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# **THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP MATRIX: A TOOL FOR ANALYSIS**

**Paper prepared for the Public Administration Committee Annual Conference  
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## **Abstract**

Local government leadership has been much in the news in recent years. Changes have included the adoption of elected mayors by a dozen or so councils plus, of course, Greater London. Council Leaders are now increasingly elected for four year terms as the heads of formal executives replacing the old committee systems. Elected mayors are likely to be back on the agenda under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government.

A result of our extensive research, including interviews with council Leaders and elected Mayors, has been the development of a matrix for the analysis of local political leaders. Along the horizontal axis we present three sets of leadership attributes:

- The formal powers and duties of leadership offices.
- The informal relationships that leaders must develop within the authority, with chief executives and other senior council officers, party Groups and councillors as well as the business community, the voluntary sector and the trade unions.
- The personal attributes a leader needs, including charisma, integrity and the ability to develop good relationships with other local leaders.

On the vertical axis are the roles political leaders have to play:

- Government: policy-making and co-ordination of the council's services. Budget-setting and control, political management of the council and its members relations with the trades unions representing the council's staff and workers.
- Governance roles – the need nowadays to relate to and manage complex networks of service providers, contractors and other businesses, the voluntary sector, the trades union movement in a fragmented local governance system.
- Allegiance: maintaining relations with councillors, party organisations and electors, with the object in particular of securing the leader's re-election when the time comes.

We will provide some illustrative material of how the matrix might be used to analyse political and other leaders and propose an agenda for further research.

## **The Matrix**

During an extensive period of research into different aspects of the new political management arrangements for local government that were introduced by the 2000 Local Government Act, we have identified a range of issues concerning political leadership that can be encapsulated within a nine-cell matrix. We suggest that this can be used to analyse the relationships between the attributes political leaders possess, or ought to possess, and the roles they are expected to play. We have applied these ideas to study elected mayors in England, to develop comparative analyses of elected mayors in different countries (Fenwick and Elcock, 2008; Elcock 2009) and to try to identify issues that need to be addressed in considering how changes in political management arrangements might

have the maximum impact on local government systems where change has been judged to be necessary. The matrix itself is presented at the end of this paper.

## **The Attributes of Leaders**

The headings across the top of the matrix address the powers, duties and influence that leaders need or indeed require in order to succeed. The first cell discusses the constitutional and legal powers and restraints that determine the scope of their powers and the limits of what leaders can legally do or are prohibited from doing: these are their institutional and formal attributes. Issues here include the existence or absence of a general legal competence for councils – thus English local authorities have long been constrained by the *ultra vires* doctrine although the 2000 Act granted them powers to address the economic, social and cultural well being of their communities, a provision widely regarded as granting councils a European style power of general competence

Another issue defined by the formal provisions of the law is the leader's term of office. The switch to electing council Leaders for a four year term of office instead of requiring them to be re-elected at the council's Annual General Meeting should give them greater freedom to plan and implement their policies over a longer period with the reasonable assurance that they have at least four years in which to do so. However, in reality its impact may be limited because many council Leaders have managed to survive their annual re-election over many years. A third issue that comes under this first heading is the extent to which local authority actions are constrained by the supervision of a higher level council, as is often the case in Germany, or by central government departments (JAG Griffith, 1966). Such central supervision and control is particularly strong in the United Kingdom, especially after the restrictions imposed on local authorities by the Thatcher and Major Administrations (Chandler, 2007; Fenwick and McMillan, 2009).

Moving along to the second set of attributes, which we define as the informal or latent ones, these mainly concern the relationships that leaders must build in order to be effective policy makers. These include relations with party Groups of councillors, which are especially problematical for elected mayors who do not belong to the dominant party on the council or indeed may not be a member of a party Group at all. Thus Independent mayor Stuart Drummond had his first budget rejected by Hartlepool council. In North Tyneside Conservative Mayor Linda Arkley has since May 2010 had to work with a council where Labour holds the largest number of seats. Although also an Independent, Ray Mallon seems to have had less difficulty with his council than others and seems to have established good relations with its ruling Labour Group.

A second set of crucial relationships political leaders are those with the council's senior officers, especially its Chief Executive or General Manager. This relationship seems to have been problematical for Martin Winter, the former elected mayor of Doncaster, who lost the services of two Chief Executives during his terms of office and sought to restrict the chief executive's role after the departure of the first incumbent during his mayoralty. Similar friction seems to have occurred between the mayor and city manager of Stoke on Trent – the only council to opt for this model when it was originally offered in the 2000 Act. Stoke subsequently reverted to a leader and cabinet model under the provisions of the 2000 Act, and since then the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 has removed the mayor and council manager option altogether.

The third set of attributes concern the leader's personality, background and skills, which we have labelled the charismatic/agent attributes. It is often argued that political leaders must possess forceful, charismatic personalities but this may not necessarily be the case. Both Mayors Richard J Daley and his son Richard M Daley of Chicago were and are tedious public speakers; the talents that have enabled this dynasty to dominate Chicagoan politics for so long lie elsewhere, particularly in their ability to develop and maintain coalitions of that city's many ethnic groups that have

maintained them in office for multiple terms (Banfield, 1961 Green and Holli, 1991).). Notoriously, although Adolf Hitler may have been a mesmeric public orator, Joseph Stalin was a leaden public speaker and a worse writer (Bullock, 1990).

There are other attributes that turn out to be important for the success of political leaders. In both English and American studies of elected mayors, being of local origin is often identified by elected mayors as a main reason for their success is winning election and retaining office in subsequent votes. At interview, mayors as diverse as Louis Mancuso in Fredonia, NY, Tony Egginton in Mansfield and Stuart Drummond in Hartlepool identified their local births, upbringings and careers as major reasons for their electoral success and survival. Ray Mallon won election as Mayor of Middlesbrough after a dramatic and stormy career as a senior officer in the local police force. Other factors, including their educational and career backgrounds also play their part, although they are perhaps less significant than those we have discussed so far.

## **Leadership Roles**

On the vertical axis of the matrix we identify the three sets of roles that political leaders must perform or become involved in. Their success or otherwise in playing these roles effectively will depend on their possession or otherwise of the attributes discussed in the last section. The first set, their governmental roles relate to the organisation over which they have been given at least a degree of control by their election as mayor by the electorate or as leader by the council. The elected mayor or council leader will play prominent roles in developing and applying council policies, either his or her own or those proposed by the ruling party Group or Groups in their election manifestos. He or she will be responsible for overseeing the co-ordination of the council's departments and services, to ensure that they are consistent one with another and that there is no wasteful duplication of services or resources. One means of achieving these objectives is by chairing the council's cabinet or executive, as now required of leader or mayor, but previously conducted in some councils alongside key committee chairs long before formal executives were required under the 2000 Act (Elcock, 1998).

Another significant governmental leadership role is to ensure that members, especially cabinet members and officers alike, are sensitive to the views and complaints of local citizens. Many elected mayors declared in interviews that they have daily meetings with the Chief Executive and other senior officers, or at least talk to them more or less daily by telephone. Elected mayors in particular also receive many comments and complaints from members of the public: Mayor Martin Winter of Doncaster described dealing with these as the micro aspect of his job but he attached great importance to dealing with them. Engaging with the public also involves the development or encouragement of neighbourhood forums, local strategic partnerships or community councils, including parish and town councils where they exist, in situations where the council and its leaders do not have power to control such bodies (Fenwick and McMillan, 2009). Political leaders must exercise restraint in exercising control over such formally subordinate bodies if they are to have a chance fully to express their citizens' needs, wishes and complaints. Such restraint is not always easy to achieve and leaders must ensure that their subordinates exercise it.

Another major governmental role is overseeing the preparation and execution of the council's strategies. Some of these will be legal requirements, such as the Local Development Frameworks that English local planning authorities are required to prepare in order to secure a coherent and nowadays sustainable future for their communities' built and natural environments. Other strategies may be required by circumstances. Thus research studies of local authority budgetary processes in all four parts of the United Kingdom during the mid 1980s demonstrated that local authorities had to develop strategies to cope with the expenditure cuts demanded by Chancellor Denis Healey in and after 1976, followed by the still harsher cuts required by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative

Administration after May 1979. A common response was for leading councillors and senior officers to form informal budget strategy groups to develop ways of cutting expenditure without as far as possible damaging their councils' front line services. These groups were known by councillors and staff by such sobriquets as "The Big Three", "The Gang of Four" or "The Magnificent Seven". Within these strategy groups, the differences between the councillors and officers concerned dwindled almost to vanishing point (Elcock and Jordan (eds), 1987; Elcock, Jordan and Midwinter, 1988).

The second set of roles, the governance ones, have become increasingly important as the local state has become fragmented as the result of the forced disposal of many facilities, resources and services to private companies or voluntary agencies in the 1980s and 1990s, together with the removal of some services to single purpose bodies, for instance the transfer of running schools from the local authority's education department to head teachers and school governors following the 1988 "Baker" Education Act. Another source of fragmentation has been local authorities' developing role in economic regeneration and development, which has demanded that council leaders and elected mayors need to develop increasingly close relationships with local businesses, business organisations and the trades union movement. Hence leading figures in local authorities, including elected mayors, increasingly require "reticulist" (Friend, Power and Yewlett, 1974) network management skills (Painter et al., 1997) to co-ordinate large numbers of private, public and voluntary organisations to achieve common approaches to their communities' needs and problems. Since councils perform a wider range of functions than any other regional or local agencies despite the attrition of their powers that occurred especially during the Thatcher and Major Administrations. Also, the council's statutory land use planning functions ensure that the local authority now sits at the centre of a wide range of networks whose activities and relationships have to be co-ordinated. The most natural person to lead this co-ordination is therefore the elected mayor or council Leader.

Studies of French local government indicate that such networking with business, labour and other interests is a main preoccupation of French maires, especially in the larger towns and cities (John and Cole, 2000). Again, the leader or mayor's attributes will determine his or her success in developing and managing these networks: they will have to be good communicators, able negotiators and use the authority of their offices to develop influence over the many independent actors who are involved in managing the political, economic, social and cultural welfare of their communities. Local authority mayors and Leaders thus play central roles in persuading divergent interests to work together in partnership for the good of the local community, rather than allowing a Hobbesian state of nature to develop in which businesses, unions and other agencies look after their own interests rather than co-operating for the benefit of the community.

The last set of roles we have named the allegiance roles because they concern the way leaders gain office and then attempt to ensure that they retain it. We might call these the Machiavellian roles, since many of the means for gaining and retaining office we discuss here were set out by that servant of the Medici family back in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Machiavelli's prince must avoid hatred, by not expropriating the citizens' property and violating their wives. He must also avoid ridicule for instance by pompous resorts to histrionics over trifles, as Cicero advised (Kapust, 2010:198). At the same time he will not always be virtuous; his survival may sometimes entail doing morally wrong things in the interest of the prince's and his state's maintenance. Hence, Daniel Kapust argues that

The aim of the prince...is to be perceived as he needs to be to maintain his position; in doing so he maintains himself by his appearance, giving appropriate signs of his character...Machiavelli's prince must project an appropriate *ethos* to preserve himself and his polity; he must be flexible and capable of changing his appearance to fit the persuasive situation. (ibid: 599).

For political leaders, gaining and retaining power involves many of the same issues that Machiavelli identified in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, although the methods involved are different and less violent.

The terms of leaders' survival are dictated in part by formal provisions, such as the term of office to which a leader is elected. Americans have long set store by short terms of office in order to ensure that their representatives remain close to their electors. The House of Representatives is re-elected every two years. Many elected mayors are elected for two or even one year terms, although this has commonly been extended to four years in the interest of giving the mayor more time to establish his or her rule and policies and thus become a more effective executive. This may be accompanied by a rule requiring that the mayor can only be re-elected once, as has been the case since 1948 for American Presidents. Mayors or other leaders may also be subject to recall or dismissal procedures, such as the passage of a no confidence resolution by the council or recall by a public petition. The provisions in the 2000 Local Government Act for the creation of elected mayors includes a provision for the removal as well as the creation of the office by local referendum – a device which, as referred to above, has been used to abolish the elected mayoralty in Stoke on Trent and has also been threatened in Doncaster.

The leader must also possess the Machiavellian art outlined earlier of maintaining supportive links with other power holders, including the members of the council and their party Groups, businesses, trades unions and voluntary agencies. However, in some countries this effort may degenerate into clientelism, whereby certain individuals, companies or agencies receive unfair or improper favour from political leaders such as elected mayors. The Greek *Toparxes* are alleged to indulge freely in such practices, which has resulted in major problems in the development of local economic development councils. (Chondroleou et al., 2005). The leader's survival thus requires the maintenance of high levels of skills in negotiation and communication. Many local mayors in England, Germany and the United States stressed the importance they attached to maintaining close links with local business leaders in order to secure those businesses' contribution to the prosperity of their communities (Elcock, 2001). French maires seek to assert their status by initiating major development projects such as the Europe Quarter in Lille surrounding the Lille Europe high speed railway junction, which was commissioned by that city's *maire*, Pierre Mauroy (John and Cole, 2000: 107-8). *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice*, as Sir Christopher Wren's son put it in an inscription in St. Paul's Cathedral.

Lastly, leaders must be accessible to their citizens, who will ultimately determine their survival or otherwise at the polls. Elected mayors in particular attach considerable importance to personal interventions to deal with citizens' complaints or grievances. In terms of their personal characters and reputations, they must be constantly aware of Lord Acton's warning that "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men". Evidence of corruption or other forms of malpractice or abuses of power lead to a leader's speedy demise once they are discovered, which is almost inevitable sooner or later in this age of investigative journalism.

The context of local leadership is undergoing rapid change. In the United Kingdom, the issue of trust in local leaders has been a significant political factor in recent years, reflected in the investigations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life into public confidence and trust, especially in local mayors. This has taken place alongside unprecedented economic crisis and the as yet untested political response. In the UK, the coalition government which took office in May 2010 has announced mayoral referenda in 12 major cities, a 25% cut in the public sector, the abolition of Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) in local government (so soon after its introduction) and changes to education which are likely to lead to little more than a few residual responsibilities being held by local authorities. In this uncharted territory, leadership will be more important and more difficult than ever and this will inevitably frame the context of theory and practice from now on.

## In Conclusion

We offer the leadership matrix as a tool for the analysis of leadership in local political systems and for national systems too. It enables scholars, policy analysts, councillors and local government officers to examine practices in their own authorities and compare them with practices elsewhere to determine how their own leadership systems could be improved. It is a tool for assessing failures of leadership as well as its successes. It also facilitates comparisons of local leaders in different countries that increase our understanding of their leadership systems and to consider what, if anything can be learnt from foreign institutions, processes or experiences (Rose, 1993). We would encourage colleagues to make use of the matrix and assess its utility (or otherwise) in developing their own research projects and teaching courses, for example by considering the interaction between the attributes and roles of political leaders in particular institutional, political or ideological contexts. Also, they might examine the relative importance that individual leaders attach to the various roles and attributes identified in the matrix.

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**FIGURE 1: ANALYTICAL GRID FOR ELECTED MAYORS**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Influences:</b>	<b>Institutional/formal</b> (Manifest/structure) Legislation, standing orders Council constitution	<b>Informal</b> (Latent/agents) Relations with council, parties, CEO, officers	<b>Individual</b> (Charisma/agent) Experience, background
<b>Roles:</b>			
<b>A. Governmental</b>	Policy, budget, vetoes, appointments, personnel	Relations with parties, backbenchers, CEO, Chief officers	Articulate, ability to dominate, negotiate competencies/experience?
<b>B. Governance</b>	Representation, outside memberships decentralised structures	Relations with lobbies, interests, other levels of government.	Reticulist abilities/skills Established contacts/networks Ruthless
<b>C. Allegiance</b>	Term of office, formal relation to council. Power of recall/dismissal Abolition of office	Relations with outside parties, lobbies, electorate Power	Approachable, Accessible? Risk of corruption; clientelism Power