed to providing the employee the support, tools, and resources required to get their job done, they can't expect an employee to keep their commitment to get their job done.

Empathy = Understanding Your Employees

Of course, for the employer to commit to providing the employee with what's

needed to get the job done, they must understand what those needs are. This is why leading with empathy matters. Empathy is critical to this mutual understanding. Contrary to what many believe, leading with empathy is not about hand-holding or making excuses. It is the opposite. Empathy is the foundation that allows us to move forward.

Leading with empathy is about understanding others and then strategically leveraging that understanding to make progress. Yes, I used *empathy*, *strategic*, and *leverage* in the same sentence—I bet you didn't expect that. The job to be done may be getting your team to arrive on time and ready to start meetings. If your team member is scheduled at a mandated meeting across town that ends 15 minutes before yours begins, and it takes 20 minutes to get across town, they rarely will be on time. If you don't understand why they always arrive late (and stressed), you're not going to solve the problem. In fact, a lack of understanding will make the problem worse.

Many people equate empathy with caring. When the topic of empathy comes up, it's common for people to think, "Now you expect me to care about everyone—what they're doing, how they're feeling. I don't have time for that." While caring is often a natural consequence of practicing empathy, the truth is caring is not required; understanding is. When you start with understanding, you

might begin to care about the person's plight.

Meantime, let's clear up some misunderstandings—some long-standing myths about empathy—and debunk them:

Myth #1:

Empathy requires you to adopt the other person's beliefs and values.

Empathy is not believing another's beliefs or living another's values. Empathy is understanding why another person believes what they believe and values what they value, even if it's different from your own.

Myth #2:

Empathy is feeling sorry for another person.

Empathy is understanding and being sensitive to another person's thoughts, feelings, and experiences; it is not commiserating with another person, which is based on your own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. While there are times to feel sorry for people, that is not the definition of empathy.

Myth #3:

Empathy makes you weak.

Empathy takes the courage to acknowledge and sit with your own difficult feelings so that you can better understand and connect with those around

Leading with empathy is about understanding others and then strategically leveraging that understanding to make progress.

you. Connecting to others strengthens relationships and has been shown to reduce depression and anxiety.

Myth #4:

You can't always practice empathy.

Yes, you can. Empathy does not require action. It is the simple act of trying to understand and get into the shoes of another person. Your ability to respond better is improved as your level of understanding expands.

Myth #5:

Empathy is give, give, give.

This debunking involves three components:

- While empathy can feel overwhelming at times, healthy empathy requires

Empathy takes the courage to acknowledge and sit with your own difficult feelings so that you can better understand and connect with those around you.

boundaries. You might burn out if you try to understand the feelings and circumstances of everyone around you 24 hours a day.

- Acting with empathy provides benefits to the empathizer, too. For starters, it helps you understand and regulate your own emotions and promotes better connections with others.
- You aren't always the empathizer. You have been on the receiving end of empathy from those you choose to spend time with.

Conclusion

It comes down to this: empathy is a strength, not a weakness. It can be built and developed. And it's critically important for leaders to know that. It's vital that they strengthen their empathy muscle so they can connect with, galvanize, and unify their workforce. Because a workforce that feels understood will help their leaders build a successful organization. **PM**

ENDNOTE

¹ <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/businessolver-quantifies-empathy-in-the-workplace-87-percent-of-ceos-agree-that-a-companys-financial-performance-is-tied-to-empathy-300628497.html>

DR. NICOLE PRICE is the Forbes Books author of *Spark The Heart: Engineering Empathy In Your Organization*. She also is the CEO of Lively Paradox, a professional coaching business that focuses on practicing empathy in leadership. Originally trained as an engineer, Dr. Price's technical background enhances her objective approach to solving process problems and helping people focus on solutions. (<https://drnicoleprice.com>)



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Balancing

Personal Challenges with Organizational Demands

Working toward equilibrium for yourself and for your staff, personally and in the workplace

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices.” Each one of us brings our unique blend of these traits to the workplace every day. But how do we as employees show up with authenticity and as managers promote a culture of psychological safety, trust, belonging, and inclusion as we all work to accomplish our mission?

This was the message of our speakers Ian Coyle, Melissa Murphy-Rodrigues, Jeff Parks, and Charlene Marsh in their ICMA Coaching Webinar, “Everyone Has Personal

Challenges: How to Balance Personal Requirements with Organizational Demands.” To watch the webinar (originally presented in November 2022), scan the QR code at the end of this article.

Balancing Your Home Life and Work Life

Our new coaching facilitator, Ian Coyle, county administrator, Livingston County, New York, set the stage for the topic. He said that to be an effective local government administrator it helps to have clarity of mind, an intentional purpose for the day ahead, and a requisite combination of inner peace and resilience to block out the noise and negativity that tends to creep up on a daily basis. Bringing emotional baggage from home into the workplace or carrying a similar type of baggage from work to

BY IAN COYLE, ICMA-CM;
JEFF PARKS; MELISSA
MURPHY-RODRIGUES,
ICMA-CM; AND
CHARLENE MARSH

home when returning to family portends challenges ahead.

Striking that just-right balance between your work life and your home life is critically important, especially for the 2023 city/county manager who is seemingly always on the job. Emails, news, social media, and life in the proverbial fishbowl are the perpetual roadblocks in the way of this balance. We should acknowledge these challenges for what they are—known obstacles—and radically accept them for what they are and move on, versus perseverating on some negative externality that is usually outside of our control.

With respect to the demands on our time and the stressors

affecting local government leaders, we should practice sound mental health techniques for ourselves and support the mental health and emotional fitness of our staff. As leaders, we must lead from the front and be comfortable with talking about mental health, such as the importance of recharging and resetting. We must encourage—and not discourage—time off to unwind from the toils of an often-challenging work environment in local government.

Finally, being mindful and intentional and actively listening and staying engaged with staff through their struggles are must-have traits for chief administrative officers. Over the past few years, the workplace has changed globally. Many professions, even within the public sector,

A stylized illustration of a person in a dark suit balancing on top of a large, textured blue sphere. The person is in a dynamic pose, with one leg extended and arms out for balance. Below this sphere, a red diagonal line slopes downwards from left to right. Underneath this line is a large, textured yellow sphere. Below the yellow sphere, another red diagonal line slopes upwards from left to right. Underneath this second line is a large, textured red sphere. The background is a light gray.

have become more flexible, and municipalities have struggled to remain relevant in a changing and competitive job market. In order to survive, progressive municipal leaders have learned that without adaptation we will be unable to thrive and compete in this new reality. Prospective and current employee expectations about the workplace have changed, and it has become the municipal leader's responsibility to manage and meet those expectations.

Balancing Tasks and Teams

Jeff Parks, president, Performance Breakthroughs, Inc., believes that if your employees have passion for their work, many of these managerial challenges melt away.

According to Jeff, the job of a manager is easy to describe, but hard to do. He says, "All you have to do is to balance both tasks and people." Jeff shared three different tools to assist

managers with doing this. The first one was the Performance Equation, a six-cell framework that equips individuals and teams for maximum performance. The Performance Equation challenges individuals to think about what the organization can do better, what the manager can do better, and what the performer can do better to leverage this approach.

The second tool that Jeff shared is the Continuum of Commitment. This tool can be used in order

to determine how team members are feeling about the organization. The continuum is a horizontal line that stretches from “compliance” to “commitment.” Individuals place an “x” on the line based on the answers to these three questions:

1. Is my input valued?
2. Is my work valued?
3. Am I valued?

The intent is to determine where the “x” is and how to move it to the right toward high commitment. Leaders should think about where their boss is (and place a “y” there) and where their staff is (placing a “z” there). Jeff suggests asking those individuals (staff and boss) where they fall on the continuum compared to your

family, etc. The tool facilitates thoughtful consideration about what you’ll continue and any changes you may want to make. Jeff stated that it is possible that life and work events (a child going to college; a major project) may cause an imbalance to temporarily accommodate that surge of activity. His message is to stay in touch with your life balance needs and make appropriate and timely adjustments. That will help both your mental health and workplace performance.

All of these tools—the Performance Equation, the Continuum of Commitment, and the Horizontal Maslow—help staff move from accountability to responsibility and help leaders balance tasks and people.

culture within the workplace is a tool for both employee retention and employee attraction. A municipality may not always have the financial resources to extend the most attractive job offer, but we can create a culture that attracts great talent and keeps the best people in place.

Part of creating that culture is appreciating the team you have. At times, we forget that we have a team of skilled professionals who have earned their positions and deserve to be treated as such. Too often, a leader will manage to their worst employee, and use that as an excuse to punish even the best, to the detriment of the organization. For example, not allowing George to work from home because Mary abused it in the

past. Rather than deal with an issue, we make a sweeping and overarching policy that harms the entire workforce.

As the manager, you can’t influence positive workplace culture changes without first mirroring those changes yourself, and a part of that is owning who you are as a person. For many of us, particularly working mothers, this can be a change from the past, but today it is imperative to embrace the different aspects of yourself as part of what makes you an effective leader in order to mirror the culture you expect from your team.

Cultural change within an organization is not simple and can be met with resistance. At times, generational differences or personality types will

We must encourage—and not discourage—time off to unwind from the toils of an often-challenging work environment in local government.

perceptions. Then have a good conversation about where there were differences.

A final tool to help leaders balance organizational requirements against personal commitments is the Horizontal Maslow, a life balance framework. This helps individuals see where they are in terms of committing time and attention to different life areas such as spirituality, finances, wellness, friends,

Culture Is Key

As a leader of a municipal organization, we have the ability to make policy that impacts our community on so many levels. Melissa Murphy-Rodrigues, town manager, North Andover, Massachusetts, said that one of the most meaningful and core ways to be impactful within our own organization is by influencing the culture of the workplace. Creating the best possible



clash over work styles. There isn't a one-size-fits-all way to manage, and we have to continue to adapt, pivot, and be flexible. Some employees may never get on board with the culture the leader is building and choose to find a different team, and that should be encouraged and appreciated. In a workplace where people are respected as adults, as professionals, and as important parts of the team, they are more likely to be appreciative, respectful, collaborative, and loyal to the mission of the organization.

Commitment Is a Two-Way Street

The last speaker on our coaching webinar, Charlene Marsh, spoke about the importance of ensuring that leaders understand that commitment is a two-way street that takes the investment of the organization in its team members and vice versa. Charlene focused on early-/mid-career professionals and used feedback from her social media forums to highlight her points.

Charlene said that when it comes to the question of whether Millennials and Gen-Zers care about what their organizations can do for them or what they can do for their organizations, the answer is not a simple one. As a self-proclaimed "Zilennial," Charlene believes that her peers can and do care about both, but that their value of the latter is only seen in a negative light. For far too many, prioritizing what an organization can do for an employee is reduced to laziness, entitlement, and lack of commitment. In reality, valuing what an

organization can do for us as employees can look like setting expectations for fair compensation, meaningful work, healthy work environments, work/life balance, and professional development opportunities.

In order to understand that this concern is not inherently bad, we must first acknowledge that we are people first and members of our respective organizations second, and we can do so in three ways:

1. Acknowledging personal responsibilities.

We all wear a variety of hats in our personal lives. How do they impact the way we show up at work?

2. Acknowledging personal styles.

We all have unique preferences and values. How do they impact the way we show up at work? Widely available personality assessments of all kinds provide insight into our communication styles, areas of skill and improvement, approaches to collaboration, and personal values that can be useful in the workplace. Self-awareness is the first step in being able to communicate our needs, and these assessments can serve as sources of the language we use to support ourselves and those we work alongside.

3. Acknowledging personal challenges.

We all have personal struggles and individual differences that impact us mentally and emotionally. For example, individuals on

As the manager, you can't influence positive workplace culture changes without first mirroring those changes yourself.

the autism spectrum may have challenges with social interaction or someone who requires hearing aids may not be able to hear the discussion in a loud echoing conference room. Both examples can cause a sense of feeling like an outsider and not part of the team. Leaders that recognize employees as people first understand the value of acknowledging these challenges and making accommodations that ensure full participation.

They can do this by, first, building trust with their employees, so that employees feel safe disclosing said challenges. Second, they can work alongside employees to identify specific manifestations of the challenges, acknowledging that they may evolve over time. Finally, they can take co-ownership of the process of exploring solutions and opportunities that provide employees with the tools, systems, and support they need to succeed in spite of these challenges.

Across generations, people want to do valuable work for organizations that value them. Leaders of organizations can demonstrate this value by prioritizing trust building, open communication, and shared responsibility in efforts to find synergy between employees' personal responsibilities, styles, and challenges with the organization's demands. **PM**

IAN COYLE, ICMA-CM, is county administrator of Livingston County, New York.



MELISSA MURPHY-RODRIGUES, ICMA-CM, is town manager of North Andover, Massachusetts.



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The author (left)
with Tagbilaran
City Mayor Jane
Yap (right).

If someone told me as a young kid that I would be living my dream job one day and traveling to the Philippines for work, I never would have believed it. Joining ICMA is one of the best decisions I have ever made, and the organization has played a significant role in my career journey as a local government professional. Little did I expect that serving on ICMA's International Committee would take me back to my country of birth and help me find new ways to contribute to the profession.

My family experienced our "Coming to America" moment when I was three years old. My mother was a nurse and through her profession we immigrated to the United States to meet the nation's demand for healthcare workers, which continues today. Indeed, nursing- and healthcare-related education remain in high demand among the Filipino people as it provides access to employment opportunities throughout the world.

With approximately 1.8 million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) globally, the number-one export of the Philippines is its people. My personal favorite "Filipino diaspora experience" is

BY PJ GAGAJENA

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

in Discovering the "I" in ICMA

Traveling to the Philippines for the ICMA International Committee meeting and study tour was a life-changing event for me as a Filipino American in local government.

boarding a cruise ship and being greeted by a Filipino who represents thousands of workers in the cruise industry worldwide. It gives me an extra feeling of being at home.

However, working and living abroad is not easy, especially when it is not driven by choice but by survival and limited opportunities. I am sure any immigrant, refugee, or asylum seeker can tell you that adapting and assimilating into a new culture and society poses significant challenges that places a heavy toll mentally and emotionally. I experienced this first-hand in having challenges speaking English while growing up and witnessing my parents confront discrimination as we struggled through a long and difficult adjustment period, which impacted their relationship, and the relationship between them, my siblings, and me.

Yet it was those challenging times that inspired me to pursue a career in public service and serve others in need. Fortunately, through my family's immense pride in our cultural heritage I never lost the ability to speak the Filipino language and proudly consumed the food, music, dances, movies, history, and traditions of my people. I have carried this "bicultural consciousness" my entire life and have sought opportunities to support other Filipinos in America and connect with the Philippines in some way.

Joining the board of the ICMA affiliate group, the International Network of Asian Public Administrators (I-NAPA), presented me the opportunity to help other Filipino Americans, as well as other Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native Hawaiians in the local government



Dr. Juliet Espiritu-Salgados, director of the Water Testing Laboratory at Holy Name University

profession. Subsequently, when I first heard that ICMA has been engaged in international activities for more than 50 years through peer-to-peer technical assistance and training, city-to-city partnerships, study tours, hosting of international fellows, and presenting at conferences and events, I jumped on the opportunity to apply to serve on ICMA's International Committee.

When I learned that the ICMA International Committee meeting and

Executive Board meeting was going to be held in Manila in March 2023, I felt this was an opportunity of a lifetime. I had never imagined there would be a possibility to connect the work I do in local government in the United States with the Philippines.

Traveling to the Philippines for the ICMA International Committee meeting and study tour in March 2023 was a life-changing event. First, it offered me a first-hand account of the "I" in ICMA,

and second, it brought full circle my life experience and career as a Filipino American in local government.

As part of ICMA's grants and contracts portfolio, ICMA has been involved in the Philippines since 2015, first to implement the Strengthening Urban Resilience for Growth with Equity (SURGE) Project through a \$47 million contract with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), ICMA's largest contract worldwide. The goal of the SURGE Project was for second-tier cities outside the urban core of Metro Manila to become economically thriving and resilient growth centers. SURGE ended in 2021, but ICMA is currently implementing two USAID-funded projects in the Philippines: the Cities for Enhanced Governance and Engagement (CHANGE) Project (\$15 million) and the Clean Cities, Blue Oceans (CCBO) Project (\$2.8 million).



ICMA Delegation at Tagbilaran City Junior High School

After attending the ICMA International Committee meeting in Manila and learning about the State Department–funded Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI), implemented by ICMA, our delegation met with Mayor Wes Gatchalian and his team from Valenzuela City, and I later traveled with part of our group to Tagbilaran City on the island of Bohol (one of more than 7,100 islands that make up the Philippines). I saw first-hand the incredible work these cities were doing to meet the goals of the USAID Projects. Under CHANGE, the goals are to (1) strengthen the enabling environment for decentralization; (2) enhance service delivery capacity, legitimacy, transparency, and accountability of participating local governments; and (3) empower residents by increasing participation in and oversight of local governance processes.

The highlights of the Tagbilaran City study tour were meeting with Mayor Jane Yap, learning from City Governance Coordinator Linda Paredes, seeing the sustainable products created by women entrepreneurs through the business advisory and training center for women, visiting the water testing laboratory at Holy Name University headed by Dr. Juliet Espiritu-Salgados, and meeting with the President of Holy Name University, Fr. Ruel “Dudz” Lero, SVD, along with his staff and ICMA student chapter members. The conversations I had with these local government officials and staff, scientists, and academic representatives were some of the most valuable and relevant learning exchanges I ever experienced, with discussions about best practices, civic engagement, council-manager form of government, and student involvement.

Going to the Philippines helped bridge the work I do



The author (left) and Michaela Canete (second from right) with YSEALI Fellows.

in local government in the United States with my interests internationally and gave me such an incredible feeling of purpose to who I am as a person and my life's work in public service. It offered a unique perspective to what my colleagues in other cities and nations are doing and made me proud of my Filipino heritage, while providing hope and confidence that the future of the Philippines is in good hands. There is no escaping the world issues that impact our daily lives—the pandemic taught us that. Even here in

the United States, the work we do every day is impacting residents who are coming from different parts of the world and our decisions create ripple effects that impact communities around the globe.

As ICMA continues to develop a global engagement strategy relevant to local government professionals around the world while meeting the needs of our members in America, I see one small role I can play to serve as an informal ambassador to bridge societies and cultures in the Philippines, Asia, and beyond, in addition to the work I am already doing for ICMA and I-NAPA in the United States. The lesson I learned is to remain engaged with ICMA and the profession in whatever way you can and allow yourself to discover new ways to make your work meaningful.

While I traveled more than 7,000 miles to discover the “I” in ICMA and found myself with a greater purpose to change the world, I kept thinking of Prince Akeem’s famous words from the movie *Coming to America* to describe my experience: “No journey is too great when one finds what he seeks.” **PM**

PJ GAGAJENA is the assistant city manager of Moorpark, California.



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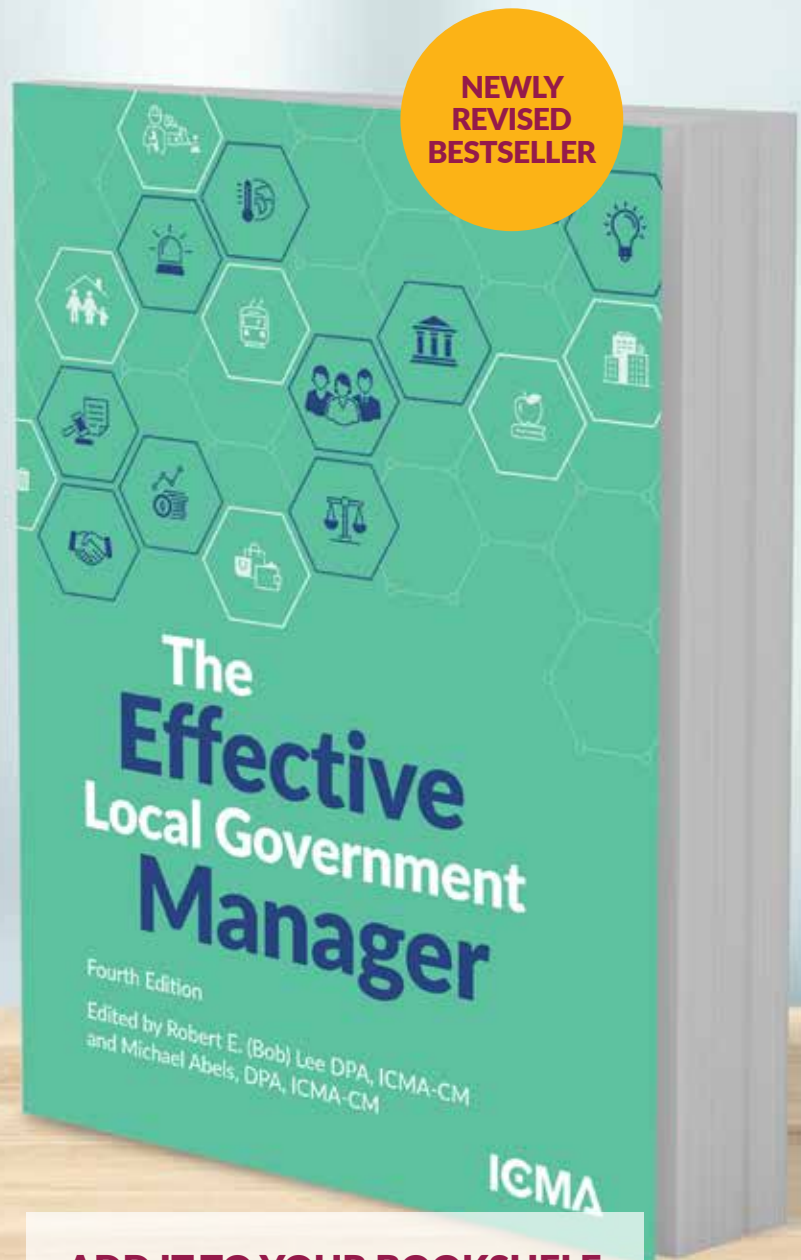
In an environment of contemporary “disruptions,” strategic thinking incorporates not only a long term perspective on priority setting, but also a willingness to identify, prioritize, and deal with what is most important in the here and now and help create meaning in an environment of uncertainty.

From Chapter 1: The Profession of Local Government Manager: Evolution of Leadership Style

— John Nalbandian and Robert O’Neill, Jr.

What’s Inside

- Building a bridge between the traditional role and responsibility of the manager with the transformational change managers are experiencing.
- Establishing the public trust (foundational toolkit)
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Building *Trust* with Staff

BY KRISTEN HILL GORHAM

Four practices that help strengthen organizational relationships and build a strong sense of trust

Trust is fundamental to running effective organizations. Assistants and deputies are uniquely positioned to serve as catalysts for developing cultures of trust with staff. In my time serving as both an assistant and a deputy, I have learned the value of four practices that help strengthen organizational relationships and build a strong sense of trust: leading with transparency

and vulnerability; taking the time to coach, advise, and problem solve; following through on commitments; and celebrating wins.

1. Lead with Transparency and Vulnerability.

Local governments can be highly sensitive political environments. The stress of managing these complex environments can significantly impact our abilities to effectively lead. Often, we are taught that professionalism requires that we eliminate or withhold the elements of ourselves and our life experiences that make us human. We must present as though we know it all, otherwise it may put us in a position of exposure and risk. However, being transparent and vulnerable doesn't mean oversharing or revealing all your cards. If you

If you act transparently and commit to being discerningly vulnerable, it can result in increased engagement, trust, and confidence when leading others.



KRISTEN HILL GORHAM

is deputy city manager of Chamblee, Georgia.

act transparently and commit to being discerningly vulnerable, it can result in increased engagement, trust, and confidence when leading others.

When I became an assistant manager for the first time, I was managing teams who, in some circumstances, had far more subject matter expertise than I did. Instead of pretending that I knew how to do their jobs and acting as if I could effectively speak on their behalf, I asked questions. While asking questions could be perceived as not knowing or revealing knowledge gaps, the vulnerability of showing you are not an expert in something gives you the opportunity to learn and shows commitment to understanding other jobs. If I understand the nuances of services we provide, or the complexity of a process, I can better support the need for resources, provide more strategic guidance, and identify the best approach for encouraging the team's efforts. In fact, I was better off taking the time to ask questions and understand rather than pretending to know more than I did on my own. It showed interest, investment, and ultimately grew trust with my team knowing I could effectively represent them as a leader because I took the time to ask questions and learn.

Similarly, vulnerability shows that you, too, are human. Mistakes happen and cannot be avoided. Inevitably, a decision will be made that has a negative impact or creates a problem rather than resolves one. Owning your decisions and being honest when they do not result in the best outcome sets an example and encourages others to own their mistakes as well. Fear of failure can result in stifled innovation and creativity, so establishing a culture of transparency and vulnerability allows staff to believe that they can try new things and trust that they can safely fail if the outcome is less than perfect.

2. Take the Time.

Deputies and assistants serve in an executive leadership capacity, but they are not the CAO, and are able to fill in the gaps in ways that the CAO may not have the time or space to fill. Sometimes we are pulled in a million different directions throughout the day or feel as though our office is a revolving door of complaints or questions. When it is not, we have a pile of work sitting on our desks that needs to be done. However, our priority as leaders should be to take the time when our staff needs it the most.

As deputies and assistants, we may have the privilege of knowing more than any other member of the organization what the CAO is thinking or wanting to achieve. In turn, we are relied upon to share that knowledge with the rest of the team, assisting them with navigating a task or assignment, coaching them through making a tough decision, or effectively meeting critical performance objectives. Setting aside the time to coach, encourage, or guide staff through a challenge may not

Be quick to provide encouragement, cheer your team on, and give credit rather than taking credit.

seem productive, but it ultimately has a greater impact on the organization than we realize. Serving as that key advisor and coaching your team sets them up for success and keeps them in line with the overall strategy of the CAO, elected officials, and the organization.

3. Follow Through.

Being a reliable and dependable leader is critical to building trust with your team. It is easy to fall into the category of “too busy” or saying you will do something and letting it slip through the cracks. While we can't always be perfect, trust diminishes significantly if your actions don't match your words. However, it strengthens tremendously when you build a reputation of simply following through. One of the worst things you can do as a leader is offer support and not actually be willing to provide it. If you say you are going to do something, try to the best of your ability to do it.

4. Celebrate Wins.

Whether it is completing a huge project that has taken years of effort, creating an operational efficiency that saves time or money, or receiving positive feedback from a customer, celebrating wins and giving credit for successful outcomes are essential to building a culture of trust. There is a critical job to be done at all levels of the organization, from front-line workers to middle managers, department directors, and executive level employees. Public service can involve hundreds of thankless tasks that may directly impact the quality of life for someone within a community. Celebrating successful efforts and outcomes shows that you value and appreciate the work that your staff is doing. Be quick to provide encouragement, cheer your team on, and give credit rather than taking credit.

Deputies and assistants have the ear of the CAO, but still serve as a voice and sounding board for staff. Our positions can bind the organization together, fill gaps, and build strong teams by creating environments where trust is given and received at all levels. However, building trust takes time, effort, and intentionality. Like respect, it doesn't come with the title. **PM**



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**Making an Impact on
Mental Health**

We were looking for mental health resources that could really have a direct impact straight to the individual, whether that be an employee or resident. ICMA promotes a mental health service called Cope Notes, which sends daily text messages, providing peer support and positive psychology directly to a user's phone. It has generated some good conversation, specifically among staff. We often sit down at the lunch table and say, "Did you get that message today?" and really dive into the psychological aspects of our daily lives.

We all typically have the normal employee assistance program (EAP), but it's often underutilized. We want to provide a service that folks will use. ICMA has done an excellent job showing us how to have that conversation in our community, how to take away the stigma, and that the well-being of our residents is of vast importance.

Advice for Other Communities

Mental health can seem like it's not our responsibility, but ultimately, it is. It starts with one person at a time. Don't be afraid to ask your peers for advice and look for resources in your community. I think you'll be surprised at some of the resources that may be there. Whatever you choose to do, just begin the conversation and watch it build.

"I Realized I Wasn't on an Island."

Throughout your career, you hit these peaks and valleys. There were times I found myself in the middle of the pandemic just really in a depressive state, and I began to look at my why: "Why am I doing what I do?" Although it's very rewarding, this is a difficult job. Throughout my journey of navigating these struggles, I began to find articles on the ICMA website that made me realize that I wasn't on an island. I wasn't the only one going through this. ICMA has provided me with so many resources and fantastic peer-to-peer contact. I'm very thankful for that.



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