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UNDERSTANDING THE WORK OF THE CITY MANAGER

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UNDERSTANDING THE WORK OF THE CITY MANAGER

ABSTRACT

The managerial behaviour approach to understanding managerial work has developed from research over the course of fifty years. The approach represents a marked departure from mainstream (and still prevalent) management approaches that depict management as a set of general composite functions. The managerial behaviour approach is distinctive in its empirical research background, object, focus and methodology. Its objective is to provide the simple answer to the complex question: what do managers do? However, the emphasis in the studies on managerial behaviour represents a limitation in so far as a context for locating and judging that behaviour is largely absent (Hales, 1986). This paper presents the results of initial research into managers operating in a different and largely neglected context - city councils. The research uses Mintzberg's (1973) concept of behavioural roles as an analytical tool to explain and understand what city managers do. This study assesses whether these roles adequately capture the important features of managerial work in the city council. It is argued that while Mintzberg's role framework is useful, structured observation alone does not adequately address the complexities of environments and styles of managers or the cognitive processes of managers. However, by integrating this approach with an appreciation of context and cognitive processes and how they can influence or affect managerial behaviour, we develop a more realistic description of what managers actually do and why they do it.

UNDERSTANDING THE WORK OF THE CITY MANAGER

“We know more about the motives, habits and most intimate arcane of the primitive peoples of New Guinea or elsewhere than we do of the denizens of the executive suites in Unilever House.”

(Lewis and Stewart, 1958)

Introduction

The above quotation reflects the rationale of the management behaviouralists, an umbrella term used for a set of scholars who, from the 1950's set out to counteract mainstream approaches to management studies. Classical works dating from Fayol (1916) presented managerial work as a set of detached conceptualisations, through to Gulick's (1937) famous 'PODSCORB' (planning, organising, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting and budgeting). Moreover, this approach continues to dominate writings on managerial work to the present day. Its critics argue that in spite of the plethora of management literature available, we still know very little about what the manager actually does. The managerial behaviourists posit that the notion of PODSCORB consists of speculation regarding what managers and their subordinates say they do, could do or should do. At best, they indicate some vague objectives managers have when they work. Relatively little of this information is based on what managers or executives actually do: “If you ask a manager what he does, he will most likely tell you that he plans, organises, coordinates and controls. Then watch what he does. Don't be surprised if you can't relate what he does to those four words” (Mintzberg, 1973).

While the managerial behaviouralists lament that we know relatively little about the work of the manager, we know even less about the work of the city manager. The fact that the world's population is becoming increasingly urban makes cities an exciting and dynamic area to study. Equally so their key actors, although they have not received commensurate academic scrutiny. Central and local governments face the problem of coping with increasing demands and rapid

change while living within tight budget and resource constraints. As a result, Mintzberg and Bourgault (2000) contend that never before have the expectations of public sector management been so high. As the performance of the state apparatus is monitored and held to a very high standard, the role of the public sector managers has become more complicated. They are asked to manage in the style of the private sector whilst respecting the traditional values of the public sector while their performance is evaluated daily by politicians, the public and the media. And unlike their private sector counterparts, public sector managers must manage in a very public manner before the very eyes of their critics.

Theoretical, conceptual and empirical accounts from the managerial behaviour approach inform a study of senior managers in the public sector and offer methods and concepts for studying new managerial roles. A number of classical studies provide the foundation for the managerial behaviour approach, namely Carlson (1951), Sayles (1964), Stewart (1967, 1976, 1982) and Mintzberg (1968, 1973). Carlson (1951) developed the diary method to study the work characteristics of nine managing directors, whereby each kept a detailed log of his activities. Stewart (1967) describes the study of 160 top and middle managers of British companies over four weeks with particular attention given to differences in their work. Sayles (1964) studied the work content of middle and lower level managers in a large American corporation using a method he termed 'anthropological'. Mintzberg's (1973) study involved the 'shadowing' of five CEO's of middle to large sized organisations. Using a method called 'structured observation', he recorded various aspects of every piece of mail and every verbal contact. The objective was to capture data on both work characteristics and job content.

Framework for analysis – Managerial Roles

In the managerial behaviour literature, 'roles' are used to label and interpret what managers do. Based on empirically grounded research, they operate at a more detailed level than the earlier classical functions of management such as PODSCORB. Many studies use Mintzberg's (1973) framework that identified ten roles to interpret behaviour in managerial work. When put together, these roles form a 'gestalt', a unified whole whose parts cannot be considered in isolation. Managers are invested with formal authority over an organisation or

one of its units. From formal authority comes status, which leads to various interpersonal relations, and from these comes access to information. Information in turn, enables the manager to make decisions and strategies for his unit. The manager's job can therefore be described in terms of 'roles' or organised set of behaviours identified with a position. They are interpersonal - figurehead, leader, liaison; informational - monitor, spokesman, disseminator; decisional - negotiator, entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator. Activity is described and recorded in terms of its purpose. Action leads to purpose which lead to roles (Dargie, 1998).

The usefulness of the framework is that it relates to actual behaviour. The evidence relies more on systematic evidence than findings by anecdotes. Moreover, the framework may be replicated. Different managerial behaviours can thus be compared. Furthermore findings from many studies support the general validity of Mintzberg's roles (Kurke and Aldrich 1979), and indicate that engaging in these role behaviours is related to managerial performance and organisational effectiveness criteria. It has also been found that the managerial level in the manager's functional area has strong effects on the extent to which each role was required on the job (Lau et al, 1980).

Theory and Context – Critiques and Ripostes:

Overall, as a body of work, the managerial behaviour approach has been criticised for ignoring both theory and context (Fondas and Stewart 1994). First, its critics argue that it presents managerial work in terms of lists - that it is essentially taxonomy rather than theory. According to Bacharach (1989), a theory may be viewed as a system of constructs and variables in which the constructs are related to each other by propositions and the variables are related to each other by hypotheses. Even Mintzberg (2000) himself writes of his dissatisfaction with his own pioneering (1973) study, for a number of reasons including the fact that, like almost all other descriptions of managerial work, it consisted of "a decomposed list rather than an interactive model". He adds that perhaps "there can be no general theory of what managers do, only specific descriptions of what particular managers do in certain circumstances" (Mintzberg, 1991). Some researchers such as Van Maanen (1989) have stressed the need for more descriptive narratives about organisational life. Indeed

Mintzberg's (1973) work did *suggest* a theory of managerial roles since his approach went beyond simple reports of frequencies and moved towards a more qualitative/idiographic perspective describing not only the 'what' but also the 'why' of managerial work (Martinko and Gardner, 1985). Building on Carlson's (1951) study, Mintzberg's (1973) role framework derived from recorded activity but also sought to explain the *purpose* of that activity (in terms of roles).

Another problem as identified by Fondas and Stewart (1994) has been the limited development of this field: "despite apparent overlap, it is difficult to reconcile and integrate concepts from different studies". To countenance this, Hales (1986) suggests that role concepts could provide one theoretical framework for research: "the concept of role might be more systematically used as a framework of analysis, with a greater emphasis upon the inter-relation between expectation and performance". Fondas and Stewart (1994) suggest that since so many aspects of managerial work are accomplished by engaging in contact with others, then "the role perspective's promise lies in its utility as a theoretical framework for explicating how a manager affects and effects the expectations others, hold of his or her behaviour in the job".

Finally, the managerial behaviour approach has also been criticised for its contextual shortcomings (Noordegraaf and Stewart, 2000). The larger part of managerial behaviour studies focuses on commonalities of managerial work or the differences between managerial jobs. An explicit emphasis on how work or jobs *vary* has been largely absent. Noordegraaf and Stewart (2000) point out that "a more specific contextual shortcoming (of the approach) is the lack of attention for public sector embeddedness, at least by private sector-oriented management scholars". This is not to say that the public sector has been entirely neglected by the managerial behaviouralists.

Using Mintzberg's original role model, Lau et al (1980) selected public and private managers, focusing on the difference between managerial behaviour in the two sectors. Dargie (1998) applied the Mintzberg (1973) framework to two chief executives of large inner city councils and two chief executives of large inner city acute trust hospitals. Both studies found that public and private sector managers perform the same kinds of activities, both in terms of complexity of job content and characteristics, i.e. the fragmented, high pressure, quick reaction

nature of executive positions. The results also indicated that public sector managers clearly spent more of their time in crisis management and scheduled meetings than do private sector managers. In terms of Mintzberg's (1973) role framework, Dargie (1998) found that the roles of figurehead, entrepreneur, leader and liaison did not apply to the city council chief executives she studied. Finally, in a study of public sector managers, Mintzberg and Bourgault (2000) found that both private and public sectors "embrace similar management functions, but the context and constraints of each sector affect the managerial role and how it is performed". Not only that but public managers must manage "in a showcase, elaborate policies in a process exposed to public scrutiny".

Analysing city management - Inter-disciplinary perspectives:

Hales (1986) notes that the models of managerial work, which have guided the collection of and formed the framework for research data, have become more fluid in character, positing a contingent and processual relationship between the constituent variables, rather than a fixed and additive one. For the purposes of this study, a variety of research instruments stemming from the disciplines of managerial behaviour, urban and governmental studies (public administration and political science) are utilised to give us a useful perspective in terms of understanding the environment in which this central figure, the city manager operates. Whilst earlier studies sought to pin down the defining characteristics of managerial work, *in extenso*, this research forms part of the stream of general agreement that managerial work is contingent upon, *inter alia*: function, level, organisation and environment (Hales, 1986). Dargie (1998) contends that "studies of private sector managers offer methods and concepts for studying new managerial roles. Political science offers the special context of the public sector. What studies have failed to do is combine the two disciplines in order to understand what public managers do and why they do it". Many of the studies by public administration scholars are unquoted by researchers from a background in organisational behaviour. However, the nature of city management is distinctive, crossing different disciplines. Its analysis thus requires the consideration of other disciplines such as governmental and urban studies (See Fig. 1)

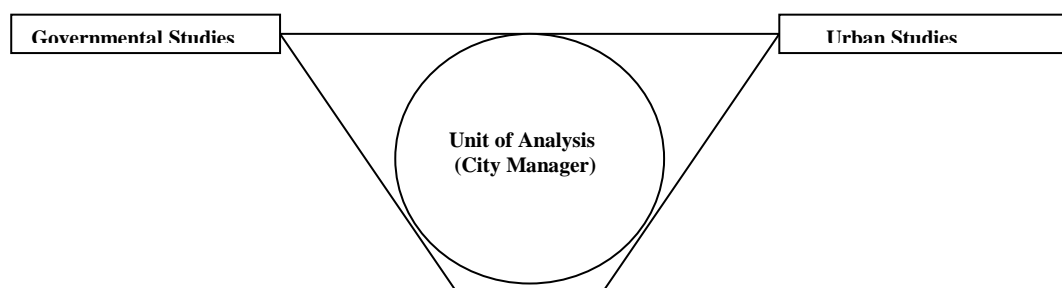


Fig. 1: Interdisciplinary Approach

The literature of new public management (NPM) is particularly pertinent in terms of understanding the context in which the public manager operates. Throughout the 1980's and 1990's, the private sector chief executive has been deemed an appropriate model for the public sector counterpart to emulate. Management was identified as the means by which the public sector could be transformed "from its staid bureaucratic paternalism...into a dynamic and effective series of organisations able to deliver 'value for money' services on a competitive basis" (Clarke and Newman, 1993).

The move to 'business the bureaucracy' has its roots in the neo-liberal reforms of the Thatcher and Reagan governments in the UK and the USA respectively. As part of their free-market policies, these governments undertook wholesale reform of the public sector including the introduction of a privatisation programme as part of a determination to instil a competitive spirit or an enterprise culture in an area now exposed to pressures from which it had been previously shielded. The theme underlying this change (also referred to as new public management) is one of governmental bureaucracy being outmoded and outdated and inferior to the ethos of managerialism with which the private sector was having so much success. New Public Management has gone furthest among the Anglophone countries of the UK, the USA, Canada and New Zealand and is increasingly taking root in all countries of the EU (Farnham et als, 1996). According to Noordegraaf and Stewart (2000): "both the new public management and public-private convergence legitimate a public sector orientation within the managerial behaviour approach".

In terms of understanding the work of the city manager, another trajectory – that of urban studies - may be integrated with those of governmental studies and managerial behaviour. The environment in which the city manager operates is distinctive and requires an engagement that structured observation alone does not provide. A better understanding of this environment can be provided by the use of research by those with a background in urban studies. Indeed within this discipline (and in direct contrast to the managerial behaviour literature), there has been a distinct emphasis on the environment rather than the individual actors within it. In this sense, this research also represents a contribution to the urban studies literature. Ward (1995) sees the study of local administration as the ‘missing link’ in the study of world cities. The processes of globalisation and urbanisation are inextricably linked. While globalisation certainly affects rural areas, global forces are central in cities. Knox (1995) recognises world cities as control points, as powerful centres of economic and cultural activity within the contemporary world system.

The process of globalisation brings to bear competitive pressures on cities and this has implications in terms of city management. There has been a shift in the policies of urban governments from administration to entrepreneurialism. The city is pressured to act like a business whilst retaining its core value of serving the public good. There has been a resultant shift from local government to local governance. The new role of local government is that of an enabler that forms strategic alliances and shares powers, responsibilities and resources with a wide range of non-elected statutory bodies and others operating in non-statutory sectors. The city manager is therefore a focal point, an interface in this context of change.

Research Methods:

The results of five case studies are presented and involve all five managers of Irish cities, namely Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford. Due to the distinctive nature of city managerial work and the indicated contextual critiques of the structured observation approach, a combination of primary and secondary research methods was used to collect data in the study. Firstly, through structured observation, Mintzberg’s (1973) role framework was used to classify and to analyse the actual nature of the work of the city manager. There was reluctance

on the part of all but one city manager to be 'shadowed'. Apart from the nuisance factor, one may speculate that this reluctance may itself tell us something about the work of the city manager. Unlike most private sector managers, their performance is already monitored in a very public manner, such as at council meetings. This shadowing or behavioural observation involved two days in the working life of the Limerick city manager. As Mintzberg (1973) found, one views the job 'as it happens'. The approach offers a combination of managerial behaviour techniques – the inductive power of observation coupled with the structure of systematic recording.

According to Martinko and Gardner (1985), a major failure of current structured observation methodologies is their inability to capture cognitive processes. They argue that "the intentions, expectations, attributions, and affective states of managers are an important part of what managers really do and structured observation, to this point, has not effectively investigated or described these processes" (Martinko and Gardner, 1985). Consequently, since it was felt that it was important to engage at a more sophisticated level with the unit of analysis than merely through structured observation, a semi-structured interview approach was also employed. Each of the five city managers was interviewed in their office for approximately one hour each. The interview approach employed Mintzberg's (1973) findings to ask the city managers if they thought that these findings applied to the management of cities as they did to business organisations. The city managers were all asked a set of additional questions pertaining to context and to the actual differences and/or similarities involved in running a city as opposed to a typical business organisation. The goal was to gain the thoughts, first hand of the city manager and to gain a deeper understanding of city managerial work in the changing context of globalisation and new public management.

Finally, a considerable amount of secondary data was used. Access to the city manager's work diaries was granted in all cases. Fifteen months worth of diaries were analysed, three months for each city manager. In addition, advantage was taken of the public access to bimonthly City Council meetings, where the city manager has a pivotal role. Twelve such meetings were attended in total, mostly in Cork due to proximity. Each meeting usually lasted approximately two hours

and the minutes of these meetings were also analysed. Consistent adherence was also paid to past and present Government reports concerning local government, particularly the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) and the Local Government Bill 2001.

Although this research focuses on Irish city managers, it forms a complete set rather than a sample study. A criticism of small sample studies is that they are not generalisable in a scientific sense. However, access to all of the incumbent Irish city managers was granted, thereby enabling a complete, and therefore generalisable understanding of Irish city management. Since the context of city management is addressed, to some degree this research also provides an understanding of city management in general.

Research Results - Understanding the Work of the City Manager:

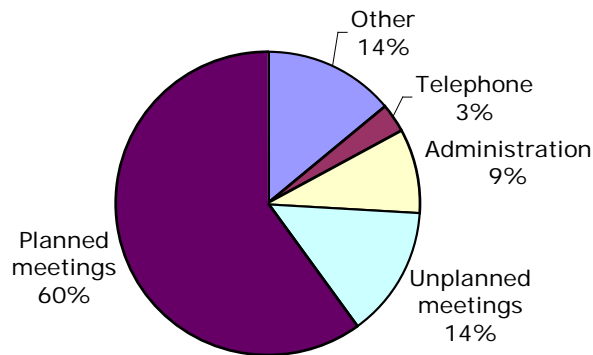
1. Characteristics and Contacts:

Mintzberg (1973) found that managers work at an unrelenting pace and that their activities are characterised by brevity, variety and discontinuity. Stewart (1967) found that managers spent little time alone in the office thinking. These findings ran contrary to the folklore that suggested the manager was an effective, systematic planner. Rather than operating from the top of an organisation, the manager operates from the centre of it. The same holds true for the city manager. Dublin city manager John Fitzgerald, points out that while there is a notion that the best managers are those who hang a sign on their door saying 'thinking – do not disturb me', in reality, he rarely gets to that stage. Over the course of two days spent shadowing the Limerick city manager, he spent only 40 minutes alone in his office. This time was spent reading relevant documentation and was interrupted by several phone-calls.

Data taken from shadowing, diary analysis and interviews confirms the hectic pace of city managerial work (See Fig. 2). Over the course of two days spent shadowing, the city manager attended eleven scheduled meetings. The majority of meetings were with groups (i.e. management team, Council meetings, range of statutory bodies) rather than individuals (although this did occur, mostly with city councillors). This is not to say that the systematic planning aspect has been

ignored. Rather, the city manager must incorporate this aspect into the day-to-day action or process of city management – or think his/her way through the day.

Fig.2 The City Manager's Week



The work of the city manager is demanding in nature and is characterised by brevity, variety and fragmentation. Although s/he has regular duties to perform, a larger part of the city manager's time is spent trying to move things and do things. As well as dealing with unexpected issues, local government encompasses many diverse and complex issues including housing, planning, waste, transport, water and economic development. In practice, and consistent with other research on managerial behaviour (Hales, 1986), city managers perform both specialist/technical and general/administrative work.

The ability to act independently and strategically is limited by the role of central government in local government affairs. While the city managers differed on the extent of this interference, all were agreed that the main issue for local government was one of under-funding. The big issue for local government is the lack of resources. Some 40 to 75 per cent of local authority funding comes from the State. Quinlivan (2002) points out that many local authorities do not know the amount of funding they will receive until very late in the preceding year and asks: "How are local authorities supposed to think strategically for the next 5, 10

or 20 years if they have no certainty about their funding from one year to the next?”

The manager’s own management team and city councillors are the people with whom the city manager has most contact (See Fig. 3). According to Collins (1987), local government managers display deference to elected representatives. “Most managers operate an open-door policy and are available to see councillors whenever they knock on the door” (Collins, 1987). Moreover, the level of public accountability through the council frequently exceeds that required under the law (Collins, 1987). The city manager spends between fifteen and twenty five per cent of his time meeting politicians. It would be surprising a private sector chief executive spent about a fifth of their time meeting their board or were so accessible to it. To be sure, the private sector chief executive meets with his or her board but is then usually left to get on with the job of administration or the management of the organisation.

Fig. 3: Whom the City Manager meets

<i>Whom:</i>	<i>Time Spent (%):</i>	<i>Whom:</i>	<i>Time Spent(%):</i>
Committees	9	Other Staff	8
Secretary	2	Councillors	20
Mayor	4	Central Government Reps	2
Unidentified	1	Senior Staff- Directors of Service	30

Yet while public sector management is encouraged to emulate the model of private sector management, its ability to do so is complicated by the representational system and traditional values of local government. In terms of making difficult or unpopular choices, the board of most private sector businesses or other public utilities are profit-driven and do not have to worry about re-election by the local population. In terms of private sector management, the three “E’s” of Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness are guiding principles. For local government, one may add Equity and Electability.

As traditional public sector values – such as representativeness, equality before the law, justice – are forced to compete with modern managerial values – such as

economy, efficiency, effectiveness – inevitable tensions arise. As a result, managerial autonomy is therefore more limited in the public sector. Managers must take into account the impact of their actions on public processes and products in terms of appropriateness, adequacy, justice, representation and participation. Noordegraaf and Stewart (2000) ask: “how do such tensions manifest themselves in the daily work of individual public managers?” The answer (at least for the city manager) would seem to be in the way s/he adapts her/his working style to suit these conditions - s/he must direct and guide rather than dominate (Mintzberg and Bourgault, 2000)”. Collins (1987) goes further in asserting that local government managers, as much as civil servants and other ‘administrators’ are politicians. “The manager must, however, be a better politician than the mayor because his leadership must be unobtrusive” (Collins, 1987).

2. Content - Use of Role Framework:

In this section, the application of roles as an analytical tool is assessed for city managers using the data from Figs. 1 - 4 and supporting evidence.

Fig. 4: What the City Manager does:

<i>Purpose:</i>	<i>Time Spent (%)</i>	<i>Purpose:</i>	<i>Time Spent:</i>
Informing	8	Query	0.5
Manager Request	3	Social	8
Review	30	Personal	0.2
Action Request	6	Appraisal	3
Strategy	32	Scheduling	0.5
Informal	7	Other/ Unidentified	1.8

A) Interpersonal Roles:

The city manager’s position provides a starting point for this analysis. This formal authority leads to a special position of status in the city council. From this formal authority and status come the three interpersonal roles. Contrary to Dargie’s (1998) findings, the interpersonal roles of liaison and particularly of leadership are applicable to Irish city managers. This indicates that context is

important in terms of applying the role framework in terms of understanding managerial work. Firstly, the Irish city manager has a significant liaison role. The liaison role deals with the significant web of relationships that the manager maintains with numerous individuals and groups outside the organisation that s/he heads. At a local level, the city manager is very much a public person – the centre of an economic, political and social network. Businesspeople, developers, councillors and other public figures are in regular contact with him/her.

Secondly, the role of leader is also relevant to the city manager, in terms of defining the atmosphere in which the organisation will work. To use Mintzberg's (1975) analogy, the folklore would suggest that the city manager is a neutral administrator and should in theory devote much of his time to policy implementation. While much of the manager's job is spent in this administrative capacity, this research suggests that the city manager in Ireland plays a pivotal leadership role, particularly in terms of policy formulation. Indeed in practice, local government managers are the actors on whom most of the burden of local policy innovation falls (Collins, 1987). New structures in place in Irish local government should alleviate the strategic input of the city manager, although they will still have a coordinating role as regards the running of Strategic Policy Committees (SPC's). The recently introduced system of SPC's brings in non-elected outside members to help initiate more strategic thinking and policy-making from councils.

Finally and somewhat interestingly in light of the prominence of the job, all city managers eschewed the role of figurehead. While evidence would suggest that the executive style mayor would identify with the role of figurehead (Loverdidge, 1971), in the Irish context this was perceived as a role reserved for the mayor or chairperson of the council. This evidence differs critically from Mintzberg's (1973) findings in his study of mostly private sector managers who did indeed see themselves as figureheads of their respective organisations. The introduction of directly elected mayors under the Local Government Act 2001 may therefore have interesting consequences in terms of the definition or the redefinition of roles and relationships of the mayor and the city manager, the figurehead and the leader of the organization.

B) Informational Roles:

The informational roles of monitor, information disseminator and spokesperson all applied to the city managers, the pivotal figure in city government with executive functions. This reflects two unique features of the manager's job – his/her unique access to external information and his/her all-embracing access to internal information. Neustadt's (1960) study found that as an apex of information, the President must become the director of his own central intelligence agency. In a similar vein, but in a local setting, the city manager is an information nerve centre within and without the city council.

As a monitor, the city manager processes the information s/he is bombarded with in order to inform him/herself about his/her organisation and its environment. As an information disseminator, the city manager transmits his/her information to others, with particular prominence given to the organisation's key set of influencers – the members. The Irish city manager is usually the lead person at Council meetings in contrast to the UK where the city manager is not permitted to speak at meetings. Interestingly, managers often report to their councils on the exercise of executive functions, even though this is not required. The role of spokesperson for the organisation is also relevant for the Irish city manager, in terms of transmitting information out to the organisation's environment.

C) Decisional Roles:

The city manager performs all of Mintzberg's decisional roles of entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator and negotiator. The city manager acts as a disturbance handler in dealing with involuntary situations and change that is partially beyond the manager's control. In the negotiator role, the city manager engages in a distinct type of decisional activity – negotiations with other organisations. The resource allocator role is also important. This role deals with choice-making activities and is perhaps best manifest in the annual budgetary process. The central role of the local government manager in the budgetary process is the key to his control of policy (Collins, 1987).

Once again, interesting differences emerged when compared to Dargie's (1998) findings. Contextual differences are again important to note here. In the UK, "chief executives in the public sector are constrained in their decision-making ability by authority and rule." In Ireland, city managers are assigned considerable

executive reserved functions. Dargie (1998) found that while they found the roles of negotiator, disturbance handler and resource allocator appropriate, “the public sector chief executives did not describe themselves as entrepreneurial.” In contrast the entrepreneurial role is relevant to all Irish city managers.

The entrepreneurial role of the city manager is developmental in nature and stems from the information-based enabling role of local government. The urban studies literature shows us that as a result of the related forces of globalisation and urbanisation, local authorities exert less direct control in a more complex and fragmented environment. Rather, the distinctive task is supportive and enabling in nature. “This enabling role involves the management of balance between a series of tensions which are intrinsic to the duality of the public domain. The role of the public sector manager is the role of counterpoise” (Ranson and Stewart, 1989). In practice, the city manager’s involvement is sought in an extensive range of economic and social activities.

In terms of understanding the work of the city manager, the developmental role, stems from this informational role of enabler. As Limerick city manager Brendan Keating points out: “the decisional role of entrepreneur may not adequately explain the economic and social development role which is an essential element of the job of the city manager. But in the local authority context there is very much a developmental role”. This role is derived from legislation which established local authorities as ‘development corporations’, responsible for the development of their areas and the provision of the necessary infrastructure (Collins, 1987). In the local government context, this is essentially a management function. Collins (1987) argues out that economic development is not an area in which councillors as a whole take an active interest.

The adjusted role framework for the study of the city manager, juxtaposed with Mintzberg’s (1973) framework is thus presented (see Fig.5).

Mintzberg’s model manager	Roles in Common	City Manager
<u>Interpersonal:</u> Figurehead	Leader	
	17	



Fig. 5: Role Frameworks:

Discussion:

According to Mintzberg (1973): “there is a logical argument as well as considerable evidence to support the contention that these ten roles are common to the work of all managers. Each manager stands between his organisational unit and its environment. Each must manage within a complex environment. To do so, the incumbent manager must perform a set of managerial roles and the requirements of these roles lead to certain common work characteristics”. This research suggests that these managerial roles are common, rather than universally applicable to all managers. While Mintzberg’s role framework is a highly useful tool in terms of analysing the work of the city manager, its real strength thus lies in offering a guide to common managerial functions.

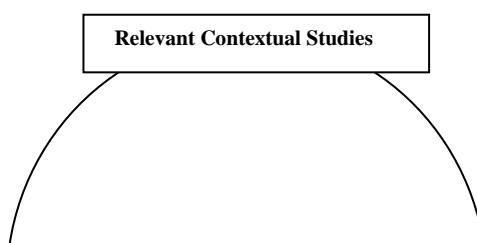
The role framework and the diversity of research evidence shows that common findings recur in managerial work (Hales, 1986). Dublin city manager John Fitzgerald explains: “When you get down to the operational side of the job, there’s not that much difference involved in managerial work. The HR issues you deal with are the same. How you deal with people is the same. Motivation is the same. Communications is the same. Balance of the bank account is the same”. However, the context is different. Dargie (1998) criticises the framework for

inadequately describing the complex work of the public sector chief executive. The framework fails to capture the way city managers operate, the unique environment in which they do so and the constraints and demands placed on them.

For the purposes of this study, the disciplines of governmental studies (public administration and political science) and urban studies, in addition to interviews and secondary research methods were employed to provide an understanding of that context. This inter-disciplinary approach also gives us an appreciation of the processes of inter-urban competition and new public management, which have encouraged the adoption of private sector models into the public sector. While the city manager is pressured to manage in the style of his private sector counterpart, his ability to do so is tempered by the need to respect the traditional values of the public sector. The context and constraints of the city council affect the behaviour of the city manager. The city manager manages in a directing and guiding style, rather than a dominating one.

In this study, an understanding of the context of city management is combined with the empirical, behaviourist findings of management studies. It is contended that an appreciation of context leads to the incorporation of additional, alternative or more applicable roles to better understand or explain managerial behaviour. For example, in their study of Navy executives Lau et al (1980) added an eleventh role, that of technical expert, based on information collected earlier in the study. As regards the study of city managers, here too Mintzberg's role framework may be adjusted. The information based enabling role involved in local government is inadequately addressed. Likewise, the decisional role of entrepreneur is more adequately described as a developmental role in the context of local government management. Although a unique approach must be adopted to understand the work and environment of the city manager, this study offers a guideline to future studies of managerial work - A similar contextual approach married with the role framework may be applied to other units of analysis (See Fig. 6).

CONTEXTUAL GUIDE



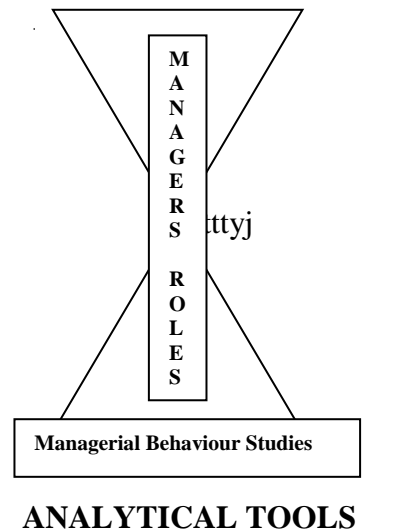


Fig. 6: Contextual Approach – Guideline Framework

Conclusion

The management behaviourists stress that we know relatively little about the actual work involved in management. We know even less about the work of the city manager. The city is identified as being at the forefront of the multifaceted restructuring and recomposing of Western societies. Local government appears at the forefront of the management of new urban contradictions and conflicts. And as the key player in city government, the city manager is an interface in this process. Studies of private sector managers offer methods and concepts for studying new managerial roles.

In this research, managerial roles were used as a tool to interpret the work of the city manager. The focus of this study has been on the complete set of city managers operating in an Irish context. It therefore addresses one of the key shortcomings – that of context - of the managerial behaviour approach. However, this research has wider implications, in spite of its distinctive setting. It offers a contextual approach for future studies of managers operating in different contexts.

Over the last fifty years, the managerial behaviourists have argued that we need to develop our vague objectives of managerial work. In a similar vein, some thirty years after the publication of *'The Nature of Managerial Work'*, we must continue to build on the approach of Mintzberg and the management behaviourists. The central theme that runs through the various improvements is

the increasing contextualisation of management behaviour – the growing focus on its social or institutional embeddedness (Noordegraaf and Stewart, 2000). As yet, the contextual approach does not provide a theory of what managers do, but nonetheless does offer a very powerful description of managerial work.

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