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# Reinventing Government: City Manager Attitudes and Actions

*With the aim of helping move research from rhetoric to empirical reality, this article reports results of a national survey of city managers on attitudes towards and actions taken to implement principles of reinventing government. A large majority of managers support key principles of reinvention. A smaller proportion of managers has taken actions to recommend adoption of reinvention programs in their budget proposals to council. Managers' action-taking is influenced by certain characteristics of city managers, their communities, and their governments, including managers' attitudes and experiences, slack resources, and region.*

Administrative reform has been a perennial if highly variable phenomenon in the United States since the Progressive Reform era. It has been experienced at all levels of government, memorialized by numerous study commissions, and embodied in legislation and executive orders. At the national level, its nomenclature represents many of the icons of public administration: the Pendleton Act, merit systems, scientific management, the Taft Commission, the Brownlow Committee, the Hoover commissions, and the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. The values pursued and promoted by reformers—neutral competence, representativeness, executive leadership, employee rights and well-being, professionalism—penetrated the theory and practice of public administration and remain vital today.

Like the fickle auto that just won't tune right, government administrative systems always seem to need a good mechanic with a toolbox and a plan. The most widely-heralded administrative reform mechanic of the 1990s was David Osborne, whose 1992 book *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector* (co-authored with Ted Gaebler) spawned a powerful reform movement whose terminology and principles have become part of the organizational vocabulary throughout U.S. governments. Osborne, a journalist, and Gaebler, a Visalia, California, city manager, captured the attention of elected officials, public administrators, schol-

ars, and the reading public in their best-selling book, which asserted that governments could fundamentally transform their systems and organizations to dramatically increase their effectiveness, efficiency, adaptability, and capacity to innovate. It was not long before some eager federal, state, and local organizations were busily engaged in seeking to decentralize operations, develop market incentives, apply private sector management principles, empower employees, and become more customer-friendly. Soon critics began to appear like ants at a picnic, first as sporadic scouts, then as a torrent. Reinvention, they argued, over-promised and would under-deliver. It was "a jumble of ideas and impulses expressing uncertainty and confusion" (Carroll

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1996, 24). By celebrating and attempting to adopt private sector strategies and techniques, reinvention was worshipping at an altar that threatened the fundamental constitutional underpinnings and legal doctrines of public administration (Moe and Gilmour 1995). It represented “a pervasive and potentially pernicious attack on bureaucracy that may ultimately undermine the professional public service” (Kearney and Hays 1998, 39). Its operating assumptions and principles were contradictory, simplistic, and doomed to fail as yet another administrative reform fad.

Beyond the rhetorical smoke that envelops what has clearly become the dominant paradigm for government reform in the 1990s (Carroll 1996; Frederickson 1996) lie interesting and important empirical questions. Two such questions are fundamental to developing an understanding of reinvention’s importance and staying power. First, to what degree have managers in government adopted reinvention thinking? Second, to what extent have these principles actually been implemented, and what factors explain their implementation? This article attempts to answer these questions at the local government level with data from a national survey of city managers. Following a brief review of the history and literature of the reinvention phenomenon, with particular attention to local government, we develop and test a model of reinvention. We find that reinvention principles are widely accepted by city managers, but that there is a gap between acceptance and action taking that can be partly explained by the characteristics of managers, local governments, and local communities.

## The Roots of Reinvention

Reinvention is not just another instance of American exceptionalism. It is an international movement that began in the early-to-mid 1980s and evolved into an expansive, holistic approach to government and public administration reform. The origins of reinvention—known in some nations as administrative reform or managerialism—were the growing scope of government activities that ran hard into seemingly intractable social, economic, and political problems and encountered various “crises” including those involving urban problems, energy shortages, the environment, and economic resources. Public bureaucracies were blamed by politicians and citizens for real and imagined failings, from corruption to cumbrous red tape. Conservative politicians such as Reagan, Thatcher (UK), and Mulroney (Canada) launched attack campaigns to spotlight administrative blemishes and blunders (Savoie 1994; Hood 1991). Intellectual sustenance for the reinvention movement was furnished by economists from the “public” or “rational choice” school, who helped foster the notion that government and its “budget-maximizing bureaucrats” divert resources from the more productive private sector (see

Dubnick 1994; Mascarenhas 1993; Kamensky 1996). In the developing countries, inadequate capacity, scarce resources, extreme centralization, self-serving elites, expensive but non-productive bureaucracies, and other serious problems imperiled economic and social progress and development (Caiden 1991; Nunberg and Nellis 1995, 1). The response of reformers was to seek far-reaching administration changes. The strategies included decentralization of administrative authority, downsizing of government agencies, increased utilization of market-based approaches to delivering government services, and increased management flexibility (Pollitt 1990; Christoph 1992; Caiden 1991; Kettl 1996, 44–57).

As noted above, in the United States the clarion call for reinvention was sounded by Osborne and Gaebler (1992). The authors’ new score for government was written as entertaining case studies and appealing anecdotes. It was amplified by Barzelay (1992), whose “New Vision for Managing in Government” consisted of a customer-oriented “post-bureaucratic paradigm” in which organizations solved problems by acting “more businesslike.” A newly-elected President Clinton embraced reinvention by creating the National Performance Review (NPR). Under the personal direction of Vice President Gore, reinvention’s objective was expressed as what some would consider to be an oxymoron: to strive for a government that “works better, costs less.” According to “A Fifth-Year Report Card” by Kettl (1998), federal reinvention has involved three phases. The initial NPR project focused on cutting programs and employees, saving dollars, empowering workers, and developing customer service improvement strategies for federal agencies. Phase II shifted reinvention’s attention to determining what government should—and should not—be doing. More downsizing and customer service initiatives were implemented, along with significant procurement reforms. Devolution of federal program responsibilities to the states and localities received attention. Phase III, which was operative in 2000, sought to “rekindle the spark” of the dimming flame of reinvention by concentrating on solving the problems of 32 “high impact” agencies while broadening reinvention’s political appeal (Kettl 1998, 2–6). Kettl’s “Report Card” reflects a “genuinely mixed review” with grades ranging from “A’s” for sustained effort and procurement reform to a “D” for “thinking through government’s basic mission.” Overall, federal reinvention is assigned a grade of “B.”

In the states, the reinvention charge was led by total quality management (TQM) programs, which were widely adopted during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Surveys of state executive branches and state agencies indicate a TQM implementation rate of approximately 60 percent (Kravchuk and Leighton 1993; Chi 1994; Berman 1994). TQM has faded in significance, but it served as a build-

ing block for further reinvention efforts that emphasize customer service. More recent state reinvention steps include the privatization through contracts and vouchers of functions ranging from social services to highway rest stops (Chi 1993; Wallin 1997), and performance management, which enjoyed a great deal of attention during the late 1990s.

To date, the only comparative published research on adoption of reinvention programs in state government is based on a survey of state agency directors, conducted as part of the American State Administrators Project in late 1994 and early 1995 (Brudney, Hebert, and Wright 1999). Eleven Reinvention proposals, or themes, were presented to the agency directors, who were asked to indicate on a four-point scale whether, and to what extent, the themes had been implemented. Although the extent of implementation varied substantially, six of the 11 reinvention proposals, led by “customer service training,” had been partially or fully adopted by a majority of agencies. The authors summed state scores into an index and developed a model to explain reinvention implementation. Significantly related to implementation were the reform mood of the state, type of agency, certain agency characteristics, interest group influence, and characteristics of individual agency heads (Brudney, Hebert, and Wright 1999, 28). The authors concluded that reinvention “falls far short of a ‘movement’” and “appears to be more of a ripple than a reform wave at the state level” (Brudney, Hebert, and Wright 1999, 28–9).

The municipal reform movement of the early twentieth century stands as the hallmark of urban reform in the United States. The rise of the council-manager plan, at-large districts, and non-partisan elections fundamentally changed the landscape of local government. Patronage-based municipal systems were supplanted in many jurisdictions by council-manager plans that embodied the principles of neutral competence and efficiency. In many ways, local government is once again the vanguard of reform. The national government’s NPR may have received the preponderance of media and citizen attention, but it can be argued that reinvention’s principles were developed and applied first in local government settings (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). Contracting out and other forms of “marketization,” competition, performance measurement, partnering, and other components of reinvention have had firm footholds in U.S. cities and counties for decades (Frederickson 1996). A variety of pressures have pushed local governments inexorably towards initiating reinvention programs, including tax and expenditure limitations, devolution of federal program responsibilities, economic downturns, and a new consumerism in the private sector that emphasizes attention to filling customers’ needs efficiently and inexpensively. Anxious to find ways to streamline service provision, many local

government officials have welcomed reinvention’s possibilities for offering alternative ways to provide services and generate non-tax revenues.

These local government “entrepreneurs” find and implement innovations and new alternatives that can shatter institutional inertia and create new, more advantageous outcomes using new technologies, economic growth initiatives, or more efficient means of delivering services (Riker 1986, 64; Schneider and Teske 1992, 741–2). Local government entrepreneurs can be elected officials such as mayors or council members, appointed officials such as city or county managers, or leaders of interest groups (Schneider and Teske 1992, 741).

According to a survey of municipal clerks by Schneider and Teske (1992, 744), local government entrepreneurs are most likely to appear in jurisdictions with slack budgetary resources, large percentages of homeowners, increasing racial diversity, growing population size, and high tax rates. Often, the entrepreneur is a city manager who may be motivated by career considerations, a public service ethic, or the desire to solve problems and attain policy goals (Teske and Schneider 1994, 332). Despite significant constraints (Peterson 1981; Svara 1990), professional managers have the discretion, authority, and expertise to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Ammons and Newell 1989).

Teske and Schneider (1994) analyzed a small sample of 49 managers identified as entrepreneurs in their survey of municipal clerks referenced above. They determined that managers are more likely to emerge as entrepreneurs in cities that pay high municipal salaries, have weak taxpayer groups, have low levels of unionized employees, and do not have mayors. A follow-up survey responded to by 31 of the managers indicated that innovative behavior is more likely on the part of those who are active in professional organizations and have previously served as managers of other cities.

The exploratory research reported by Teske and Schneider is very helpful in moving us towards a better understanding of managers as entrepreneurs. However, it is hampered by three serious methodological problems. First, the survey relied on municipal clerks to identify entrepreneurs. This is secondhand information that assumes municipal clerks have the knowledge and aptitude to know an entrepreneur when they see one. Undoubtedly, many have such capability, but just as likely, many do not. Second, the sample of 49 managers is extremely small, and not suitable for generalization to all council-manager cities. Finally, the study by Teske and Schneider employs a dichotomous dependent variable to measure the presence or absence of entrepreneurial city managers. Such a crude measure ignores the likelihood that entrepreneurial or reinventing attitudes and actions are a matter of degree, rather than presence or absence.

To probe more deeply and systematically into the world of reinvention as experienced by city managers, we report the results of a national survey conducted under the auspices of the International City Management Association (ICMA). We develop a model to examine the extent to which city managers support the principles of reinvention and take actions to implement those principles, giving particular attention to identifying the personal, community, and governmental factors that influence managers' actions.

## Methodology

This research is based on the reinvention sentiments and actions of city managers. With regard to reinvention in the United States, city managers are the "heroes of the story" (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). They have served as the focal point for municipal reform since the Progressive Era, and today they are considered the prime movers of local government reinvention efforts. Although managers are formally charged with the neutral and non-political oversight and implementation of policies developed by council, their survival depends on the "ability to come to grips with the complex political realities of the communities in which they operate" (Stillman 1974, 104). Successful managers know how to lead a double life: "officially neutral while in fact ... scrambling for their share of political influence in order to achieve success for themselves and their programs" (Stillman 1974, 104). City councils and citizens call on their city managers to recommend policies and implement programs that reduce the costs of government (Svara 1995; Montjoy and Watson 1995) and help it function more effectively (Osborne and Platrik 1997). According to Svara (1999), this policy initiation and implementation role of managers has expanded during recent years. Reinvention initiatives may offer certain benefits to managers. Gains in flexibility and efficiency can enhance the manager's influence and improve service delivery. Moreover, managers may pursue reinvention reforms to advance their professional reputations, which may translate into salary gains and opportunities to compete for positions in larger communities (Ruhil et al. 1999, 440).

In collaboration with the ICMA, a reinvention survey was developed and pretested on 20 city and town managers. Based on comments and suggestions received, the survey was edited and then mailed out in late 1997 to all managers of municipalities of 10,000 or greater. It was introduced by a letter from the executive director of ICMA. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of support for the principles of reinventing government on a Likert-type scale. Managers then were asked if they had recommended any of 12 specific actions to apply these principles

through the municipal budget during the past five years. The survey also contained questions on characteristics of the managers themselves and their jurisdictions.

The response rate to the two waves of questionnaires was quite satisfactory. Out of 1484 council-manager cities in the U.S. with populations of 10,000 or greater, 912 responses were received, which is a response rate of 60.1 percent. The responding managers were predominantly white (94 percent) males (93.5 percent) in the age range of 35–49 years. The respondents were a highly educated group, with 72 percent holding a master's degree or higher. Analysis by ICMA staff indicated that the survey's respondents were representative of ICMA member cities in this population category in age, race, gender, and size of jurisdiction.

## Reinvention Attitudes and Actions

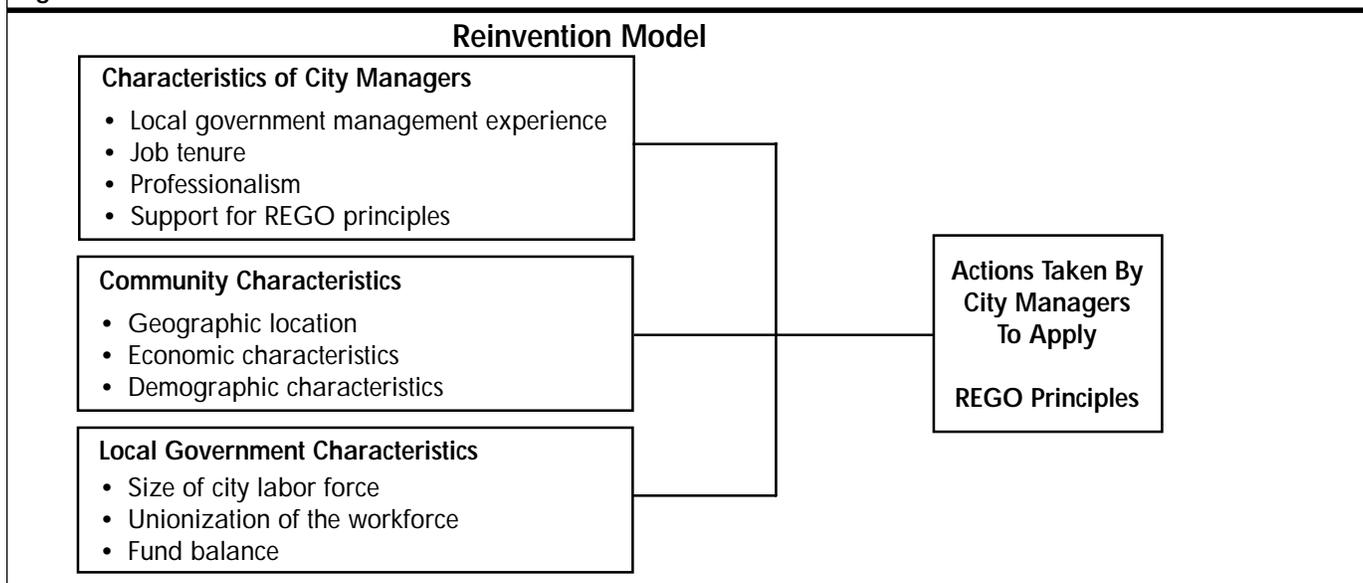
Any number of factors could influence city managers' proclivity to support and recommend implementation of reinvention principles and programs. Our model posits that implementation of reinvention principles, which is measured by actions recommended by managers in their executive budgets, is a function of city manager characteristics, community characteristics, and city government characteristics (see Figure 1).

### City Manager Characteristics

The professional experiences of city managers influence their budget and policy recommendations (Banovetz 1995; Crewson and Fisher 1997). Research indicates that more experienced, highly educated, "professional" city managers tend to reflect the priorities of city councils in their recommended municipal operating budgets and tend to develop greater insights on how to make government more efficient and effective (Ammons and Newell 1989; Morgan and Watson 1995; Schneider and Teske 1992). We expect that total years of experience in city management, length of tenure in the current position, years of formal education, and membership in the leading professional organization for city managers will affect managers' support for and application of reinvention. Specifically:

- 1(a) The greater the number of years of experience and job tenure in local government management, the more likely city managers are to take actions that apply reinvention principles.
- 1(b) The greater the number of years of formal education, the more likely managers are to take actions that apply reinvention principles.
- 1(c) Managers reporting membership in the ICMA are more likely to take reinvention actions than non-member managers.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2 Actions That Apply Principles**

Actions to Be Taken	Apply	Principles That Are Being Applied
• Respondents recommend fee increases instead of tax increases	➔	• Government uses private market rules to influence change; government is entrepreneurial—earns rather than spends money
• Respondents recommend contracting out a municipal service	➔	• Government steers rather than rows; government is competitive
• Respondents include funding customer service training for employees	➔	• Government is customer driven
• Respondents recommend using enterprise funds	➔	• Government is entrepreneurial—earns rather than spends money
• Respondents include funds to train employees in better decision making to respond quicker and more effectively to citizens	➔	• Government encourages participation and teamwork; government is less rule driven; government is customer driven
• Respondents recommend partnering with third parties to provide a service	➔	• Government is competitive
• Respondents recommend the use of citizen surveys to identify needed service quality improvements and to improve communication with citizens	➔	• Government is customer driven; government is anticipating rather than curing problems
• Respondents anticipate non-tax revenues and recommend entrepreneurial activities in their budgets	➔	• Government is entrepreneurial—earn rather than spend money
• Respondents recommend entrepreneurial activities and include funds to implement them	➔	• Government is entrepreneurial—earn rather than spend money; government is results oriented stressing outcomes, not inputs
• Respondents include funds for incentives to employees who act entrepreneurially	➔	• Government is entrepreneurial—earn rather than spend money; government is mission driven and not rule driven
• Respondents recommend changing the budget format to fund outcomes not inputs	➔	• Government is results oriented
• Respondents included funds to train neighborhood groups in decision making to empower them to make decisions for their neighborhood	➔	• Government is empowering rather than serving citizens

To measure the level of support city managers have for reinvention, Osborne and Gaebler’s (1992) 10 principles of reinvention were translated into 16 statements about programs and attitudes that capture those principles.<sup>1</sup> Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each statement. Figure 2 displays the components of manager support for reinvention. We anticipate that managers who support the principles of reinvention will be more likely to apply those principles than non-supportive managers.

1(d) Support for reinvention principles is positively related to actions taken to apply or implement those principles.

### **Community Characteristics**

The financial health and resources of a jurisdiction are likely to influence the adoption of reinvention principles. A manager in a city with strong fiscal characteristics should have the necessary (“slack”) financial resources and policy

flexibility to pursue entrepreneurial actions (Schneider and Teske 1992, 743). Fiscal strength in the respondents' municipalities is measured by per capita income and taxable property values. Region might also influence managers' propensity to innovate. Although entrepreneurial city managers are probably not regionally distributed (Teske and Schneider 1994, 334), there may exist certain regional characteristics that facilitate reinvention. Political and administrative culture, for instance, varies across regions of the United States. Some cultures, as shaped by changes in socioeconomic and political variables, may be more conducive to reinvention than others. Specifically, city managers in the fast growing, rapidly changing Sun Belt may be more likely to perceive the need for and political acceptability of reinvention actions than managers in non-Sun Belt states.

Population growth might be related to reinvention as well. Growth suggests a dynamic economic, social, and political environment that implies "changes in budgets, policies, resources, clientele, and other arenas" (Brudney, Hebert, and Wright 1999, 25) which may strain existing resources and make a city receptive to reinvention (Schneider and Teske 1992, 743). This variable is measured through managers' responses to a survey question asking the extent to which population had increased or decreased during the past 10 years. Similarly, city population may affect reinvention actions by city managers. Large jurisdictions may have greater need for administrative and policy innovation and contain the slack resources required to invest in them (Epstein 1993). Finally, the density of population may affect managers' propensity to recommend reinvention. Central cities, with their large concentrations of people and attendant problems, might exhibit greater need for innovation than suburban and other low-density jurisdictions.

- 2(a) Fiscal strength of a municipality is positively related to application of reinvention principles.
- 2(b) Sun Belt managers are more likely to take reinvention actions than non-Sun Belt managers.
- 2(c) City population growth varies positively with reinvention actions by managers.
- 2(d) City population varies positively with reinvention actions by managers.
- 2(e) City population density varies positively with reinvention actions by managers.

### Local Government Characteristics

Internal organizational characteristics influence innovative behavior (Lewis 1980). City managers may be more willing to take risks if they head organizations large enough to invest the resources and technical expertise necessary

for implementation of reinvention programs (Schneider and Teske 1992; Brudney, Hebert, and Wright 1999, 25; Epstein 1993, 358). The size of the operating fund as a percentage of municipal revenues and the number of full-time municipal employees are used as proxies for organizational resources and expertise, respectively. Another local government characteristic potentially related to reinvention is unionization. The conventional wisdom appears to be that unions obstruct reinvention initiatives because they seek to limit managerial authority and flexibility in general (Schneider and Teske 1994), and oppose all forms of privatization in particular (Chandler and Feuille 1991). However, the alternative view is that the presence of unions makes managers more innovative, because managers must work creatively to accomplish their objectives (Freeman and Medoff 1984). We state the hypothesis in terms of the conventional wisdom.

- 3(a) The size of the discretionary fund balance in the municipal operating budget is positively related to reinvention actions by managers.
- 3(b) The size of the municipal government workforce is positively related to reinvention actions by managers.
- 3(c) Unionization of municipal employees is inversely related to reinvention actions by managers.

There are three dependent variables employed in the analysis. The first, support for reinvention, consists of an index based on managers' responses to 16 statements that represent reinvention principles (four of the statements are worded in terms of nonsupport for reinvention). A four-point scale elicited possible responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" (see Table 1). Support for reinvention is included as an independent variable in the second and third models.

As an additive scale, the support for reinvention scale should vary from a theoretical low of 16 to a theoretical high of 64, with a midpoint of 40. In actuality, the lowest score any manager attained was a 34 and the highest was a 61, with a mean of 48.4. The scale thus indicates the positivity the managers express towards the concept of reinvention—only 1.2 percent of the managers have scores on the reinvention scale below the theoretical midpoint of 40. To simplify the scale, the scores were adjusted to run from 1 to 28 by subtracting 33 from each score.

Recommended actions is the second dependent variable. We assume that to apply reinvention principles, city managers must design and recommend specific programs and include money for funding them in their executive budget recommendations. For example, if managers want to apply the reinvention principle that "government should be results-oriented," then the municipal budget should be reformatted to measure outcomes rather than inputs (Osborne

**Table 1 Components of Support for Reinventing Government Scale**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	N
Taxpayers are customers and should be treated as such.	.6	1.2	22.8	75.4	908
It is acceptable to use third-party contractors to provide municipal services.	3.0	1.2	56.9	38.9	902
Local government should "steer" but not necessarily "row the boat."	2.0	14.0	69.1	14.9	841
Community groups should be empowered to make decisions that affect their neighborhoods.	1.2	22.0	63.7	13.1	835
Competition should be introduced into the delivery of public services.	.7	6.7	72.0	20.6	869
Municipal departments should bid against third-party contractors for local government work.	1.7	30.4	57.4	10.5	822
It is important to have a mission statement for local government.	.7	8.2	48.9	42.3	870
Local government should be entrepreneurial.	.6	5.3	58.4	35.7	883
Local government should develop non-tax revenue sources.	.7	2.6	52.6	44.2	898
There should be financial incentives for municipal employees to be more entrepreneurial.	.8	15.7	61.9	21.6	847
Service fee increases are more acceptable to the public than tax increases.	1.3	20.0	67.5	11.2	875
Competition plays an important role in moderating the cost of government services.	.6	20.7	67.8	10.9	859
Municipal government employees should be the only providers of services offered by local government.*	32.7	62.5	4.0	.8	902
A traditional administrative model with appropriate controls in local government is preferable to a less structured model.*	6.5	48.5	41.9	3.1	781
There can be accountability problems when municipal services are privatized.*	2.9	29.9	61.3	5.9	886
The aims, structure, activities, and responsibilities of government are unlike business.*	4.0	34.4	49.5	12.1	873

NOTE: Table entries are percentages. N is number responding to each question.  
 \* Question coding for these questions was reversed in constructing the REGO support scale.

**Table 2 Actions Taken by Manager (Last Five Years)**

	Percent agreement	Number responding
<b>Has the budget to the city council:</b>		
Recommended a fee increase instead of a tax increase to fund certain services?	87.5	906
Included funds for customer service training for municipal employees?	81.0	909
Recommended the use of enterprise funds?	80.5	886
Recommended contracting out a municipal service to a third-party vendor?	80.4	909
Included funds to train employees in developing better decision-making skills so they can respond more effectively to citizen complaints?	78.1	906
Recommended partnering with a private business or nonprofit agency to provide a program or service?	74.7	905
Recommended funding citizen surveys to determine expectations and levels of satisfaction?	62.5	897
Anticipated non-tax revenues derived from entrepreneurial efforts of the municipality?	55.5	796
Recommended programs that would make the municipal government more entrepreneurial and then included funds to carry out those programs?	51.2	895
Recommended setting aside funds to be used as employee incentives?	47.0	909
Changed your budget format to funding outcomes, not inputs?	35.1	848
Included funds to help train neighborhood organizations in decision making?	21.4	905

and Gaebler 1992). Respondents were asked to indicate if they had taken 12 implementation actions to apply reinvention principles.

Figure 2 relates reinvention actions taken by managers during the past five years to the principles being applied. Manager implementation responses were summed, ranging individually from zero to 12, and are shown in Table 2. The percent indicating taking actions varies from 87.5 percent who recommended a fee increase instead of a tax increase to only 21.4 percent who included funds in their executive budget to help train neighborhood organizations. Clearly, some reinvention actions are more popular or feasible than others.

The additive scale developed from the 12 recommendations for action varies from a low score of one to a high score of twelve. Almost 3 percent of the managers reported having recommended all 12 actions; another 7.6 percent recommended 11 of the 12. Fully 22 percent report having recommended 10 or more actions. Less than 1 percent reported having recommended only 1 action, another 2.3 percent recommended 2 actions, and less than 7 percent report having recommended 3 or fewer actions. In sum, the recommended actions scale has a mean score of 7.4 (theoretical midpoint would be 6.5) with scores somewhat clustered around the high end of the scale.

A second recommended actions index was developed

**Table 3 Level of Difficulty in Taking Reinvention Action**

	Weight Assigned
1. Funding training programs for neighborhood group's decision making	3 points
2. Changing budget formats for funding outcomes not inputs	3 points
3. Setting aside funds for incentives for employees to be entrepreneurial	2 points
4. Developing programs to make local government more entrepreneurial and including funds in the executive budget to implement them	2 points
5. Anticipating non-tax revenues from entrepreneurial activities in the executive budget	2 points
6. Recommending the use of citizen surveys	2 points
7. Recommending partnering with third parties to provide services	1 point
8. Funding training employees in decision-making skills to respond to citizen requests	1 point
9. Recommending the use of enterprise funds	1 point
10. Funding customer service training for employees	1 point
11. Recommending contracting out a municipal service	1 point
12. Recommending a fee increase instead of a tax increase to fund certain services	1 point
<b>All 12 actions taken</b>	<b>20 points</b>

to account for the varying degrees of difficulty city managers associate with reinvention actions. To determine the levels of difficulty, personal interviews were conducted with 14 managers during the September 1997 annual ICMA conference and an additional 10 telephone interviews were conducted with managers shortly thereafter. Results are reported in Table 3.

According to the interview respondents, the most difficult actions are (1) funding training for neighborhood groups to help them develop decision-making skills (neighborhoods may not have organized citizen groups that are ready to be "empowered" as suggested by reinvention supporters), and (2) changing budget formats to fund outcomes rather than inputs (a politically and technically complex process that requires city managers and their staffs to establish clear program outcomes for diverse services and to link outcomes, through data collection systems, with dollars in the budget). Three points were assigned to each of these two actions. Four actions were determined to be moderately difficult, and assigned a value of two points. The remaining items received values of one point. In this weighted recommended actions scale, managers received scores ranging from zero to 20.

This weighted recommended actions scale resembles the unweighted scale in its distribution. Twenty percent of the managers attain scores of 15 or better while only 9.6 percent show scores of four or lower. The mean of the weighted recommended actions scale is 10.6 and the scale appears to be fairly normally distributed.

## Findings

Because all three of the dependent variables in this study approach interval scales, ordinary least squares (OLS) is an appropriate instrument for analysis of the data. The dependent variable for the first OLS model employed in the analysis is city manager attitudes regarding reinvention principles, measured by our reinvention support scale. As is evident from percentage distributions in Table 1, apparent support for reinvention is high. As a group, managers express high levels of agreement with reinvention principles. Positive support statements elicit levels of agreement ("agree" and "strongly agree") ranging from 68 percent to 98 percent, and averaging approximately 86 percent. Results for the four statements supporting the traditional, non-reinvention approach are variable (see last four items in Table 1). Less than 5 percent agree that municipal employees should be the only providers of services; 67 percent agree that privatization can lead to accountability problems; 62 percent indicate that government differs from business in various respects; and 45 percent prefer a traditional administrative model of local government to a less structured approach.

Before examining the factors related to managers' recommended actions to implement reinvention principles, it is worthwhile to consider those factors that influence managers' attitudes towards reinvention. The first column of Table 4 shows the relationship between various manager, community, and city government characteristics and support for reinvention.

Although the adjusted  $R^2$  of .05 is rather low, all but three of the hypothesized relationships for manager, community, and government characteristics and reinvention attitude are in the predicted direction. The three surprises are time in current position, taxable value of property, and percent of workforce unionized. Time in current position is statistically significant, but contrary to our expectations, the longer a manager has served in his or her current job, the less supportive they tend to be of reinvention. Fund balance as a percent of revenues and number of full time employees per 10,000 population are significant at the .01 levels. Significant at the .05 levels are ICMA Membership and, as noted, time in current position. Two of the four manager characteristics and two of the three city government characteristics in the model attain statistical significance, but none of the six measures of community characteristics is significantly related to reinvention attitude. Apparently, managers' attitudes towards reinvention are primarily a function of their individual experiences<sup>2</sup> and city government characteristics. With respect to the latter, managers in cities with relatively large fund balances and relatively large numbers of employees tend to look favorably on reinvention principles. Perhaps generous fund bal-

**Table 4 Multiple Regression Analyses of Reinventing Government Attitudes, and Implementation of Reinventing Government Proposals**

	REGO attitudes	Recommended actions	Weighted recommended actions
Constant	13.46	6.48	8.41
Education	.32 (.35) [.04]	-.03 (.19) [-.01]	-.10 (.34) [-.01]
ICMA membership	1.14* (.56) [.09]	.42 (.32) [.06]	.73 (.55) [.06]
Time in current position	-.36* (.15) [-.11]	.05 (.08) [.02]	.02 (.15) [.00]
Time in government service	.26 (.17) [.07]	.17* (.09) [.08]	.18 (.17) [.05]
Reinventing government attitude		.17** (.02) [.28]	.30** (.05) [.28]
Per capita income	.23 (.22) [.05]	.18 (.12) [.06]	.40 (.22) [.08]
Taxable value last 5 years	-.21 (.13) [-.08]	.28 (.18) [.07]	.47 (.32) [.06]
Population change last 5 years	.06 (.20) [.01]	.16 (.11) [.06]	.23 (.19) [.05]
Sun Belt/Frost Belt	.38 (.41) [.05]	.63** (.22) [.13]	1.10** (.40) [.13]
Central city	.34 (.59) [.03]	.29 (.32) [.04]	.74 (.58) [.06]
Population (in 10,000)	.01 (.04) [.01]	.03 (.02) [.06]	.06 (.04) [.09]
Fund balance as percent of revenues	.46** (.17) [.12]	.09 (.10) [.04]	.12 (.17) [.03]
Number of full-time employees per 10,000 population	.27** (.14) [.11]	.28** (.07) [.18]	.47** (.13) [.17]
Percent of workforce unionized	.21 (.13) [.08]	.07 (.07) [.04]	.12 (.13) [.04]
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.05	.22	.21

NOTE: Entries are regression coefficients, standard errors (in parentheses), and betas (in brackets) from OLS regressions conducted with pairwise deletion of missing data.  
 \* p < .05  
 \*\* p < .01

ances make city managers more amenable to considering the potential risks and rewards of reinvention. A large local government labor force with attendant pay and benefits costs may make reinvention seem more necessary.

The second and third columns of Table 4 show the results of the recommended actions models, which are more robust than the attitudes model ( $R^2=.22$ ,  $R^2=.21$ ). All relationships are in the direction hypothesized with the excep-

tions of manager education and workforce unionized, neither of which attains statistical significance. Differences regarding the two recommended actions models (unweighted and weighted) are relatively minor. Time in government service is statistically important in the unweighted model, but not significant in the weighted version. At least in terms of the number of actions taken, with more years of government experience, managers tend to feel sufficiently competent and knowledgeable to make reinvention proposals to council.

Not surprisingly, reinventing government attitude (the dependent variable in the first model) is the strongest predictor of recommended actions ( $B=.28$ ). Out of the six community characteristics in the models, only Sun Belt/Frost Belt is statistically significant. The direction of the regional relationship indicates that managers of Sun Belt cities are more likely to recommend reinvention actions than their counterparts in Frost Belt cities. Certainly city managers who are willing to take risks and act entrepreneurially are situated in all states and geographic regions (Teske and Schneider 1994). However, our survey findings show that managers in the South and Southwest are more likely to be champions of reinvention than those in the northern tier of states.

Only one of our three city government characteristics—full-time employees per 10,000 population—is significant, but it is the second most important variable in the two recommended actions models ( $B=.18$ ,  $B=.17$ ). Managers in cities with highly concentrated work forces apparently perceive a greater need for reinvention programs and policies than managers in less labor-intensive jurisdictions. Perhaps there are greater efficiencies to be gained from reinvention initiatives in cities with high levels of employment density than there are in cities with relatively low levels of employment.

A parsimonious model that eliminates statistically unimportant variables is presented in Table 5. In this version, to create an improved operationalization of the wealth or slack resources of a jurisdiction, a wealth index was created from the fund balance and taxable value variables<sup>3</sup>. The adjusted  $R^2$  remains .22 in the unweighted model and declines slightly to .20 for the weighted recommended actions model, using six fewer independent variables. The explained variance remains the same for the reinvention attitudes model. The relative importance of the remaining variables is only slightly altered. City government characteristics continue

to show the highest betas in the attitudes model, followed by manager characteristics. Similarly, few notable changes are evident in the two recommended actions models. The wealth index attains statistical significance at the .01 levels in both recommended actions models. The parsimonious model confirms that reinvention attitudes are a function of manager characteristics and city government characteristics. Two manager characteristics are important determinants of actions taken: time in government service, which is significant in the unweighted model, and reinventing government attitude, which is significant in both actions models. Region is the only significant community characteristics variable. wealth index and number of FTE employees per 10,000 population are both significant at the .01 level in the actions taken models.

## Discussion

In the absence of quantitative data to lend a sense of measurable reality to the rhetoric of reinvention, one can only surmise as to whether or not the principles are being taken seriously and applied at the grassroots of government. By surveying the chief executive officers of a large number of cities, we attempt to determine the extent of support for reinvention among this key group of decision makers. We examine city manager attitudinal support for the principles of reinvention, and the extent to which managers convey their attitudes into actions recommended to the city council in the executive budget. In the highly politicized environment of local government, there is a vast world of difference between “saying” and “doing.” Apparent verbal support for reinvention means little unless managers commit to marshalling the human, financial, logistical, and political resources necessary to implement actual programs and policies. Lurking in the hallway that leads from positive attitudes to positive actions are any number of political, structural, procedural, and demographic obstructions that may affect a manager’s sense of the feasibility of any given reinvention reform being adopted and successfully implemented.

The research reported in this article endeavors to move beyond rhetoric to the reality of reinvention by examining its key players in the local government setting. It would be very difficult to argue that any local government actor is more knowledgeable of the reinvention reality in their jurisdiction and in a better position to influence its adoption than the city manager. Managers’ attitudes towards reinvention matter, but even more im-

**Table 5 Multiple Regression Analyses of Reinventing Government Attitudes, and Recommended Reinventing Government Proposals (Parsimonious Model)**

	REGO attitudes	Recommended actions	Weighted recommended actions
Constant	14.78	4.85	5.92
ICMA membership	1.22** (.52) [.10]		
Time in current position	-.33** (.14) [-.10]		
Time in government service		.21** (.08) [.10]	
Reinventing government attitude		.17** (.02) [.28]	.30** (.04) [.28]
Sun Belt/Frost Belt		.74** (.19) [.15]	1.34** (.34) [.15]
Fund balance as percent of revenues	.42** (.16) [.12]		
Wealth Index		.50** (.16) [.12]	.75** (.29) [.10]
Number of full-time employees per 10,000 population	.39** (.11) [.15]	.35** (.06) [.22]	.62** (.11) [.23]
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.05	.22	.20

NOTE: Entries are regression coefficients, standard errors (in parentheses), and betas (in brackets) from OLS regressions conducted with pairwise deletion of missing data.  
\* p < .05  
\*\* p < .01

portant are the actions that they recommend—or choose not to recommend—to their respective legislative bodies. Nearly always, any step that moves beyond symbolic local government action involves financial resources in which “commitment is memorialized by money” (Wildavsky 1975, xii–xiii). Yet certain community and government characteristics may intercede. This research has sought evidence of reinvention commitment by examining whether or not managers take specific actions by including reinvention programs and money in their executive budgets, while taking into account sets of manager, community, and government characteristics.

Survey data indicate that city managers are highly supportive of reinvention principles. Nearly all respondents believe that taxpayers should be treated as customers, that third party contracting and competition in service delivery are acceptable, that government should be mission driven and entrepreneurial, and that non-tax revenue sources should be developed. Slightly fewer agree that local government should steer but not row, empower community groups, provide financial incentives to entrepreneurial employees, and give preference to service fee increases over

tax increases. However, managers do indicate some concerns with reinvention, particularly regarding the accountability problems presented by privatization and the assumption that government and business are alike in structure, activities, and responsibilities. Importantly, city manager actions to implement reinvention principles fall short of professed positive attitudes. This is easily understood when the legal and political context of local government is taken into account. For instance, entrepreneurial approaches to providing services and raising revenues may be discouraged or derailed by legal prohibitions or restrictive union contracts.

To explore the question of what factors encourage or inhibit managers who seek to pursue reinvention initiatives, we developed models using reinvention attitudes and actions recommended as the dependent variables, and specified sets of manager, community, and government characteristics as independent variables.

Manager attitudes towards reinvention vary positively and significantly with ICMA membership, and negatively with the time they have worked in their current position. Thus, personal and professional experiences influence managers' attitudes on reinvention. Interestingly, the longer managers spend in their present job, the less favorably they view reinvention. City government characteristics are also important factors in managers' attitudes: financial resources and relative size of the municipal labor force are significantly related to positive attitudes on reinvention. However, none of the four community variables used in the analysis were significantly related to attitudes. Our model fails to explain the vast amount of variance in managers' reinvention attitudes, leaving us to conclude that a host of personal, experiential, and situational factors influence managers' views on and support for the principles of reinvention.

The recommended actions models confirm the obvious: a favorable attitude regarding reinvention principles translates into a propensity to recommend reinvention programs to the city council. This conclusion is not all that obvious. The multiple regression format for this analysis demonstrates that a favorable managerial attitude toward reinvention principles is *the most* significant predictor of reinvention recommendations, controlling for a variety of other managerial attributes, as well as local government and community characteristics. Managerial attitude toward reinvention has an independent effect over and above what one might expect if, for example, municipalities that want to implement reinvention policies hire managers who have strong beliefs in reinvention principles.

Years of experience in government service is important in actions recommended as well. City managers who have worked in different local governments in a variety of staff capacities may have developed the experience and confi-

dence needed to undertake actions that require a level of expertise seldom found in managers who are just embarking on their careers.

Community characteristics are associated with the propensity of managers to recommend reinvention actions to city council, but only the regional variable attains significance. Why are Sun Belt managers more amenable to reinvention than managers situated in Frost Belt states? Admittedly, this is a rather crude operationalization of region, and its full dimensions are unknowable. Nonetheless, Sun Belt states such as California and Arizona have been acknowledged leaders in local government reinvention (Berman and West 1995). Ted Gaebler, coauthor of *Reinventing Government*, was the city manager of Visalia, California, which became something of a poster city for the reinventing government movement. Phoenix has been a national leader in developing innovative programs and quite likely has influenced nearby jurisdictions to adopt some of its experiments. More generally, Proposition 13 and a weak state economy during the 1980s forced managers in California to be more creative in generating revenues and cutting costs than colleagues in other states. In addition, there has probably been a diffusion of reinvention-related innovations from several large, progressive Southern cities, such as Charlotte, Atlanta, and Richmond. One should not overlook the possibility of a Tiebout-type competition among cities in which improvements in service costs and quality are sought to gain a competitive edge in attracting new businesses and encouraging existing firms to expand (Tiebout 1956).

Although city government characteristics are important determinants of reinvention attitudes, only full-time employees per 10,000 population is significantly related to actions recommended by managers in the full models. A labor-intensive city government is an expensive enterprise that may prompt managers to search out productivity savings through contracting out services, generating non-tax revenues, or taking any number of other entrepreneurial actions to increase efficiencies. Fund balance as a percent of revenues is positively related to number of actions recommended by managers, but does not attain statistical significance. However, conflating fund balance and the community characteristic of taxable value into a wealth index creates a significant variable in the parsimonious model. Hence, this finding comports with that of Schneider and Teske (1992), who concluded that slack resources in a municipal budget present enterprising city managers with assets for developing entrepreneurial activities.

Unionization of the municipal workforce was positively—although not significantly—associated with recommended actions, contrary to the hypothesis that city government unions oppose reinvention activities and discourage managers from recommending such programs.

One explanation could be that work rules and other restrictive provisions of collective bargaining contracts prompt managers to seek changes to remove such impediments. Alternatively, unions may not be unilaterally opposed to reinvention reforms. As key stakeholders, some unions seek to become partners in reinvention rather than opponents, and thereby influence reinvention outcomes. For example, a union may trade job security for current employees in return for productivity enhancements. Moreover, not all reinvention efforts are perceived by unions to be threats. Like supervisors, members of bargaining units also resent excessive paperwork and red tape and seek to do a better job of serving client-customers. Such considerations led federal employee unions to support the first phase of the NPR (Rosenbloom 1998). Finally, the lack of statistical significance of the unionization variable may reflect “reality-facing” on the part of labor union leaders who recognize, in the late 1990s, that outright opposition to reinvention efforts in local government is simply neither politically popular nor practically feasible.

## Conclusion

The founders and followers of the reinventing government movement represent a powerful force in governmental reform at all levels in this country and abroad. In the United States, the movement set its roots in local government. Despite the scholarly attention focused on the NPR and related federal efforts, reinvention under different names has been present at the local level for a decade or more. In the sense that new terminology is being employed to describe not uncommon practices, reinvention is “old wine in new bottles” (Frederickson 1996). Yet very little systematic, empirical attention has been directed by scholars to the extent and implementation of reinvention. Most of our “evidence” on the various aspects of reinvention remains anecdotal and impressionistic.

This article contributes to the ongoing debate by reporting the results and analysis of a survey of 912 city managers on attitudes towards, and actions taken, to reinvent government. In council-manager cities, managers confront a myriad of competing forces that encourage them to become the leading policy and administrative entrepreneurs. Demands from council, taxpayers, interest groups, and others place constant pressures on managers to hold service costs down while maintaining or even increasing service levels. Increasingly, local governments are the primary jurisdictions for providing services, as the federal government and the states push responsibilities down to the lowest jurisdictional level. In response, the large majority of managers responding to our survey have developed a substantial bias in favor of reinvention principles. It is not surprising that city managers should be open to and ac-

cepting of reinvention. The phenomenon, which has deep roots in earlier municipal reforms, was first observed and written on at the local level. Moreover, managers who become reinvention entrepreneurs can elevate their sphere of influence and enhance their professional reputation and career mobility, while attaining the respect and recognition of their peers. However, there is a gap between rhetoric and reality, and a notable variance in the levels of commitment to reinvention actions as registered through executive budget recommendations to city council.

Our findings indicate that managers’ attitudes in support of reinvention are not always turned into implementing actions. In some respects this may indicate a manager’s hesitance to step into a possible political tar pit, or simply a penchant for inaction. But reinvention implementation is also a function of certain restraining and facilitating characteristics of individual cities and their governments. Even the most determined reinventer may confront substantial forces of obstruction that render moot most serious reinvention initiatives.

The demands on U.S. local governments have never been greater. The dimensions of reinvention are somewhat vague and changing, and it will always be a work in progress rather than a finished product. There are clear limits to the success of reinvention, many of them political. No matter how well designed and how strongly supported by administrators and employees, reinvention cannot overcome or solve enduring political problems, of which there are many. And it is difficult to know how deep its support is. Reinvention initiatives may be shallow feints intended to distract political or taxpayer attention from substantive issues. Reinvention may also mask determined efforts by conservative forces to attack and shrink or eliminate government programs and employment (Kearney and Hays 1999). And certainly there are important concerns about principles and practices of reinvention that dilute accountability and threaten to undermine the public law basis of public administration (Moe and Gilmour 1995). Nonetheless, reinvention is an unavoidable issue for many—if not most—local governments in the United States. As the latest wave of administrative reform, it has strong legs that promise to carry it for many years to come.

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## Notes

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1. Four of the statements were worded in terms of non-support or opposition to reinvention principles. For example, "There can be accountability problems when municipal services are privatized."
2. In an early version of this research, we included in the model a measure of managers' political ideology derived from a survey question. The ideology variable was statistically unimportant.
3. Wealth index is created from fund balance and taxable value of real estate. A value of two was assigned for a fund balance of 4 percent or more and increasing taxable value of property. A value of one was given for either a fund balance of 4 percent or increasing property value. Cities with fund balances below 4 percent and with stable or declining taxable values received a value of zero for the index.

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