

City Managers Conference Session:  
“Pitfalls to Avoid in the City  
Management Profession”

February 7, 2020

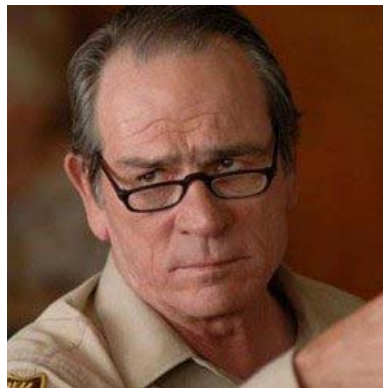
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The Centre for Organization Effectiveness

Discussing an “Undiscussable”



## Presentation Outline

- Why This Matters So Much
- Current Context
- Current Structural Arrangements
- Current Mindsets: Professional and Personal
- Blind Spots
- Red Flags
- Antidotes
- Closing Comments



Variables



## Why this Matters So Much



## A Reminder re Complexity

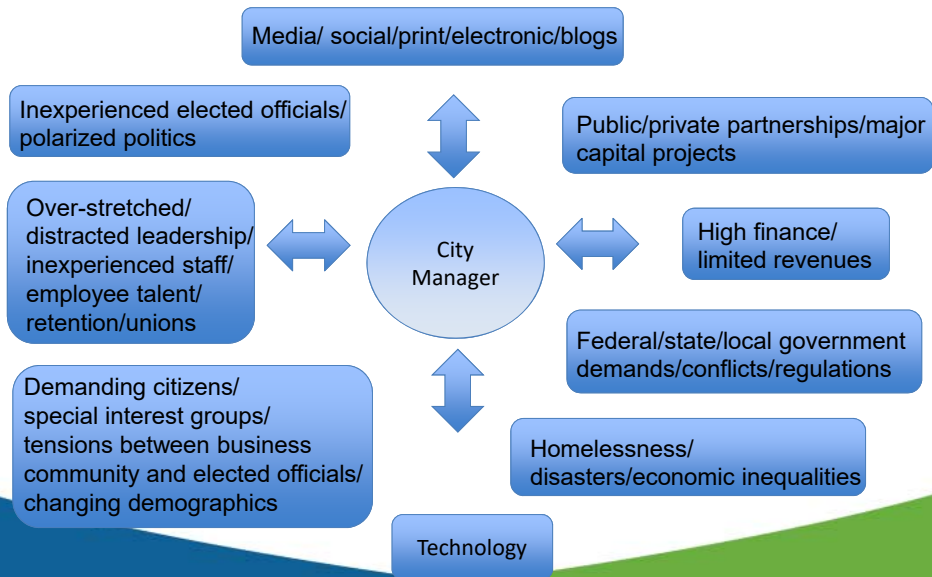
This is a “VUCA” World\*:

- Volatile
- Uncertain
- Complex
- Ambiguous

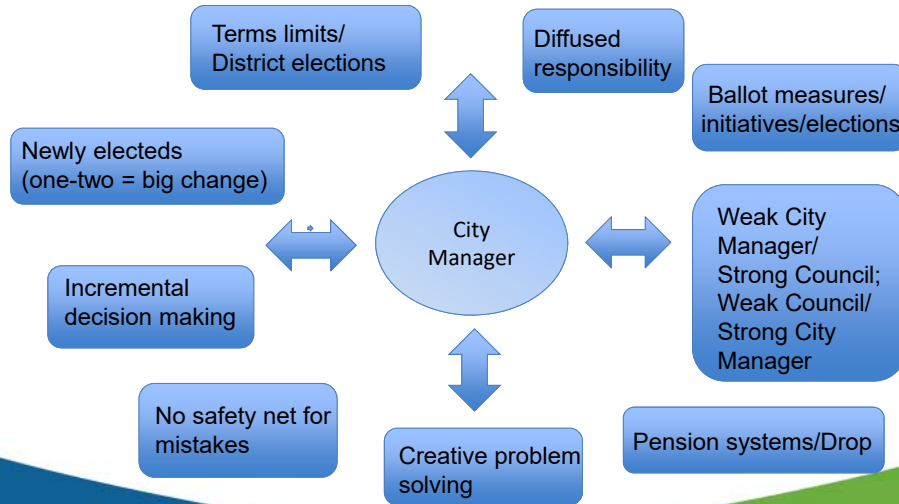


\*ICMA, 2012

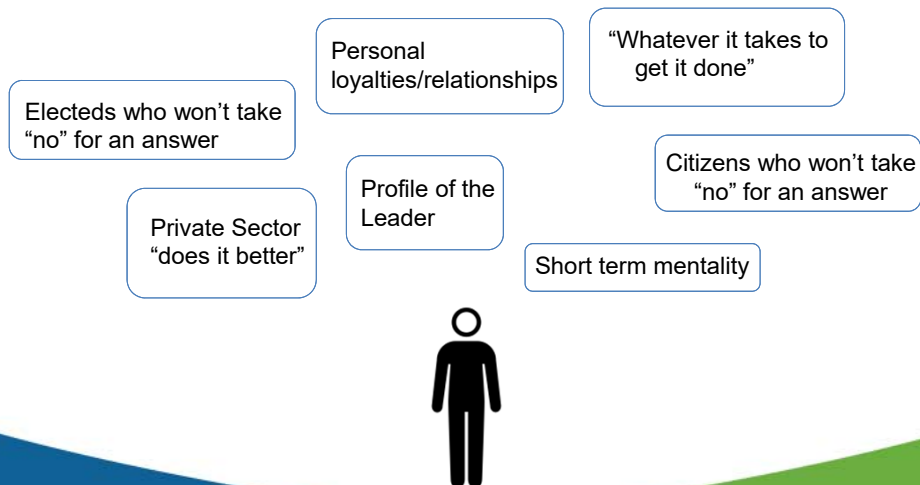
## Current Context



## Current Structural Arrangements



## Current Mindsets: Professional



## Current Mindsets: Personal

Highest  
One Year;  
Drop

Cool Projects;  
"still having  
fun"

"Undisciplined  
pursuit of more"

Denial of  
risk and  
peril

Inability to  
imagine the  
perspective  
of other  
interested  
parties

Degree of  
sophistication  
about how  
organizations work

Staying/  
Waiting  
too long



## Blind Spots



Hubris Born of Success



## Blind Spots (cont'd)



### Moral Hypocrisy/Double Standard



## Blind Spots (cont'd)



### Ethical Fading



## Blind Spots (cont'd)



### The "Want" Takes Over



## Blind Spots (cont'd)



### Ethical Spinning



## Blind Spots (cont'd)



**“...individuals feel a greater license to engage in questionable behavior after having engaged in worthy behavior.”** (Bazerman and Tenbrunsel, 2011)

**Johari Window**

	Known to self	Not known to self
Known to others	Arena	Blind Spot
Not Known to Others	Façade	Unknown

## Perceptions of One's Own Ethicality

**“Are You As Ethical As You Think You Are?”**



“I should behave ethically,  
Therefore I will”

“I should have behaved ethically,  
therefore, I did.”

**PREDICTION**

**RECOLLECTION**

**Should**

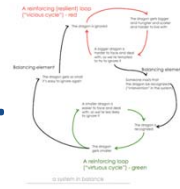
**Want**

**DECISION TIME**

“I don't see the ethical implications of this decision,  
so I do what I want to do”



## It is the Interplay...



“I’ve concluded there are more ways to fall than to become great”.

Jim Collins, author of **Why the Mighty Fall: And Why Companies Never Give In**, 2009.

Some

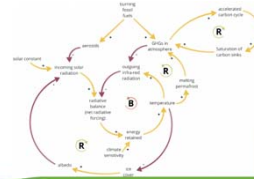
## RED FLAGS



## Red Flags



- The language you use
- Really cool project; legacy; highest one year
- Incurring downside risk; high infrequent/high risk/low skill
- “Undisciplined pursuit of more”



## Red Flags



- Not learning anymore
- Doing battle with an Elected Official
- Changes that matter in the “**Current Context**”;  
“**Current Structural Arrangements**”
- Externalizing blame



## Red Flags (cont'd)



- Erosion of healthy debate and dialogue



- Inexperienced staff



- “Unconsciously” competent







## ANTIDOTES



## Antidotes



- Create mechanisms 
- Understand the “bank account” 
- Think several steps down the road 
- Create a “devil’s advocate” role
  - Team must discuss “undiscussables” 

## Antidotes (cont’d)



- Time/System One decision-making; System Two decision-making; outside feedback



- Manage your reaction to ambiguity
- “Blameworthy” continuum

## “Blameworthy” Continuum

A Spectrum of Reasons for Mistakes

(not all mistakes are equal):

Blameworthy ----- Praiseworthy

Deviance			Uncertainty	Exploratory
Inattention	Lack of Ability	Task Challenge	Hypothesis Testing	Testing
	Process Inadequacy	Process Complexity		

## Antidotes (cont'd)

- Reframe issue(s) broader; partner with City Council/Board of Supervisors
- Anticipate the “want” self
- Identify **hidden**, but powerful, values
- Exit gracefully; make it a project



## A Word of Caution to Elected Officials



## Closing Comments



## What Will the 90 Year Old You Say to You?

## References

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- Trevino, L. and Nelson, K., **Managing Business Ethics: Straight Talk About How to Do it Right**, 7th Edition, 2017
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