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# The Lived Experience of the First 300 Days as a City Manager

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The Lived Experience of the First 300 Days as a City Manager

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Faculty of the School of Education of the  
University of St. Thomas

By

Richard F. Fursman

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Education

July 2012

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

The Lived Experience of the First 300 Days as a City Manager

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experience of newly appointed city managers through their first 300 days on the new job. Through Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), five male participants shared their experiences of joining a new city as a newly appointed city manager. Data was collected through one-on-one interviews which provided rich descriptions of the participant's perceptions during their first 300 days. Analysis of the interviews resulted in the development of three Super-Ordinate themes that are part of the experience of the city managers as they worked through their first 300 days. The first theme, *Joining the Organization*, identifies the transformation city managers experience from their decision to leave their old organization and breaking bonds to experiencing disorientation associated with the expectations, strangeness, and tests of their new job. The second theme, *Transitioning to the New Normal*, describes how the new managers establish trust, set the tone of their administration, and deal with doubts while letting go of their old job. The third theme, *Experiencing Effectiveness*, brings the experience to the point where the new managers have established their effectiveness through the acquisition of institutional knowledge, contributing to the organization culture, and building their relationship with the city council. Future research is suggested for both positivistic and interpretive studies.

## Chapter 1

### The Lived Experience of the First 300 Days as a City Manager

The position of city manager is frequently referred to as the preeminent position in cities across the United States with the council-manager form of government. The council-manager form of government is also the most widely used model in the country with 49% of cities with populations between 2,500 and 1,000,000 having adopted it as of 2010 (International City Managers Association, 2010). Under the council-manager form of government the mayor has no more authority than a council person as the city manager acts as the chief executive of the organization. The mayor and council serve in the capacity of a traditional board of directors, similar to a corporation. The city manager is appointed by the mayor and council and serves at their pleasure. The city manager's primary responsibility is to implement the policies of the elected officials and to direct day-to-day operations through other city staff such as planning, engineering, public safety, and budgeting. In most cases, the city manager is also responsible for all hiring including highly visible positions such as police and fire chiefs, directors of finance and public works, and other department heads.

The position also turns over frequently; every five years, 50% of the city managers in the country are either fired or voluntarily leave their positions (Ammons & Bosse, 2005). The threat of termination is constantly hanging over the head of the city manager creating a certain vulnerability that permeates their work and life (Freyss, 2008). Waldron (2003) indicated that "...many municipalities are indeed littered with the shards of city managers who have been bruised and battered on their way to servicing the public good" (p. 1). The volatility and constant turnover means that many managers are continuously changing positions and many cities are continuously introducing new managers to the community and staff. With this high level of

turnover, many cities and city managers alike are experiencing regular adjustments to new leaders and new environments leading to instability, higher costs, and project delays (Feiock & Steam, 1998).

The city management profession is aware of the volatility, frequent turnover, and large numbers of managers moving into new positions (Ammons & Bosse, 2005). However, little is known about what professionals experience in their roles as new city managers or the amount of time or experiences they need to have to become effective. There are numerous circumstances that could impact the experience of the new manager and their road to effectiveness. Some of those circumstances may include the new manager's knowledge of the organization, professional competencies, and their emotional state of mind. Other circumstances may include how the elected officials relate to the new manager and each other, the exit of the previous manager, and the issues that need immediate attention.

Most of the hundreds of managers I have met began their jobs with fragmentary knowledge of the city and organization. They first became acquainted with the mayor and council only after they begin their duties. I have conducted over 40 city manager placements as owner of Brimeyer Fursman, LLC., an executive search firm specializing in the placement of city managers nationwide, and have never placed a manager who knew the elected officials or members of the staff very well before they started. The managers I have helped place step into their leadership roles with superb academic and professional experience but with little awareness of what would greet them when they started. I know first-hand as a veteran city manager of five cities that each city has its own personality, own set of political rivalries, and simmering issues to navigate.

Cities also have distinct personalities that need to be learned quickly. Some cities are growing with expanding tax bases, new schools, and shiny malls with well-to-do residents who expect a high level of services. Other cities might have declining populations, shuttered businesses, pocked streets, and residents who cannot afford to pay taxes. While there are numerous unique situations each manager must deal with, there also appear to be consistencies among manager hires. Each manager must learn the expressed and unexpressed expectations of their roles, must learn the internal and external environment where they will be working, and learn the pace of change that the city and organization can tolerate (Waldron, 2003).

I have experienced stepping into a job as a newly hired city manager five different times. As I reflect back on those first hours and days on the job, I recall the conflicted mix of excitement, pride, doubt, confidence, and bewilderment knowing almost nothing about the organizations I was hired to lead. I sensed I was well prepared for the technical work that lay before me, yet I had prepared no script or plan of action for my first hours, days, and weeks. In my role interviewing and talking with hundreds of potential city managers and following them into their positions, I have found that almost to a person they echo these sentiments. They feel prepared for the technical work but the organization and its culture is a complete mystery to them and few have had detailed entrance strategies

### **Statement of the Problem**

Every year numerous cities hire city managers to replace those who retire, leave for other cities, or leave the profession after being fired or finding a new career (ICMA, n.d.). Newly hired managers begin in unfamiliar surroundings and likely take a considerable amount of time to acquire the institutional knowledge needed to do their job effectively, leaving a significant period of time when productivity is sacrificed. Most times, there is not an established system or process

for cities to follow to help newly hired managers acclimate to their positions. There are no studies that answer the question of when a newly-hired city manager becomes effective, but studies of newly hired private sector executives show they take an average of 6.2 months to reach the point where their contribution to the company begins to surpass the costs of bringing them on (Wells, 2005).

Many cities go through an extensive and expensive process to hire their chief executives (ICMA, n.d.), but fail to prepare them or the organization for the change that comes with a new leader. There are many anecdotal accounts from city managers on their entry into a new job with a new community (Dockendorf, 2005; Lopez, 2001; Simon, 2005), but, after an extensive search, I was not able to find studies on how city managers adapt, make sense of their own perceptions, or how long it takes to experience on-the-job effectiveness.

I have experienced firsthand as a city manager, and have observed as an executive recruiter of city managers, that the staff and elected officials often leave the process of adapting, getting acquainted, and learning the culture entirely up to the new manager. This can have the effect of greatly limiting the productivity of the new manager for months, or even a year or more. Even worse, a misstep or slow start can lead to a disastrous result for both the community and the new manager.

Simon (2010) experienced a situation like this when he joined a city as an assistant administrator for a suburban community in Minnesota with a population of about 10,000. Simon shared that it was completely up to him to become acclimated. He reported that no one met with him or provided guidance, leaving him with "...no clue what the next year would bring" (p. 32). After a frustrating year with no input from staff or elected officials on what was going on in the

organization, Simon left the position as he started, never understanding "...what was happening" (p. 32).

The conventional wisdom in the city management profession is that the first order of business is to set a tone of being calm, in control, and thoughtful while learning the cultural norms and the nuances of key people. John Schneiger, City Manager of Montrose, Colorado said it directly when he was interviewed by the *Montrose Daily Press* in 2001 (Lopez), "the first year is a lot of learning, and you have to have respect for the way things are being done" (p. 23). He also said that, "you need to go ahead and find out from people the way things are being done and not make too many changes" (Lopez, p. 23). Schein (2004) viewed the role of the new manager/leader as central to shaping the assumptions that define culture. This leaves the new leader strategy of taking it slow to learn the culture at odds with Schein's (2004) assertion that the new leader sets the culture. There may be a significant amount of time that passes as the new manager waits to learn the culture, while the members of the organization wait to learn the expectations that will shape the culture from the manager.

Another experience I have shared with city managers in my role in city manager executive search is the reality of being immediately inundated with action items. The first day for city manager John Prescott of Vermillion, South Dakota (Dockendorf, 2005) appeared to be typical of what many city managers experience on their first day on the job. Randy Dockendorf, reporting for the *Press and Dakotan* of Yankton, South Dakota wrote that Prescott, "...didn't have to wait long to get thrown into the fire" (p. 31). Dockendorf also quoted Prescott describing his first day:

It was a very busy first day, and I had a council meeting that night where there were a couple of matters they were addressing, he said. I hit the ground running. There was no

breathing room, but it was OK. That's part of the business of city management. You're thrown in there as best you can (p. 31).

In addition to the frantic pace and immediate responsibilities of the first day, new managers are also operating in a completely exposed environment where their every action can be scrutinized and evaluated. In only a few observed moments of the new hire, people make their judgments and form lasting opinions. Brant, Check, and Pedraz (2009) suggested that everything is magnified for a new leader on their first day as organization personnel are looking for clues as to how the new person thinks and acts. Brant et al. (2009) suggested the first day for a new leader should be planned with great care as the lasting effects are indelible. Healy, Havas, and Parker (2000) noted that, with the primacy effect, once the first impression is cast it is very difficult to change.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions new city managers have of their first 300 days on the job with a new community. I sought to interpret the new managers' perceptions of their job effectiveness in those months relative to their understanding of their duties, organization culture, and relationships. I chose to study the first 300 days to provide the new manager enough time to get past the point where their presence is likely contributing to the organization (Wells, 2005), yet still at a point of being new to the organization and able to recall clearly what they have experienced.

### **Research Questions**

The primary research questions that guide this research are: (1) what is the experience of the new city manager over their first 300 days? (2) how did a new city manager experience being effective in their first 300 days?

## **Significance of the Study**

The impact and importance of the research according to Yardley (2000), is measured by the reader. The reader should be able to discover in the writing an interesting message that is important to the profession. I believe that this research on city managers will provide city organizations and their new managers with a better understanding of what happens during the first 300 days on the job. This understanding can lead to new ways of preparing the organization and manager to work together more effectively (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2000).

City Managers work in a highly volatile environment where the constant threat of termination is an undertone that is part of the managers' work and life (Freyss, 2008). This study did not attempt to look deeply into the reasons why there is the constant threat of termination or how this might impact the longevity of managers. However, only half of all newly appointed city managers stay in their positions more than five years (Ammons & Bosse, 2005). The volatility and constant turnover means that many managers are continuously changing positions and many cities are continuously introducing new managers to the community and staff. With each change, both the manager and the city go through a transition stage that can result in instability, higher costs, and delays (Feiock & Steam, 1998). In my 17 year experience as a city manager in five different communities, I found that city managers are an integral part of the community with ties to service clubs, volunteer groups, schools, and other community leaders. Those relationships become an important part of the business that is conducted at city hall; the effects of a manager leaving can be felt throughout the community.

In addition to the costly and time-consuming searches for new executives, frequent turnover of city managers also has substantial economic, emotional, and productivity impact on individuals and groups (Freyss, 2008). Downey (2001) reported that in the private sector, the

cost of a failed hire at the executive level is 40 times the base salary when factoring the cost of recruitment, severance agreements, lost productivity, mistakes, and lost opportunities.

The city management profession, the cities they serve, and all those doing the hiring of executives in public, for-profit, and non-profit organizations can benefit from this research because they will gain insights into the experiences managers have had adapting to their new environments while learning to become effective in their roles. This awareness can lead to better ways of introducing managers to a new work environment, which will, in turn, help the manager and the organization adapt and perform more quickly. The research may also lead to actions aimed at increasing manager longevity. This research can also help organizations and managers align expectations through a broader understanding of the manager's perceptions of his/her role in establishing and/or influencing the culture of the organization. When the hiring authority is aware of the variety of experiences the new manager may have when starting a new position, they may be better prepared to help the new manager become effective more quickly.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research was aimed at finding the meaning individuals have come to realize through their experiences. The examination of the life world of city managers explores what is meaningful in the context of their experiences as it happened to them. The significance of the experience is not the experience itself, but the meaning found in the experience. Crotty (1998) explained, a constructionist's epistemological position on knowledge is that "there is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it" (p. 8).

### **Definitions**

For the purposes of this study, *city manager* and *city administrator* are identified as the individuals who are responsible for the overall performance of their municipal organizations.

The roles of city manager and city administrator are similar enough to be considered together for the purposes of this study. Both positions act as the top administrator and typically organize and direct department heads, supervisors, technicians, and support staff to implement programs and deliver public services. The manager and/or administrator report directly to the elected body and implement their policies while assuming the responsibility for the budget, personnel, and directing day-to-day operations. City managers and administrators are typically hired as at-will employees meaning they can be removed from their position without cause or at the will of the council.

*Time to effectiveness* is found in many parts of the dissertation. This refers to the amount of time it takes for city managers to feel that they have become effective by contributing to the organization.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter provides some context and justification for the study through a review of relevant literature. Although I conducted a thorough search and examination of books, professional journals, and dissertations, I found no research that dealt directly with the question of adaptation, socialization, or enculturation of city managers and administrators as it related to the timing of their effectiveness. There are research findings (Fisher, 1986; Louis, 1980; Schein, 2004) on the socialization process of new hires in the mid-management ranks and below in private organizations; however, I found no research on the lived experiences city managers where the intent was to understand the lived experience of city managers as they began their jobs with new communities.

This literature review is divided into six primary areas that serve to frame the study: (1) the history and role of city managers in today's cities, (2) time to effectiveness of new executives, (3) socialization of new members to an organization, (4) new employees' preconceived expectations, (5) onboarding new executives; and, (6) a comparison between private sector and public sector chief executive officers.

#### **City Management Profession**

The council-manager form of government was first established in 1908 when the Staunton, Virginia city council appointed Charles Ashburner as their first general manager (Svara & Nelson, 2008). Today the council-manager form of government is the most popular government structure in the United States. More than half of the cities in the United States with a population of over 10,000 have appointed professional administrators (ICMA, 2008). The council-manager form of local government is a partnership between the elected local body and

the appointed city manager. Law-making authority resides with the elected body while the nonpartisan manager uses broad authority to run the organization.

The council-manager form of government began as a result of the progressive reform movement in the United States at the start of the twentieth century. The movement to professional management was designed to replace corrupt practices in local governments with effective, transparent, responsive, and accountable management (Childs, 1965).

The position city managers hold is similar in many ways to that of a president or chief executive officer of a corporation. Like their corporate counterparts, city managers are the team leaders, responsible for the overall performance of the organization. One of the primary responsibilities of the city manager is to implement the goals and policies of the community's local elected officials. Some of the assumed duties of the city manager include preparing the city's budget, managing personnel including hiring and firing, strategic planning, and directing the day-to-day operations through department personnel such as police and public works (ICMA, n.d.).

City managers also have to be keenly aware of the issues of the communities they serve such as public safety concerns, the need for economic development and job creation, the impacts of deteriorating neighborhoods, an aging population, and much more. Some typical daily responsibilities that city managers either deal with directly or through department heads include: meeting and conferring with the council, preparing and monitoring the budget, project management, and ensuring that local laws are upheld fairly and uniformly throughout the community (ICMA, n.d.).

Professional city management was intended among other things to bring continuity and professionalism to city operations, however, half of all city managers leave within five years of

their hiring (Ammons & Bosse, 2005). Changing city managers so often disrupts the organization's effectiveness as different preferences, skills, and backgrounds lead to new policies and approaches. The ability to do major construction or change service delivery systems can be hampered by city manager turnover. The moves tend to hinder debt issuance and contracting until new relationships can be established (Clingermayer & Feiock, 2001).

**City management profession—environment and skill set.** Waldron (2003) indicated the city manager profession has evolved from neutral management experts "...hired based on their technical expertise in finance, policy development, personnel and general administration" (p. 28) to other archetypes. Waldron noted that changes in city council expectations resulted in an evolution from neutral management experts to "...community facilitator/broker, public entrepreneur/ community builder, politician, and caretaker/conservator" (p. 29).

The neutral management expert uses highly developed technical skills such as budgeting and personnel management while avoiding involvement in politics. Several authors (DeSantis & Leal, 1998; Green, 1989; Nalbandian, 1999; Schilling, 1995; Svara, 1989) have commented on the technical skills city managers need to have to provide leadership in all city operations. Both Svara (1989) and Freyss (2000) pointed out that the policy and political arena should be relegated to the city council and that city managers should not serve as political leaders.

As demands on the city manager increased, new archetypes emerged to meet those demands (Waldron, 2003). One new type is the facilitator/broker who negotiates between multiple interest groups especially in cities that have active interest group factions in place (Wheeland, 1994). The city manager must have good listening and engagement skills to be able to reach common-ground among constituents (Freyss, 2000). Frederickson (1997) noted the

emergence of this archetype city manager role as a networker, partnership builder, and coordinator.

The public entrepreneur and community builder work style introduces the idea that the city manager should play a role in shaping the policy agenda and establishing a vision for the community. This expanded role is in response to city councils failing to take on that role as they should. The city manager is therefore in a position to act as change agents for the community (Behn 1998; Luke 1986; Sanger & Levin, 1992; Teske & Schneider, 1994; Wilson, 1989).

Another archetype reflecting the increasing demands on the city manager is the politician. Here the city manager is acting similar to an elected official, heavily into policy development rather than administration (Waldron, 2003). This type tests the line between politics and administration out of necessity (Mosher, 1992), but according to Long (1965), should not be viewed as a negative.

The caretaker/conservator city manager has the opposite approach of the politician as they do not take any actions unless they originate from the city council (Feyess, 2000). In a pejorative rebuke of this type, Ammons and Newell (1989) described the caretaker as a puppet. Nalbandian (1999) suggested the caretaker/conservator lacks values and is playing it safe for job survival.

### **Time to Effectiveness**

In business settings, it takes new senior managers an average of 6.2 months to reach the break-even point, or the time at which the new leader's contribution to the company begins to surpass the costs of bringing the person on board (Wells, 2005). The time it takes to learn these technical and social nuances can be robbing the organization, community, and new leader of greater effectiveness. Some new executives and senior leaders never learn the culture, miss expectations, or never fit in and end up as casualties, forcing the organization through another

costly search process. Ciampa and Watkins (1999) found that sixty-four percent of new executives hired from outside the company will fail at their new jobs. Those failures appear to come quickly with 40% of leaders going into new organizational roles failing within their first 18 months (Brant, Check, & Pedraza, 2006).

Fritz (2008) suggested that the first one-hundred days represent the window of opportunity for a new executive to establish their effectiveness. Effectiveness is identified by Fritz (2008) as having acquired enough influence within the organization to make a positive impact. Fritz also adds that structural barriers to effectiveness for the new executive can be hidden in cultural norms, miscommunications, and unexpressed or misinterpreted expectations. Case (2009) concluded that new CEOs in health care systems are more effective when they have clarity in their role objectives, identity development, and have built strong relationships. In a 2010 mixed methodology study of new middle school principals, Baeza (2010) concluded that the transition period for the new principals was vital to their success. He found that the new school principals used culture, trust, and relationship building along with strong communication skills as key strategies to build success in this key transition period.

I was unable to find any studies that specifically deal with the relationship of effectiveness and time in office for a city manager. There are a few non-academic accounts of how new city managers adjust to their new surroundings and begin to feel comfortable with their new roles. Lopez (2002) wrote of one such account from the city of Montrose, Colorado where the new city manager spoke about his first year as the new city manager. The city manager reflected on his difficulties in getting everyone to focus and go in the same direction while noting that he knew "...it would take a year or two to get things where I would feel comfortable with them" (p.24). The mayor of the community, Carlos Guara, indicated that it took the manager

“...about six months to adjust to things, but now we’re on the same page...” (p. 23). The new manager indicated that it was not until months eight and nine that strong relationships began to develop (Lopez, 2002).

### **Socialization of New Hires**

Most research concerned with an individual’s entry into an organization is based on the study of socialization. Organizational socialization refers to the process by which an individual acquires the attitudes, behavior, and knowledge needed to participate as an organizational member (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Research in this area was done with the desire to find ways in which a socialization process could be developed or enhanced to reduce turnover (Louis, 1980), and to ensure that newcomers could be effective (Bauer & Green, 1994). Later researchers linked the importance of socialization of new employees with productivity and performance, attitudes, organizational commitment, and turnover (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998). Kennedy and Berger add that another objective of organizational socialization is to ease the emotional reactions of stress, uncertainty, and anxiety to strengthen social ties and accelerate the newcomer’s learning and adjustment (1994). This stress and anxiety is referred to as “reality shock” (Hughes, 1958) and an experience that is “...characterized by disorientation, foreignness, and a kind of sensory overload” (Louis, 1980, p. 230).

How the socialization process takes place has also received some study. Filstad (2004) explained that socialization for the new hire is about understanding the community but also should stress social and cultural learning. Senge et al. (1999) identified culture in the workplace as “...a pattern of shared basic assumptions that have been learned by the members of their group” (p. 336). Schein (2004) defined culture:

as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integrations, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17)

The assumptions come from doing things that lead to success again and again (Senge et al., 1999). This tacit knowledge can be developed with frequent social interactions with co-workers. New hires normally acquire the information needed for the job from supervisors and co-workers and rely less on observation and interactions (Filstad, 2004). Anakwe and Greenhaus (1999) agreed that supervisors play an important role in organizational socialization. Jones (1983) and Major, Kozlowski, Chao, and Gardner (1995) also found that the interaction of new workers with veteran members determines the effectiveness of the newcomer's ability to adjust to work settings. Written materials, observations, and other sources are important to socialization while artifacts, or the visible structures and processes of an organization, are necessary in understanding the culture (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992; Senge et al., 1999).

Rounds (2010), when researching how workers adjust culturally when moving to a foreign country, found that cultural support, understanding, training, and respect shown toward new employees leads to a smoother transition when moving into a foreign work environment.

Schein (2004) assumed that it is the leader who will change the minds of others when it comes to assumptions that define culture. Schein sees the role of the leader to articulate and sell "...new visions and concepts..." (p. 417) or to create the conditions for others to find them. What the manager may or may not know is how willing the elected officials and staff are to accept social and cultural change.

The CEO/leader is also an improviser according to Quandt (2007). In her mixed methods study of new leaders and improvisational leadership, Quandt confirmed that leaders are continually adjusting to the environment while constantly taking in information. There can also be a dynamic shift in personnel with firings and new hires, shift in market focus, and new teams developed which all can lead to culture change. The socialization process for the leader is more in line with Schein's (2004) argument that the leader can have the biggest impact on culture change and therefore the socialization process remains awkward.

Dealing with a sense of loss can also have an impact on the socialization process, as the new hire goes through the adjustment of a new job. Emery (1984) found, in a 1984 study of 83 community colleges, that two-thirds of the new CEOs missed their previous jobs. The study also revealed that only 11% reported that they had an immediate sense of belonging.

### **Preconceived Expectations**

New hires often come with preconceived expectations of what their new job will entail. Expectations may come from previous professional experience, from the preparations the new hire takes before joining the organization, and through the processes of recruitment and selection used by the hiring authority (Dean & Ferris, 1984). Sometimes the expectations can lead to a let-down if the job duties or culture is different than expected. Unmet expectations are one reason employees leave jobs and why organizations develop socialization strategies (Louis, 1980). Many executives experience a strong feeling of disorientation and discomfort when they encounter the differences between what they expected and reality (Downey, 2001). Menard (2006) in her study of recently hired curriculum directors, found that differences between the new directors' expectations of the work environment and what actually occurred to be the biggest challenge for them. Menard also discovered that the curriculum directors were left on

their own to determine what was expected of them and to discover what would be considered to demonstrate success in their job. The time the curriculum directors took to learn about the organization, assess realities, and deal with changing expectations left them little time to actually do their jobs.

Expectations derived from previous jobs may also interfere with the socialization process if the new hire is hanging on to past thinking from their former organization. Argyris (1964) suggested that individuals need to let go and move away from an existing state before they can successfully move forward. Watkins (2009) agreed, noting that individuals who have absorbed a different organization's culture may "...bring with them its view of what a win is and how it is achieved" (p. 82). Another block in learning the job and the environment is the self-imposed expectation of needing to appear to know what to do. The hire maybe too embarrassed to ask questions about a job they think they should know, so they pretend to know it and struggle (Argyris, 2000).

Absent in most socialization research is the question of how this specifically affects a new CEO or organization head. Most research found on socialization was focused on employees at the management ranks and below without taking into account the special circumstances of the head of an organization (Bauer & Green, 1994; Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998; Hughes, 1958; Louis, 1980; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Downey specifically noted that fewer than 5% of orientation programs are targeted at executives (2001). There was no research discovered that focused on the socialization process of new city managers; although a number of anecdotal accounts of starting the role as a new manager in a new community are represented.

## **Onboarding**

A recent shift to include executive socialization is manifest in the practice of onboarding. “Onboarding” is a relatively new term used to describe the equally new practice of socializing new senior-level managers or executives as they enter a new company (Korn/Ferry International, 2007). The research conducted to date on onboarding is focused on the results of processes and best practices of organizations obtained from surveys. The conceptual and theoretical exploration of onboarding has lagged behind the practice however with the exception of Downey (2001) and Watkins (2003), both of whom are referenced in this paper.

The Aberdeen Group (2006), an executive research firm, has explored the current practice of onboarding and claims that companies that invest in onboarding will optimize their returns on the investment of hiring. The primary indicators they used to measure success for onboarding are time to productivity, engagement, and retention (Korn/Ferry International, 2007). The Aberdeen Group (2006) indicated that onboarding has matured from a checklist of sorts conducted by human resource professionals to an inclusive process that involves integrated systems including socialization in the company culture. The practice of onboarding is rapidly becoming the norm as only 24% of companies in 2006 did not or planned not to implement a formal onboarding process (Aberdeen Group, 2006). This practice does not yet appear to be widespread in the public sector however; the term onboarding could not be found in the municipal lexicon and in my experience is generally not taken seriously by the federal government. Recent studies signify that the federal government onboarding practices are inconsistent, do not focus on mission, vision, or culture, and fail to integrate activities of the stakeholders (Partnership for Public Service, 2008). Onboarding is lagging in the health industry as well where processes designed to help executives become effective are under-developed (Fritz, 2008).

Some suggest that newly hired leaders should take on the onboarding role themselves by creating and working plans for their entry, hinting that organizations may not have effective onboarding processes for leaders (Brant et al., 2009; Watkins, 2009). Brant et al. (2009) suggested that helping executives develop their functionality and deliver results requires preparing for the first days and weeks well in advance of the start date. This preparation is conducted primarily by the incoming leader whose focus should include messages that will be used to project their own image. Successfully entering a new organization means taking control of the message by "...choosing and controlling..." what employees will see and hear and when (p. xv). Brant et al. (2009) also suggest that the first 100 days is the best time to build a high performance team.

Building a high performance team includes assessing talent and hiring different people if needed (Brant et al., 2009). Watkins (2009) concurred that entry into a new organization is an exciting opportunity for the leader and the organization to make changes. But Watkins also warned that the new period is a time of heightened vulnerability as the new leader has no working relationships established and is not fully aware of their new role. Watkins (2009) suggested the new leader set up a road map to handle key challenges that come with transition into an organization in order to accelerate the time to effectiveness. Some of the suggestions include promoting oneself, diagnosing the organization, securing early wins, and building one's own team.

Scharmer (2007) concluded that new executives would be helped if they conduct stakeholder interviews to start a process of clarifying key initiatives, building relationships, and exposing tensions that may exist. He proposes that a formalized feedback process can help the new executive understand what their success looks like to others. Scharmer identified several

questions to be used including, “what criteria will you use to assess whether my contribution to your work has been successful?” And, “what, if any, historical tensions and/or conflicting demands have made it difficult for people in my role or function to fulfill your requirements and expectations?” (p. 17).

In contrast, Senge et al. (1999) suggested that leaders should not come with such an elaborate change plan in hand. Senge et al. appear critical of the idea of the mythical heroic CEO coming in to rescue an organization from itself. Lasting change would have to come over time from a change in culture throughout the organization. A sudden shock from an incoming CEO would likely be met with natural, aggressive resistance. Watkins (2009) added that if the changes are not handled carefully, the new leader could fail quickly with “...a severe, perhaps career-ending, blow to the individual” (p.8).

Fritz (2008) pointed out that there is perhaps a delicate balance between the desire to make needed changes and get early victories and going too far and too fast. It is important to have small victories, but equally important to keep the victories in the context of the organization’s culture and in consideration of one’s own awareness of what is really needed. Clarity and awareness come from asking questions, listening, and reflecting on the meaning.

### **Differences between the Business CEO and City Manager Environment**

The fourth section examines the similarities and differences in the environments where public and private sector chief executive officers work. I contend that the differences between the public sector and private sector are significant enough to warrant separate studies of these groups. This area will not be examined in the research; however I mention it here to suggest that research findings on socialization, time to effectiveness, onboarding, and pre-conceived expectations for private enterprises are only partially illuminating for the public manager.

Homogenous environments might suggest that what is experienced by private sector CEOs could be experienced in much the same way by public officials. Their different environments indicate that what is experienced by private sector CEOs may not relate well to their public domain counterparts.

Rainey, Backoff, and Levine (1976) identified ownership as one feature which distinguishes public from private organizations. Private businesses are owned by individuals or shareholders, whereas public organizations are owned by the community. Citizens are the community and therefore the government. A private business can exist in a community without the community members being part of the business. Another contrast between private business and government organizations is the revenue source. Public agencies derive a major portion of their funding through taxation in contrast to fees that are paid by customers for goods and services in the private sector. The public sector is not particularly interested in profits and is therefore seen to be responsible for providing services that would otherwise not be provided by the private sector. It follows also that market forces dictate private business actions while politics drive the actions of public agencies (Walmsley & Zald, 1973).

The open, transparent relationship between public organizations and their stakeholders is significant as well. City managers must hold into account external factors that would be foreign to private company leaders. Almost all records, transactions, processes, and plans are open to the public. The public is free to make multiple demands which come from numerous stakeholders with often competing agendas. If the results are not to the citizens' liking, they are free to go to the election booth and select a new board to run things differently. Businesses have market constraints which can be the catalyst for changes to be considered; but in order to survive, the

free market business will ultimately concentrate on what is most profitable rather than act like a public body that must satisfy a political constituency (Metcalf, 1993; Ring & Perry, 1985).

Significant differences between private and public management practices were uncovered in quantitative research conducted by Boyne, Jenkins, and Poole (1999) in the area of human resource management policies and practices which stemmed from the culture or common ethos or guiding beliefs in public agencies. The ethos of the public sector is that of a servant who is providing a public service to citizens equally, impartially, and paternalistically (Stewart & Walsh, 1992). Compared to the private sector CEO, this ethos of service may impact the meaning the city manager experiences in their first nine months on the job.

Archetypal structures acting as foundations for private and public sector approaches to innovation were explored and compared by a team of researchers in England (Publin Report, 2005). The organizing principles for the public sector are to enact policies for the betterment of the public. For the private sector, the pursuit of profits and revenue growth are foundational. Performance is measured by financial returns for investors in the private sector, while in the public sector there are multiple and sometimes conflicting performance measures that preclude monetary calculations. Leaders in the public sector receive fewer material rewards for excellence while operating in highly scrutinized political environments. Leaders in private business have various degrees of autonomy depending on their organizational structure and are more likely to be rewarded financially for success. Relationships with end-users in the private sector are dictated by market feedback. The traditional relationship between the public sector and end-users has as its foundation a citizen to citizen approach rather than a seller and customer, transactional approach (Publin Report, 2005). These transactional differences between public and private

sector CEOs might suggest different approaches to their jobs are needed as they start with a new city or company.

Boyne (2002) argued that, while there appear to be some differences between public and private organization management, there is little empirical evidence to make any conclusions. His review of 34 empirical studies on the differences between public and private agencies provided evidence for three areas of strong differences between both agencies. Public agencies appear more bureaucratic, there is less organizational commitment, and the aspiration to promote the well-being of the public is stronger while being less materialistic than that of their private sector counter-parts. This may suggest that organization changes may occur more quickly with a new private sector CEO, while the tendency to do things with an altruistic bent would be anticipated by the new city manager.

Wilson (1989) compared and contrasted the differences between public and private sector effectiveness and identified three basic constraints on the effectiveness of government not present in the public sector. First, public agencies cannot generate profits and provide them for use by their members. Second, public administrators cannot allocate time and money however they like. Finally, they are often serving community goals rather than goals the organization would choose. “As a result, government management tends to be driven by the constraints on the organization, not the tasks of the organization. Government management focuses on the top line, which, in effect, are the constraints” (Wilson, 1989, p. 27). Wilson pointed out the problems that these constraints create on the efficiency of an organization:

Government bureaus are less likely than private agencies to operate efficiently, at least with respect to the main goal of the organization. There are three reasons for this. First, government executives are less able than their private counterparts to define an effective

course of action. Second, public executives have weaker incentives than do private executives to find an effective course of action. Third, public executives have less authority than private ones to impose an effective course of action. (p. 349)

This section has pointed to the environmental differences between the worlds of public and private leaders. The political, social, and economic environments that separate them can lead to significant differences in the ways they perceive, learn, and adjust to new jobs, especially when considering the values embedded in the differing cultures. The differences in the assumptions of acquiring effectiveness after entry into a new leadership position cannot therefore, necessarily be applied across the disciplines of the public and private sectors (Backoff & Levine, 1976; Boyne, Jenkins, & Poole, 1999; Metcalf, 1993; Publin Report, 2005; Ring & Perry, 1985; Walmsley & Zald, 1973). There appear to be such significant differences of expectations, circumstances, and values between private and public management that the research findings on one group cannot necessarily be applied to the other.

### **Summary**

The council-manager form of government was first established in 1908 and is the most popular government structure in the United States today (ICMA, 2008). The council-manager form of local government is a partnership between the elected local body and the appointed city manager. Law-making authority resides with the elected body while the nonpartisan manager uses broad authority to run the organization including budgeting, managing personnel, strategic planning, and directing the day-to-day operations (ICMA, n.d.).

Professional city management was intended, among other things, to bring continuity and professionalism to city operations, however, half of all city managers are gone within five years of their hiring (Ammons & Bosse, 2005). Changing city managers often disrupts the

organization's effectiveness as different preferences, skills, and backgrounds lead to new policies and approaches (Clingermayer & Feiock, 2001).

In business settings, it takes new senior managers an average of 6.2 months to reach the break-even point, or the time at which the new leader's contribution to the company begins to surpass the costs of bringing the person on board (Wells, 2005). The time it takes to learn these technical and social nuances can be robbing the organization and new leader of greater effectiveness. Fritz (2008) suggested that the first one-hundred days represent the window of opportunity for a new executive to establish their effectiveness. Fritz (2008) also added that structural barriers to effectiveness for the new executive can be hidden in cultural norms, miscommunications, and unexpressed or misinterpreted expectations.

Organizational socialization refers to the process by which an individual acquires the attitudes, behavior, and knowledge needed to participate as an organizational member (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Filstad (2004) explained that socialization for the new hire is about understanding the community but also should stress social and cultural learning. Senge et al. (1999) identified culture in the workplace as "...a pattern of shared basic assumptions that have been learned by the members of their group" (p. 336). However, the idea of sharing the culture of the organization with a new city manager may seem backwards for employees. The members of the organization may be waiting and observing the manager for clues of how they should react rather than the other way around.

New hires often come with preconceived expectations of what their new job will entail. Sometimes the expectations can lead to a let-down if the job duties or culture is different than expected. Unmet expectations are one reason employees leave jobs and why organizations develop socialization strategies (Louis, 1980). Many executives experience a strong feeling of

disorientation and discomfort when they encounter the differences between what they expected and reality (Downey, 2001).

“Onboarding” is a relatively new term used to describe the equally new practice of socializing new senior-level managers or executives as they enter a new company (Korn/Ferry International, 2007). The Aberdeen Group (2006) indicated that onboarding has matured into an inclusive process that involves integrated systems including socialization in the company culture. The practice of onboarding is rapidly becoming the norm in private business; however, the practice does not yet appear to be widespread in the public sector.

Research on onboarding and socialization has questionable relevance to city management. Differences in environments might suggest that what is experienced by private sector CEOs may not relate well to their public domain counterparts. Rainey, Backoff, and Levine (1976) identified ownership as one feature which distinguishes public from private organizations. Other contrasts between private business and government organizations include revenue sources, the open, transparent relationship between public organizations and their stakeholders, and the operating ethos with the public sector employee seeing themselves as a servant (Stewart & Walsh, 1992), rather than a seller and customer, as seen in a private transactional approach (Publin Report, 2005).

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

The ontological disposition of this study is social constructionism, which holds that knowledge of the world is intentionally constructed as a result of a person's lived experience (Creswell, 2007). The subjects in this study, city managers, have unique personal experiences when beginning their employment that are rich with meaning. I used an interpretive approach to this research beginning with questions designed to draw out the participants' understandings of their experiences and feelings during their first 300 days as a city manager in a new community. The primary research questions that guided this research were: (1) what was your experience as a new city manager over your first 300 days and how did it feel? (2) how did you experience being effective as a city manager?

I was inquiring into the meanings that the participants attached to their experiences as they entered and adjusted to life in a new community while attempting to be an effective CEO. Interpretive research was a good fit for examining this in-depth journey into the experiences of the participants and the sense they made of it. My focus throughout the research was on building understanding, using context laden words to construct meaning from the data (Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Meaning is not discovered, it is constructed by human beings when they engage with the world that they are interpreting (Crotty, 2003). Each unique experience of the city managers could not be captured by merely listing or cataloging the series of events each manager went through. Such a positivistic approach would not have provided a depth of understanding of what it was like for the individuals in this study; rather, their experience is meaningful and important in the consciousness of the city managers themselves. Simply looking at the first 300 days apart from the manager who experienced it would void the study of its meaning.

This interpretive study on the entry of city managers into new positions places the emphasis on the interpretive process of constructing meanings from their experiences and discovering areas of significance.

### **Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis**

The approach I used for this study was phenomenology using the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach by Smith et al. (2009). IPA is a phenomenological approach to research in psychology and the human, health, and social sciences. It was developed by Jonathan Smith, Professor of Psychology, at Birkbeck University of London. This method suited my intentions of focusing on the meanings new managers and administrators construe from the phenomenon of starting their new role with a city.

For me, the phenomenological researcher, it was my responsibility to be drawn to the participant's personal world directly, while being dependent on my own conceptions. Both of these (the participant's personal world and my own conceptions) are required to make sense of that other personal world through interpretative examination. The interpretive framework of this study provided a method to investigate the meanings individuals create from their experiences through language and reflection which draws on the practice of hermeneutics. As a former city manager and a current city manager search consultant, I could relate to the experiences of the participants. I was able to use my insider status to gain the confidence of the city managers I interviewed and used my own reflections to understand their concerns and claims, consistent with the tradition and practice of phenomenological research (Husserl, 1931; Smith et al., 2009). The dual purpose of phenomenology is to gain the insider perspective of the phenomenon, while recognizing that as the primary analytical instrument, my own beliefs and experiences would add to the reflection. My beliefs, in this research tradition, are viewed as requirements for making

sense of the experience of other city managers (Smith et al., 2009). Bracketing, or setting aside my beliefs and reflections so new meanings can emerge through reflection (Crotty, 1998; Husserl, 1931) was used to “...recognize my role as interpreter rather than as an essential technique for removing bias” (Fade, 2004, p. 648).

I experienced job changes as a city manager five times; I never once reflected on what was happening to me or others in the process of engaging the new community. I have met hundreds of managers and administrators over the years who have changed jobs as well, many of whom I have helped find new positions. Yet I never discussed with them our reflections beyond asking, “How is the new job going?” I think I assumed, and perhaps others assumed too, that there may have been no need to go into the meaning; after all, we had all been through it. We already knew what it all meant. Here is where I find discovery is needed the most—when something that is never questioned or examined is taken to be understood. Existing habits, cultural norms, and inherited understanding can inhibit new meanings and understandings from emerging.

### **Subjects/Participants**

Five city managers were interviewed for this study who had recently completed or were about to complete their first year with a new city. I believed that it would be important to interview the managers when their memories were clear and feelings fresh. The emotions of the participants were clearly evident throughout the interviews. Bitter, happy, or excited feelings were an important part of the story and revealed the mindset of the participants.

I recruited participants from urban and rural cities with populations over 5,000 throughout the Midwest. I chose cities of over 5,000 to attract research subjects with enough staff to have the full dynamic of managing people, personalities, and issues. I used the city

manager state list services in Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin to send invitations (see Appendix A) to professionals in the field via email. The selection was purposeful as it was intended to gather reflections from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon first hand (Creswell, 1998; Smith et al., 2009) and where the most can be learned about the research questions (Patton, 1990). The invitations identified the purpose of the study and the requirements of the participants. The mass emailing netted two responses, so I also used my personal network to locate individuals who fit the profile sought and recruited them directly with the invitation through email. Three more managers volunteered for the research after the personal contact.

I anticipated a fairly small population of participants would be needed for this research. The most significant reason to keep the population small was my intent to conduct in-depth, detailed accounts of the reflections the participants would be sharing. Samples for qualitative studies are often small to accomplish just that (Patton, 1990). Kvale (1996) pointed to the tradition of phenomenology as interviewing enough people "...to find out what you need to know" (p. 101). Lincoln and Guba (1985) simply suggested interviewing until saturation is reached or no new information is being discovered.

The phenomenological tradition values the quality of the research over the quantity. The phenomenological researcher is concerned with rich, descriptive, and detailed accounts of complex human phenomena. The data generated from this kind of inquiry can be overwhelming if too many subjects are interviewed. This over-load of data provides the researcher with too much information to get through, and with little if any added significance (Kvale, 1996; Smith et al., 2009). I found that even after only three interviews I was beginning to hear most of the themes repeated. By the end of the fifth interview, I was satisfied I had reached a significant level of saturation.

I limited my subject search for city managers to Minnesota and neighboring states for two primary reasons—network and costs. The region has hundreds of cities with the manager form of government; my ability to access this group without incurring high costs of travel was a major factor, although one trip did involve two days of driving. I am also connected to the region professionally and am familiar with the institutions and individuals who assisted me with the recruitment of subjects. Based on my experience working as a search consultant with city managers, I believed this would be enough of a population to draw from for the study and close enough to keep costs and travel time down.

### **Data Collection**

I used unstructured, in-depth interviews for the purpose of data collection. The interview process had open-ended questions which were flexible, yet specific in intent (McMillan, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). IPA requires rich, detailed data obtained from participants who are invited to recall and reflect upon their experiences. The lengthy interview I used is a classic tool of qualitative research and the preferred tool of IPA researchers. This type of interview allowed me to “...engage deeply with the participant and their concerns...” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 58). It was my responsibility as the researcher to engage, listen, and probe into the subject’s life world for the data to be significant (Kvale, 1996; McCracken, 1998; Smith et al., 2009).

I began by asking each participant the same base questions but followed the base questions with probing questions that varied significantly from participant to participant. Each participant received an interview guide before the questioning began so they could become familiar with the topic and intent of the interview. (See appendix D for questions and probes).

I used my own experiences as a city manager and recruiter to help me identify relevant follow-up questions and complete the initial analysis once the first interview was finished. I was

fully aware that my familiarity with the topic could be counter-productive if I became too eager to draw conclusions from my preconceived outcomes. I did indeed become emotional at times and made notes of that during the interview. The IPA research method requires that I bracket my experiences for the purposes of formally acknowledging my interpretative role (Fade, 2004). To deal with the issues generated from my own bias I monitored my own reactions during the interviews using field notes as I collected data and I also kept a journal on how the data was impacting my thinking. I also benefitted from discussing my possible biases with my wife and professional partner, Irina, who helped me self-reflect.

### **Data Management and Analysis**

Ruona (2005) described the purpose of qualitative data analysis as searching "...for important meanings, patterns, and themes in what the researcher has heard and seen" (p. 236). I used a 6-step process to analyze the data using a heuristic framework typically used by IPA researchers (Smith et al., 2009). Hermeneutic phenomenologists seek to discover meaning or new understanding through the examination of text to the point, as Schleiermacher believed, can exceed the understanding of the author, or in this case subject (Ricour, 1977; Smith et al., 2009). It was my role as an analyst to consider the hermeneutic circle of looking to understand the whole through each part, while understanding any given part through examination of the whole.

IPA also considers the researcher to be simultaneously like and unlike the participants involving a double hermeneutic or as Smith et al. (2009) described it, "the researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of  $x$ " (p. 35). Smith et al. suggested further that the researcher stand inside the shoes of the participant to get their view empathetically while also standing next to them to observe and view things from a different angle, questioning what is being said.

**Step 1: Transcribe, read, and re-read.** The first step I took in conducting data analysis was the preparation of the data. After each interview I transcribed the recordings into an electronic format using Word. I used a three column form (see Appendix B) during the transcribing; one column was for the transcription, two others were used for taking notes and creating a map for easy reference. Once transcribed, I read and reflected on each of the interviews and made notations. Bodgan and Biklen (1992) suggested that conducting data analysis with data collections can assist with decisions on whether to narrow or expand the study, develop additional questions, and try out ideas and themes as the research progresses. I did find that after the first interview, I was deliberately more patient with the rest of the subjects and let periods of silence happen rather than always trying to fill the space. I also was prepared with additional follow-up questions that I used for some of the remaining interviews.

The process of analysis I used with the first interview I continued with each subsequent subject. This ongoing analysis is necessary according to Merriam (1998), who suggested that the process can get out-of-control with so much data. She stated, "...the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection" (p. 162). I used the early analysis to help me focus and generate interpretive ideas (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994) before I began the vigorous process of coding. During step one, I consciously focused on the voice of the participant and become actively engaged with the data. I continued to record my most powerful reflections in a notebook I kept for this purpose.

**Step2: Initial noting.** The purpose of the second step is to "...produce a comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 83). At this point of examination I began searching for significant matters revealed by the participants "...such as relationships, processes, places, events, values, and principles..." (Smith et al., 2009, p. 83). The

initial noting process involved looking at the text on the page and examining the language use and placing it into the context or the lived world of the participant. I used the separate columns on the page to record exploratory comments, often using one or two words to describe an idea or direction.

Exploratory comments were generated from a focus on three distinct approaches designed to look at the transcript from different perspectives. The first approach I followed Smith et al. (2009) and involved reviewing the descriptive content of the transcript to extract content from descriptions, idioms, conjectures, and emotions.

The second approach I used was concerned with language use and was coded as linguistic comments. Here I observed and make note of "...the ways in which the content and meaning were presented" (Smith et. al., 2009, p. 88). How the participant was coming across was a primary focus during this phase of discovery. The participant's pace of speech, use of humor, sarcasm, tone, excitability, use of metaphors and references to self are some of the linguistic clues that I noted (Smith et al., 2009). There was significant contrast in the mood and body language of the participants that closely matched the descriptive content.

In the third approach to coding, I moved toward interpretation, dealing with the data conceptually and often with an interrogative form. During this approach, I drew on my own experience as a city manager, recruiter, and knowledge of the profession to "...sound out the meaning of key events and processes..." (Smith et al., 2009, p. 89). IPA is openly interpretative, encouraging the researcher to move away from what has been transcribed, provided that the interpretations are rooted in the words and context of the participant and not imported from the researcher.

Two other approaches to coding I used included underlining text that seemed important as I was reading it, with an accompanying explanation of why. The other approach was free association with the text (Smith et al., 2009) where I wrote down whatever thoughts came to mind while reading. I became more and more comfortable with this last approach after each transcript examination.

**Step 3: Developing emergent themes.** This next step involved moving away from the transcript and concentrating primarily on the notes I took in the coding. This is the step where I began my attempts to decrease the amount of detail while stringing together common threads, interrelationships, and patterns. Those commonalities were brought together in themes expressed as succinct statements which captured their combined essence. There was an expectation here that emerging themes would be more than a pure reflection of the participant's words. As the researcher, I was now in the role of analyst and interpreter as well. The combination of description and interpretation working together helped me begin to capture and develop a deeper understanding of what has happened and what it means (Smith et al., 2009). To process the themes, I used one of the columns on the transcription to record and track the work.

**Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes.** Once all the themes had been established, I brought them together in one box according to how they related to one another. Themes which represented parallel or similar understandings were clustered for further analysis and interpretation resulting in an encompassing or super-ordinate theme (Smith et al., 2009). Super-ordinate themes were clustered to form even tighter super-ordinate themes through the process of subsumption (Smith et al., 2009). Connections between themes were also examined through the lenses of context, frequency, and function. Once the subsumption of

themes had been exhausted, I developed a table to create a visual representation of the analysis with annotations sufficient to remind me of the source.

**Step 5: Moving to the next participant.** As I moved to the next data source, I took care to ensure that the case was considered without undue influence from the preceding analysis. Here bracketing was used again to set aside those ideas to minimize the influence on the interpretation of the next case. The nature of IPA suggests that I, as researcher, would expect to be influenced somewhat in the process and that would have some impact on further analysis. I was conscious of the other interviews and the bracketing preparations helped refocus my attention on the current participant. To ensure new themes were allowed to form from each case independently, I systematically followed each step as outlined for each subsequent case.

**Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases.** Once all the individual transcripts had been reviewed and analyzed, I examined the findings for patterns across the cases. I took the tables developed as described in step 4 and reviewed them for connections and theme agreement or disagreement. I also moved the analysis to a more creative and theoretical level when identifying themes and super-ordinate themes that were present in one case but shared a broader conceptual quality with the others. Here again the individual parts shed light on the understanding of the whole, while the whole brought a better understanding of the parts in the circular hermeneutics tradition (Smith et al., 2009).

As the analysis continued, I moved to deeper levels of interpretation, which is consistent with the IPA method. The themes yielded several interpretations of what was happening. As I worked with all the cases together, the analysis focused for the most part on the group level; but the illustrations came from "...particular examples taken from individuals" (Smith et al., 2009, p.106).

The themes and super-ordinate themes, once fully developed, were examined across cases for recurrence. Recurrent themes and super-ordinate themes were brought together in a table to help with the view of the whole. The whole was combined with individual voices to create a complete picture with each supporting the other.

### **Validity**

Significant precautions were taken to ensure validity in the traditions of phenomenological research. Throughout the research, three key issues of trustworthiness inherent in qualitative data analysis were kept in the forefront (Ruona, 2005). The first issue was concerned with internal validity or credibility of the findings; or how the findings do or do not make sense to those studied and those who read the work. The second issue is transparency. I took steps throughout the research and writing to keep the process and my own reasoning transparent. The subjects in this study reviewed the findings and results and all indicated strong agreement. Other readers can judge if the findings presented match their own ideas of the phenomena being described. This is consistent with the understanding that qualitative analysis is considered reliable when other researchers would find the results consistent and reliable given the purpose, method, and analysis of the study. The third issue was transferability or external validity. The conclusions are not generalizable; however the conclusions are transferable in the sense that the understanding of the phenomena may help guide understanding of similar situations.

Yardley (2000) identified four wide-ranging principles for judging the quality of qualitative research. The four principles include sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. The IPA process I used addressed all of

the principles introduced by Yardley. I will now expand upon the validity, transparency, and transferability I described in the preceding paragraph.

According to Yardley (2000), sensitivity to context is demonstrated during the interview process when the researcher is present with the participant and is able to gain their confidence and to ensure sense is made of their experience. All five of the participants in this study were in a comfortable place without distractions. I was conscious of my body movements and how follow-up questions would convey the interest and concern I had for each. When writing chapters four and five, I included a significant number of extracts from the interviews to provide a voice for the participants. All the participants read the findings and concurred that the report was accurate and that the interpretations were on target.

As an IPA researcher, I was committed to making all the participants feel comfortable and then actively listening. The familiarity I had with the topic provided me with an opportunity to be empathetic and ask relevant follow-up questions when the situation called for it. During one interview, I noted how deeply moved the participant was and offered to stop. He kept going, but I wanted him to know we could stop at any time. I was also aware of how my extensive time in the profession could make me more judgmental. I sensed this when I interviewed this man; I was becoming angry with his council. I made note of this and took a break. I made a conscious effort to listen to the story without getting involved.

The rigor or thoroughness of the study begins with the selection of good subjects for the study (Smith et al., 2009). The group I interviewed was a homogeneous group of city managers who have been in a new city manager role for about one year. I was prepared to dismiss any participant who appeared to be unfit for the profession. All the participants had excellent resumes and were well respected in the field of city management.

Yardley (2000) also mentioned transparency and coherence as factors in judging quality. I have already addressed transparency in this section and will focus on coherence. The coherence of this work was addressed by stringing together themes logically and conclusively. This required several re-writes while venturing back and forth from paying attention to the parts while keeping the whole in mind; and then thinking of the whole with the parts in mind. I often had new insights during rewrites which enriched the findings. I also kept a file of field notes during each interview to keep track of my reactions during the process and reflect on any concerns (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Researcher bias.** I have been a city manager and city administrator for 15 years. I have experienced the bewildering feeling of being totally lost and alone at the start of a position. I am now an executive search consultant who places professional city managers and administrators in their positions. I see firsthand how many executives struggle with their new roles, especially when it comes to understanding and fitting into the social norms of the organization. My own experience with the topic provided me with strong insights into the problems, language, norms, and emotions that were shared. I was aware that those same insights could also be potential blinders to the data interpretation that emerged, especially if I had an emotional reaction.

I knew all the participants in the study as colleagues in the city management field before the research began. When I was a city manager, I often attended seminars and training events that included other city managers from around the region. It was important for me to search my thoughts for any pre-conceived ideas I might have about the individuals and set them aside and bracket them. All of the participants conducted themselves professionally and with deference to the seriousness of the research.

**Bracketing.** I understood the need to bracket my emotions and thoughts when conducting this research. When appropriate, I used my experiences as an aid when interpreting the data and also bracketed my thoughts and set them aside. I did a great deal of reflection before each interview to guard against becoming too emotionally or intellectually connected to statements made by the subject. I took extensive notes and learned to remain focused on the experiences of the subjects. During the times when I was aware of having a connection to statements in the interviews, I was particularly attentive as I searched for the meaning to emerge. I used my personal experience as a city manager and recruiter to ask questions that probed deeper if the experience seemed under-explored. When I transcribed and reviewed the data, I continued to reflect on my own thought management that occurred during the interview. As indicated in the researcher bias section, I also searched my thoughts for any pre-conceived ideas I may have had about the participants and bracketed those as well.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

This chapter identifies the essence and lived experience of five city managers during their first 300 days with a new community. In depth interviews were based on two central research questions: (1) what was your experience as a new city manager over your first 300 days and how did it feel? (2) how did a new city manager experience being effective in their first 300 days? The findings in this research study are arranged to provide the reader with a brief introduction to the research subjects followed by the thematic findings identified through the IPA process outlined in Chapter 3, Research Methods. The chapter is further designed to take the reader on a journey with the subjects as they live the experience of starting a new job as a city manager with a new community.

#### **Participant Overview**

All participants had a unique and powerful story to tell about their journey from one community to another. The stories they shared recounted their personal feelings, actions, and fresh reflections of entering into a new position of significant responsibility. They described experiencing anticipation, excitement, doubt, loss, connection, bewilderment, anger, and more. Some of the participants said they saw themselves firmly planted in their new organizations while others said they were still searching for a firm connection.

All five participants have advanced degrees in management and had successful careers as city managers. They all left one professional city or county management job for a new one with a city where they had never worked before. They were all hired after going through highly-competitive search processes involving numerous candidates and months of vetting. The individual backgrounds of the participants provide insight into their experiences prior to moving into their new positions. The following section provides brief introductions of the participants.

They have been given pseudonyms and their previous employers have been given fictitious names to conceal their identity. The populations of the communities have also been distorted to conceal identities.

Table 1 outlines the description of the participants. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants.

Table 1

*Profiles of Study Participants*

Pseudonym	Time with previous job	Population prior / new position	Reason for leaving
Frank	11 years	90,000/30,000	Job related stress and dissatisfaction
Paul	7 years	5,000/20,000	Desired more challenges/meaning
Tom	7 years	15,000/70,000	Dream job opened
Justin	6 years	65,000/60,000	Political conflict
Robert	5 years	5,000/70,000	Move closer to family

**Participant 1—Frank.** Frank had been employed with the County of Durock, Iowa, as their administrator for the previous 11 years. The County has a population of nearly 90,000 and was situated near a large metropolitan area. Frank had over 20 years of experience as a city and county administrator in three different states. He was experiencing significant job related stress when he was recruited for a city administrator position in a rural, Midwestern community of about 30,000. The job required him to move with his wife and school-age children. The organization he was entering was in chaos. They had been without an administrator for a year and had developed a number of unofficial practices to handle issues including staff working directly with the council rather than going through the interim administrator. The interim

administrator was the finance director and some on the council thought he should take the job permanently. Those council members created obstacles during the search and continued to go through the finance director for information after Frank's arrival.

We met at a restaurant for breakfast located within his new community. He was dressed in a suit and tie and was reading the paper with a cup of coffee when I sat down. Frank appeared calm but very worn-out when we started. As he spoke about his experience, he became increasingly upset when he went from recounting his experience to pure venting. Then he became calm again as he finished.

**Participant 2—Paul.** Paul moved from a city administrator job representing an affluent metro city of about 6,000 to an economically distressed rural Midwestern community of about 20,000. Paul had held his previous position for seven years where he felt comfortable and competent in his work. He enjoyed his surroundings and fellow workers but desired more challenges and meaning in his work. The new city manager appointment was the third of his career and it required him and his wife to move a considerable distance with their young children. The city was coming off of a year of interims and a hire of a city manager who ended up leaving after three months. The council was unified, but the staff was deeply divided. Several departments were floundering and the strain was reflected in bickering and passive aggressive behavior.

We met at a local restaurant for lunch. He wore a sport coat and tie. Paul had a bright smile when we shook hands and he looked happy and excited to share his story. I had known Paul as a man of few words, but when the interview began he spoke quickly and energetically. He said he found the interview to be good for him as it gave him a chance to think reflectively about his experience in ways he had never previously considered.

**Participant 3—Tom.** Tom was working as a city manager for seven years with an established, fully developed suburb of 15,000 that was part of a larger metropolitan area. His new position as a city manager of a large and growing metropolitan suburb of 70,000 was a significant jump in the size of the community and the job. The position change did not require him to move his young family. He was well-regarded in his previous community and was still connected to many of the people in the community. He had no other reason to leave than that a dream job had opened where he could be challenged. The new council, staff, and community were exceptionally healthy and well prepared for the transition to a new manager. The previous manager left on excellent terms and there were no significant organization problems festering.

I met Tom in his office where we sat across from each other in lounge chairs. He was dressed in a suit and tie, yet was relaxed and kidding as we led up to the interview. He was attentive and eager to jump into each question. Sometimes he would start to answer a question, then stop and suddenly edit himself enthusiastically with a new idea. He leaned forward when he spoke as if fully engaged in the event. He was clearly happy to be where he was.

**Participant 4—Justin.** Justin was city manager of a growing, affluent, and well-regarded community of 60,000 when he left for a similar sized community. He was enjoying a highly successful tenure of six years at his previous position but was under significant work related stress due to an elected official's misconduct. Justin was a city manager veteran of four other communities when he started his new job. His new council was unified and well-respected. There were some staffing issues that needed to be tended to, but for the most part, the organization was stable and working well. Justin was living within a 15 minute drive of the new city so he and his wife were not planning on moving into the new community. He was experiencing being an empty-nester as well as starting the new job.

I arrived at Justin's office with a few minutes to spare and waited for him to get free from the phone. He came out to greet me, dressed in a new suit, after being alerted by his assistant. He took me back to an office that was neat, clean, and orderly. Justin was relaxed with his hands folded behind his head as we began. He sat back in his chair and remained calm and easy going throughout the interview.

**Participant 5—Robert.** Robert was enjoying a dream job serving as a city manager in a resort community of 5,000 for five years when he and his wife decided to move closer to family to help care for elderly parents. They are empty-nesters and had no issues relocating to a rapidly growing Midwest suburb of about 70,000 where he is now city manager. His new City had been working under an interim manager for about six months. The interim manager was the assistant city manager and had not applied for the permanent position. The council appeared to be supportive of staff with no agenda to shake things up.

We met in his office in the late afternoon before a council meeting. He was dressed in a dark suit and we sat across from each other at a small conference table. Robert was calm yet quick with his answers through all the questioning.

### **Interview Process**

Face to face interviews, lasting between 50 and 77 minutes, were digitally audio-recorded, and transcribed into a MS Office WORD document by me after each interview. I informed the subjects in the recruitment letter and again when we met that the interview would be recorded and transcribed by me. I informed them that I would keep the audio-recordings secure and protect their identity. All of the subjects agreed to be interviewed and taped and signed the permission form to be recorded for the interview. I used a semi-structured interview

guide for each interview that was sent to each subject prior to the interview. I also took observational notes during the interviews.

### **Data and Theme Analysis**

I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009) as the data analysis tool. Smith et al. (2009) suggested that the researcher stand inside the shoes of the participant to get their view empathetically while also standing next to them to observe and view things from a different angle, questioning what is being said. For this study, the ultimate goal was to understand the lived experience of each subject as they journeyed through their first 300 days as city manager.

I used a six-step data analysis process suggested by Smith et al., (2009) to navigate through the data and form themes and super-ordinate themes. Prior to the six step process, I transcribed the data and began preliminary analysis which I captured with note taking. The following data analysis steps are what I used for the research:

1. Step 1: Read and re-read transcript
2. Step 2: Initial notation of content
3. Step 3: Development of emergent themes
4. Step 4: Search for connections across emergent themes
5. Step 5: Repeat Steps 1-4 for each case
6. Step 6: Identify patterns across cases

### **Super-Ordinate Themes**

Using the six-step IPA process of data analysis three super-ordinate themes have been identified as describing the essence of the new city manager's experience during their first 300 days with a city. Each of the super-ordinate themes —joining the organization, forming a new

team, and experiencing effectiveness—represent the shared collective experiences of five city managers on similar yet unique journeys; the super-ordinate themes are supported by 12 sub-themes.

**Theme I—Joining the organization.** Joining the organization describes the transformation the city managers experienced from the point of considering where they were in their careers, to their decisions to move, to the initial weeks on the job. All five managers had made an assessment of their professional and/or personal lives. Each came to the conclusion that it was time to explore a new opportunity. Each of the five faced a compromise of giving something up to explore this new opportunity. Each of the five city managers prepared for the change in their own way and arrived at their new city manager position with some idea of what they were going to be doing, but were also surprised by many aspects of the new position. Three sub-themes to joining the organization describe the experience. The sub-themes include the decision to leave, breaking old bonds, and disorientation.

*Joining the organization—decision to leave.* Each subject initiated their separation from their previous employer and to some extent anticipated the sense of loss. At the same time, they prepared for the new jobs ahead. All the participants had researched the cities where they were hired prior to their interviews and appointments. Once an employment agreement was reached, several of the managers engaged with their future city extensively prior to their start date, touring the community with staff, studying the comprehensive plans, reading the council meeting material, and spending time with the out-going city manager. It appeared that once the decision to leave had been made, the focus of the five was on the future.

All participants spent a significant amount of time assessing their own professional and/or personal situation before deciding to apply for a new city manager job. For all five, the

self-assessment appeared to build over time. Paul was “safe” in his job but over the years began to sense he was getting stale. He was experiencing the sameness of each week, month, and year and knew inside that “it was time to move on.” He expressed that he was “...getting a little bit complacent...” where he was and wanted to be challenged. He also reflected that he found a position with a community where he was experiencing more meaning. “I find it much more meaningful here than in \_\_\_\_\_.” He said indicating that was something missing before.

Tom was also at a point where he wanted to challenge himself, explaining that “...at some point there are other challenges I want to take on. So it wasn’t leaving something so much as *going to* something.” He did not know where his next opportunity would come, but he would be very picky about it. “There were only a few other cities I would go to.” So, before the job ever opened, he felt the push inside to make a change.

Frank was battling the feeling of being ineffective and stressed by a difficult, long-term employee. He wanted to have a leadership position that would give him an opportunity to have a greater impact on the organization and community.

In my position I had no authority over the employees and one in particular challenged me on every idea I had. It got to the point that a big part of the job was just playing a game. It was exhausting. (Frank)

Justin had been embroiled in an ethical battle that resulted in severed ties with an elected official. After discovering and revealing a serious scandal, he decided to remove himself from the situation. He later would reflect that the move “...re-inspired me and warms my heart again and gets me pumped to come to work. That’s what’s in it for me.”

Robert was happy and comfortable in his job and was looking to leave purely for family reasons. He waited for a job that appealed to him professionally that would also bring him and his wife closer to aging parents.

My wife's an attorney and was never able to find a job in her profession in our small resort Community. Moving here we are 45 minutes away from our parents. So, (pause) I wanted the right professional job, where my wife could find work and we could deal with some family issues. Those three things came together well here. (Robert)

***Joining the organization--breaking old bonds.*** Once the decision to leave was made and the city managers had been hired for their new positions, breaking old bonds with former council and staff occurred. There was some sense of loss for all five managers as they moved away from their current positions where they had invested so much of themselves personally. For some the pain is lingering and deep. Four of the city managers reported feeling sadness, disappointment, loneliness, and guilt. Tom recalled the stinging questions of his former staff as he announced his decision. "Why would you ever leave us? Why would you ever go?"

Ten months into his current position, Paul said he still was missing his old work mates "...a fair amount of the people from time to time." For Robert and Frank it was the geographical area they missed the most. Robert loved the outdoor lifestyle of the resort community he managed and related that "It was like a dream job." Frank had a cozy home with a large lot full of trees and creek running through it. "Moving away from our home was the toughest part of the decision. It kept me from applying for other jobs for a long time."

Justin was feeling the bonds break as soon as he gave notice. Staff had begun adjusting to life without him and he became a non-factor at work. "Decisions that people in my former city used to bring me stopped. My workload there was really low. I had a really easy coast out of

there.” Justin’s pain of separation would be eased when he hired two of his former employees in key positions with his new city.

***Joining the organization--disorientation.*** The sub-theme of disorientation is best related by further examining three supporting themes—great expectations, the unnatural place, and being tested. All of the study participants had made a decision to leave their previous community. They had broken the bonds with their former colleagues and were taking on their next role as city manager. The combination of high expectations, an unfamiliar workplace atmosphere that seemed unnatural, and the experience of being immediately tested left all five participants feeling either disoriented or overwhelmed. Justin described his new work-load as a surprise, “I did not anticipate that very well. It was a bit of a shock.”

Tom described his entrance into the City as “perhaps feeling frantic.” He also indicated that the newness of everything was “...nerve wracking, and you have to have the patience to sit back and take it in and learn.” Compounding the effect was the weight of responsibility he felt as the city manager of a fairly large city. Looking back reflectively at the time, Tom seemed to be half amused by his own discomfort.

It’s funny how 6 months, a year, a year and a half later, how disorienting it was and looking back and now almost laughing about it. Because, it was brand new, and (pause) that is even more difficult being a city manager. You’re coming in and the first day in you’re the CEO of the organization, but you’ve never been here before and you’re all new. So it was rather head-spinning.

The participants never mentioned that the technical aspects of the job represented a challenge when they started their jobs. The disorientation was coming from the change in environment rather than the need to learn a new skill. The shock or overload to the nervous

system was happening in various ways beginning with the high expectations others appeared to put on them or they put on themselves.

*Disorientation—great expectations.* Part of the joining process for all of the participants was being introduced to the organization and the community. The introduction process included going to meetings set up by the mayor and council, meeting department directors and staff, visiting and joining service clubs, and attending neighborhood events, ribbon cuttings, and numerous community events. The managers were greeted with smiles, welcomes, and invitations to speak. Many community members wanted to know them and hear their new ideas. Frank felt a strong welcome from the community from the start. He was also puzzled by the idea that he was being looked at as some kind of rescuer of the community along with two other prominent new officials in the community.

There was a lot put into the fact that there is going to be a new city administrator, a new county administrator, and a new school superintendent. The odd thing about that is, is it kind of made it sound like these three new people are going to come into town and rescue everything from whatever. (Frank)

Paul said the “first three months were extraordinary.” He described the experience as “...being treated like a King a little bit.” He and Justin both noted that they felt like a “celebrity” or “rock star.” Justin sensed he had been “discussed” before he ever met some of the people. “The groups whoever they were—well, I’m new to them, but *they heard of me*, they knew who I was.”

All the new managers described their entrances as warm and welcoming, but they also noted the pressure of being under constant scrutiny with strangers focusing on every word being said. Tom experienced being “...paraded from group to group and event to event.” He pointed

out that he was treated well and had a nice welcome, but he also was aware that his first words needed to be chosen carefully as they would likely make a lasting impression.

It is amazing that people are watching what I say and do and it gets repeated. So I always have to be cognizant of that. More people might be looking for or listening for certain things from me that they may not from somebody else. (Tom)

The continuous community contact part of the job made Robert a bit uncomfortable as he is a self-described introvert. He noted that the “social” aspect of the job was happening more with the new job than other places he had been. The social pressure was imposing a certain amount of pressure to perform, but Robert and the other participants were also bringing their own self-imposed expectations to the new job with them. “For me there is always a bit of discomfort with the community part, because I do tend to (pause)—I am an introvert. I’m not the glad hander.”

Robert indicated that he found it important to build credibility from day one. He entered the new position with a belief held by the other four participants that staff is “...expecting someone to come in and make decisions.” Tom noted that his mindset is that every time you start over you have “to prove yourself again.” Frank sensed that staff would want to “...know what I was going to be able to accomplish.” The self-described need to make a difference and be a leader as quickly as possible was tempered by the conscious effort to take things slow. The polarity of needing to act now and yet be patient will be explored further in this section.

*Disorientation—the unnatural place.* Part of the reason for taking it slow was dealing with the “unnatural” sense of the new place where they were working. All five of the participants had some sense of the employees not acting natural at first. Three of the five had determined that the employees needed time to settle down and let their guard down. Frank sensed he was being

told things that were “coded” and employees “...weren’t talking to me straight.” Paul described the communication as too much “Minnesota Nice.” He was hoping for some “straight talk” but said, “There was too much sugar coating going on.” Justin was the most direct when he said, “People aren’t acting naturally. They are puffing up or kissing your ass. They are just acting unnatural when you get there.” Justin sensed it took three to four months for the “natural” workplace to come out.

Waiting for the organization to settle down and needing to understand how things worked kept all five managers from making too many changes. They were deliberate in their study of the people in the organization and were reluctant to make any sudden moves that might be considered rash. The entry into the new organization was meant to be a period of observation and listening. They used their first months as time not to learn the job, but to learn the people and organization.

There was a certain amount of discomfort associated with the waiting period. All were feeling the polarity of the desire to contribute while recognizing the need to hold back. Tom was perplexed by the idea of being the CEO of the organization on day one and knowing practically nothing about the organization, the people, or the projects.

When I arrived I had to work on plans and strategies that were previously set up, so there are a few examples of projects where I said to the council and others, it’s like I’m walking in on someone else’s conversation and trying to finish it. (Tom)

Another reason two of managers waited on decisions until they were more familiar with the organization came in the form of staff and citizens asking them to settle an old account on their behalf.

In the community I got this initial blast of people who had a grievance of one sort or another, like, ‘the previous city manager never called me. He never did anything about this, or I’m sure he was hiding something. But I’m sure you’ll handle it because you’re a great leader and a great man and bla, bla, bla.’ I think it’s important in those instances to be pretty circumspect and not gin-up [to make something up] their expectations about what you’re going to do about it. You also get a fair amount of that on the inside; ‘before the previous manager left he promised me a pay raise if I did X, Y, or Z.’ (Justin)

Tom experienced a similar situation. “Someone will come up and say, ‘*this is the situation in this department.*’ I would come to find out that that wasn’t actually the case at times.”

*Disorientation—being tested.* Four of the managers described an occasion early into their job where someone or some event would *test* them. This was expressed as no surprise by some of the participants. Residents or staff would present an issue to the manager that would appear one-sided or with a ready-made solution that on the surface would seem obvious. Some of the managers would be complimented and “battered –up” in anticipation of a favorable response or action. According to Justin, “Those are the kinds of things you have to be ready for—the self-interest people who are going to try to ply you and blow in your ear and get you to do their thing.” The managers were careful not to promise anything or act too quickly. They sensed the need to be “circumspect” as Justin put it, about the issues and people involved. It was another opportunity to take it slow, observe the situation, and gather more information.

Tom was also tested in the same manner as Justin, but also experienced being trusted by the department directors immediately. He was being told very delicate things in confidence that

he considered to be a test. It was a situation where the group indicated that they would trust him immediately and then sat back and watched how he would react.

My initial impression was that they trusted me from the very start. They were saying things that told me they were treating me like I'd been here for five years and they completely trusted me. That was one of my initial feelings that this was going to be a good fit. Because this was happening right off the bat (excited). They were kind of putting it upon me. It was a test too. (Tom)

Frank was tested "...as a fresh set of eyes to question why we do certain things." He sensed he was being judged by how he would respond to requests for change, but he also was certain that those asking for change really didn't want much or any. He concluded that, "People want change, but they really don't."

On two occasions the new managers acted against their initial instincts and they "failed the test" and it hurt them. Paul was so caught up in all of the royal treatment that he made a couple of quick decisions that backfired. He was hoping to be a quick and certain decision maker and believed some one-sided stories he was being told without checking things out as thoroughly as he normally would. He brought things forward to council meetings that were not fully examined and he had to retract his recommendations on things he thought were simple matters. This had a deep sting of embarrassment for Paul. He looked at me during this part of the interview shaking his head and half smiling as if to say 'but that's not the real me.'

It makes me think I need to get back to the roots of who I am and how I've got to manage and need to stick with that plan a little bit. I got caught up a little bit in the arrogance of celebrity or whatever you call it. (Paul)

Justin was also flattered by a service organization he joined when he arrived to take on an important coordinating role similar to a position he had in his other community. He ended up being overwhelmed at work and didn't have the time to put into the volunteer role that he committed to. The group ended up asking him to step down from this position. He said he experienced a little loss of face at a time he was trying to establish it.

I should have told those guys you're going to have to give me 2-3 years before I start a task with you. I didn't say that because I thought I could do it. So there was a little loss of face there at a time when I'm trying to build it, not lose it. So that was regrettable.

(Justin)

**Theme II—Transitioning to the new normal.** Once the new managers were working inside the organization they began to make assessments and bring together “their teams.” They were experiencing the disorienting feelings brought on by the sudden rush of expectations, people acting unnaturally, and being tested. They were dealing with loss and the strain of self-imposed expectations. Every manager mentioned working toward effectiveness and a sense of normalcy. They all were dealing with the desire to take it slow enough to give them time to understand and bond with the staff and council while at the same time feeling the need to speed things up. The elements related to transitioning to the new normal included the sub-themes of letting go of the past, setting the tone, establishing trust, and dealing with doubts.

***Transitioning to the new normal—letting go of the past.*** Once the managers began their new assignments, their past was quickly put behind them. Four of the managers recalled the discomfort and pain of leaving their past jobs, friends, and the success they enjoyed; but once they started anew, they turned their focus to building new relationships. After only a few weeks, the need to focus on the new environment left Tom with the sense that he had left his old job a

long time ago. He indicated at the nine month mark that he was feeling like he had made the change three to five years ago.

I haven't been here a year yet, but I feel like I've been here 3-5 years. I mean I feel that once you're here, and you spend that much time here, and involved here, (pause) my previous job seems longer ago than last spring. (Tom)

Once Tom became involved with the business of the new city, he was "all in" mentally and emotionally. Frank also described the same commitment to being "all in" from the start.

Paul sensed he had an equal amount of relationships built in his first few months that he had left behind in his previous position.

I miss some of those relationships. But I have created an equal amount of relationships here. Maybe not as strongly yet, there is a good handful here that I am building relationships with which are establishing a core for a good team. (Paul)

Justin perhaps didn't let go, but brought two close members of his former team with him. This move provided a great deal of comfort to him.

I had good connections with these two people and got to bring them here right at the early part of my time here. It was at a time when I was missing my friends a lot but trying to cut that relationship off and engage more here; it was good to have them here to help me with that. (Justin)

***Transitioning to the new normal —setting the tone.*** Setting the tone describes the phenomenon of establishing a management style persona. The managers spent a great deal of time reflecting on their efforts to let the organization know who they were. Two supporting themes for setting the tone include who you follow and early critical decisions.

Early impressions were important to the managers when they started their jobs. Paul wanted to be known as "...being open, transparent, and direct." Robert began with the message that he was about supporting the team "I wanted to make sure that department directors know that I'm backing them with the council and with the public. I think I proved that right away." For Justin, setting the tone was all about deliberately letting people know who he was in a controlled, matter-of-fact manner. On Justin's first day, he had a staff meeting and used a PowerPoint presentation to introduce who he was that he titled, "How to work effectively with Justin Smith." The slide show was a way to be in control of the message he wanted to share. He let them know his work history, his personal interests, and how he liked to conduct work and communicate.

Tom was also concerned with how he would present himself, communicate, and ultimately relate with others when interacting one on one. His actions, tone, and itinerary were intentional as he looked ahead to the long-term relationships he was building, sensing that was the most important task for future success. "It was more important to think about how do I present myself, how do I communicate. How you have a dialogue or interaction one-on-one with people over time might be more important than some decision." Tom wanted everyone to relax and get to know the fun side of his personality. He also wanted people to know he wasn't afraid of admitting the fact that he didn't know everything. "I had a sense of humor, and I was sincerely presenting myself as someone you can talk to, but also as someone who doesn't know the city yet."

Four of the participants indicated they pushed themselves deep into their new organizations past the department heads and managers in an effort to meet every employee. This is no small task with organizations that have multiple shifts and several hundred employees. At

the 10-month point, Tom thought he had met all but a couple of the 275 full-time and a good share of the 500 part-time and seasonal staff. “There are still a few cops that work the late shift that I have not met,” he said.

Robert started with the department heads, but then moved to each department one by one, spending weeks and months meeting and talking, but mostly listening. He wanted to build rapport with all the staff and the city council. The meetings helped him convey that he was a leader interested in what was going on with each employee.

I did 12 meetings with employee groups of various depts. Catching different shifts to delve deeper in the issues that came up. Quite often early on, the first 10 minutes they're fairly quiet, then you get that one person to open up, then the next person opens up and you let them know you're listening to their concerns and I'm writing things down and these are things I'm going to work on so when we do this again two years from now, we're going to try to effect some change. I think all in all I had good feedback from employees. I took the time to go out and meet with them and listen to them and not just treat it as something to check off a list, then on to the next thing. (Robert)

Justin was also moving about the organization to meet the staff.

I walk out of the office a lot, I walk around a lot, I walk out of the building a lot. I drop in at Fire Stations; I go to the public works building, ice arena, etc. I want to know the staff. (Justin)

Paul also spent a lot of time meeting everyone in a deliberate way which is explored more when I describe trust building.

Every new manager was putting in many more hours at work than their previous jobs. Intentional or not; this was part of setting the tone. Putting in more hours at the onset was

anticipated and deliberate for a number of reasons. The new managers wanted to get up to speed quickly on the issues and projects, in addition to meeting hundreds of people. All of the managers understood that their first months on the job would mean brutally long hours and sacrifice. Robert had some concerns about the difficulties that lay ahead and the time he would need to commit. "I know I had some concern going in that this was going to be a difficult job, time-consuming job, different issues (pause) and I think I was really kind of mentally prepared for that." Tom was putting in significant hours adjusting to his new environment in part "...because the community is bigger and the organization is bigger." Justin was working much longer hours to adjust to the workload.

The workload here is incredible compared to what I had in my previous position. But, it hit me at a time in my life when I can work more than I used to. I have more time and attention to apply to this. If I had little kids with this load it would be difficult. (Justin)

Days were filled with meetings, so evenings and early morning hours were used for research. In the evening, light coming from the manager's office in an otherwise dark building was sending a message to the employees, citizens, and council that their new manager was a hard worker and dedicated. Paul recalled that he was working late every night. "People saw my office light on well into the evening. They knew I was committed. I think I gained respect after that and that has paid huge dividends."

Frank was also arriving early, staying late, and showing up on the weekends. He was trying to gather as much information as he could, but also demonstrate he was willing to work hard and match the efforts of the 'hardest' working employee at city hall.

*Setting the tone--who you follow.* The preceding city manager had a significant amount of influence on the context of the new manager's appearance. All five were keenly aware of their

similarities and differences with their predecessor's personalities or style. Four of the five sensed going in that they were the opposite of what the organization had had. They were confident that their new style was going to help the organization and were able to observe when their "style" was having an impact.

Paul is an introverted thinker who wants to gather a lot of information and make some analysis before coming to a decision. He noted how he was impacting staff. "This is a change for them as they have had the extraverts, the strong managers just making decisions to make decisions to show they are in charge. I am much more logical and will study things." (Paul)

Robert said, "I have a different personality than the previous city manager. I pay a lot of attention to the internal things of the organization." Justin sensed the department directors were "...very warm and open and they enjoyed the different style of staff meeting and interaction with them."

Frank concluded the change in style from the previous manager was not resulting in a change of behavior from his management team. They were accustomed to a very authoritative leader who was closed off and tight with information. They described their former boss as "a little dictator." Frank invited input and discussion and began to understand that the team was not ready for it. When he asked questions or challenged something, he assumed he was simply inviting discussion. Staff reacted by getting defensive or shutting down. They were accustomed to giving the manager way more power and control than Frank wanted or thought he should have. They then were reacting in a passive aggressive manner toward Frank when he challenged their thinking rather than engage in the discussion he was seeking.

I was replacing someone who was very authoritarian and I am pretty much the exact opposite. At times the directors were having a disproportionate reaction to what I'm

bringing up and when I see that, I realize they are reacting to how my predecessor did his job as opposed to what I'm bringing up. (Frank)

The style differences between the managers and their predecessors had a greater impact on the organization than the managers anticipated. The new managers were all purposely taking things slow and were being deliberate about changes, however, the force of their personalities alone were enough to change the culture somewhat.

*Setting the tone--early critical decisions.* Two of the new managers had immediate opportunities to set the tone with an early critical decision. Both viewed their situations as a challenge they would have rather been able to deal with later and yet an opportunity to do something important. Justin was met with a disciplinary issue that he thought should have been dealt with before he arrived. He also had two critical vacancies to fill on his management team including the assistant city manager as was mentioned earlier. On Tom's first day in office, the director of public works announced his retirement. This was soon followed by a vacancy of another key staff person.

Justin immediately reviewed the personnel issue and made a decision to act. The individual was responsible for gross misconduct and Justin took the strong step to remove them without delay. This turned out to be an early signal to staff that Justin was clearly comfortable making tough decisions. "For me it was one of those instances where I could come in and do the obvious and sensible thing, and people said hey, this guy's going to take care of business!" (Justin)

The two managers understood that the hires they were making would be an indication to the city council, community, and staff of the team they were intending to build. Tom hired a well-respected public works director through a strong competitive process and he received

accolades for his decision. On the other hire he decided to promote from within and was challenged by staff who questioned the person's ability. Tom listened but ultimately made the hire from within.

The two hires reflect to the city council, community, and staff about the team that you are building. And that tells a little bit about you as well. Those are two pretty big things that I had to get involved with that so far have been successful. It's good to be in a position to pick your own team. But I didn't want to do that my first 90 days. (Tom)

As previously described, when Justin made his hires he brought in former work mates that brought some familiarity and comfort to him; this was also a strong signal about whom he would feel comfortable with.

In both cases the new managers felt at ease with their decisions and look back on them with confidence that they made the right call. "To see them both succeed immediately was great to see." Justin said of his two hires. They viewed what they did as an important early chance to demonstrate their leadership skills under pressure. The actions they took were a natural part of the job for them and helped ease some of the pressure to make a contribution.

***Transitioning to the new normal--establishing trust.*** At the center of all the interviews with the new city managers was trust. For all the new managers, trust defined the health of their new relationships. They all wanted, even cherished, the idea of having a team where completely open, direct, and "safe" conversations could take place. They wanted a relationship with the department heads where team members could say things in front of each other without worry that it would leak out, get distorted, or be used against someone. They wanted a place where crazy ideas could be tested, issues vented, and where free flowing thoughts and language could be

forgiven if something inappropriate slipped out unedited. Tom viewed that type of relationship coming from a high functioning team.

There are several types of cues to when you get that high functioning management team and you know when you can say sensitive things that are going to stay here. There are some managers that have difficulty discussing sensitive issues. There is the necessary stress release that I believe that comes off of difficult meetings with residents and conversations with council members that you would never say in front of anybody else but you can say in there; I've experienced that here. (Tom)

In some ways the new managers were strategic and pragmatic with their approaches to trust building. They were all aware that they would have some trust granted to them on their arrival, but that they would need to earn more through actions. Robert was quick to back up his staff and give them credit for accomplishments in front of the council and public. He focused on being "authentic and real with people, and not play games." Similarly, Paul was conscientiously being open, transparent, and direct with everyone.

They all took time once again to get out and meet as many people as possible as a first step to building trusting relationships.

I spent a lot of time meeting with department heads, council members, fire shifts; engaging up front, taking tours, showing a sincere interest and demonstrating that I care. It was a good way of gaining some trust and being effective in making some decisions and understanding why I am making decisions because I had actually been out to talk to others and see things. (Paul)

Tom indicated that he felt the trust right away. "My initial impression was that they trusted me from the very start. They were saying things that tell me they were treating me like

I've been here for five years and they completely trust me." Robert too felt his efforts had garnered a strong trusting relationship. The other three were still feeling uncertain about their team unity when the interviews were conducted.

Justin had a good team situation, but still said it did not compare to the close knit group where he had come from. Speaking of his new team he said, "I don't have a good confidence that they keep all those confidences as well as they should. That's an issue we have to work on more here." Paul, whose staff had been without administrative leadership for a year, had to be patient with his team. He noticed distrust among some of the departments and noted that even after working there for 10 months he still had a fair amount of work to do with some individuals.

Frank's situation was more dire. His management team was fragmented and certain members continued to "work directly with certain council members without his authorization or knowledge." He also had the previous acting city manager behaving disrespectfully toward him at times, undermining his authority. Frank even felt he "was getting set up at times by an employee" to make him look bad.

*Transitioning to the new normal--dealing with frustration and doubts.* All the participants had moments of frustration as they were building their teams. The frustration had different starting points for the managers and a wide range of effects on them. The frustration wasn't a singular feeling they all shared, but different sensations pointing to one target. The frustration came from personal blind spots, no direction, gamesmanship, overworking, and relationships. The common thread in all the causes was the desire to build trust or protect the trust that had been established. Some were able to get past the frustration quickly; others were dealing with it constantly. One manager in particular, Frank, appeared to be near the point of despair.

Tom experienced minor frustration; having to act before he thought he was ready. He was interacting on a disciplinary issue the police chief was dealing with before he had time to understand the chief or the situation. Tom resigned himself to doing the best he could, when he was forced into those types of situations. “You do the best you can.” He said matter of factly.

Justin found himself working far more hours than he anticipated and with a team that appeared to be not totally comfortable with him. He longed for the days not so long past where he had his team of confidants who could be trusted and would trust him. “We had 5 department heads. That group was really dependable. We could discuss anything at any level. I had zero worry about things leaking out and that was a great feeling. I don’t quite have that here.”

Paul was experiencing some of the same feelings with his team and he also was increasingly concerned about the processes that the staff used which were inefficient, duplicative, and outdated. He had many ideas on how to improve things, but deliberately slowed himself down after hearing from a staff person that, “you don’t have to make change just to make change.” Paul was struggling with trying to build the trust level of the team and make the changes he saw as obvious. The frustration over this paradox was evident in his face.

How do you make those changes while trying to maintain the trust level of all those same individuals who are being impacted on a day to day basis or ultimately—a career change for them? I don’t really have a good degree of confidence moving forward to do that right now. (Paul)

Frank was frustrated early on about a number of things and the feelings continued to mount as time went on. At ten months he was still looking for how he was going to establish the team and himself as a leader.

The perception among staff is that I'm not as much of a leader or as engaged as the former manager. They're all pissing and moaning about stuff that I can't do anything about. I'm not going to run around trying to prove to everybody whether I know what I'm doing or not. (Frank)

Frank's head was hanging low at this point and he was clearly agitated recalling his experience. I asked if he was ok. He nodded and continued. "I've been trying to determine whether or not I am being effective."

**Theme III—experiencing effectiveness.** The city managers experienced effectiveness through a variety of circumstances at different periods after their entrance into their new positions. There are five sub-themes that are part of the third super-ordinate theme which include gaining institutional knowledge, turning points, adapting to and changing culture, understanding expectations, and council relationship.

*Experiencing effectiveness—gaining institutional knowledge.* A key factor for experiencing effectiveness was having enough knowledge or information about the organization or team to make decisions with confidence. All five managers immediately set out to learn issues, people, and the culture of the city and organization.

Robert summed up the situation he experienced starting his new job. "The first few months as the city manager I had absolutely no institutional knowledge—every day for the longest time, I was learning something new." Robert estimated that it was between six to seven months into the job when he had acquired enough knowledge to be effective. "It became easier to build credibility after six to seven months because I had more knowledge of the issues and I could be more effective on how I presented information to people." He was quick to point out that in order

to enact “longer lasting change,” he needs to “be the sponge and first learn everything about the organization before suggesting changes to this or that.”

Justin indicated he did so much prep-work in advance of his arrival that he was able to get right to work.

I did a lot of driving tours of the city with staff. I read the comp plan, city code and kept up on the council packets. I was getting the council packets two months before I started. When I came here, I asked staff to give me a printout of faces and names so I could begin to know who was where and who was who, so by the time I got here I knew a lot about the city and was able to check right in. (Justin)

Tom also gained significant knowledge of the organization through research he “did on the community before starting.” He also was deliberate about meeting everyone and observing as much as he could.

What I did was to take every opportunity I had to meet with people one on one. I did not set up one-on-one meetings with the 300 employees here. But in a real casual informal way, whether it’s walking from one meeting to another or walking by a group of employees, introducing myself, talking to them individually is often impossible.

Frank indicated he was quickly able to get out and connect with the citizens and “got to know people in the community well.” Connecting with the staff and council was another matter. When we interviewed he was still struggling to gain useful institutional knowledge and to understand the organization.

I spent time trying to understand the administrative processes that the organization had. I began to realize that those processes (sigh) in some employee’s minds were the paramount issues they (pause) they were using as indicators of whether or not I knew

what I was doing. Whether I had my own processes or could understand their processes. It was actually a bit odd I thought. However, as time went on I got better and better at understanding it; but there are still, after 13 months, some mysterious qualities about why certain things are done a certain way. However, that's kind of receding a little bit now.

(Frank)

Paul is still learning and observing after 10 months on the job. "I am much more logical and will study things. Having background and knowledge will allow me to make quicker decisions in the future. I recognize the importance of using rationale to make decisions." He expressed confidently that he was able to quickly assess and understand how the organization functioned, clarifying that, "One of my strengths is identifying those situations." However, his comfort in knowing when was the right time to make changes remains in question. When asked if he was going to be making more changes he thought, no. "I'm probably stepping back quite a bit and just listening and observing."

*Experiencing effectiveness—turning points.* All five managers were intent observers when they began their duties, and four experienced change in the organization or themselves—a turning point. For some, the turning point was an event that brought an abrupt change or recognition, for others it was getting into a process familiar to themselves where they could be helpful and make decisions. A supporting theme of turning points is budgeting.

Paul and Justin mentioned three months as a point when things began to change for them. There was a clear demarcation of time for Paul when the switch came from being a new "celebrity" to being an effective administrator. "There seemed to be a natural change after three months, almost to the *day!*" Paul sounded amazed as he said it. He sensed "a shift in the energy and momentum toward more of a 'let's get things done.' Not that it was a negative change, just a

*recognizable* change.” The change coincided with taking action on the budget. This was something all five experienced and will be explored later as a supporting theme.

Justin also felt the organization change soon after the three month period as staff began to act more natural. “After they get into that more natural way of behaving and acting, I could really begin to assess what parts of the organization needed to be fixed and what parts I didn’t want to mess with.” It was at this three month period when he felt he had an opportunity to begin some organization changes, but he was careful to include those around him and ask for suggestions.

I opened it up and invited any employee that wanted to tell me what they think I ought to be doing here that they should tell me. I then drafted a plan and had individual meetings with department heads to explain how to do it. So it took a while to do that. (Justin)

After the discussions, Justin reduced his management team from sixteen to six. This had the effect of creating some hard feelings for those who were removed from the board room. Justin recalled matter-of-factly, “...that they are not quite as warm and happy as they were because they had a loss of status.”

Tom experienced a turning point over the concerns of some employees when he promoted someone to human resource manager. Tom indicated that this “...manager is a very important part of the operation.” The hiring process helped clarify his decision making process in the eyes of his team. He would consult with others, but ultimately he would make the decision. He described the hiring of the human resource manager with the following:

There were some dissenting opinions from my team who were questioning her experience and if she’s the right fit at the right time. I thought it was the right time and I went ahead with it and told the team she was the right hire. I could have held off, but I went ahead

and it worked out well. You want to get those first hires correct your first year, so for some people this wasn't popular. And I had to say to the team that I think it is a good hire and I hope you come along. (Tom)

Frank experienced a significant change after 11 months on the job when he had a facilitated performance review. He said that "the facilitation was key to moving forward." It helped Frank vent 10 months of frustration, and helped him get some clarity on how he was doing.

We had a 'come to Jesus' discussion at a facilitated meeting. We got a lot of things out on the table about how each of us as individuals perceive things and work on things and they understood me better and I understood them better. (Frank)

The facilitated meeting helped Frank envision how he would insert his influence over time. He recognized the importance of culture and how he, the organization, or both were going to have to change. Three of the other new managers expressed similar views on culture as well which is explored in greater depth later in this chapter.

*Turning points--budgeting.* Managing the budgeting process gave a clear sense of accomplishment for four new managers. The timing of the interviews fell a few months after all their budgets were adopted so the process was fresh in their minds. Frank, who had little to share in the sense of accomplishments other than his connection with the community, indicated the budget process was an area where he made a positive contribution. His mood was much more positive as he recalled working on the budget and making a contribution. "I thought we did a good job on the budget. I know we made some changes that I'm not sure would have been made prior to my arrival."

Paul was very excited when he talked about the budget process being a chance to be effective.

One of the things I think was a strong achievement was the seven budget meetings in the fall. I was able to get out to each one of the wards in the city and talk to the public about our financial situation with the budget, just listening as well. I heard a lot of good feedback. The budget hearing went well considering the fiscal times. We were very logical and direct with the budget. (Paul)

Tom mentioned the budget 13 times during the interview. He indicated that the city staff were anxious after cuts "...from the years before [where budget cuts] had resulted in layoffs." The mayor directed Tom to have a budget that contained no growth. Tom was clearly pleased when he reported how the two-year budget turned out.

We brought forth a budget that did not have cut backs in service, provided a fair raise to employees and implemented a new half-million dollar fire department duty crew; reduced the debt and passed unanimously. This council spent more time on the budget and that was reflected positively. I felt that was successful. (Tom)

Robert mentioned the budget seven times in his interview and supported the idea that it is a major factor in judging his success.

We went through our large budget session with the council. To me that was a pretty important event. We had some direction from our planning session. No increase in property taxes, no employee layoffs. We brought the council a budget that maintained services; no tax increase; no layoffs. And we went through the budget as quickly and as efficiently and without controversy as any budget I've done in 30 years. I thought it was a very good process. (Robert)

They understood the budget and knew precisely what to do. For all the managers, knowing what was expected of them was exactly what they wanted and needed to perform, but that wasn't always clear.

*Experiencing effectiveness—adapting to and changing culture.* Frank reflected on how awkward he felt at city hall, even after 13 months. He was operating in a manner that encouraged department heads to self-regulate and challenge how things were being done and it was upsetting people. He pointed out that he "...came from a very unstructured place to a very structured one." After a couple of months Frank noticed that "...people began to realize that I am different than what they had. That I wasn't buying in totally to their way of doing things." By being deferential and deferring to his team, he was viewed as not knowing what he was doing; after all, the previous manager was authoritarian and told everyone what to do and they did it.

The perception was that I wasn't as much of a leader or as engaged. I think that for a while some of the staff probably felt that *I* didn't either know what I was doing, or *they* didn't know what I was doing. (Frank)

Frank doesn't see himself becoming authoritarian and expects the culture to change around him in a gradual way. He explained, "It's going to be one of those things, the longer I'm here the culture will change a little bit. My finger prints will be on things. It will be a very gradual, subtle nuanced thing for them."

Paul found himself meshing wonderfully with the council but was uncomfortable with how the work was being processed within the organization. He identified the work flow as a product of culture that would have to change with him as manager. It was just a matter of how much and when.

The culture has been very slow pace and not much rhyme or reason and confusion as to who is doing what, two to three people are maintaining files of various similar things— ‘why is that?’ electronic records for example—there is no semblance to how we’re maintaining anything for filing or who is doing what. It’s just a lot of lack of order. There is such a mass amount of little things that have been ignored forever – processes, inefficiencies, some disputes between departments, frustrations between departments not being resolved. There are honestly so many of them that I have to do something about them. (Paul)

Both Tom and Robert indicated that they were great culture matches for their new cities. Robert shared that, “From the cultural standpoint there was no culture shock coming into the organization.” He was familiar with the area and was at ease almost immediately. “I feel well accepted here. It felt comfortable quickly; it has been a good fit.”

It was the same story for Tom. “My initial impression was that they trusted me from the very start.” He was also getting feedback that assured him that he was a good fit.” Most of the feedback I’ve gotten has been along the lines of ‘you fit in well,’ ‘this seems to work,’ ‘we haven’t missed a beat.’” Even though the culture fit appeared to require little organizational change for Tom, he still noticed that he was the one adapting to the situation. “I tried early on to adapt more rather than have other people adapt.” Then he broke his thought and added, “Even so, there is always an adaptation to a new leader.”

***Experiencing effectiveness--understanding expectations.*** The five new managers understood their roles in running the operations, but the real difference for them was when the council provided (or never provided) clear expectations and goals. Clear council expectations

had the most profound impact on the ability of the new managers to perform, acclimate, and lead.

Justin and Robert recalled the good fortune of having things waiting on a list for them to handle when they arrived. In each of their cities, certain decisions had been put off while waiting for the new managers to arrive. They were both able to begin work on those tasks almost immediately. This provided early structure, comfort, and measureable results to be judged by.

Tom had no such list waiting for him so he set out to “discover” the council’s priorities through a series of individual meetings with them. Interestingly, the manager doesn’t work for a *single* council member, rather the council as a body. Tom had to mix the expectations and desires of the four council members and the mayor into what he imagined to be a cohesive direction.

Frank found himself struggling to determine what the council really wanted from him. He has yet to experience understanding regarding what is and isn’t significant from the elected council as a whole. He has concluded that the council is unsure what the manager is supposed to do and what their role is and ultimately, “...they don’t know what the hell they want.” Frank was visibly shaking as he told this side of the story. He had to stop at times and take a drink of water. He wanted to discover a direction or consensus of issues from the elected officials but was not able to do it. He finally has resolved to begin working on the suggestions individual council members make.

I have noticed that council members bring up issues when they are together and direct them to me as if I am supposed to carry out each individual council member’s interests. Some things I finally decided to just go ahead and do. The odd thing is, no one has really pushed back and said ‘we never decided we were going to do that!’ (Laughing in disbelief) (Frank)

The situation has left Frank in a disjointed leadership role with no direction and “very poorly defined criteria for what I’ll be judged by.” He was left on his own to figure out his own job expectations, organization goals, and vision for the community. He senses this leaves him in a very vulnerable position as all consequences will have fingers pointing at him as the originator.

The clearest and most helpful expectations came from goal-setting retreats two of the cities had with their new managers during their third month with the organization. Robert and Paul both had very positive experiences with the retreats. They came away with clear goals, specified outcomes, and a stronger sense of confidence.

The directions gave them permission to take the organization in a new direction and the council was showing confidence in their leadership to do it. This had a significant impact on those reporting to the new manager as they watched the council rally around their new boss.

The thing that helped set some of that on a pretty good course was having the staff/council planning retreat still pretty early on. Spending that time with the council and really getting an understanding of where they are coming from. Because it’s hard to pick that up from a Council meeting when you have an agenda and they work their way through it and you don’t always get a chance to talk through some of the bigger issues.

(Robert)

***Experiencing effectiveness—council relationship.*** Perhaps the most important factor shared about effectiveness was the relationship between the city council and the city manager. The subjects mentioned the council 108 times during the five interviews. The managers’ effectiveness, confidence, and job satisfaction was suggested to be tied to their relationship with the elected officials. They viewed their job in partnership with the council. The stronger the partnership, the more effective they described their performance and experience to date.

Justin sensed a connection with the council immediately and it continued to build. He contrasted that ever building relationship with the ups and downs of his staff relationship.

The council was excited that I was here and wanting to help me all the time. We still have a really good, positive relationship; it's probably better now than when I started. My relationship with staff went through a little dip because people were nervous about organization changes I was making. (Justin)

Justin immediately had to make two significant hires; he reorganized his department head structure and removed someone from office. He chose to inform the council privately of his action to remove someone and counted on their support.

I told the council privately, "here's what happened, and here's what I did." There you go. Four of the five council members weren't surprised. They recognized that was an issue because they heard about it from employees and were pretty happy. (Justin)

Justin enjoys his relationship with the council but avoids becoming close friends. He likes to keep work and his private life separate. He explained that "...private life outside of work, I keep private." He begs off invitations to events or to get a drink, go to a baseball game, etc. "I get lots of that, but 99% of the time I say no politely, I beg it off, I make up something. I don't want to do that."

Tom also has a good, albeit business-like relationship with his council members. His relationship building started with understanding the communication preferences of each council member. He said the first thing he set out to do, "was to ask how do you like to be communicated with and how frequently?" Unlike Justin, Tom wants to eventually count the council members as friends and get to know them personally as well.

I've been to social events that are city based. But I haven't been to someone's house for dinner yet. I have had a glass of wine at a city social event, or rotary, or coffee at Caribou and have asked about their family, see how they are doing. To know about how they process information and make decisions it is also good to know where they're at in their own lives. I think it's important to know them individually outside of their role as a council member. (Tom)

Robert views his responsibility to the council as being a mirror image of what the council expects. He recognizes the value of the planning retreat he had with them after three months in office. He said he values the high standards the council sets and works to meet them. "I think the council sets high standards. It's important for me to reflect those when I'm out in the public or meeting with employees; really carrying the council message of high quality services to the citizens."

Robert is also experiencing a challenge with the mayor that could threaten the excellent working relationship he has with the council. Robert is clearly concerned with how he has had to "gently" challenge the mayor on some conflict of interest issues that are blurring the lines between the mayor's business and city policy. "To me that's probably the (pause) thorniest issue I have to work with. And it's the kind of conflict that could blow up at some time." Robert describes the mayor as "very intense" while being "hands on." He concludes that there are still some mysterious qualities in his and the councils' relationship with the mayor. Robert was deliberate with his words now, slowly picking the right ones.

I think the council is still trying to figure out their relationship with the mayor, so I think they're just—it's not a bad relationship. It's a matter of knowing the expectations. I just don't want it to blow up. We're going to figure this out." (Robert)

Paul appears to have a highly functional relationship with his council where he feels supported and appreciated, naming the council as “the highlight” of the experience. He has also welcomed their confidence, which is a clue to his staff that he is in charge. He even seems somewhat surprised at the authority he has been given. “They really look to me to make a lot of decisions, perhaps more than I’d ever been comfortable with or experienced before.”

Paul views the relationship with the council and staff as a team where everyone needs to do their part. When they had their goal-setting retreat the whole group came together.

It went extraordinarily well in all capacities; involvement, engagement, and discussion. I heard great feedback from the council that it was one of the best retreats they had in terms of tone, but also the structure I think they appreciated as well. I heard that from about one-third of the staff as well. I stepped back and let the staff speak openly with the council and the council to the staff as well. We set a work plan from that for the next 18 months and went to work. (Paul)

Paul emphasized that the essence of being a team is the trust and the sense that there is support when times are tough. “The whole council seems to have my back.”

Frank is confused and frustrated with his relationship with his council. This has left him feeling anxious and depressed. He is constantly looking for ways to understand their personalities, positions on issues, and to gain their trust. He tries to do his best and gets frustrated by criticism of his work when he is being judged by “...very poorly defined criteria.” Frank is constantly being surprised when he learns through some third party about dissatisfaction with his handling of an issue. “What I didn’t like was not being talked to more directly about what people didn’t like.”

All this has left Frank with very little sense of teamwork with the staff and council. Certain council members “...rely on the finance director rather than him and seem to purposely try to create division.” Council members also back bite each other leaving Frank as the repository for their comments on each other’s faults. Without a unified team, unified council, or any goals, Frank is now trying to navigate the job by doing tasks for “...seven people with their own agendas.” Looking ahead he is abandoning a push for strategic actions for the upcoming year. “I plan on kind of moving ahead doing things and coming back to the council with my own agenda and say ‘here is what I want to do and how I want to do it.’” This leaves him doubtful about any kind of success. “You really can’t do this kind of work without their (council) involvement. They really have to look out for my back too!”

### Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes

Table 2 summarizes the 21 themes, sub-themes, and supporting themes.

Table 2

<i>Themes and Sub-themes</i>			
Major Themes	Joining the organization	Transitioning to the new normal	Experiencing effectiveness
Subthemes	Decision to leave Breaking old bonds Disorientation Great expectations The unnatural place Being tested	Letting go of the past Setting the tone Who you follow Early critical decisions Establishing trust Dealing with doubts	Gaining institutional Knowledge Turning points Budgeting Adapting to and changing culture Understanding expectations Council relationship

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

I undertook this study to better understand what city managers experience during their first 300 days with a new city. As an executive search consultant working primarily with cities, I wanted to become more aware of the managers' experiences to better anticipate and serve my clients in the future. As my clients enter their cities, they find themselves as CEOs of organizations they hardly know, directing people who are for the most part, complete strangers. I found that my own experiences as a new city manager have been informative and helpful, but it was not enough.

I have been hired and entered into the service of five cities as their city manager. Each new city experience was unique, but I found some consistencies as well, at least at the start of each job. My dim memories of decades past came vividly alive as I listened to the reflections of the city managers in this study. I experienced again the anxieties, excitement, self-doubt, confidence, and the strange sensation of being in command of total strangers in a foreign setting.

Throughout the research I discovered things retrospectively about my tremendous successes and epic failures that I can now trace back to my preparations, expectations, and relationship building. The things I learned about myself through the others I studied were at times sublime and at other times melancholy. I regret that I cannot do things over again with an enlightened awareness of others, process, and especially self. Yet, I am uplifted by the opportunity to better assist others as they make their transitions during the most critical time of their job.

The journey experienced by the managers of joining the organization, transitioning to the new normal, and experiencing effectiveness demonstrated more than anything else, the tremendous amount of effort needed to make the transition. All five participants worked to the

point of exhaustion both physically and mentally. If I can do anything for the managers with whom I work, it will be to help prepare them for the time and energy commitment they will need to succeed.

### **Overview of Major Themes**

Three major themes emerged during the research which capsulated the experience of the new city managers' first 300 days in office. The three themes are summarized with commentary in this section. The three themes include joining the organization, transitioning to the new normal, and experiencing effectiveness.

**Theme 1--Joining the organization:** Three sub-themes to joining the organization include the decision to leave, breaking old bonds, and disorientation. All five participants in this study were intentional about leaving their existing job some time before the job they took ever became available. All five managers had made an assessment of their professional and/or personal lives and realized that they needed to make a change. The change brought with it excitement and some pain. Everyone felt some degree of loss when they left their previous community. To move ahead and join the new organization, the managers needed to let go of the past and break their old bonds. This was harder for some than others, with one manager bringing two employees with him so the old bonds became part of the new. Tom's comments sum up the sensation of moving beyond the old job, "I feel that once you're here, and you spend that much time here, and involved here, (pause) my previous job seems longer ago than last spring..."

Joining the organization had a disorienting affect that resulted from a mix of high expectations, an unfamiliar workplace atmosphere that seemed unnatural, and the experience of being immediately tested. Managers experienced the phenomena of being treated like a "celebrity" or "king" as they entered. For some, the experience of being named manager came

with the expectation that they would be some sort of hero who according to Frank, "...are going to come into town and rescue everything from whatever." All the city managers were introduced to community leaders and people who the council considered important. The high expectations were also coming from the new managers as they took on the positions. With the expectations came pressure to perform at a high level. All the managers appeared to reject the "hero" myth by adopting an approach of building a team first. Senge et al. (1999) were also critical of the idea of the mythical heroic CEO coming in to rescue an organization from itself. Lasting change would have to come from a change in culture throughout the organization over time. A sudden shock from an incoming CEO would likely be met with natural, aggressive resistance.

All five of the participants had some sense of the employees not acting natural at first. Getting to know the organization and making an assessment of staff and process was difficult for the managers at first because people were not being themselves. When the managers started, they were often greeted by employees who were uncomfortable and were putting on a show. Three of the five had determined that the employees needed about three to four months to settle down and let their guard down. Justin was the most direct when he said, "People aren't acting naturally. They are puffing up or kissing your ass. They are just acting unnatural when you get there."

The entirety of the experiences produced sensations the participants described with the words shock, head-spinning, disorienting, and nerve-wracking. This stress and anxiety is referred to as "reality shock" (Hughes, 1958) and an experience that is "...characterized by disorientation, foreignness, and a kind of sensory overload" (Louis, 1980, p. 230).

Four of the managers experienced being tested almost immediately after starting their new positions. Individuals would make requests or suggest changes that would clearly test the new manager's decision making process. There were also certain amounts of unfinished business

that the new managers faced such as needing to make an immediate hire, discipline someone, or make structural changes. The new managers dealt with requests by being “circumspect” about the timing and the information they were being given. They were also deliberate about taking their time before making too many big changes, with the exception being personnel issues. With personnel issues such as hiring and discipline, two of the managers viewed these tests as a welcome opportunity to set the tone.

**Theme 2—transitioning to the new normal:** Four sub-themes help explain transitioning to the new normal. They include letting go of the past, setting the tone, establishing trust, and dealing with doubts. Four of the five managers mentioned being absorbed in their new positions as soon as they had arrived. Some indicated lingering feelings toward their old workmates. Emery (1984), in a study of 83 community colleges, found that two-thirds of new CEOs missed their previous jobs and that sense of loss was contributing to the CEOs having adjustment problems to their new jobs. The city managers seemed to be responding better as their new responsibilities had them letting go of the past quickly. They were no longer in the mindset of the old job, but had reset their minds to absorb new information and make new connections. A few described the transition as immediately being “all in.” This process of letting go is reflected in Argyris (1964) who suggested that individuals transitioning need to let go and move away from an existing state before they can successfully move forward. Bridges (1984) indicated the letting go process involved letting go of an old identity. “No one can begin a new role or have a new purpose if that person has not let go of the old role or purpose first” (p. 25). He added that whatever the reason for the change, the effected individual must “...let go of who they were and where they have been if they are to make a successful transition” (p. 25).

When setting the tone, the managers were conscientious about their efforts to let the organization know who they were while establishing a management style persona. There appeared to be the desire on the part of the new managers to be connected with a brand of some sort of their own making. Shils (1984) pointed out that a person's personal style is probably one of the most important arrows in the public administrator's quiver. Justin went so far as to use a power point presentation of himself to let the others know who he was and how he wanted to operate. This reflects the advice of Brant et al. (2009) who suggested that the incoming leader should include messages that will be used to project their own image. Successfully entering a new organization means taking control of the message by "...choosing and controlling..." what employees will see and hear and when (p. xv).

Another part of setting the tone was differentiating themselves from their predecessors. All the new managers were mindful of whom they were replacing. They all understood either the similarities or differences they shared with the former manager. Four of the managers saw themselves as bringing a different style, and that the changes would be welcome. This was an important part of setting the tone as the new managers established how things would be different and better. Knowing the management style of the former managers gave the new managers a sense of how their style might be perceived and how quickly they would be able to make changes.

Two of the new managers had the opportunity to make early critical decisions. They considered this a great chance to make an early contribution, establish their style, and build trust as elements of setting the tone for their administration. Both managers were confident about their decision which involved hiring and removing personnel. These early critical interventions

established their credibility and place at the head of the organization. This was clearly an advantage for them going forward.

For all the new managers, trust defined the health of their new relationships. Having trusting relationships meant they would be safe to suggest changes and take chances on untried concepts. Trust was the true test of being accepted and a sense of the new normal taking shape.

Here is where the sense of missing the old team was felt the most. Four of the new managers had left situations where they were completely trusted and where they trusted those around them. The time it took or was still taking as they closed in on their first year left a sense of lingering isolation. For Frank, the isolation was choking; almost cruel. He had no team. None of his closest advisors were helping him avoid pitfalls. They even appeared to be deliberately trying to trip him from time to time.

For one new manager, trust was thrust upon him as if being tested, for others it was a slower process of following through on statements, demonstrating competency, and backing others up when they took chances to better the organization. Robert was quick to back up his staff and give them credit for accomplishments in front of the council and public. He focused on being “authentic and real with people, and not play games.” Similarly, Paul was conscientiously being open, transparent, and direct with everyone.

Dealing with and overcoming frustration was part of the experience in building a new normal for all the participants. All the managers wanted to contribute at the high level they were accustomed to and were not prepared mentally to be unable to have an immediate impact. Their new organizations had various levels of gamesmanship, council direction, staffing issues, internal fighting or harmony, and projects that left all the participants overworked and mentally exhausted at times.

Watkins (2009) provided a summation of many of the points here when he suggested the new leader set up a road map to handle key challenges that come with transition into an organization in order to accelerate the time to effectiveness. Some of the suggestions include promoting oneself, diagnosing the organization, securing early wins, and building one's own team.

**Theme 3—experiencing effectiveness.** The ultimate goal of the new city managers was to be effective. They experienced effectiveness at different periods after their entrance into their new positions through a variety of circumstances. Five sub-themes that help reveal the experience include gaining institutional knowledge, turning points, adapting to and changing culture, understanding expectations, and council relationship.

All five managers immediately set out to gain knowledge about the institution by becoming familiar with issues, people, and learning the culture. Some spent a great deal of time before they took the job to learn more about the institutions and the communities they would be serving. Brant et al. (2009) suggested that helping executives develop their functionality and deliver results requires preparing for the first days and weeks well in advance of the start date. Scharmer (2007) also concluded that new executives would be helped if they conducted stakeholder interviews to start a process of clarifying key initiatives, building relationships, and exposing tensions that may exist. The new managers spent a great deal of time observing, asking questions, and meeting people. Filstad (2004) found that new hires normally acquire the information needed for the job from supervisors and co-workers and rely less on observation and interactions. The new city managers had no peers or supervisors in the organization however, and had to rely heavily on their observations and interactions to learn.

A common experience of the new city managers was that it took three to six months into the job to acquire enough knowledge to become effective even with their work before the start of their jobs and the intense study as they entered their positions. During their knowledge gathering time the new managers experienced a real hesitance to do anything significant right away if they did not have to. Watkins (2009) suggested that entry into a new organization is an exciting opportunity for the leader and the organization to make changes but also warned that the new period is a time of heightened vulnerability as the new leader has no working relationships established and is not fully aware of their new role. Frank, who was still experiencing a significant trust issue after 11 months, had not been able to get to the point where he sensed he understood the institution. He could not trust the messages so his ability to acquire the needed knowledge was limited.

Four of the five managers began experiencing change in their organizations and themselves between three to six months which coincided with the combination of acquiring enough knowledge, the organization acting more naturally, and taking on significant events. The same experience was observed by the mayor of Montrose, Colorado, Carlos Guara, who indicated in an interview with the local paper that it took their new manager "...about six months to adjust to things, but now we're on the same page..." (Lopez, 2002, p. 23). The new manager of Montrose indicated that it was not until months eight and nine that strong relationships began to develop.

Once the new managers had experienced their turning points, they were making organization changes, helping with projects, or making personnel changes. All of the new managers recognized the budget process as a major milestone in their transition. Managing the budgeting process gave a clear sense of accomplishment for four new managers. Working

through the budget gave them the opportunity to work on something they were experienced with. They understood that the budget reflected not only their ability to understand the numbers, but how well they understand the culture and values of the organization as well.

There were various levels of give and take between the new managers and the organization when it came to changing or adapting to culture. Frank reflected on how awkward he felt at city hall, even after 13 months. He been unable to fit into the culture or change it to reflect his style. Others were experiencing change within themselves as well the organizations adapting to their styles. Paul was uncomfortable with the slow pace and inefficiency at city hall and began to effect some process changes. He identified the work flow as a product of culture that would have to change with him as manager. Paul wanted to make more changes sooner, but held back out of concern for doing too much too soon. This would agree with Senge et al. (1999) who suggested that leaders should not come with a change plan in hand. Lasting change would have to come over time from a change in culture throughout the organization. A sudden shock from an incoming CEO would likely be met with natural, aggressive resistance. Watkins (2009) concurred explaining that if the changes are not handled carefully, the new leader could fail quickly with "...a severe, perhaps career-ending, blow to the individual" (p.8). Fritz (2008) indicated out that there is perhaps a delicate balance between the desire to make needed changes and get early victories and going too far and too fast. It is important to have small victories, but equally important to keep the victories in the context of the organization's culture and in consideration of one's own awareness of what is really needed. Clarity and awareness come from asking questions, listening, and reflecting on the meaning.

Ultimately culture fit and change came down to the personality of the new city manager and how that matched with the way things were being done at city hall. All the new managers

hoped to influence the culture eventually. Some managers indicated they would try to adapt their ways more to the existing culture while others were more direct on how things were going to have to change for the employees. For those willing to adapt to the existing culture, they were actually biding their time, knowing they would slowly turn the culture in the direction they desired. Quandt (2007) viewed CEOs and leaders as improvisers. In her study of new leaders, she confirmed that leaders are continually adjusting to the environment of the organization while constantly taking in information. Schein (2004) assumed that it is the leader who will change the mind of others when it comes to assumptions that define culture. Schein saw the role of the leader to articulate and sell "...new visions and concepts..." (p. 417), or create the conditions for others to find them. Another significant factor in culture adjustment were the expectations of the council when they hired the manager. The incoming city manager had to know if the council wanted and expected change or if they wanted more of the same.

Acquiring and understanding council expectations had a profound impact on the ability of the new managers to perform, acclimate, and lead. All the managers understood and enthusiastically embraced the fact that they worked for the city council. When the council provided clear goals or even a to-do list, the managers were happier and felt they could contribute at a higher level. Similarly, Case (2009) concluded that new CEOs in health care systems are more effective when they have clarity in their role objectives. Barber (1977) suggested that understanding expectations impacts performance. He stated that managers must be cognizant of the context of the organization they are entering and how they can best work, function, and survive within that context. Scharmer (2007) suggested the new leader ask clarifying questions to get to clear expectations. Two of his questions were, "what criteria will you use to assess whether my contribution to your work has been successful"? And, "what, if

any, historical tensions and/or conflicting demands have made it difficult for people in my role or function to fulfill your requirements and expectations”? (p. 17)

Frank received no direction and his council was split on all important matters. He received contradictory instructions that left him confused and unable to perform well. He found no key to unlock the mystery of the council or the staff.

Combined with understanding expectations, the most important factor shared about effectiveness was the relationship between the city council and the city manager. The subjects mentioned their relationship with the council more than any other topic during the five interviews. They each had their own unique relationship with their councils that fit their personalities and the circumstance. Some enjoyed a strictly professional yet collegial relationship and limited conversations and contact to work matters. Others desired deeper relationships when possible and were much more on a personal level.

All the subjects considered the city manager professional to be in a partnership with the council with shared responsibility for outcomes. A strong relationship between the council and new manager was viewed by the staff and community as the council giving the manager authority to do their job. This was a boost to those managers who received this show of support and confidence. DeSantis, Glass, and Newell (1995) also found this to be true, noting that a manager’s job satisfaction is directly associated with the degree of support they receive from the council. Once the council demonstrated their support of the manager, the manager had the ability to enact change without the threat of staff going around their back and chatting with the council. Two-way trust was again the key ingredient for the manager-council relationship to flourish. Here again Frank struggled. Some of his council members had not wanted to hire him and they never attempted to bond with him or share any ideas. Frank sensed this isolation and concluded

that as a result of the poor relationship with some council members, the staff viewed him as weak and not the ordained leader.

### **Essence of the Study**

In recalling the first 300 days at a new city, the city managers in this study revealed a journey into themselves and into organizations unknown to them. All of the participants wanted to be effective and fulfilled in their new jobs. For a variety of personal and professional reasons each participant experienced a point when a decision to leave their current job had settled into their hearts and minds. A mental switch occurred and each took a leap into the process of applying, interviewing, and accepting a new position. Stepping into the new organizations meant dealing with the pain and loss of separating from trusted colleagues, friends, their homes, and the communities they helped build.

The new managers were greeted, challenged, and burdened by others and themselves with great anticipation and expectations upon their arrival. Moments of excitement and a deluge of new faces, information, and tests combined in an atmosphere that was unsettled and unsettling. During that period, surrounded by staffs who were not behaving naturally, the new managers experienced a bit of shock described as a mind-spinning, nerve wracking, and disorienting feeling.

Transitioning into a new normal state, the managers let go of the past and completely immersed themselves into the new organization intent on distinguishing themselves from their predecessors. Dealing with some self-doubts and frustration they worked on establishing trust with the staff, council, and community. A significant amount of time was taken to observe and let things settle, but early critical decisions were often needed.

Most of the new managers began to sense a turning point in their organizations and their own ability to be effective between three and nine months. They had acquired a great deal of institutional knowledge by this time, got to know the staff and council, and were adapting to a new culture while changing it at the same time. They were also developing the most important element for their effectiveness, their relationship with the city council. A visible display of confidence by the council toward the manager combined with clear expectations provided the managers with the mandate they needed to perform at a high level. The ongoing deep development of a team in partnership with the council ultimately determined the managers' sense of belonging, accomplishment, and job satisfaction.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

This study intended to focus on city managers who had been at their current job for nine to fourteen months. The purpose of the timing was to interview the participants while they still had a clear memory of their first 300 days in office.

All the participants were from the Midwest; managers from other parts of the country may have yielded different experiences. The conclusions provided in this phenomenological research cannot be generalized or assumed to be the experience that other city managers would have. The population sample of five allowed for an in-depth exploration of each of the participants' experiences, but limited the reach of the study. The population sample was limited to city managers who were veterans of at least one other city. The experience of first-time managers may have produced different themes. All of the managers in the study were moving from a currently held position to another. Many city managers have experienced being in transition after being fired and may have different experiences when entering a new community. All of the

managers in the study were white males. Minority and women managers may have had different experiences.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

During the research process, the scope was limited intentionally to the lived experience of city managers during their first 300 days in office. Several topics arose during the course of the research which may be of interest to others who wish to uncover additional phenomena or explore some of the findings in more depth. The study explored only city managers who were currently employed and had previous city management experience. The experience of city managers in transition and first-time managers may be quite different. Phenomenological studies of private sector and non-profit CEOs entry into their organizations would broaden the understanding of additional groups.

The new city managers observed that people in the organization were not acting naturally when the new managers arrived. A study that examines the staff perspective would add to the overall understanding of how the change was impacting them and if indeed they recognized that they were also acting unnaturally.

Additional exploration of whom the new managers follow is needed. The technical strengths, management style, and relationship with staff of the departing manager may have an impact on the experience of the new manager. The impact on an organization experiencing a new manager with a completely different personality and style could be contrasted with an organization experiencing a new manager with a similar personality and style. Research on city managers who fail to make it through their first year at a new appointment would bring an additional view to the work. There can be as much learned through the failures as the successes.

The role of the council, expectations, and connection with staff would be good places to start for such a study.

A positivistic study on the city manager population who moved into new positions could determine the length of time they needed to gain the institutional knowledge necessary to function at a high level. This would require defining what high level means and perhaps outlining what institutional knowledge consists of. This information would help verify the length of time councils could anticipate the new manager needing to get up to speed.

Additional research on the role of the manager and the impact on culture may help reveal how attempting culture change or trying to keep it the same impacts the effectiveness of the new manager in the short and long-term. This study identified managers who viewed themselves adapting to the existing culture and others who were requiring more change from the organization to fit their style.

A broad study on the hiring practices of cities when they search for city managers would be beneficial to the profession. This study revealed that some of the councils were providing few goals, and the managers were left not understanding the expectations. The councils that provided clear direction enabled the managers to achieve a greater sense of accomplishment. Future researchers might want to examine the elected officials' cohesiveness and sense of direction at time of hire and review the impact on the new manager and their relationship with the council. In this study, the most dysfunctional council also had the most distraught new manager.

The council act of 'ordaining' or granting power from a 'higher' authority, the new manager is a critical factor for the success of the manager and to help create a bond between manager and council. A study that examines the question, 'is there a rite that councils use that gives them the experience of when and that new managers must experience before- being

ordained as the leader?’ This research could begin with the entire search and interview process where the managers must first experience a series of tests to the point where they sensed being the ‘ordained’ leader.

### **Implications for Managers**

This study suggests several things incoming city managers will want to consider when receiving an appointment to a new city. Each of the three themes provides newly appointed managers with points of reference as they formulate a plan for their first six to nine months in office.

Every newly appointed manager should have an entry plan. The entry begins with learning as much as possible about the people and organization. This should begin before the first day to the greatest extent possible. Waldron (2003) concluded that “...managers clearly need to know what they are getting into in a particular city. What appears to be an ideal position may not represent a proper match of archetype. New managers should also prepare themselves emotionally for the separation from their old colleagues and the support and friendship they enjoyed.

They will likely encounter immediate attention upon their arrival including a rush of introductions and requests for interviews from the press and for being the guest speaker at social clubs. During this period, managers will likely be asked a lot of questions and be told of high expectations. As they enter the organization they should be aware that staff may be acting differently than normal. People in the organization will need some time to settle down until a true picture of the organization can be seen. During this entry period, city managers should prepare mentally for a certain amount of shock as a result of all the changes coming at them. Hughes (1958) indicated this period produces stress and anxiety referred to it as “reality shock”

and Louis (1980) notes it is an experience that is "...characterized by disorientation, foreignness, and a kind of sensory overload" (p. 230).

The early preparations will help the new managers establish themselves and send a message to the staff and council. Brant et al. (2009) suggested that executives prepare for the first days and weeks well in advance of the start date to develop their functionality and be able to deliver immediate results. Scharmer (2007) also concluded that new executives start a process of clarifying key initiatives and building relationships before taking office. It is also important to be mindful of the style of the individual they are replacing and think through how their style will impact the culture or the organization. It would be very helpful to have a clear indication from the council on how much change, if any, is desired. The role of manager often times means critical matters will need to be handled sooner rather than later. Advance work will help provide some confidence when dealing with issues that come up. Building trust and a solid team with council and staff is the most critical factor for success. The new managers should be mindful of all promises made and always follow-through on suggestions. Immediately get out and meet everyone in the organization. Listen to their stories and ask a lot of questions. The interest shown others will help the new managers integrate in a number of ways.

New managers will want to spend time checking in with their new council members individually. Getting to know the members personalities and motivation for representing the city will give the manager important insights into how to approach issues and what the priorities are. It is a good idea to keep testing this by asking for council feedback.

### **Implications for Hiring Authorities**

When city councils go through the process of hiring, they should first take a good hard look at themselves and define what their culture is and what their immediate and future needs

are. They will want to be able to communicate clearly to candidates what they will be expected to accomplish if they are hired and what changes, if any, need to be made to the organization.

Waldron (2003) had similar advice:

Each city council needs to spend much more time identifying its community's development stage and what type of person it truly wants and needs as a city manager. This should be clearly understood by and agreed to by all council members, if possible. This understanding should be clearly conveyed to job applicants and hiring consultants in order to avoid the problem of a future difficult relationship, or an inappropriate match between the manager's needs and the city's needs. This reflects the aphorism that preparation and analysis invested by both parties early in the process is time wisely invested in the future. (p. 172)

The councils will want to be mindful of what a significant change in personality and management approach can have on the staff and community. If significant change is being sought, the council will have to communicate clear objectives, demonstrate patience, and be prepared for push-back.

The most important role of the council, once the new manager arrives, is to demonstrate open support for them. This will send a strong message to the staff and community that the new manager is now in charge. It is also important to clarify as a whole the direction they want the community and organization to go and the role they want the manager to take. They should outline goals, timelines, and responsibilities as a team.

Staff should be encouraged to be part of the hiring process. Everyone will benefit by the staff having access to the candidates, and candidates to the staff. This will enable the stakeholders to assess and be assessed before the hiring process is finalized. Potential new

CEOs can better determine if they are going to be a good fit if they can ask questions and observe the organization. I have also discovered through coordinating the hiring process of 52 city managers that staff often has keen insights into the cultural fit between themselves and their potential new boss. Staff can be assigned the role of providing their assessment of the candidates to the hiring board provided they do not rank the candidates. I have witnessed hiring boards asking for rankings and then later regretting it when they selected a candidate that was not the staff's number one choice.

### **Implications for Organization Development Practitioners**

Organization development professionals may find themselves involved with the hiring process of the chief administrator. Significant help to the organization and the potential new CEO could be provided through organization development practices.

A thoughtful organization assessment can provide the hiring authority some insight on the current state of the organization and where they would like to go. The organization development practitioner can assist the group in defining the expectations of the new hire and to begin to introduce the idea of change to the entire organization. The organization development practitioner can help the organization answer questions Scharmer (2007) suggested the new leader should have clarified. Two of his questions were, "what criteria will you use to assess whether my contribution to your work has been successful?" And, "what, if any, historical tensions and/or conflicting demands have made it difficult for people in my role or function to fulfill your requirements and expectations?" (p. 17). Another thing that would be helpful for the new manager and the council would be to have the organization development professionals design an exit process designed to capture the impressions of the outgoing manager on the contextual nuances of unfinished business.

Guidance can be offered to the incoming city manager as to the current state of the organization and review operating and communication norms. The organization development practitioner can assist with the socialization process by facilitating discussions on culture and the expectations staff and the new manager has of each other. Additional help can be provided by guiding any change with processes that will promote the health of the organization and avoid unnecessary missteps by the new manager.

The organization development professional can help the new leader and the followers understand each other and agree on how to move forward when the new leader brings a new style change. If a collaborative type replaces an authoritarian type of manager or if some other significant style change is inherent in the new manager, the adjustment could be enough negatively influence the working dynamic of the organization.

### **Personal Reflections**

I undertook this study to better understand what city managers experience during their first 300 days with a new city. As an executive search consultant working primarily with cities, I wanted to become more aware of the managers' experiences to better anticipate and serve my clients. This study had been more than a research exercise for me; it has been a journey into my own experiences in the city management profession that have brought both joy and despair into my life. The most powerful impression I had of the participants was the excitement they had for their profession. The city managers I spoke with viewed their job as their life's work, or a vocation. Their personal desire to be excellent was another impressive characteristic of each participant. Many of my own experiences were brought back to the front of my mind as I heard the stories and searched for the meanings in them. The following are a few of reflections on my own journey as a city manager and search consultant serving the field.

I experienced significant pain when I left two of the cities I had managed, but under very different circumstances. I left a 25,000 population suburb in Minnesota intentionally for personal and professional growth after serving there as city manager for seven years. I had become very fond of several of the council members and considered many of the 150 full and part-time staff to be close friends. Over 12 years later, I still communicate warmly with several of them. The staff had a very emotional going away party for me and I was presented with some wonderful mementoes and recognition. The gesture that is seared into my memory came from a deceased employees' son who came by the event and gave me a hand-written note of thanks and well wishes.

I had fired his father after repeated attempts to get him sober. He was a snow-plow operator and was showing up to work under the influence. After several attempts to help him, I eventually had to let him go. His wife had left him with his two sons. The two boys begged me to give their father his job back. I sat with them as they cried; my explanations were understood but meaningless. I also got a call from his parents asking to help. Six months later I attended his memorial. I was sick to my stomach when I entered the funeral home but was immediately met with hugs, tears, and thanks.

I had wondered reading that young man's card if I had made the right decision. I was going to miss everyone terribly. We had done so much together. Yet, a few days after those tearful goodbyes I was integrating into my new responsibilities and to my surprise, sensed that my previous job was a long time ago. The switch in my heart and mind had been flipped.

Within the first hour of my first day on the new job I received a phone call from the public works director informing me that we had sewage flowing into four homes as a result of a problem cleaning one of the sewer lines. After being advised not to admit fault by the insurance

company I was confronted by the homeowners as the new head of the city. I decided the only way to act was openly and honestly and shared all information with the homeowners and immediately sent in clean-up contractors. The test provided me with an opportunity to share with the community and staff that I was going to be open and honest with the public regardless of how embarrassing it might be for the city. As to the employee who was concerned about keeping his job, I suggested he educate the entire crew on how the process had failed.

The rest of my week was a constant parade of faces, speeches, and meetings; all while I was trying to absorb as much information as I could. I did sense my head was spinning at times and the pressure, long hours, and excitement left me unable to sleep deeply. My agenda also had upcoming union negotiations and budget preparations. Both events proved to help me set the tone and were turning points in my own effectiveness and in changing the culture to fit my values. The city had a long history of contracting out union negotiations to a third party who was assigned to grind out the most favorable deal for the city. I canceled the contract and took over negotiations. I also jumped into the budget eagerly and was able to add value to the process significantly. The two events projected an atmosphere of change that would bring the team closer together and flatten the distance between the line workers and the manager. At my firing six years later, three different state union presidents came to the meeting and testified on my behalf. They later told me they had never done that for any other city manager.

When I started I also experienced a practice which was bizarre for me. When I asked questions on processes I often was answered in the third person as if the answer was going to a hypothetical person. For example, I would ask the human resources manager a question such as, "How can I get a hold of the last couple of years of employee reviews?" The reply was something like, "The city manager simply should call me and I will get that information to him."

After a few days I asked how long people were going to call me 'city manager' rather than Richard? That question and a request to address me as Richard ended that practice. I had not informed people of how I wanted to be addressed and everyone was too nervous to ask me.

I was replacing a command and control manager who liked to keep and hold information. He was not into power and decision sharing. My style was the polar opposite. It took my staff significant time to adjust to being asked, empowered, and informed. I assumed they all liked the changes. But in retrospect, I can now see how the adjustment could have been difficult and how I was a bit too confident and perhaps arrogant. After all, I was bringing what I thought to be wonderful changes and rationalized that the employees would run toward the changes without any trepidation.

My approach to trust building was to be immediately and completely transparent. I could not function mentally in isolation and needed the sense of connection to thrive as a leader. I learned that this approach worked well for me, but came with an equally sharp edge. My previous team, the one I felt closest to and the one that was the most productive was also one I overexposed myself to on some personal issues. Later, when I needed to enact some discipline, my personal issues were there to be tampered with. Entering my next position I decided to hold back certain things. The bonds were never as close, but I discovered the trust was still there.

When I arrived at my city manager positions I never had clear expectations expressed to me. I learned over time what was expected of me by having talks with the various elected officials and then piecing together what I understood to be the collective vision of the group. Latter in my tenures, I was able to have retreats with the council and staff with better performance as a result. I did enjoy full and immediate support from the council in all my positions. The visible and vocal support of the council helped me take on my role as leader of the

organization. Knowing the council had my back when I started, freed me to try things that would challenge and invite the organization to come together.

## **Conclusion**

The transition that city managers and city council's experience during the first 300 days of a manager's appointment with a city should be well planned and deliberate. Even before a resume is sent to a city for consideration, potential new managers should take time to understand why they are looking to make a change and consider what type of culture they will need to work in to be successful and fulfilled.

The leaders of an organization that is perceived to be running well may want to maintain the status quo when hiring their next city manager. They will likely want an individual who will match the organizational culture to maintain the harmony of the work place. The organization and candidate must uncover and articulate the actual culture as opposed to what might be espoused, in order to find the proper fit. Hidden meanings keep the understandings of the organization buried, making finding and establishing a good match for manager and community a matter of chance. If the manager enters an organization being informed about an espoused culture but the opposite is practiced, the risk of failure for the manager grows.

For the candidate, the process of interviewing should be directed at the hiring authority as much as they interview candidates. Any potential candidate should examine why they are interested in making a change to the organization and ask themselves the following questions: 'Does it appear that I would be a good fit for this organization based on their present needs?' 'How would my style of management be different from their most recent city manager, and, are they looking for more of the same or significant change?' 'How prepared am I to move away, establish new roots, and alter my approach if needed?' Part of the process of joining a new

organization will be coming to grips with letting go of familiar surroundings, old friends, and old ways of doing things.

City councils must be equally prepared before the process of recruiting and interviewing begins. In order to be effective in hiring the best city manager for their city, the elected officials must understand their collective culture, their collective vision, and their collective understanding of the role of the new manager in executing their agenda. City council members must be prepared to describe the nature of the current organization, and be clear on the skills and management type they think will be successful. This clarity will help candidates interpret for themselves if they would be good for the organization, and it will help the hiring authority screen candidates based on a set of criteria. It is important to keep in mind that the most important relationship for the city manager is the council. The council-manager relationship will ultimately have the greatest impact on the success or the manager. Establishing what the ideal candidate-council relationship will look like, will help identify the right person and set them up for success.

Newly appointed managers need to prepare themselves mentally for a flood of attention from the community, organization, and media. The new manager should be mindful of the type of first impression they will want to make. This will require developing an entry plan before the job ever begins which will involve further research on the organization and the important issues of the moment. Having a plan will help with the disorientation that comes from the new job. Early wins or successes involving simple issues or practices can help get the manager set an early good impression and should be part of the entry plan. There are times when significant or critical issues greet the new manager on the first day. The new manager should be prepared to use the whole organization to analyze the problem and move forward. This approach will give the manager an opportunity to collaborate, assess staff, and team build.

Important, yet not urgent, matters that involve significant changes to the organization should be left for a time when the organization is better understood by the manager. Those types of decisions need to be well-constructed and communicated and should be considered only after 6 months to a year have passed. The new manager and council should expect resistance, even bitterness, if too much change comes too soon. This time is better spent getting to know the organization by going deep into the layers or process, structure, and lines of authority.

The new manager should make a purposeful attempt to get to know everyone, spending time to ask questions and listening carefully to anyone who speaks. They should take good notes and then review the data, looking for emerging themes and tendencies. The new manager who demonstrates this interest will begin to establish the critical element of trust with the members of the organization and will be able to make decisions that reflect thoughtfulness and an in-depth understanding of the issues. During this trust-building phase it is important to keep track of all promises or statement of action being made. No follow-through from being over-committed, loosing-track, or changing positions on issues will result in loss of credibility and ultimately trust.

The council's most important role when the new manager arrives is to publically ordain the person as the head of the organization. Each community and council may have slightly different ways or rites of demonstrating that the new manager has arrived and is in command. The council should declare publicly, and in a unified voice, that they have complete confidence in the new manager. This message is most important for employees, as they will be looking for cues from the council as to the level of support of the new manager. Without this strong public support, doubts will linger as to the power the manager will have to take control of the position, make changes, and ultimately impact the organization.

Whenever a change occurs at the city manager position, the organization should strongly consider using a facilitator to assist with a socialization or onboarding process. The onboarding specialist can assist the council, new manager, and staff to uncover the social norms, critical issues, and expectations of the group. It is important for the new manager to understand how the council reacts to split votes, employee discipline, and citizen complaints. The manager will want to know how they should react in a council meeting if a decision the council is about to make would be a potential misstep that would come back to haunt them. Should the new manager speak up? Should the new manager quietly whisper into the mayor's ear, pass a note, or let it ride out and deal with it later? These seemingly simple points have the power to innocently cause embarrassment and status loss if not handled appropriately. A comprehensive onboarding and socialization process will help clarify simple and complex issues and practices which otherwise interfere with the manager's ability to be effective quickly. Leaving the manager on their own to 'discover' all of the social norms and practices, will likely cause delays and exposes the manager to unnecessary risks.

The organization should also strongly consider combining the onboarding process with a goal-setting session. Clear goals and objectives which will be used to judge the performance of the new manager will provide clarity to the new manager and their direct reports. The new manager will understand expectations, how they will be reviewed, and the norms of the organization. With these understandings, the manager can build more meaningful relationships with the council, community, and city personnel. At six and 12 months the manager should be reviewed in accordance with the parameters established during onboarding. The review period is an important opportunity to make any corrections if needed and to offer praise and support for a job well done.

A special case for any potential new manager and council to consider is the role of 'change-agent.' When the council is deliberately seeking an individual to change the culture or introduce some other significant change to the organization, more time and attention will be needed to clarify outcomes and potential pitfalls. Here the proper 'fit' for the position may be an individual very different than the previous manager and perhaps counter-culture. In this situation, the council and potential applicant should be aware of change expectations and what skills or approach would be best suited to that end. Significant change may leave the organization reeling with employees voicing-out complaints or leaving before the new culture takes hold. If the council suddenly shifts positions, the new manager may be left outside the circle and feeling vulnerable. Potential manager candidates would be advised to ensure strong support from the council exists upfront, with clear expectations, and a solid contract before accepting an appointment with potentially dangerous career consequences.

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## Appendix A Participant Recruitment Letter

[Date]

Dear City Manager

I am currently working on my dissertation to complete my doctorate degree in Organization Development at the University of St. Thomas. At this time, I am seeking to conduct interviews with City Managers/Administrators who have recently completed their first 300 days with a new city.

The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions new city managers have of their first 300 days on the job with a new community. I seek to elucidate the new managers' perceptions of their job effectiveness in those first 300 days on the job relative to their understanding of their duties, organization culture, and relationships. I believe that this study will be significant for the city management profession, the cities they serve, and all those doing the hiring of executives by gaining insights into the experiences managers have had adapting to their new environments while learning to become effective in their roles. This awareness can lead to better ways of introducing managers to a new work environment, which will help the manager and the organization adapt and perform more quickly. I hope this research can also help organizations and managers align expectations through a broader understanding of the manager's perceptions of his/her role in establishing and/or influencing the culture of the organization.

I am writing to ask your assistance by volunteering for an interview or in suggesting another for an interview to participate in this study. Potential participants must have recently completed 300 days as a newly appointed City Manager or Administrator with a community of at least 5,000.

If you participate in the study you will be asked to take part in a conversational interview conducted by me at a comfortable location that you select. You will be asked to talk about your experience as a city manager/administrator as you started in a new community. The interview will last between 1 to 2 hours. The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed for analysis purposes.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. There is no financial benefit. Should you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will not be used in the study.

Information that is collected as part of the study will be confidential and will be used in a manner that protects your privacy and identity. You will decide what experiences you want to share and you can stop an interview or observation at anytime. To minimize the risk that your identity will be recognized, I will use a pseudonym. In my dissertation and in any follow up reports that I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. As a participant in this study you will have the personal benefit of possible insights gained through reflection on your experience.

If you would like to be considered for participation in this study, please contact me by telephone, 651-338-2533 or e-mail, richardfursman@gmail.com. I am also available to answer any questions that you might have.

With gratitude,

Richard Fursman

Doctoral Candidate, University of St. Thomas

## Appendix B CONSENT FORM

### UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

#### The Lived Experience of the First 300 Days as a City Manager

IRB Log Number: 294139-1

I am conducting a study about the perceptions new city managers have of their first 300 days on the job with a new community. I seek to elucidate the new managers' perceptions of their job effectiveness in those first 300 days on the job relative to their understanding of their duties, organization culture, and relationships. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you have recently experienced your first 300 days as a city manager/administrator with a city of at least 5,000 population.

This study is being conducted by: Richard Fursman, a doctoral candidate in Organization Development at the University of St. Thomas.

#### **Background Information:**

This research focuses on the experiences of new city managers and administrators who are new to their current job. The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions new city managers have of their first 300 days on the job with a new community. I seek to elucidate the new managers' perceptions of their job effectiveness in those first 300 days on the job relative to their understanding of their duties, organization culture, and relationships. I believe that this study will be significant for the city management profession, the cities they serve, and all those doing the hiring of executives by gaining insights into the experiences managers have had adapting to their new environments while learning to become effective in their roles. This awareness can lead to better ways of introducing managers to a new work environment, which will help the manager and the organization adapt and perform more quickly. I hope this research can also help

organizations and managers align expectations through a broader understanding of the manager's perceptions of his/her role in establishing and/or influencing the culture of the organization.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to participate in a single interview (approximately 1-2 hours) conducted by me at a comfortable setting selected by you. This may be at your work-site, at a private office that I have access to, or at an alternative location suggested by you.

1. Give your permission to use an audio-tape to record our conversation during the interviews. The audio-tape will be transcribed for analysis purposes.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The process of interviewing could cause discomfort at times. I will work to minimize such occasions. You will decide what experiences that you want to share and you can stop the interview at any time. To minimize the risk that your identity will be recognized I will use a pseudonym. In my dissertation and in any follow up reports that I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way.

The information will be used to provide alternative insights and perspectives to assist in understanding the experience of managers entering a new job. Your exploration of your own experiences may lead you to a better understanding of yourself and your role as a manager.

There is no financial compensation for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:**

Precautions will be taken to maintain confidentiality and to protect the anonymity of the participants. All records of this study will be kept private. To protect your privacy, the transcript of your interview will not include your name. If I choose to use a transcriptionist, I will require them to sign a confidentiality agreement asking them to keep any responses transcribed

confidential. In my dissertation and in any follow up reports that I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you. On occasion, specific quotes will be used and attributed to an assigned fictitious name.

Paper research records and tape recordings will be kept in a locked file. Computer records will be password protected. Back up files will be stored on a portable storage device that will be kept in a locked file box. I am the only person who will have access to the records. The audio tapes will be erased within one month of the dissertation approval. Paper records will be destroyed within five years of the study publication.

### **Rights of the Participant**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. During the course of the study you have the right to end an interview at any time. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will not be used in the study. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas.

### **Contacts and Questions**

This study will be conducted by Richard Fursman, a doctoral student at the University of St. Thomas. If you have questions now, or if you have questions at anytime in the future, you may contact me at 651-338-2533. You may also contact my advisor, John Conbere at 651-962-4456, or the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in this study, to be audio-recorded during interviews, and to being observed in my work setting.

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Signature of Study Participant

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Date

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Signature of Researcher

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Date

## Appendix C – Data Analysis Form

## Transcript Analysis – Example: Interview with City Manager

Margin	Center Margin	Margin
Interesting or significant words or phrases	Body of Transcript	Emergent Themes

## Appendix D - Survey Instrument

### Demographics Information

1. What city do you work for?
2. What is the population?
3. How long have you been in this position?
4. How many similar positions have you held?
5. How many employees are there in this organization?
6. How many direct reports do you have?
7. Have you hired or recommended any hires?
8. How many elected officials do you report to?

### Interview Questions

1. I would like to explore what your experience was like during your first 300 days in this position. I will start with a high level reflective question and will follow up with clarifying questions as needed. What was your experience as a new city manager over your first 300 days and how did it feel?
2. How did you experience being effective as a city manager?

### **Probes as needed:**

How did you spend your time?

What were the high points?

What challenges did you face?

Can you describe an example?

What did you do to address these challenges?