



The Political- Administrative Dichotomy

NSFM Annual Fall Conference

What does
Dichotomy mean
anyway?

Traditional definition:

A division into two especially mutually exclusive or contradictory groups or entities; also : the process or practice of making such a division.

Are Council and Administrative roles divided ?

How are Councils and Administrators' roles divided?

How do they navigate together?

Political-Administrative Dichotomy

- ▶ Exists at all levels of government
- ▶ Strength of our system of responsible government
- ▶ It is a natural source of conflict
- ▶ Need political acuity to function and flourish in such an environment
- ▶ Political acuity can be learned and is an important competency for both staff and elected officials

Sound familiar?

- ▶ Door to door campaign is complete and you win the election!
- ▶ What did you hear at the door?
 - ▶ Too much or incompetent staff
 - ▶ Other council/councilors made terrible decisions!
 - ▶ Why are you wasting tax dollars on *insert issue here*
- ▶ I'm gonna change all of this!!!!!!
- ▶ Staff puts you through a training session, which felt more like some strange cult like brainwashing – I don't buy it! The people's needs should outweigh these 'professionals'.
- ▶ And the chasm begins to build.



Different Perspectives of Councillors and Staff

| | |
|--|--|
| Accountable to Electorate | Accountable to Council |
| (Possible) concern for re-election | Allegiance to professional principles and policy |
| Priorities may vary depending on community wants and needs | Priority is evidenced-based decision making and solid guidance |
| Four-year term | Career |
| Sensitivity to local culture | Focus on rational, professional values |

Similar perspectives of Councilors and staff

Passion for community development

Passion for community development

Listen to understand and find ways to do better work.

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Support projects and priorities that sustain and grow the community and economy

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Protect tax increases and control costs while providing great service.

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Protect safety and security of our citizens

Protect safety and security of our citizens

Council

- ▶ Represents community
- ▶ Choose best policy for community, reflective of community values
- ▶ Broad oversight of its implementation
- ▶ Council is not structured to directly manage policy implementation





Examples of political activities

- ▶ Setting the annual property tax rates and approving the annual budget.
- ▶ Approve the creation of a new staff position - evaluation of CAO
- ▶ Creation of various policy supporting council's intentions and vision for their community.
- ▶ Council, represented by its Warden/Mayor, speaks on any political matter (we are building a new administrative building to meet the accessibility needs of our constituents).
- ▶ Setting the strategic vision and objectives of their community.

- ▶ Preparation of the annual budget
- ▶ Hiring and termination of staff - staff evaluations and coaching
- ▶ Implementing and ensuring Council policy is being followed, make recommendations for amendments when appropriate.
- ▶ Staff, led by their CAO, speaks only on administrative matters. (the building will cost 4.2 million and will be funded through capital reserves).
- ▶ Executing the strategic priorities as set by Council.

Examples of Administrative activities

How do we deal with the grey?



Example - Staff regularly addresses dissatisfaction of their CAO to a Councillor without discussing directly with CAO.

As a Councilor, what do you do?



Example - Council passes a Grants Policy and then once staff have come up with recommendation, it isn't what Council thought that the policy would deliver. They do not agree to the outcome.

As staff, what do you do?

How do we deal with the grey?



Example: One Councillor with strong opinions continually seems to get their views disproportionately reflected in staff reports, for better or worse.

As a Council or, what do you do?



Example: A procurement outcome results in business being taken from a local company. Council wants to backtrack and interfere in the process.

As staff, what do you do?

How do we deal with the grey?



Example: A Councillor attempts to interfere with a building permit application for a resident in their community

As staff, what do you do?





Council or councilors overstep their role and risk dissention when they:

- ▶ Openly criticize municipal staff or their only staff, the CAO in public forum.
- ▶ Instruct the staff directly on any matter, or secretly have inappropriate conversations with staff without the direct knowledge of the CAO.
- ▶ Ignore professional legal, engineering advice replacing it with what is politically expedient.
- ▶ Promise action in their community without following a council motion or policy.
- ▶ Review invoices prior to a cheque run and approving the disbursements at the Council table.

Council or councilors overstep their role and risk dissention when they:

- ▶ Believe that their individual opinion overrides the will of council or professional advice, or somehow represents the will of all your electorate.
- ▶ Fail to listen and work with their teammates, either elected or appointed, as they too represent the will of the community.
- ▶ Prefer to drop surprises to CAO or staff to catch them off-guard rather than respect their need to take time to analyze.

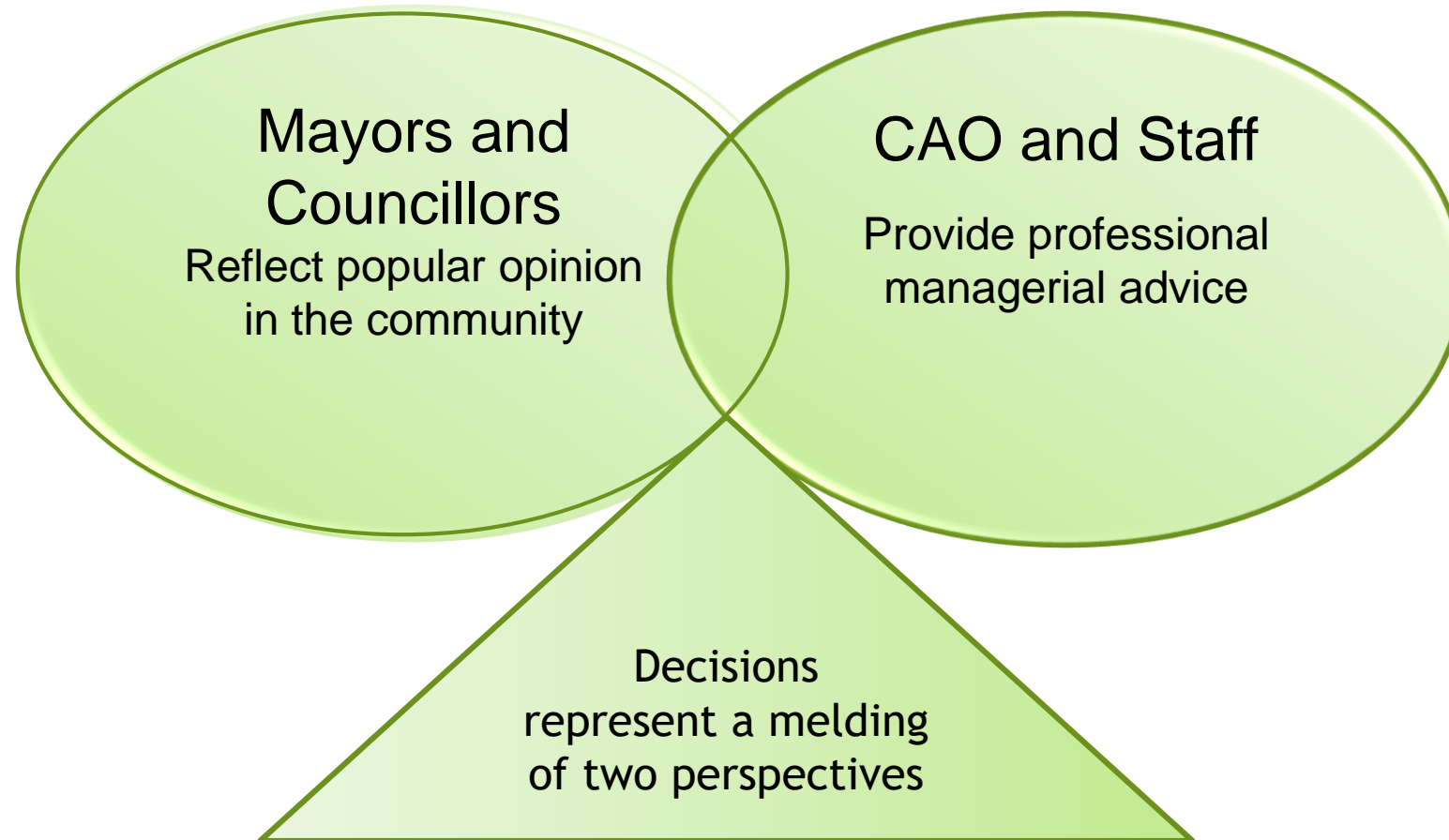
CAO and/or staff overstep their role or risk dissention when they:

- ▶ Make political statements in a public forum, social media etc.. Or openly malign the decisions made by Council.
- ▶ Act outside of policy (ie procurement authority) as it is administratively expedient.
- ▶ Ignore their duty to inform Council and provide professional advice, act on their own to push their own agenda.
- ▶ Meet with other political leaders without the permission or inclusion of their political leadership.

CAO and/or staff overstep their role or risk dissention when they:

- ▶ Favour certain Councillor's opinions disproportionately rather than respect the attitude of the whole.
- ▶ Fail to respect the will of Council as the will of the community.
- ▶ Devalue local knowledge and the sensitive and difficult work required of public figures.
- ▶ Assume that Councillors care more about re-election than the long-term good of the community.
- ▶ Risk professional credibility by wading into political discussion.
- ▶ Attempt to evaluate or gauge political temperature of Councillor/Council as their primary perspective.
- ▶ Catch Councillors or Council by surprise.

Balancing the Political and the Professional





Ten Rules of the Road

1. Treat All Council Members Equally

- ▶ Avoid favoritism
- ▶ All councilors should be treated equally regardless of differences in experience and abilities
- ▶ Treat council as a collective decision-making body not as a collection of individuals
- ▶ Close working relationship between CAO and Mayor/Warden as leader of council



2. Keep Politics and Management Separate

- ▶ Policy decisions are council's business
- ▶ Management is management's business
- ▶ Staff must respect democracy
- ▶ Council must respect professional management
- ▶ What you call me, tells me what you think of me
 - ▶ Elected representatives rather than politicians
 - ▶ Title or staff rather than bureaucrats
 - ▶ Drop the labels! We are in the same boat!

3. Elected Representatives Represent the Whole Community

- ▶ Do the very best to represent your constituents BUT seek to understand the needs of the municipality as a whole
- ▶ Consider the broad community including people who have not yet been heard, as well as, future citizens



4. Ensure there are No Surprises

- ▶ When you look good-we look good
- ▶ Don't make important policy decision in a vacuum or on the fly in response to a public delegation's request or complaint
- ▶ A Councillor should never say "I've spoken to staff and they agree with me". Poison!
- ▶ While staff should leave public debate to councilors, they should not leave them exposed.
- ▶ Staff should not argue with a councillor, but they will assist in ensuring that a draft resolution has no obvious flaws or inaccuracies. Staff members need to implement whatever council authorizes



5. Don't Air Dirty Laundry in Public

- ▶ No one wants to hear acrimonious debate and personal attacks- reflects poorly on council and the municipality
- ▶ Limits to what councilors can accuse staff of
- ▶ Councillor should never accuse staff of
 - ▶ stupidity
 - ▶ unethical behavior
 - ▶ Incompetence
- ▶ Can we focus on civility please!

6. Don't Waste Councillors' Time



- ▶ Staff presentations should give enough information for council to make evidenced-based decisions but there is a balance between enough and too much information
- ▶ Late evening decisions are often not good decisions
- ▶ Follow good decision-making principles
- ▶ Allow appropriate time for Council to be informed - any decisions shouldn't be left to the last minute.
- ▶ Public process should not impede or exhaust decision making

7. Make Good Use of Staff Time and Talent

- ▶ Where possible - avoid temptation to defer or refer back for a staff report if it's not necessary
 - ▶ Every staff report cost taxpayers' money and takes staff away from some other issue
- ▶ If council knows it's not going to agree to some demand, it should have the courage to act.



8. Pass the Ball to the Public Figures

- Public figure as a champion and/or spokesperson
- Staff comment publicly on technical information only
- Elected representatives should be seen as being in charge by the public



9. Ensure Respect

- ▶ Climate of mutual respect
- ▶ Respect for:
 - ▶ Each others intelligence
 - ▶ Professionalism
 - ▶ The public office
 - ▶ The challenges each faces
 - ▶ That both elected and staff are trying to serve the best interests of their community and citizens



10. Respect the Chain of Command

- ▶ While the CAO is the only true employee of Council. Council should be aware of who's in charge of what
- ▶ While councillors do not direct individual department heads it doesn't mean they can't have a relationship with staff.

