

The Question of a County Administrator

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Joe Mareane, Tompkins County Administrator
Cortland County League of Women Voters
July 14, 2016

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(From the perspective of a County Administrator)

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The Underlying Premise

- Counties are highly complex businesses
 - Services range from snow plowing to mental health care to jails to economic assistance
 - Intricate revenue streams
 - Complex civil service and union rules
 - Hundreds of millions of dollars in activity
 - Regulators on “gotcha” patrol
 - Public demands for accountability and performance
 - Conflicting priorities within organization

The Underlying Premise

- Example: Tompkins County
 - \$170 million budget
 - 719 employees in four unions
 - 27 departments (competing for resources)
 - 3 major sponsored agencies (TC3, Library, CCE)
 - 476 contracts with agencies, vendors, other governments
 - 257 sources of revenue

The Question

- Does this complexity warrant a transfer of authority from a legislature to a full-time, well-paid, professional manager?

Or

- Can executive management be performed by smart, engaged legislators and responsive department heads?

Typical Role of the Administrator



Typical Role of
the
Administrator

Nexus between
Legislature and
Departments

Typical Role of
the
Administrator

—

Nexus between
Legislature and
Departments

Primary point of contact
between legislature and
department heads and
staff

Typical Role of
the
Administrator

—

Nexus between
Legislature and
Departments

Communicates
legislature's policies and
priorities to organization

Typical Role of
the
Administrator

Nexus between
Legislature and
Departments

Communicates
organization's issues and
proposals to legislature

Typical Role of
the
Administrator

—

Nexus between
Legislature and
Departments

Hires and fires
department heads, with
consent of legislature

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



Nexus between
Legislature and
Departments

Conducts regular
performance reviews of
department heads

Typical Role of the Administrator



Advisor

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



Advisor

Advises legislature on
technical aspects of
operations

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



Advisor

Identifies and analyzes
policy options, does
research, follows-up on
questions, facilitates
discussions and decisions

Typical Role of the Administrator



Budget
Manager

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



Budget
Manager

Prepares annual capital
and operating budget
that reflects Legislature's
priorities

Typical Role of
the
Administrator

Budget
Manager

Advises Legislature about
budget options and
impacts

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



Budget
Manager

Monitors and manages
the budget during the
year

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



Budget
Manager

Proposes measures to
maintain fiscal balance

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



Budget
Manager

Plans--looks down the
road for trends, threats,
opportunities

Typical Role of
the
Administrator

—

General
Manager

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



General
Manager

Runs the business of
government

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



General
Manager

Manages the managers

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



General
Manager

Establishes
accountabilities

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



General
Manager

Establishes performance
metrics

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



General
Manager

Looks across
departmental lines for
efficiencies and
“synergies”

Typical Role of
the
Administrator

General
Manager

Encourages and facilitates
excellence and innovation

Typical Role of the Administrator



Negotiator

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



Negotiator

Participates in labor
negotiations

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



Negotiator

Participates in major
project and contract
negotiations

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



Negotiator

Facilitates resolution of
inter-departmental
conflicts

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



Communicator

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



Communicator

When legislature defers,
communicate with public
and media

Typical Role of the Administrator



Intergovernmental
Liaison

Typical Role of
the
Administrator

Intergovernmental
Liaison

Day-to-day contact and
coordination with other
governments

Typical Role of the Administrator



Perspective

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



Perspective

Helps organization look
beyond the short-term

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



Perspective

Provides countywide and
organization-wide
perspective to decision-
making

Typical Role of
the
Administrator



Perspective

Positioned to balance
competing interests

Typical Role of
the
Administrator

Single Point of
Accountability

Typical Role of
the
Administrator

Single Point of
Accountability

The one person the
Legislature can hold
accountable for
organizational performance

Without Manager

- Nexus with department heads
- Budget manager
- General manager
- Negotiator
- Communicator
- Intergovernmental liaison
- Broad perspective
- Single point of accountability

Without
Manager

- General manager
- Broad perspective
- Single point of accountability

Why not to
have an
Administrator



Why not to
have an
Administrator

—

Cost

Why not to
have an
Administrator

Cost

Salary of \$100,000+

Fringes of \$50,000+

Staff and technological
support as needed

Why not to
have an
Administrator



Conflicting
agenda

Why not to
have an
Administrator



Conflicting
agenda

Possibility of Administrator
having his/her own agenda
that conflicts with
Legislature's

Why not to
have an
Administrator



Conflicting
agenda

Easy to forget who's working
for whom

Why not to
have an
Administrator



Distance

Why not to
have an
Administrator



Distance

Greater distance between
legislators and
department heads and
staff

Why not to
have an
Administrator



Distance

Diminished ability of
legislators to influence
operations and decisions

Why not to
have an
Administrator



Loyalties

Why not to
have an
Administrator



Loyalties

Diminished allegiance
between committee
chairs and department
heads

Why not to
have an
Administrator



Loyalties

Departmental
responsiveness to
legislative requests or
directives could be
impacted

Why not to
have an
Administrator



Engagement

Why not to
have an
Administrator



Engagement

Less involved legislators
could mean less engaged
legislators

Ground Rules

Finding a Balance

- Communication between Administrator and Legislature is key
- Administrator must accept primacy of Legislature – understand bounds of position
- Legislature can't micro-manage, and should work through Administrator

Ground Rules

Finding a Balance

- Elected officials are public face and voice of the County
- Administrator can't play sides
- Hiring and firing by Administrator, with consent of Legislature

Ground Rules



Finding a Balance

- Present Legislature with options, not “done deal”
- Administrator must accept responsibility for performance of the organization

Summary

- Counties are incredibly complex businesses
- A full-time, well-trained, professional manager can help maximize efficiency and effectiveness
- An administrator can be particularly helpful in:
 - Managing managers
 - Articulating legislative policies and priorities

Summary

- Making decisions based on a broad, balanced organizational perspective
- Focusing accountability that would otherwise be diffused

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Administrator)