

**ความเป็นมืออาชีพสาธารณะในบริบทท้องถิ่นไทย:  
การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบทัศนคติต่อความเป็นมืออาชีพ  
สาธารณะของปลัดเทศบาลไทย และปลัดเทศบาล  
ในมลรัฐอิลลินอยส์**

**Public Professionalism in Local Government  
Setting: A Comparative Analysis of Thai and  
Illinois Municipal Chief Administrators’  
Perceptions of Public Professionalism**

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**บทคัดย่อ**

บทความนี้มุ่งศึกษาทัศนคติของปลัดเทศบาลในประเทศไทยและมลรัฐอิลลินอยส์ ที่มีต่อความเป็นมืออาชีพของบุคลากรของรัฐ ทั้งนี้จากการวิเคราะห์วรรณกรรมทางด้านรัฐประศาสนศาสตร์และธรรมาภิบาล คณะผู้วิจัยได้สังเคราะห์นิยามขอคำว่า “มืออาชีพของบุคลากรภาครัฐ” ไว้คือความสามารถในการถ่วงดุลช่องทางการตรวจสอบทางด้านการเมือง กฎหมาย ระเบียบทางองค์การราชการ และความรู้ทางวิชาชีพของบุคลากรภาครัฐ ทั้งนี้คณะผู้วิจัยมุ่งตอบคำถามนำวิจัยหลัก 2 ข้อ คือ (1) โครงสร้างการบริหารเทศบาลส่งผลกระทบต่อมุมมองของปลัดเทศบาลต่อการเป็นมืออาชีพ และ (2) การที่ปลัดเทศบาลเป็นสมาชิกขององค์กรวิชาชีพส่งผลกระทบต่อมุมมองของปลัดเทศบาลต่อการเป็นมืออาชีพ

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อย่างไรซึ่งคณะผู้วิจัยมีเป้าประสงค์เพื่อแสวงหาปัจจัยที่ทำให้ปลัดเทศบาลมีความเป็นมืออาชีพมากยิ่งขึ้น เพื่อเพิ่มพูนความสามารถในการถ่วงดุลอำนาจการตรวจสอบในด้านต่างๆ ซึ่งในบางครั้งอาจมีความขัดแย้งกัน โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่ง คณะผู้วิจัยมีความสนใจในบทบาทของโครงสร้างการบริหารของเทศบาลและองค์กรวิชาชีพที่มีต่อความเป็นมืออาชีพของบุคลากรในองค์กรปกครองส่วนท้องถิ่น

### Abstract

*In this article, the researchers examine the perceptions of public professionalism among Thai and Illinois municipal chief administrators. Based on an extensive review of extant literature on good governance and public management, public professionalism is defined in this article as the ability to balance political, legal, bureaucratic, and professional accountabilities. The researchers seek to answer two central questions. First, how do differences in municipal government form influence chief administrators' public professionalism? Second, to what extent is public professionalism influenced by the municipal chief administrators' membership in professional associations? With both questions, the researchers seek to identify the factors contributing to Thai and Illinois municipal government officials' ability to manage different, and sometimes conflicting, expectations and accountabilities. In other words, the research objective is to find out whether the degree of public professionalism among municipal government officials could be enhanced by appropriate institutional design of the municipal government and encouragement of municipal government officials' membership in professional associations.*

## **Introduction**

In recent years, as the control and capacity of many centralized and formerly centralized states have withered, those small units of government have emerged as the experimental site for both grassroots democracy and local self-governance (Wei 2000). In other more decentralized countries, municipalities have become even more important than they were several decades prior. Fiscal stress at the higher levels of government resulted in an increase in the number of service responsibilities delegated to the local entities. Mouritzen and Svava (2002, 6) assert that municipal governments everywhere have become increasingly responsible for a vast array of public services: “some of these are developed locally and others are formed and funded at higher levels of government but delivered locally.” Compounding the challenge brought about by the magnitude of service responsibilities, the diversity of municipal residents and complexity of socio-economic and political problems make running a municipality a daunting public administrative task (Mouritzen and Svava 2002).

At the core of this study is an interest in the professionalism provided by the appointed executives in municipal government. Municipal chief administrators-the unit of analysis in this study-along with elected municipal leaders sit atop the political and administrative hierarchies of government. In this study, municipal chief administrators or chief administrators consist of three groups: Thai municipal administrators (Thai MAs), Illinois city administrators (Illinois CAOs), and Illinois city managers (Illinois CMs). The nature of the chief administrative position is complex.

They interact closely with the local elected officials and assist them in shaping the municipal government agenda. They are charged with coordinating the work of municipal departments and ensuring successful implementation of the public policies and programs. Also, communication with the higher levels of government and other municipal communities falls within the chief administrators' realm of responsibilities.

Such an immense list of responsibilities raises several questions: what is the appropriate contribution of municipal chief administrators to the general public welfare? What are their rules of engagement? What are the standards used to assess their performance? How should they conduct themselves when confronting a host of expectations and dilemmas generated within and outside their public organization? These questions are related to the concept of public professionalism (Bourgault and Parent 2008). Sherwood (1997, 217) argues that public professionalism is "a matter of extreme significance to the achievement of effective, responsive government." Professionalism among local government officials, particularly the appointed executives, has become a critical issue in many countries that have adopted the decentralization reform over the past few decades. Currently, there is little disagreement over the importance of professionalism among public officials. However, there is a lack of clarity about the definition and measurement of public professionalism. Martin (1994) notes that the lack of clarity arises from the two contrasting visions of the public service: the democratic model that stresses the importance of political institutions and due process and the managerial model that emphasizes technical and economic rationality.

The contrasting visions of the public service emulate the Finer-Friedrich exchange over which type of accountability should be the cornerstone of public administration. Many empirical works in recent years have demonstrated that neither Finer nor Friedrich was entirely correct (e.g., Maynard-Moody and Leland 1999; Dunn and Legge 2001; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003). In their work environment, public administrators, especially the street-level bureaucrats, have no choice but to reckon with both internal and external sources of accountability and diverse stakeholders with different, and sometimes conflicting, expectations. The major task confronting public administrators is not to choose which type of accountability to adhere to, but to seek the balance among those competing expectations in order to ensure the quality of services delivered to citizens.

In this study, we argue that the concept of public professionalism should be viewed, treated, and analyzed in a similar manner as the concept of public accountability. In the municipal government setting, it is difficult for municipal chief administrators to legitimately overlook any source of accountability and expectation. Public professionalism is determined by the way in which public administrators manage multiple accountability approaches that both constrain and guide their actions. Green and his colleagues (1993) criticize the conventional view of public professionalism solely defined in terms of technical skills, competency, and specialized knowledge. However, without denigrating the importance of technical competency, Green and his colleagues argue that commitment to democratic values and the rule of law should also be emphasized as other core elements of public professionalism.

Similarly, Sherwood (1997, 213) observes shifting emphasis in the concept of public professionalism among American city managers: “managers no longer simply manage; they function in an environment of increasingly complex role relationships.” Not only must the professionalization of public administrators include technical skills and analytic capabilities, it must also enable public administrators to effectively manage other expectations generated outside the organization (Sherwood 1997). Normatively speaking, municipal chief administrators with a high degree of public professionalism are those who are capable of balancing the bureaucratic, legal, political, and professional accountability approaches. As conceptualized by Romzek and Dubnick (1987), these four forms of accountability offer the equally legitimate means for managing public expectations. In this study, we argue that municipal chief administrators—as appointed executives of their municipalities—must seek to balance them to ensure effective and responsive municipal government.

The public professionalism concept used in this study provides a normative vision of how municipal chief administrators ought to behave. In practice, different contextual factors result in the varying degrees of professionalism among municipal chief administrators. Among other important contributing factors, this study focuses on two main variables: (1) form of municipal government and (2) membership in professional associations. To examine the impact of these contextual factors on the degree of public professionalism, we use the survey questionnaire to study the perceptions of Thai MAs, Illinois CAOs, and Illinois CMs.

## Literature Review

### Importance and Definition of Public Professionalism in the local Government Setting

Local government provides a rich laboratory to examine one of the most fundamental questions in the study and practice of modern public administration (Nalbandian 2006). Mosher (1982) compellingly articulates the question: How can public administrators possessing technical expertise and discretionary authority that ensure professional influence over policy formulation and execution be held accountable to the people's will, when they are not elected? The interplay between the desire for democratic accountability and the demand for efficiency is most intense at the local government level where "conflicts over values and the distribution of resources have personal immediacy....with a variety of individuals and groups living, working, and politicking side by side" (Mouritzen and Svava 2002, 6).

Mouritzen and Svava's statement encapsulates the context under which Thai and Illinois municipal government officials work. Because of the decentralization reform, Thai and Illinois municipal governments have become important actors in fostering local democracy and in providing public services for the local citizens. Moreover, due to their close proximity to citizenry, municipal government officials are now real "street-level bureaucrats" who interact with local citizens on a daily basis. As they strive to provide high-quality public services (e.g., garbage collection, education), municipal government officials inevitably face a variety of internal and external challenges. Internal challenges include resource constraint, organizational hierarchy, and increased workloads, while external challenges are the higher

level of government that still wields influence over local communities, citizen diversity, and a large number of stakeholders with different, and sometimes conflicting, expectations. Thus, professional municipal government officials are necessary organizational elements that help to enhance the municipal governments' ability to deal with the internal and external challenges.

During the last few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, professionalism has become a subject of “scrupulous analysis” in the social sciences (Kovryga and Wyman 2001). Jarausche (1990, 10) observes that the renewed interest in public professionalism stems from “the rapid and ultimate advancing of knowledge-based economy and society.” Similarly, Tukur (2004, 6) argues that a safe and secure democratic society requires public administrators to be “gentlemen, friends of the people, genuinely learned, and transparently upright.” In other words, in normative terms, public professionalism must be identified with democracy and its institutions and must also embrace legal equity. Tukur's normative argument of what public professionalism should encompass is consonant with Svava's view: “All who serve the public... have professional responsibilities to elected officials, the staff in their organization, and the ‘public’-citizens and residents of their community, country, and world, as well as future generations” (Svava 2009, 1038). Defined in this way, public professionalism is very broad and cannot be limited to technical competencies and analytic skills (Green, Keller, and Wamsley 1993).

The need to redefine local public professionalism intensifies as the public officials' role becomes more complex than in the past (Sherwood 1997). No longer do these appointed officials simply “manage” municipal government operations. Particularly in the decentralized



governance structure, the municipal chief administrators are unavoidably expected to wear different hats (e.g., organization management, conflict mediation, policy formulation, enforcement of municipal ordinances and laws of the higher levels of government). Recognizing this complexity, Svava (2009) broadly considers public professionalism to include multiple values that altogether promotes democratic government.

The public professionalism framework developed and used in this study is founded upon Svava's concept of an ethics triangle (2007a). The ethics triangle situates the duty to advance the public interest at the center and stresses the importance of balancing the three major ethical approaches: teleology, deontology, and casuistry. In brief, teleology emphasizes ends, purposes, and goals that result from actions, while deontologists use "agreed-upon or settled values to determine one's moral obligation to act" (Svava 2007a, 53). To use this approach, public administrators need to have the knowledge of the ethical principles and the capacity to employ those principles in specific situations. Casuistry, ethics as virtue, is a method of "interpreting and resolving moral problems...by the circumstances of particular cases rather than on the application of ethical theories and principles" (Jonsen 1995, 237).

These broad concepts evoke Dwight Waldo's perspective on public professionalism several decades ago. According to Waldo (1968, 10), "the professional perspective is the only one broad and flexible enough to enable us to contain our diverse interests and objectives, yet firm and understandable enough to provide some unity and sense of direction and purpose." The disadvantage of Waldo's broad perspective is the difficulty in measuring the degree of public professionalism. This disadvantage

becomes more apparent as the need to understand and enhance public professionalism in local government intensifies, particularly in those countries where the decentralization reform has been adopted (Caiden 2000; Kovryga and Wyman 2001).

To address this disadvantage, this study argues that public professionalism is determined by the appointed officials' ability to balance the accountability approaches that the context of their work environment demands. Conventionally, accountability in public administration means answerability for one's actions or behavior (Pennock 1979; Dwivedi 1985; Dwivedi and Jabbara 1988; Kernaghan and Langford 1990; Uhr 1993; Harmon 1995). However, viewing accountability as answerability implies that "accountability involves limited, direct, and mostly formalistic responses to demands generated by specific institutions or groups in the public agency's task environment" (Romzek and Dubnick 1987, 228). The accountability-as-answerability concept only covers one dimension of accountability in public administration. As Romzek and Dubnick (1987) argue, public administrators must manage diverse expectations generated both within and outside their organization. These diverse expectations could be conceptualized and classified into four distinct categories: bureaucratic, legal, political, and professional (Romzek and Dubnick 1987). An overview of each of these accountability approaches is as follows.

*Bureaucratic accountability or organizational accountability* denotes the process by which public servants adhere to their superiors' expectations and the standard operating procedures (SOPs) of their agencies. *Legal accountability* is defined as the process by which actors outside of an agency impose legal sanctions on the agency. *Political accountability*

means the process by which public administrators are responsive to their constituents. *Professional accountability* is “characterized by placement of organizational activities in the hands of the employees with the expertise or special skills to get the job done” (Romzek and Dubnick 1987, 230).

These four accountability approaches are equally legitimate mechanisms for managing public affairs in a democracy. Nevertheless, public administrators’ use of the accountability approach (es) depends on the relevant institutional and contextual considerations (Romzek and Dubnick 1987). Based on their analysis of the Columbia space shuttle tragedy, Romzek and Dubnick (1987) argue that the environmental/institutional pressures developed in modern democracy enable other accountability approaches to take precedence over the professional accountability. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was Romzek and Dubnick’s subject of study. They conclude that the political and legal pressures on NASA before and after the space shuttle explosion enfeebled the agency by distracting it from the professional accountability based on deference to expertise.

The Thai and Illinois local governance structures reveal a delicate pattern of central-local relations. In Thailand and Illinois, the decentralization reforms (1997 in Thailand and 1970 in Illinois) did not make the central/state government authority dissipate. In fact, the Thai central government and the Illinois state government still remain important actors in the central/state-local relations. The complexity of decentralized governance presents immense challenges to the municipal chief administrators. *First*, they must be more politically accountable to diverse social actors who can voice their concerns and influence the policy-making process via multiple participatory channels that emerged after the decentralization reform. Their tasks are to

arbitrate among those competing interests, assist the underprivileged social groups in articulating their interests, and inform local elected officials in the policy-making process. *Secondly*, as intermediaries between their local governing bodies and the higher levels of government, municipal chief administrators must use both legal accountability and bureaucratic accountability approaches. Their intermediary role is now more important than before decentralization. Previously, the legal accountability mechanisms (the rules and regulations) and bureaucratic accountability mechanisms (standard operating procedures) from the central/state government were primary influences over the municipal government operations (Mead 1996). Currently, as municipal governments became more autonomous in managing their local affairs, the chief administrators must pay attention to the local ordinances as well. *Third*, under the forces of globalization, municipalities around the world at different stages of economic development have converged on the problems they must address, such as rising unemployment, dilapidated public infrastructure, migration, environmental degradation, and social conflict (Freire and Yuen 2004). Similar to other public agencies, each municipal government department has become an expert organization specialized in carrying out certain specific functions. The coordination and supervision of these specialized departments require the expertise, competence, and analytical skills of municipal chief administrative officers (professional accountability).

### **The Public Professionalism Framework**

Thai and Illinois municipal chief administrators also face multiple sources of legitimate expectations. They ideally have to *balance* the four

accountability approaches, as they seek to achieve a high degree of public professionalism in managing municipal government affairs. As discussed earlier, municipal chief administrators serve many roles that reflect the four accountability approaches. Some of these roles however are likely to conflict with other roles. Hence, there is a strong need for municipal chief administrators to balance the demands, expectations, and accountability approaches associated with those roles.

However, balancing multiple accountabilities poses a short, but difficult, question for both scholars and practitioners in public administration: How? Ideally, municipal chief administrators ought to view all four accountability approaches as important. Otherwise, the under- and over-utilization of any accountability approach (es) are likely to threaten the general public welfare-both local and national. This argument is similar to Svava's ethics triangle model which argues against the under- and over-utilization of any single ethical approach to public administration (Svava 2007a). Yet, as Simon (1978) observes, human cognitive ability and attention are limited. Although the concept of balancing multiple accountabilities sounds noble in theory, it is difficult and unclear for the practitioners. Certainly, the chief administrators with a high degree of professionalism are those who consider every type of accountability approach to be "important." However, in this paper, we argue *that municipal chief administrators tend to choose the accountability approach towards which they are oriented as the foundational value of their strategy to balance other accountability approach.* Based on this argument, municipal chief administrators are grouped into five categories of public professionalism. These five types can be ranked in the descending order of desirability:

transformational, policy, procedural, apolitical, and ersatz (Table 1).

**Table 1** Types of Public Professionalism and Characteristics

Type of Public Professionalism	Characteristics
Transformational	All accountability approaches important, with emphasis on professional accountability
Policy	All accountability approaches important, with emphasis on political accountability
Procedural	All accountability approaches important, with emphasis on legal and bureaucratic accountabilities
Apolitical	Emphasis is on the bureaucratic, legal, and professional accountability approaches. Political accountability is underused.
Ersatz	One, two, or three accountability approaches are overused.

*Transformational professionalism* is the ideal type of public professionalism. Municipal chief administrators acting as transformational professional, first and foremost, value professional accountability the most in their integration of other accountability approaches. The mechanisms of professional accountability, including self-scrutiny, expertise, and horizontally based relationship among experts (peer review), is the premise upon which citizens give appointed public officials the discretionary authority and legitimacy through elected officials (Hann and Freeman 1989; Caiden 2000). Similar to the transformational administrators, chief administrators with *policy professionalism* are likely to balance all four accountability approaches, but consider political accountability as more

important than other accountabilities. Policy professionalism is less desirable than transformational professionalism because it considers the chief administrators as primarily advisors and assistants to the elected officials (Moe 1985; Mourtizen and Svava 2002).

*Procedural professionalism* is the third most desirable type of public professionalism that considers the four accountability approaches to be important, but emphasizes the bureaucratic and legal accountabilities. Procedural professionalism is less desirable than policy professionalism because it makes chief administrators similar to national/state government bureaucrats. Public administration literature abounds with theoretical support for procedural professionalism. Kettl and Milward (1996) argue that public administration actually has its origin in law and that public administrators assisted by their knowledge and technological tools are expected to execute the law to the highest professional standard. Similarly, Rosenbloom (1983, 33) asserts that the legal approach of public administration charges public administrators with the duty of “applying and enforcing the law in concrete circumstances.” Beckett and Koenig (2005, 1) also argue that “the administrative concern is law in action.” Public administration is essentially “government telling citizens and businesses what they may and may not do” (Shafritz and Russell 1997, 14).

Municipal chief administrators acting as apolitical professionals consider every accountability approach important, except political accountability or political responsiveness to elected officials. Municipal chief administrators who *exhibit apolitical* professionalism evoke Max Weber’s vision of *Beamtenherrschaft* (centripetal administrative authority) in which bureaucrats take over the role of democratic government and

deviate from political objectives established by democratically elected officials (Page 1985; Lane 2005). The apolitical professionals are different from the procedural professionals in their unwillingness to interact with local elected officials. If the procedural professionals thought the mayors' policies did not comply with the national/state laws and regulations, he would likely educate the local elected officials about relevant laws and regulations and instruct them to come up with the new policies. On the other hand, if a similar circumstance arose, apolitical professionals would be unlikely to communicate with the local elected officials and settle any problem in court or ask national/state government agencies to rectify the situation.

*Ersatz public professionalism* is the least desirable form of professionalism. According to the 1995 Merriam-Webster's dictionary of English usage, ersatz means "being a usually artificial and inferior substitute or imitation." Tukur (2004) distinguishes between real and ersatz professionalism, as he discusses the Nigerian bureaucratic behavior. As Tukur (2004, 3) describes, ersatz public professionals conduct themselves as "appendages to ruling groups, parties, and the monied class," show no respect for democratic institutions, and do not imbibe the values of equity and justice. On the other hand, real public professionals are "gentlemen, friends of the people, genuinely learned, and transparently upright" (Tukur 2004, 6). They identify themselves with the democratic institutions and always strive to ensure that their actions are legal, equitable, and ethical.

Ersatz public professionalism connotes the lowest degree of public professionalism. Ersatz public professionals underutilize one or more



accountability approaches or are not aware of any accountability approach at all when making decisions. For instance, a chief administrator is an ersatz public professional if he/she only serves the mayor, but fails to use other accountability approaches, such as the legal, bureaucratic, or professional accountability.

Moreover, in this study, we examine the municipal chief administrators' characteristics that explain their degree of public professionalism. At the institutional level, in the public administration literature, there are several theoretical and empirical works on the impact of the form of municipal government on the municipal chief administrators' administrative behavior (e.g., Svava 1990; Peters 1995; Mouritzen and Svava 2002; Lichter 2008). Classic works founded upon the politics-administration dichotomy advocated the council-manager form of government, pointing out that the chief administrators in the council-manager cities enjoy substantial discretionary authority in managing the internal affairs of municipal government without having to be involved in partisan politics (Peters 1995). However, in recent years, empirical evidence appears to challenge the politics-administration dichotomy doctrine and its emphasis on the institutional form of government (Montjoy and Watson 1995). In this study, the institutional form of government is determined by who in the municipality holds the ultimate authority to appoint and dismiss the chief administrator (Table 2).

Deviating from the conventional focus on the institutional form of government, Knoke (1981), Wollebaek and Selle (2002), and Stolle and Rochon (1998) argue that professional associations fosters interpersonal trust and inculcate the good governance norm among their members.

However, Svava and Terry (2009) note the lack of scholarly works on the influence of membership in professional associations on public officials’ degree of professionalism. Due to the dearth of systematic analyses of the role that membership in professional associations plays in enhancing the chief administrators’ public professionalism, we include membership in professional associations as the other major factor in the public professionalism model.

**Table 2** Three Institutional Forms of Municipal Government in This Study

<b>Form of Government</b>	<b>of Appointment, Transfer, Dismissal Procedures</b>
<i>Council-manager city</i>	The councils appoint and dismiss the CMs.
<i>Mayor-council city</i>	In Illinois, the mayors appoint the CAOs with the councils’ consent. The employment contract specifies the dismissal process.
<i>Thai municipality</i>	The Department of Local Administration (DoLA) appoints MAs. The Local Government Personnel Commission holds the authority to dismiss them. The mayors have the legal authority to ask the provincial commission on municipal government personnel and standards to initiate the transfer of MAs

We also control for other potential factors. Barrilleaux, Feiock, and Crew (1992) identify several characteristics and correlate them with the level of professionalism in state government. Among those key characteristics, the level of education and skills of state administrators constitute the core of administrative expertise that enhances public professionalism. Barrilleaux

and his colleagues also find a positive correlation between population size and degree of public professionalism. In explaining this relationship, Sherwood (1997) argues that a bureaucracy in a large community tends to be costly; particularly in the metropolitan setting, the bureaucrats enjoy greater merit protection and are likely to be guided by a professional code of ethics.

Years in the chief administrator position could also influence the degree of professionalism because it tends to correlate with experiential learning by individual administrators. Cyert and March (1963), March and Olsen (1975), and March (1978) refer to experiential learning as adaptive rationality which individuals use in their decision making as they deal with drifts in environmental or taste attributes. Chief administrators who have been working in city government for a long time are likely to be flexible in dealing with complex administrative and political problems. Two other factors are the home rule status of an Illinois municipality<sup>3</sup> and the relationship between mayors and chief administrators. Hypothetically, the chief administrators in the home rule municipalities are more likely to use their specialized knowledge than those in the non-home rule jurisdictions.

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<sup>3</sup> In Illinois, The home rule authority provides a jurisdiction with a higher degree of administrative discretion, particularly in terms of revenue diversification. , the 1970 constitution confers upon municipalities over 25,000 in population the home rule authority which includes all the governing powers, except those explicitly denied to them by the General Assembly and the State Supreme Court. The home rule municipalities are no longer required to acquire the General Assembly's "enabling legislation" to solve their municipal government problems (Banovetz and Kelty 1987). However, not all municipalities have become home rule units. A home rule municipality must meet the population requirement or get citizen approval through a referendum

Also, the chief administrator who maintains a regular working relationship with the mayor or president of the municipal council would be more capable of using the formal knowledge and managerial expertise to assist the elected officials in formulating policies and implement those policies in the community's best interest.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Variable Operationalization**

Questions from scenario section in the survey questionnaire are used to operationalize public professionalism, which is the dependent variable in this study. Public professionalism is treated as an ordered categorical variable with five distinct categories: transformational professionalism, policy professionalism, procedural professionalism, apolitical professionalism, and ersatz public professionalism. The transformational professionalism is the most desirable and ersatz professionalism the least desirable. Table 3 describes in detail how the operationalization method for each type of public professionalism was carried out. In the survey, respondents were asked to rank each accountability approach from “not important at all” (1) to “very important” (4).

**Table 4** Operationalization of the Dependent Variable Using Questions from the Scenario Section in the Survey Questionnaire

Type of Public Professionalism	Professional Accountability	Political Accountability	Legal Accountability	Bureaucratic Accountability
<i>Transformational</i>	Responses are “very important” (4).	Responses are “important” (3) or “very important” (4).	Responses are “important” (3) or “very important” (4).	Responses are “important” (3) or “very important” (4).
<i>Policy</i>	Responses are “important” (3).	Responses are “very important” (4).	Responses are either “important” (3) or “very important” (4).	Responses are either “important” (3) or “very important” (4).
<i>Procedural</i>	Responses are “important” (3).	Responses are “important” (3).	Responses are “important” (3) or “very important” (4).	Responses are “important” (3) or “very important” (4).
<i>Apolitical</i>	Responses are “important” (3) or “very important” (4).	Responses are “not important” (1) or “somewhat important” (2).	Responses are “important” (3) or “very important” (4).	Responses are “important” (3) or “very important” (4).
<i>Ersatz</i>	<p><b>Two criteria:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Respondents rated all accountability questions either “not important at all” (1) or “somewhat important” (2). “not important at all”</li> <li>2. Respondents rated one, two, or three accountability questions either “not important at all” (1) or “somewhat important” (2). However, if respondents rated political accountability (1) or “somewhat important” (2), but rated others “important” (3) or “very important” (4), their responses would be labeled “politically neutral public professionalism.”</li> </ol>			

In this study, two major independent variables are: (1) the form of municipal government and (2) membership in public official associations. We operationalize the form of government variable by the way in which the chief administrators' responsibilities are determined and by who holds the authority to appoint and dismiss the chief administrators. In the Illinois council-manager form of government, the CM is appointed by the city council and his/her responsibilities determined by the state statute. In an Illinois mayor-council city, the mayor or village president with the city council's consent appoints the CAO (Lichter 2008). However, the CAO's responsibilities are determined by municipal ordinance, not the state statute. This means that the local governing body in a mayor-council city could vote to limit or expand the CAO's responsibilities. On the other hand, the local governing body in a council-manager city does not have as much authority to determine the CM's responsibilities. Thai MAs are appointed by the Interior Ministry and remain members of the national civil service. However, Thai mayors can petition to the provincial commission on municipal government personnel standards to transfer the MAs to other municipalities. Thus, similar to the Illinois mayor-council form, the Thai Municipality Act of 1953 (amended 2001) leaves the right to determine the MAs' responsibilities to the elected mayors.

The second variable-membership in professional associations-is operationalized by using the survey results. The Thai respondents are asked whether they belong to the National Municipal League of Thailand (NMLT) and the Municipal Officers' Association of Thailand (MOAT), while the Illinois chief administrators are asked whether they belong to any professional associations.

Apart from these major independent variables, I included other controlled variables as suggested by the empirical and theoretical works discussed earlier. These variables are each municipality's population size, tenure as chief administrator, a municipality's home rule or non-home rule status, level of education, informal and regular working relationship with elected officials, managerial skills, and technical skills.

Using factor analysis, the technical skill index was found to consist of ten variables. The managerial skill index was found to consist of eight variables. The factor loadings for each index are presented in Table 5. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values for the technical skill and managerial indices were 0.915 and 0.861, respectively. A Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value between 0.7 and 0.8 indicates a high degree of internal consistency or reliability of an index (Field 2006). As the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values for both managerial and technical skill indices are above 0.8, they exceed the reliability range.

### **Data Collection**

A survey instrument is employed in this study. For the survey data on Thai municipal administrators, the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) supplied the national survey results. In 2009, the NIDA research team used a survey questionnaire to explore the perceptions of multiple accountabilities among the Thai municipal administrators. In 2010, we used the NIDA survey questionnaire to examine the perceptions of multiple accountabilities among 192 Illinois municipal chief administrators. Several questions in the survey questionnaire were however modified to reflect the nuances of Illinois municipal government.

For the interview data, the NIDA research team conducted face-to-face interviews with 62 Thai municipal administrators between 2009 and 2010. We used the same interview questions to interview 30 Illinois city managers and administrators in 2010. The majority of interviews with the Illinois chief administrators were conducted on the telephone. We only conducted four face-to-face interviews with Illinois chief administrators.

**Table 5** Technical and Managerial Indices

<b>Managerial Skill Index</b>		<b>Technical Skill Index</b>	
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Factor Loading</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Factor Loading</i>
Ethics policy	0.600	Auditing procedures	0.613
Interorganizational communication	0.813	Budgetary process	0.688
Interpersonal communication	0.685	Community economic development	0.726
Leadership	0.629	Conflict resolution	0.765
Problem-solving process	0.722	Decision making	0.754
Contract/project management	0.741	Interdepartmental coordination	0.736
Public relations	0.450	Employee motivation	0.754
Standard operating procedures	0.436	Employee participation	0.726
<i>Cronbach's</i> : 0.861		Employee performance assessment	0.631
		Employee selection	0.608
		<i>Cronbach's</i> : 0.915	



Although the survey questionnaire contains the general and scenario-related questions, we only used the survey data from the scenario section because using a scenario to examine public professionalism helps overcome the social desirability effect of a survey instrument. In a discussion of cross-cultural management research, Smith and colleagues (2008) suggest that the scenario-based approach helps enhance internal validity of the survey results by reducing inherent limitations in the survey method, such as response biases and fixed responses. Moreover, if open-ended questions are included, the approach could also enrich an understanding of the respondents' solution to a scenario (Smith, Peterson, and Thomas 2008).

## **Results and Discussion**

The five types of public professionalism are arranged in degree of desirability. Therefore, the degree of public professionalism-an ordinal dependent variable-requires an ordinal logistic regression (OLR). However, there are two issues with using the OLR model to analyze my data: (1) zero and small frequencies and (2) the violation of the proportional odds assumption. To deal with these two issues, we use the generalized ordinal logistic model (GOLM) which relaxes the proportional odds assumption (Fahrmeir and Tutz 1994). A GOLM analysis is done to determine which variables impact and predict the Thai MAs, Illinois CAOs, and Illinois CMs' degree of public professionalism. As form of government is a categorical variable, we have to make a statement about the effect of a specific category in comparison to some other category (Norūsis 1997). Thus, an indicator-variable coding scheme is used to create two separate

variables (TH\_MA and IL\_CM) to analyze the relationship between form of government and degree of public professionalism. With this method, the variable TH\_MA is the indicator variable for the Thai municipal government form, coded 1 for Thai MAs and 0 otherwise. The variable IL\_CM is the indicator variable for the Illinois council-manager form, coded 1 for Illinois CMs and 0 otherwise. The reference category is the mayor-council form.

### Form of Government

Statistical results in Table 5 reveal that form of government affects the chief administrators' public professionalism in a complex way. The GOLS coefficient for the form of government variable suggest that compared to Illinois CAOs, the odds of a Thai MA having a high degree of public professionalism decrease by a factor of 0.15<sup>4</sup> ( $p = 0.01$ ) in the GOLS model, holding all other variables constant. In other words, when faced with specific problem, Illinois CAOs exhibited a greater degree of public professionalism than Thai MAs. On the contrary, the indicator variable IL\_CM is not significantly related to the degree of public professionalism. This means that form of government has no impact on the Illinois CAOs and CMs' degree of public professionalism when they face a specific problem.

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<sup>4</sup> The odd ratio is the natural logarithm base (e) raised to the power of the exponent (b), where the exponent (b) is the parameter estimate. In this case, b for the coefficient is -1.91. The odd ratio is  $e^{-1.91}$  or 0.15.

**Table 6** GOLM Analysis of Thai MAs, Illinois CAOs, and Illinois CMs’ Degree of Public Professionalism

Variable		GOLM	
		B (SE)	Sig.
Thresholds <sup>1</sup>	[1=Ersatz]	21.82	1.00
	[2=Apolitical]	(24.05E+3)	1.00
	[3=Procedural]	22.06	1.00
	[4=Policy]	(24.05E+3)	1.00
TH_MA	[1=Thai MA]	22.41	0.01
IL_CM	[1=Illinois CM]	(24.05E+3)	0.27
Membership	[1 = Yes, 0 = No]	22.77	0.03
Informal relations	[1=Yes, 0=No]	(24.05E+3)	0.01
Home Rule	[1=Yes, 0=No]	-1.91 (0.70)	0.49
Education	[1=High School]	0.63 (0.57)	1.00
	[2=Baccalaureate]	0.64 (0.26)	1.00
	[3=Graduate]	0.69 (0.67)	1.00
2009	Population	0.41 (0.60)	0.20
Tenure		44.73	0.54
Technical skill		(30.74E+3)	0.13
Managerial skill		24.71	0.00
		(24.05E+3)	
		23.22	
		(24.05E+3)	
		1.04E-5	
		(8.06E-6)	
		-0.00 (0.00)	
		-0.36 (0.24)	
		0.68 (0.24)	
		<i>Omnibus Test</i> : $\chi^2 = 59.96$ , d.f. = 12, <i>p</i> = 0.00, Deviance ratio = 0.69	
Note: Thresholds are intercepts for all but the highest level of the ordinal dependent variable.			

## Membership in Professional Associations

With regard to the impact of membership in professional associations on the degree of public professionalism, the GOLM coefficient reveals a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ( $p = 0.03$ ). That is, controlling for other variables, being a member in professional associations increases the odds of a municipal chief administrator demonstrating transformational public professionalism by a factor of 1.90 ( $e^{0.64} = 1.90$ ). As expected by theory, membership in professional associations enhances the degree of public professionalism among municipal chief administrators in Thailand and Illinois.

## Other Statistically Significant Variables

Several other variables are significantly related to the degree of public professionalism. The informal relations variable (which indicates whether a municipal chief administrator has informal working relations with the mayor) shows a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable ( $p = 0.01$ ). Controlling for other variables, having informal working relations with the mayor increases the odds of a municipal chief administrator demonstrating transformational professionalism by a factor of 1.99<sup>5</sup> ( $p = 0.01$ ). In other words, Thai MAs, Illinois CAOs, and Illinois CMs who have informal working relations with the mayors exhibited a greater degree of public professionalism than those who do not.

The managerial skill variable is also significantly related to the degree of public professionalism. As previously discussed, the managerial

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<sup>5</sup> As the parameter estimate (b) is 0.68, the odds ratio is  $e^{0.68}$  or 1.97.

skill variable is a composite variable that measures the municipal chief administrators' proficiency in ethics policy, interorganizational communication, interpersonal communication, leadership, problem-solving process, contract/project management, public relations, and standard operating procedures. The GOLM model indicates that for each one-point increase in this composite variable, the odds of a municipal chief administrator showing a high degree of public professionalism increase by a factor of 1.97<sup>6</sup> ( $p = 0.00$ ). These results suggest that proficiency in each of the managerial skills increases the municipal chief administrators' degree of public professionalism.

### **Analysis of the Thai and Illinois Chief Administrators' Qualitative Survey Responses**

Based on the statistical results, form of government contributes to the differences in public professionalism between Thai MAs and Illinois CAOs. However, Illinois CAOs and CMs are not statistically different in their public professionalism. In other words, form of government does not affect the CAOs and CMs' ability to balance multiple accountability approaches. In-depth responses provided by the Thai and Illinois municipal chief administrators reveal their different perceptions of multiple accountabilities.

Our survey questionnaire contains the flood scenario section in which municipal chief administrators were asked to provide a detailed description of what they would do to rectify the hypothetical situation. In the flood scenario, the mayor unilaterally entered into a

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<sup>6</sup> As the parameter estimate (b) is 0.68, the odds ratio is  $e^{0.68}$  or 1.97.

procurement contract with a local construction company that would distribute construction materials to the flood victims. The reimbursement cost exceeded the amount allowed by the municipal ordinance, and the state/central government guidelines.

In their in-depth responses, the Illinois CAOs and CMs demonstrated their strong conscience of professional accountability and acute awareness of the need to follow the state government's operating procedures. In the flood situation, violation of the bureaucratic accountability mechanisms, especially the state purchasing and reimbursement policies, could jeopardize the community's long-term financial interest. As one of the Illinois city managers from a home rule city pointed out:

Going around the state procedures and regulations implies that we may be doing something in the grey area. With that, we have to be careful that what we do is not compromising or putting the community's interest at risk. *I do not view myself as an overt bureaucrat. But, I am not going to put myself and the community at risk of financial penalty or other penalties.* (emphasis added)

Therefore, regardless of the contractual agreement with the vendor, the majority of Illinois chief administrators felt it was safer to abide by the state reimbursement policy than the legally-binding contract. Several chief administrators explained that the procurement contract was not legitimate in the first place. One of the Illinois chief administrators argued that:

“the procurement contract is not a factor given that purchases were most likely not made in accordance with the contract (e.g., not authorized by board action, no purchase order, not purchased by a village employee).”

Moreover, some Illinois jurisdictions rely on many grant projects from the state government, so they might be inclined to religiously follow the state policies and procedures. If the reimbursement limit were also mandatory, then it would have the legal accountability dimension. An Illinois chief administrator asserted that it was difficult for him to tell the difference between bureaucratic accountability and legal accountability, especially when the state policies and procedures are mandates. Since the mandates are legal requirements, the chief administrators have no choice but to abide by the letter and spirit of those laws. On the other hand, if it is only a recommendation, the decision could boil down to the relationship between that particular jurisdiction and the state government.

Overall, Illinois chief administrators cannot take state mandates and procedures lightly because those mandates and procedures are different from the city ordinances which are amendable by the city councils. As one of the city administrators contended, if he feels the city ordinances have become obsolete, he would advise the council to adjust them so they would not hinder the city operations. However, if the state mandates and laws are obsolete and impractical, there is nothing much he and the city council could do. The State of Illinois is sovereign and has the ultimate authority over its local governments.

Similarly, the Thai MAs considered the bureaucratic accountability approach to be an important factor in their decision making. In their views, commitment to the procurement contract with the local vendors (legal

accountability) is not as important as adherence to the central government reimbursement regulations. Similar to their counterparts in Illinois, the Thai MAs saw the legal contract with local vendors as illegitimate because it did not follow the interior ministry's procurement procedures in the first place. A Thai municipal administrator stated that:

Even though the Municipality Act of 1953 [amended 2001] has given much discretionary authority to municipal governments, it clearly states that all local government purchases and procurements must abide by the MoI procedures and directives.

Therefore, in the area of purchasing and procurement, the central government procedures supercede the municipal ordinances and even any contractual commitment made between the municipal government officials and local businesses. Failure to follow the central government procedures carries with it financial penalties for municipal government as a whole, as well as penalties for each individual municipal official involved (e.g., demotion, salary reduction, expulsion from the national civil service). Public agencies in charge of fighting corruption-National Anti-Corruption Commission and the Public Finance Audit Office-have been actively investigating financial irregularities in local governments on an annual basis.

Regarding political accountability, the Thai and Illinois chief administrators did not exhibit much difference in their perceptions. In the flood scenario, form of government does not appear to influence the chief administrators' perceptions of the mayoral directives. Also, noteworthy are the similarity and the difference between the Thai and Illinois officials' perceptions of bureaucratic and legal accountability approaches. With



regard to the similarity, the majority of survey respondents indicated that they could not differentiate between bureaucratic accountability (adherence to the state/central government reimbursement guidelines) and legal accountability (honoring the legally-binding contract with local vendors). As previously discussed, the Illinois state and Thai central governments are sovereign and still possess the constitutional authority over local governments.

However, Thai and Illinois officials differed from one another in their interpretations of legal and bureaucratic accountabilities. For Thai municipal chief administrators, legal accountability is bureaucratic accountability and vice versa. A majority of Thai municipal chief administrators expressed their determination to abide by the interior ministry's reimbursement regulations due to the fear of an investigation by the Public Finance Audit Office. In fact, Thai officials explicitly stated that because they are civil servants (or central government bureaucrats), their decisions must be grounded in the law. On the contrary, the large majority of Illinois chief administrators repeatedly referred to the communities' long-term financial interests and their professional associations' code of ethics. Professional accountability approach emphasizes the use of technical knowledge and adherence to the code of ethics as the foundations of public administrative behavior. The majority of Illinois chief administrators in this study associated legal accountability with professional accountability. As quoted earlier, Illinois officials were concerned that if they followed the mayor's unilateral agreement with the local vendors, the financial penalties sanctioned by the state/central government would put their communities' solvency at risk.

In the statistical model, membership in professional associations also influences the chief administrators' public professionalism. Specifically, when faced with the flood problem in the survey, municipal chief administrators who are members of professional associations showed a greater degree of public professionalism than those who are not members of professional associations. Nevertheless, the chief administrators' in-depth responses expose nuances of the relationship between membership in professional associations and degree of public professionalism. The Thai MAs expressed their doubt about the effectiveness of training programs and ethics code offered by the National Municipal League of Thailand (NMLT) and Municipal Officer Association of Thailand (MOAT), arguing that the two associations do not help them cope with many administrative problems that have emerged after decentralization. Specifically, the two associations do not adequately provide them with practical managerial skills or professional code of conduct to cope with real-world problems.

The Illinois CAOs and CMs' views of the ICMA and ILCMA training programs were not consistent. A large number of Illinois CAOs and CMs reported that they do not have time to attend those training programs. Meanwhile, many did not think that those training programs are relevant to their communities' needs and problems. Thus, they were uncertain that they would benefit from leaving their administrative responsibilities to attend those meetings and conferences. On the other hand, the Illinois CAOs and CMs considered the ICMA and ILCMA code of ethics to be both practical and helpful in enabling Illinois chief administrators to manage municipal government affairs. In addition, the Illinois CAOs and CMs who are not ICMA or ILCMA members indirectly benefit from the

professional knowledge and code of ethics offered by the two professional associations. Even without formally joining the two associations, the non-member chief administrators are aware of their professional codes of ethics, agree with them, and use them as moral compass in their work. These chief administrators also have access to various training materials and publications that are available on the ICMA and ILCMA websites.

In sum, these empirical findings address the two research questions regarding the nature of public professionalism among Thai and Illinois municipal chief administrators, which is measured by the chief administrators' ability to balance political, legal, bureaucratic, and professional accountability approaches. In this study, our comparison of the perceptions of public professionalism among Thai MAs, Illinois CAOs, and Illinois CMs yields empirical evidence that reveals the positive influences of institutional design of local government and membership in professional associations over the municipal chief administrators' public professionalism.

Nevertheless, two important observations are noteworthy. First, the use of Romzek and Dubnick's multiple-accountabilities framework may not be the most effective operationalizing strategy for the study of public professionalism at the local government level. In the Thai and Illinois contexts, the majority of municipal chief administrators could not distinguish between legal and bureaucratic accountabilities. In practice, the distinction between the legal and bureaucratic accountability approaches is blurred. Also, based on this study, legal accountability has both the local and national aspects, which the Romzek and Dubnick framework fails to capture.

Second, future studies of local public professionalism could benefit from a more rigorous method of operationalizing the impact of professional

associations on administrative behavior. More importantly, efforts should be made to ensure the appropriateness of the social capital concept in the Thai local government context. Granted, the two associations of Thai municipal government officials are still under the interior ministry's influence and such influence appears to affect the municipal government officials' public professionalism. However, are there other factors that shape the municipal chief administrators' views of multiple accountabilities? Do the Thai cultural values matter? What is the definition of "Thai culture"? What cultural values contribute to the different perceptions of public professionalism among Thai municipal government officials? Do those cultural values also influence the internal working of Thai professional associations?

## **Conclusion**

Apart from addressing the two research questions, our empirical findings offer several contributions to the public administration literature and potential policy implications that are relevant to the Thai municipal government context.

First, this study contributes to the studies of accountability in public organizations, especially in municipal government. Classic public administration literature, without empirical investigation, implicates several theoretical arguments that indirectly show the multi-faceted nature of democratic accountability (e.g., Friedrich 1940; Finer 1941). In recent years, public administration scholars have offered empirical evidence to demonstrate the complexity of holding government agencies accountable

(Romzek and Dubnick 1987; Kearns 1995; Dunn and Legge 2001). Dunn and Legge (2001) in particular show that American local government officials must deal with multiple expectations and social actors in their work.

This study extends these theoretical and empirical works by laying out the public professionalism framework that combines both Svara's ethics triangle model and Romzek and Dubnick's concept of multiple accountabilities. In order to maximize local public welfare, the public professionalism framework emphasizes that municipal chief administrators-the highest appointed municipal government officials-must balance the political, legal, bureaucratic, and professional accountability approaches in their decisions. Quantitative analysis of the survey responses provides preliminary empirical support for this framework. Overall, this research demonstrates that Thai and Illinois chief administrators who participated in the survey must contend with political, legal, bureaucratic, and professional accountability approaches in decentralized governance.

Second, more than previous research, this study systematically explores the concept of public professionalism. Previous research, without empirical support, argues that public professionalism is a combination of multiple values, each of which has its own legitimacy and potential to advance democratic governance (Waldo 1968; Green, Keller, and Wamsley 1993; Sherwood 1997; Svara 2009). In theoretical terms and by empirical evidence, we explicitly demonstrate that a municipal chief administrator's degree of public professionalism hinges upon his/her ability to balance the four accountability systems in his/her decisions. Also, this study contributes to the public administration literature by offering the taxonomy of public professionalism. The five types of public professionalism are contingent

upon the accountability approach (es) that municipal chief administrators use to balance other accountability approaches and could also be ranked in order of desirability.

Third, besides the contributions to the public administration scholarship in general, preliminary empirical evidence in this study enriches the literature on Thai local public administration by exposing Thai MAs' perceptions of multiple accountabilities after the 1997 decentralization reform.

Fourth, based on the regression results, efforts to further professionalize Thai MAs ought to involve the development of a healthy informal relationship between the mayors and municipal administrators, as well as enhancement of Thai MAs' interpersonal communication skills. In other words, the degree of public professionalism among municipal chief administrators depends on mutual understanding and respect between elected and appointed officials. To gain the local elected officials' respect for their managerial and policy roles, municipal chief administrators must be able to communicate effectively and persuade the elected officials to agree with their recommendations. This is consistent with Banovetz's argument that contemporary local government officials are under political and social pressures to "match their technical competence with human relations skills" (Banovetz 2003, 58).

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