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Planners' perceptions of the influence of leadership on coordinating plans

Based on interviews with 92 planners in five Canadian city-regions, we explore planners' perceptions of the ways that leadership affects their ability to coordinate land-use planning activities in the context of sometimes divergent or conflicting priorities and policies. Practitioners describe conditions where transformational leadership -- with organizational leaders building followership around values set by political leaders – has become common, and planners have often settled into managerial roles as agent of municipal councils. Planners identify two other roles they may play: as facilitator of communication and collaboration, and as leader for smart growth strategies. The evidence suggests that planners align their role expectations not only with preferred theories in the discipline, but also with the leadership regimes they encounter.

Canadian communities today have large numbers of plans to manage, complicating the task of coordinating land-use planning objectives (Burns and Grant, 2014; Taylor and Grant, 2015). Municipalities are complex organizational systems whose parts may pull in different directions. Hatzopoulou and Miller (2008) note that institutional relationships affect planning integration. Others describe the challenges of 'departmentalization' (Argote et al., 2000)—sometimes known as 'silos'—and lack of trust (Willem and Buelens, 2007) within and among governments. Municipal decision-makers often must deal with conflicting priorities: eg, improving transit systems or keeping tax rates low; renewing older neighbourhoods or maintaining housing affordability. Various departments may push for different outcomes. Ensuring that planning priorities are achieved requires effective leadership to allow planners to execute their roles effectively to shepherd plans through the process.

It is hardly original to say that planning is political: Altshuler (1965) confirmed that half a century ago. Forester (1989) noted that practitioners must think and act politically to be effective because they are planning in the face of power. Planners' interactions (re)produce social and political relations within organizations (Forester, 1989: 71). Power is inevitably at work in planning contexts (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Van

Assche et al., 2014), as planners cooperate with political leaders, developers, and residents to shape urban outcomes and to define their own roles. Metzger et al. (2017) considered the ways power is produced: they suggested that power is the outcome of social processes, a phenomenon explained within patterns in social networks. '[I]t is precisely the study of how such power is performatively *enacted*, how power is harnessed or generated in the process, that becomes the interesting object of research' (Metzger et al., 2017: 211). As planners work to coordinate disparate policies and plans, we find power socially constructed and exercised through practices of leadership and role execution.

In this paper, we explore how practitioners socially construct leadership –and their own roles as planners—in the organizations and networks within which they operate as they describe the challenges they face in coordinating plans and implementing policies within and across municipalities. Reporting on the results of interviews conducted with a large sample of Canadian planners, we seek to shed light on planners' perceptions about the way that institutional arrangements and leadership practices affect their work and their understanding of their own roles. An exploration of practitioners' views cannot fully account for outcomes –whether plans do indeed get well coordinated – but it can illuminate the context within which planners explain the challenges and opportunities they face, and within which they succeed or fail to meet their own and community expectations for better coordinated results.

We begin by briefly reviewing the literature on leadership and the role of the planner before presenting the results of interviews from five Canadian city-regions. In the final sections, we comment on the implications of our findings. Operating in a context where both large 'P' and small 'p' politics shape their daily practices, planners find the task of ensuring plan coordination and implementation challenging: dozens of plans with diverse and sometimes conflicting policies are in effect in many cities, while planning departments find themselves short-staffed and pushed in many directions (Burns and Grant, 2014; Hall et al., forthcoming). Planners interviewed value strong leadership, but defined that in ways that matched their own interests in advancing planning agendas. By identifying the constellations of leadership styles that practitioners described encountering, and arguing that planners aligned their own role expectations with preferred and possible options, we offer useful insights for theories that seek to explain planning practice.

Leadership in planning

Yukl (2008) suggested that a strong corporate culture backed by shared beliefs and values can facilitate organizational performance. As Yukl and Lepsinger (2005) noted, however, achieving coordination across different parts of an organization proves difficult, especially when subunits have different functions, subcultures, and expertise. Within governments, departments may pursue their own policies or agendas oblivious to the consequences for other departments, the organization, or the community at large (Froy and Giguère, 2010). The siloed, or distributed, nature of duties in local government can impede communication, thereby undermining cooperation in pursuing objectives, including land-use planning (Mills et al., 2007). Thus, organizations such as local governments need effective leaders at all levels to build support for core ideologies and missions to coordinate actions and outcomes (Yukl and Lepsinger, 2005).

Organizational leaders employ varying styles of leadership (Yukl, 1998). Some prefer a transactional style: the traditional boss who shapes the exchange process (rewards and penalties for behaviour) to ensure task completion and reinforce bureaucratic authority (Bass, 1990; Stone et al., 2004). Some may believe in transformational leadership, building commitment to organizational goals and empowering followers to achieve them, with a clear focus on organizational outcomes (Bass, 1990; Stone et al.,

2004). Transformational leaders prove extraordinarily effective as they build trust and loyalty through supporting and encouraging employees (Bass, 1990). Others endorse servant leadership, 'demonstrated by empowering and developing people' within the organization (van Dierendonck, 2011: 1229), and generating trust among followers by focussing on their interests (Russell and Stone, 2002). Organizational leaders shape and exercise power through social interactions, relationships, and institutions, creating shared understandings of the roles of leader and follower (Foucault, 1995).

In the context of developing and implementing land-use planning policies, departments and agencies need to work together. Organizational leaders such as city managers or chief administrative officers (CAOs) and planning directors play critical roles in ensuring that coordination occurs. The city manager system of local government originated in the United States and became commonplace in Canada during the 1970s (Siegel, 2015). Chief administrators serve at the pleasure of city councils, and are often promoted from within organizations: for instance, from chief financial officer or head of public works. Few have specialized training for leading municipal organizations in ways that supplement their specialized disciplinary backgrounds (Siegel, 2015). By controlling resources and setting priorities, city managers have considerable power to shape and implement urban planning agendas.

While city managers bring different leadership styles and philosophies to their roles, many follow elected officials in embracing the values of the new public management (NPM): that is, they aim to increase effectiveness, efficiency, innovation, and adaptability by adopting organizational practices that pervade the private sector (Glor, 2001; Kearney et al., 2000; Olesen, 2014). Canadian local government managers have embraced NPM, with the desire to see 'public sector organizations becoming more capable, responsive and innovative' (Molloy and Johnson, 2010, 130). With the growth in NPM in planning practices (Gerber, 2016), we might expect to find notions of transformational leadership becoming more common in local practice as city managers seek to align staff priorities with council's values.

Leaders influence organizational cultures by the ways they interact with others. Power games and lack of trust among co-workers can affect interdepartmental knowledge sharing (Willem and Buelens, 2007), but trust can engender effective cooperation among individuals, groups, and organizations (Nilsson and Mattes, 2013). Organizational research indicates that an open atmosphere and high levels of sociability allow spontaneous and voluntary knowledge sharing (Constant et al., 1994). Leaders can create contexts within which trust develops, for instance, by encouraging the exchange of information and developing positive attitudes among workers (Jones and George, 1998). Constant et al. (1994) found that experts are more likely to contribute to coworkers who need, respect, and thank them: personal touches may mean more than technologies such as information-sharing software. Informal networks and interactions can enhance opportunities for collaboration and policy coordination within organizations (Taylor, 2014).

Planners must operate within the political culture of their organizations (Wheeler, 2015). Although they come to practice bearing professional and personal values, they find they 'work in contexts of fluid and contested power relations' (Forester, 1989: 177) where they are embedded in power networks with other ends (Booher and Innes, 2002). Sager (2009) described Nordic planners as torn between two possible roles: the collaborative or communicative planner endorsed by contemporary planning theory (Forester, 1999; Healey, 1997), and the professionally efficient and effective planner envisioned by NPM and neoliberal rhetoric (see also, Puustinen et al., 2017). A recent study explored planners' self-perceptions of their roles in practice: 'such insights are critical in determining the extent to which planning practitioners serve to challenge, maintain, or reinforce existing power imbalances in the planning system' (Fox-Rogers and Murphy, 2016: 74). Fox-Rogers and Murphy (2016: 74) suggested that

Irish planners saw their roles as reflecting 'traditional pluralist and managerialist perspectives … shaped by dominant discourses in current planning ideology — namely, collaborative and participatory approaches.' Irish planners talked about trying to 'balance' or achieve the public interest (pluralism) but also saw the planner as mediator facilitating collaboration. In the managerial perspective, planners emphasized their technical roles as experts. Less commonly, planners took reformist perspectives, performing as advocates for the disadvantaged, or took neoliberal perspectives, identifying their roles as entrepreneurs or agents of growth in efficient bureaucratic systems (Fox-Rogers and Murphy, 2016). Nelson (2006) argued that planners need to take on roles as leaders, shaping built environments and policies in ways that respond effectively to contemporary and future challenges. The rise of smart growth in North American planning gave planners renewed faith in their mastery of tools for urban improvement, while key voices in the new urbanism movement pushed planners to seize opportunities to lead (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck, 2000; Grant, 2009b). Thus, planners have several role options to consider as they negotiate daily practice. The next sections present the empirical findings of our study of how Canadian planners view leadership as an influence in their work of trying to coordinate plans, and how those views affect practitioners' perceptions of their own roles.

Leadership in practice: A comparative case study

To evaluate how planners in Canada are coordinating plans, we initiated a comparative case analysis of five urban regions (Table 1). Metro Vancouver in British Columbia and the Alberta Capital Region, which includes Edmonton and other communities, are rapidly growing agglomerations in Western Canada. The Greater Toronto Area in Ontario in Central Canada includes Canada's largest city, Toronto, along with multi-tiered regional municipalities and towns. Halifax Regional Municipality in Nova Scotia and the Northeast Avalon Region, which includes St John's and other small communities, are the largest urban regions in Atlantic Canada, but growing more slowly than those in the other regions. We selected the regions to reflect a range of locations and sizes, organizational arrangements, and experiences with coordinating plans.

Table 1: Overview of the five urban regions studied

	Communities included	Area, approximate population 2011 (growth 2001-2011)	Structure for regional coordination
Metro Vancouver, British Columbia	Vancouver, Surrey, Burnaby, Coquitlam, and others. (Total of 21 municipalities, one First Nation, one electoral territory)	2900 sq km 2.3 million people (16.4%)	Formerly Greater Vancouver Regional District, renamed Metro. Regional growth strategy adopted in 2011.
Alberta Capital Region, Alberta	Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, Spruce Grove and 21 other municipalities (including First Nations' reserves)	9400 sq km 1.2 million people (23.7%)	Capital Region Board formed in 2008. Regional growth plan adopted 2010.
Greater Toronto Area, Ontario	City of Toronto, and the Regions of Durham, Halton, Peel, and York (and lower-tier municipalities within them)	7100 sq km 6 million people (19.2%)	Province of Ontario adopted Growth Plan for Greater Golden Horseshoe 2006, 2016.
Halifax Regional Municipality, Nova Scotia	Unified regional municipality containing two former cities, a town, and county	5500 sq km 390,000 people (8.7%)	Amalgamated municipality created by Province 1996. Regional plan adopted in 2006; revised 2014
Northeast Avalon Peninsula Region, Newfoundland and Labrador	St John's, Mount Pearl, Conception Bay South, Paradise, and 11 other small municipalities	1350 sq km 195,000 people (13.9%)	Regional plan for St John's area adopted 1976. (New process initiated in 2009 by province, but stalled.)

Governed by a regional board, Metro Vancouver municipalities voluntarily collaborate around planning and infrastructure issues such as water treatment and waste management (Metro Vancouver, 2016a). Limited in opportunities for urban expansion because of the province's protected agricultural lands in the narrow coastal plain and river valleys, the cities of Vancouver, Surrey, and others began collaborating in regional planning in the late 1940s (Metro Vancouver, 2016b). Although member communities range from under 1000 to over 600,000 residents, each community representative has one vote on decisions. Member communities produce regional context statements that indicate how local plans will comply with the 2011 regional growth strategy.

Planning in Alberta's capital city, Edmonton, is coordinated at the regional level by the Alberta Capital Board, established in 2008 (Capital Region Board, 2016). Leaders of constituent communities serve on the board, with one vote per community. A ministerial order in 2010 gave the board authority to approve municipal plans for compliance with the regional growth plan, thus facilitating policy coordination. Administrators within Edmonton, the largest city, coordinated production of a suite of plans during the 2000s. 'The Ways' plans share common branding and a vision of where the city intends to go, exemplifying highly coordinated planning practice (Edmonton, 2016; Taylor and Grant, 2015).

With more than 6 million residents, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is Canada's most populous city-region (Toronto, 2016). Discussions about regional planning began in earnest in 1943, with the first regional plan (R White, 2007). In the 1970s the Province of Ontario created upper-tier regional governments in York, Durham, Halton, and Peel with authority over planning (R White, 2007). In 1998, the Province amalgamated Toronto with Scarborough, North York, York, East York, and Etobicoke to create the new City of Toronto. In the 2000s the Province passed several acts that legislated smart growth in the Toronto area. The Places to Grow Act of 2005 set the stage for the 2006 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, an area that includes the GTA (R White, 2007). Provincial policy effectively substitutes for regional cooperation on planning and enforces compliance with smart growth priorities.

The largest city in Atlantic Canada, Halifax has experienced slow but steady growth over the years. The first regional plan in 1975 had relatively little effect on competition for industrial and residential growth (Grant, 1989). When the Province of Nova Scotia created Halifax Regional Municipality from four constituent communities in 1996, some authors saw evidence of efforts to coordinate systems and improve efficiencies (Vojnovic, 1998); others thought government was exemplifying the need for fiscal restraint (Sancton, 2004). In 2006 Halifax adopted its first regional plan, but 20 years after amalgamation, many pre-amalgamation plans remain in effect, hampering coordination. Differences in development philosophies among councillors from urban and less urban parts of the region feature in animosity over planning decisions (Berman, 2016).

The Northeast Avalon Region includes 15 communities, some very small. The City of St John's is the largest, with just over 106,000 in 2011. The St John's Urban Region Plan adopted in 1976 remains in effect (Municipal Affairs, 2016), but does not address contemporary concerns. The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador initiated work on a Northeast Avalon Regional Plan 2009, but progress stalled with a change in provincial government (J White, 2013). In the absence of an effective structure for regional planning and growth management, municipalities compete for investment and are not easily able to coordinate planning activities with their neighbours. Official plans are supposed to comply with the regional plan, but non-compliance is common.

Each municipality within these five city-regions has its own political representatives and administrative staff. The cities have city managers or chief administrative officers, with varying reporting requirements for planning staff. Smaller communities have leaner staffing, with a town clerk or engineer. Organizational charts for communities are similar, with the city manager reporting to council, and other departments reporting either directly to the manager or to a deputy city manager. The Vancouver area communities typically put citizens or customers—rather than city council—at the apex of their organizational charts (eg, Surrey, 2016).

To understand the challenges of coordinating plans in these regions, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 92 practitioners across the regions between June and September 2014. We recruited participants through purposive and snow-ball sampling methods: most interviews were conducted in person, with an average length of 55 minutes. All but one of the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis by thematic coding.[1] The sample included 58 males and 34 females. Respondents' level of experience varied from under one year to 44 years, with an average of over 17 years (Table 2): Vancouver planners had the greatest average level of experience, Edmonton planners the lowest. Almost two-thirds of respondents were municipal planners (Table 3). Some 65% of those interviewed reported that they had earned planning degrees.

The interviews gave planners the opportunity to share their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities to better coordinate plans in a context where Canadian municipalities have large numbers of plans to manage. We asked respondents their thoughts on the role of political leadership and departmental hierarchies in influencing the success of plan coordination, but discovered in analysis that the topic of leadership often emerged spontaneously elsewhere during the interviews. Given the nature of the sampling and interview methods we provide excerpts from interviews rather than statistics to illustrate our findings.

Table 2: Respondents' Years of Planning Experience

	Number of Respondents	Average Years of Experience*
Metro Vancouver	15	20.3
Alberta Capital Region	18	13.2
Greater Toronto Area	31	19.8
Halifax Regional Municipality	15	15.8
Northeast Avalon Peninsula	13	16.0
Total for sample	**92**	**17.4**

Note *: 1 planner in Northeast Avalon and 3 in Halifax did not report years of experience.

Table 3: Planning Roles of Respondents

	Municipal	Provincial	Regional	Consultant	Other	Total
Metro Vancouver	7	0	4	2	2	15
Alberta Capital Region	16	0	1	0	1	18
Greater Toronto Area	26	0	0	0	5	31
Halifax Regional Municipality	7	2	2	2	2	15
Northeast Avalon Peninsula	5	5	0	3	0	13
Total	**61**	**7**	**7**	**7**	**10**	**92**
Percentage	**66.3%**	**7.6%**	**7.6%**	**7.6%**	**10.9%**	**100%**

What planners say about political leaders

Mayors and city councils affect the ability of planners to coordinate policies and plans because they focus the attention of departments on the need for action. Planners in all regions suggested that effective leadership can clarify directions for staff. A Vancouver planner (VAN03f) said, 'Political leadership inevitably is huge, right.' A Toronto planner (GTA04f) agreed: 'Political leadership is also key. … if it's a mayor's priority or council has articulated something is a priority, and there's leadership being shown in the particular area, obviously, there's going to be great inter-divisional coordination.'

Planners often noted that they need political support to make their work practical and meaningful. For instance, a planner in a smaller community in the Toronto area said,

> GTA21m: We have a very good cohesive council here that has generally backed our Planning Department as they've gone through the process. So we don't see a lot of pushback from members of council saying, you know, 'I don't like this…'. The mayor makes sure that there's consensus—that things are well thought out. … We don't see those contentious debates that you see in some other municipalities.

On the one hand, planners valued effective political leadership. Some respondents, like one Halifax planner, acknowledged the influence of political leaders who generated council unity and policy clarity.

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'Certainly, under the new mayor, there's good leadership. The new mayor in Halifax has corralled the latent and/or dispersed good impulses amongst the council, and sort of corralled them into a coherent voice, which has been really great' (HRM09m).

On the other hand, planners sometimes lamented political interference or councillors bending to powerful community interests. A planner in St John's (STJ10f) talked about lands being re-designated to accommodate development following pressure from a powerful former provincial premier: such policy changes undermined policy coordination. A Toronto-area planner described the way that councillor interference in planning studies can affect staff work.

> GTA15m: Some councillors take certain positions of how they want a study to proceed. We'll talk to them, but sometimes they're interfering in the process under the Planning Act. So we try to separate the politics from the planning technical side. … We've got one councillor now, a regional councillor, trying to insert himself in all the technical meetings on studies for this area. And we've respectfully declined. And he's not happy about it. But for the most part, our council is good. They let us do things. We keep them updated.

At the time of the interviews, controversial Mayor Rob Ford had been sidelined, but was running for office again (Warnika, 2016). Not surprisingly, we heard frequent comments from Toronto city planners about political dysfunction. Several planners for the city described challenges related to ineffective political leadership. One explained the problem:

> GTA06m: I think in general, and this is just even before the recent political issues in Toronto, there's always been political involvement and directing of work. And that's really what their job is, is to direct staff to do work in certain directions. … So in some respects, you know, we don't always just go off on our own and do what we want. We're doing our work at the direction of city council. And the challenge can be if the political leadership is either weak or ineffective or if they can't coordinate themselves properly to push in a certain direction, then it's difficult for us to do that as well. You know, our role also is to lead them in the aspect of providing sound planning advice, technical expertise on planning matters. ... But if they can't function well together then it definitely can limit the success of coordinating between plans, especially different departments.

The relationship with political leaders is challenging for practitioners: planners need direction but sometimes resent the exercise of power in directions they do not advise; planners also try to lead through demonstrating expertise. Although political leadership came up often in the interviews, the central role played by those in a municipality's administrative hierarchy in facilitating policy coordination proved even more salient.

What planners say about administrative leaders

Respondents commonly mentioned city managers, chief administrative officers (CAOs), departmental directors, or commissioners as playing pivotal roles in the success of plan coordination because those leaders set agendas and organizational priorities. A Vancouver-area planner explained.

> VAN07m: I think one thing is a clear corporate direction. And if you know that 'Listen, guys, this is the direction of the city. This is what's important, and we're all going to row together on it,' that really helps. Without that, you're left with good will. … clear corporate direction and saying, 'we are one city, we have one objective'. It's not about different departments scrapping for their piece of the pie or getting their oar in the water. There's no substitute for that kind of leadership

from the senior management team. And, of course, that's facilitated by a council that has a clear and consistent direction.

Managers and administrators were sometimes praised for leading processes to generate common corporate values or strengthen connections among departments. A large proportion of respondents spoke of the need for strong administrative leadership, especially to link planners with political masters. For instance, a planner from the St John's area said,

> STJ01f: … from my experience working in municipal government, what it takes is a very strong CEO [chief executive officer], somebody that's got their finger on the pulse of what's happening within the various units of the municipal government, and can keep council on track as to each of these different plans that are in place and the initiatives that are coming out of them, and how they are all connected or can be connected.

Some respondents suggested that creating a culture or processes that valued collaboration facilitated planners' work in coordinating plans.

> GTA13m: But I think more important than [political leadership] is corporate leadership. So quite frankly if you don't have a strong, respected and committed CAO, you're not going to get any of this. … I can't speak enough about the support and direction we get from the very highest levels here in terms of not only allowing the coordination to happen but insisting the coordination happen, and doing whatever needs to be done to facilitate that… I guess it's a culture. The culture of cooperation, collaboration, getting together, sharing, it runs through the corporation and it starts at the senior management level. And if you don't have that, this interdepartmental policy and plan coordination would never happen. It starts culturally and it starts at the top.

Respondents believed the most effective managers create a positive climate for teamwork, collaboration, and action. A Vancouver-area planner (VAN02m) noted, 'one of the main challenges is at the staff level, you have to have respect for the different disciplines and you have to have a team-oriented attitude. And management has to build that team-oriented attitude'. A Vancouver city planner (VAN01m) described the desire for action: 'we have a very strong city manager. She is very involved in ensuring that staff reports really turn the dial on the objectives we're trying to do and set clear goals'. Comments on the Edmonton city manager's leadership approach often praised his impact on coordination. One planner (EDM10f) noted, 'the city manager, when he came, instituted a really proactive cultural shift in our organization. So we have five leadership principles, and one of them is we are one city. And so there's a huge emphasis on breaking down silos, on working collaboratively.' The city manager initiated processes for coordinating the 'The Way' plans: The Way We Move, The Way We Grow, etc. (Edmonton, 2016). The significance of corporate culture –positive or negative -- came across in many interviews.

One Toronto respondent (GTA21m) appreciated senior staff's willingness to give department heads discretion: 'We have a new CAO who has a more modern management style. So he allows the department heads to be department heads. … He says, "you're getting paid fairly well so I expect you to do the job".' In large cities, however, organizational hierarchies can be multi-layered, adding to the complexities of coordination. Managers at varying levels can facilitate or hinder communication and coordination, as a Toronto planner noted.

> GTA06m: …In a large organization like Toronto… it's not like you're in a smaller municipality or a smaller town where, you know, to get all the people in the room in a small town, it could be … five people. And between the five of them, as long as they can make a decision together, it's easy to get agreement or discussion … But between 25 people is very difficult. And so it starts

with leadership at all the different levels of those different groups. So those departments, … they all need to have excellent leadership in order to work together well and communicate effectively together, and to coordinate that work.

Respondents sometimes sounded ambivalent about the role of lower-level managers. They infrequently mentioned planning directors. A few well-known planning directors in Vancouver and Toronto received considerable praise from their staffs, but in certain cases planners identified problems with intermediary managers. For instance, one planner said, 'I want to be careful not to say that there's no leadership [on that issue in our city]. So I'm speaking particularly in the division I'm working in, I don't see that leadership' (GTA02f). Similarly, the heads of other municipal departments weren't discussed often: when they were, it was usually to imply that Engineering or Transit did not understand the role of planning. Planners saw organizational leaders as necessary, but not always effective in promoting coordination.

What troubles planners about leaders

Planners interviewed suggested that leaders make mistakes that frustrate coordination because they do not understand planning. A Vancouver-area planner gave an example.

> VAN08f: It was like a big joint environmental sustainability-type plan. And the CAO wanted his sustainability people to run it. And they were not planners... I think there was one planner, and she was about maybe two years into her career… way over their heads. …Eventually they came to the Planning Department because we knew what to do. And as soon as we got it then it just completely went off in a totally different situation, and actually progressed properly. Because we had the expertise, we knew what we were doing.

Some practitioners noted that administrative leaders brought in from private practice or from other government agencies disrupted organizations by changing procedures or structures. A St John's-area planner (STJ04m) described his manager: 'He knows nothing about planning. That's the sad part.' A Toronto-area planner provided details.

> GTA23f: … Maybe some senior staff in the past that were used to spearheading projects and not including others. I'm not going to say control issues but that's sort of where it falls from. … In Planning at least, we had a director who came in from the consulting world. And he was used to taking projects and running with them at his own speed and his own taste, and that was the way he liked to do things. We do have other staff that have come in, a different director of Planning and a different director of Development and Engineering that are… more of the mindset of who should be involved and what needs to be done to implement a project, to implement a space. So I think we've gotten past some of the challenges in the last few years.

Changes in leadership may redirect departmental focus and municipal agendas. Many respondents talked about organizational restructurings that altered planners' power relationships with departments such as engineering, economic development, or transportation. Some cities, including Halifax and Edmonton, have been through several restructurings in recent years. Reorganization of hierarchies creates uncertainty about the place and importance of planning, especially in situations where new departmental leaders are not planners. A St John's-area planner explained.

> STJ10f: Recently the past city manager reorganized the internal city department structure to tuck Planning back under Engineering. I think it used to be its own department. And now all the planning staff respond to engineers as their managers. … it's really hard to advocate for planning when you don't have a senior planner that's equal to a senior engineer.

Competition among departments and the perception of silos, or rigid divides of responsibility and ideology among departments, came up frequently as perceived problems that leaders need to overcome. One Vancouver-area respondent explained the challenge for leaders:

> VAN12m: But the reality is there are reasons for silos. These are complex bureaucracies with a huge amount of technology that we take for granted that requires systems management… And we're human beings so we need clarity and leadership. And leadership tends not to work well if from day-to-day, you never know (a) who's in charge, (b) what they want, and (c) are able to correct direction.

Planners recognized that leaders vary in personalities and leadership styles. Respondents praised those who added personal touches, echoing Constant et al.'s (1994) observations.

> GTA16f: I'm really lucky, I have a great manager. He's one of those types of people who is very determined and very aware of whether or not people have responded back to him. And he's willing to go forward with the personal touch to get away from email, to actually walk down a flight of stairs to the other department and go see if that manager is around to just chat with them, to try to make sure that there's understanding and communication.

While being cautious about criticizing their bosses, those interviewed often suggested that leaders' effectiveness depends on how they act with staff.

> GTA01m: Our past CAO, he had actual focus groups … of different persons throughout the organization. All the different departments, we met monthly as a sounding board as to see what the feelings are and what the needs are. This was a way for our CAO to be more educated as to what's happening within the organization. I was actually part of that. But that didn't carry over into our current CAO because he has a different leadership personality.

Planners in Halifax and St John's proved most critical of leaders' styles, especially around communication. One noted,

> HRM03f: In our own business unit, I think there's a lack of communication between the managers and staff. But that may be just us specific to HRM, right. … The manager is not communicating with the staff … So that would be a barrier or a challenge for sure. Even amongst staff, even amongst planners, there are not regular meetings, which is very frustrating. …Depending on who your supervisor is, the supervisor may want to have regular meetings. And then you've got another supervisor, and that person doesn't want regular meetings. It's very… inconsistent.

One former planner with Halifax suggested that a previous planning director and the CAO disempowered planners: 'One [problem] is having that innovative urge beaten out of them by a planning director who, for many years, didn't like people popping up with new big ideas. You know, similar to how the CAO is now, I guess you'd say. And so creativity was stifled.' The same planner described 'a culture of obedience' among staff. By contrast, planners in the cities of Vancouver and Edmonton more often described themselves as empowered by leaders committed to coordinated planning and implementation.

A developer in Vancouver compared the leadership styles of three City of Vancouver planning directors, and considered their effects on planning outcomes.

> VAN09m: …when [Director A] was director of planning, he was bright enough and articulate enough and intelligent enough that the politicians generally listened to him and took his advice.

But we have had other planners who weren't as bright or as articulate or intelligent, and they allowed the politicians to basically tell them what they wanted to see happen. And so there is no doubt that it is a reflection of both the quality and respect for the planners and the quality of the politicians, and some of the other administrators… And [Director B], who is a very nice fellow …, is not as strong or forceful as [Director A] was. [Director C], who was there before, was in fact quite strong and forceful, but managed to alienate a number of people. And as a result, I think there wasn't as much respect for the role of a planner as there might have been.

Municipalities frequently change administrative managers. For instance, Vancouver, Surrey, Burnaby, Edmonton, City of Toronto, Vaughan, Oshawa, Halifax, and St Johns had different city managers by 2016 than they had in 2014. Planners in many other communities also mentioned the negative consequences of recent leadership changes. Major changes, whether political or administrative, can shift policies or priorities, as well as leadership styles. A Halifax planner (HRM06m) explained: 'Council changes next time, the mayor changes next time, the CAO changes, and it shakes everything up. You know, the CAO in a municipality, the change of a CAO or a change of approach of a CAO… what happens throughout the corporation during those moments… should not be under-estimated.'

Councils in Edmonton and Vancouver dismissed their city managers in the Fall of 2015 (Stolte, 2015; Sundstrom, 2015). According to online news articles, each manager was let go because of leadership style and council's desire for a 'fresh perspective'. By contrast with their political masters, respondents interviewed generally praised the leadership styles of the two city managers forced out. The kinds of leadership traits that appeal to planners may not sustain political support.

What planners say about the role of the planner

In many ways, planners' views of leadership aligned with their philosophies of their own roles. Some of the debates that animate the literature on leadership emerged in the comments we heard. Should civil servants operate as agents of the state (directed by city council), as facilitators of community engagement, or as visionary leaders? Although planners' remarks often suggested they aspired to lead on policy matters, they also reflected the power restraints that limit their scope of practice.

Several respondents, especially those working in smaller communities or who occupied management positions, suggested that planners serve council and public. The role of **planner as agent** of political leaders may be associated with transformational leadership styles that see civil servants as enabling political agendas and advancing the interests of the organization (Stone et al., 2004). A planner in the St John's area opined, 'Council has too much power. And we're all given our marching orders by council' (STJ07m). In Halifax, several planners indicated that their managers operated under a philosophy that reflected ideas associated with transformative leadership styles, serving the agenda set by political leaders instead of encouraging independent staff initiative. One explained,

HRM14m: It's the role of council to have that initiative in its relationship with the public. We're here to support them, we're not here to drive or give direction to the organization… Staff don't initiate any recommendations out-of-the-blue anymore. That's what regional council does… The CAO sees the role of regional council [as] seeing what the values in the community are and bringing that forward. And staff are there to implement that, not be the drivers of that.

Even in Edmonton and Vancouver, with their progressive organizational cultures, managers sometimes reflected the same sentiment. For instance, an Edmonton planning manager (EDM02f) acknowledged, 'We can write whatever we want, as many thousands of pages as we want to and bring them forward,

but at the end of the day, we work for our councils who work for our citizens. So we work for our citizens.'

Practitioners were well-attuned to the organizational and political hierarchies within which they worked. In some cases, their self-deprecating remarks revealed perceptions of subservience. A Halifax planner (HRM12m) feared that 'a lowly planner' may not have power to make things happen, but could get support from superiors. A Vancouver-area planner (VAN07m) said, 'I hopefully know what's going on' when discussing strategies for collaborating with colleagues. An Edmonton city planner illuminated the power difference between council and planners, using cautiously optimistic language.: 'Council has to have the leadership to say, "I recognize how you're feeling but this is the direction we're going in". … We make our recommendation to council but we hope they are going to stick with our city policy' (EDM06f). In general, planners with fewer years of experience and authority in civic hierarchies expressed less optimism in their ability to shape outcomes.

A consultant planner in Halifax noted that some managers create poor working conditions for staff.

> HRM06m: So often a CAO will come in and hire somebody quite quickly to come in and determine where are the managers that kind of sync into her vision and where are the senior staff or senior management that don't sync into their vision … Some will use fear. … Which is 'I want this, and my firing will be fast and furious'. …The first CAO I worked with was very much about sitting down, explaining expectations, measuring those expectations on a regular basis, and encouraging outcomes by celebrating those that are doing it in the direction he's wanting to go in, or holding up examples for us as a municipality to move towards. So he created a very proactive, positive, 'I will stay overtime, we're doing really interesting things here', kind of attitude. Then… he was let go quite suddenly and a new CAO from another municipality was moved in. Exact opposite approach. Within the first week or two, he just started -- every Friday for about 2 months at 3:00, an email would arrive outlining the senior management throughout the corporation who had been let go that week. … Meetings were held where expectations were outlined, but you were never sure… The positive reinforcement was never being given. The strategy there was to develop fear to keep you on your toes so that when the CAO said 'jump', you jumped …because you wanted to keep your job.

In using fear as a motivator, some managers exhibited a transactional leadership style.

Not all planners accepted limited roles without commentary. A Toronto-area planner articulated a normative understanding of the planner's role and responsibilities, revealing the way that practitioners may rationalize perceived obligations and relative powerlessness.

> GTA17m: … I think most municipal staff understand that the political winds will change, depending on what the public is saying. Sometimes you have to get through all that B.S. to get to a final plan that actually makes sense. Sometimes it is influenced by the politics. Sometimes you have to ignore it and still work your way through it ... Because from our point of view, just from a pure planning point of view, we have, I would say, not less shackles but different shackles on us compared to other departments, because we have an ethical obligation to recommend to council what's in the public interest versus what's in the political interest. Other departments don't always necessarily have that freedom. … From a planning point of view, we can acknowledge that council may say that they don't like something. That's fine. 'Our recommendation to you in the public interest is to do X even though [the public] said Y.' At the end of the day, that's their decision. If they want to go in a different direction from what staff are going to advise them, that's what they're elected to do. It's no skin off your nose. We recommend something; they choose what they want to do with it.

Some practitioners -- especially managers and senior planners in the City of Vancouver, Metro Vancouver, and the City of Edmonton – frequently used the language of collaboration to reveal their view of the role of the **planner as facilitator**. This role draws on communicative and collaborative planning (Forester, 1999; Healey, 1997; Sager, 2009), which has influenced planning theory over the last two decades. An Edmonton branch manager noted,

> EDM09m: You've got a vision that sets up where we want to head. You've got a culture of shared oversight, of shared leadership, of shared vision obviously, and collaboration. You've got a structure which is not necessarily hierarchical or siloed. If you've got that basis inside your organization where you can freely communicate and perhaps share responsibilities, and also share some leadership, you've got the right foundation for getting around the problem of having projects that are shared interdepartmentally or inter-branch.

A regional planner in Vancouver explained, 'We're able to really work together in a kind of collegial way to advance policy and make sure it's as robust as can be before we hit the political ground. … I think that there's a real corporate culture here as well around building the plan collaboratively' (VAN03f). Respondents often used the verb 'collaborate' in association with words such as 'coordinate', but also alongside 'corporate culture'.

In the GTA, several respondents identified Markham as an area of strong planning. The community is well known in Canada for promoting smart growth and new urbanism planning principles (Gordon and Vipond, 2005). A manager described the context: 'Markham has always had very strong political leadership. Very balanced but also pro-development in many ways… as long as it's quality development' (GTA11m). Another manager elaborated:

> GTA27f: Markham stands out head and shoulders above the other [communities in York Region]. And it started long [ago]. … There was true collaboration there between the mayor at the time, one of the most significant developers, and the commissioner, and the province on a couple of key projects that set that municipality off in a different direction.

Only a few planners in other communities identified their local councils as pro-planning. For instance, a planner in a planned town in the St John's area suggested that council listened to the planners in ways that facilitated good choices: 'And new guys on council – after a while they begin to realize "hmm, maybe I should listen a bit more [to the planners] before thinking I know the answer." So in my municipality we have a very strong pro-planning council that provides leadership' (STJ04m). As the planner intimates, collaboration depends on council's interest in promoting a long-term planning agenda.

Some of those interviewed discussed the idea of **planner as leader** in urban development. Most often, this role was idealized, and linked to specific expertise – usually in urban design. Such respondents, usually with a mid-range of experience under their belts, suggested that councils and senior managers should respect planners' expertise. A St John's-area planner (STJ07m) said, 'I think that there's plenty of opportunity for politicians to listen to their staff and not be reactionary.' A planner in the suburban region of the Toronto area called for planners to lead: 'If some planning is not done very well, [the professional planners' institute] should take the lead and we should do some proactive planning here. That's lacking here in Canada' (GTA19m). Another St John's area planner opined at length.

> STJ11m: [Planning is] an extremely reactive profession. ... There are definitely cities in Canada that are showing leadership and that are not just enabling their planners but they're enabling the full force of their professionals across the board, and are getting where they want to go as a result. You know, not everybody wants to live in Vancouver, and I understand that. But the

people who want to live in Vancouver often like the decisions that their council makes because council is able to show a vision, and they have a bureaucracy that seems capable of seeing that vision through. In contrast, a lot of councils … seem to tolerate their administration and their bureaucracy and their consultants, putting this high-minded ideal language in their policy documents, and then leaving out any ways of enforcing that.

Some practitioners advocated forceful leadership from planners, informed by ideas of 'good planning'. A Halifax-area planner (HRM09m) explained, 'Policy should never trump a better solution. You should be able to do the right thing and not have some section 44b in a book somewhere prevent you from doing the smart thing, the better outcomes for the community'. Practitioners who wanted to be visionary leaders often expressed commitment to values aligned with smart growth and new urbanism approaches. When they offered examples of good practice, they typically pointed to Vancouver and Calgary.

Planners interviewed in Vancouver proved most positive about their roles, and most likely to intimate that they, or the planners who preceded them, were leaders. Talking about the Livable Region Plan adopted in Greater Vancouver in the 1970s, one manager explained the planning and political consensus around ideas that have come to be known as smart growth:

> VAN13m: I can't say the issue of lack of coordination was a very big issue for us ever. And that's because we were kind of philosophically on the same wavelength. We all believed in the Liveable Region Plan. We believed in the idea of town centres. We believed in the idea of a strong downtown. We believed in the idea of mixed use densification. We believed in rapid transit, alternates for the car. On all fronts, we were kind of in accord. So the plan was just sort of naturally consistent.

With political and leadership changes within the City of Vancouver in recent years, the new corporate culture may have constrained the power of planners somewhat. A senior planner in Vancouver clarified his understanding that planners offer leadership and make decisions within a policy framework set by those above.

> VAN02m: … the director of planning has played a primary role in setting policy and planning. I think the other thing that very much distinguishes our role, which is fundamental: council passes the bylaws, council approves the policies, but we as staff… administer the plans and we make decisions.

Linking leadership and planners' roles

Our analysis of five urban regions in different parts of Canada has the potential to contribute both to theory and to practice in planning. Our investigation of what Canadian planning practitioners say as they talk about the significance of leadership in enabling or preventing the coordination of plans has offered useful insights into perceptions of the functioning of organizational cultures and of the role of the planner. Planners' comments offer a glimpse into the way that practitioners socially construct power relationships to account for their successes or failures in achieving desired outcomes and implementing policies. We see that although planners often aspire to leadership roles in shaping urban outcomes, they more commonly find themselves working as agents of political interests that may not share their commitment to 'good planning'. They describe the challenges of negotiating relationships with powerful city managers and council members. The real politics of planning practice come across in practitioners' critiques of reactionary decisions, administrative silos, and the mechanics of fear. For the most part, planners aligned their role expectations with the leadership regimes they encountered; those who advocated greater leadership from planners typically worked outside municipal practice.

These cases suggest that the model of transformational leadership described by Bass (1990) and Stone et al. (2004) is influencing municipal practice in Canada. Planners appreciated leaders with charisma who engaged in practices to build common commitment to organizational goals because that facilitated plan and policy coordination while addressing mandates expressed by council and enacted by city managers and department leaders. For instance, managers who implemented programs and practices promoting core values (Halton Hills) or 'one city' (Edmonton) enhanced opportunities for coordination. Although few respondents spoke explicitly about the new public management, evidence of a push for efficiency, accountability, and clear lines of responsibility was clear. Many of the practitioners revealed a certain allegiance to what Fox-Rogers and Murphy (2016) called a managerialist role, aligned with the NPM approach (Sager, 2009).

We found little evidence that theories of servant leadership (Russell and Stone, 2002) currently influence the organizational cultures within which planners work. Historic references that respondents made to earlier planning activities with the Greater Vancouver Regional District or under previous Vancouver planning directors Larry Beasley and Ann McAfee implied that planners there were practice leaders, enabled by servant leadership from councils and administrators who gave practitioners authority to act; however, histories of the time noted the progressive political climate and dynamic growth that enabled planners to initiate innovative directions (Hutton, 1998; Punter, 2003), while current practice seems more constrained. Respondents revealed their longing for contexts in which planners enjoy the respect and power to act on their expertise to create places exhibiting the attributes they value. Nostalgia for an imagined past of empowered planners cast a halo over Vancouver even as organizational changes may mean in practice that traditional leadership practices have made a return, and planners have less ability to lead and innovate than they desire. Some practitioners certainly aspired to the planner / leader role that Nelson (2006) espoused. Canadian planners have become firm adherents to smart growth ideas (Grant, 2009a) and hope to find ways to implement them in their practice with the aim of enhancing coordination through corporate commitment to that agenda.

This paper provides a window into how a large sample of practitioners understand the exercise of power in contexts where planning work has become increasingly complex because of the large number of plans in operation. Planners' comments suggested that they appreciated strong leadership when that entailed support for planning policies and when leaders built trust and commitment within organizations: in other words, they liked transformational leadership styles. When powerful leaders did not support the

planning agenda, or when leadership styles changed dramatically within organizations, planners kept their heads low and did what was requested. Although what planners say may not fully reflect what happens in practice, practitioners' perceptions offer useful insights into the way they conceive of their work and account for why coordinating large numbers of plans – whether within organizations or across political borders – proves so challenging.

Notes

1. Respondent codes indicate the region, the sequence of the interview in that region, and the respondent's gender. [GTA- Greater Toronto Area, VAN = Metro Vancouver Area, EDM = Alberta Capital Region (including Edmonton), HRM = Halifax Regional Municipality, STJ = St John's urban region or Northeast Avalon Peninsula. Gender codes: m = male, f= female.]

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