



Frequently, I hear the lament, “Why do our meetings last so long?” My experience and observations lead me to conclude, there usually are three main reasons:

1. Lack of a solid strategic base or policy framework that enables councils to have the “long-term-comprehensive” perspective necessary to make rational and disciplined incremental decisions. This process helps to dispose of most items on a typical regular city council meeting agenda.
2. Councils not operating in the proper council arena (venue) or meeting format to set sound policy or make decisions in a reasoned manner.
3. People (council members and citizens) seeing council meetings as community “kaffee klatches” where council and citizens engage in endless unfocused conversation, feeling this is the way to represent people’s interests or concerns, make decisions, and “run” the city.

Lack of a strategic base or policy framework for decision making.

In a previous article entitled “Was I Elected to Do What the People Want or to Govern Well,” the conclusion was that council members have to be able to choose between citizens’ and council members’ short-term desires and the long-term priorities and responsible leadership decisions that reflect what is more important and essential to the entire community and its future.

For councils to be truly effective leaders, policy setters and stewards of the nature and quality of a community’s future, they must have a framework of strategic perspectives and policies that enable them to make the consistent and reasoned tactical and incremental decisions required to dispose of most items on a typical regular council meeting agenda. This concept is illustrated in the “Governance Iceberg” model shown on the next page.

The strategic base is essential to leadership effectiveness and is 90 percent of council’s ability to lead/govern well. This base enables council to approach each incremental decision within a “big picture long-term” context to ensure consistency in decision making so that short-term, politically popular decisions do not create default (unintended consequences) policies contrary to a community’s real long-term interests. In the absence of the strategic base, councils drift into foundering and protracting discussions in search of a rationale for making a decision about the issue before them.

Not operating in the proper council arena

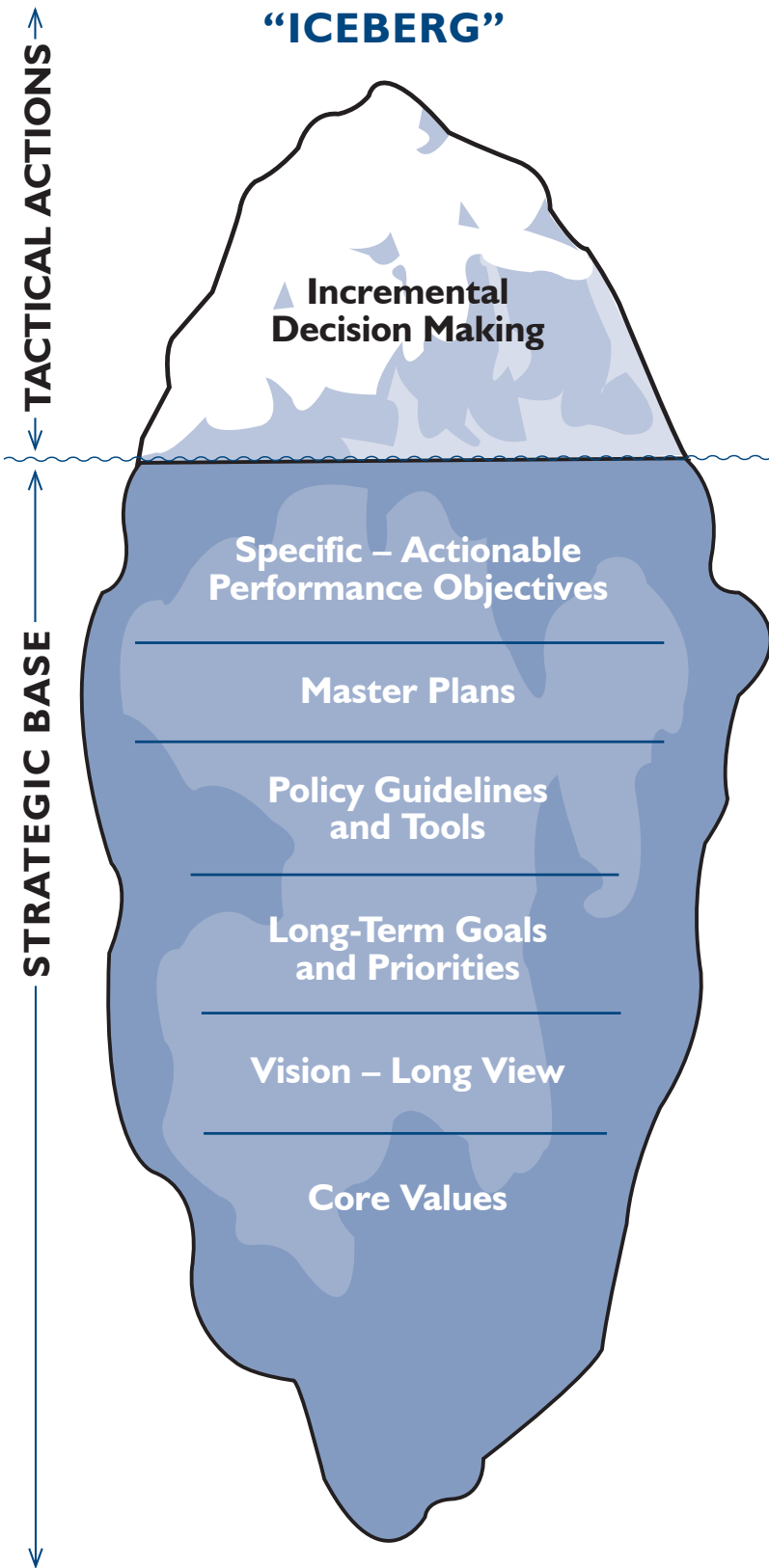
To achieve the strategic base components listed above, city councils need to operate in a variety of distinct settings or meeting formats to achieve certain ends. These include: establishing long-term leadership vision and priorities; goal setting and policy making; passing resolutions and ordinances; engaging the community in thinking about its future; establishing revenue generation and resource allocation policies (budgets); and empowering management and employee performance to achieve goals and policies without council or council member micro- or nano-management.

The “meeting settings” or arenas are vitally important to the quality of decisions and outcomes achieved. Also, the arena chosen must have the characteristics and conditions necessary to enable council to “act, think, and interact” in a manner essential to fulfilling the task before it effectively.

There are four council-staff arenas, and each must be appreciated for its purpose and contribution to a council’s effectiveness:

- Goal-setting (retreats or “advances”);
- Exploration and analysis (study sessions);
- Disposition/legislation (regular public meetings where votes occur); and
- Community relations (interactions with constituencies and other agencies).

GOVERNANCE "ICEBERG"



The figure on the next page identifies the purpose, typical setting, focus, and key characteristics of each arena. All four arenas are essential to a highly-effective governing body's fulfillment of its leadership, policy making, goal setting, and empowering responsibilities.

Arenas for Governing Body-Staff Performance

Highly-effective governing bodies will hold at least one goal-setting retreat or "advance" annually. They also will hold two study sessions monthly, usually between regularly scheduled public hearings. Here they confer with staff and other experts on significant items under consideration requiring eventual official actions. While these study sessions are open to the public, as observers, the public should not participate in the board-staff dialogue. Many councils short-change this arena, pushing the opportunity for learning into the formal public hearing, which is not designed to promote much in-depth analysis of complex issues. The arena of *disposition/legislation* is designed to get to a vote, not promote careful analysis of complex issues.

When councils try to deal with everything in the formal council public hearing (the arena of disposition and legislation) they attempt to make up through endless dialogue and public opinions the pieces of the Governance Iceberg not created through serious deliberation in the goal setting and exploration and analysis arenas. Result: a mish-mash of reactive, and often inconsistent, decision making and long meetings.

Council members seeing council meetings as community "kaffee klatches" or opportunities to micro/nano-manage city operations.

Council meetings exist for council to do its business, which is to provide leadership, direction, establish results/ends to be achieved, and pass authorizations through resolutions and ordinances.

Some council members believe council meetings should be forums of endless collegiality and informality where every one is allowed to state and profess their views, opinions and predilections to the point of exhaustion in hopes that a gem of a decision will emerge or specific "how to" direction will be imposed as the "popular will" on management. Result: these meetings are long, results are minimal, and long-term perspectives frequently absent.

A well disciplined council that has established, in the proper arenas, the components of the strategic base of the Governance Iceberg seldom have meetings that last more than 2 to 2-1/2 hours. Council leadership emerges from the goal-setting and exploration and analysis arenas.

The area of disposition and legislation is the most highly visible one to the public, but its function is to achieve closure through passing motions, resolutions and ordinances that authorize council-established leadership priorities, goals and policies to be implemented through numerous tactical or incremental steps and actions. This arena is not the arena where leadership is fashioned; it is where the fruits of leadership become evident in specific approvals that are made in a manner necessary and consistent in achieving council's goals and policies.

ARENA	GOAL-SETTING	EXPLORATION & ANALYSIS	DISPOSITION-LEGISLATION	COMMUNITY RELATIONS
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish vision Explore potentials Set goals Direction/priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Services Staff action Budgets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the issue(s) Problem identification Selecting "best options" Building commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Official action Vote on items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resolutions Ordinances Public input Mobilization of support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interaction with constituency/citizens Building alliances Outreach-liaison Coordination with other entities
Typical Setting	Retreat/Advance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> informal off-site workshop 	Study Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> conference room 	Public <ul style="list-style-type: none"> formal board meeting in chambers 	Numerous <ul style="list-style-type: none"> diverse formats
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future of county, city/ community Evaluation of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs Trends Strategic issues Community desires & values Leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing knowledge for decision making Sorting of options Examine consequences Set strategies Ability to make competent and informed decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agenda – formality "Show" of authority Ratification/adoption Political pressures Psychological needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication Problem solving Collaboration – coordination Partnership Acting as a community
Key Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informality Sharing of options Open dialogue Creative thinking Humor – adventure Face-to-face/group interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board-staff dialogue Questioning – testing of ideas Information exchange Negotiating – consensus building No voting Face-to-face/group interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal meetings Rules and procedures Public input/involvement High visibility Pressure/advocacy from groups Voting Group interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being "outside" city hall/court house Responding to requests Joint ventures Interagency activity Multiple interaction modes and communication techniques

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