

Near the Top: Understanding Gender Imbalance in Local Government Management

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Overview

- Background
- Research Question and Method
- Patterns of Comments
- Rewards of Local Government Management
- To Pursue (or not) the Job
- Cornerstones of Career Advancement
- Gender and Racial Dynamics in Local Government Management
- Moving Forward

Research Question and Method

- What career patterns and experiences shed light on gender imbalance in local government management?
- Near the Top Advisory Committee
 - Angel Wright-Lanier, Deputy Manager, City of Mooresville, NC
 - Ashley Jacobs, Assistant Administrator, Aiken County, SC, and President of the League of Women in Government
 - Bonnie Svrcek, Manager, Lynchburg, VA
 - Kendra Stewart, Professor, College of Charleston
 - Kristen Wyatt, Executive Director, ELGL
 - Pam Antil, CAO, League of Women in Government
 - Renee Paschal, Manager, Chatham County, NC

Research Question and Method

- What career patterns and experiences shed light on gender imbalance in local government management?
- Interview questions designed with input from ICMA and Near the Top Advisory Committee
- Interview candidates identified by research team, advisory board & ICMA staff

Research Question and Method

- 37 interviews with managers/assistants from cities & counties across the nation
 - 6 men of color
 - 46 percent were people of color
- Many came up through budget offices
- Southeast (n=19), West Coast (7), Midwest (6), Northeast (n=4), Canada (1)
- Interviews professionally transcribed and coded in MaxQDA

Patterns of Comments

- Rewards of Local Government Management
- To Pursue (or Not) the Job
- Cornerstones of Career Advancement
- Gender and Racial Dynamics
- Moving Forward

The Rewards of Local Government Management

- Service to community
- Immediate impact of work
- Improving lives

These are same motivations thought to draw women to nonprofit



To Pursue (or Not Pursue) the Job

- Diversity and Inclusion
 - Organizational diversity, particularly in leadership
 - Community diversity and cultural opportunities
- Personal Fit
 - Political values
 - Organizational values (transparency, community engagement)
- Work-Life Balance
 - Disproportionate caregiving makes it a harder career choice for some women
 - Not mentioned by men (one who referred to his wife as “single mom”)

To Pursue (or Not Pursue) the Job

And so, that is very challenging in this position, when you know, I've got like thirteen evening meetings a month. My kids are grown and gone and I'm an empty nester now, but to do that when you're, to be in a management position, it requires so many off-hour meetings, and to be a parent, I just can't drop everything and go get a kid that's puking at school. So, that I think, is the biggest, biggest hurdle. You have to have a very strong support system at home and a husband that can be flexible, because if you don't, and I certainly don't know how a single parent could do this job.



Cornerstones of Career Advancement: Mobility, Mentors and Networks

- Mobility
 - Required for job advancement
 - Challenging for people with families
- Mentors
 - Interviewees named mentors, profiled their influence in detail
- Networks
 - Professional conferences
 - Affinity organizations (NFBPA, League of Women in Government, ELGL)

Cornerstones of Career Advancement: Mobility, Mentors and Networks

That was the first time that I saw myself in the field of local government management and to find myself as a grad student at a conference surrounded by black men and women that were doing amazing things as local government professionals. Not everyone was a city manager, lots of positions from line positions all the way up to city manager, but they were all there and engaged with one another and committed to each other's success, and for the first time I saw myself in the field and became very excited about the field.



Gender and Racial Dynamics in Local Government Management

- Few interviewees could report no racial or gender dynamics affecting them

I'm one of those, and I guess I've been fortunate in that I haven't really run up against any of the stereotypes and discrimination that a lot of women do, or maybe, I just don't take it as discrimination. You know, I look at it as I've got a job to do whether I'm female or whether I'm male, and I just do my job. And yes, there's not a lot of us around. There's far more than there used to be, and sometimes, I'm like, "Good grief. Will they just give it a break," you know? ... Sometimes, we discriminate against ourselves, because we're women, or because we're black, or because we're Hispanic, or because we're Asian. But, the sooner all of us accept that we're managers, and we all have the same job to do, I think we're going to be a whole lot better off.

Gender and Racial Dynamics in Local Government Management

- Being the Only
- Stereotyping
- Social Exclusion
- Racial Dynamics

Being the Only

- Being the only woman or person of color in the room
- Can challenge integration into local government management groups
- Can be isolating and uncomfortable
- Increases sense of scrutiny and need to demonstrate competence
- Supported by research on “tokens”, creates heightened visibility and performance pressures (Kanter 1977)



Being the Only

✓ **CHECK**

✓ **CHECKED**

✓ **RECHECK**

I would say not so much with race as more so in gender that there are things that I had to make certain that any work or project that I worked on that I double-checked, I triple-checked, that I was at least 10 times better to make certain that when I spoke that I knew exactly what it was that I was talking about or chose maybe not to speak on the subject if I wasn't well versed, because I knew that at any given point and any given time more than likely I would be up against or compared to a male counterpoint and more often than not it was a white male counterpart.



Stereotyping

- Stereotyping and the behavior it produces
 - Surprise when others discover manager's status
 - Requests to take on subservient roles (make copies, coffee, being mistaken for a waiter)
 - Being asked about childcare
- Reinforces outsider status
- Similar trends report in research on other male-dominated professions (law enforcement, firefighting, piloting)

Stereotyping

I have made coffee for people just to teach them that they don't want me to make coffee for them... You're going to go and make another pot, because you're going to hate it. And I worked in a restaurant, so I actually do know how to make coffee. If I can make these requests work for my purposes, like being the secretary of something means the record's going to say what I want it to say, then yes.



Social Exclusion



- Exclusion from social networking opportunities
- Language of exclusion
- These patterns consistent with research on women/people of color having less access to social networks than their white male counterparts

Social Exclusion



... at a meeting where I convened a bunch of men to talk about a big problem we're having related to the organization and running waste water and got up and the other senior man, I won't say who it is, got up and said, "Thank you, gentlemen." And I thought really? Are you serious? Really?

Social Exclusion

And all of the sudden the chancellor was inviting my planning director and my development director to dinner parties or Christmas parties. So, I had to tell a high-ranking female I knew at the university, "Look it's not that I'm dying to go to these things. But, from a protocol standpoint, my staff shouldn't get invited to things at the president's house that I don't get invited to."



Racial Dynamics

- Blatant racial commentaries in online news items featuring them;
- Witnessing racial (and sometimes racist) dynamics on elected boards;
- Turning in a wallet to police in a white neighborhood, only to be asked by an officer how much money he had taken out of the wallet;
- Being told by a caller that he wants someone who speaks English
- A community partner asks a manager if he ever considered changing his non-American name;
- A manager being shown a picture of all white men in his office and being told, “These were the good old days.”

Race creates an additional layer of challenge for local government managers

Moving Forward

- Connection between this research and budget office?