Building Practitioner-Held Theory Through Triangulation

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ABSTRACT

This study employs a research strategy called triangulation to determine the distributions of personal theories of organizations toward an organizational doctrine called practitioner-held theory. In this study, triangulation combines qualitative methods (interviews with city managers) before and after the use of quantitative methods (a survey of city managers) to develop practitioner-held theory. The survey results are analyzed to combine the personal theories of organizations of 220 city managers into ten theoretical dimensions: structural reform, task management, insular governance, participative management, Theory Y, norm setting, participatory democracy, citizen input into decision making, community leadership, and legislative involvement in management. Each dimension is discussed in the context of the public administration literature, from analysis of quantitative data, from analysis of qualitative data, and in relation to a practitioner-held theory model. The practitioner-held theory model's support of practitioner thinking based on limited instrumental rationality is discussed by clarifying action-consequence relationships and highlighting the normative positions of practitioners on organizational issues. The conclusions evaluate practitioner-held theory against general criteria.

Building Practitioner-Held
Theory Through Triangulation[1]

Practitioner-held theory exemplifies a prevailing organizational doctrine for the administration of government. Research on the development of this doctrine and practitioner-held theory has intuitive appeal for scholars and practitioners of public administration because it places practitioners at the center of the theory building process. This study takes a step toward building a practitioner-held theory model; triangulation combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies to determine how practitioners think and to generate empirical support for the model.

A three-rung generalization ladder organizes the relationships between personal theories of organization, theoretical dimensions, and practitioner-held theory. The personal theories of organizations (PTOs) occupy the bottom rung of the generalization ladder. PTOs provide the empirical base for the study. PTOs exist within every practitioner, and the number of personal theories of organization equals the number of practitioners. A practitioner's PTO stipulates organizational actions that should take place and suggests action-consequences relationships. PTOs are similar to the espoused theories discussed by Argyris and Schon (1974).

The intermediate rung on the generalization ladder contains the theoretical dimensions, which unify and validate the practitioners' thinking (PTOs) on organizational issues. These dimensions are constructed from the general patterns found among the practitioners' personal theories of organizations, and they are qualitatively validated before final inclusion in the practitioner-held theory model. The theoretical dimensions also provide a common ground to mesh practitioners' and researchers' thinking on organizations.

Practitioner-held theory occupies the top rung of the generalization ladder; it is the highest level of generality sought by this study. Practitioner-held theory evolves from a cumulative set of normative and relational propositions that coincide with the theoretical dimensions. The resulting propositions describe practitioners' thinking in the context of organizational issues. The issues discussed are not exhaustive, but they cover many administrative concepts and concerns discussed in the current literature. Practitioner-held theory attempts to address Charles Levine's call for "a new, consistent doctrine to guide efforts to improve governance and management" (1986, 205). It can also explain and predict the actions of practitioners.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

The research strategy in this study follows inductive reasoning and uses triangulation. The evidence from the practitioners' personal theories of organizations is gathered and combined into theoretical dimensions to form practitioner-held theory. Triangulation is used to collect this evidence from qualitative methods (interviews with city managers) and quantitative methods (a survey of city managers). Triangulation is an attempt to bridge the historical dichotomy between the two methods, improve the validity of the findings, and increase our understanding of practitioner-held theory.

[2] The literature review coinciding with the initial interviews included: Aleshire and Aleshire 1977; Ammons and Glass 1988; Barber 1988; Bolman and Deal 1984; Bosworth 1958; Bowman 1978; Bozeman and Straussman 1984; Cayer and Weschler 1988; Claunch 1977; Denhardt 1984; Downs 1967; Duncan 1974; Frederickson 1976; Harmon and Mayer 1986; Kammerer 1963; Lau, Newman, and Broedling 1980; Lewis 1982; Lockard 1962; Loveridge 1971; Newell and Ammons 1987; Ostrom 1974; Pateman 1970; Peters 1978; Powell and Schlacter 1976; Presthus 1978; Rainey 1983; Rainey 1989; Rehfuss 1989; Schein 1985; Seidman 1980; Shafritz and Ott 1987; Smith 1976; Stillman 1974; Svara 1985; Warwick 1975; Waldo 1952; Waldo 1978; Leonard White 1927; Orion White 1975; and Writh and Vasu 1987.

[3] For example, the researcher's questions covering structural theories started with the researcher asking if organizational charts were important to city management. The city manager quickly found a chart and explained the value of the organizational chart and the changes that had occurred since the chart was printed. This invited the researcher to probe the city manager's theories when he made or supported these changes, ask if he could anticipate any future changes, and question why he would make these changes. These interviews helped to establish conceptual importance and clarity on structural issues including hierarchies, reorganization, and specialization. Similar questions were used for the other conceptual areas and in the following interviews. Dexter's (1970), Murphy's (1980) and Werner and Schoepfle's (1987) books were very helpful during this stage of the study.

Both methods are incorporated in the research strategy; they strengthen each other because they use different ways to uncover practitioner thinking about the same organizational issues. Each method is allowed to do what it does best: the qualitative method elicits what managers think about when they consider organizational issues, and the quantitative method measures the distributions of the managers' thinking on these issues.

City managers were selected to respond to the questionnaire because they "remain almost the only generalist public administrative class in the nation" (Mosher 1982, 82). They use a "wide angle lens" (see Aleshire and Aleshire 1977) when considering organizational issues inside and outside city government; other public administrators who are specialists can "zoom in" when considering organizational issues.

We used the qualitative method during the research design phase of the study. While we were reviewing the literature,[2] five city managers selected by convenience sampling were interviewed. Two of the interviews were unstructured and they concentrated on survey methods (e.g., the format of the mail questionnaire, various means to increase the response rate) to be used in the study. Three of the interviews were semistructured with an emphasis on identifying conceptual areas that are important to city managers. During the first semistructured interview the researcher used three preconceived conceptual areas: structure, environmental interaction, and decision making.[3] The information from the first interview led to six preconceived conceptual areas used in the second interview: structure, environmental interaction, decision making, council-manager relations, human relations, and financial management. The information gathered from the first two interviews was used to develop eight conceptual areas used in the third interview: structure, environmental interaction, decision making, council-manager relations, citizen interaction, department head-manager relations, employee participation, and ethics. The information gathered during these interviews and in the review of the literature was used to develop eight conceptual areas or sections on the mail questionnaire, the quantitative instrument used in this study. These conceptual areas included: structure, external environment, decision making and control, council-manager relations, citizen participation, employee participation, perspectives of city employees, and power relationships and politics. This study takes a step toward clearing concepts of importance with practitioners before testing their distributions on them, but future attempts to measure theoretical distributions of manag-

ers' thinking might use more systematic efforts: focus groups, (see Morgan 1988; Stewart and Shamdasani 1990), Delphi methods (see Linstone and Turoff 1975; Moore 1987), and content analyses of practitioners' documents may be helpful (see Holsti 1969; Krippendorff 1980).

As the questionnaire was developed it was pretested with academics and city managers. The first pretests were with two academics who had considerable interest in city government. The final pretest was with an academic well versed in social science methods. The three academics read the research prospectus and understood the study's purpose, scope, and methodology. They critiqued the cover letter. During these pretests the academics read the statements and exchanged ideas extensively. These critiques exchanges resulted in suggestions that improved the cover letter and the questionnaire's design.

Pretests also were conducted with three city managers who read the cover letter and completed the questionnaire in the researcher's presence. This encouraged verbal feedback, and the city managers commented: "I like the booklet format of the questionnaire" "What does this statement mean?" "What do you want here?" and "I'm going to cop out on this one and respond 'neither agree or disagree.'" These pretests also allowed the researcher to judge the city manager's impression of the questionnaire, the amount of time it took a city manager to complete the questionnaire, and the number of times a city manager decided to change an answer. All these observations during the pretest contributed to the questionnaire content.

When they answered the mail questionnaire, the city managers were asked to detach their thinking from their cities, as the ninety-six statements were generalizations about the organizational actions of city governments. They responded to the statements using Likert response options: strongly agree (1), agree (2), neither agree nor disagree (3), disagree (4), and strongly disagree (5). The questionnaire was mailed in February 1990 to 247 city managers and assistant city managers in Texas cities with populations over 10,000. After a thank you/reminder postcard and a second questionnaire were sent to the city managers who did not complete the first questionnaire, the response rate was 89 percent with 220 questionnaires returned by April 1990.[4]

[4] Credit for the high response rate goes to Dillman (1978). The two-tailed probability test for the separate variance estimates provides little evidence that the respondents and nonreposndents means on age, months of experience in position, and population are not the same in the following table.

Charac.	Respondents	Nonrespondents
Age (mean)		
	44.2 (n=193)	42.7 (n=22)
Two-tailed probability	.275	
Months of experience in position (mean)		
	74.8 (n=198)	56.0 (n=22)
Two-tailed probability	.063	
Population of city		
	104,908 (n=218)	137,442 (n=27)
Two-tailed probability	.526	
Education		
College degree (%)		
	93.4 (n=185)	87.0 (n=20)
Graduate degree (%)		
	55.1 (n=109)	60.9 (n=14)
MPA (%)	31.8 (n=63)	35.8 (n=8)

[5] Convenience sampling selected the city managers for the interviews. Some city managers were selected based on their willingness to cooperate in the study as evidenced by the following comments on the mail questionnaire: "If I can be of further assistance, please feel free to contact me"; "If I can be of additional help please call!"; "I would welcome a call to discuss any theories or topics at your convenience"; and "Call me if I can be of further assistance." Other city managers were selected because they were in the Austin area or Dallas-Fort Worth area and were available when the author could interview them. These city managers also were selected in the belief that they had a wide range of PTOs. In another manuscript titled "Identifying an Administrative Style Typology of Public Managers" these managers were found to have a variety of administrative styles. In that manuscript city managers interviewed were classified as follows: "involvement champions" (n=5), "pathology busters" (n=2), "householders" (n=1), and "detached skeptics" (n=1).

[6] The author included only the theoretical dimensions that: (1) met the face validity and unidimensionality criteria when constructing the indexes, (2) had three statements on these dimensions (providing a more difficult test for the face validity and unidimensionality criteria and for greater variation in index construction), and (3) were systematically covered in the postquestionnaire interviews with the city managers. Other dimensions uncovered by this study that met the face validity and unidimensionality criteria but did not have three statements or systematic coverage in the interviews included: legislative involvement in management decision making, hierarchial

The construction of indexes along theoretical dimensions was used to analyze the questionnaire sections that coincided with the eight conceptual areas developed during the initial interviews with the city managers. These indexes avoid the biases inherent in single items, provide a greater range of variation, and increase the efficiency of the analysis by reducing the data (Babbie 1973, 253). Statements for index inclusion had to meet the face validity (or logical validity) and unidimensionality criteria. Usually three or four statements in each section covered a topic of theoretical interest (e.g., structural reorganization, citizen participation) and provided face validity. A separate factor analysis was performed on the responses to all statements in each of the eight sections to validate the unidimensionality criteria and to assist the labeling of the underlying theoretical dimensions of the city managers' PTOs. Groupings of three statements that had high factor loadings on an underlying dimension and retained their face validity were used for index construction (see Appendix B for the factor loadings). These statements may not capture adequately the city managers's PTOs on a theoretical dimension; therefore, the postsurvey interviews can provide convergent validation of the findings.

The qualitative method was used again after the city managers completed the mail questionnaire. Nine interviews were conducted with city managers between May 1990 and January 1991.[5] The interviews were directed toward the theoretical dimensions derived from the quantitative findings. The main objectives of the interviews were to understand better the practitioners' thinking in their organizational worlds, to explain or validate the PTOs revealed through the mail questionnaire, to allow for deeper dimensions to emerge (Jick 1979, 604), and to improve the generality of practitioner-held theory.

THE PRACTITIONER-HELD THEORY MODEL

The practitioner-held theory model representing the city managers' PTOs from the analysis of the quantitative findings is illustrated in exhibit 1. Ten theoretical dimensions that met the face validity and unidimensionality criteria are plotted in Figure 1 as they relate to practitioner-held theory. These dimensions do not exhaust the possibilities uncovered by this study,[6] nor do they cover the hundreds of dimensions that could be included in a practitioner-held theory model. The direction of arrows indicates general incorporation or repulsion of the theoretical dimensions for the city managers from the quantitative findings. The relational lines without arrowheads

structures, structural maladies, organizational democracy, citizen education, responsiveness to citizens demands, productivity means, socialization with employees, competition for resources, division of power, awareness of the city manager's functions, increased input from boards and commissions, working with external interests, long-range planning, and control of employee behavior.

[7] An individual city manager's totals for the three statements on a dimension had more chances to be labeled practitioner support (3, 4, 5, 6, 7) and practitioner opposition (11, 12, 13, 14, 15) than practitioner inconclusiveness (8, 9, 10). This breakdown is due to the design of the questionnaire.

suggest a neutral relationship, since city managers do not support or oppose these dimensions. The number below the relational lines shows the support or opposition the city managers had for the dimension. These numbers represent the average means for combinations of three questionnaire statements on the theoretical dimension for 220 city managers. The scale on each dimension is from 3 to 15; 3 is for maximum practitioner support and 15 is for maximum practitioner opposition. Lower means (3 to 7.5) show practitioner support for the theoretical dimension, higher scores (10.5 to 15) show practitioner opposition for the theoretical dimensions, and midrange scores (7.6 to 10.4) suggest practitioner inconclusiveness for the theoretical dimension.[7]

Exhibit 1
The Practitioner-Held Theory Model:
From Analysis of the Survey Findings

LEGEND
→ Practitioner support (3.0 to 7.5)
— Practitioner inconclusiveness (7.6 to 10.4)
← Practitioner opposition (10.5 to 15.0)
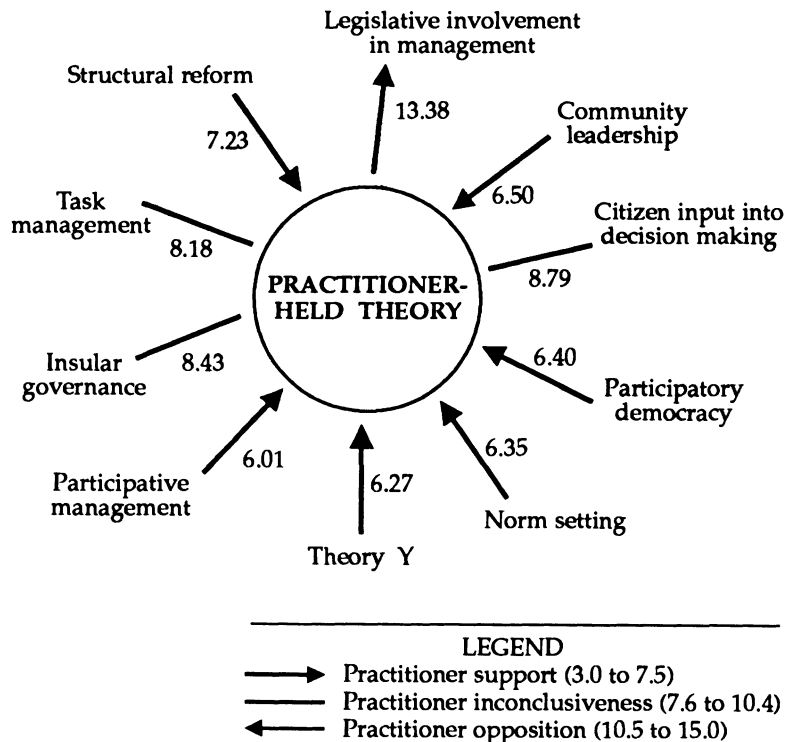
THE FINDINGS

The following discussion addresses each theoretical dimension from the public administration literature and presents findings from the survey of city managers. The findings from the interviews test and enrich the relationships of the theoretical dimensions and improve the generality of practitioner-held theory. The total score of the city managers' responses to three mail questionnaire statements is shown in brackets where their interview information is discussed.

Structural Reform

Structural reform in city government is often synonymous with reorganization. Scholars often have discussed the virtues of reorganization: improved decision making, increased efficiency, and increased effectiveness (Gormley 1989; Hult and Walcott 1990). Meier (1980, 396) notes the "practitioner enthusiasm for reorganization." Seidman (1980, 3) contends that the true believer thinks that "reorganization can produce miracles," and Bolman and Deal (1984, 58) state "reorganization is a fundamental approach to improving organizational effectiveness." In exhibit 1, the structural reform dimension that combines the city managers' PTOs on reorganization has a mean of 7.23. This mean represents city managers' low support for reorganization as a technique to improve decision making, increase efficiency, and increase effectiveness (see Appendix A).

Interviews with three city managers strengthen the incorporation of this dimension into practitioner-held theory. The first city manager [6] supporting structural reform explained a recent incorporation of the public works department into a utilities department and expressed a desire to combine the police and fire departments under a public safety director. The PTO of this city manager noted that these combinations reduce the span of control, improve communications, and reduce the cost of providing government through better use of equipment. A second city manager [13] with a seemingly unyielding position on structural reform simply stated, "I would never reorganize." He saw reorganization as a facade for action. But even though he thought such reorganization slowed down government and was a waste of time, he also agreed that small adjustments, such as moving streets and community services functions into the utilities division, were often necessary. His PTO dictated that this arrangement would provide better oversight of the streets and community service functions by a director who was an engineer. The final city manager [12], on the opposition side of the structural

reform dimension, noted a desire to increase the span of control for city management because the city council was in control of the finance director and the city attorney. The qualitative method provided evidence that even the city managers with PTOs opposing structural reform on the mail questionnaire were in support of some structural change and other benefits.

Task Management

Task management refers to the city managers' preferences for specialization in city government. The academic literature on specialization is sparse and usually neutral on theories of specialization. Some authors note the benefits of specialization (Durkhein 1984); however, Robert Presthus (1978, 2) notes that "there is an inherent tension between those in hierarchical positions of authority and those that play specialized roles," and that specialization in city government can have pathological characteristics. The city managers' PTOs have a mean of 8.18 on the task management dimension in exhibit 1. This mean suggests practitioner inconclusiveness, although the city managers' PTOs provided more support than opposition on this dimension. The city managers' PTOs were divided on two issues: whether there is too much position specialization in city government and whether specialization increases efficiency in the delivery of services. The city managers' PTOs suggested that position specialization in city government did not inhibit a manager's ability to control subordinates (see Appendix A).

The encounters with the city managers supplement the quantitative findings. A city manager [11] in opposition to task management recognized the inherent problems with specialization. He noted, "Sometimes we get so specialized that we lose communication, and there's not enough feedback because of our structure." When asked "What are your perceptions on specialization in city government?" another city manager [11] who did not fancy task management responded, "specialization leads to a lack of communication." An assistant to a city manager, who was present during the interview, provided a cogent example of this pathology. She noted that horizontal communication becomes difficult to achieve with specialization; for example, "public works is digging out a road that streets has just finished paving over." The dangers of task management were clearly stated by a city manager [13] who noted that specialization can "create a greater turf orientation, greater inefficiency, and everybody becomes myopic as they focus on their particular function rather than the goal for the organization." One city manager [8], who was the biggest advocate of task management of those interviewed, noted that

his results-oriented management style kept people in special-ized positions focused on the advancement of the city. The city managers' PTOs that were against task management, as revealed from the qualitative method, fortified the findings from the quantitative method.

Insular Governance

Classical schools of organization thought ignored theories about politics and conflict in support of insular governance: a belief that government should avoid things that would subtract it from rationality. In the past, the torment of politics and conflict in city government was a sign of bad management. Managers have viewed politics as annoying or irrelevant, or as Henry Mintzberg calls it, "illegitimate" (Hult and Walcott 1990, 6). However, few managers would deny the presence of politics and conflict in their organizations.

The city managers' PTOs were inconclusive on the insular governance dimension with a mean of 8.43. The survey find-ings revealed that a majority of the city managers believed in a politics/administration dichotomy. They agreed that politics should be divorced from their positions and that internal politics should be eliminated. The city managers' support of insular governance may reflect PTOs that appeal to profession-al or rational approaches rather than political approaches to management (Svara 1990). However, most city managers disagreed that conflict should be avoided (see Appendix A).

The interviews validate the city managers' PTOs derived from the quantitative method, and they substantiate the incon-clusive relationship of the insular governance dimension to practitioner-held theory. One city manager [5] simply stated, "I don't think politics belongs in government," and he did not like to see himself in manipulative roles. A city manager [10] with more opposition to the insular governance dimension told how he used his influence to manipulate the city council's vote on an issue. Another city manager [11] dispelled the dichoto-my by noting, "The old theoretical distinction between politics and administration is a farce." He noted, "Everything we do has political overtones and connotations." Politics can be positive "if it makes you aware of a perspective that you were not able to see before," noted a city manager [12] opposing the insular governance dimension.

On the conflict component of this dimension the city manager [11] who dispelled the dichotomy noted that conflict is part of the territory, and "the worst thing managers can do is be afraid of it." Another city manager [9] said that when

conflict happens "you should attempt to head it off at the pass, address it, and go from there." A city manager [8] close to the mean on this dimension remarked he could not think of any situations where conflict could be good.

Participative Management

The value of participative management, or as Dwight Waldo (1952, 89) would note, "'democracy' within an administrative system," does not necessarily have its theoretical roots in the practitioners' support of democratic ideals. Instead, participative management has been a tool to accomplish specific management ends (Meade 1971; Powell and Schlacter 1976; Smith 1976; Mosher 1982). These ends are evident in the city managers' strong support of the participative management dimension with a mean of 6.01 (see exhibit 1). The city managers' PTOs are in agreement that participative management can result in better city employee interaction with the public, an increased sense of employee responsibility, and increased effectiveness of city government (see Appendix A).

During the interviews, the city managers were asked to comment on the positive and negative effects of participative management. This information checked the authenticity of the their PTOs, provided new insights on why there is such a high level of support for participative management, and documented the negative effects of participative management.

The city managers' support for participative management is full of nuances. One city manager [7] favored participative management because it was a means to defer responsibility. He stated that participative management is in vogue because "you're afraid of making a mistake because it makes the front page news." He also believed that he could make better decisions because of the feedback provided by participative management. Another city manager [7] with a cautious PTO in regard to participative management noted: "I listen to my department heads . . . in terms of making decisions about certain types of issues. Now I'm careful, or should I be more careful, in how I sometimes let them approach the city council." Another city manager [3] had his department heads give budget proposals before the city council during the first month he was on the job. A city manager [6] observed that managers can have better employees if the employees feel "like they are part of what's going on." Another city manager [5] even noted that the real benefit of participative management is that it allows employees to "buy into the system."

On the negative side, a city manager [6] indicated that participative management slows down the decision processes. Another city manager [6] responded that the negative effect of participative management is "getting bogged down . . . instead of doing something in six minutes you spend six weeks." Another drawback one city manager [6] noted is that midlevel managers resist participation in areas where they once had decision responsibility. After agreeing that participative management results in inefficiencies and time loss, a city manager [5] alluded to the internal politics involved: "Department heads use it (participative management) to further their own departments." Support for participative management revealed by the quantitative method is diluted by the findings from the qualitative method.

Theory Y

The public management literature champions the managers' Theory Y perceptions of employees. This theory was first promulgated by Douglas McGregor (1960) and supports the assumption that employees find their work enjoyable. If managers assumed that employees found work distasteful, this would be a Theory X perception of employees. According to Anthony Downs (1967, 72) managers also believe that employees have a desire for personal loyalty to their organizations. The city managers' responses to the questionnaire validate the Theory Y perceptions. The city managers believe that employees find their work enjoyable, not distasteful, and they have a strong loyalty to city government (see Appendix A). The Theory Y dimension in exhibit 1 had a mean of 6.27, demonstrating strong support for the positive perspective that city managers have for city employees.

To obtain the city managers' perceptions of employees, they were asked, "What adjectives would you use to describe city employees?" Answers to these questions clearly validate the PTOs of the city managers based on quantitative information. A city manager [8], moving toward the Theory X orientation that McGregor discusses, responded, "dedicated, professional, in some cases authoritative, in some cases unknowingly arrogant . . . very conscientious." He went on to say, "I don't think you can just . . . peg government employees as being lazy, no good." On a loyalty scale (one being low and ten being high) this city manager rated the police and fire department somewhere in the middle, top management very high, and the rest of the city employees around seven. Another city manager [4], in response to the adjective question, noted that the city's employees were "more informed than you think they

are, they have enormous potential, they are smart, conscientious, loyal to the organization (not to their manager or supervisor), they have a desire to help, and they are an inspiration."

Norm Setting

When city managers support norm setting, they assume that the organizational culture and ethical behavior among employees is created by and controlled by management (see Schein 1985). It may be easy to be optimistic about managerial abilities to engage in norm setting, but attempts by managers to influence the organizational culture and ethical behavior have not achieved the intended results. There are limits on the ability of managers to influence or control the organizational culture and ethical behavior (Peters 1978; Heffron 1989, 23).

The mean for the norm setting dimension (6.35) suggests that many city managers believe they should act proactively. More specifically, most city managers believe they should influence the organizational culture in city government and promote a set of ethical standards for city employees. City managers are less adamant that their department heads' cultural values should match their own (see Appendix A).

Influencing the organizational culture involves instilling a perspective in city employees. A city manager [3] with strong support for norm setting noted that "within organizations, you need to have some consistent values . . . of how you view . . . racist attitudes . . . customer service, and service ethic." This city manager noted that employees should take a "broad perspective of issues that are going on" and should be "thinking of the national perspective or from an international perspective." Another city manager [5] believed that culture is created through dialogue with people and that this culture can influence employees to "avoid thinking in terms of a fiscal year—to use a three to five year perspective." Beyond these perspectives a city manager [5] stated his PTO for influencing the culture by stating that he "spends a lot of time talking to employees, listening to them, making sure they know it's okay to question me." The last two city managers were backers of codes of ethics as a means to impart ethical behavior. Interviews with city managers supported the inclusion of the norm setting dimension into practitioner-held theory.

Citizen Participation

Even though citizen participation is a well-established political tradition in the United States (Rehfuss 1989, 102), some scholars highlight the problems of citizen participation

(Cupps 1977), and others note the acceptance of citizen partici-
pation in the governmental process (Svara 1990). While
council-manager cities have been found less responsive to
citizens than mayor-council cities (Lineberry and Fowler 1967),
council-manager cities, nevertheless, have been remarkably
responsive to citizens (see Thomas 1986). The city managers'
relationship to democratic governance has not been established
from their theoretical perspective.

Citizen participation encompasses two dimensions. The
first is the participatory democracy dimension, which has a
mean of 6.40. This index encompasses both the need for more
citizen participation and the benefits derived from it: increased
governmental responsiveness and the ability to change a city
manager's views on various issues (see Appendix A). The
second theoretical dimension is citizen input into decision
making. This dimension addresses the more specific uses of
citizen participation. The city managers provided a neutral
response on this dimension with a mean of 8.79. They agree
that although citizen input provides improved information,
they would limit it. It appears that citizen input is not suitable
for all decisions (see Appendix A).

The following discussion of the interview findings places
the mail questionnaire scores of the city managers on both
dimensions in brackets: the participatory democracy score
followed by citizen input in decision making score. The inter-
views revealed more evidence that dampened the city manag-
ers' enthusiasm about citizen participation, as suggested by
their PTOs determined from the quantitative method. The
interviews also support the relationships of these two theoreti-
cal dimensions with practitioner-held theory. A city manager
[6,10] promotes citizen participation because it "support[s] the
way things are being done" and "you get good ideas from it
too." His opposition to citizen participation in decision mak-
ing was unmistakable when he stated, "the nuts will show up
(for city council meetings); therefore, they get a disproportion-
ate share of the concern"--he likened citizen participation to the
squeaky wheel theory. A city manager [9,13] with an obvious
dislike for citizen participation noted that "heavy duty citizen
participation when it's uninformed, or in fact ignorant, can
really slow the process down and make it much more costly."
Another city manager [5,6], who advocates citizen participation
and is not particular about the way it influences the decision
making processes, noted that "involving the citizens yields
better results"; but, "at the same time, however, community
involvement is very inefficient." These interviews suggested
the intricacies involved in determining the city managers'
PTOs on citizen participation.

Community Leadership

The city managers' involvement in community leadership is often considered a political aspect of city government. In the early days of the council-manager form of government, the city managers' propensity for community leadership (see Svara 1989) may not have matched their espoused theories (L. White 1927; Bosworth 1958; Lockard 1962).

Today, most city managers interact with the environment external to city government and they "are involved in community political leadership" (Nalbandian 1990, 654). Their strong theoretical belief in community leadership is displayed in exhibit 1 where this dimension has a mean of 6.50. An overwhelming number of city managers agreed that they should address more local and professional groups, that they should have more contacts with businesses, and that they should be community leaders (see Appendix A).

The interviews downplayed the city managers' enthusiasm for community leadership as determined through the quantitative findings. One city manager [6] cautioned against becoming the "lightning rod" on issues because the city manager can "get too far out in front; that is what the councilmen and the mayor are there for and you should rely on them to do that." Another city manager [8] noted that his management style was "pretty much behind the scenes" on most issues and that he was a "low profile city manager." He did not want to be the "point man on patrol seeing if there are any booby traps or mines out there." The qualitative method reveals a more cautious approach within the city managers' PTOs when community leadership is considered.

Legislative Involvement in Management

Traditionally, management of city government has been within the purview of city managers' duties. Most studies look at the managers' perceptions of their policy roles (instead of their management roles) to clarify relationships with city councils (Wright 1969; Newell and Ammons 1987). The city managers' perceptions of their management roles resist encroachment by city councils, although Svara (1988, 29) writes that a majority of city managers in North Carolina agreed with the depth and frequency of the councils' appraisals of their performances. Even though city councils could play a larger role in management of local government (Svara 1985, 227), the mean for the legislative involvement in management dimension is a nonsupportive 13.38 (see exhibit 1). The PTOs of the city managers strongly disagreed that the city council should

give operational directives to city managers, become involved in managerial functions, or give directives to department heads (see Appendix A).

The city managers' PTOs on council involvement in management provide congruence between the findings from the qualitative and quantitative methods. A city manager [15] stated that he did not like council involvement in management: "They hired me to run the city and they need to stay out of my way." Another city manager [15] noted that he had a better perception of citizens' needs and that the city council typically responds to "squeaky-wheel type situations." He observed that city managers "have a better perspective of what those overall needs are; it's one based on careful evaluation, analysis, and input from the citizenry, and not just a knee jerk reaction." A city manager [12] more supportive of council involvement talked about a council decision involving the nuts and bolts of building a convention center by "demonstrating to the citizens that the council is on top of things even though I'm not." The information from the interviews matches the intensity of the city managers' dislike of council involvement in management as determined by analysis of the information on the mail questionnaire.

The findings from the qualitative method have provided a deeper understanding of the theoretical dimensions, and they either strengthened, confirmed, or weakened the ten theoretical dimensions relationships to practitioner-held theory from the quantitative findings. The qualitative findings strengthen the relationships to practitioner-held theory for five theoretical dimensions: structural reform, insular governance, Theory Y, norm setting, and legislative involvement in management. The task management, participatory democracy, and citizen input into decision-making dimensions confirmed (not strengthened or weakened) associations with practitioner-held theory. Two theoretical dimensions, participative management and community leadership, were weakened in their quantitative relationships to practitioner-held theory. Most of the findings presented in this article have convergent validity (except for some of the city managers' comments discussed along the structural reform, participative management, and community leadership dimensions) since the methods were able to yield similar data. The variance in the data is attributed to the various PTOs that practitioners hold, not the methods employed.

PRACTITIONER-HELD THEORY

Practitioner knowledge gained from the quantitative and qualitative methods has led to the development of practitioner-held theory and many generalities that are inside the practi-

tioner-held theory circle (see exhibit 1). These generalities bring the theoretical dimensions together, describe the organizational doctrine for the administration of government, and support practitioner thinking based on limited instrumental rationality. These generalities fall into two groups. The first group clarifies action-consequence relationships and the second group highlights the practitioners' normative positions on organizational issues. The following discussion synthesizes the findings, giving equal weight to the qualitative and quantitative findings.

Practitioners think relationally, and practitioner-held theory contains several action-consequence relationships that suggest instrumental rationality. This rationality is limited because practitioners do not provide unanimous support or opposition to these relationships. The relationships originate with actions or features that occur in public organizations: structural reform, task management, participative management, and citizen participation. In theory, each action produces various consequences. There is a consensus that structural reform can be beneficial. More specifically, reorganizations are credited with several benefits: improved decision making, increased efficiency, better communications, reduced spans of control, provision of oversight, and increased effectiveness of organizations.

Task management and specialization are features endemic to most organizations. Specialization may or may not increase efficiency in the delivery of services; it creates communication problems, and parochialism may increase among specialized units. Practitioners believe that position specialization does not inhibit their control of subordinates or their ability to perform task management.

The benefits and drawbacks of participative management are implanted within practitioner-held theory. Practitioners believe that participative management leads to better employee interaction with the public, increased employee acceptance of responsibility, more employee involvement, increased effectiveness of government, a means for management to defer responsibility, and improved management decisions. The drawbacks of participative management, derived from the postsurvey interviews with practitioners, include slowing down the decision processes, inefficiencies, time loss, midlevel management resistance, and creation of internal politics.

Practitioner-held theory includes some preliminary consequences of citizen participation. Citizen participation can increase governmental responsiveness, change the practi-

tioners' views on issues, and provide improved information to management. The disadvantages of citizen participation involve inefficiency and inputs from those who are uninformed and ignorant.

Practitioner-held theory elucidates practitioners' normative positions or perceptions on several organizational issues. These positions are believed to inform, dictate, and constrain the actions of practitioners, and these perceptions may have emerged as a result of past action-consequence relationships. In either sequence, the practitioners' positions are grounded in limited instrumental rationality. This grounding is evident from the city managers comments during the postsurvey interviews that addressed these organizational issues. The positions are inside and outside the practitioners' organizations.

Inside their organizations, practitioners back insular governance. Practitioners agree that politics should be divorced from their positions and internal politics should be eliminated. This is the part of practitioner-held theory that supports a dichotomy between politics and administration, a dichotomy frequently dispelled in the public administration literature. Conflict should not occur in organizations, but when it does, practitioners would be quick to resolve it. Practitioners support Theory Y assumptions in believing that employees find their work enjoyable, not distasteful, and that they have a strong loyalty to their organizations. The proactive posture of practitioners is evident as they believe in norm setting: influencing the organizational culture and its underlying ethical values. This posture provides a powerful component to public administration, and the espoused methods of the practitioners are clear. Practitioners would influence the organizational culture by instilling consistent values and broad, long-range perspectives within employees. Ethical values can be swayed by codes of ethics.

Practitioner-held theory is applied selectively outside practitioners' organizations. The practitioners support citizen participation, but citizen input into decision making is guarded. Practitioners support displays of community leadership, especially in contacting more local, professional, and business groups, and they like to be community leaders. However, practitioners believe they should take a cautious approach when interacting with the external environment. Legislative bodies should not be involved in the management of local governments; more specifically, legislative bodies should not give directives to city managers or department heads.

Practitioner-held theory and the organizational doctrine it supports is tied to limited instrumental rationality. The PTOs of some practitioners will not support the actions or the consequences in the action-consequence relationships, and some PTOs support normative positions on organizational issues without a grounding in action-consequence relationships or without a link to future actions of practitioners.

CONCLUSIONS

Practitioner-held theory can be judged by how it meets the general evaluation criteria applicable to all theories. These criteria receive some academic attention (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Hage 1972; Argyris and Schon 1974; Dubin 1978) and they include generality, scope, relevance, testability, simplicity, internal validity, and predictability. Each criterion is printed in boldface in the following discussion.

Practitioner-held theory appears to meet most of the evaluation criteria. The use of triangulation in the research strategy has allowed for convergent validation of most findings. This validation "tests the degree of external validity" (Jick 1979, 603) or the level of **generality** in the formulation of practitioner-held theory. However, practitioner-held theory may or may not be applied by city managers outside Texas. The values used by Texas city managers in articulating their personal theories of organizations may or may not be similar to the values of other city managers outside Texas and other practitioners of public administration. A more comprehensive practitioner-held theory, capable of a higher level of generality, could be built by research on a variety of public administrators in local governments, at other levels of government, in other regions of the country, and in different areas of the world.

The **scope** of the organizational issues covered in the building of practitioner-held theory is limited. Practitioner-held theory does not encompass the innumerable dimensions that would detail the ultimate practitioner-held theory. Beyond the dimensions that could have been included in this study (see note 6) additional dimensions would include discussions of technology, management strategies, decision making, organizational change, group dynamics, and others. It may be difficult or impossible to formulate a definitive practitioner-held theory; there will always be situations in which practitioners are unsure of the outcomes of actions or in which they do not know how other practitioners would behave.

Since practitioner-held theory is based on knowledge gathered and analyzed from practitioners' personal theories of organizations, it is expected to have **relevance** for public administrators. Glaser and Strauss (1967, 238) maintain that "a grounded theory, particularly a substantive theory, must correspond closely to the data if it is to be applied in daily situations." Beyond understanding their normative positions and the action-consequence relationships, practitioners may gain a better understanding of what they are doing, formulate a different perspective of their personal theories of organizations, and improve their actions by considering practitioner-held theory.

Testability of practitioner-held theory is forthcoming because practitioners and scholars can determine or verify the ability of actions to yield intended results. To meet the **simplicity** criterion, the concreteness of the theory is addressed. A theory is concrete if there is "a minimum gap between theory and its application to reality" (Argyris and Schon 1974, 198) by practitioners. For example, practitioners armed with knowledge from practitioner-held theory may better understand their theories that provide daily support for participatory democracy (a normative position), and yet they often oppose citizen input to decision making because of negative consequences. Better understanding occurs when practitioners know why they have these theories.

The **internal validity** of practitioner-held theory depends on the authenticity of the data and the methods used to construct the theory. The evaluation of practitioner-held theory should not be separated from the processes used to generate it. By involving practitioners in the research process and by using triangulation, the data should have high authenticity. The means to integrate information from the interviews with city managers before and after the survey of city managers should be appropriate for this type of theory building.

The **predictability** of practitioner-held theory is difficult to determine. Any action by practitioners can result in myriad consequences. The predictability of practitioner-held theory could be enhanced by using Delphi techniques to clear action-consequence relationships with practitioners before quantitative methods are applied.

> Triangulation has helped practitioner-held theory to meet or at least to address most of the general evaluation criteria. On the way to meeting these criteria it is hoped that the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods has provided empirical support for the personal theories of organizations explored in this research, enriched the theoretical dimensions, and proved their worth to the art of practitioner-held theory building.

Appendix A: Summary of Mail Questionnaire Results

Note: The labels for the theoretical dimensions appear in upper-case letters preceding the three statements that constitute the dimension. These labels did not appear on the mail questionnaire. The questionnaire numbers are next to each statement.

Based on your experience as a city manager, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the <u>structure</u> of city government using the following scale:

SA = Strongly Agree
AG = Agree
NI = Niether Agree or Disagree
DI = Disagree
SD = Strongly Agree

	(Percentages) SA-AG-NI-DI-SD	N	Mean
STRUCTURAL REFORM			
14. Reorganization of city government is a means to improve decision making in city government	05-52-31-12-01	219	2.54
15. Reorganization of city government is a means to increase the efficiency of city government	06-60-26-06-01	220	2.36
16. Reorganization of city government is a means to increase the effectiveness of city government	07-58-28-06-01	219	2.33
TASK MANAGEMENT			
21. There is too much position specialization in city government	06-25-23-45-02	220	3.12*
22. Specialization and the division of labor increase efficiency in the delivery of city services	02-34-34-29-02	220	2.96
23. Position specialization in city government inhibits a city manager's ability to control subordinates	01-09-22-61-07	220	3.66*

Based on your experience as a city manager, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about <u>power relationships</u> and <u>politics</u> in city government using the following scale:

	(Percentages) SA-AG-NI-DI-SD	N	Mean
INSULAR GOVERNANCE			
65. Politics should be divorced from a city manager's position	19-37-15-25-04	219	2.58
74. Conflict in city government should be avoided	05-24-20-47-04	220	3.21
75. Internal politics should be eliminated in city government	08-46-23-21-02	220	2.64

Based on your experience as a city manager, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about <u>employee participation</u> in city government using the following scale:

	(Percentages) SA-AG-NI-DI-SD	N	Mean
PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT			
33. Participative management results in better city employee interaction with the public	17-65-14-04-00	220	2.06
34. Participative management increases the sense of responsibility that employees have	20-76-04-01-00	220	1.86
35. Participative management would increase the effectiveness of city government	14-66-17-02-00	220	2.11

Based on your experience as a city manager, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about <u>city employees</u> using the following scale:

	(Percentages) SA-AG-NI-DI-SD	N	Mean
THEORY Y			
50. In general, most city employees find their work in city government distasteful	00-02-06-69-23	218	4.13*
51. In general, most city employees find their work in city government enjoyable	06-82-10-02-00	219	2.07
52. City employees exhibit relatively strong loyalty to city government	05-67-20-08-01	220	2.32
NORM SETTING			
58. A city manager should influence the organizational culture in city government	30-58-09-03-00	220	1.85
59. The cultural values of department heads should be consistent with the city managers	08-24-33-32-04	219	2.99
61. City managers should promote a set of ethical standards for city employees	53-44-03-01-00	219	1.51

Based on your experience as a city manager, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about <u>citizen participation</u> in city government using the following scale:

	(Percentages) SA-AG-NI-DI-SD	N	Mean
PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY			
39. There should be more citizen participation in city government	12-63-20-05-00	220	2.18
40. Citizen participation increases governmental responsiveness	14-65-12-08-01	220	2.17
41. Citizen participation can change a city manager's views on various issues	09-80-11-01-00	220	2.05
CITIZEN INPUT INTO DECISION MAKING			
42. Citizen participation improves a city manager's decision making by providing more information	08-73-15-05-00	220	2.17
44. Consultation with citizens is important when city managers make operational decisions	02-26-23-41-07	220	3.24
48. Citizens should play a bigger role in the city manager's decision making process	01-18-32-39-10	218	3.39

Based on your experience as a city manager, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the <u>external environment</u> of city government using the following scale:

	(Percentages) SA-AG-NI-DI-SD	N	Mean
COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP			
79. City managers should address more local professional and civic groups	11-63-21-06-00	220	2.22
82. City managers should have more contact with businesses	07-66-22-05-00	220	2.24
87. A city manager should be a community leader	17-66-13-04-01	220	2.05

Based on your experience as a city manager, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about <u>council-manager relations</u> and <u>the role of city councils</u> in government using the following scale:

	(Percentages) SA-AG-NI-DI-SD	N	Mean
LEGISLATIVE INVOLVEMENT IN MANAGEMENT			
1. City councils should give operational directives to city managers	05-16-09-39-31	217	4.01
4. City councils should become involved in managerial functions	01-03-02-23-71	218	4.62
8. City councils should give directives to department heads	03-01-00-13-83	216	4.76

* Statement reversed for the analysis.

Appendix B: Factor Loadings on the Theoretical Dimensions

Theoretical Dimension	Statement Number	Factor Loading
Structural reform	16.	.93
	15.	.93
	14.	.81
Task management	22.	-.82
	21.	.78
	23.	.66
Insular governance	75.	.82
	74.	.76
	65.	.69
Participative management	34.	.71
	33.	.71
	35.	.65
Theory Y	50.	-.88
	51.	.85
	52.	.66
Norm setting	61.	.85
	58.	.59
	59.	.50
Participatory democracy	40.	.83
	39.	.81
	41.	.66
Citizen input into decision making	44.	.87
	48.	.64
	42.	.44
Community leadership	79.	.82
	82.	.80
	87.	.65
Legislative involvement in management	1.	.79
	8.	.74
	4.	.48

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