



9.29.16

# MANIFEST

Welcome to the Manifest; a ~~weekly~~ summary that cares more about brevity than grammar, and what is about to or could happen in Seaside than what did or didn't. Contributions to future editions are welcome at [cmalin@ci.seaside.ca.us](mailto:cmalin@ci.seaside.ca.us) prior to noon on Fridays.

## Special, ICMA Conference Edition

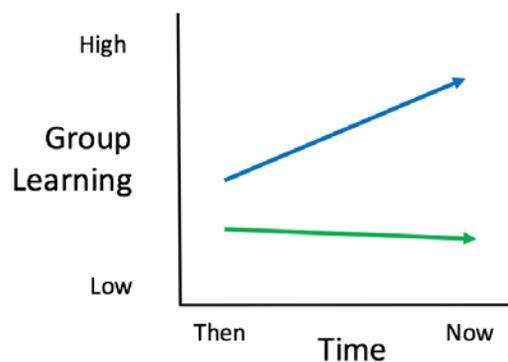
### Optional Reading, Unless You're A Department Head

▣ So There's These Two Guys ... John stops for a moment and says he's getting too excited. The room rumbles with laughter, for John's a rather gentle soul. He's also John Nalbandian, dean of the city manager training brigade if ever there was one. Chaired the Public Administration Department at KU. Mayored Lawrence, Kansas. Schooled most all of us at one time or another.

In the cavernous ballroom at the ICMA Conference, it's standing room only as he and retiring ICMA Executive Director Bob O'Neill Jr. discuss whether leadership teams or management teams are the thing du jour. The two guys on the planet who've thought most about the profession; when one of them talks, you listen. When both are on the stage together, you arrive early to get a seat, and ignore that the powerpoint projectors are flickering on and off like Anthony Weiner's self-control.

John's got a new chart. It seeks to explain quite a bit, and goes something like this:

I've tweaked it just a little; adding the word "Group" to the "Learning" axis, coloring the arrows and making the green one angle slightly downward rather than slightly upward. They're small changes, and we can argue about them later. So, what are the green and blue arrows?



The blue arrow is Administrative Sustainability / Staff / What Can Get Done. The green arrow is Political Acceptability / Elected Officials / What We Want. What we as a society want and what we as a society can get done are growing apart, John says. Well sure, just look around. Particularly at the state and federal level.

It has something to do with this group learning thing, which is not exactly a random thought from a guy teaching group leaders for a few decades. The city manager profession exists almost as a cult of life-long learners, passing on what works and what doesn't across the water coolers, conference tables, emails, journals and new hires of our careers. Life's complicated, getting more complicated and we're the ones who try to keep the lives going and getting better in cities, towns and villages across the globe. You stay sharp, or your community falters. So we fill ugly, windowless rooms like these.

With unending respect for local folks who put their names on local ballots, John points out there's little or no systematic training or learning legacy for elected officials. Unless you have one of those dynasty last names, there's very little to fall back on or look up to in your new role as elected official. You frequently want nothing to do with your predecessor, having run against him or her to take office. You have a day job and/or retirement to keep you busy, so there's time constraints as well. Values and personalities start to prevail over data, because values and personalities are easier. Policy by anecdote, sound bite and Twitter blast becomes the norm, and the gap between what we want and what we can achieve grows. Again, with unending respect for local officials, I'll argue the green line is trending slightly downward nationally given historic lows for faith in governing institutions including Congress.

So, into this widening chasm, guess what John and Bob suggest? They suggest we move on from the quaint notion of The Principles of Scientific Management and build leadership teams. Whew. That's a relief, because since I started sitting in the ejector seat in 1999, every department head appointment letter has ended with the sentence "Welcome to (insert jurisdiction name here)'s team of leaders." It's been arrive, triage, team-build and watch organization and community succeed. With cross-departmental leaders, not mere managers. Seventeen years into the experiment, the two high priests of the profession deliver a confirming encyclical, via flickering powerpoint.

They suggest other 30,000 foot flightpaths. Adapt administrative roles. Re-organize at a scale that respects civic attachment while optimizing efficiency and effectiveness. Bolster deliberative forums. Be the architect of "yes". Build skills in symbolic leadership. Familiarize yourself with the Stockdale pair of socks (or paradox, I was in the back row and may have misheard the men's hosiery advice). Stories > facts. Be an incremental revolutionist. Be the bridge in the gap. There was lots of metaphor talk about being a bridge, which was somewhat disconcerting given the state of bridges in America.

I'm variably infamous for saying dumb stuff like "live in the future", without explaining I mean it's preferable to work toward a better state of being than complain about where you're at or how you got there. Gosh, I was hoping for something about the fine state of future living in the John & Bob list o' things to do and be. It didn't show up, but I think they just didn't get to it (the future's funny, that way). I also think that's the essential deal. Past is all well and good (except all the nasty bits), the present seems so present it's hard to get past but the future gets here with startling regularity. You either

shape it or get shaped by it, so it's best to build a team, tie it together with trust and mission, and attack the gap between not just what we want and can do now, but what we've never dared dream and must do to get there.

Are there going to be people standing safely distant from the gap? Sure. Will some celebrate your falling into the gap? Yep. Do you have to send these people Christmas cards too? I would. Should you go alone? Sometimes you'll have to, but try to bring your team along. Will others take credit when the team makes it to the other side? Absolutely. That's the way it works. Will some ... years from now ... thank you for treading into the abyss? It's possible. Is there a new and better future on the other side of the gap? There can be. There better be.

I should stop now, I'm getting excited.

**Have a great Thursday.**