

Examining Factors That Influence the Tenure of County Managers

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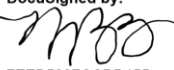
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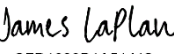
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ABSTRACT

County managers choose to remain in their position, and in doing so increase their tenure in their position or in their career as a local government manager, for a variety of reasons, which include various factors of influence in the areas of political stability, organizational attributes, position attributes, compensation and benefits, personal preferences and motivations and community qualities and demographics. This study addressed what groupings of factors have the most influence on a county manager's decision to remain in their position. Using a national study of county managers in the United States, I surveyed 1,216 county managers seeking their inputs on what factors of influence were most impactful in their decision to remain in their present position. Tenure in both current position and tenure in terms of overall county government management service were both significantly related to certain factor groupings. Overall, managers' valuations of certain factors of influence on tenure—specifically position attributes, age, educational level and community qualities and demographics—did not have significant effects.

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CHAPTER I

STUDY OVERVIEW

The local government management field, which is rooted in both the scientific management movement and the Progressive Era, has a long history as an ethics-based, principled aspect of public administration since its inception in Sumter, South Carolina, in 1904. Cities were the first governments in the United States to take on the manager–council form. Later, hybrid positions and structures retained the position of chief administrative officer (CAO), and a growing number of county governments maintain the position of county manager. Professionals working in county and city management describe their careers as challenging, rewarding, taxing, and fulfilling.

A number of professional and personal challenges await those who make a career in local government management, including political issues, the need for competent staff, and the fiscal solvency of their community. These challenges, coupled with individual motivation related to upward mobility, may shape county managers' length of service. According to data from the International City/County Management Association (ICMA, 2016), the average years of service for a county manager is 7.3 years.

Of course, some county managers remain in their positions for longer than average, but more could be known about these managers, including information about their demographics, motivations, and values. Previous studies have focused on turnover and challenges in the profession, but fewer studies have examined why managers choose to stay in communities and continue with a decade or more of service to one organization.

Although some studies have discussed the tenure of city managers (e.g., DeHoog & Whitaker, 1991; Watson & Hassett, 2003a, 2003b) and turnover in the county administrator position in large counties (Tekniepe & Stream, 2010, 2012), little research has centered on the direct factors influencing county manager tenure.

Manager tenure, which is broadly defined as length of service in this study, is an important concept for both staff (e.g., county managers) and staffing entities (e.g., county governments) as the CAO position is such a vital part of county government leadership. The answers to the research questions posed here provide a glimpse at what factors of influence matter to county managers and how those factors play into their decision to remain in their position.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors influencing tenure in county manager positions using a national email survey to collect data. County manager titles depend on a number of factors, including the state government where the county is located, local ordinances and laws, and differences in forms of government. These titles include county manager, county administrator, county coordinator, and county CAO. For the purpose of this study, the term *county manager* is used to refer to all of these position titles. I did not observe major regional trends in terms of the title of the county manager positions; however, chief administrative officer as a title is often found in California. The county administrator/controller combined title is predominant in Michigan. The nomenclature of manager versus administrator is often, but not always, an important distinction as well in terms of power and authority. For example, in New York, a county administrator customarily has the same responsibility areas as a county manager, to

include operational oversight and budget management. However, a county manager in New York has those areas of responsibilities plus the unilateral authority to hire and fire personnel. A county administrator in New York usually does not have that authority and is limited to making recommendations on human resource matters versus independent discretion. The sample population of this study was county managers in the United States, with contact information provided by the National Association of Counties (NACo), the National Association of County Administrators (NACA), state associations of county managers, and the ICMA membership directory.

Challenges persist for local governments of all types. New York, Michigan, and Oregon, among other states, limit the amount of taxes a county government can raise in any year. Other areas of administrative difficulty include politics and staff relations. As county governments across the United States grapple with the continued effects of these levy caps imposed on property taxes by state legislatures, political discord and local infighting, and the challenges of ever-shrinking intergovernmental funding streams, the stability of leadership in county manager positions becomes even more important. Those county government officials in the process of hiring a new manager or retaining a strong manager would benefit from knowing what the relevant research has shown regarding the attributes of a community or organization that cause managers to remain in their positions. Although tenure in a position is not uniformly related to success or positive outcomes of either the position holder or the local government served, generally speaking, longer length of service can benefit government organizations because these managers gain and retain institutional knowledge, provide stability of practice and

mindset, and help the institution avoid the costs and organizational challenges related to multiple recruitment efforts.

Measurements, Goals, and Research

Using the data from a multiquestion web-based survey, the aim of this study was to develop a list of possible reasons why managers choose to stay in their position in order to test the hypothesis that certain groups of factors influence manager tenure more than others. To deduce what factors might drive manager tenure levels, respondents were asked to rank a list of 26 items using a score of 1 as the highest and 26 as the lowest score. The scores were applied to six factor areas:

- Political stability
- Compensation and benefits
- Community qualities and demographics
- Organizational attributes of the county government
- Personal preferences and motivations
- Position attributes of the manager job

Items in each factor area included a broad-based listing of possible wants and needs in a position, including strength of department heads, quality of life in the community, the local school system, and bond ratings of the county government. The grouped factor areas included the subfactors that fell under each category. Factors and their subfactors are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Factor Areas by Category

Factor area	Subfactor
Political stability	Relationship with the board or council Political conflict Relationship with elected official department heads
Compensation and benefits	Pay (salary) Pay (compensation other than salary) Health insurance benefits Other fringe benefits
Community qualities and demographics	Community quality of life Services/programs provided by the county School system (parental perspective) Weather/climate of the county Population of the county
Organizational attributes of the county government	Work environment Organizational support Strength of department heads/staff Overall financial condition of county government Bond rating of the county
Personal preferences and motivations	Job satisfaction Public service motivation Family wishes and concerns Career growth/progression Spouse/significant other employment Religious concerns
Position attributes of the manager job	Management discretion/latitude Respect/appreciation of the manager position Availability/presence of an employment agreement

Although some of these individual factors and their corresponding categories were found in other tenure and length-of-service literature, the list was independently crafted for this dissertation based on my personal experience with guidance and assistance from my committee chair. Watson and Hassett's (2003a) work was perhaps of most influence on my factor categorization effort in that their common factors of influence were quite similar to those that were used for my survey. Certainly, professional and personal circumstances impact professional durability. In turn, internal factors related to both one's employment and external factor's relating to one's home life impact tenure.

When producing the factors for this study, the concept of work-life balance was an underlying theme, and as a subject this is quite prevalent in the literature. Greenfield and Terry (1995) wrote of the prevalence of work-life programs in organizations and how various areas of often emphasized, from financial wellness to mental health to insurance related benefits. They further posited that employers who do not embrace the strategic importance of work-life balance may be caught flat-footed and face employee attrition at unnecessarily higher levels as a result. This risk speaks to the importance of the inclusion of both personal and professional related factors in my list.

Caillier (2017) studied work-life programs using a panel of federal employees and noted that some programs miss their mark in terms of not reducing turnover intention. He additionally noted that health-wellness programs did in fact lead to more job satisfaction. He also mentioned that the often-competing influences of home and professional life can lead to role conflict. Incorporating factors in my factor list that relate

to so-called “home life” such as family concerns and spouse employment were thus important.

Work–life balance strategy assessments focused on the private sector are also found in the literature and were likewise relevant to this research. Bird (2006) wrote that corporate business executives, when assessing organizational leaders, cannot think of an either/or scenario wherein the employee either has efficiency-driven mentality that is largely work focused or they have lives outside of work. Bird discussed the need for that balance and the organizational impacts gained by such balance in the habits and practices of the workforce. Further, he discussed that the definition of work–life balance is indeed different for everyone. Related to my factor list identification, it is thus essential to include a diverse cross-section of the factors and include a requisite mix of personal and professional motivational factors, including some related to the organization itself.

Earlier this year, the Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington—a nonprofit association serving local governments in the state of Washington—published a report (LaCavita & Burrows, 2022) on work–life balance and highlighted several findings. Eight key factors were referenced when assessing elements of proper work–balance in public sector settings: culture, employee engagement, vision/mission/values, performance, empathy, flexibility, rituals/events, and team-building. LaCavita and Burrows noted that local governments need to make their environments more attractive to would-be prospects given the impacts of the Great Resignation and need to focus on improving in some or all of these eight areas to confront the retention and recruitment challenges of 2022 and beyond.

LaCavita and Burrows (2022) also included a case study on the City of Issaquah and the efforts undertaken by this local government to make changes to culture, morale, and balancing the personal and professional interests of their staff. The city had the benefit of an earlier, prepandemic effort that commenced in 2019, when they surveyed employees and asked about improving organizational culture. The survey noted items like feedback improvements, culture-building efforts, and opportunities for staff to have fun. Postpandemic, the 2022 update to this survey included three new priorities from staff—better work–life balance, a review of compensation and benefits and expanded mentorship, training, and professional development opportunities. In line with my research on county manager tenure influences, these survey results display the multitiered efforts needed to assure a balanced approach to the chief administrator’s work. Although this work was not specifically focused on the city manager/chief administrative officer (the position comparable to county manager in a municipal government), the findings are nevertheless relevant and on point to the work of a local government executive, irrespective of jurisdictional type.

Deloitte, the international consulting firm, produced a report (Datar, 2022) on the public sector’s possibilities and opportunities in the race to win the talent war for staff in this evolving labor market. As many previous reports have likewise concluded, government is often behind the curve in terms of compensation and benefits. Governments may have fallen further behind postpandemic but, as Datar (2022) noted, more research is needed on the pay disparities between private and public sectors. Flexibility and work–life balance were two cited values that the next generation of staff holds in high esteem. One theme that crosses generations is the positive impact of public

service motivation. Employees who gravitate towards work in local government often tend to have a sense of altruism and a spirit of community service. Capitalizing on this motivation will be important for governments of all sizes. Public service motivation was noted for many in my survey of county managers as a factor of influence in remaining in their present position.

The overarching question to the participants in my survey of county managers was “Please rank how each of the following has impacted your decision to remain in your position.” The resulting rankings, categorized by the six factors, produced data regarding which of the ranked items were most highly valued by the participants. The ranking system produced broad detail on the sentiments of sitting county managers and their specific employment preferences.

The goals of this study were as follows. First, to survey county managers across the United States with various methods of distribution including electronic mailing lists, network boards, and direct email solicitation through the NACo and ICMA membership directories. At the time of survey production and distribution, there were approximately 1,300 county manager positions of various types in the United States. A goal of 150 respondents was sought. Next, the responses were assessed and years of tenure were charted and graphed. The demographic survey data, including governing body and population size of the county, were analyzed and commonalities identified as applicable. Finally, in the discussion phase of the research, the results were compared and contrasted to city manager studies in the academic literature.

The overarching research question guiding this study related to the factors of influence that were most impactful to a manager’s decision to remain in their present

position and to assessing the differences between those factors. The research question was, What are the key factors that influence the tenure of county managers?

Based on the review of the relevant academic literature and using the stated goals and research questions as structural guidelines for this work, the aim was to test two hypotheses, which were driven by the literature:

Hypothesis 1: County manager perception of political stability is positively associated with tenure.

Hypothesis 2: County manager perception of compensation and benefits is not associated with tenure.

Summary

This study has numerous implications for both practitioners and academics. Practitioners may find the study's survey research section useful, where numerous factors of influence are examined and relationships are assessed among key government organizations, community and demographic attributes, and employment decisions by county managers. Public service motivation is often discussed as a factor of influence in new employees choosing a career path. As Holt (2018) wrote, members of the workforce with a public service motivation are more inclined to self-select for a career in the public sector. Additionally, Holt found that those who strongly valued compensation and monetary rewards were less likely to work in government. The results could also be important for government leadership positions in general. Although managers hold separate positions in local government administrations, practitioners may also find the results fruitful for recruitment and retention efforts in the department head and director ranks.

Governing bodies and those in the recruitment and human resources fields could certainly find the survey responses and subsequent analysis important, perhaps even more so today with the challenges of the Great Resignation impacts. These are the hiring agencies, decision-makers, and “buyers” of talent in the competition to hire county management professionals. Knowing the preferences, motivations, impacts, and factors of influence on the decision-making process of county managers could guide personnel practices and retention programs aimed at keeping leaders in organizations and reversing attrition trends.

From an academic perspective, this work adds to the literature on the subject of tenure and local government management. Unlike past research, this study has the potential to more singularly spell out relationships between tenure and influential factors in the county manager field, which is separate from city management and distinct from other similarly structured fields, irrespective of population sizes. Although regional variation was not specifically sought out, the information gleaned from the data could be important additions to the body of work on political cultures and clusters and the cultural norms and regionalization of preferences among government units in the US. Additionally, the answers from county managers on questions in the realm of work–life balance could be important information sources for that area of research focus.

The literature on tenure in local government management tended to focus on the causes of turnover and often centered on the city management profession. Although city and county managers share similar skill sets, backgrounds, and job descriptions, the work of a county manager is nevertheless distinct from the work of a city manager in numerous ways. These perspectives include county government service diversity, the existence of

elected official department heads in county government, and the sheer size and scope of counties as broader and bigger government bodies that cover more land and area. As Benton (2002) wrote, county governments are built for regionalization of service delivery in ways that city governments are not. He also noted that the reform movements of the Progressive Era eventually bled into a different kind of reform movement for counties in the growing calls to allow counties more flexibility (and expansion) in services delivered at the county level. These reforms naturally led to government and structural questions, which in turn led to the growth of the county manager or county administrator position as chief administrative officer. As services expanded and the calls for counties to do more robust service delivery grew louder, it was only natural for the government organization to develop positions of the type of a chief administrative officer.

The county manager, as chief administrative officer of county government, is charged with a number of high-level functions, including union negotiations, operations management, and budget development. A growing area of responsibility is intergovernmental relations and legislative advocacy. As illustrated in Table 2, common characteristics show up in the varying types of position specification statements in existence, including oversight of personnel, budget preparation and financial reporting and overall administration of the affairs of the county government.

Table 2

County Manager/Administrator Job Description Samples

County	County manager job description sample
Luzerne County, PA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Serves as the head of the executive branch of government for the County.- Responsible for the administration of all County operations placed in his or her charge by the Home Rule Charter, the Administrative Code and other County ordinances and/or resolutions.- Directs the County's organizational, operational, management, budget and administrative operations and activities as well as providing oversight for all division heads in the County
Pender County, NC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Responsible for the administration of all departments of county government under the Board of Commissioners' general control.- Appoints County employees and agents, except those elected by the people or whose appointment is otherwise provided for by law- Directs and supervises the administration of all county departments under the Board's general control- Prepares and submits the annual budget and capital program and to prepare a comprehensive financial report at the end of each fiscal year.
Greene County, GA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Oversees day-to-day activities of County employees who are not employees of a constitutional officer.- Responsible for effectively coordinating the various County departments and agencies.- Administers County laws, ordinances, and resolutions- Appoints and removes County employees- Prepares an annual budget
Livingston County, NY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Oversees all County government functions, advising department heads and county officers along with coordinating the activities of county government to effectively implement the directives and policies established by the Board of Supervisors- Oversees purchasing functions- Carries out the duties and responsibilities of budget officer of the County, preparing and, upon adoption by the Board of Supervisors, administrating of both the Annual Operating Budget, the Annual Maintenance Budget, and the Long-Range Capital Program- Participates in collective bargaining negotiations with representatives of employee bargaining units- Prepares administrative and management studies, as may be required by the Board of Supervisors.

Mariposa County, CA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Serves as chief administrator responsible for implementing the policies and direction of the elected Board of Supervisors. - Oversees the County budget as well as County strategy, real estate, economic development, housing development, public information, technical services, indigent defense, purchasing, legislative agenda and performance management. - Collaborates with elected officials, department heads, community organizations, state and federal governments, and other parties. - Represents the County on various internal, community, statewide, and national boards and committees.
Benzie County, MI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responsible for coordinating departmental activities, studying administrative procedures and policy, and recommending changes to improve the operations of County Government. - Reviews budget requests and makes recommendations to the Board of Commissioners. - Communicates and coordinates all County Board policies and decisions to all affected departments. - Acts as a communication link between the County Board of Commissioners, other governmental units, department heads, elected officials, various County organizations.
Osceola, FL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Serves as the chief executive officer overseeing County operations. - Implements board policies and preparing an annual operating budget. - Manages all departments and coordinates operations with constitutional officers, other elected officials and partner agencies.
Penobscot, ME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Works with all elected officials, department heads, and employees to solve problems and concerns regarding employee relations, personnel issues, budgets, County policies, and administrative procedure. - Anticipates and resolves problems and issues, both internally within County departments and externally with other governmental agencies, vendors, and members of the public. - Supervises the development of the annual County budget. - Develops administrative policies and procedures for review and <u>approval by the Board of</u> <u>rs.</u>

The stressors of these high-level responsibilities may lead to turnover; however, changes often occur due to upward mobility and salary-enhancing career moves. Not everyone wants to stay at a county manager job, even the good ones, due to a multitude of these so-called pull factors that lead to departures at all stages of tenure and career.

Although longer tenure does not always equate to professional prominence, research on the subject is important to the field of local government management, as evidenced by the substantial body of research work on city managers. A study of tenure that includes a survey of county managers to learn what factors of influence are most important to them as they choose to stay and serve a community could provide county governing bodies with important data on the demographics of long-serving managers and what community, personal, and organizational characteristics affect their tenure.

Dissertation Plan

This chapter provides an overview of the dissertation work. Hypotheses are introduced and the foundation of the study is presented. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature pertinent to the subject of tenure, including research focused on city versus county differences, turnover, and the reasons leading to voluntary and involuntary manager departures. Chapter 3 includes an outline of the research methods proposed for the study. The central point of data collection for the study is a survey, consisting mainly of the individual respondent's ranking of multiple items of influences of tenure. The survey was distributed electronically to in-service county managers across the country. Chapter 4 includes my results. Demographic trends are reviewed, and the centerpiece OLS regression models are run, followed with commentary. Chapter 5 provides a conclusion and overall summary. I provide an overview of the findings, discuss limitations, and connect this research back to the literature before ending with some concluding discussion.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Problem Statement and Overview

Tenure as a generic, nonindustry-specific subject is plentiful in the academic literature. Past research focused on businesses and chief executive officer tenure (De Alessi, 1974), superintendents and their turnover, and tenure in the education arena. Research related to this work was focused on city managers and their reasons for remaining in a position (Feiock & Stream, 1998). Researchers have assessed the impacts of short tenure and long tenure, as well as explanations behind both long and short tenure. Chang et al. (2022) questioned the narrative of tenure as a component of organizational performance and lamented common definitions of tenure. Unaddressed by the literature were questions regarding what drives tenure in county manager positions and whether this drive differs from what has been learned about city managers. In order to develop a sound and thorough review of the literature, studies focused on tenure and turnover were appraised along with those focused on differences between city and county management. Finally, and most relevant, studies focusing on factors of tenure influence in city manager positions were assessed.

Intergovernmental Relations, County Management and Conflict

Aspects of the intergovernmental relations and intergovernmental management movement are rooted in features like efficiency, public management/managerialism, and the efficacy of delivery systems. For a county government, the intergovernmental

relations system runs vertically upward to the state government and the federal government, vertically downward to the town or city level, and horizontally across to other county governments for possible shared service possibilities. As noted in the position descriptions, the work of the county manager on these types of issues is embedded in the position detail and an expected major charge of the county manager in terms of responsibilities.

The fiscal perspectives of these intergovernmental relationships are most impactful to the local governments delivering public services and in turn attempting to solve complex policy and societal challenges through the administration of federal and state-defined programming. These programs often come with strings attached and include unfunded mandates. There is then a level of financial tethering that exists through a series of partnership opportunities. Counties play a major role in these cross-government financial transfer scenarios and, although not a universal requirement, county managers are often tasked with figuring out these challenging financial concerns between other governmental units. Stephens and Wikstrom (2007) noted that reforms suggest that all local governments, including counties, should designate an administrative official (often a county manager in these case of counties) to monitor vertical and horizontal intergovernmental developments and promote intergovernmental cooperation.

With respect to this complexity of job tasks, county managers carry responsibilities that often include those of a budget officer, public information officer, or county spokesperson. The manager is often expected to be the lead communicator/facilitator for advocacy and conflict resolution for items like municipal agreements, service pacts, and funds transfers from state to county to local government.

These managers thus find themselves on the front lines of intergovernmental relations and these relations can be a source of tenure challenge. As the Avery County, NC, county manager job description notes (Avery County, 2022), the county manager is charged with “coordinating intergovernmental agencies and acting as the County’s representative when dealing with other governmental units.” The Santa Fe County Manager’s position duties statement includes “representing the County in intergovernmental relationships” (Santa Fe County, 2022). A National Association of Counties report (2008) labeled county managers as the hubs of shared services and intermunicipal efforts.

Klase and Song (2000) commented that challenges arise in the intergovernmental arena due to structural conflicts in terms of who (what level of government) is responsible for policy-making process and this can be a source of county conflict. The authors posted that county governments are perhaps more susceptible to other levels of government to these conflicts due to their size, their growth in the past several decades, and their overarching nature of service delivery. The authors also noted that county governments by their nature operate within a system that includes fragmented and small often unincorporated areas. These and other factors were cited as bases for these comments on structural conflict.

School Superintendents and Public Sector Tenure

In public sector leadership outside of the traditional city or county manager positions, the school superintendent holds a position similar to county managers, including characteristics such as work scope, educational attainment, position duties, and responsibilities areas. Like county managers, school district superintendents often work for a governing board, maintain a term of office, work under an employment agreement,

have budget responsibility, and maintain the title of the public organization's chief administrator. Examining tenure in the school district superintendent ranks was therefore critical. Like managers, superintendents have a relatively short tenure, with studies pegging the average tenure between 2.5 and 6.4 years. Williams and Hatch (2012) found that specific traits or interests of the superintendent, such as a focus on organizational culture and exhibiting characteristics of a servant-leader, were important to length of service. The length-of-service standard analyzed as a long-tenure benchmark was 12 years. Organizational performance, mutual trust, and shared decision-making were key positive factors influencing the length of superintendent service. An interesting by-product of tenure in Williams and Hatch's study of superintendents and school governing structure was a decrease of goal setting and school-board-to-superintendent directives. As a superintendent grew further entrenched over time, their autonomy and independence increased, which was not surprising.

In a study of the impacts of turnover on school districts in Texas, Hill (2005) discovered a negative effect on the organization when a district leader departed and their replacement came externally. Hill focused on the potential negative effects of managerial change and the importance of succession planning. Forecasting a leadership vacancy, assessing the wants and needs of the organization in terms of the desired traits and qualities of the next leader, and an updated, impartial assessment of the job specifics were recommended to assure proper succession planning. The possibility of harmful impacts on an organization in managerial turnover was determined to be relevant to the study of tenure.

City Managers and Public Sector Tenure

The most pertinent studies reviewed were those focused on turnover and tenure among city managers. The research on this subject included myriad assessments, ranging from reasoning categories, the push (i.e., forced exit) versus pull (i.e., attraction to what is perceived to be a better position) to political conflict and other sources. Relevance here is important as city managers, as noted throughout my work here, share many common characteristics with county managers.

Political conflict for city managers was often rooted in direct discord with the mayor or the governing body or both. In researching the subject of tenure at the city level, DeHoog and Whitaker (1991) studied 133 Florida city managers from 1986–1990 and found that conflict was a significant cause of turnover. They probed for reasons why managers left, noting the importance of conflict. Furthermore, they sought to define and delineate the two common types of conflict, notably the one arising from manager versus council prioritization on policy or outcomes, and the other arising from factions within the council itself. The conflict between the manager and the council was found to be the more common of the two as a source of manager departures. Commonly, the manager relationship with the council is one of policy implementor (manager) to policy developer (council), and when the lines blur distrust and animosity can result. The changing degree of manager involvement in policy and mayoral or council involvement in policy implementation, in addition to voluntary turnover for better opportunities, were also cited by DeHoog and Whitaker as sources of turnover in the city manager group studied here.

Barber (1988) took a different approach to the problem of manager tenure, focusing instead on the promotion of managers. Barber studied newly promoted

managers and surveyed respondents on the decision to move from one governmental employer to another. Personal challenges, normal career advancement, and monetary considerations were identified as the top three reasons for making a change. Family considerations and the desire to relocate from a position with a negative environment also factored into the moves.

Mani (2014) reviewed specific determinants of city manager tenure using a base of North Carolina managers as a case study group. North Carolina is a strong council–manager state, with numerous positions of appointed authority in towns and cities. Consequently, the state represents a cross-section of large and small, rural and urban. Mani noted that the stability of the manager position was crucial to the effectiveness and efficiency of core local government service delivery. Investigating the key characteristics and attributes of active city managers in the state, Mani found that fiscal aptitude was aligned with longer tenure; advanced education was surprisingly connected to shorter tenure; and political variables, contrary to other studies, had no significant impact on length of service to a community. Interestingly, 90% of the managers surveyed by Mani, when asked to opine on strengths and weaknesses of electoral systems (e.g., elections by district versus at-large), stated that at-large district election systems led to better governance. Mani also referenced the diversity and equity of the at-large districts can lead to broader coalitions for policy-making influence. This point may have bearing on city and county manager sentiments with respect to political stability and governing body relationships.

Ammons and Bosse (2005) assessed the dual meanings of tenure and raised a number of questions about ICMA data on city manager tenure. They conducted a

longitudinal study to examine the completed tenures of city managers in 120 U.S. cities. Population range was taken into account through varying strata of population in an attempt to avoid concentration within a range and risk bias. Ammons and Bosse noted that deficiencies in service-so-far descriptors of tenure (whereby tenure is defined as length of service in a community, or in the profession, ending with the point in time of survey data capture) are often used in ICMA reports on the subject matter. They asserted this miscalculation is not ill intended but exists nonetheless and described the potential negative impacts of the mischaracterization. The basis for the discrepancy in tenure definition is, they found, that the service-so-far tally credited to a current city manager role is merely a snapshot and is only accurate should the managers surveyed retire or resign the day after the data are collected. In concluding comments, Ammons and Bosse suggested that researchers purposefully defined what tenure represents or used other phrases like *service-so-far* or *completed tenure*.

Feiock and Stream (1998) examined the tenure of 110 Florida city managers through a two-part survey conducted in 1989 and 1995. They found the average tenure of this subset of Florida managers was 3.4 years. Based on what the authors perceived to be a gap in the academic literature on the subject of employment arrangements related to tenure, they focused partially on the presence of an employment agreement or contract between the manager and the jurisdiction served. Hypothesizing that managers with an employment agreement are likely to have shorter tenure, contractual arrangements were not an influencing factor on city manager tenure, but employment arrangements had an intervening effect on tenure.

Thurmond (2009) sampled the available reports and research on the subject of turnover and found that, although no single factor was the root cause, 20 common factors were identified as relating to a local government manager's decision to leave their government post. Of these 20, Thurmond pinpointed the following as the most important: conflict, manager performance, presence of the master's of public administration degree, years of managerial experience, previous positions held, negotiating skills, and behavior of the manager.

Watson and Hassett (2003a) examined turnover, tenure, and career paths of city managers. They sourced their information from publicly available data on the ICMA *Who's Who Directory of Local Government Managers* and the ICMA *Municipal Yearbook* (professional association publication of positions in the nation by city). Watson and Hassett then completed subsequent follow-ups directly with the municipality if there were questions or gaps in the data. They found that average tenure for the 113 city managers in their study was 6.3 years. Interestingly, the tenure of many of these managers with the city itself, regardless of the manager position, was nearly double (12.25 years), which showed the common practice in these large cities of promoting internally. These findings were deemed important to the study of tenure and succession planning and were directly relevant to this research work.

Watson and Hassett (2003b) found that political conflict often presents as an explanation behind manager departure, honed in on the longest of the long-serving with 20 years of service or more, and determined the factors that kept these managers in their city manager positions so long. Using available data from ICMA and other sources, they surveyed a pool of 146 city managers who had served in their communities for more

than 20 years. The purpose of the survey was to determine what distinguishing and common characteristics arose from demographic, educational, and personality data. A 73% response rate produced a nationwide profile of 107 city managers. The respondents were primarily well-educated White males who enjoyed a high level of satisfaction with their position. The question of why managers stayed was an important piece of the study, and it served as a model for the evaluation and survey analysis conducted as part of this research. Table 3 shows the rank order of factors in the study by Watson and Hassett.

Table 3

Rank Order of Job-Related Factors and Mean Scores

Rank	Job-related factors	<i>M</i> score
1	Job satisfaction	3.13
2	Political stability	3.22
3	High degree of management latitude	3.42
4	Family desires	3.45
5	Quality of life in community	3.89
6	Salary and benefits	4.57
7	Spouse's employment/profession	6.19

Note. Adapted from Watson and Hassett (2003b, p. 22).

In concert with one of the 20 factors leading to turnover in the local government management profession cited by Thurmond (2009), McCabe et al. (2008) assessed the role of political and economic change in manager turnover. They cited tenure as important and perhaps growing in its level of importance as managers have taken on greater responsibilities, particularly in the gray area of policy formulation and

development. With policy development and formulation often crossing election cycles and fiscal years, McCabe et al. noted the value of city manager tenure was due in part to managerial oversight in the policy implementation process. That service continuity can be of significant value when considering the role managers play with respect to investments in projects, infrastructure, initiatives and other longer-term obligations. Taking political instability as one factor of turnover, the results indicated that the rate of council makeup change had a corresponding effect on the probability of manager change. Although fiscal conditions were discovered to have no impact on manager tenure, general economic conditions in the community, as expressed in per capita income for the purposes of the study, positively affected manager tenure. Economic change downward was also a factor in turnover, although statistically slight compared to the other factors examined.

Succession planning (i.e., the plan for what happens when a manager leaves) is the subject of a study by Leland et al. (2012). They surveyed North Carolina managers using a web-based survey distributed by the North Carolina City/County Management Association and had a response rate of 36%. They argued that there are organizational performance and financial incentives to properly plan for the next manager but that planning efforts might differ depending on the type of government structure in place. Tenure is an important tangential factor in succession planning because communities that employ longer-tenured managers and retained them for lengthy periods benefited from the institutional knowledge that these officials possess and would likely benefit from knowing why their tenure was so lengthy and from having time to adequately plan for their successor. Somewhat surprisingly, Leland et al. noted the council–manager structure “lends itself to having little incentive for elected officials or the current manager to plan”

(p. 46), which if true lends further credence to the importance of studying job characteristics that managers find most important when choosing to remain in a position.

Relative to the questions of public service motivation, Lee and Wilkins (2011) discussed the job motivational factors, both intrinsic and extrinsic, for nonprofit and public sector officials. They noted that the literature tends to focus on the private sector versus the public sector or the nonprofit sector versus the private sector, but rarely the intersectoral differences and similarities between public and nonprofit job motivations. Although not explicitly connected to tenure, job motivations are quite similar to influences on why one would stay in a position. These include compensation and benefits, the presence of a pension system, career advancement and other motivations. Lee and Wilkins theorized that the sectors would differ on commonly used rewards and thus an examination of job motivational factors would produce results showing factors meaning more or less to employees depending on the sector. Public sector employees held higher values for career advancement and the presence of a pension system whereas nonprofit employees valued more strongly family-friendly policies and increased responsibilities.

County and City Management: Similarities and Differences

In the profession of local government management, city managers still represent the most commonly recognized title, owing in part to the city manager being the older of the two most common local government manager titles (ICMA, 2022). The council–manager form of government, established in Sumter, South Carolina, in 1904, was first confined to the municipal structure of cities. Later, the movement spread to other cities, most famously Dayton, Ohio, and was later situated in Roberson County, North Carolina,

in 1929 (Newell, 2004). Cities outnumber counties in the United States due to the local government structure in the country, namely the usual size constraints of the former.

County governments are closely aligned with city governments, and managers in each of these types of governments share common features, including a preference for professional degrees (e.g., the master of public administration [MPA]), similar career paths, and budgetary skills. Relative to the MPA, some local governments will indeed pay for staff to obtain this degree as part of a professional development plan. However, differences do exist between the two positions. Pammer et al. (2000) noted that county government is a fundamentally different enterprise than city government. County governments are larger, more expansive operations and often involve different forms of governing bodies such as an elected board of commissioners or board of supervisors. For example, in a board of supervisors and county administrator governance structure, the administrator is a CAO who works for a group of individually elected town or city supervisors who jointly serve as the CAOs of their representative jurisdictions. These members of the governing body of the county are already elected at their town or city level. Their full-time position is that of supervisor, chief executive officer, and likely budget officer, to their hometown jurisdiction. Their concurrent part-time position is that of legislator on a countywide board representing their town. Thus, members of a board of supervisors wear two hats.

Furthermore, managerial discretion in the manager position can be somewhat bucked with the presence of separately elected official department heads such as the sheriff, district attorney, and clerk or recorder, among others. Due to the presence of these elected official department heads, this fragmentation and distribution of managerial

autonomy can be a stressor for county managers. As Klase and Song (2000) wrote, this direct line of administrative authority (e.g., a clerk, sheriff, or elected assessor) hinders the strengthening of management capacity of county government and is a contributing factor in intracounty conflict. These elected official department heads often operate under different administrative structures. Depending on the county, these structures can mean individual budget authority versus the budget authority residing with the county manager, discretion over personnel decisions versus centralization with the manager, and other associated managerial discretion. Contrast these examples with the synthesized structure for all of the other departments that funnel administratively through the county manager, and one posits that this can lead to personnel pressures and disagreements over operational decisions.

Although city managers and county managers share common traits, degrees, and professional backgrounds, the institutions of county and city government have contrasting characteristics. Researchers have opined that counties are the dark underbelly of local government. Counties have also been referred to as the “dark continent” and the “headless wonder” (Bollens et al., 1969). With mayors, and to an extent city managers, a local government would have clarity in terms of administrative authority, whereas a county with disparate oversight of operations due to elected official department directors would not have that same, clear line of administration. In part these characterizations, written in the 1960s, were a product of counties not yet rising to a level of sophistication in terms of structure, administrative affairs and governance as their (managerially) older municipal brethren. Yet in the same breath researchers have referenced the anticipatory nature of county government development, whereby structures and lines morph and

county governments become pseudometropolitan in nature. Even with development, counties remain restricted in growth through two major structural traits. The first is the existence of the hodgepodge organizational hierarchy with chief elected department heads. The second is the harshly regulated operating environment counties govern in, especially as it relates to state-to-county mandates, administrative burdens, and authority control measures. That being said, as Bollens et al. (1969) pointed out, counties are present in nearly every state and what happens governmentally in an area assuredly affects the county government, irrespective of direct responsibility of the governmental issue. This situation lends importance to the issue of intergovernmental relations as they relate to city–county rapport.

In the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (1982) report, county government was profiled in its then present form. Notable areas of operational focus in the 1970s and early 1980s in some ways mirror the present-day foci of county governments, namely, regional service delivery, mental health services, and solid waste. The scope and breadth of county services tend to dwarf those of city governments and the heavy emphasis in later decades on human service programming usually not found at the municipal level adds to the list of differentiators between the governments.

The mid-20th century saw a turn for counties into more urban, traditionally municipal services such as parks, fire protection, and public safety. The Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (1982) cited the changing and regional roles of counties, which was a byproduct of the challenges and belt-tightening at the city level as the stresses of urbanization influenced municipal governments (p. 238). Last, the report referenced the city-like challenges facing counties including grant levels from the

state and federal government and the municipally ubiquitous struggle over home rule authority. Benton (2002) noted that county government as a structure itself was not initially intended to provide the robust levels of services that municipal structures were, but county governments later found themselves expected and in some cases compelled to provide additional services and programs to their constituents.

It could be that the lack of growth in the academic literature specific to counties is based upon the sometimes-pervasive opinion that county governments are still substate authorities created to deliver state services at the local level. This rigid, counties-as-state-operators structure is changing, however, and has been morphing for many decades. As Kemp (2008) pointed out, post-World War II sprawl and suburbanization led counties to a period of growth in terms of expansion in areas like planning and zoning, employment, and economic development. According to Kemp, this expanded profile, which in some city–county relationships caused consternation and disputes of a territorial nature, nevertheless led to opportunities. Consolidations, regional service delivery partnerships, and programs and services in unincorporated areas are just a few examples of cities and counties cooperating to generate taxpayer savings and efficiency gains in governmental operations.

County and city partnerships often induce the creation of intergovernmental or quasi-governmental offices for purposes of advancing community and economic development interests on a regional basis. These efforts are usually buoyed by the participation of private sector and community groups as well, making for well-rounded, well-represented efforts in the shaping of local development initiatives. As the tenure of county managers can at least partially be influenced by the community quality of life in

the jurisdiction of service, these regional relationships are important facets of city-county connections to reference for this study.

On the subject of intergovernmental relations, the idea of collaborative governance comes up as a topic of consideration when discussing the litany of cooperation opportunities available to a county manager. These include partnerships with nonprofits, town and city governments and the state and federal government. As alluded to in the section detailing manager job responsibilities, these are key and critical tasks of county managers and could thus play a role in tenure. McGuire (2006) studied the literature available on collaborative practices in public management and deduced that the work was critical, systemic and far from episodic in nature at this point in the history of intergovernmental relations. Collaborative governance in fact is a permanent fixture, particularly in areas of county government involvement like social service programs, economic development and emergency management.

Counties, by their geographic structure, are the macrolevel of local government to the city, town, borough, or village microgovernment. Despite similarities, the life of the professional manager (i.e., the city manager) can differ between the two levels of government. For example, Fico and Lacy (2013) found that newspapers devoted far more attention to city concerns and issues than county government matters. As the fourth estate, the media is often the bastion of both government criticism and public support and, with the rise of Trump and others, a frequent lightning rod for criticism, warranted or not, in terms of veracity and objectivity. Fico and Lacy referred to counties as “stealth” organizations, often flying under the radar of local press coverage, where local and even national concerns compete for reader and publisher preferences. They asserted that,

although county governments in general have grown in terms of service scope and budget size to perhaps rival their local government counterparts, corresponding media attention has yet to keep pace with the growth in the stature and reputation of counties.

The *Public Administration Review* editorial board convened a forum and conducted and subsequently published an academic–practitioner exchange related to future research on counties (Lundy, 2007). County government practitioners commented on a proposed, aggressive research agenda centered on county government. The fact that a discussion took place specifically on counties and the necessity for an academic–practitioner dialogue on the development of a targeted resource agenda was evidence of both the growing strength of county governments and the relative lack of diverse academic literature on county governments as a specific subject matter.

As county government has grown in complexity and in diversity of service provision, so too has the suite of responsibilities for the county manager. Modlin (2011) noted that the county manager position has all but assumed most of the power in county government, most importantly in the budget process. This power inversion, from elected representatives to the appointed manager, likely has an impact on manager turnover and tenure. Modlin wrote, “Positive relationships with commissioners, the managers’ ability to provide acceptable alternatives in critical budget situations, and the acceptance of manager budget decisions by other elected officials all contribute to the managers’ influence” (p. 21).

When talking about power and scope of service related to Modlin’s (2011) commentary, the reference to the budget process looms large as the central source; however, an understated, additional strength of counties is the county as convener. The

county government, due to intergovernmental relationships and an overarching public presence, can often be the facilitator of shared goals and pluralistic community efforts around a series of community interests, whether related to economic development, infrastructure projects or education/youth programs. Fostering this system of interdependency can potentially be related to the factors of influence on county manager tenure. Some managers may indeed seek out and maintain employment in particular positions due to these opportunities for shared interest planning. Others may have their tenure impacted negatively due to their inability to address, or lack of interest in addressing, these types of broad, community-wide goals and objectives.

County managers are not different from their city manager counterparts relative to the subjects of career paths and job patterns. A traditional approach to a county manager career involves the aspiring manager serving in the capacity of an assistant or an intern and gradually rising through the ranks to higher-level deputy manager positions until they reach a CAO position for a local government. Although this is the traditional pathway, others means of entry into the field of county management exist, such as movement from nonprofit organization executive director titles and transfers from the world of private sector management.

Although county managers often come from the ranks of assistants and department heads, it is important to distinguish the types of positions and the potential impact on tenure as a result of these differences. CAO positions are where the proverbial buck stops and, as a result, tend to be in the thick of highly contentious personnel issues and political and financial challenges with the governing body, citizens, unions, and other stakeholders. Department directors have more rigidly defined duties that lend themselves

to a less stressful environment. As Hansell (as cited in Newell, 2004) wrote, the chief executive officer, chief accounting officer, and chief operations officer positions are outward facing toward external relationships with citizens, elected officials, and business and other special interest groups; and they are more visible and more vulnerable to being forced to move on and move out of a community than are those who operate as department directors or assistants (p. 6).

County Manager Tenure

Existing literature addressing the subject of county manager tenure was sparse. Tekniepe and Stream (2010, 2012) studied the county manager turnover during nearly 2 decades of data production and review. In their 2010 county manager turnover study, they examined manager positions in counties with populations over 500,000 and investigated data from 1992–2006. They posited that manager turnover in these counties was based primarily on political consensus issues, community and fiscal stability, and relationships with the commission or governing body. In an interesting finding they concluded that graduate education had a positive corresponding effect on length of service to a community. In contrast, one might posit that the lack of an MPA, or some graduate degree, has negative tenure impacts to sitting county managers

In their later study, Tekniepe and Stream (2012) researched county manager turnover in large American counties with populations exceeding 500,000 from 1992 to 2009. This study was quantitative and covered 32 counties, all operating under the council–manager form of government. Citing research focused solely on city manager tenure and turnover, Tekniepe and Stream (2012) noted that the two positions had become more professionally alike than different. For example, the professional

association of local government managers includes both city and county managers. Additionally the position specifications, with respect to the core area of budgeting and operations management, are very similar. They noted the scarcity of academic literature on county manager turnover and tenure. Focusing on the push factors leading to manager change, Tekniepe and Stream investigated the influence of factors such as financial performance, political conflict, and jurisdictional adversity and found that political conflict was of significance and that fiscal performance also had a significant effect.

Political Stability, Board Relationships, and Manager Tenure

In the pure form of professional local government management, city and county managers play the role of conductors to the composers of the elected governing bodies. They are charged with carrying out public policy efficiently once it has been vetted and produced as policy or legislation by the council or board. When not managed effectively, this delicate relationship between policy making and policy implementation may negatively affect the relationship between a manager and governing body, leading to turnover and reducing the length of service in communities served.

Two areas of influence related to manager tenure are common. First, political conflict and instability, as noted by Carrell (1962), DeHoog and Whitaker (1991), and Kaatz et al. (1996), explains that the political influence of the council and the political dynamics at play in the council (or board) and political influences in general are often key elements of tenure impact for a county manager. And second, as illustrated by Pammer et al. (1999), the relationship between the manager and the governing body is a second key area of tenure influence. However, there are several other factors, including

communication, staff support, personal motivations, and the pull or attraction factor to another community or a county via a different job opportunity.

In short, political influences, including turnover in the governing body and conflicts between board members, can influence city manager turnover. In one of the earliest works on manager–council relationships and conflict, Carrell (1962) advanced six major causes of conflict between a manager and council: power, personality, politics, policy implementation, manager inflexibility, and communication. Power refers to the decision-making ability and who makes what choices. Personality is the personal assessment of character among and between the council and the manager. Politics is the “small p” politics of local and neighborhood issues arising as a source of conflict, and the “big P” political issues of partisan elections and party debates. Policy presents as a source of conflict due to both council demands for implementation expediency and administrative debates on planning efforts towards particular policy matters. Manager inflexibility focuses on ethics and the rigidity with the manager’s conduct versus the flexibility sought by council on managerial matters. Finally, communication presents as a category of conflict due a host of reasons—information sharing (or lack thereof) can lead to disagreements on knowledge of activities or policy developments. Personnel decisions, and communication upward from the manager to the council or board on some situational staff change is also a source of communication conflict. Finally, the governing body’s expectations on communication style and preferences and the manager’s adequacy in articulating complex policy and administrative matters can also develop into a conflict situation relates to the area of communication. Over 50 years after Carrell’s study, the

conflict that arises from politics and policy-making remains interwoven in the literature on manager turnover and length of service.

To help illustrate this issue, DeHoog and Whitaker (1991) and Kaatz et al. (1996), through studies of managers in Florida and the Chicago area, respectively, deduced that political conflict directly impacts city manager turnover. In their study of the career trajectories of a survey group of 133 Florida city managers, DeHoog and Whitaker discovered that conflict originating from policy disagreements contributed to manager turnover in the Florida cities studied. Similarly, Kaatz et al. surveyed a pool of 168 managers in a national survey and found that political conflict, particularly conflict involving the manager, was directly correlated to managers involuntarily vacating their positions.

Turnover and tenure impact are also susceptible to the interplay between politics and administration that is common in council–manager forms of government. With lines blurred, conflict—particularly politically tinged conflict—can arise and impact the tenure of managers. Svara (1999) discussed this shifting boundary in a study of manager–council relations in large American cities, including a morphing of council priorities and influence related to the city manager’s increasing role in mission origination versus implementation.

Pammer et al. (2000) differentiated counties from cities in terms of their structure, service delivery, and level, extent, and severity of the presented conflict. He conducted a series of interviews with county managers and administrators, many of whom were making the transition from city to county, who raised differentiators that included budgeting authority, which sometimes resides with elected official department heads, and

the absence of a formal charter related to governance and hierarchy. These managers referred to some of these situations in a surprised sense, meaning they were perhaps not expecting to experience some of these differences between the work of a city versus county manager. Pammer et al. cited fragmentation of county government coupled with county-specific complexities associated with intergovernmental relationships as reasons county managers “face varying degrees of conflict which is significantly different in scope from cities and, in many cases, is beyond their control” (p. 312). They also noted the significant impact of political stability on the manager’s ability to carry out their functions. One survey respondent, for example, reported the need to wait out a “political climate” (Pammer et al., 2000, p. 313) change on his governing body in order to carry forward a suggested policy recommendation.

Previously, Pammer et al. (1999) observed that the council–manager form of government was predicated on sound manager–board relations, yet conflict does present frequently. Pammer’s methodology was a case study of Florida mid-size city management. Conflict was noted as often being politically based and a possible reason behind the early termination of managers. A second finding was that the managers who chose to stay in conflict-induced employment situations were able to sustain their positions. These managers prolonged their stays by working with the council on policy decisions aimed at decreasing the conflict. Thus, Pammer et al. argued, the manager plays a role in facilitating conflict resolution.

The Role of Region

The role of region may play a role related to county government management and thus tenure. Elazar (1966) writing about American federalism, outlined three distinct

types of political cultures—moralistic, individualistic and traditionalistic—that cluster by region. Moralistic focuses on the value of public service and the notion that, to advance community and the public good, governments serve a vital purpose. Individualistic cultures lean more to the business orientation of government and the paramount rights of the individual. Traditionalistic, which tends to dominate in the South, reveres tradition, family, and prestige. Generally speaking, these political cultures are built on religious, social, racial/ethnic, and regional subcultures.

This culture clustering can very much shape the nature of public administration, such as the role of the county manager. As an example, the South as a region tends to align with, as put forward by Elazar (1966), traditionalist culture. Families, social connections and hierarchal norms are perhaps more valued in these types of cultures. Johnson (1976) conducted an analysis using Elazar's theory of American political culture. Johnson set up three distinct indices, aligned with the three main political cultures developed by Elazar, and constructed each index by using religious data corresponding to each state. He then used discriminant analysis to essentially test Elazar's classification of each state's dominant political culture.

Johnson (1976), mirroring Elazar's (1966) focus on the clustering of political cultures, examined the eight dependent variables that present as foundational underpinnings to the culture classifications. These are government activities, local emphasis in government, government centralization, innovative activity, encouragement of popular participation, popular participation in government, importance of political parties and party competition. For the purposes of my research, the first two variables—government activities and local emphasis in government—are perhaps most connected to

this survey of county managers and factors influencing tenure due to their association with local government and, thus, potentially county government. Using Elazar's arguments, Johnson theorized that moralistic and individualistic cultures would be positively related to government activities and that local government and local government administration would be emphasized in states where the moralistic culture was dominant. Indeed, Johnson's theories when tested substantiated his assumptions on these two variables. Government activities were positively related to states where moralistic was the dominant political culture. Local emphasis and administration of programs were positively related to states where moralistic and individualistic were the dominant political culture.

Lieske (1993) wrote about regions and states, took Elazar's (1966) approach to a new, expanded level, and found 10 distinct subcultures. These subcultures, which he additionally referred to as streams or factor clusters, are dominated by religious or ethnic connections to the residents of the states or regions. These clusters are fairly cleanly distributed across the US among the more than 3,000 counties included in the study, and have additional nuances versus the Elazar's more streamlined work. Lieske's clusters included distinctions for factors related to religion (e.g., Mormon), ethnic background (e.g., Hispanic, Germanic), and in some cases both (e.g., Black Belt). Lieske further discussed the possible explanatory power of the clusters in terms of social problems, political behavior and, more granularly, expenditures at the local level for things like education, public welfare and also general local revenues.

Another area noted in the literature relative to the interplay between culture and government management was the issue of finance. Koven and Mausolff (2002) discussed

the influence that political culture plays on state budgeting, with a focus on local spending as well. They evaluated expenditure datasets in the 1990s and, even when controlling for variables such as economic and demographic, found that political culture is an influence and can help to explicate policy choices and thus expense decisions across different regions and localities.

Summary

This section provides a review of the existing literature on the tenure of local government managers. In this literature, however, city managers as a study group often represented the common denominator. County managers have been studied, but these studies were confined by author-imposed restrictions on the study group, such as the population of the community served. The juxtaposition of county and city government has been studied in greater detail, with differences cited along with a growing consensus that management needs between the two are not that disparate. Studies of political stability and relationships between manager and governing body were reviewed. This research showed that the politicization of decision-making at the local level had a correspondingly negative impact on manager tenure. The role of the political culture and region was also noted in the research.

Although length of service to a community is not necessarily the solution to better governance, tenure is nevertheless an important area of study for public administration scholars as results can be practically applied in communities where tenure is valued in decisions related to recruitment and compensation for existing county managers. The development of a solid, national survey distributed to sitting county managers, as outlined

in Chapter 3, served as an appropriate basis for a research study relevant to the existing literature.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Summary and Review

A review of the relevant literature showed that political influence, particularly the political stability of the organization served, is considered a strong factor of influence by county managers. The literature also supported the importance of servant leadership in the city manager cohort, but it did not illustrate the strength of the relationship between compensation and city manager tenure. Based on the literature review, it was posited that further exploration would show compensation and benefits of the position were valued less than other factors of influence by city managers.

I designed this study to determine which factors influenced the tenure of county managers. This chapter details the methodology for the study and includes sections on population and procedure, the survey instrument and analysis, data collection and descriptive characteristics of sample population, study delimitations and limitations, and concluding comments. Specific subtopics covered include study design, participants, data source and collection, and measures.

The review of the relevant literature led to the following research question and hypotheses. The research question was, what are the key factors that influence the tenure of county managers? The hypotheses were as follows.

Hypothesis 1: County manager perception of political stability is positively associated with tenure.

Hypothesis 2: County manager perception of compensation and benefits is not associated with tenure.

Although a choice was made not to design the research around city manager tenure, the discussion chapter of this work includes commentary comparing city and county manager tenure. The work of county managers does not differ significantly from that of city managers, so I assumed that the survey results would produce findings similar to studies focused exclusively on city manager tenure (e.g., Watson & Hassett, 2003a, 2003b). In addition, the survey respondent profiles of longer tenured managers (i.e., 20 years or more) are discussed more thoroughly in the discussion chapter.

Sample and Population

The population for this study was county managers working in county governments in the United States. The process used to recruit participants was relatively straight forward. According to a list received from the NACo, there were approximately 1,216 county manager positions at the time of the study. Current county managers were eligible to participate in this study. Potential participant source lists were reviewed, including membership directories of the NACo, the ICMA, the NACA, and state-level affiliates of ICMA. However, the national email listserv of NACo was the most comprehensive list available and thus best suited for use in this study. This NACo email list was originally created to document the members of a county government participating in NACo, so it is broken down by position title, which made it the best possible survey distribution outlet for this study.

By utilizing the NACo membership data, I was able to create a sample that was regionally representative of state populations. Factors that could have impacted the

characteristics of the population included state-by-state differences in both the types and forms of county governments, and the prevalence or lack of the position of county manager in certain states. Therefore, although the NACo list did not assure representation from every state, the 1,216 surveyed managers in the recruitment email represented the most comprehensive list available at the time of this research, and this count ensured that the minimum response rate was achieved and allowed for the presence of unusable information in the electronic surveys. When asked to report biological sex, 78% of the survey respondents answered male and 22% answered female. Nearly all of the managers, 97%, declared their race as white, and 65% reported earning a graduate degree in some field. The median tenure of respondents was 20 years of service to the present community. Not all states have county managers; consequently, responses were not received from every state. However, a geographic spread was realized, with the most responses coming from Michigan, New York, Georgia, Colorado, and California. Nearly 70% of the respondents were working under an employment agreement. Job titles of the sample population included county manager, county administrator, county chief administrator, and county coordinator.

Survey Instrument and Analysis

Valdosta State Institutional Review Board approval was sought and an exemption obtained (see Appendix A). The survey instrument included 26 questions (see Appendix B). In 2015, I developed a draft survey and field tested it in the state of New York for a previous course research project. This testing allowed for improvements and edits in this final, nationally distributed instrument. The survey was used to collect demographic information on race, biological sex, age, and state (i.e., location) of employment. In

addition to demographics, the survey collected information on the presence of an employment agreement, compensation, job satisfaction, and appreciation from the governing body. Finally, the survey included a numbered list of 26 factors that could influence tenure. This part of the survey was most important for collecting feedback to test the hypotheses and answer the study’s research question. These factors were broken down into six categories and were spread randomly within the survey. These factors and the corresponding categories, although found to some extent in the literature, were created specifically for this research. A list of operational definitions can be found in Appendix C. The survey provided a Likert scale and participants were asked to rank a variety of factors that could play a role in their decision to remain in their current positions as county manager. Rankings ranged from not at all important to extremely important for ranking the level of influence. A snapshot of the factors of influence subsection of the survey instrument is shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Factors of Influence (Ungrouped)

Political conflict	Relationship with board	Services/programs provided by the county
Public service motivation	Respect/appreciation of the manager position	Bond rating of county
Management discretion/latitude	County population	Overall financial condition of county government
Availability/presence of an employment agreement	Organizational support	Work environment
Pay (salary)	Pay (compensation other than salary)	Health insurance benefits
Other fringe benefits	Job satisfaction	Strength of department heads/staff
Relationship with elected official department heads	Family wishes/concerns	Community quality of life
School system (parental perspective)	Spouse/significant other employment	Weather/climate of county
Career growth/progression	Religious concerns	

Data Collection

Data were collected for this study using a web-based survey that was sent to selected participants. Apart from the cover page, which was an institutional review board approved model consent statement for anonymous survey research, the survey had two sections: questions on demographics and questions on factors affecting tenure. The demographic section consisted of seven questions aimed at gathering information about the participants' backgrounds— gender, age, race/ethnicity, and population of the community served. Age was recorded as the age at time of survey completion. The second part was designed to collect information about the factors that contributed to the participants' tenure as county manager. This part of the survey listed 26 possible areas influencing tenure. These factors were spread across six factor areas related to the managers' decisions to remain in their position, and participants were asked to rank them using a Likert scale. The survey was administered electronically via Qualtrics, a well-recognized industry platform for electronic survey distribution, collation, and analysis. Respondents were able to answer using the online platform.

Participants in this study included county managers working in the United States as of July 25, 2016. Effort was made to capture as many individuals in this population as possible. The participants were solicited to participate via email with an embedded link to the Qualtrics-based survey. An announcement of the study was distributed to the county manager email Listserv managed by the NACo. The Listserv comprised 1,216 email addresses of county managers, including administrators and those with coordinator titles at the time of initial distribution. Participants were informed that this was a completely voluntary survey submission and that they were being asked to participate because of

their position as a county manager. There were no incentives provided to participants in exchange for their involvement in this study.

The survey link was submitted to the NACo Listserv for the first time on July 25, 2016. The first email cover letter is included here as Appendix D. This email was distributed to the 1,216 email addresses on file at NACo under this county manager/administrator email list that NACo manages. I was solely responsible for collecting the survey data in the Qualtrics system.

A second email, a first reminder, was sent on August 18, 2016 to the NACo Listserv. Participants again were directed to point their browser to the Qualtrics web link and complete the survey. A third and final email was sent on September 14, 2016. The email cover letter is included in Appendix D. The solicitation emails noted that the survey was for the purposes of doctoral research, that the submissions were anonymous, and that completion time was estimated at 5–6 minutes.

The survey was officially closed for responses on September 26, 2016, at 5 p.m. ET. There were 187 responses to the survey, including incomplete responses, and all were logged in Qualtrics. Eight respondents did not complete the survey; therefore 179 responses were useable for the purposes of analysis. Regarding an ideal survey response rate, previous studies of similar participants were used to arrive at a rule of thumb. Watson and Hassett (2003a, 2003b) used a sample of 117 and 103 long-tenured managers respectively in their study of city manager tenure. Feiock and Stream (1998) used a sample size of 110, DeHoog and Whitaker (1991) used a sample of 133, and Kaatz et al. (1996) used a sample of 168 city managers. When the survey for this study closed on September 26, 2016, 179 useable responses had been received, exceeding the study goal.

This represented 14.7% of county managers who received the email solicitation to participate in the survey.

Study Limitations, Caveats and Concerns

One obvious constraint of this study was the deliberate decision to study just county managers as the only selected subject group of local government managers. Although the work of city and town managers is very similar to that of county managers, and in fact the literature was quite heavy on studies of that population, I decided to limit this study to county managers only for the chief reason that this population appeared to be understudied.

The study had several limitations. The first identifiable limitation was that of control. I had no control over the number of surveys completed nor over the level of incompleteness of those that were indeed submitted. The second identifiable limiting factor was the prevalence of county management positions and geographic disparities that existed in the numbers of county managers by state. For example, in some New England states, there was a dearth of county manager positions, a direct byproduct of the fact that many states in this area had either limited or no county government at all. According to a recent report from the NACo (Istrate & Mills, 2015), 43% of counties nationwide employ a county manager. The report further delineated the differences in county manager use across states and regions. Counties in the northeast region were most likely to appoint an administrator, with nearly 75% of counties having one. In the Midwest, only 30% of counties have an administrator position. In seven states (Arizona, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, New Jersey, and Virginia), all counties appoint

administrators whereas none of the counties in five other states (Arkansas, Hawaii, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Vermont) have this position

Consequently, the existence or absence of county manager positions in some regions was not a limitation of the study as defined in research but a result of the differences in the structure of government in our nation's counties.

Other limitations related to the design of the study itself. This study was a cross-section design; therefore, causality could not be inferred. The sample was also nonrepresentative and thus generalizations could not be made to the full population of county managers in any U.S. state, but generalizations could be made to theory. Last, the responses were assumed to be honest and not subject to social desirability biases.

Concluding Comments

The methodological approach outlined in this chapter was utilized for a variety of reasons. From a survey design and distribution perspective, electronic communication was easily the most effective and efficient means of survey distribution. The NACo email listserv was the best way to reach the audience of the county manager population in the United States. The strength of Qualtrics was an obvious benefit in that the software was well recognized and the forward-facing features for participants were user-friendly.

With respect to the survey, the line of questions—specifically the factors of influence section—was appreciably different than other studies in that the factors were focused on reasons for wanting to stay at a county government position as opposed to reasons for wanting to depart. Also, the survey questions were not dependent on limitations associated with a county population size. Last, the survey recipients targeted

for participation were not limited to longer-tenured managers as was the case with other studies.

This chapter provides information about the population of county managers in the United States, procedures used for contacting those county managers and asking them to participate in the survey, the survey instrument, and the specific survey questions. The resulting set of responses formed the basis of the conclusions of this research. Effort was made to eliminate selection effects as much as possible and any limits related to data and respondents, for example regional or state variations, could not be controlled for. The results and more analysis are included in the next chapter, including a discussion of specific results related to both demographics and tenure.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter provides information relative to the survey results, an investigation of the research question and the analysis of the tested hypotheses. This chapter also provides deeper insight into the measures used as well as the analysis. Although these findings may not be entirely representative of county manager populations due to the sample size, the results could contribute to the discussion and literature around the tenure of county managers. I constructed a survey to test the hypotheses specified in the previous chapter—including highlighting the differences identified between managers when ranking the various actors of influence. The two hypotheses were tested for strength on theories regarding manager retention. The factors influencing tenure for all county managers in the study are explored and tested for associations, connections, and themes.

The research question was, what are the key factors that influence the tenure of county managers? To address this research question, two hypotheses related to the relationship between a county manager's tenure and the factors influencing that tenure were statistically tested using data gleaned from a national survey. The hypotheses provided possible answers for the guiding research question of this study

Hypothesis 1: County manager perception of political stability is positively associated with tenure.

Hypothesis 2: County manager perception of compensation and benefits is not associated with tenure.

Although the response rate as a percentage of total known county manager positions is relatively low (15%) and full geographic diversity was lacking, the observations, including the subsequent discussions, commentary, and opportunities for future research referenced in Chapter 5, could add to the discussion on the tenure of US county managers and the impact of various factors on tenure. In this chapter, I address the research question, provide descriptive characteristics, and clearly report the measurements of each variable. Finally, I summarize and then interpret the outcomes in relation to their importance to the research question and the two hypotheses. I conclude with a report on my findings and observations, including both consistencies and inconsistencies in the results, and ending with a discussion of possible alternative interpretations.

Demographic Trends

The descriptive statistics for the respondents' demographic characteristics appear in Table 5. The county managers in this survey cohort follow the demographic patterns revealed in previous studies (Feiock & Stream, 1998; Tekniepe & Stream, 2012; Watson & Hassett, 2003a, 2003b) of managers, city or county, in terms of educational attainment. The majority of respondents were male ($n = 137$, 77.4%) and had a graduate/professional degree ($n = 116$, 65.5%). Of those with degrees, public administration, political science and finance/economics were the most prevalent primary academic areas of study. Forty-six percent completed their highest degree in public administration/affairs/policy ($n = 82$, 46.3%). Most self-identified as White ($n = 171$, 96.6%), and the largest percentage of respondents were from the Midwest region ($n = 69$, 39%) (see Appendix E for regional variation).

One questions related to compensation specifically. The participants were asked to state the range of their present salary in \$25,000 increment levels. Annual salary varied, with the largest percentage of respondents earning \$100,001–\$125,000 ($n = 42$, 23.7%). The salary responses span from one respondent in the \$0-\$25,000 range to 19 respondents in the over \$200,000 bracket.

Employment agreements (also called contracts) often exist between a manager and their respective governing body, usually covering such items as severance, compensation increases, vacation accruals, and other benefits. Managers responding to the survey were asked if they had an employment agreement/contract. Most had an employment contract ($n = 123$, 69.5%) and worked with their governing body under the parameters of an employment agreement, and the rest (54) did not.

Table 5*Frequencies and Percentages for Demographic Data*

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Biological sex		
Male	137	77.4
Female	40	22.6
Total	177	100.0
Education		
High school graduate/GED	1	.6
Some college/associate's degree	6	3.4
Bachelor's degree	54	30.5
Graduate/professional degree	116	65.5
Total	177	100.0
Race/ethnicity		
White	171	96.6
Non-White	6	3.4
Total	177	100.0
Employment contract		
Yes	123	69.5
No	54	30.5
Total	177	100.0
Annual salary		
\$0–\$25,000	1	.6
\$50,001–\$75,000	17	9.6
\$75,001–\$100,000	33	18.6
\$100,001–\$125,000	42	23.7
\$125,001–\$150,000	34	19.2
\$150,001–\$175,000	19	10.7
\$175,001–\$200,000	12	6.8
\$200,001+	19	10.7
Total	177	100.0
Region		
Northeast	33	18.6
Midwest	69	39.0
South	43	24.3
West	32	18.1
Total	177	100.0

As seen in Table 6, age ranged from 24 to 63, with a mean age of 42.01 (*SD* = 7.99). County population size ranged from 220 to 1,250,000, with a mean of 227,436. Total years of experience in local government management and administration ranged

from 1 to 45 years with a mean of 23.21. Years in current position ranged from 1 to 37, with an average of 9.24. This figure of years of service in current position (tenure) is higher than the tenure figure in the studies referenced earlier as part of the literature review on city and/or county manager tenure.

Table 6

Statistics for Age, County Population Size, Years of Experience, and Tenure

Variable	<i>n</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	175	24	63	42.01	7.99
County population size	172	220.00	1,250,000.00	227,436.34	1,001,018.30
Years of experience in local government management	175	1.00	45.00	23.21	9.81
Years in current position	174	1.00	37.00	9.24	7.12

Dependent Variables

The research topic of this dissertation is the tenure of county managers, specifically the factors that influence them as they make career decisions to remain in their position. Tenure is dependent upon a litany of factors, some of which are perhaps even incapable of being the subject of study. I ran two models. The first considered total years of service in the profession of local government management, i.e., tenure. The second looked at tenure in a community, not overall tenure in the profession over a career but tenure in terms of years of service to the manager’s present community, which was the dependent variable. The second model’s dependent variable therefore is years of service as a county manager in their present county government.

For the model, the specific wording I used to determine tenure was two pronged. First, I asked the participants for their length of service in the profession (Model 1), with

answers calculated to the nearest year and month. Next, I asked respondents for their overall length of service in years to their present community (Model 2), with answers calculated to the nearest year and month. Of the 174 responses to this question, the mean showed a very stable, long-tenured manager with just under 10 years of service in their present position. Responses ranged from a low of 1 or less than 6 months to a high of 37 years.

Key Independent Variables

County manager tenure is thought to be influenced by a variety of factors, 26 of which I included in the survey to these county managers. Although more than 26 factors influence the tenure of a county manager, the categories I used in this survey were common determinants of tenure or turnover in other studies (Watson & Hassett, 2003a, 2003b). Therefore, in simplistic terms, tenure is dependent on a variety of factors to include compensation, political dynamics in the community, and a host of organizational characteristics and personal preferences. These independent variables had varying degrees of influence on county managers in terms of the manager's willingness to continue serving the community they are managing.

I limited the possible factors of influence on tenure down to 26 in total and structured the factors into six core areas as follows: political stability, compensation and benefits, community qualities and demographics, organizational attributes of the county government, personal preferences and motivations, and position attributes of the manager job. These represent the six composite measures that form the basis of my OLS analysis.

I tested the importance of various factors of influence on county manager tenure through the 26 factor list and Likert Scale ratings on each factor. These ordinal variables

were scored on a 6-point ordinal scale. The frequencies and percentages of the responses for the 26 factors are found in Appendix F.

The 26 factors of influence were grouped together into the six factors represented in Table 7. The items for each factor were averaged to arrive at a final score. To summarize and clarify, the key independent variables include six groupings of factors that are based on the composite measures.

Table 7

Description of the Six Factors

Factor	Items
Political stability	Relationship with the board Political conflict Relationship with elected official Department heads
Compensation and benefits	Pay (Salary) Health insurance benefits Pay (other than salary) Other fringe benefits
Community qualities and demographics	Community quality of life Services/programs provided by the county Bond rating of county School system Weather/climate Population
Organizational attributes of county government	Work environment Organizational support Strength of department heads/staff Overall financial condition of county
Personal preferences and motivations	Job satisfaction Public service motivation Family wishes & concerns Career growth/progression Spouse/significant other employment Religious concerns
Position attributes of the manager job	Management discretion/latitude Respect/appreciation of the manager position Availability of employment agreement

Political stability scores ranged from 2 to 6, with a mean score of 4.69 ($SD = 0.78$). Compensation and benefits scores ranged from 1.75 to 6, with a mean score of 4.24 ($SD = 0.73$). The community qualities and demographics scores ranged from 1.33 to 5.67, with a mean score of 3.72 ($SD = 0.80$). Organizational attributes of county government scores ranged from 2 to 6, with a mean score of 4.78 ($SD = 0.61$). Personal preferences and motivations scores ranged from 1.67 to 5.67 with a mean score of 4.03 ($SD = 0.70$). Finally, position attributes of the manager job scores ranged from 2.00 to 6.00 with a mean score of 4.57 ($SD = 0.81$). Cronbach's alphas for the factors ranged from .41 to .72.

Regression Analysis

The analysis of the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis for two models (total years in administration [Model 1] and total years in current position [Model 2]) follows.

Table 8

Regression on Total Years Tenure (Model 1)

Variables	Coefficient	Standard error	<i>p</i>
Key independent variables			
Political stability	0.17	0.83	.836
Compensation & benefits	0.49	0.73	.502
Community demographics	1.89	0.85	.027
Organizational attributes	0.55	0.92	.550
Personal preferences	-1.05	0.98	.285
Positional attributes	0.28	0.69	.690
Control variables			
Region (South)	-0.96	1.58	.546
Gender	1.32	1.22	.281
Age	0.84	0.07	.001
Educational level	3.74	1.05	.001

Note. $R^2 = .59$, $N = 165$.

Model 1

Model 1 (Table 8) examines the dependent variable total years of local government administration. OLS regression was used to determine the extent to which independent variables predicted total years of county administration experience. The key independent variables in the model included the composite/index scores for the factors of compensation benefits, organizational attributes, positions attributes, political stability, personal motivations and community qualities. Controls include region, age, gender and educational level.

The result of the regression analysis in Model 1 predicted nearly 60% of the variance in total years in local government administration ($R^2 = 0.59$). One of the key variables was found to be a significant predictor of total years in local government; whereas, two of the control variables reflect statistically significant predictive effects for study participant total years of tenure.

There was no statistically significant relationship between political stability and total years of tenure. As composite scores reflecting the level of importance of political stability increases by 1 unit, total years of tenure increase by 0.17 years. However, the relationship was not statistically significant. There was no statistically significant relationship between compensation benefits and total years of tenure. As composite scores reflecting the level of importance of compensation and benefits increased by 1 unit, total years of tenure increased by 0.49 years. However, the relationship was not statistically significant.

There was a significant, positive relationship between community quality of life and demographics and total years of tenure. The more satisfied county managers were

with community quality of life, per the composite index, the longer they were likely to work in administration. As composite scores reflecting the level of importance of community quality of life and demographics increased by 1 unit, total years of tenure increased by 1.89 years.

For organizational attributes, there was no statistically significant relationship between organizational attributes and total years of tenure. As composite scores reflecting the level of importance of organizational attributes increase by 1 unit, total years of tenure increase by 0.55 years. However, the relationship was not statistically significant. There was no statistically significant relationship between personal preferences and total years of tenure. As composite scores reflecting the level of importance of personal preferences increased by 1 unit, total years of tenure decreased by 1.05 years. However, the relationship was not statistically significant. Finally, there was no statistically significant relationship between positional attributes and total years of tenure. As composite scores reflecting the level of importance of positional attributes increased by 1 unit, total years of tenure increased by 0.28 years. However, the relationship was not statistically significant.

Employment by region was not significantly related to total years of tenure. Those employed in the South region tended to have lower total years of tenure than those employed elsewhere; however, the relationship was not statistically significant. Gender was not significantly related to total years of tenure. Males tended to have higher total years of tenure than females. However, it was not statistically significant.

Age and educational level, however, did show statistical significance. Age was significantly and positively related to total years of tenure. As age increased by 1 year,

total years of tenure increased by 0.84 years. Education level was significantly and positively related to total years of tenure. Employees with graduate or professional degrees tend to have longer total years of tenure than employees with bachelor degrees or less.

Model 2

Model 2 (Table 9) displays the dependent variable of years in the county manager's current position. OLS regression was again used to determine the extent to which independent variables predicted tenure in the respondent's current position. Model 1 is replicated here using total years in current position as the dependent variable. In the prediction of tenure in current position, only 19% of the variance ($R^2 = .19$) was explained by the key and control variables. Two independent variables were statistically significant predictors of study participants' current years of tenure in their current position: community demographics and positional attributes. Additionally, two control variables (Age and South) showed statistical significance.

Table 9*Regression on Years in Current Position (Model 2)*

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	<i>p</i>
Key independent variables			
Political stability	0.48	0.81	.550
Compensation & benefits	0.95	0.69	.171
Community demographics	2.04	0.82	.014
Organizational attributes	1.13	0.94	.230
Personal preferences	-0.61	0.94	.519
Positional attributes	-2.08	0.67	.002
Control variables			
Region (South)	-2.97	1.54	.056
Gender	1.02	1.17	.384
Age	0.22	0.06	.001
Educational level	0.25	1.01	.808

Note. $R^2 = .19$, $n = 168$

There was no statistically significant relationship between political stability and years of tenure in current position. As composite scores reflecting the level of importance of political stability increased by 1 unit, years of tenure in current position increased by 0.48 years. However, the relationship is not statistically significant. There was no statistically significant relationship between compensation and benefits and years of tenure in current position. As composite scores reflecting the level of importance of

compensation and benefits increased by 1 unit, years of tenure in current position increased by 0.95 years. However, the relationship was not statistically significant.

Again, as in Model 1, there was a significant, positive relationship between community quality of life and demographics and years of tenure in current position. The more satisfied county managers are with community quality of life, per the composite index, the longer they are likely to stay working in their present position. As composite scores reflecting the level of importance of community quality of life and demographics improve by 1 unit, years of tenure in current position increased by 2.04 years.

There was no statistically significant relationship between organizational attributes and years of tenure in current position. As composite scores reflecting the level of importance of organizational attributes increased by 1 unit, years of tenure in current position increased by 1.13 years. However, the relationship was not statistically significant.

There was no statistically significant relationship between personal preferences and years of tenure in current position. As composite scores reflecting the level of importance of personal preferences increased by 1 unit, years of tenure in current position decreased by 0.61 years. However, the relationship was not statistically significant.

There was a significant, negative relationship between positional attributes and years of tenure in current position. As composite scores reflecting the level of importance of positional attributes increase by one unit, years of tenure in current position decrease by 2.08 years.

Employment by region was significantly related to years of tenure in current position at the .10 level. Region (South) was inversely related to years in current position.

Southerners tend to serve less time in their current positions compared to those from outside the South. This difference is nearly 3 years. Gender was not significantly related to years of tenure in current position. Men tended to have higher years of tenure in current position than women. However, it was not statistically significant.

Age is significantly and positively related to years of tenure in current position. As age increased by 1 year, years of tenure in current position increased by 0.22 years. Education level was not significantly related to years of tenure in current position. Employees with graduate or professional degrees tended to have longer years of tenure in current position than employees with bachelor degrees or less. However, this is not statistically significant.

Summary

This chapter presents the results of my survey. I discuss the demographics of my survey respondents in addition to the descriptive characteristics of the respondent population of county managers to include, among other items, population served, length of service and presence of employment agreement. I review geographical differences in terms of the respondents and showed some diversity of state representation with heavier respondents in a few select states. Last, I detail the 26 factors of influence, explain the grouping of the factors into six core areas, and show the OLS results of the formal test of the two models. In the next and final chapter, I discuss further the results of my study and finally discuss opportunities for additional research.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study examines the effects of various factors of influence on county manager tenure. I ultimately found that tenure in both current position and tenure in terms of overall county government management service were both significantly related to certain factor groupings. Overall, managers affirmed valuations of certain factors of influence on tenure—specifically position attributes, age, educational level, and community qualities and demographics. This conclusion proceeds by summarizing the methods and findings before considering the theoretical contributions and contributions to the study of public administration. Also included is a discussion on connections to this study and the practice of county management. The chapter closes with a discussion of study limitations, a commentary on opportunities for future research related to the topic of county manager tenure specifically, and concludes with a brief summary.

The guiding foundation for this work was an assessment of what factors influence county managers to remain working in their present position and in the field in general. These factors of influence are varied, and managers are influenced in different ways. Studies often noted the push/pull factors of manager departure, but this study assesses and appraises reasons why county managers chose to stay in their position and profession. Some factors of influence relate primarily to the individual, some to the county government itself, and some are community oriented. Although some city manager-specific studies aimed to answer the “Why do they stay?” question, there was a

gap in the literature related to what multidimensional factors (organization, personal, political, financial, etc.) contribute to a county manager remaining in their position.

The research question that motivate this study was, what are the critical factors that influence the tenure of a county manager? The focus is on county managers and administrators who were employed as the chief administrative officer in their respective jurisdictions at the time of data collection. To answer this research question, I administered a survey to county managers to assess how strongly each manager was influenced or not influenced by various sets of factors. The survey asks for gender, education level, region of employment location, and other demographic information. Additional survey questions asked about an employment agreement and job satisfaction level. Using data gleaned from a survey administered across the United States in 2016, the results of the analysis show that there are statistically significant relationships between certain groupings of factors of influence in both total tenure and years of service in the manager's present position.

To summarize, this chapter is structured in five sections. First, I discuss the preliminary findings, including notations of any trends in the descriptive statistics. Also in this first section, the survey completion data is discussed. The second section describes the finding of each research question. In the third section, I discuss how this study contributes to the public administration literature. In the fourth section, I discuss the implications of the findings for the professional practice of county management, and additionally I review study limitations and concerns. In the end, I bring forward recommendations for future research and make concluding comments.

Overview of Findings

My study surveys county managers in the US and their impressions and understandings of why they remain in their position. A total of 1,216 surveys were administered to then currently serving county managers. This was a national sample, and the list was obtained from the databases of the NACo and the ICMA. 179 responses were satisfactorily completed and analyzed for this study. For the survey itself, I included 26 total possible factors of tenure influence. These include factors such as compensation (pay), community quality of life, and family wishes and concerns. I then grouped the factors into six categories or groupings of factors:

1. Political stability
2. Compensation and benefits
3. Community quality of life and demographics
4. Organizational attributes of the county government
5. Personal preferences and motivations
6. Position attributes of the manager job.

Although county manager tenure is based on several factors, my research draws several conclusions. Based on my findings, age is significantly and positively related to tenure in both total tenure and tenure in current position. There is also a significant, positive relationship between the grouping of factors labeled *community quality of life and demographics* and both total tenure and tenure in current position. Education level is also significantly and positively related to total years of tenure. Employees with graduate or professional degrees tend to have longer total years of tenure than employees with bachelor's degrees or less. Finally, there is a significant, negative relationship between

the grouping of factors labeled *positional attributes of the manager job* and years of tenure in current position.

Sample and Instrument—Discussion and Limitations

This study was constructed with a Likert scale ranking of the various factors of influence, which I feel was the proper assessment for this study. However, there are limitations presenting in both the sample and the instrument that will be discussed in this section.

First, on concerns relating to the sample, despite efforts to minimize bias, this study had limitations and concerns relating to response rate. The rate of participation—meaning the number of county managers responding to the survey, as compared to the total number of county managers employed at the time of survey distribution—provided enough data but still represented a small subset of the total county manager base in the US.

Another area of limiting information in the sample was the lack of regional variation. For example, proportionate to the number of county management positions in certain states like California, Florida, and North Carolina, I expected to see even higher response counts from these states. They simply have more county manager positions than most states, and so I expected more from these states. On the other extreme, New York and Michigan were well represented in proportion to their number of county manager positions. I presumed the New York participation to be based on my networks and contacts in my home state. With Michigan, I reasoned that their state association of managers forwarding along my survey to managers boosted participation . This study was

limited, too, by a titled position of county manager not existing in every state or every locale.

Aging data was also a limitation based partially on the timing of survey completion, and data are only as good and accurate as when collected at the time of initial completion. Still another limitation of this study was the constraint of county managers as the only subject group among the possible participants in the overall local government management field. I limited this study to county managers though I could have broadened to include others in the rank of chief administrative officers to local governments, such as city and town managers. Many of the seminal research efforts on the subject of tenure have been confined to those in management at the municipal level and it would be interesting to see the comparisons with this, while similar, still distinct and separate group of local government administrators.

An additional limiting factor included the survey itself. Although the methodology is useful for the purposes of gaining timely responses in a digital format, the structure of any rigid, defined survey limits the breadth and scope of obtainable information. The study was a cross-section design and qualitative. Additional questions could have been included. Another potential limiting factor not discussed in this study was the possibility of significant government changes of a particular county. For example, a change in the position of city mayor within the county or a change in the governance structure of the county itself. Such change in the local government structure might result in a major influence on a county manager's willingness to stay or leave a position, which would impact tenure. This particular instance created a limitation in the study.

Additional limitations were also present in the design of the survey. I excluded measures that might have been included and measures operationalized differently versus the original construct. There was also no opportunity for the survey respondents to provide commentary outside the fixed structural responses. This limited type of feedback from county managers restricted the possible depth of feedback. Although I chose to utilize close-ended questions for clarity and ease of coding, the use of an open-ended question allowing respondents to directly address job satisfaction in relation to tenure would have been helpful. Finally, a drag and drop method of prioritizing work–life factors may have been beneficial.

Contributions and Connections to the Literature

The literature review was conducted approximately 6 years ago and situated my work as I was planning and starting this effort. I then examined the public administration research work that has been done since my review and detailed, when applicable, how this study connects with those newer studies. Further, I looked at how my study solves some of the gaps that presented when I conducted the research in 2016.

As noted in Chapter 3, much focus was placed on the push and pull factors of city and county manager turnover. In a few studies specifically focused on county managers, limitations of a minimum (and large) size were placed on those county governments surveyed. In the most-cited works of city manager tenure, there is a level of specificity with the tenure length (20 years). Research efforts that included surveys of all county managers were limited as were articles that included surveys of all city managers.

In 2022, I searched for articles published after 2016 that included themes or connections to this study on county manager tenure. My aim was to determine how my

study might walk alongside or converse with these newer works. Additionally, I wanted to assess how, and if, in fact my study moves the field forward by filling gaps.

The literature does not appear to have expanded in great measure since my data collection effort in 2016. However, four articles brought forward since my initial review on the subject of local government management tenure, albeit related to city managers and focused on communities of a certain size. Lee and Lee (2021) analyzed turnover data from city managers of 156 large cities in the US. Again, as was discovered in previous research on the subject of city managers and tenure/turnover, political push factors had significant impacts to manager tenure at the city level in these jurisdictions.

Likewise, Connolly (2018) addressed of managerial turnover at the city manager level and asked the question “Can managerial turnover be a good thing?” She analyzed the fiscal situations of the local government being studied and assessed whether turnover in the chief administrative position would impact the fiscal outcomes of the city. Specifically, the research was timed to the Great Recession of 2008 and an analysis of 165 council-manager municipalities in the State of California. The results indicated that city manager turnover, perhaps contrary to conventional wisdom, might lead to better fiscal outcomes.

Relative to the issue of political or other conflict and the impact on managerial turnover in the public sector, Liao and Sun (2020) examined the underlying structures and what they refer to as the “intention” of turnover or the decision-making process prior to resignation or retirement. Factors related to “organizational job embeddedness” and “cooperative context” provided a diffusing element to otherwise turnover-producing conflict situations with the board or organization. The importance of organizational job-

embeddedness is of particular connection to my study, as organizational attributes scored well in the factors of influence rankings.

Although not specific to manager tenure per se, a present and likely growing area in the research that nevertheless has a connection to the work of county management is the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on workforce issues in general, including human resource concerns in the public sector. With respect to tenure, the pandemic's impact on the conditions, finances, and the work–life balance of a county manager.* fix this sentence Intergovernmental relations were challenged with various governmental restrictions, mandates, regulations and executive order debates making headlines across the nation. Coupled with budget and fiscal constraints due to unfunded pandemic service response obligations, sales tax losses due to economic calamity and staff departures from burnout or vaccine mandates, and counties begin to be hotpots for job stressors not seen in other sectors. Undoubtedly, we saw a great many members of the public sector workforce voluntarily leave their positions as part of the Great Resignation and county managers were no different.

It is clear that local government manager tenure and turnover (inclusive of both city and county manager titles) as a subject has produced a variety of important research. The post-2016 literature still focused exclusively on the city manager group and often in population-specific jurisdictions of a large size. The research presented in my study provides additional value to this body of work. First, it fills a gap related to county managers of all populations as a study group. Second, it focuses on tenure in both the field and in the present position. Other studies tended to focus on one or the other and mainly focused on present position. Third, my study is not centered on turnover, per se,

but on factors of influence on staying in a position versus leaving a position. This focus departs from the traditional course of action research related to departures versus retention. Although other studies have tended to focus on the push and pull factors of managerial retention, my study addressed the issue of magnetism to a position or profession and what areas of work, organizational and personal life influence the manager in that decision-making process.

Opportunities and Recommendations for Future Research

Looking at useful applications and future research opportunities, city and county managers and their respective governing bodies can utilize the data gleaned from the survey's 26-factor list. Included in these results is vital information in terms of those factors most influencing tenure. Perhaps counties could wrap the information into recruitment advertisements and promotional pieces highlighting the benefits of the county, including when and where appropriate, references to those factors that managers found most impactful to service length. For example, community quality of life was a major factor of influence and perhaps those aspects of the demographic profile could be highlighted when competing for talent.

Managers could also benefit from a national study that further cements the assumptions and research in other studies—namely that of the impact and challenge of political climate on manager tenure and turnover. First, governing bodies can self-examine tendencies, cultural norms, board–manager relations, and other factors against new data that displays opinions of managers and what they value in relationships. Second, with counties very much feeling the impacts of the Great Resignation or Great Reset, the results of this study could assist county governments with idea generation

around both talent acquisition and manager retention efforts. Third, both managers and their governing bodies could benefit from simple data points, like the fact that most managers have an MPA and most have employment agreements. If a county government was establishing a manager position for the first time, these facts are important data points to reflect on as the position description, job specifications and recruitment advertisements are produced.

Next, length of service and the subset of managers with 20 and 25 years of service could be looked at. For example, researchers could study how different or alike are these managers from those in the rest of the respondents in terms of their values and their rankings in the factor categories of tenure influence. Examining these managers further to see if they follow patterns or create distinct results themselves as a subgroup would present an interesting area of to focus more attention upon. Additionally, previous studies on city managers could be looked at. Watson and Hassett (2003b) make clear that the city manager group studied at that time valued political stability. Those long-standing city managers especially valued political relationships with their board or governing body. In my research, a connection emerged between the long-tenured county managers and those long-tenured city managers in terms of their perceived preferences from their survey responses. This connection could lend itself well to an opportunity for future research that includes both city and county managers of a long tenure.

With respect to the service length of a professional manager, the value of the political dynamics internal to the organization cannot be overstated. Further research could perhaps hone in on what exactly these managers define as political dynamics as the term could be interpreted very loosely and broadly. Specifically, this research would

focus on the politics of the board/manager dichotomy. Last, the “value of tenure” question remains—is there an appropriate method of research inquiry to use to determine the benefits to a county government of having a long-serving manager? Likewise, what are the detriments? Operational performance indicators, annual reviews, finances and budgets, and perhaps awards and recognition could all be useful in assessing the value a seasoned manager brings to an organization.

Studies based on my survey’s other questions might represent other opportunities for future research. Researchers might consider asking about job satisfaction and assessing the nexus to the presence of an employment agreement. For example, on the issue of job satisfaction, the cohort of survey respondents overwhelmingly was satisfied with their position of county manager. How does this level of job satisfaction among county managers compare to that of city managers? How do these levels compare with those of other professions? Although my study did not get that in depth, future studies could assess if the satisfaction rates are different, higher or lower, from those longer-tenured to those newer to their position/county. On the subject of the presence of an employment agreement where 65% of managers responding had a contract/agreement, is this contract/agreement a factor of tenure at all? Although these contracts/agreements would seem to be a tenure-protecting mechanism due to the likely inclusion of termination clauses and severance provisions, this assumption should be tested. Intergovernmental relations was also an issue that came up often in my research. A future research project could focus on the tenure of county managers in relation to the level of collaboration among governance structures as measured by a statistical assessment of agreements, service provision, and governing legislation.

Other elements of the methodology process could be amended. For example, the survey could be replicated in the post-COVID era and responses could be compared to the 2016 results cited here. It is safe to say that the labor market, economy, and employment norms have been upended due to the global pandemic. Remote work has increased tremendously. Comparing survey sentiments from 2016 to 2022 would be interesting.

The research design itself likewise is a candidate for a shift in research possibilities. Also, focus groups of county managers could be utilized with tenure-oriented questions. Another option to consider is a qualitative study wherein respondents would be surveyed on additional prompts and queries. Still another suggestion is to replicate my with a mixed-methods study. Finally, perhaps a study focused on a subset of female managers could be completed.

Along the same lines as the focus group option, perhaps case studies could be developed of select county managers representing different geographic areas. This geographic-focused review could be juxtaposed against the studies focused on political culture discussed in the Role of Region section. With the South region in studies of political culture and clustering of political norms and tendencies leading to an ordering of common characteristics, it is indeed a surprising finding that in the model for years in current position, South was marginally significant, at an inverse relationship, at the .10 level. According to Elazar's (1966) political cluster theory, the South as a region is traditionalistic and defers to history, culture and norms. Therefore, a compact of hiring a CAO for a county could in fact lead to more respect and appreciation for that compact and thus possibly longer tenure and not shorter tenure. This case study option could also

be confined to follow up queries with selected managers. Deeper and richer interrogative techniques might be modeled in such a study

In considering other further research, I believe the region-by-region assessments would be worthy of investigation. In looking at the regional variation (Appendix E), I noted that per the US Census Bureau (US Census, 2018), the Southern region is made up Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. Of those states, Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas were not represented in the survey. These non-response-states have 846 counties with nearly 300 possible additional respondents (at a 35% rate of counties nationwide with managers).

With respect to the South, participants noted tenure as a factor of influence in an inverse relationship in their present position. Southern respondents had equal presence of degrees and employment agreements. Age was not materially different from respondents in other regions. Two recommendations seem prudent for future research. First, Florida should be isolated as it has been anecdotally characterized as having lower tenure than other states, particularly at the local (city/town) level. Florida also has been the state of reference in a few of the tenure focus city manager studies mentioned in the literature review. Second, another region and its clustering tendencies, per Elazar (1966), should be compared with the South based on political clustering theory, and those results should then be compared with the updated Florida results.

Concluding Discussion

Overall, the work of this study is of value-added impact to the existing research on city and county manager tenure. In the academic sphere, it aligns well with the existing literature while still carving out a specific niche that previous researchers had left unexplored. In the practitioner realm, the resulting survey responses and findings provide critical insights to both county management professionals and the governing bodies that hire, retain and fire them.

Relative to revisiting the hypothesis, I theorized that the factors of influence related to compensation and benefits would not be statistically significant predictors of tenure for county managers. This was substantiated in the regression analysis that addressed the research questions and tested the hypotheses. With respect to my first hypothesis, that county manager perception of political stability is positively associated with tenure, the findings of my research indicate that this hypothesis is rejected. Political stability was not a statistically significant predictor of tenure influence for county managers surveyed in this study. This runs contrary to the theory I posited, which was in part based on the literature review, specifically those studies that focused on push and pull factors of managerial turnover at the county ranks and the importance of politics on those decisions.

The notion that county managers are influenced mainly by compensation and benefits, in terms of their reasoning to remain in employment in their present position, was rejected in this study. In fact, one of my earlier hypotheses when commencing this research was on the valuations county managers would provide the factor grouping of compensation. Based on Watson and Hasset (2003a) and Thurmond (2009), I surmised

that this grouping would not be as highly rated as some of the others based on past studies regarding manager preferences due to public service motivation theory and how, traditionally, public sector CEO and CAO positions are just not that lucrative when compared to peer private-sector positions with the same organizational, budgetary, and operational oversight responsibilities. In other words, county managers do not seem to “do it for the money.” Although compensation and benefits like insurance and the presence of a pension are of course attractive, when compared against other factor groupings and after testing for the particular significance of these factors on tenure itself, I theorized that the grouping would not rank high. This factor ranked fourth out of six factors at a mean of 4.24. This factor grouping was statistically insignificant in predicting tenure in current position and total years of tenure. The articles cited in the literature review discussed the relative weight that local government managers place on their salary and total compensation package. My findings buttress the findings of those studies.

The most significant factor of influence for county managers was the grouping of factors in the area of community demographics, which points to opportunities for counties of all sizes to emphasize and invest in their quality of life, cultural attractions and amenities—along with the compensation and benefits and a strong organization and position structure—to ensure a strengthened tenure profile of their county manager. This finding is present in both models, meaning that both in terms of present position and total tenure over all, which means that counties emphasizing and investing in these factors would be predictive for rankings on managers staying in their present positions and tenure over all; County manager respondents had a mean tenure of 9.5 years and an age of 42. If managers are parents, they likely weight school systems preferences high.

Quality of life in general, from an *attraction* (business promotion, new industry, residential growth, etc.) perspective is regularly cited as an influence on a variety of public administration endeavors. Therefore it seems that elements that prospective managers find attractive would likewise be attractive to those who remain in the community and county from a retention perspective and therefore be aligned with tenure preferences for key community leaders like county managers.

It is critical to assess the reasoning and the subsequent valuation that the managers placed on community quality of life and demographics. Underscored in the data is the importance of quality of life and cultural attractions and amenities. Sentiments around these factors of influence could reflect post-materialism values. As we come out of the pandemic, this may only be more important. This connects to the discussion here of COVID and self-assessments done in the wake of personal connections, a newfound appreciation of “home” and all things outdoor recreation and also remote work and living where you want to live, irrespective of job location.

Last, there is value added to the work and research around work–life balance. Many factors affect tenure, from the personal to the professional. As organizations focus on the impacts of the Great Resignation and try to balance work/life with staff including key position-holders like county managers, it is important to know the preferences, wants, wishes, and needs of these managers regarding employment status.

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APPENDIX A: IRB Consent/Approval



**Institutional Review Board (/RB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants**

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-03240-2015 INVESTIGATOR: Ian Coyle
PROJECT TITLE: County Manager Tenure: Examining Influence

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board oversight under Exemption Category(ies) : 1. You may begin your study immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS:

Although not a requirement for exemption, the following suggestions are offered by the IRB Administrator to enhance the protection of participants and/or strengthen the research proposal:

NONE

D If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.

Elizabeth W. Olphie

1/2J/t5

Elizabeth W. Olphie, IRB Administrator

Date

Thank you for submitting an /RB application.

Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.

APPENDIX B: Full Survey

County Manager Tenure - Factors of Influence

You are being asked to participate in a survey research project entitled "County Manager Tenure:Examining Influence," which is being conducted by Ian M. Coyle, a doctoral student at Valdosta State University. This survey is confidential. The researcher will not associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey. You can also stop at any time and do not have to answer all questions. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your completion of the survey serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 or older. Mr. Coyle is working under the direction of Dr. Mandi Bates Bailey, DPA Committee Chair. Dr. Bailey's email is mdbailey@valdosta.edu

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Ian Coyle at 585-943-0589 or imcoyle@valdosta.edu. This study has been deemed exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance Federal regulations. The university's IRB, established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259-5045 or irb@valdosta.edu.

What is the current population of the county for which you are currently working?

- Under 15,000
- 15,000 - 30,000
- 30,001 - 60,000
- 60,001 - 120,000
- 120,001 - 150,000
- 150,001 - 180,000
- 180,000 and over

Which of these forms best describes your county's governing body?

- County Legislature
- County Commission
- County Board of Supervisors
- Other

How would you rate the effectiveness of your governing body?

- Very Ineffective
- Ineffective
- Somewhat Ineffective
- Somewhat Effective
- Effective
- Very Effective

How satisfied are you with your job as county manager?

- Very Unsatisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Somewhat Unsatisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied

How would you assess the scope of your job responsibilities?

	Far too Little	Too Little	About Right	Too Much	Far too Much
Job Responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How would you characterize the governing body's appreciation of your work as a County Manager?

	None	Little	Some	A Lot
Appreciation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate how each of the following has impacted your decision to remain in your present position. Please provide answers to all of the rows and check the answer in the corresponding column that applies.

	P r o v i d e d b y t h e C o u n t y	Not at all Importa nt	Very Unimportan t	Somewhat Unimportant	Neither Important nor Unimporta nt	Somewha t Important	Very Important
School System (Parental Perspective)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious Concerns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spouse/Significant Other Employment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pay (salary)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Population of the County	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strength of Department Heads/Staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Fringe Benefits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
				Somewhat Unimportant	Neither Important nor Unimporta nt	Somewha t Important	Very Important
Bond Rating of County	<input type="radio"/>	Not at all Importa nt	Very Unimportan t	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public Service Motivation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pay (compensation other than salary)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family Wishes & Concerns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relationship with Elected Official Department Heads (i.e. Sheriff, Clerk, Treasurer)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Organizational Support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work Environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
					Somewhat Unimportant	Neither Important nor Unimporta nt	Somewha t Important
Political conflict	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Unimportan t	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health Insurance Benefits	<input type="radio"/>	Not at all Importa nt	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall Financial Condition of County Government	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relationship with Board	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Job Satisfaction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Weather/Climate of the County	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Services/Programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
							Very Important

Extremely Important

Extremely Important

Extremely Important

What is your biological sex?

- Male
- Female

What year were you born?

What is your highest educational attainment?

- Less than a High School Diploma
- High school graduate/GED
- Some college / Associate's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate (e.g., JD,PHD,DPA)

What was your primary academic area of study?

- Public Administration/Affairs/Policy
- Political Science
- Some college / Associates Degree
- Engineering
- Finance/Economics
- Human Resources
- Did not attend college/GED

What race/identity do you most closely identify with?

- White
- Black/African-American
- Hispanic/Latino
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Other

How long, to to the nearest whole year, have you been in your current position?

Employment agreements /contracts often exist between a manager and the respective governing body, usually covering such items as severance, compensation increased and benefits. Do you have an employment agreement / contract?

- Yes
- No

To the nearest whole year, what is the total number of years experience you have in local government management/administration?

What is your annual salary?

- \$0 - \$25,000
- \$25,001 - \$50,000
- \$50,001 - \$75,000
- \$75,001 - \$100,000
- \$100,001 - \$125,000
- \$125,001 - \$150,000
- \$150,001 - \$175,000
- \$175,001 - \$200,000
- \$200,001+

In what state do you currently reside?

APPENDIX C: Operational Definitions of the Factors of Influence

Availability/presence of an employment agreement—the legal contract afforded the county manager position

Bond rating of county—credit rating and profile of the county's finances

Community quality of life—culture, attractiveness and vitality of the county community

County population—total amount of residents in the county

Family wishes/concerns—family desires on where to live or what job to take/leave

Health insurance benefits—what insurance product is afforded the position and at what payment level

Job satisfaction—feeling of fulfillment or enjoyment from work as a county manager

Management discretion/latitude—assessment of how much freedom the manager has to operate

Other fringe benefits—other than health insurance, other benefits afforded the position

Overall financial condition of county government—assessment of budget and financial outlook of the county government itself

Organizational support—level and type of support from the rest of the county government organization

Pay (compensation other than salary)—any other compensation besides salary

Pay (salary)—salary compensation for the county manager position

Political conflict—political-based division or discord in the organization or community

Public service motivation—intrinsic inspiration to serve the public or work in government

Respect/appreciation of the manager position—valuation of how much the position of county manager is supported

Relationship with board—county manager and governing body relationship

Relationship with elected official department heads—working arrangements, and the strength thereof, with separately elected county managers (e.g., sheriff)

Religious concerns—comfort level to express faith in a community

School system (parental perspective)—assessment of the school district from parental lens

Services/programs provided by the county—governmental services and departments operated by the county

Spouse/significant other employment—impact of spouse or partner's job

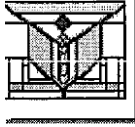
Strength of department heads/staff—how competent the managerial team is at the county

Weather/climate of county—the weather patterns of the county

Work environment—elements that comprise a work setting

Career growth/progression—the movement up from place to place in a career

APPENDIX D: Cover Letter and Email Survey Solicitation



County Manager Tenure
Ian Coyle to:
Bee: eountymanager

07/25/2016 10:26 AM

Colleagues,

I hope this email finds you well. Below, please find a link to a brief (~5-6 mins) survey I am hoping you can complete. It is intended for County Managers (e.g., County Administrators/County Managers/appointed County Executives/County Chief Administrative Officers) and the results will form the basis of my forthcoming doctoral dissertation defense. I am hoping for a solid response rate and I sincerely appreciate your willingness to take some time out of your busy schedule to assist me in this effort. If you are getting this email twice, I apologize. I am using multiple email lists to broadcast the availability of the survey.

Thank you in advance.

https://valdosta.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1ljQqly18AhoS4R

Kind Regards,

Ian M. Coyle, ICMA-CM
County Administrator
Livingston County
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APPENDIX E: Regional Variation

There are 20 states represented in this study. They are addressed below based on the U.S. Census Bureau regional designation (US Census, 2018). The most responsive states, by response count, were Michigan with 42, Georgia at 24, and New York with 22. Utah, Minnesota, Wyoming, and Alabama had one response each. The overall responses show some, albeit small, regional variation.

Region 1: Northeast

The U.S. Census Bureau (US Census, 2018) designated the Northeast as Region 1. This region includes New England and the Mid-Atlantic states. Included in the Northeast region are the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. There are a total of 33 responses from this region in this analysis. The Northeastern state with the highest response rate in this region was New York with 22 responses, greater than 12% of the overall sample. Maine was the only other Northeast state represented with 11 responses.

Region 2: Midwest

The U.S. Census Bureau's Midwestern region's eastern border (US Census, 2018) begins with the Ohio River along Ohio's eastern and southern borders. It extends westward through the Plains states and concludes at the northern borders of Arkansas and Oklahoma. Included in the Midwest region are the states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. A total of 70 responses from the Midwest in this analysis. The Midwestern state with the highest response rate in this region was Michigan with 42 responses, approximately 23% of the overall sample. The next highest response rate states were, in

order, Wisconsin (8), Illinois (7) and Kansas (6). Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota and South Dakota had zero responses.

Region 3: South

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (US Census, 2018), the American South is a large geographic region that extends from the northern borders of Maryland and Delaware and the southern border of the Ohio River westward to the western borders of Oklahoma and Texas. Included in the South region are the states of Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. A total of 43 responses from the South in this analysis. The Southern state with the highest response rate in this region is Georgia with 24 responses, approximately 13% of the overall sample. Florida was second highest response rate state with 10 responses. Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas had zero responses.

Region 4: West

This region extends from the western borders of the Plains states to the Pacific Ocean and includes the Mountain and Pacific subregions. Included in the West region are the states of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming, Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington. There are a total of 33 responses from the West in this analysis. The Southern states with the highest response rate in this region are California and Colorado with 14 responses each, approximately 8% of the overall sample, respectively. Florida was second highest response rate state with 10

responses. No other state had more than five responses and Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Alaska, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington had zero responses.

APPENDIX F: Frequencies and Percentages of Responses to the 26 Factors

Table 10*Breakdown of Responses*

Items	Not at all Important <i>n</i> (%)	Very Unimportant <i>n</i> (%)	Somewhat Unimportant <i>n</i> (%)	Somewhat Important <i>n</i> (%)	Very Important <i>n</i> (%)	Extremely Important <i>n</i> (%)
Political conflict	13 (7.3)	10 (5.6)	25 (14.1)	55 (31.1)	54 (30.5)	20 (11.3)
Relationship with board	2 (1.1)	2 (1.1)	2 (1.1)	14 (7.9)	80 (45.2)	77 (43.5)
Services/programs provided by the county	7 (4.0)	6 (3.4)	18 (10.2)	70 (39.5)	58 (32.8)	18 (10.2)
Public service motivation	2 (1.1)	1 (0.6)	6 (3.4)	41 (23.2)	68 (38.4)	59 (33.3)
Respect/appreciation of the manager position	2 (1.1)	1 (0.6)	6 (3.4)	42 (23.7)	96 (54.2)	30 (16.9)
Bond rating of county management	20 (11.3)	13 (7.3)	29 (16.4)	69 (39)	31 (17.5)	15 (8.5)
Discretion/latitude	1 (0.6)	0 (0)	4 (2.3)	25 (14.1)	109 (61.6)	38 (21.5)
Population of the county	34 (19.2)	26 (14.7)	49 (27.7)	59 (33.3)	5 (2.8)	5 (2.8)
Overall financial condition of county government	2 (1.1)	2 (1.1)	11 (6.2)	60 (33.9)	78 (44.1)	24 (13.6)
Availability/presence of an employment Agreement/contract	34 (19.2)	9 (5.1)	16 (9.0)	33 (18.6)	51 (28.8)	34 (19.2)
Organizational support	1 (0.6)	2 (1.1)	1 (0.6)	41 (23.2)	102 (57.6)	30 (16.9)
Work environment	1 (0.6)	1 (0.6)	5 (2.8)	31 (17.5)	110 (62.1)	29 (16.4)
Pay (salary)	1 (0.6)	3 (1.7)	9 (5.1)	82 (46.3)	73 (41.2)	9 (5.1)
Pay (compensation)	5 (2.8)	6 (3.4)	25 (14.1)	71 (40.1)	62 (35.0)	8 (4.5)

other than salary)						
Health insurance	7 (4.0)	4 (2.3)	15 (8.5)	61 (34.5)	74 (41.8)	16 (9.0)
benefits						
Other fringe benefits	6 (3.4)	11 (6.2)	16 (9.0)	83 (46.9)	55 (31.1)	6 (3.4)
Job satisfaction	0	2 (1.1)	2 (1.1)	13 (7.3)	96 (54.2)	64 (36.2)
Strength of department	3 (1.7)	1 (0.6)	8 (4.5)	41 (23.2)	91 (51.4)	33 (18.6)
Heads/staff						
Relationship with	4 (2.3)	1 (0.6)	10 (5.6)	41 (23.2)	80 (45.2)	41 (23.2)
Elected official						
Department heads						
(e.g., sheriff, clerk,						
treasurer)						
Family wishes &	15 (8.5)	3 (1.7)	7 (4.0)	44 (24.9)	68 (38.4)	40 (22.6)
concerns						
Community quality of	2 (1.1)	0 (0)	7 (4.0)	32 (18.1)	86 (48.6)	50 (28.2)
life						
School system	48 (27.1)	12 (6.8)	16 (9.0)	50 (28.2)	32 (18.1)	19 (10.7)
(parental perspective)						
Spouse/significant	44 (24.9)	6 (3.4)	22 (12.4)	53 (29.9)	38 (21.5)	14 (7.9)
Other employment						
Weather/climate of the	28 (15.8)	19 (10.7)	49 (27.7)	59 (33.3)	19 (10.7)	3 (1.7)
county						
Career	13 (7.3)	6 (3.4)	25 (14.1)	67 (37.9)	49 (27.7)	17 (9.6)
Growth/progression						
Religious concerns	102 (57.6)	17 (9.6)	32 (18.1)	11 (6.2)	11 (6.2)	4 (2.3)
