



Exec to Exec

National Association of Regional Councils 1700 K Street NW, Washington, DC (202) 457-0710

A Dispersed Collaborative Decision Making Process: A linkage of key public-private decision makers and/or institutions, which are essential to defining issues and solutions and capable of implementing a solution. This is a collegiate, but definable, and--in some fashion--continuing process. It may be nourished through a primary institution(s) or individual(s) (i.e., regional leader or statesman) serving as the catalyst/broker for the process. This is a much more complex approach than any of the others; it is not a sanctioned government process, nor does it have legal status. What it does offer is great flexibility to the participants and nature of issues. It emphasizes a creative partnership between public, private, and civic interests, and calls for a new intensity in relationships and the use of collaborative skills. This pattern may be a precursor to the other patterns, but, most importantly, it creates a climate for institutional change. Many inventive and experimental arrangements can unfold from this pattern. With this approach, a participant must have a meaningful power base and/or offer value to the decision-making process. Value can include being an important advocate, catalyst, objective data source, mediator, or representative of a key sectorial interest.

Concluding Comments

We have some examples of attributes of these patterns in the United States and Canada. However, regional councils in the U.S. are more restrained from experimentation with different variations of these patterns. In many cases, regional councils are unable to advocate or pursue these patterns themselves, because of their current public power bases, programmatic and resource limitations, or even their level of credibility. External forces or circumstances usually cause change, rather than internal planning or foresight.

This leads to questions for further exploration and discussion: How will these patterns develop? How will they be achieved? What forces and/or politics may push or pull better decision making and coordinative management processes or institutions?

The forces for change include:

- Rapid economic growth or decline
- Continued limited public resources
- Social and racial unrest
- Severe demographic shifts
- Stalemate/chaos and/or crisis
- An overriding national goal or objective

How these forces might be tapped and utilized is a subject for further discussion. Another topic for further discussion is: The Role of the Regional Professional--What Type of Leadership?

For the regional council executive director or any professional manager, change presents opportunities, challenges, and risks. Leaders of public agencies have special professional standards involved in public service--working for people who directly represent the citizenry. It is an atmosphere quite different from being a manager and leader in the private sector where standards for openness and due process are not requisite and frequently at odds with competition in producing a bottom-line profit.

Public managers assume a risk whether they lead on an issue (particularly one that is controversial or lacks political support) or maintain the status quo and are gently pulled along by change. Both of these people can be excellent managers and professionals. They simply look at the nature of leadership and risk from different perspectives.

The potential leadership dilemma that needs to be discussed is: If you are a risk taker in the public sector (and want to bring about change), how do you do it with a constituency which may not support change or would oppose it? Public sector professionals must have some ethical guides for leadership in this dilemma.

Metro Charter Committee
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Dear Executive Director,

This is the second of my periodic commentaries to you, and it contains some points which I think we need to consider as we attempt to shape our future. When we gather in Cleveland at the end of this month for our Executive Directors Professional Development Conference, these are some of the concepts which we will explore. A key word in the name of our conference is "Development" --indicating that we are involved in a process of growth. I hope to see many of you in Cleveland and have the opportunity to hear your views.

Richard C. Hartman
Executive Director

Regional Communities and Evolving Patterns of Governance

Background

Over the last two years, we have been discussing the regional community and the regional roles that need to be played in that community (NARC Special Report #129, March, '87). Last year at the Executive Directors Conference in Arizona, these roles were discussed, and the consensus seems to be that regional councils, as we know them today, can play these roles. Or, putting it another way, they can be regional planners, brokers, and doers.

During the last few months, we have added more published material to this discussion--first with a discussion of the professional challenge to the regional council executive director (*ED to ED*, March, '88), then with *Future Regional Roles in Reality* (May, '88) which provides examples of how regional councils are playing these future regional roles today.

With this issue of *Exec to Exec*, we add to this dialogue by suggesting how regional decision making and the structures to facilitate it are evolving and what they may look like in the future. This is a further effort to frame a discussion or debate--to pose some ideas and thoughts to challenge and test us all.

Basic to this discussion is the realization that every regional community is different. They have different issues, politics, personalities, cultural histories, and timing for change. So, to say anything too specific or provide a realistic prescription for how an individual regional community or council evolves is most difficult.

We also need to consider the proposition that regional councils as we know them today may not be the key regional organizations in the future, by their design or that of others. While they are the most important public organization on the regional community landscape today, they are only one element of the forces and interests which make the region the dynamic focus for the future.

Why Must Regional Communities Work Better?

What is the purpose for looking at regional communities, organization, and roles. The basic tenet here is that, as citizens, we increasingly live in regional communities which comprise interdependent contiguous human scale neighborhoods which make up cities and counties and even larger-scale regional communities. These regional communities may include portions of more than one state. This growing significance of the regional community is based on a fundamental set of dynamics in our country:

First, regions are the focus and arena for basic economic activities and functions which are a crucial link in furthering U.S. economic competitiveness.

Second, demographic changes (not the least of which is a growing population with great mobility), along with resource and social inequities, require a regional community approach for political solutions which are financially and practically most feasible.

Finally, these larger regional communities can provide political processes in a home rule context which allows effective interaction of the public and private sectors to manage our future destiny. This can be done with limited change in local and state government as we know it today.

Our challenge in regional communities is to bring diverse interests and leaders together more effectively to form some type of pattern and arrangement which can:

Make regions more economically competitive and make our public and private investments more cost effective;

Provide programs committed to basic social equity with economic and educational opportunities for all;

Enhance the special character and resources native to a region and its communities while sustaining and improving the region's quality of life and cultural heritage;

Improve regional public decision making and service delivery which can address fiscal disparities within the region to provide equity and improve opportunities for rational development with a commitment to local home rule.

Focusing on the Key Regional Roles in the Regional Community

Regional council executive directors have asked which of the ten regional roles are most important. Of the ten, five roles appear to be fundamental. They are primary--the foundation for an effective regional coordinative management system.

Of these roles, first is the *idea and advocacy of the regional community*. If the real community is the region, you constantly have to be the proponent of that regional community. Currently, neither our thoughts nor our institutions are geared to the reality that we live and work in large regional communities where more and more key decisions are made which impact our daily lives.

Second is the *building of coalitions for regional decision making*. This is the ability or empowerment to reach out to diverse leaders--public, private, academic, civic--to define issues, agree to actions, and have the political capability to achieve those actions. Coalition building tends to be ad hoc, post crisis, extremely difficult where interests differ, and complicated by personal egos and institutional jealousies.

Third is a *primary role in regional economic development or development restraint strategies*. Of all the roles, this one in the long term has the most significant impact on other regional roles and key institutions and interests. Being a credible partner here leads to many other opportunities. In putting so much emphasis on this role, remember that supporting activities include data collection and analysis and infrastructure planning and programming.

A fourth role is *addressing human resource development and needs*. This role focuses on the challenges of inequities in our society and the needs of disadvantaged persons. Resource and social inequity issues must be approached from a regional economic well-being and global competitiveness perspective. Coalition efforts can emphasize not only social values but the reality that the economic vitality of a region is served best when adequate resources ensure a dependable and educated labor force. This reflects the crucial linkage of education to jobs as a major regional issue. Any human segment of the community which is disadvantaged is a major negative factor in the region's prosperity and well being.

Finally, is the role as a *broker or steward of leaders or sectorial interests which make up the regional community's power structure*. This means a hard look at the nature of a regional council's power base today and in the future. It means analyzing what power bases are necessary for making better regional decisions and how to link them. We can be reminded that Webster's Dictionary defines power as the ability and capability to act and perform effectively; having great influence or control over others.

Patterns of Future Governance

With these thoughts in mind, we can look at generic patterns of regional institutions or processes that are evolving or can serve as a basis for playing these key regional roles. These patterns are defined generally and not in great detail. You will be able to judge what regions may have some semblance of these models today without naming them or evaluating their degree of development or effectiveness. We are in a very dynamic and transitory phase of regional community evolution, for our regional communities have become the economic engines for the nation. The effectiveness of economic innovation and entrepreneurship in our regions, while retaining home rule and quality of life values, will determine the economic competitiveness and growth of our country.

At least three generic patterns are evolving and seem reasonable in the future to achieve these roles and goals:

A Home Rule Unitary Governance: A regional public agency/institution which has the power to discipline public and private agencies and individuals in those public policy matters affecting the regional community and economic development. This agency must have home rule attributes with an elected governing body representative of citizens and/or communities. It must also have the authority to sustain itself and its activities financially.

State Intervention(s) Through an Agency and/or Process: Specific action(s) by a governor or state legislature which introduces into a region the state's own vehicle or policy goals for regional decision making. It differs from the home rule model by the dominance of state interests, agencies, or individuals in regional decisions. It is also the pattern most clearly evolving in those regions with crisis situations and the pattern most likely to develop over the foreseeable future.