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The Leadership Role of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) in Smaller Municipalities: Two Profiles

Robert H.A. Tremblay
Western University

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**The Leadership Role of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)
in Smaller Municipalities: Two Profiles**

Subject Keywords: Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), Management, Municipality Size,
Public Administration

Geographical Keywords: Malahide, Middlesex Centre, Ontario

MPA Research Report

Submitted to

The Local Government Program
Department of Political Science
The University of Western Ontario

Robert H.A. Tremblay
July 2018

Report Title: The Leadership Role of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) in Smaller Municipalities, Two Profiles

Abstract: This research project describes the leadership roles of the municipal Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) in smaller municipalities through two profiles of experienced professionals working in southwestern Ontario. The CAO is the organizational superior to all municipal employees. The position is the main conduit between council and administration, and is ultimately responsible for policy development and implementation. The profiles were developed through semi-structured interviews. On a much smaller scale, this replicates the method employed by Siegel in his 2015 book, *Leaders in the Shadows: The Leadership Qualities of Municipal Chief Administrative Officers* (University of Toronto Press). The profiles reveal that there is much commonality between large and small, with specific emphasis on change management.

Subject Keywords: Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), Management, Municipality Size, Public Administration

Geographical Keywords: Malahide, Middlesex Centre, Ontario

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List of Acronyms

AMCTO:	Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks, and Treasurers of Ontario
AMO:	Association of Municipalities of Ontario
CAMA:	Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators
CAO:	Chief Administrative Officer
CSP:	Community Sustainability Plan
DPA:	Diploma in Public Administration
FCM:	Federation of Canadian Municipalities
MPA:	Masters in Public Administration
OMAA:	Ontario Municipal Administrators Association
OMAFRA:	Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs
OSUM:	Ontario Small Urban Municipalities Association
WWR:	Township of Whitewater Region

Introduction

The goal of this research project is to identify specific trends and patterns regarding the leadership roles of the municipal Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) in smaller municipalities. In Ontario, the position is not mandatory, unlike the Treasurer and Clerk, which are required under the *Municipal Act*; however, most Canadian municipalities have now moved to a CAO model (Siegel and Fenn 2017) whereby the CAO is the organizational superior to all municipal employees, the main conduit between council and administration, and ultimately responsible for policy development and implementation. However, the position has received very little research attention. The contributions of David Siegel (2010; 2015a,b) are the most significant, but he has focused mostly on larger municipalities.

This paper presents profiles of two experienced CAOs from smaller municipalities in an effort to compare and contrast the leadership roles of CAOs in large and small municipalities. The purpose is to determine if there are any significant differences that only apply in the rural context or within smaller municipalities. This topic is relevant given the impact of local government on a community's overall health and vitality, and the large number of municipalities in Ontario with populations under 20,000. In addition, smaller municipalities with modest budgets must pay to recruit and retain a qualified CAO. The main research question is the following: How does municipal size affect the leadership role of the CAO? The research methodology is qualitative and observational. One of the aims of this study is to gain insight that could potentially assist with the recruitment and retention of professionals and senior managers within smaller local government organizations.

Case Selection

Two Michelles

The CAOs profiled for this study were pre-selected and both served on the Board of Directors of the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks, and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO). Michelle Casavecchia-Somers is the CAO/Clerk in the Township of Malahide in Elgin County. Michelle Smibert is the CAO in Middlesex Centre, just outside the City of London. They each have more than 25 years of municipal experience and are generally recognized in their field. The profiles were developed through semi-structured interviews with both CAOs and seven other participants from within their professional orbit. The CAOs were interviewed twice; once at the beginning of the process and a second time at the end. For each profile, additional colleagues were interviewed to outline and assess the leadership capabilities and qualities of these administrators. They represent different facets of the CAO's work, including the head of council, senior management team members, and in the case of one profile a colleague operating in a similar position at another municipality. On a smaller scale, this replicates the method employed by Siegel in his 2015 book, *Leaders in the Shadows: The Leadership Qualities of Municipal Chief Administrative Officers* (University of Toronto Press). He interviewed the CAOs twice and interviewed individuals from the CAOs' area of influence.

Demographic Differences

It is possible to gain some insights on the demographic contrasts that exist between CAOs operating in larger and smaller municipalities. Flynn and Mau (2014) sought to understand the demographic profile of the municipal CAO by deploying a survey with the assistance of the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA). A total of 219 responses were received from a potential of 1320, with 158 CAOs working in municipalities with populations under 25,000. A 16.5% participation rate was achieved. Forty percent of participants were over the age of 55 and 164 respondents were male. Forty percent of respondents had a graduate degree, as education attainment increased based on population size. CAOs with no post-secondary education were limited to units with fewer than 25,000 inhabitants. They found that experience increases in larger municipalities, signaling a younger leadership in smaller municipalities. Our profile CAOs are well-educated, female, in their fifties, with more than 25 years of experience.

Keith Robichaud

As mentioned, not much study has occurred on the CAO from smaller municipalities. *Leaders in the Shadows* includes profiles of CAOs, primarily working in larger municipalities. With regard to operating in smaller municipalities, Siegel argues that “in some ways their jobs have been more difficult and more important because many duties that CAOs in large cities delegate to others become the direct responsibility of the CAO in smaller places” (2015a: 155). Keith Robichaud is the exception, who Siegel billed a partnership builder. In most of his assignments, Robichaud benefited from good staff-council relations and a competent management team. He was able to focus his attention on

economic development opportunities and inter-municipal partnerships. He viewed municipalities as arrangers of service. Through our profiles, it may be possible to determine commonalities with Robichaud's experience.

Southwestern Ontario

While both profiled CAOs lead a municipality with fewer than 20,000 residents, it is important to note that much diversity exists under that population threshold. According to Statistics Canada, only 94 census subdivisions in Ontario have populations greater than 20,000. (Statistics Canada, Retrieved on July 20, 2018) Middlesex Centre is growing at a faster pace compared to Malahide, but the median age is lower in Malahide, which has a larger average household size. Middlesex Centre neighbours the City of London, while Malahide's urban centre is the Town of Aylmer, which is its own jurisdiction. Middlesex Centre has a larger budget, doubling Malahide's financial resources.

Table 1: Comparison Middlesex Centre/Malahide

Statistics Canada (2016)	Canada	Ontario	Middlesex Centre	Malahide
Population - 2016			17,262	9,292
% Change from 2011	5%	4.6%	4.7%	1.6%
15-64 years of age	66.5%	66.8%	63.3%	61.8%
Median Age	41.2	41.3	43.5	35.6
Average Household Size	2.4	2.6	2.8	3.1
Financial Information Return (2016)				
Taxation Own Purpose (Schedule 10)			\$14.6M	\$6.5M
Total Expenses Before Adjustments (Schedule 40)			\$25.6M	\$12.1M

The Rural Context: Capacity and Autonomy

Local autonomy and capacity are important factors facing smaller municipalities. Jacob et al. (2008) looked at four rural municipalities as case studies. They conclude that capacity is a more relevant determinant factor with four dimensions: strategic planning, citizen participation, expertise, and revenues. They note that municipalities are heterogeneous; one size does not fit all. The authors speak of the embedded social ties found in the rural area.

The article sets out two dimensions of autonomy: initiative relates to legislative powers, while immunity speaks to being able to operate without relying on another order of government. The authors suggest that autonomy is only one component of capacity, which is an outcome. It also has two dimensions with the first involving management, which includes developing, directing, and controlling resources for policy and program aims. The fiscal dimension is the buffer or slack provided in times of uncertainty that provides discretion:

For a local government to be effective, capacity must be conceptualized in its broadest sense. This includes not only paying attention to the regulations determining autonomy but also to the local assets, liabilities, and processes that permit a municipality to effectively act on the basis of those regulations. (2008: 413)

The authors case studied four small communities. One notable example was Shannon, Ontario which was pro-active with a strategic planning approach tied to budgets. In addition, it had greater citizen participation with a more educated populace and staff. It also benefited from larger assessment growth, took advantage of debt to fund important capital investments, and achieved success securing senior level grant funding.

It is possible to use the case of Shannon, Ontario to compare with the experience of the CAOs operating in Malahide and Middlesex Centre. The authors found that “towns with few staff, weak institutional infrastructure, and a small pool of volunteers or experts encounter very different challenges in the face of the obligations and regulations designed for larger cities” (2008: 425).

Slack and Bird (2013) studied merging municipalities. They state that the objectives of amalgamation include seeking economies of scale, ensuring better coordination of services, allowing for the sharing of some costs with reduced spill over. This speaks to a municipality’s ability to have the financial and technical capabilities to operate. The municipality must be a sufficient size to operate, but not big enough to completely ignore the subsidiary principle:

The subsidiary principle, for example, suggests that the efficient provision of services requires decision-making to be carried out by the level of government closest to the individual citizen, so that resources will be allocated with the greatest efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness. When there are local differences in tastes and costs, there are clear efficiency gains from delivering services in as decentralized a fashion as possible. Smaller, fragmented general-purpose government units may also stimulate competition between local jurisdiction for mobile residents and tax bases that will induce them to offer the best possible mix of taxes and services. (2013: 3)

Nearly twenty years after the amalgamation period, both Malahide and Middlesex Centre still deal with issues involving the subsidiary principle, initiative, and immunity.

Leadership

Transactional and Transformational

David Siegel’s book and related articles on municipal chief administrative officers form the starting point for this research proposal. In *Leaders in the Shadows*, the author

speaks to the ways CAOs lead up, out, and down with specific human examples. Siegel notes that given the complex and multi-faceted role of the CAO, council must appoint the right person with the right skills at the right time. This is important, as CAOs are change agents that guide the operations and direction of their municipality. Siegel has set out specific traits, skills, and behaviours for a CAO to be successful.

Table 2: Characteristics of the Successful CAO (Siegel, 2015: 272)

<p>Traits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrity Respect Energy Resilience Passion Humility rather than charisma
<p>Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional intelligence Politically sensitive, but not politicized Confidence grounded in hard work and preparation, not in hubris Don't micromanage, but support staff Good communications skills, including listening "Cool as a cucumber" Build on your strengths; strengthen your weaknesses
<p>Behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapt to your environment Be changed oriented Make changes carefully; respect local customs Councillors are in charge, but sometimes they need professional assistance Always be grounded in rationality Build teams Surround yourself with great people; if you do not have them, develop them Promote training and development opportunities Tear down silos; avoid turf talk You are not the municipality; you are the temporary hired help There's life outside your own municipality Respect the work-life balance

Van Wart (2015) developed a framework to evaluate transformational leaders. It starts with two characteristics associated with transactional matters. Management by exception is more reactionary, dealing with problems and crisis as they arise. Contingent reward involves the contract relationship with the employer, starting with pay. Transformational leaders go beyond these first two dimensions to include coaching, leading by example, commitment, and change management.

Table 3: Framework for the Analysis of Transformational Leaders (Van Wart, 2015, p. 761)

Management by exception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deal with low-performing employees • Avoid technical mistakes and blunders • Deal with performance lapses • Stabilize organization if needed
Contingent reward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay • Life-work balance
Individualized consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching • Delegation • Training opportunities
Idealized influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model exemplary behavior • Avoid personal scandal • Use of charismatic communication
Inspirational commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain commitment in the work and the profession • Teamwork
Intellectual stimulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the need for change • Provide a plan • Build internal support • Ensure top management support • Ensure external support • Provides resources • Institutionalize changes • Pursue comprehensive change

Roles and the Council-Staff Relationship

Siegel may have been inspired by Mintzberg, who developed a model for managerial work at three levels: information, people, and action. The roles include seeking and getting information, using it to control work, leading and managing people, networking with contacts, as well as supervising action. At the centre sits the person who comes to the job, bringing a set of values, experiences, knowledge, and competencies. The person in the job creates a frame that includes the purpose of the job, a perspective on what needs to be done, and a specific set of strategic positions for doing it (1997: 132).

The author's three edges of management include the political edge where interactions occur with government, or for the CAO where relationship is built with mayor and council. The stakeholder edge is where the public, business interests, as well as other pressure groups play – this mirrors Siegel's leading out. Lastly, the operating edge is where the CAO ensures effective and efficient service-delivery. These edges are like tectonic plates that smash into each other and apply pressure on the CAO. Siegel also describes the CAO as the pinch point in an hour glass with council above with staff below.

Leading Up

Siegel (2010) points out how different local government is compared to other levels of government in terms of the lack of political unity, which must be gained on an issue-by-issue basis, as well as open and transparent decision-making where staff advice is given in public. Siegel argues that leading up to council is the most difficult as it does not involve formal authority, but rather power flowing from influence. This relates to the relationship of trust between council and the CAO, which is anchored on competency, action, and

communication. Policy-making and agenda setting are part of leading up: “The contemporary municipal chief administrative officer must remain separate from electoral politics, but be operationally oriented, politically sensitive, and definitely involved in the politics of governing society” (2015: 57).

Fenn and Siegel reviewed the evolving role of chief administrative officers, suggesting that the CAO model has strengthened the council-staff relationship. Fenn and Siegel describe what constitutes good council-staff relations: treating all council members equally; keeping politics and management separate; remembering that elected representatives represent the whole community; ensuring there are no surprises; discouraging personal attacks; not wasting councillors time; making good use of talent; passing the ball to council champions; ensuring respect; as well as preserving the chain of command. “As evidence of its value, the CAO model has been adopted by most Ontario municipalities because it effectively addresses the complex managerial and policy-making problems that municipal councils face” (2017: 29). They recommend that the legislative framework be amended to more clearly define the valued role of the CAO, to maintain managerial professionalization, and to protect public service from politicization.

Svara (2001) speaks to the proper role of administrators in the political process based on professional knowledge. He offers an alternative that he calls complementarity, which includes a differentiation between the political and administrative dimensions, but with necessary interaction and involvement on both sides. This respect is based on the mutually beneficial characteristics of each, involving political control on one side and professional independence on the other.

Siegel (2015b) employs a bargain analogy. On one side, the politicians are accountable to the elector. On the other, the public service provides advice on policy and ensures decisions are implemented to ensure efficient management. He notes the importance of loyalty and competency in the bargain, which is a condition precedent that affects every aspect of the relationship on a continuum. The bargain is subject to subtle negotiation and premised on two tenets:

The CAO will provide her or his best professional, administrative advice to council. It is important to be aware of the political implications of this advice, but those implications should not change the advice offered. Council will consider the CAO's advice in a respectful manner. If it chooses to reject that advice, it will do so without public, personal criticism of the CAO. (2015b: 416)

Leading Down

The CAO is viewed as council's only employee overseeing all departments and corporate activities in a compliance role with regard to collective agreements, rules, procedures, and regulations. It involves managing resources, both human and financial. Part of this dimension is overcoming silos by ensuring horizontal integration and coordination in the organization.

The CAO plays a coordinating role. Plunkett (1992) adds that unlike provincial or federal senior bureaucrats, the CAO cannot remain anonymous as the title holder is to provide advice in public and in the form of public staff reports. Plunkett also distinguishes this order of government with its absence of an accountable political executive. He relates the principles of the council-manager plan which influenced the evolution and introduction of the CAO:

- Small councils with five to seven members;
- Council responsible for enacting by-laws, policy-making, and supervising administration;
- Full-time professional staff serving at council's pleasure with full responsibility for the nitty gritty of operations;
- Council adoption of a budget prepared by staff;
- Mayor's ceremonial duties.

Indeed, many of these characteristics apply to Ontario municipalities today, including Malahide and Middlesex Centre.

Leading Out

This role involves relationship-building with the media, residents, businesses, neighbouring municipalities, and other levels of government. It is an ambassador-type role, which stems from both major theoretical currents influencing public administration, namely New Public Management (seek out partnerships) and New Public Service (promote citizen engagement). Siegel suggests this dimension involves issues management with good negotiation skills: "Although the CAO has an important role to play in leading out, the special nature of that role can be quite ambiguous. The mayor and councillors should take a strong role here, and the CAO must be careful not to be too far out in front of her or his political masters" (2015: 42).

StrategyCorp is a consultant firm that assists various clients including municipalities with strategic planning and lobbying. They conducted interviews of CAOs in Ontario's large municipalities in 2016, with a follow up for smaller and mid-sized municipalities in 2017. The reports describe the CAO as council's chief policy advisor with a leadership role to play in the community and with economic development. They concluded that CAOs generally linked corporate success with community success. Moreover, issues facing municipalities

include leading out dimensions, such as public engagement, economic development, real-time issue management, and diversity. Smaller municipalities face similar issues with fewer resources and lack of specialists.

According to the 2017 report, CAOs from smaller places have the same issues building the senior management team, but are faced with increased competition from neighbours, attraction issues related to fit with the rural lifestyle, and difficulty finding suitable housing and employment for the spouse or partner. With regard to other factors, the local talk phenomenon is a rather rural phenomenon where local gripes, gossip, and rumours are discussed by community elders around a coffee shop table. Smaller municipalities also encounter difficulties when trying to find comparable municipalities to benchmark against.

Profiles

The two profiles will take up the questions addressed under case selection and through discussion on leadership, as they relate to leading in smaller municipalities.

The Fixer as Change Agent – Michelle Casavecchia-Somers

Michelle Casavecchia-Somers celebrated 30 years of municipal service in 2017, having started her journey as a Clerk Trainee with the Village of Grand Bend the summer of 1987. She admitted that she was attracted to public administration and municipal government by chance, falling into it. Born and raised in Seaforth, a small farming community an hour north of London, her father was a parts manager at a local car dealership and her mother ran a home daycare. While her parents did not pursue post-secondary education, they encouraged their three children to do so. She attended Fanshaw

College earning a business accounting diploma. The graduate soon understood that the repetition of making sure multiple ledgers balanced as a junior accounting analyst was not very motivating to her. One of her instructors, Paul Jarvis, encouraged her to undertake the municipal administration program, which would build on her accounting foundation while pursuing other avenues, including policy development. The program resulting in an internship funded by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs in Grand Bend.

Career Path

Beginnings

In the late 1980s, prior to the amalgamation era, Grand Bend had an approximate population of 800 permanent residents, and much like today, would grow exponentially in size each summer with a few thousand more. She describes the village office as tiny with four administrative positions, two staff in public works, and about 10-15 summer students. It was a busy summer with the trainee getting involved in all aspects of municipal administration. As a popular vacation spot, it was a great summer for someone in her early 20s. However, when the fall came and the pace slowed down drastically, the intern's motivation waned. In January 1988 she accepted the position of Deputy Clerk-Treasurer in her home town of Seaforth. She describes her boss CAO/Clerk Jim Crocker, as the most amazing leader she had the opportunity to work with. He was positive and supportive, well respected by staff, council, and the community. According to Casavecchia-Somers, who was clearly influenced by his leadership, he had an immense passion for the community and understood the issues facing small town and rural Ontario. She remained for four years and Mr. Crocker saw potential giving her more responsibility. He mentored by allowing

her to take the reins while he took leave over the summer months, checking in on a weekly basis. He left the municipality in her hands to oversee operational matters during his absence as a quasi CAO mentee.

Casavecchia-Somers told the story of a report on a new initiative she worked tirelessly on with research and recommendations. After council did not embrace it, she went home and cried. Her mentor advised her that she could not have done a better job on the report. Regardless of how well prepared the message is, sometimes the recommendation is not welcomed. She called the experience eye-opening and described the advice as likely the reason she remains in the municipal world thirty years later: “Jim allowed me to fail and win ... He taught me that a good CAO needs to be committed and passionate about the advice they give to council.” Seaforth was followed by a short stint in East Williams before a nine-year tenure with the City of London.

Table 4: Career Path - Michelle Casavecchia-Somers

Position	Timeframe	Municipality (then)	Municipality (Now Part of)
Clerk Trainee	May-December 1987	Village of Grand Bend	Municipality of Lambton Shores
Deputy Clerk-Treasurer	1988- 1992	Town of Seaforth	Municipality of Huron East
Clerk-Treasurer/ Tax Collector	1992	Township of East Williams	Municipality of North Middlesex
Committee Secretary	1992-2001	City of London	City of London
Clerk	2001-2002	Municipality of Thames Centre	
Director of Corporate Services/ Clerk	2003-2007		
Chief Administrative Officer/ Clerk	2008-2009	Township of Perth South	
Chief Administrative Officer/ Clerk	2009-Present	Township of Malahide	

More in a Big Place

The City of London was a culture shock with “more” ... more people, more documentation, more guidelines, more consistency. It affirmed a passion for the clerk role that continued on in every position held. While in London, her supervisor Jeff Malpass, saw potential in the committee secretary and encouraged her to participate in Western University’s Diploma in Public Administration in the Local Government Program. It was viewed as a necessity for advancement in the hierarchy of the larger city.

When asked to describe the differences between small and large municipalities, she contrasted the “more” of London to the personal and less formal environment of rural municipal government, “where policy may be done on the fly or based on historical remembrance.” Smaller places provide a hands-on experience. She points out that regardless of size, municipalities face similar issues, such as an increasing demand for services with decreasing resources. According to Casavecchia-Somers, most municipalities struggle with implementing change; moreover, all have public who is critical, with some facing conflict between staff and council of varying degrees. She suggests it is important to lean on best practices, pick what works best, and borrow approaches from both small and large municipalities.

London provided her an opportunity to hone her clerk skills and eventually she yearned for involvement in more areas. Her career progressed in Thames Centre where she started as Clerk, then Director of Corporate Services. She describes it as going home. She was eventually drawn to the Chief Administrative Officer/Clerk role as it provided the certainty of her first love being a Clerk. She also knew she could perform the duties of the

other side, having acted as CAO in Thames Centre for a short-time and she was inspired by her first mentor, who provided a great example of what could be achieved.

Chief Administration

According to the CAO/Clerk, Perth South and Malahide were very similar upon her arrival since both were in a state of transition. She replaced long-serving incumbents who retired after more than 35 years: “They had not embraced change with small departments - siloed despite their size and little coordination. Both had not kept up with trends in technology and legislation, but both benefited from dedicated and committed staff.” Casavecchia-Somers was motivated by the opportunities in both municipalities to bring refreshed leadership and direction with a consolidated vision highlighted by a different approach. She states that there were opportunities to initiate change and achieve results in a short period of time, which she calls gratifying and exciting.

In both situations council was seeking change with organizational reviews. In Perth South, she was asked to do the review in-house, but in Malahide a consultant had conducted it one year prior to her arrival. Both reviews involved transforming the bureaucracy. In both situations, some positions needed to be eliminated, while other roles were realigned. This was a result of the post amalgamation period when most staff were kept on and inserted in jobs that became more complex following consolidation. Some staff were in positions they were ill-suited and not trained for.

In Malahide, Casavecchia-Somers faced some service level expansions. Mayor Mennill articulates the challenges facing the community: “Every municipality does not have enough money to do all the infrastructure that is necessary. We try to keep up and our

municipality is as good or better than most. We have increased taxes but the municipal tax base was not meant to cover all costs. In 1977, municipalities were getting 52 cents on the dollar from federal or provincial funding and it is now about 19 cents.”

Malahide has a special relationship with the Town of Aylmer, with township offices located there. Perth South had a similar relationship with adjacent St. Mary’s. Both urban areas rely on the surrounding farming community to visit for shopping and services. Malahide and Aylmer partner on a number of fronts, including the community complex in East Elgin, which they jointly own. They also partner on economic development and tourism, including special events. A sewage plant is located in Malahide but services Aylmer, and Malahide provides information technology, GIS, and road patrol services to its neighbour through contract.

Aylmer’s CAO Jennifer Raynaert has worked for the town for 27 years, having started as a bookkeeper, before moving to Deputy Treasurer, Director of Finance/Human Resources, and eventually CAO in 2011. Reynaert stated that the town was hit hard by the 2008 economic downturn and struggles to retain people and businesses. She notes the urban centre of Elgin County is facing an aging population while trying to attract younger families. She points to the shared community complex as a strategic partnership between both municipalities. The governance model has forced elected officials and staff to work collaboratively: “We are always looking for ways to do things more cost effectively, looking for the win-win. There are no boundaries as far as I’m concerned. We work well together.”

Casavecchia-Somers faced one particularly difficult time in 2012 with a taxpayer revolt over a proposed solid waste or garbage flat fee that was to be imposed on occupied

properties. The Township had also seen rate increases higher than the rate of inflation to keep up with service demands and aging infrastructure: “It was a major lesson learned and demonstrated the need for additional outreach and information to the community in advance of a major decision,” she conceded.

The revolt brought about scrutiny on how the Township conducted its business, staff, wages, taxes, and affordability, which created a lasting impact on the organization. The Township adjusted its budget process with a new committee. Attendance at budget meetings declined over the years. The CAO/Clerk admits that she struggled during that time to provide advice and information to council, while also reassuring staff that they were valued despite the running discourse. It had a severe impact on morale and turnover with some longstanding members of the staff team deciding to retire.

Leadership

General Characteristics

Casavecchia-Somers takes most pride in being an effective change agent. She was called upon to bring about modifications to structure, programs, staffing, and technology. In Perth South, there was some reluctance to implement a new software for taxes, but it resulted in significant time savings. She speaks to the importance of developing, promoting, and executing a change project. Implementation seems to be a major preoccupation with her. She also expresses a sense of ownership and pride for the staff team she assembled, who are knowledgeable and innovative. Mayor Mennill describes her as setting the example, working hard, and always being available. He also commends her communication skills and her professional presentation style.

The CAO has a dual role as Clerk and prides herself on her legislative knowledge. She estimates that 30 to 40 per cent of her time is spent on the extra role, but she also relies on a competent Deputy Clerk to handle most of the day-to-day legislative duties. She believes her earlier years of experience in legislative roles dealing with by-laws, minutes, policies, procedures help her in chief administration: “In smaller municipalities where resources are challenged, dual roles are not out of the question, but having competent staff to assist is valuable.” Her CAO colleague from Aylmer stated that she leans on her neighbour for clerk-type questions, noting Casavecchia-Somers is knowledgeable and helpful. Suzanna Dieleman, her Treasurer, describes her as a clerk at heart.

The revolt mentioned earlier also led to a proposed staff wage roll back that came under other business at one council meeting, with no pre-warning or consultation with the mayor or CAO. Council passed a 10 per cent roll back on a four to three vote, despite pleas from staff to research the matter and report back with options. Faced with this political manoeuvre, the CAO/Clerk went about her statutory duty of implementing the decision of the majority of council by contacting the Township’s solicitor who advised that the rollback was tantamount to constructive dismissal, which required her to prepare a closed session update. Council needed to rescind its previous motion and some members were angry with the CAO/Clerk, but she stood her ground. Instead of a rollback, Council implemented a freeze; but, the damage was done with regard to morale. One staff member describes the situation as difficult in terms of council-staff relations, with all staff hurting. The CAO/Clerk said all sides learned from the experience: “Council recognized they need to involve staff to ensure legislatively they can accomplish what they set out to do and to find a way to make things work.”

According to her CAO colleague, Malahide's CAO/Clerk leads by example. Jennifer Raynaert states: "she is collaborative, but when it is required she will take the necessary action. She can make tough decisions and owns them. She is unafraid to take that approach when required. Everything I have seen and heard, she is very well respected." Raynaert notes that Casavecchia-Somers ensured the municipality had the proper policies and procedures in place, thus changing the organizational culture: "she has taken the municipality leaps and bounds."

One of her staff describes her as being informed while holding strong opinions: "Michelle's strength is that she is a knowledgeable person who will do the research and find things out. She knows who to contact and is usually willing to bring someone in and involve people who have the expertise. She is good at handling difficult tasks and gets personal satisfaction from dealing with the difficult stuff."

Leading Up

Casavecchia-Somers advises that the sooner in a council term, a CAO can draw political leaders together around a common view, vision, or goal, the better: "Over the years, I have come to realize that it is important to adapt to, and understand, the priorities of the community and council. Communication and goal setting are key." When Mayor Mennill assumed the position of head of council in 2010, he was supportive of the changes taking place at the administrative level. They met one-on-one to get on the same page on larger policy and procedural issues that needed to be addressed. As the previous deputy mayor, the new mayor knew the issues and brought forth a different approach than his predecessor who was more hands on, by being a presence in the office and involved in

administration on a daily basis. Mennill understood there needed to be a separation between council and administration. They developed a strong working relationship with two-way communication and conversations on what Casavecchia-Somers describes as the “how and why”.

Another dimension of leading up is supporting council through the adoption of a strategic plan. Council produced a term of council document outlining its priorities. It followed the adoption of the Community Sustainability Plan (CSP) in 2012-2013, which a consultant completed. The CSP was a strategic response to the tax payer revolt. It was meant as a way to reach out to the community to gain input and establish priorities, ensuring more community involvement with articulated goals. The CAO/Clerk stated that it was too soon after the CSP to develop a more fulsome strategic plan. The term of council priorities document was produced with three facilitated sessions assisted by a representative of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). Administration reports annually on outcomes for both documents with most items now addressed. All those interviewed for this profile mentioned that staff reports refer to the priorities document, ensuring tie in to the strategic framework on most decisions.

According to Suzanna Dieleman, the Director of Corporate Services/Treasurer for the Township: “we put some effort on how we frame recommendations to get council thinking about a long-term strategic focus.” It appears that it is an embryonic approach about planting the seed and waiting for council to take steps. For instance, staff are encouraging council to extend water services to a village to attract growth to ensure the elementary school can stay.

Fire Chief Brent Smith notes staff must articulate to council the need for change to ensure legislative compliance. He makes specific reference to challenges faced by the Fire Department by new regulatory changes that require follow up.

Others interviewed noted that the CAO/Clerk's interactions with elected officials are typical of a smaller municipality. She is friendly yet very professional at all times: "She is very diplomatic with them. She does her best to listen to what they have to say and respond in an appropriate fashion." Mayor Mennill said she is firm: "if council tries to go away from policy, she is quick to point out the deviation."

Leading Down

Casavecchia-Somers says that she strives to lead by example. Having started on the front lines, she says that she is familiar with the challenges faced by staff and the opportunities that exist for them. She does the best she can and expects the same from her staff. She recalls the advice given to her by her former boss in London: hire the best, rely on them, and allow them to perform. The CAO/Clerk suggests that she has confidence in her team. While away in Jamaica, she heard of the county bridge collapse in Port Bruce through social media. Unable to do much from so far away, she stated that her directors did a phenomenal job of handling initial response.

Staff note that Casavecchia-Somers is a gatekeeper in terms of information with a disseminating role. According to senior staff, she usually shares information about what is happening at her level and with council when she can. She admits she is not the ideas person and tries to support her staff who have more expertise. One staffer noted the lack of aspirational goals and values for the municipality as a whole.

She meets with her management team on a weekly basis. Treasurer Dieleman notes: “she sets out expectations and says to go and do it. She leaves it to us on how to do it and can overrule. We communicate and discuss where we are at.” Fire Chief Brent Smith said she lets everyone do their job, is overall fair, and approachable. Her staff underscore that while Casavecchia-Somers is collaborative, she is ultimately the boss and will make the final call. They note her ability to deal with difficult situations, using an example how she worked with the new fire chief to address on-going issues at one station, involving entitlement. She made necessary human resources decisions and changes. To her staff, she is sometimes initially resistant to a new idea but often comes around after more thought and discussion. She is known for picking her battles.

Leading Out

Malahide is a service provider for Elgin County for all road maintenance, as the county does not have a roads department. It also provides GIS services, while the County leads tourism and economic development. In Perth South, the County did planning services and emergency management for the lower-tier units, as well as health and safety. Mayor Mennill noted that Casavecchia-Somers has played a particular role in sharing services with other municipalities, which he deems was more cost effective for Malahide.

One particular issue that brought the CAO/Clerk to lead out was the bridge collapse in Port Bruce. This county bridge had a massive impact on local residents. Staff and the mayor note her role in interacting with the County to ensure the interests of Malahide were met. The County decided to place a temporary replacement bridge on a township road allowance. Neighbouring CAO Jennifer Raynaert remarked that Casavecchia-Somers

remains persistent and strong in her approach, noting that the needs of her municipality were always at the forefront.

With regard to local media, Casavecchia-Somers highlights the special relationship that exists with the community paper. She speaks of a concerted effort to get information out to residents. She admits that the mayor plays a primary role in interacting with community groups, including the Port Bruce Rate Payers Association, which has partnered with the municipality in recent years to deliver enhanced recreational infrastructure to the village. The Township has positive relationships with other service groups who partner and undertake a number of projects. She also delegates where necessary; for example, it is the Fire Chief who addresses the media on fire and emergency management matters. The mayor states that she is good at calming people down and seeing the big picture. He relies on her and senior staff for background when preparing remarks.

Casavecchia-Somers currently is entering her third two-year term as a Zone Director on the Board of the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks, and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO). Throughout her career, she has relied on AMCTO to find most recent legislative updates and to complete a number of formal training programs. She credits its broad network to her career success, noting the importance for municipal professionals from smaller/rural places to share best practices. Later on, she got involved at the zone level before joining the board. She did so to give back to the association, understanding that AMCTO has a role to play to prepare the next generation of leaders and to promote local government as a career choice.

In summary, Casavecchia-Somers is a fixer, having been brought in to two municipalities to implement staffing changes. She is determined, having faced a taxpayer revolt and a proposed salary rollback. She is a negotiator always looking out for the interests of her municipality. The CAO/Clerk also spent considerable time reviewing policies and procedures to ensure legislative compliance. She controls information and requires a solid rationale before adopting a new idea.

The Results Driven Leader – Michelle Smibert

Michelle Smibert grew up in Thames Centre outside of London. It was a “no brainer” to attend Western University where she excelled academically and athletically. While she started in pre-med, she eventually transitioned to kinesiology and political science. A class colleague talked about local government which peaked her interest. She started taking courses offered by AMCTO, which deepened her understanding of local government. After graduation, she was able to find an entry position with North Dorchester, which became part of Thames Centre during the amalgamation period. She stated: “I fell into it. It was not chosen, but I found it. I am learning every single day. It changes every day - giving back to the community whether you live there or not.”

Career Path

Beginnings

One mentor she speaks fondly and sadly about is the former Clerk-Administrator in North Dorchester, who hired her and showed her the ropes. He got Michelle involved in AMCTO, brought her to zone meetings, and was generally a valuable person to learn from.

He had a wonderful sense of humour. Tragically, he committed suicide during her time in North Dorchester. She explains that he was gay and it got out. Times were different back then; it stopped his advancement. He had applied for a position at the county and did not get an interview. According to her, this rejection and relationship troubles he was facing first lead to depression, then to his death.

Despite the loss, she progressed quickly through the organization in great part due to his mentorship. After her first six months as an assistant, her role was redefined as Deputy Clerk, with responsibilities involving the committee of adjustment, by-laws, and research. The position was a bit of a catch-all, which happens in smaller places, as she was the backup for payroll, assisted with health and safety, and even organized staff events.

Smibert eventually rose to the position of Clerk. When North Dorchester amalgamated with West Nissouri in 1999 to form Thames Centre, Smibert continued on in the role. She moved on to the City of London in 2001. She notes that in smaller places staff get exposed to more, with involvement in different areas: “You see things happen quicker. It is not quite so bureaucratic.” According to her, this is in contrast with larger places, where things are more specialized.

Table 5: Career Path - Michelle Smibert

Position	Timeframe	Municipality
Assistant Clerk, Deputy Clerk, Clerk	1991-1999	Township of North Dorchester
Clerk	1999-2001	Municipality of Thames Centre
Manager of Licensing and Elections	2001-2004	City of London
Deputy Clerk	2004-2010	City of Stratford
Chief Administrative Officer	2010 to present	Municipality of Middlesex Centre

Specialization

Smibert joined the City of London to manage licensing and elections. There, she was responsible for everything from polls to pooling of lottery proceeds. She relied on AMCTO's licensing working group to liaise with other lottery officials, share best practices, and access more resources. The city also afforded time to focus on special projects. She brought that expertise to the City of Stratford as Deputy Clerk and then decided to pursue her Masters of Public Administration in the Local Government Program at Western University.

Chief Administration

Smibert started to feel pigeon-holed in the legislative services function. Feeling the need to stretch and advance, she applied for a director's position and did not get it. The Deputy Clerk was encouraged to get more experience, needing to leave to get it. "I found myself complaining about the leaders within the organization and decided I had to do something or shut up. I took the opportunity to see what I could do to make a difference." She acknowledges that the CAO faces a great deal of criticism. The position holder wants to get things done despite many obstacles. She was drawn to the opportunity to work with staff and elected officials, building expertise and relationships.

Mayor Al Edmondson noted that she scored very high during the recruitment for the position of CAO in Middlesex Centre: "She can do all the things we asked of her and more." He describes his municipality as a fast-growing community of communities. Middlesex Centre is close to London and is influenced by it. The CAO believes that "what is good for London is good for our area. London does not understand what we do or who we are." She

takes the leveraging approach by not reinventing the wheel. Middlesex Centre has faced some servicing issues, but also learned from their neighbour on growth and development.

Leadership

General Characteristics

The municipality's innovative approaches are in part credited to the vision of the CAO. It has a fleet of environmentally-friendly cars with four hybrids and two electric vehicles. The new fire station is the first in Canada to be net zero and carbon neutral. "The majority of the team understands the changing mindset on how we build buildings, save operational costs, and the role we can play with new zero buildings so that we do not rely on hydro," said Smibert. The municipality was able to obtain funding from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' (FCM) Green Fund. She describes how the municipality pushed back against naysayers when it came to the project.

Other innovations include the greater use of technology for a new payroll system, which replaced a manual process with inefficiencies and lack of consistency. Smibert says it as a tool to support her high functioning team as it can track employee orientation, run job costing, set up schedules, and provides reports on absenteeism. It reinforces her strong ideology on having the proper tools to achieve corporate results. Another project is the implementation of Laserfiche as an electronic records management system. Middlesex Centre did not have one person in the organization to look after records management. The system allows documents to be retrieved easily and in a timely fashion. The CAO's interest and expertise on legislative matters was specifically highlighted as she stays abreast of changes and remains connected to associations.

One staff member describes her as positive, respectful, intelligent, and confident. She is approachable to both council and staff. Fire Chief Colin Toth adds: “She has moved us forward ... We are doing the things we are supposed to do to meet legislation and regulation. We budget properly and follow best practices.” Mayor Edmondson contrasts Smibert’s leadership style saying that too many CAOs tend to be aggressive and controlling. “She hires the people; we have excellent staff; she lets them do their job, which is key.” Smibert outlines her philosophy of leadership as a trifecta of learning, listening, and adapting. She likes to lighten things up and celebrates the successes of the team. She encourages staff to be pro-active instead of reactive.

Leading Up

Her approach is results driven, linking strategy to outcomes with measurement and reporting through the balanced score card approach, which is a strategic planning and management system that connects strategy and mission with operational outcomes. It provides key performance indicators and targets that can be tracked as well as reported. Smibert states that council knows where the municipality has been and likes where it is heading: “The majority are big picture thinkers ... They support the management team’s ideas. It has been a true partnership.”

Mayor Edmondson confirms: “We have a strategic plan and we use it for every move we make. Michelle makes sure that happens and to her credit, administration has a balanced score card so that everybody is moving in the same direction.” The CAO cautions that this approach did not happen overnight. Sessions were held with council to develop goals and objectives. Efforts were made to ensure alignment with the balance score card,

which is linked to the performance management program. The system was developed by the municipality's human resources consultant and is used as far down in the organization as possible. According to the Fire Chief: "Michelle is very heavy on strategy. Council and directors work well together. The environment invites collaboration."

Throughout her career, she worked with heads of council with not much direct interaction with London's mayor due to the size of the organization. She describes the mayor in North Dorchester as fair with a good sense of humour who always spoke his mind. Stratford's Mathieson has a strong personality and runs the show. It was important to get him the right information to build a solid relationship. "It is a matter of understanding different personalities and priorities, while building relationships to work together," concludes Smibert.

Leading Down

Tiffany Farrell first met her new boss during her interview for the position of Director of Corporate Services/Treasurer. She had heard about Smibert as Farrell's previous CAO had completed the Masters of Public Administration in the Local Government Program at Western University with Smibert. She was also well-known at the time, as she was President of AMCTO. Farrell was encouraged to take control of the budget process and change it to make it her own. The goals for the department, according to the CAO and council, were clearly set out in the interview. "Communication is big with Michelle," said Farrell.

Smibert is credited with mentoring new directors with coaching on leading and managing staff. She provides them with the liberty to try new initiatives, such as an

onboarding process developed by the Treasurer for new hires. Farrell describes Smibert's management style in this way: "She is democratic and listens to us. We meet as the directors group once per month or every six weeks and talk through issues. She is a good listener, welcomes and provides input, but she ultimately makes the final decision." The Treasurer calls her a visionary with great ideas who is also big on change to try to get the municipality to the next level. Smibert expects her staff to keep her in the loop, but she also gives her directors freedom to manage. "She holds us accountable to be the best we can be. I need to be challenged," said Farrell. The Fire Chief describes her as a "cool leader" who asks the right questions. She is demonstrative, flexible, and supportive.

Chief Colin Toth says that "Michelle leads things but gives directors room to do their jobs. She has a unique way of bringing that out in us". She takes the time to listen to his projects, allowing directors to be passionate about the areas they lead. She lets them run their departments with oversight and feedback, providing options and suggestions: "I am a firm believer that they are paid to do their job. I don't need to micromanage them."

Mayor Edmondson credits her for undertaking an employee satisfaction survey, demonstrating that she understands how morale is important to an organization: "Michelle values quality; she is not afraid to pull the reigns tighter and try to move them forward. She puts money in the budget so people can move ahead. Sometimes we have them for a few years and help them move along a path. She is very astute, recognizes good work, and encourages better work from others."

Smibert points out it was important to build the best team possible, which necessitated bringing in people from the outside and in some cases, without municipal

experience: “We needed to get a little more sophisticated with the right experience, education, certification, and designations.” This impacted the organizational culture. She describes her job as holding the team accountable. She labels the municipality’s leadership team as fast-paced, forcing her to do some work with them on the finer points. Smibert says they are getting a lot done. They no longer accept doing it one way because it was always so. They are looking at the process pieces to ensure they are as efficient and effective as possible, which she says is what council expects.

Leading Out

One senior staffer said the CAO allows the right people with the necessary expertise to speak to the media. Those are the people who are in it everyday and passionate about the topic at hand. The mayor mentioned efforts to clarify any rumours as part of issue management. The CAO believes the municipality is often forgotten by local media, which is more pre-occupied with the goings-on at city hall or with the county. The mayor is the face to community groups and organizations. Siegel’s in the shadows metaphor is appropriate.

Collaboration exists with the County of Middlesex, for which the municipality receives information technology, planning, and legal services. They work together on issues of common concern with delegations to Ministers at the annual Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Conference.

As a past president of AMCTO, she calls her involvement with the organization a inevitable, as the association supported her throughout her career. She points out how her involvement was also good for her municipality with the CAO working on issues facing the sector. She was recently acclaimed to the position of Secretary-Treasurer for AMO. It is an

executive position on the Board reserved for a municipal profession. AMO advocates for the interests of all 444 municipalities of Ontario and plays an important role in municipal-provincial relations. This builds on her AMCTO experience, as well as serving on the Board of the Ontario Small Urban Municipalities Association (OSUM). According to Smibert, OSUM has advocated on a number of issues of interest to Middlesex Centre, including policing, servicing, and school closures: “One size does not fit all and the board has helped convey that message looking at different perspectives.”

In summary, Smibert is a change agent that seeks results. She spent considerable effort building a competent team, which she does not micromanage. She implemented the balanced score card to align strategy with outputs. She benefits from a strong relationship with council and shows dedication to the profession with involvement in a number of associations. She is a policy entrepreneur with specific focus on environmental projects.

Successful and Transformational Leaders in Smaller Places

It is important to link together the current academic research with the profiles developed in this paper. We will assess the two leaders in terms of the characteristics determined by Siegel (2015a) for the successful CAO. In addition, we will apply Van Wart’s (2015) Transformational Leadership framework.

Characteristics of Success

Siegel suggests the following traits are important to a successful CAO: integrity, respect, energy, resilience, passion, and humility. It appears both CAOs are well respected and their integrity is not in question. Their relative long tenures demonstrate a certain

resiliency. Casavecchia-Somers weathered the taxpayer revolt. Smibert shows passion for innovation with a fleet of renewable vehicles and a net zero fire hall.

In terms of skills, Casavecchia-Somers demonstrates emotional intelligence and political acuity when speaking about the advice she gives to elected officials knowing it can be rejected, despite its merits. Smibert was particularly noted for not micromanaging staff. Both heads of council mentioned the excellent communication skills of their administrative leaders. Casavecchia-Somers admits she is not the ideas person, which speaks to her ability to build on her strengths and surround herself with others who have the expertise she lacks. Both are grounded in hard work and preparation, demonstrated by their commitment to return to school to finish a DPA and MPA to progress in their respective careers.

With respect to behaviours, both CAOs worked in larger municipalities before becoming CAOs. They were able to adapt to their environments, while remaining change oriented. Smibert spoke about increasing Middlesex Centre's sophistication with the proper mix of experience, education, and skills. Casavecchia-Somers talked about tightening up policies and procedures to ensure legislative compliance. They both speak about aligning administrative decisions with council's strategy by providing council with reports and recommendations that reflect the strategic objectives of the organization. They spent considerable time building the right team with notable changes in staffing. Smibert was especially highlighted for allocating the necessary funds for development and new work tools. Casavecchia-Somers spoke of tearing down silos, even in a smaller place. Both mentioned elements of good work-life balance. So, it appears that a CAO working in a

smaller place can develop or manifest the necessary characteristics outlined by Siegel to be successful. Size does not impede or magnify these traits, skills, and behaviours.

Transformational Leadership

Van Wart (2015) provides an interesting frame to look at the leadership of our two profiles. Both manage by exception, having dealt with low performing employees. Casavecchia-Somers tried her best to stabilize the organization after a taxpayer revolt. Her township increased the tax levy greater than inflation to ensure the organization's financial sustainability. Both CAOs spend time on individualized consideration. Smibert's senior managers mentioned her coaching and delegation. The mayor spoke of her efforts to ensure sufficient training dollars were included in the budget. Both CAOs were selected for this study because of their involvement in professional associations. Both show a commitment to the profession by giving back and participating in advocacy work. In our profiles, we called Casavecchia-Somers the Fixer as Change Agent, while Smibert is dubbed a Results Driven Leader. This speaks to Van Wart's intellectual stimulation frame. Both spent considerable time institutionalizing change. Smibert's implementation of the balance score card is proof of her efforts to operationalize the strategic plan. In Casavecchia-Somers' case, the Community Sustainability Plan was a response to the taxpayer revolt, yet it also allowed greater alignment with annual reporting back to council and the community.

Conclusion

Advice for Future CAOs

One of the aims of this study was to gain insight that could potentially assist with the recruitment and retention of senior professionals within smaller local government organizations. Each of the nine interviews included a question on advice to students and mid-career professionals aspiring to be CAOs. The following is a summary of that advice, which confirms that being a CAO in a smaller place is a rewarding experience, with opportunities to bring about change, and to deal with constraints that include resources.

Michelle Casavecchia-Somers shared the same advice given to her 30 years ago: “Be committed and passionate about advice giving and sometimes that advice is not always welcomed but accept it and still embrace everything every day. Public service can be harsh; change is inevitable; people can be critical.” In the end, she believes she used her power and influence for good. She reinforced the importance of communication and persuasion.

Michelle Smibert urges: “Just do it. It is challenging work.” She notes the growing dissatisfaction and distrust of elected officials and government, pointing out that it is only a small portion of the population. She says the work is rewarding and provides an opportunity to move things forward, while the sector deals with demands for more services with less resources.

For Jennifer Raynaert, you need pretty thick skin at times to survive in local government. She says that “my recommendation is that you need to do it for the good of

the community. With that approach, you cannot go wrong and be consistent in your approach.” She estimates that a CAO is more hands on and recognizable in smaller centres and must be less political, with council more front and centre. Because she lives and works in Aylmer, she is extra careful to stay out of the electoral ring. “God bless anyone who wants to do it. Develop a love for the community you work in and the small accomplishments are very rewarding,” she advises.

Suzanna Dieleman suggests a “bloom where you grow” attitude: “Give it your best. Learn everything you can and find out what you are passionate about by listening and helping. Seek out other people to expand your learning and experiences.” Tiffany Farrell’s advice is based on the model set by Michelle Smibert who has a thick skin and can make light of difficult situations. A CAO can take the burden for the team, wear multiple hats, and be comfortable with change: “Be there for your employees.” Farrell notes that respect is important by surrounding oneself with trusted people and working together as a team for the organization as a whole. It is about empowering employees to get things done.

Fire Chief Colin Toth warned that it can be a lonely job and CAOs take a lot of heat. It is about building the right team and steering the ship: “You need to have a strong personality, be polished and honed. It is not for the faint of heart.” For Chief Brent Smith it does not need to be different to be a CAO in a small versus a larger place given his experience with the City of London: “Trust and guide department heads and assist them in making the best decisions possible. Stay informed.”

Mayor David Mennill commented: “Taking on the CAO role in any municipality can be taxing, dealing with the public who often only show up if they are angry. It takes a special

skill to deal with people. You must be a people person. There are some rewards, such as making a difference, because you can lead improvement.” Mayor Al Edmondson notes that there is opportunity in the sector to move through the system if a person has the desire and the ability. “You can be a smaller fish or a bigger fish and learn from that,” noting Middlesex Centre CAOs have come from or departed to larger places. He says it is important to have a sense of humour: “Some of the things people criticize you for may not be what is really happening.” He advises that one can do great things in a small community.

These insights correlate with both Siegel’s characteristics of success and Van Wart’s framework for transformational leadership. With regard to the rural context, it appears there is sufficient opportunity and the ability to bring about lasting change. We started with the following question: How does municipal size affect the leadership role of the CAO? The answer is that generally, size does not affect the leadership role. The traits for success and the ability to be transformational apply. While in the smaller context, some CAOs may be called upon to hold a dual role, such as Casavecchia-Somers’ clerk duties. There may be resource constraints, including human capital. There may be less specialization, but the legislative requirements are the same.

We Need to Know More

It appears through our profiles that criteria applied to the study of CAOs in larger places is relevant to the smaller context. Both CAOs demonstrate characteristics deemed necessary to be successful and elements of transformational leadership. However, it is important to reiterate the vast diversity that exists for municipalities with populations fewer than 20,000. Casavecchia-Somers and Smibert also both worked for a time in larger

places, notably the City of London. They both speak about employing best practices and adapting. They were change agents in chief administration.

Understanding the pressures and challenges facing a rural or small-town CAO can help us better understand the reality facing these communities. This study did not allow for comprehensive survey work, but it seems timely and necessary to undertake such work to better contrast and compare factors, including municipal size and location. It would be worthwhile for professional associations working on behalf of CAOs, such as CAMA, OMAA and AMCTO, to work collaboratively with post secondary researchers. More study is needed on the role, leadership, and experience of the municipal CAO, regardless of size.

Lastly, both CAOs profiled are female. Our interviews did not address the gender dimension, which is worthy of further study in terms of the leadership role of the CAO. One study of City Managers examined the differences between male and female incumbents (Fox, 1999). The author found that women, more than men, incorporate citizen input and are concerned with community involvement in their decisions. Second, “women managers tend to emphasize communication in carrying out their duties as manager” (Fox, 1999, p. 240). Third, the study concluded that women see themselves less as policy entrepreneurs, more as managers and facilitators. With regard to our subjects, Casavecchia-Somers in Malahide undertook the Community Sustainability Plan to better understand the community’s wishes after a taxpayer revolt. Smibert at Middlesex Centre pushed back against naysayers of its net zero fire hall. Casavecchia-Somers was described as a gatekeeper when it came to information and communication. She meets with her management team on a weekly basis, while Smibert does so less frequently. Smibert is

more of a policy entrepreneur, leading innovative environmental initiatives, which is the exception not the norm in smaller places. Casavecchia-Somers' approach to policy is in keeping with Fox' conclusions as she has spent a great deal of time fixing policies and procedures. Evidentially, the gender dimension deserves more attention and this could be paired with a fulsome survey of all CAOs.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Questions for Casavecchia-Somers

1. I wonder if you could tell me a bit about your family background and early upbringing, with particular emphasis on why you made some of the decisions you did about going to university and ultimately following a public service career?
2. What attracted you to public administration and municipal government?
3. Are there particular people who have had a significant influence on your approach to leadership and management?
4. Can you tell me about your first municipal position?
5. You have worked for different size municipal units, large single-tier such as London and smaller ones such as Thames Centre, Perth South and Malahide. Can you describe the differences and similarities?
6. As you transition from university to municipal government you participated in an internship program. Can you tell me how that came about and what you got from it?
7. Why were you drawn to the role of Chief Administrative Officer?
8. What was the situation like in Perth South and Malahide when you arrived?
9. There have also been changes in staffing in both municipalities. Can you tell me a bit about those changes and your role in them?
10. Malahide has a special relationship with Aylmer with your municipal offices located there. How do you lead in this context?
11. Over your career you have worked with a number of different heads of council and councillors. How have you been able to adapt to a number of different environments?
12. As CAO, what role did you have in working with the county and province on general issues affecting municipal government?
13. You serve on the board of the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks & Treasurers of Ontario. Why was participation important to you and what did you gain or learn from the experience?
14. Describe your relationships with outside groups, such as the media, special interest groups and community organizations and how these have evolved over your career and depending on the municipality.
15. As a CAO, what accomplishment gives you the most pride?
16. Can you tell me a bit about your philosophy of leadership?
17. What advice would you offer to students and to mid-career municipal officials aspiring to be CAOs?

Appendix 2

Questions for Smibert

1. I wonder if you could tell me a bit about your family background and early upbringing, with particular emphasis on why you made some of the decisions you did about going to university and ultimately following a public service career?
2. What attracted you to public administration and municipal government?
3. Are there particular people who have had a significant influence on your approach to leadership and management?
4. Can you tell me about your first municipal position?
5. You have worked for larger municipal units, such as London and Stratford and smaller ones such as Thames Centre and Middlesex Centre. Can you describe the differences and similarities?
6. Why did you decide to complete your Masters in Public Administration?
7. Why were you drawn to the role of Chief Administrative Officer?
8. What was the situation like in Middlesex Centre when you arrived?
9. There have also been changes in staffing since you've been here. Can you tell me a bit about those changes and your role in them?
10. Middlesex Centre being so close to the City of London seems influenced by it. How do you lead in this context?
11. Over your career you have worked with a number of different heads of council and councillors. How have you been able to adapt to a number of different environments?
12. As CAO, what role did you have in working with the county and province on general issues affecting municipal government?
13. You served on the board of both the Ontario Small Urban Municipal Association and Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks & Treasurers of Ontario of which you served as President. Why was participation important to you and what did you gain or learn from the experience?
14. Describe your relationships with outside groups, such as the media, special interest groups and community organizations and how these have evolved over your career and depending on the municipality.
15. As a CAO, what accomplishment gives you the most pride?
16. Can you tell me a bit about your philosophy of leadership?
17. What advice would you offer to students and to mid-career municipal officials aspiring to be CAOs?

Appendix 3

Questions for Head of Council

1. How long have you been on council? What positions have you held outside of council?
2. When did you first meet the CAO? What was your first impression?
3. Can you describe the environment that she faced when she became the CAO? What was the environment with council?
4. What was the environment among staff?
5. What are some of the challenges that you face as council in this municipality?
6. In what ways does the municipality engage in strategic thinking? What role has the CAO played in strategy?
7. Each CAO may have a specific area of interest or expertise. Which projects or areas has the CAO played a special or significant role in?
8. How would describe the CAO's management style and how she tried to instill it in others?
9. How would you describe her method of interaction with staff?
10. How does she go about motivating people?
11. Can you give some examples of difficult situations that she was able to resolve?
12. How would you describe her method of interaction with councillors?
13. Has she changed the organizational culture of the municipality since she has been here?
14. How would describe her interactions with the community, special interest groups, local media?
15. What advice would you offer to students and to mid-career municipal officials aspiring to be CAOs based on your experience with the incumbent?

Appendix 4

Questions for Senior Managers/Staff

1. How long have you worked for the municipality? What jobs have you held?
2. When did you first meet the CAO? What was your first impression?
3. Can you describe the environment that she faced when she became the CAO? What was the environment with council?
4. What was the environment among staff?
5. What are some of the challenges that you face in your position in this municipality?
6. In what ways does the municipality engage in strategic thinking? What role has the CAO played in strategy?
7. Each CAO may have a specific area of interest or expertise. Which projects or areas has the CAO played a special or significant role in?
8. How would describe the CAO's management style and how she tried to instill it in others?
9. How would you describe her method of interaction with staff?
10. How does she go about motivating people?
11. Can you give some examples of difficult situations that she was able to resolve?
12. How would you describe her method of interaction with councillors?
13. Has she changed the organizational culture of the municipality since she has been here?
14. How would describe her interactions with the community, special interest groups, local media?
15. What advice would you offer to students and to mid-career municipal officials aspiring to be CAOs based on your experience with the incumbent?

Appendix 5

Questions for Partners/Outside Organizations

1. How long have you been involved with the municipality? What roles have you played and with which organizations?
2. When did you first meet the CAO? What was your first impression?
3. Can you describe the environment that she faced when she became the CAO? What was the environment with council?
4. What are some of the challenges this municipality has faced?
5. In what ways does the municipality engage in strategic thinking? What role has the CAO played in strategy?
6. Each CAO may have a specific area of interest or expertise. Which projects or areas has the CAO played a special or significant role in?
7. How would describe the CAO's leadership style?
8. Can you give some examples of difficult situations that she was able to resolve?
9. How would you describe her method of interaction with councillors?
10. Has she changed the organizational culture of the municipality since she has been here?
11. How would describe her interactions with the community, special interest groups, local media?
12. What advice would you offer to students and to mid-career municipal officials aspiring to be CAOs based on your experience with the incumbent?