

2015

# Political Leadership and Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Patrick C. Williams

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Walden University

2015

Abstract

Political Leadership and Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy

by

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MBA, Centenary College, 2002

BS, Southern University, 1987

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Applied Management and Decision Sciences

Walden University

August 2015

## Abstract

Municipal leaders in the United States face difficult decisions when prioritizing nonmandated civic projects for funding, especially when operating budgets are restricted. This phenomenological study investigated municipal leaders' decision-making processes in a state in the southern United States, using a conceptual framework based on rational choice theory, bounded rationality, and group decision-making theory. It specifically explored personal and organizational decision-making processes related to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated civic projects via in-depth interviews with a convenience sample of 15 municipal leaders. Thematic analysis identified expert opinions, the time and cost to complete a project, the perceived value relative to expense, and the availability of additional funding sources as themes important to understanding participants' decision-making processes. Organizational factors that were important in these decisions included the need for clearly defined responsibilities and consistency in funding decisions. No clearly defined organizational processes were in place in any of the participants' municipalities, and the participants noted that areas such as infrastructure improvements, traffic congestion, community involvement, and formal processes in their municipalities were in need of improvement. Positive social change can flow from greater governmental transparency through municipal decision makers' adoption of systematic decision-making systems and processes. Positive social change can also result from greater inclusiveness through increased public outreach efforts. Results add to the research base by contributing to a better theoretical understanding of organizational decision-making processes in the municipal context.

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## Dedication

“To God Be the Glory.” I wish to dedicate this dissertation to the woman of my life: my wife, Karanda. You are the one person who constantly supports, encourages and believes in me, all along this journey and quest for what I deem as the elusive PhD. The many times you have read and reread the same paper over and over, making sure I don’t have any misspelled words. You are a very pivotal part in my achieving a goal that I yearn. I will continue to reach for the highest marks as you continue your endless support.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Municipal leaders in the United States play a crucial role in the effective management of civic services that is especially important in a downturn economy. Top-level management of these civic services involves the prioritization of increasingly scarce public funds to meet community needs. This study examined this prioritization in a southern state in the United States where the available resources for nonmandated initiatives are being increasingly squeezed by mandatory funding for special districts and specified services. Prioritization in this state is, as in other U.S. states, also impacted by the need to address longer-term requirements to cover liabilities for pension funding and to address the socioeconomic development of communities.

The decision-making processes involved in the prioritization of municipal funding are little understood due to a general lack of research in this area. There is also a specific research gap in this area of the state examined in this study, hereafter referred to as Magnolia (pseudonym). As a result, a best practice evidence base on which to develop criteria or systems for prioritizing projects is not available, and mayors in this state have little guidance to underpin their decision-making. This contributes to inconsistencies in mayors' actions over time and inconsistencies between municipalities in relation to funding decisions, as well as choices that may not always be in the best long-term interests of the communities being served.

There is a significant need for improved understanding of current approaches to decision-making regarding the prioritization of projects for municipal funding in

the United States, and the development of best practice guidance in this area. This need has become even more pressing due to the financial pressures facing municipalities in Magnolia and across the United States in the years from 2008 to 2015. More efficient management of public sector organizations and their funding allocations is becoming increasingly important for leaders. This is especially true for the leaders of municipalities and other public sector organizations, who are increasingly expected to produce more effective results with increasingly scarce resources (Friedman, 2011; Villadsen, Hansen, & Mols, 2010).

The impact of these pressures on municipal projects in the United States has been well documented. For example, Edon and Landow (2012) stated that “Funding sources have been stagnant or declining in the current Great Recession, affecting essential services as well as capital financing” (p. 59). The economic downturn has so profoundly affected local government that there are now few, if any, specific successes (Callahan, 2012). Pressures on local governments include increasing claims on budgets from government employees’ retirement benefits, increasing costs of health care, an aging population, and uncertainty regarding future demands on budgets and resources (La Plante & Honadle, 2011). Further, there have been major shortfalls in infrastructure investment and reinvestment that also need to be addressed (ICMA, 2012, LaPlante & Honadle, 2011).

From the theoretical perspective of rational choice theory, the decision-making process involves weighing the expected costs and benefits of various options or courses of action in order to identify the optimal way of achieving the desired goals. According to the theory, all individuals act in a rational way based on the

information available to them, and taking into account other constraints such as available resources, opportunity costs and the norms of the institution in which they are employed (Zey, 1998). Rational choice theorists assume that individuals' actions should be consistent with the objectives they hope to achieve (Zey, 1998). This theory contends that individuals have certain preferences and will be motivated by goals that best enable them to meet these preferences (Wandling, 2011). A variation on this theory by Pelikan (2010) acknowledges that individuals have access to different levels and types of information and their ability to make rational decisions will be limited or bounded by the information available to them, resulting in different decisions being made.

Rational choice theorists generally see organizations as having a high level of control over their environment. From this perspective, external factors do not have a high level of influence on decision-making, except by providing information to guide the process. Organizations are seen as being generally able to make those decisions that enable them to meet their desired goals (Williams & Fedorowicz, 2012). This is limitation means that rational choice theory cannot fully explain decision-making in the public sector, especially at municipal level, for several key reasons.

First, the opportunities and limits on municipal decision-making are strongly influenced by the changing political and economic contexts within which the managers of these organizations now operate (Taylor & Cheng, 2012). Socioeconomic conditions beyond the control of municipalities have a significant influence on public service outcomes (Triantis, Sarayia, & Seaver (2010). Like most

leaders, municipal leaders frequently must make management decisions under conditions that are uncertain (Dervishi & Kadriu, 2014). The decision-making process can be influenced by the environment, controlled by external factors, or otherwise influenced by entities such as special interest groups, lobbyists, or higher elected leadership. In my 13 years of professional experience as a consultant and elected official, I have observed that in all local government structures, political concerns have a strong impact on resource allocation, project prioritization, and funding plans (Grant, 2014).

Second, there are nonnegotiable demands on municipal funds. Municipal leaders and managers must devote resources to mandated priorities such as garbage collection, fire protection, police protection, roads, bridges, water, and infrastructure issues. Simultaneously, they must make decisions about how to invest strategically in development in the longer-term interests of the community, and which nonmandated projects to fund in order to achieve this. Municipalities are required by federal law to allocate funds to the No Child Left Behind Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Act, the Clean Air Act, the Homeland Security Act, and the Clean Water Act, for example (National Conference of State Legislatures, NCSL, 2013) .

A rapid growth in mandates since 2000 has led to increased costs for local and state governments. In 2011, the United States Office of Management and Budget noted that the nationwide cost of unfunded mandates to the public, metropolitan areas, and the U.S. states was between \$44 and \$62 billion annually (OMB, 2011). Using a broader definition of unfunded mandates, the NCSL (2013) stated that, within the previous five years, there had been in excess of \$132 billion

annually in unfunded mandates, the responsibility for which has been shifted to local and state governments by Congress.

Much of the mandated demand for local government funding in the United States relates to special districts (Wallace, 2012). The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) defined a special district as an entity in finance and administration that has substantial autonomy, has the character of a government, and is organized. Special districts typically have responsibility for a variety of activities such as “flood control, mosquito control, fire protection, soil conservation, pollution control, libraries, parks, and airports” (Fink & Wagner, 2013, p. 2), but generally are not self-funding. Special districts create unanticipated expenses for local level public sector management (Berman & West, 2012; Smith, 1969). Municipalities are responsible for increasing revenue sources, and special districts are often the recipients of this revenue.

The use of special districts has grown considerably since the 1960s due to a range of factors, with their number more than doubling between 1962 and 2007 to 37,381 across the U.S. (Fink & Wagner, 2013). By 2011, special districts accounted for 41.8% of local government authorities nationwide, with a prevalence as high as 30 special districts per 100,000 residents in states such as Missouri (Killian, 2011). At the time of the study, Magnolia had a relatively low two special districts per 100,000 residents. Special districts present contradictory values and priorities to the municipalities that fund them, and local mayors can thus meet with opposition in their attempts to achieve goals important to the entire metropolitan area, (see Berman & West, 2012).

Apart from these mandated funding responsibilities, municipalities must also decide how to balance longer-term investments in economic development with more immediate priorities. These competing immediate priorities include garbage collection, fire protection, police protection, roads, bridges, water, and infrastructure maintenance. A further long-term requirement is to meet unfunded employee pension obligations, expected to “present a serious fiscal problem to state and local governments in the not-too distant future” (Beermann, 2013, p. 108). Unfunded pension liabilities are a significant financial liability in Magnolia; in 2007, for example, Magnolia’s unfunded pension liability amounted to \$10.979 billion (Coggburn & Kearney, 2010). In addition, Magnolia’s 2007 liabilities also included a further \$19.609 billion of liability for unfunded Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB), according to Pew Center on the States’ 2007 research (as cited in Coggburn & Kearney, 2010).

A factor that complicates decision-making is that the managers and leaders of municipalities often plan in increments of four years, in accordance with the length of government terms. This incremental planning leads to inconsistencies in the decision-making process. Promoting the public good, which is the traditional role of government, is a long-term issue (Scholten, 2009). But rather than acting according to long-term objectives, as rational choice theory would suggest (Zey, 1998), municipal leaders and managers may establish short-term funding priorities or act in ways that are not consistent with established mandates (Brunsson, 2002).

The third factor that limits the applicability of classic theories of decision-making to public sector management is that municipal decisions are not made by

municipal mayors in isolation. Municipal mayors' decision-making process is complicated by the involvement of other municipal stakeholders, and is shaped by techniques or systems specific to that organizational environment (Scholten, 2009). Ammarapala (2007) stated that the majority of the decisions made by leaders in general derive from a group decision-making process, which can be complicated due to multiple concurrent objectives. However Kugler, Kausel, and Kocher (2012) found that group decision-making is more rational than individual decision-making. Mayors' decisions, then, are constrained by the need to be responsive and responsible to governing bodies such as city councils.

The interests of private sector and nonprofit sector stakeholders are another factor in municipal decision-making, especially as there is now a consensus that municipalities are struggling to provide needed public services because of operating shortfalls (International City/County Management Association [ICMA], 2011; Kellian, 2011; Pollitt, 2010; Random & Newman, 2010). When funds are scarce, leaders must look to these private organizations to meet human service needs. Edon and Landow (2012) noted that donations from private entities become more important when other available resources become scarce; these donations can be used to fund services and capital-intensive projects (Kettl, 2015). In an economic downturn, nonprofit organizations also often play a major role as providers of human services.

The complicating effects of these factors on municipal decision-making create a pressing need for primary research to provide a more accurate understanding of how this decision-making occurs in practice. There is also a

pressing need to provide an evidence base from which best practice guidance can be developed. This is important because the methods that leaders use to prioritize funding and to rank programs have a significant effect on performance and service delivery at the municipal level. Established theories of decision-making can be used as a general framework to study this phenomenon but do not sufficiently explain it.

To summarize, researchers have examined ways in which government leaders prioritize and organize (Orr, 2009). Sound strategic decision-making impacts financial sustainability, though examples of this practice in local government contexts are hard to find (Callahan, 2012). In particular, it is not yet known how strategic prioritization manifests among the executive leadership in municipalities in “Magnolia,” a state in the southern part of the United States. To address this research gap, this qualitative, phenomenological study investigated decision-making processes relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated civic projects in Magnolia. It was specifically designed to identify factors that influence these processes through in-depth interviews with municipal leaders. The study design was crafted in order to address the need for improved understanding of how economic downturn conditions impact decisions related to civic services in Magnolia. The findings of this study offer insight into the best avenues for advancing policies and practices related to Magnolia municipalities’ long-term priorities. Social change may be achieved when elected municipal leaders are able to meet citizens’ needs without exceeding their limited budgets.

In the remainder of this chapter, the background of the problem and the problem statement are presented to identify the reason the study was conducted and

to identify the information gaps that it addressed. These sections are followed by the purpose statement and nature of the study. The assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study are then discussed. Definitions, research questions, and significance of the study follow, and the conceptual framework is described. A summary concludes the chapter.

### **Background of the Problem**

Understanding the factors that go into decisions on how resources are allocated is important for ensuring that the public sector in Magnolia remains financially sustainable and accountable to the citizens it serves in difficult economic times. Balancing budgets while continuing to meet the public's needs is an increasingly important function of municipal management. Insights into the complex process of balancing budgets are expected to be especially important if the current economic uncertainty continues.

In the face of tight municipal budgets and competing pressures for funding, there is also likely to be growing public demand for increased transparency of decision-making processes used for prioritization purposes. Managers need to ensure that they can document and share systems with the public, as well as employing them effectively within the organization. Some research has already been conducted on processes of prioritization among government leaders. Orr (2009) researched the traditions used by local governments when they prioritize, mobilize, and organize. Similarly, Christensen and Skinner (2009) examined program prioritization and the involvement of citizens in ranking the relative importance of programs and placing them into priority tiers. In general, however, researchers have not addressed

financial sustainability combined with strategic decision-making. These topics have only been addressed in separate studies that do not examine prioritization processes. Consequently, little is known about how municipal decision-makers balance priorities.

For example, Callahan (2012) examined the importance of developing strategies for the achievement of fiscal sustainability at local government level, and developed four best-practice case studies from Southern California. Mitchell (2011) provided information on when and why leaders are often inconsistent when making strategic decisions, based on empirical research with a sample of technology firms. Mitchell found that managers with greater metacognitive experience are less likely to be inconsistent in their decision-making, but that inconsistency is often the result of a hostile external environment.

Multiple studies have emphasized that there is a gap in the public management literature in relation to the decision-making processes of leaders (Andersen, 2010; Hansen & Villadsen, 2010; ICMA, 2011; Teelken, Ferlie, & Dent, 2012). Some have attributed this to the commonly held view that decision-making in public administration is so tightly restricted by regulations and bureaucracy that most decisions are pre-determined (Vogel & Masal, 2012), but the lack of research in this area means that this view cannot be substantiated by evidence. These examples suggest that there is a strong body of research in topics tangentially related to the topic of this study, but that the factors that influence strategic prioritization among municipal leaders have not been studied in-depth.

The literature review process for this study did not identify any previous research that specifically examined the role of municipal managers and leaders in strategic prioritization of resources in Magnolia municipalities. This is a significant gap in the literature and represents an evidence gap that may severely hinder the ability of Magnolia municipal managers to improve the quality and efficiency of their decision-making. The present study was needed to address these research gaps and to contribute insight that could lead to more efficient planning and management on the part of Magnolia mayors and, ultimately, better responses to civic needs in all economic conditions.

### **Problem Statement**

The general problem addressed by this study was the void in relation to research on leadership and decision-making in public administration (ICMA, 2012; Vogel & Masal (2012). This void exists especially in relation to Magnolia, where very little public management research has ever been conducted. The specific problem was that the political and economic contexts within which municipal mayors now operate, in Magnolia and across the United States, are inherently likely to result in inefficiencies and inconsistencies in the decision-making process regarding the prioritization of nonmandated projects owing to the impact of the recent economic downturn that began in 2008. Callahan (2012) argued that the downturn may have affected local governments so profoundly that, in the ensuing years, there have been few clear-cut successes in accomplishing nonmandated goals.

The problem of shifting priorities in local government is a nationwide issue in the United States. Despite the strong consensus regarding the existence of the

problem, however, little research has been conducted to investigate the factors that influence resource allocation decisions at the municipal level. This situation represents a significant gap in available literature, which, if addressed, could lead to positive social change through improvement in public services.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the present qualitative, phenomenological interview study was to investigate decision-making processes relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated civic projects in Magnolia and to identify factors that influence these, based on in-depth interviews with municipal leaders. The objective was to investigate the views of municipal leaders on the effectiveness of current decision-making processes and on how these might be improved in order to increase consistency and quality of decision-making in their respective municipalities.

The intent was to develop best practice guidance based on the findings that may be used by current and future municipal leaders across Magnolia and elsewhere, to improve strategic decision-making and reduce inconsistencies in resource allocation decisions. It was expected that the research findings would be of practical value in the development of decision-making criteria, tools, and systems that both simplify the decision-making process and make it more robust. For example, based on the findings of the study, it may be possible to develop standardized prioritization criteria or ranking systems for recommended use by municipalities when determining how to allocate available funding to nonmandatory projects. This could help maximize the value that can be generated from increasingly scarce municipal resources, and ensure that funding decisions are justified and defensible in the

context of competing priorities. Social change impacts include the possibility of greater public involvement in the decision-making process as well as improved delivery of public services as a result of clearer decision-making processes.

### **Research Questions**

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, a number of research questions were developed to guide the process of data collection and analysis. These were intended to help ensure that the study addressed the full range of factors that might potentially influence municipal decision-making regarding funding of nonmandated civic projects, based on a comprehensive review of relevant theoretical and empirical literature. Five research questions were used to guide the study, as follows:

**Research Question 1:** What are the factors that influence municipal leaders' personal decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in public sector management?

**Research Question 2:** What are the factors that are perceived to influence organizational decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in municipal public sector management in Magnolia.?

**Research Question 3:** What organizational systems or processes are used in decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in municipal public sector management in Magnolia.?

**Research Question 4:** How do the research participants perceive the effectiveness of current decision-making related to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in management of their municipal administrations?

**Research Question 5:** How can the decision-making processes of municipalities related to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects be improved?

These research questions were used to guide the design of the interview protocol (Appendix B). Each main research question was converted into a number of corresponding open-ended questions for use when conducting semi structured interviews with the research sample of municipal leaders. The research questions also were used as a general framework for use when conducting thematic analysis of the research data generated from interviews.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The use of a conceptual framework incorporating various established theories and models of decision-making helped ensure that the study was well grounded in existing knowledge and understanding of this area, while informing the design of the study and the methodological approach to be used. According to the definition put forward by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) a conceptual framework sets forth the main topics to be studied and describes their relationships. A conceptual framework is an important aspect of any research study, which draws on existing theories and knowledge to help guide the research design and enable the researcher to identify and focus on issues already known to be of relevance to the phenomenon of interest.

Rational choice theory provided a basic foundation for conceptual framework of this study. This classic theory of decision-making focuses on the importance of examining individual thought processes and the various factors that

influence or constrain them (Wandling, 2011). It is grounded in an economics-based perspective, which assumes that individuals carry out rational calculations of the likely costs and benefits of alternative decisions or courses of action in pursuit of their goals before making the choice expected to maximize the benefits and reduce the costs. From this perspective, decisions can be understood by taking into account the preferences of the decision-maker and the expected consequences of the various choices being made in relation to the achievement of these preferences (Oppenheimer, 2010).

Based on this theoretical perspective, it was assumed for the purpose of the study that municipal leaders would generally make rational choices, within the context of the resources available to accomplish their goals, however these were defined by the decision-maker. Whether or not this is correct, the concepts of goals, choices, and perceived costs and benefits that underpinned this theoretical perspective was believed to be useful for exploring the thought processes of municipal leaders in decision-making about funding priorities.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that decision-making processes are also influenced by constraints including the information available to the decision-maker, and the need to make choices between goals that compete for available resources (Pelikan, 2010). As Herrnstien (1990) stated, rational choice theory provides insights as to how individuals behave for maximum reinforcement, rather than being a prescription for normal behavior. To address this within the present study, the model of Bounded Rationality (March & Simon, 1958; Simon, 1997) was incorporated within the conceptual framework. Bounded Rationality

highlights that, in practice, individuals do not always make fully rational decisions because their thinking is constrained by the information available to them within the time available for decision-making.

Pelikan (2010) refined the model of Bounded Rationality by highlighting that individuals have unequal access to crucial data for decision-making, and that the bounded rationality resulting from this condition explains the different decisions they make and the errors that often occur in decision-making. In the municipal context, organizational decision-making structures and the systems used by different municipal leaders in generating information to inform their decision-making process will act as bounds or constraints on rationality in the decision-making process and therefore needed to be investigated in the study.

Further, it is important to take into account the fact that mayors do not generally make funding decisions in isolation. Within their administrations, the CEO and the department heads are also directly involved in the decision-making process. Reflecting this, the conceptual framework for the study incorporated Marakas' (2003) model of group decision-making.

Marakas (2003) identified five crucial dimensions of group decision-making: structure, roles, processes, style, and norms, all of which can have an influence on the outcomes of decision-making. Marakas categorized three types of decision makers: multiple decision makers, group decision makers, and team decision makers. Among multiple decision makers, equal authority usually does not exist, and no single individual may have the authority to make the final decision. Nevertheless, because each individual is interested in the outcome of the decision,

multiple decision makers are commonly motivated to reach an agreement. In group decision-making, by contrast, the environment is more structured and official. Each member has equal authority and the outcomes frequently are negotiated. Finally, team decision-making is characterized by the presence of one individual who has the authority to make the final decision. However, the decision is still made along with other members who have the same goals, according to Marakas (1998).

Ammarapala (2007) argued that, therefore, the most suitable decision-making tools are the multiple attribute group decision techniques. The utilization of the Multiple Criteria Decision Method (MCDM) allows leadership to consider multiple measures concurrently (Hwang & Yoon, 1981; Keeney & Raiffa, 1993; Turskis & Zavadskas, 2011). However, Ammarapala argued that the MCDM is less than optimal because the multiple measures may be nonquantifiable and in opposition to one another. This author stated that a collaborative decision-making framework could be better than a group framework, supporting clusters of leaders in prioritizing, assessing, investigating, and identifying risk.

The conceptual framework for the study did not pre-determine the nature of the research findings, since the methodological approach adopted within this framework enabled the researcher to examine both individual thought processes and the various organizational and other factors that may influence or constrain these. In this way, the study provided an opportunity to examine the relevance and applicability of established theories of decision-making to the municipal context in Magnolia, while also allowing for new insights and understanding of municipal decision-making to be generated.

The use of a qualitative, phenomenological approach that permits the examination of the personal perceptions and experiences of municipal leaders, while incorporating consideration of the wider organizational context and how this affects decision-making, was used for the study. A qualitative, phenomenological approach is the most appropriate methodological approach since it enabled me to build on but not be constrained by established theoretical approaches to the study of decision-making.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach for the current study. Qualitative rather than quantitative research methods were appropriate, because the aim of the study was to generate explanatory and illustrative information relating to municipal decision-making to achieve in-depth understanding of this phenomenon and how it can be improved in order to increase the quality and sustainability of outcomes. Quantitative methods, which use structured data collection techniques to generate quantitative data, are more appropriate when the objective of a study is to examine the prevalence of certain attitudes, behaviors, or experiences within the population of interest rather than generating in-depth understanding and insights (Babbie, 2012; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014).

Qualitative research has been described as a process of studying a social or human situation by constructing a complex, multi-dimensional verbal image that contains detailed views of participants under natural conditions (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative research is conducted within the interpretivist research tradition, which contends that there is a need to examine the whole rather than partial aspects of a

social phenomenon in order to properly understand it. In contrast, quantitative research, which is inductive and positivist in nature, is intended to test specific hypotheses or theories developed on the basis of prior knowledge, with empirical testing of the relationships between specified variables (Merriam, 2014).

Qualitative research is often used to generate knowledge and understanding of issues on which little previous research has been conducted, such as municipal decision-making. The objective of qualitative researchers is to understand social issues from the perspectives of those who experience them and the meanings that they attribute to their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Willig, 2013). Unlike quantitative research results, the findings of qualitative research cannot be generalized to a wider population, but are important in gaining a rich and detailed understanding of a particular issue, based on the first-hand experiences and views of a relatively small number of individuals directly involved (Borland, 2001; Creswell, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Within the qualitative research approach, there are a number of different approaches to data collection and analysis, defined by Creswell (2012) as Biography (narrative), Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography, and Case Study. The phenomenological approach was used in this study. It is discussed in what follows.

The phenomenological method was selected for use in this study, in which the intention was to generate detailed understanding of the municipal decision-making based on the first hand experiences and perceptions of municipal leaders. According to Creswell (2012), the phenomenological approach is best suited to research designed to understand the real meaning of phenomena.

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) noted that phenomenological study is one in which the researcher tries understand participants' perceptions, views, and ways of seeing a situation. This methodological approach was introduced to social research by Moustakas (1994), who argued that social phenomena can only be understood from the perspectives of those who directly experience them. This form of research is usually based on in-depth interviews, focus groups or other means of obtaining unstructured or semistructured information from the research participants, and data analysis is focused on examining the data for relevant recurring patterns or themes that enhance understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Phenomenological researchers need to be able to suspend their own conceptions or pre-defined notions of the research issue in order to identify and understand the perspectives and interpretations of their research participants, in a process often referred to as *bracketing* (Finlay, 2013). However, the researcher is directly involved in interpreting and drawing conclusions about the research findings. For this reason, it has been argued that phenomenological research involves a two-stage interpretation process, or *double hermeneutic*, in which the research participants first make sense of their individual experiences and the researcher then interprets and makes sense of the research findings relating to the phenomenon as a whole (Larkin, Eatough & Osborn, 2011).

A number of other qualitative research techniques were considered for use in this study but were rejected due to the nature and purpose of the study. Specifically, narrative, ethnographic, and case study methods were deemed inappropriate for the following reasons. Narrative research methods, usually employed in biographical

research, are more suitable for examining the lived experiences of a single individual, based on interviews or documentary evidence (Creswell, 2012).

Similarly, in ethnographic research the focus is on understanding a particular social group or culture, based on direct observation of and interaction with members of the group by the researcher, and usually involving extensive field research. The purpose of ethnographic research is to generate a comprehensive understanding of the overall characteristics or culture of the group under study, rather than a specific phenomenon experienced by them (McCaslin & Scott, 2003).

Finally, the intention of the case study method is to provide detailed understanding of a time-bound group, event, or issue, using multiple methods of data collection (Farquhar, 2012; McCaslin & Scott, 2003; Yin, 2013). None of these qualitative approaches were deemed to be suitable for the current study, in which the objective was to generate in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon rather than an event, person, or group.

In the current study, the qualitative, phenomenological approach was used to investigate the decision-making processes relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated civic projects in Magnolia and identify factors that influence these. In phenomenological research, a reflective and structured analysis process is used to extract from the qualitative data the essence of the phenomenon and what it means for the research participants. This is then used to develop more general findings in accordance with the research questions (McCaslin & Scott, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). In the current study, I used phenomenological methods to identify the critical factors that influence the decision-making process among municipal leaders and within their

organizations, and to understand the complex ways in which the participants prioritize nonmandated programs.

Leedy and Ormond (2010) indicated that phenomenological research is typically conducted using in-depth interviews with a small sample of purposively selected participants. According to Creswell (2012), Polkinghorne (1989) recommended that phenomenological researchers should employ a sample of 5-25 participants who have experienced the situation or phenomenon of interest. Authorities in the fields of phenomenological research concur that sufficient information, or saturation, can be achieved with this number of participants (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Dworkin, 2012; Francis et al., 2010; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). To investigate the phenomenon of municipal decision-making, therefore, I collected data from in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of 15 leaders from different municipalities in the North, South, Central, East, and West regions of the state of Magnolia.

Data were analyzed using inductive content analysis in the NVivo 10 software package (QSR International). This facilitates the process of categorizing and interrogating the data, and also enables the researcher to record observations and notes in the software. The use of qualitative analysis software is helpful not only for coding data and conducting the analysis, but also in providing a comprehensive documented record of these processes, which can be used by third parties to evaluate the validity or dependability of the study and the accuracy of the conclusions reached (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Gephart, 2010).

The methodology of the study is described in detail in Chapter 3. This sets out the method used for sampling research participants for the research and the justification for this approach; the instrument design, the stages of data collection and the analysis and reporting methods. The chapter also discusses the overall research design and methods used, and discusses the reasons for the choice of these, highlighting their benefits by drawing on existing methodological literature.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Analytical Network Process (ANP):* A general theory used to evaluate compound relative priorities by individual relative priorities. This theory also provides a method of prioritizing by using experimental information and individual judgments, and it provides a framework describing the importance of evaluation and the ranking of preference factors (Eshlaghy & Yusefvand, 2011).

*Benchmarking:* The revision of specific procedures and policies to reflect procedures that thriving metropolitan areas use. Benchmarking allows decision makers to gain an understanding of how similar organizations have attained a level of accomplishment equal to the level sought (Camp, 2013).

*Critical success factors (CSF):* Factors that, if addressed, would significantly improve project implementation chances (Pinto & Slevin, 1987).

*CSF approach:* A process for determining the set of factors that the manager considers critical for success. CSF can be characterized as internal (endogenous) or external (exogenous) to the organization (Dubey & Bansal, 2012).

*Knowledge Management Process (KM):* A process that helps organizations to identify, select, organize, and publish essential information and skills. This

process is useful in scenarios where information is contained in an organization's records but is not regularly organized (Eshlaghy & Yusefvand, 2011).

*Multiple Criteria Decision Method (MCDM):* A decision-making strategy whereby users analyze several criteria simultaneously (Ammarapala, 2007).

*Prioritization:* The act of arranging matters to be decided in order of significance; the act of determining the priorities for the matters at hand (Floz, 2004).

*Scarce Economic Resources:* The study of how humans use knowledge to identify resources, to use these scarce resources, along with knowledge, to create commodities, and to distribute commodities among people (Khumalo, 2012).

*Special District:* In the context of finance and administration, an entity that has substantial autonomy, has the character of the government, and is organized (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

*Tangled Hierarchies:* A theory stating that issues associated with the distribution of scarce resources within a metropolitan area develop into problems that are complicated to resolve (Hofstadter, 1979).

### **Assumptions**

First, I assumed that the research instrument designed for this study would be effective in collecting relevant interview-based data from the research participants, for the purpose of addressing the research questions and fulfilling the purpose of the study. Every effort was made to achieve this by ensuring that the interview guide was thoroughly grounded in a comprehensive review of the literature and a robust

understanding of the context and the issues likely to influence the decision-making of municipal leaders.

Secondly, in conducting in-depth interviews with purposively chosen participants, I assumed that the answers provided would be honest and open, and that participants would accurately describe their decision-making processes. I assumed that, in general, elected leaders do their best to make the right decisions for their municipalities and the communities they serve. In addition, I assumed that nonmandated projects are targeted to specific neighborhoods and areas, such that the decision-making process may be specific to those areas.

However, it was also necessary to assume that, given the political context of municipal decision-making, the strategic thinking of political appointees, such as the municipal leaders interviewed in this study, would be influenced by their political beliefs. This does not contradict the assumption that they endeavor to make the right decisions for the municipalities and communities served. It means that the “right” decisions as interpreted by the interviewees would be colored by their political allegiances. I realized that my subjective assumptions would have to be taken into consideration. This was taken into account in interpreting the research material.

Finally, I made the assumption that the system by which municipal leaders are elected for four-year terms would be likely to result in inconsistencies and a focus on short-term rather than long-term objectives in the decision-making process. Given the relative lack of evidence from previous research about municipal decision-making processes, this and other assumptions were based on personal

perceptions and logical inferences arising from the general organizational decision-making literature.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The study was delimited to leaders of municipalities in Magnolia. Therefore, the target population for this research study was elected municipal mayors currently in office in Magnolia. I selected a purposive sample of 15 participants from this population. Because this study was phenomenological in nature and based on a relatively small sample, the results are not likely to be directly transferable to other contexts. However, broad insights gained through the research process and the development of best practice guidance based on the findings may be useful to other mayors in Magnolia, as well as municipal leaders in other states in the USA.

### **Limitations**

For the purposes of this study, a large municipality was defined as a city with 100,000 or more citizens; a medium municipality has between 40,000 and 100,000 citizens; and a small municipality has a population of fewer than 40,000 citizens. There are only three cities in Magnolia with a population of over 100,000, which was a potential limitation. If no mayors of large municipalities agreed to participate, my plan was to include mayors from more medium cities while ensuring that the North, Central, South, East, and West regions of Magnolia were represented.

The purposive sampling procedure was a potential limitation for the present study. While I made every effort to adhere to strict criteria in the sampling process, there was still a possibility for subjective bias. This could limit the transferability of results. An additional limitation, stated by Patton (2014), was the possibility that

participants' responses may have been distorted because of personal bias, politics, anger, or anxiety. Furthermore, limitations may have existed because the data obtained in the interviews are "subject to recall error, reactivity of the interviewee to the interviewer, and self-serving responses" (p. 306). To address this limitation, every effort was made to assure participants that their responses were confidential and to develop trust and rapport with interviewees.

At the time of this research, I was an elected official of Magnolia, which had the potential to lead to researcher bias. Although there existed no direct connections between me and the participants, it was possible that they may have been acquainted with me through legislative activities. This issue was addressed by disclosing my status to all participants and not allowing my elected position to influence any measures of the study. I disclosed that I was interested in running for the position of mayor in the future, which was another potential source of bias. This issue was addressed by not disclosing, during the process of conducting this research, the city in which I intend to run for mayor. However, these issues are all limitations.

### **Significance of Study**

The findings of this study constitute a unique contribution to the existing limited body of knowledge related to mayors' decision-making processes related to setting priorities for funding nonmandated projects (Mitchell, Shepherd, & Sharfman, 2011). More efficient management of public sector organizations is becoming increasingly important in the U.S., especially as the leaders of municipalities and other public sector organizations are increasingly expected to produce more results with decreasing resources (Villadsen et al., 2010). It is

therefore crucial that today's municipal mayors be effective managers as well as effective leaders of their organizations.

This was explained further by Zaytsev's (2012) distinction between two forms of political activity. He argued that the role of political appointees should be focused on policy management, problem solving, program implementation, and decision-making strategy; the second type of activity involves the development of program and policy solutions, which Zaytsev argued should be delegated to experts, analysts, and consultants. According to this approach, the role of municipal mayors should be focused on the first category of tasks, which is clearly management related. The findings of the research are likely to be of considerable value in improving the effectiveness and efficiency of decision-making as an important component of this increasingly important municipal management role.

Another reported reason this management role has become so important is that the personnel structure in many municipalities has changed over time due to cutbacks in spending, in some cases resulting in reduced managerial expertise at senior levels of the organization. At the same time, workloads are growing due to an expansion in social problems and the growing needs and demands of communities. This means that effective decision-making has become even more important in many municipal contexts (Vogal & Masal, 2012).

Additionally, results of this study offer insight into the best avenues for advancing policies and practices related to Magnolia municipalities' long-term priorities. In common with municipalities in other states across the U.S., those in Magnolia must determine how best to allocate scarce resources left over once state

mandated services such as health and human services, public safety, justice, and road maintenance have been funded (Krueger & Bernick, 2010; Maher, Deller, & Amiel, 2011).

Social change may be achieved when elected municipal leaders are able to meet citizens' needs without exceeding their limited budgets. Citizens are seeking more from elected officials and are expecting better stewardship over scarce resources (Taylor et. al, 2011; Van Wart, 2013).

According to Edon and Landow (2012), a structured ranking system and a close examination of leaders' ties to proposed projects can help ensure that projects are prioritized in a rational, objective way. Insights from this research, as well as policies founded upon them, could aid future leaders in balancing mandated concerns with nonmandated needs. Ultimately, it may help ensure that available resources are allocated to nonmandated projects in ways that maximize the benefits to society as a whole.

Further, leadership efficiency in the public sector is important because it helps establish confidence and satisfaction among citizens and contributes to organizations' positive reputations (Hadiyati, 2014). The results of the research may help provide Magnolia's municipal leaders with knowledge and understanding of how to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness through better decision-making.

An important aspect of this involves responding to increased public demands for transparency of decision-making and accountability of elected leaders, including more reporting of the use of public funds (Killian, 2011; Melitski & Manoharan,

2014). According to), transparency of decision-making processes is likely to promote greater trust in state and local level public sector organizations (Barnett, Taylor, Hodge, & Links, 2009; Grimmelikhuijsen, 2010). The current study contributes to this by generating information on current decision-making processes and best practice that can be adopted more widely to improve consistency and quality of decision-making and underpin the development of systematic decision-making processes and tools.

It was intended that the current study would contribute to this important social goal by generating an improved evidence base about municipal decision-making and the factors influencing this, and by using this evidence, to develop best practice guidance to improve the consistency and quality of decision-making. Though the research was conducted in Magnolia, it was expected that the findings and recommendations of the study would be of wider interest to municipal leaders in other states and would contribute more generally to improved municipal decision-making, resulting in greater social benefits from the more efficient use of scarce resources.

### **Summary and Overview**

Municipal leaders play a crucial role in the effective management of civic services, and one that is especially important in a downturn economy. Top-level management of civic services involves the prioritization of increasingly scarce public funds to meet community needs. In Magnolia, as in other U.S. states, the available resources for nonmandated initiatives are being increasingly squeezed by mandatory funding for special districts and specified services, as well as the need to

address longer-term requirements to cover liabilities for pension funding and to address the socioeconomic development of communities.

The decision-making processes involved in the prioritization of municipal funding are poorly understood, since there has been a scarcity of research in this area, particularly in Magnolia. As a result, a best practice evidence base on which to develop criteria or systems for prioritizing projects is not available, and mayors have little guidance to underpin their decision-making. This can be expected to lead inconsistencies over time and between municipalities in relation to funding decisions, as well as choices that may not always be in the best long-term interests of the communities being served.

The outcomes of this qualitative, phenomenological study offer support for Magnolia municipal leaders in developing their processes of decision-making related to the prioritization and allocation of scarce resources to nonmandated projects. Through this study, I sought to gain an understanding of inconsistencies in the decision-making process that could result in variations in the establishment of priorities to fund municipal projects, and to identify best practice methods and processes in the municipal management process that lead to effective project prioritization and funding decisions.

The conceptual framework was based on rational choice theory (Wandling, 2011), the model of bounded rationality (March & Simon, 1958; Pelikan, 2010; Simon, 1997) and Marakas' (1998) model of group decision-making. Through interviews with a purposive sample of elected mayors of Magnolia municipalities, I

gathered data that address a gap in existing research and that provide insight for leaders and policymakers related to resource allocation at the municipal level.

Chapter 2 contains a review of existing literature related to the research topic. The focus of the literature review is the critical factors affecting the decision-making process that elected leaders utilize. In addition, Chapter 2 contains a description of the process of prioritizing and allocating scarce resources. Chapter 3 contains a detailed methodology of this research study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

The purpose of the current quantitative, phenomenological study was to identify the critical factors that influence elected municipal leaders' decision-making processes related to the prioritization of nonmandated projects. It also examined the process for allocating resources to fund these projects, in the U.S. state examined in this study, hereafter referred to as Magnolia (pseudonym).

Multiple studies have noted a gap in the literature on leaders' decision-making processes in this context. For example, ICMA (2011) repeatedly noted a lack of literature on the decision-making processes of leaders. Valles-Gimenez and Zarate-Marco (2011) expressed concerns about the spending needs (e.g., for buildings, transportation infrastructure, street maintenance, and so on) of leaders with government funds. Dubey and Bansal (2012) examined the critical factors in business processing engineering as a means of improving performance within a government manufacturing unit, but paid little attention to individual and group decision-making in this process. In addition, the authors of several studies have expressed concerns about special districts (Foster, 2007; Killian, 2011).

Ammarapala (2007) looked at the effects on groups of the decision-making process of leaders. In general, existing research has not explored municipal decision-making in context.

This dissertation study was designed to identify and address potential inconsistencies in the decision-making process and in the strategic allocation of resources that could result from municipal leaders' planning according to four-year

political terms. In this literature review, I evaluate the existing empirical and theoretical literature relevant to the research topic. The chapter begins with a description of the literature search strategy. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework. The review of literature follows. A summary concludes the chapter.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

An exhaustive search focusing on the years 2010 to 2015 was conducted using the following databases: Policy and Administration, Business Source Premier Complete, the Academic Search Premier, Business Source Complete, ERIC/EBSCO Host Premier, PsycARTICLES, and PsycINFO. The primary search terms included: allocation, civic services, decision-making, inconsistency, local municipalities, mandates, mayor, prioritize, and scarce resources. All search terms were used in all databases, alone and in combination. In addition, I conducted further research using books, organizational publications, and government databases. The search netted a total of 262 sources, of which 226 (86%) were published between 2010 and 2015.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Rational Choice Theory**

Rational choice theory (RCT), according to Oppenheimer (2008), originated with Adam Smith's (1776) essay "On the Wealth of Nations." The concept of rational choice goes by a variety of different names in different fields. According to Zey (1998), rational choice is called public choice in the field of political science. In economics, rational choice is labeled as neoclassicism. The term rational choice theory is the one most frequently used in the fields of psychology and sociology.

RCT is relevant to the fields of political science, moral philosophy, game theory, sociology, and economics, and is used to link these diverse fields together (Oppenheimer, 2008). Coleman (1990) demonstrated a connection between the theory of rational choice and sociological problems, arguing that RCT could provide an answer for social issues on the macro level. Additionally, Colman (1990) stated that any such resolution must be addressed empirically on a micro level, (see Figure 1). According to RCT, collective relationships operate on an economic scale, so interactions between groups are directed by rational choices made by rational actors. That is, people take action only after weighing the costs and benefits to determine the optimal outcome (Zey, 1998).

According to Zey (1998), individuals' tendency to make rational choices causes several limitations on their actions, including

- Scarcity of resources: among multiple actors, there are variations in the possession of and the right to use available resources;
- Opportunity costs: “are those costs associated with forgoing the next most attractive course of action” (Friedman & Hechter, 1988, p. 202);
- Institutional norms: these norms can influence both costs and benefits, depending on the help or limitations distributed to actors by institutions; and
- Information: the availability of quality information has an effect on actors' choices.

The theory of rational choice is not without its critics (Green & Shapiro, 1994; Wandling, 2011). Green and Shapiro (1994) criticized RCT, stating that “despite its enormous and growing prestige in the discipline, rational choice theory has yet to deliver on its promise to advance the empirical study of politics” (p. 7). In contrast, Quackenbush (2004) stated that criticism of RCT is based on a misunderstanding in the critical literature related to RCT. Herrnstien (1990) stated that RCT is not really empirically testable because it is a normative theory, providing insight as to how one should behave, rather than being a description of normal behavior (see also, Cairney, 2013; Ermakoff, 2010; Hampsher & Hindmoor, 2010; Hewig, Kretschmer, Trippe, Hecht, Coles, Holroyd, & Miltner, 2011; Lee, Lee, & Wadhwa, 2010; McClennen, 2010; Moscati & Tubaro, 2011; Paternoster & Pogarsky, 2009; Verbeek, 2010).

RCT was an appropriate theoretical framework for this research because its breadth encompasses several different theories that utilize the assumptions of rationality (Quackenbush, 2004). This was important to this study because its design was based on the assumption that municipal leaders strive to make rational decisions. Quackenbush (2004) described three unrelated approaches to rational choice: game theory, expected utility theory, and nonformal theory.

Researchers have used the RCT theory to investigate a variety of issues. Tamika (2009) looked at the electronic government barriers and benefits as perceived by citizens who use public services. Paternoster and Pogarsky (2009) looked at rational choice, agency, and thoughtfully reflective decision-making, and the short- and long-term consequences of making good choices. Boudon (2009)

stated that applying RCT clarifies why persons prefer specific measures. The precedent provided by these studies supports my use of RCT for studying decision-making process. No previous study has specifically addressed the decision-making process of mayors in Magnolia.

### **Deduction of Rational Choice**

According to Friedman (1996), rational choice theory can be used to deduce the choices that rational individuals (agents) will make in particular situations.

Friedman presented the following process for this deduction:

1. Making an identification of the category or type of agent or agents.
2. Connecting the objective or objectives, relating the particular situation or phenomenon to the selected agent.
3. Defining the environmental attributes that could help or hinder the agent in attaining the specified goals.
4. Ascertaining the type and characteristics of data known to the agent as it relates to the environment.
5. Identifying the possible actions that the agent could take in order to reach the specified goals without going outside the limits of the environment or the agent's present state of knowledge.
6. Determining from the available courses of action which action will lead to the most efficient realization of goals on the part of the agent.
7. Predicting that the agent will choose the course of action identified using the previous steps.

## **Bounded Rationality**

Bounded rationality theory is similar to rational choice theory and was used in this study as a supporting conceptual framework. The concept of bounded rationality was introduced by March and Simon (1958) and was later developed by Pelikan (2010) in the context of policy-making choices. Other significant bounded rationality theorists include Caplan, Crampton, Grove, and Somin (2013), and Simon (1997). Pelikan (2010) argued that the role of the economy in government policy making is to provide a basis for rational choice on the part of decision-makers. Making policy decisions according to a rational framework is crucial for avoiding impractical and deceptive policies (Ermakoff, 2010; Fiori, 2011; Gunwoo, Wonjoon, & Sujin, 2011; Lee, 2011; Salant, 2011; Schiliro, 2012; Webster, 2013).

Pelikan (2010) stated that information is unequally distributed among individual rational agents. These agents' capacity for rational decision-making is therefore bounded, or limited, by the available information. This limitation may cause different agents to make different decisions because of unequal access to crucial data. This can lead to mistakes in decision-making; these mistakes are also a product of the bounds of rationality in each instance (Pelikan, 2010). Pelikan (2010) explained that decision-making bounds could result from nature, in the form of unequal intuitive capacity, or from nurture, in the form of unequal education or social encounters.

Pelikan (2010) emphasized the importance of understanding rationality in distinction to the available information as such. For Pelikan, rationality is the aptitude to identify, comprehend, and make use of available information, a definition

that suggests that differences in rational capacity may be overcome by equalizing the distribution of information among individuals with equal decision-making aptitude.

Pelikan (2010) also stated that it is important to understand that rationality can be sorted into problems of different economic categories. According to Pelikan (2010) “Rationality differences between individuals are therefore not limited to overall superiority or inferiority, but different individuals may have comparative advantages in its different sorts” (p. 235). For example, rationality can be bounded by available resources. This concept is applicable to municipal leaders because their decision-making processes may be bounded by a scarcity of funds.

As another example, rationality can be bounded by consequences, which could be unequal among different situations. Again, this point is applicable to municipal leaders’ decision-making processes because available resources must be applied in a way that takes account of citizens’ needs and requirements.

Pelikan (2010) argued that it is important to view rationality as a type of human capital. The economy ties individuals together, but rationality cannot be received directly from others. However, as with any other type of human capital, rationality can be improved upon through education, experience, and self-teaching. Furthermore, just as with any other type of human capital, rationality has to be considered as a resource capable of being used to meet society’s needs.

### **The Critical Factors Affecting Local Government**

Local leaders desire to achieve their goals as prudently as possible; therefore, leaders must understand the factors that affect a government’s ability to achieve success. Critical success factors (CSFs) are essential elements that make a unique

contribution to a winning strategy and may perhaps influence operations either positively or negatively (Calof & Smith, 2010; Chawla, Khanna, & Jin 2010; Cöster, Engdahl, & Svensson, 2014; Johnson, Wittington, & Scholes, 2011; Padovani & Orelli, 2010; Raravi, Bagodi, & Mench, 2013).

Flynn and Arce (1997) stated that “an internal CSF has related actions taken within the organization, while an external CSF has related actions performed outside the organization” (p. 312). Dubey and Bansal (2012) similarly stated that, in order to understand CSFs, leaders must consider endogenous and exogenous factors.

Valles-Gimenez and Zarate-Marco (2011) argued that, within certain municipalities, the spending needs of leadership with government funds are considered a critical factor, as is the municipality’s capacity to fund each department’s budget, (see also Mogues & Benin, 2012; Viinamäki, 2012).

According to Hsiao (2011), another critical factor is the ability of public entities to gain, reinforce, and transform relevant knowledge to enable growth.

Orr (2009) stated that the success of an organization leadership’s ability to mobilize, prioritize, and organize the actions of an administration exerts a strong impact on municipal government in general. Conversely, according to Mihaela and Tudor (2013), the dynamics of political influence in each administration can affect the delivery of public services either positively or negatively. These political factors are especially dominant in the municipalities that rely solely on state funding (Mihaela & Tudor, 2013). As a result, local public services can be insufficiently or incorrectly addressed, leaving the true needs of the general public neglected (Mihaela & Tudor, 2013).

Outside government organizations, the public's perception is an important success factor. Leadership efficiency in the public sector is important, because it establishes the citizens' confidence and satisfaction, and it improves the organization's reputation, (Starling, 2010). Siljanoska, Korobar, and Stefanovska (2012) stated that a false impression of a municipality's fiscal condition is created when the provided services and the costs are not clear. This false impression is exacerbated by confusion and inconsistency in inter-departmental funding practices. As a result, in many communities, managers, and elected officials are being challenged to move from a short-term crisis mode of thinking and to begin thinking differently about how to deliver services that meet citizens' needs (ICMA, 2011).

Municipalities are having difficulty coping with funding shortages that threaten their ability to pay for the cost of necessary public services (Random & Newman, 2010). Providing clean water, police protection, fire protection, garbage collection, and safe roads and bridges is a difficult task for most municipalities. Accountability is becoming a critical factor for leadership. Because of fiscal constraints, the demands on accountability of elected leaders have increased, causing a change in the practice and structure of reporting the use of public dollars (Killian, 2011).

One reason for the increased emphasis on accountability is that, once a budget has passed, a review process is lacking, and budgets become historical documents that are reviewed or consulted after preparation (Olurankinse, 2011). Existing literature indicates that local leaders have taken action to address issues and demands (Random & Newman, 2010), but a considerable source of risk exists when

unplanned, unforeseen, broad structural changes are required for government organizations.

To address risk, public sector leaders use creative measures, such as special districts, to address the needs of their communities. The issue of special districts and their relation to municipal decision-making is considered in the following subsection.

### **Special Districts**

The U. S. Census Bureau (2012) defined a special district as an entity in finance and administration that has substantial autonomy, has the character of a government, and is organized. The use of special districts has grown considerably in recent years due to a range of factors. Special districts now account for 41.8% of local governments (Killian, 2011). The rigid laws that deal with annexation by municipalities have resulted in newly formed residential areas that fall outside original municipal boundary lines, rendering them unable to take advantage of municipal government services (Berman & West, 2012; Morcol & Gautsch, 2013; Scutelnicu, 2014; Scutelnicu & Ganapati, 2012). Killian explained that these new residential areas have driven the growth in the use of special districts.

Some authors have argued that the existence of special districts to cover gaps in service provision is a sign of weakness in the government as a whole (Billings & Thibodeau, 2013). Similarly, Carr (2012) stated that local special districts sometimes are created to evade debt limitations set by the state for local governments. Although special districts can lead to increased service availability, they also present a problem for municipal leaders in metropolitan areas. Special districts can have

contradictory values and priorities, and local mayors may thus meet with opposition in their attempts to achieve goals important to the entire metropolitan area.

Additionally, special districts hinder institutional reformers from evaluating the total needs of the community and from determining the optimal balance of scarce resources (Allen & Oliver, 2014; Clarke, 2014).

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) (2011) established that complications exist in the area of coordinating and planning government services in many districts, (Odinot, 2015). Accordingly, the politics of evaluating competing demands for local resources may be complicated by the existence of special districts. Municipalities are responsible for increasing revenue sources, and special districts are often the recipients of this revenue. Krueger and Bernick (2010) stated existing research points to the fact that special districts can be an opportunity for political operatives to gain recognition of added services to the existing political makeup. Conversely, Krueger and Bernick stated that limiting special districts will instead lead to more collaboration. The state should provide more services to relieve the burden to local governments.

ACIR (2011) embraced the views of the supporters of public choice, concluding that the creation of special districts should not be restricted, as long as such districts act to meet the needs of the public by increasing flexibility for local entities. Whether or not metropolitan areas create special districts, there should be consistency in the decision-making process, which could be ensured through accountability. The issue of special districts is important to municipal government because, according to Killian (2011), special districts can compromise reform

endeavors on the part of municipal leaders. However, friction between public choice supporters and institutional reform supporters creates a barrier to meaningful change (Killian, 2011). Nevertheless, Killian, called for enhanced accountability as part of the solution.

### **Politics**

Additionally, as Triantis, Sarayia, and Seaver (2010) stated, uncontrollable socioeconomic conditions have a significant influence on public service outcomes, (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013; Eriksson, 2012). Thus, political influence is an endogenous critical factor affecting the decision-making process among government leadership.

In all local government structures, political concerns have a strong impact on resource allocation, project prioritization, and funding plans (Grant, 2014). Scholten (2009) stated that at the center of Western democracy rests a representative and deliberative democratic system. Elite politicians seek public support, so, in all democratic municipalities, the power base has to be considered as a critical factor in decision-making. In a representative democracy, the people decide who governs, but elites and professionals have a large impact on day-to-day decisions (Scholten, 2009).

At the municipal level, the influence of power and elite politics is particularly strong because elected officials focus on short-term outcomes and elites must target short-term policy issues in order to take advantage of their positions (Scholten, 2009). However, promoting the public good, which is the traditional role of government, is a long-term issue (Scholten, 2009). Thus, stakeholders that are a

part of the decision-making process may take into account their own short-term desires, and there may be power struggles among minority groups who want to obtain short-term benefits. This could be a critical factor influencing the allocation of resources. Scholten (2009) argued that this process could prove to be a hindrance for the pioneering decision maker.

Eschenfelder (2010) asserted that it is crucial to make the most of existing resources. Although municipal leaders take risks, and make new plans to address the needs of the community, politics is a driving force that could affect the leaders' ability to achieve success. The aforementioned are factors covered in the literature; however, within each municipality, there may exist other critical factors to be revealed in the study.

### **Decision Making in Municipal Leadership**

In recent years, the topic of municipal decision-making has generated increased interest. The ICMA stated that local government leaders have had to reconsider their priorities, delaying or scaling back where possible, and eliminating things that are unnecessary (ICMA, 2012). This action can create some concerns. According to Hotaling et al., (2010), by considering various outcomes of every alternative, people concentrate on several pieces of a crisis, thereby producing a response to every selection. Leaders have to consider all possible actions, and Scheibehenne, Rieskamp, and González-Vallejo (2011) stated that individuals seek to identify the results of a particular decision, and then select the most appropriate one for the chosen plan. Still, people normally choose the decisions that produce the fewest penalties (Busemeyer & Townsend, 2011). There will be territorial actions

taken, and organizations that have a culture of rigidity along with ineffectiveness, tend to have unconstructive responses, which lead to inadequate decision-making (Yafang, 2011; Yiing & Ahmad, 2010).

Within every municipality, leaders make decisions. The decision-making process can be influenced by the environment, controlled by external factors, or otherwise influenced by entities such as special interest groups, lobbyists, or higher elected leadership. Municipal leaders' decisions frequently affect groups of people as opposed to individuals, and the issues that decisions address are often complicated (Savio & Nikolopoulos, 2013). Given that municipal leaders plan in increments of four years, there is a problem with the inconsistency in the decision-making process (Robert, Shepherd & Sharfman, 2011; Wu & Xu, 2012) that results in variations in the establishment of priorities to fund competing projects.

Marakas (1998) stated that there are various types of decision makers, and within the group decision-making process, the decision maker is the most essential factor. Marakas categorized three types of decision makers: multiple decision makers, group decision makers, and team decision makers. Among multiple decision makers, equal authority usually does not exist, and no single individual may have the authority to make the final decision. Nevertheless, because each individual is interested in the outcome of the decision, multiple decision makers are commonly motivated to reach an agreement.

In group decision-making, on the other hand, the environment is more structured and official. Each member has equal authority and outcomes frequently are negotiated. Finally, team decision-making is typified by the presence of one

individual who has ultimate decision-making authority. Still, Ma et al. (2014) stated that like opinions should be measured to prevent wrong decisions.

However, the decision is still made in conjunction with other members who have the same goals, according to Marakas (1998). Existing literature contains many theoretical suggestions regarding optimal decision-making processes. Ammarapala (2007) stated that the majority of the decisions made by leadership use a group decision-making process, which can be complicated due to multiple concurrent objectives. Ammarapala argued that, therefore, the most suitable decision-making tool is the multiple attribute group decision technique.

More recently, Gwo-Hshiung (2010) and San Cristóbal (2011) stated that the utilization of the Multiple Criteria Decision Method (MCDM) allows leadership to consider multiple measures concurrently. Various other researchers have stated refinements of decision-making models to take into account competing claims, relationships between complex attributes, and incomplete information (Cabrerizoa, Pérezb, & Herrera-Viedma, 2010; Glöckner & Wittman, 2010; Wang & Zeng, 2010).

However, Ammarapala (2007) contended that the MCDM is less than optimal because the multiple measures may be nonquantifiable and in opposition to one another. Ammarapala stated that a collaborative decision-making framework could be better than a group framework, supporting clusters of leaders in prioritizing, assessing, investigating, and identifying risk.

Ammarapala (2007) argued that consistency in decision-making could be achieved through the collaborative decision-making technique. Pairwise comparison

research has indicated that collaborative decision-making could lead to the avoidance of difficulties while still achieving results that are sound and reasonable (Siraj & Keane, 2012). Significantly, this result was achieved when participants were aware of the potential problems to be avoided, emphasizing the importance of understanding and structured decision-making among leaders (Siraj & Keane, 2012).

The Knowledge Management process (KM) was introduced by Naghavi, Dastaviz, and Nezakati (2013). This theory suggests that optimal decision-making is related to how knowledge is acquired and transferred throughout organizations. In order to make valuable use of KM, those who apply it must take into consideration specific organizational factors (Anand & Singh, 2011; Mishra & Uday, 2011). The process of choosing a competent leader is the most important step in KM. The theory holds that leadership that delegates and consults can lead to positive outcomes (Naghavi et al., 2013). Zhong, Jin, and Chen (2012) stated that the style of the decision maker could efficiently and effectively influence the decision-making process, (see also Workman, 2012; Smith, 2014).

A decision maker's style is associated with his or her preference for risk. The decision to take a risk prevails when there is a stronger potential for a loss. However, the decision to avoid a risk is made when there is a stronger opportunity to make a gain (Chen, 2012). Zhong et al. (2012) stated that there is more opportunity for innovation in environments that are unstable and complicated than in those characterized by stability and simplicity. Thus, daring decisions—those that are course-changing, bold, significant, and that embrace risk—are not likely to be linked

to everyday policy (Scholten, 2009). Nevertheless, leaders cannot ignore economic realities, even in the most uncertain conditions.

The structure of the governing body drives these economic decisions. Clement (2010) claimed that, due to the economy's structure, the rules set at the local level are confined, inadequate, and unsound because of decisions made at higher levels of governance. Additionally, authors have taken the position that existing inequities in the economy, society, and politics affect resource use at the local level (Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Clement, 2010; Rhys et al., 2012). Koliba, Mills, and Zia (2011) emphasized the importance of recognizing the characteristics of nonprofit entities, the public sector, and private organizations in order to advance a model of accountability (Never, 2011; Verschuere & De Corte, 2014). With respect to government, the more the leadership is exposed to the public, the greater the transparency (De Fine Licht, 2011; Koliba et al., 2011).

Zaytsev (2012) differentiated two types of political activity. The first, which Zaytsev associated with politicians, consists of policy management, problem solving, program implementation, and decision-making strategy. The second type consists of developing programs and solutions to economic, political, and social problems. This second type Zaytsev associated with consultants, experts, and analysts. This model stated that municipal decision makers should delegate responsibility and make concrete decisions only when it is most appropriate to do so.

Barnett, et al. (2009) stated that an open process of decision-making encourages trustworthiness in state and local organizations that are accountable for implementing decisions. Edon and Landow (2012) supported this position as it

relates to capital expenditures. Professional groups and researchers have developed recommendations for supporting decisions that promote values such as planning, public participation, transparency, efficiency, and accountability. Research has shown that public outreach programs promoted by nonprofit organizations enjoy greater participation on the part of the public than do programs initiated by local governments themselves (Kasymova, 2014). In support of the need for transparency, Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer (2012) argued that support should be given to contradictory views as long as they are organized and discussed openly by responsible elected officials.

In addition to considering economic realities and transparency demands, municipal leaders need to consider the private sector in their decision-making. Many services can be privatized, and the privatization process is an important decision entrusted to elected municipal leaders. Several authors have addressed the factors related to the question of privatization of certain municipal services (Lezgoomez, Picazo-Tadeo, & Guardiola, 2011). According to Bel and Fageda (2009), municipal leaders have several key motives for privatizing public services, including economic efficiency, budgetary strictures, politics, and ideology (as cited in Lezgoomez et al., 2011).

The importance of relationships in municipal decision-making cannot be overlooked. Bel and Fageda (2009) pointed out that, in the decision-making process, relationships cannot be considered noteworthy from a statistical point of view. However, research conducted by Higgs and Rowland (2011) showed that it is critical for municipal leaders to incorporate alternative, clarifying information when

presenting government decisions. This process helps maintain strong relationships with the public and within the government organization itself.

Lezgoomez et al. (2011) noted that it is challenging to discover normal patterns of government decision-making at a local level because previous studies have evaluated the outcomes from various areas of service. Bel, Fageda, and Mur (2013) similarly stated that the anticipated logical factors affecting the decision-making process for, as an example, privatizing trash collection, are not the same as the anticipated factors related to the privatization of the water supply or municipal sports activities. Nevertheless, there are factors that are common to all municipal decisions within broad categories

### **Policy Making**

Policy determines the structure an organization follows, and the policy of municipal governments is the driving force in the delivery of public services. Crozier (2010) noted that older forms of political policy are becoming obsolete and new policy strategies gain prominence. Hibbert and Huxhan (2010) emphasized that complex issues can be resolved through the implementation of policy that structures internal collaborations. Nevertheless, accountability is still an important issue. Koliba et al. (2011) pointed out that, because of the constitutional separation of political powers, the accountability of elected leaders relies on strong, established formal ties with other government branches. However, the authors also argued that the public could hold elected leadership accountable through sunshine laws, strong participation, and purposeful discussion.

Villadsen et al. (2010) stated that the leadership of public organizations is expected to produce better and more efficient results with scarce resources. According to Nabatchi (2010), municipal leaders are obligated to deal with the community and the problems of scarce resources through the implementation of policy. Christian, Levine, Essounga-Njan, and Lyons (2013) stated that citizens are directly affected by government policies and spending. Failures of public policy are frequently the result of an absence of vocal public dissent, thereby allowing policy makers to reach decisions without outside input, a phenomenon known as groupthink (Bénabou, 2012).

Within the policy-making process, the levels of government have to be taken into consideration (Clement, 2010). The latter is achieved by means of implementing important policies that are transformed and negotiated, starting at the phase of policy design and continuing until the decision is made. Policy is implemented at the highest governance level within a municipality, and it is important that the best possible leaders be in these positions so that consistency and community improvement are assured.

As an example, Vall'es and Z'arate (2011) stated that municipal leaders must consider rural areas in their policy decisions in order to ensure consistent service delivery. Lyngstad (2010) stated that leaders should pay more attention to policies that promote economic development. Policymaking can be used as a tool for the reversal of economic and social decay in rural areas, while also raising the standard of living.

### **Programs and Services**

Within municipalities, there are great demands for services and programs. Local municipalities have even greater responsibilities than state governments when considering preferred capital projects such as the basic needs of a community, utilities, economic development, and transportation (Edon & Landow, 2012). Conversely, Rivenbark and Ballard (2012) stated that major service provided by the local government is fine, employee interaction needs fixing. However, due to the scarcity of resources, there is a need for better allocation of those dollars for the programs and services that are beneficial to the community; therefore, there should be tools put in place to determine those services, such as benchmarking.

### **Scarce Resources**

Currently, municipalities across the nation are facing a downturn economy in which available operating dollars are greatly diminished (Miller & Svara, 2009). Edon and Landow (2012) stated, “Funding sources have been stagnant or declining in the current Great Recession, affecting essential services as well as capital financing” (p. 59). The economic downturn may have so profoundly affected local government that there are few, if any, clear-cut successes (Callahan, 2012). The rules of managing a municipality have changed, and each municipality is struggling to address challenges unique to its particular economy and community (ICMA, 2012; LeRoux & Pandey, 2011).

Vaughan (2010) stated that the need for human services in times of a downturn economy multiplies as funds decrease, triggering donors to concentrate more closely on singling out the more productive entities to which to donate. Laffer,

Moore, and Williams (2011) stated that even states considered affluent face difficulties with a downturn economy.

Pelican (2010) asserted that, when considering probable efficiency issues related to scarce resources allocated, rationality has to be the first concern. The author also stated that good judgment must be used collectively in order to allocate scarce resources in a nuanced way. Hofstadter (1979) coined the phrase *tangled hierarchies*, which suggests that the issues associated with the distribution of scarce resources in a metropolitan area develop into problems that are complicated to resolve.

When funds are scarce, leaders must look to private organizations to meet human service needs. Nonprofit organizations also become very important during an economic downturn. Edon and Landow (2012) stated that, the scarcer the available resources, the more important become donations from the private entities, which can be used to fund services and capital-intensive projects. According to Edon and Landow, scarce resources and a resource demand that exceeds available funding make it especially important to review projects that are competing for resources. A structured ranking system and a close examination of leaders' ties to proposed projects can help ensure that projects are prioritized in a rational, objective way.

It is important to make the prioritization process transparent to the community. Gazely (2010) researched the outcomes of the collaborative factors that influence partnerships between municipalities and nonprofits. The researcher stated that there is value to considering several measures of performance, along with

understanding what is reinforced by observations and interpersonal factors that support shared achievement.

In the economic climate prevailing during the time of this research, partnerships were an important part of the budgeting strategy for many municipalities. However, under these circumstances, the decision-making process became vulnerable, leading to shifts or inconsistencies in values. For instance, accepting private donations could have an impact on public opinion. In addition, the process of planning could be altered, potentially leading to reduced transparency (Edon & Landow, 2012).

Greenblatt (2007) asked, “Is there a point at which the flow of private dollars, however well-intentioned, amounts to undue influence over public policy?” (p. 59). Leaders have to be aware of the consequences and use rational judgment when accepting the support of private organizations. Olurankinse (2011) cautioned that obtaining capital funds is not the purpose of local government. However, the availability of funds in partnership with private entities emphasizes the important role of leadership in addressing fund scarcity.

### **Resource Allocation**

Municipal leadership determines where scarce resources are directed, and sometimes these resource allocation decisions are not made with the public’s best interests in mind. Olurankinse (2011) stated that effective and efficient control of operations is important to the budgeting process. Part of this effectiveness is ensuring that municipal services have sufficient coverage among a municipality’s citizens. Folz (2004) contended that, if a certain proportion of citizens are able to

obtain services, it becomes possible to eliminate a perception of disconnect as a hindrance to service quality. Elected leaders can provide insight into the level of service delivery that can be supported and is expected and desired by stakeholders and citizens, according to Folz (2004). An understanding of economics is important in order to allocate resources efficiently, balancing service expectations with budget constraints.

In every municipality, economics is a driver of success and viability. Khumalo (2012), citing Samuelson and Nordhaus's 1992 definition of economics, called it "the study of how societies use scarce resources to produce valuable commodities and distribute them among people" (p. 598). Khumalo stated that, in the 21st century, economics can be defined in simple terms as "the study of how we use resources that human minds have identified, and we use our minds to create commodities and distribute them, distribution implies choice" (p. 606). Khumalo also stated, "Governments cannot feed all the people; people given the freedom to use their knowledge will find ways to feed themselves" (p. 605). This view emphasizes the fact that an understanding of what the people need is in the best interest of the leadership. According to Khumalo, visionary leadership is required to meet citizens' needs while simultaneously securing economic development.

### **Government Unfunded Mandates**

Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 (UMRA) was put into place in order to limit the number of unfunded federal mandates imposed on state and local governments (U.S. General Services Administration, 2014). The definition of a mandate used in UMRA is, "any provision in legislation, statute, or regulation that

would impose an enforceable duty on state, local, or tribal governments or the private sector, or that would reduce or eliminate the amount of funding authorized to cover the costs of existing mandates” (NCSL, 2013, p. 1). The definition of an unfunded mandate used by the NCSL is more expansive, and includes almost all federal mandates that require partial fulfillment by local or state funds.

Therefore, by this definition, unfunded mandates include any legislation that institutes a provision of aid in the form of a grant. The definition also includes any instrument that poses a reduction in available funds; any mandate that is set to expire, that is expanded or extended; any condition that, if not adhered to, would result in a loss of federal funds; any losses in local or state funding; and any legislation that compels the local or state government to cover its citizens without federal funding, including expectations on a national level (NCSL, 2013).

Leaders must balance investments in economic development with priorities of garbage collection, fire protection, police protection, roads, bridges, water, and infrastructure issues. The U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (2011) stated that mandates to local and state governments by the federal government are built into American federalism. According to the Commission, mandates by the federal government were once limited, but there has been a rapid growth in mandates in recent years that has led to increased costs for local and state governments.

The OMB (2011) noted that the cost of unfunded mandates to the public, to the metropolitan areas, and to the states is between \$44 and \$62 billion each year. However, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) (2013) stated that,

within the last five years, there has been in excess of \$132 billion dollars in unfunded mandates, the responsibility for which has been shifted to local and state governments by Congress. It should be noted that NCSL has a broader definition of an unfunded mandate than does OMB. Still, because of the decision-making process of different leaders, this is one of the driving reasons that, after allocating funding for required mandates, an inconsistency in the allocation of funds to other civic services remains (Savas, 1978).

Another burden with which municipal governments will contend is unfunded employee pension obligations, which “will present a serious fiscal problem to state and local governments in the not-too distant future” (Beermann, 2013, p. 108). This suggests that the second decade of the 21st century will be even more financially trying for local governments than was the first. Underfunded liabilities of health and pension plans have the potential of destroying governing bodies’ financial stability (Beerman, 2013). Another reason for underfunded pensions is the attempt at all levels of government to maintain services without raising taxes (Beerman, 2013).

For the private sector, the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) was enacted to address the pending financial difficulties resulting from underfunded pensions. The act releases employers from some of the obligation to pay insolvent retirement plans. No similar relief exists for state and local governments. Beermann (2013) noted that, in the case of a local municipality or state becoming insolvent, the constitution still demands the payment in full of all obligations related to pensions. Still, there are some experts who contend that the crisis is not as serious as some believe (Beermann, 2013).

Constitutionally, municipal governments are not expected to work with the federal government, but the new paradigms of intergovernmental relations and intergovernmental management have led to increased collaboration between municipal and federal levels (Kincaid & Stenberg, 2011). Kincaid and Stenberg (2011) stated that this shift was made possible by mayors of large cities, who have gained influence through politics.

However, most federal funding to municipalities is handed down through state governments, and leaders of smaller local governments occasionally do not state government leadership (Kincaid & Stenberg, 2011). According to Kincaid and Stenberg, there is a belief among municipal leaders that federal funds for poor and urban areas are not properly directed, leaving local governments to contribute more money to those areas.

Traditionally, local leaders viewed federal and state mandates as a financial burden (Caruson & MacManus, 2012). Caruson and MacManus (2012) conducted a study examining whether local leaders perceived mandates related to inter-locality emergency services as encouraging or discouraging. Several disasters occurred in the first 10 years of the 21st century, including the 9-11 attacks in 2001, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005, and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010.

With each of these events, the need for the coordination of emergency management on an inter-local level called for unfunded mandates. Caruson and MacManus found that, after each event, the barriers to inter-local collaboration needed to be removed so that the management of the emergency systems could work effectively and efficiently.

Mandates are causing local governments to think differently. Baker (2011) stated that governments should reduce the cost of operating their municipalities. However, Baker noted this type of budget cutback would result in a reduction of funding to parks and libraries in order to meet mandates for fire and police protection. Bunnell and Jepson (2011) stated that an important development is taking place, with some states putting forth an effort to address the issue of mandates by passing legislation requiring local governments to prepare plans for their implementation. Mandates have a considerable impact local and state governments' budgets and continue to affect their ability to provide needed civic services. This indicates a need for rational decision-making on the part of elected officials, since sound decisions are required to make the best use of scarce resources.

### **Summary**

As a summary of the major themes in the literature, critical factors affecting the decision-making process and scarce resource allocation were prominent elements. Within the literature, there are many factors that can affect the decision-making process of leaders, however; there is limited research that identifies and provides an explanation of this.

In this chapter, I presented an introduction to and explanation of the critical factors affecting local government, along with the concerns of special districts and the politics that can be involved. Additionally, I looked at municipal leadership and the policy-making process along with the offered programs and services. I further explored the process of prioritizing within the ranks of leadership and the scarce resources and the allocation of the resources as well as the effects of government

mandates. I also presented the theory of rationality along with bounded choice and the deduction of rationality.

There is a gap in literature related to the factors that influence resource allocation decisions at the municipal level. The research that exists does not address municipalities in the state of Magnolia. The findings of this study contribute knowledge related to inconsistency in mayors' decision-making processes related to setting priorities for funding nonmandated projects (Mitchell et al., 2011). This was accomplished through a qualitative, phenomenological study consisting of interviews with a purposive sample of 15 municipal leaders in Magnolia.

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to identify the critical factors that influence the decision-making processes of elected municipal leaders in the United States. It specifically explored these processes related to the prioritization of nonmandated projects, the allocation of resources to fund these projects in the U.S. state of Magnolia (pseudonym), and to identify effective examples of decision-making systems and processes that can be used to develop best practice guidance.

I employed a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore the decision-making processes and factors relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated civic projects in Magnolia. Using a purposive sample of 15 municipal mayors from across Magnolia, I conducted in-depth interviews and supplemented these data with a small secondary analysis of municipal budget allocation documentation.

The decision-making processes involved in the prioritization of municipal funding were not well-understood due to a general lack of research on this topic. There is specifically a significant research gap related to how these processes function and are influenced in the state of Magnolia. As a result, a best practices evidence base on which to develop criteria or systems for prioritizing projects was not available at the time of the studying, resulting in mayors in Magnolia having little guidance to underpin their decision-making. More efficient management of public sector organizations and their funding allocations is becoming increasingly

important in the United States, especially as the leaders of municipalities and other public sector organizations are increasingly expected to produce more effective results with increasingly scarce resources (Villadsen et al., 2010).

The current dissertation study addressed these research gaps and contributed insights that could lead to more efficient planning and management on the part of Magnolia mayors and, ultimately, better responses to civic needs in all economic conditions. This chapter contains the description of the current qualitative, phenomenological research method and design. The target population of Magnolia mayors, procedures for sampling, researcher-designed data collection instrument, procedures for data collection, and the processes for analyzing and reporting on the research findings are all included. Because the research design is qualitative, the researcher's role is also described. A summary concludes the chapter.

## **Research Design and Rationale**

### **Research Questions**

The current study was guided by five primary research questions. These questions were formulated in order to understand the current effectiveness of municipal decision-making from the perspective of municipal leaders, and to assist in identifying examples of good practice decision-making processes and systems that can be used to develop best practice guidance. These questions were:

**Research Question 1.** What are the factors that influence municipal leaders' personal decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in public sector management in the United States?

**Research Question 2.** What are the factors that are perceived by citizens to influence organizational decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in municipal management in Magnolia?

**Research Question 3.** What organizational systems or processes are used in decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in municipal management in Magnolia?

**Research Question 4.** How do the research participants perceive the effectiveness of current decision-making related to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in management of their municipal administrations?

**Research Question 5.** How can the decision-making processes of municipalities related to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects be improved?

These questions were designed to ensure that this study addressed the full range of potential influences on decision-making in municipal management, based on a comprehensive review of relevant theoretical and empirical literature. By exploring both individual and organizational-level decision-making, I was able to explore the inter-relationships between these factors from the perspective of the research participants. The questions were also designed to explore the research participants' perceptions about what constitutes effective decision-making, how this is achieved in their municipality, and how decision-making might be improved.

Overall, the research questions were designed to enable me to identify examples of effective decision-making and the contexts in which these occur, and to understand why weaknesses and inconsistencies arise and how to overcome these, so

that evidence-based best practice guidance can be developed. The research questions were used as an overall framework for use when conducting thematic analysis of the research data generated from interviews, as stated by Turner (2010).

### **Design**

The current research used a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach to investigate the decision-making processes relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated civic projects in Magnolia and identify factors that influence these. The study was based on in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of 15 municipal mayors from across Magnolia, supplemented by a small secondary analysis component involving the review of municipal budget allocation documentation.

A qualitative research method was appropriate for this study because the aim was to generate explanatory and illustrative information relating to municipal decision-making. A goal of this selection was to achieve an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon and how it can be improved in order to increase the quality and sustainability of outcomes. In contrast, quantitative methods, which use structured data collection techniques to generate quantitative data, would have been more appropriate if the objective of a study had been to examine the prevalence of certain attitudes, behaviors, or experiences within the population of interest rather than generating in-depth understanding and insights.

Qualitative research is usually concerned with understanding a particular issue or phenomenon in depth, rather than investigating the relationships between variables or comparing the experiences of different groups of individuals (Creswell,

2012). It is an inductive (Bryman, 2012) or “grounded theory” method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) which attempts to understand and describe people’s experiences in order to develop an in-depth understanding of these upon which new theories and explanations can be developed.

Qualitative research is a way of exploring a social or human phenomenon by constructing a complex, multidimensional verbal image based on participants’ detailed accounts and conducted under natural conditions (Creswell, 2012).

Qualitative research is conducted within the interpretivist research tradition, which contends that there is a need to examine the whole rather than partial aspects of a social phenomenon in order to understand it properly. In comparison, quantitative research, which is inductive and positivist in nature, is intended to test specific hypotheses or theories developed on the basis of prior knowledge, with empirical testing of the relationships between specified variables.

Qualitative research is often used to generate knowledge and understanding of issues on which little previous research has been conducted, such as municipal decision-making (Punch, 2013). The objective of qualitative researchers is to understand social issues from the perspectives of those who experience them and the meanings that they attribute to their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Unlike quantitative research results, the findings of qualitative research cannot be generalized to a wider population, but are important in gaining a rich and detailed understanding of a particular issue, based on the first-hand experiences and views of a relatively small number of individuals directly involved (Borland, 2001; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It is also of value in

generating information about relevant factors or concepts related to the topic of interest, which can be incorporated into subsequent quantitative research to determine their applicability to or prevalence in a wider population (Bansal & Corley, 2011). Within the qualitative research approach, there are a number of different approaches, defined by as Biography (narrative); Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography, and Case Study (Charmaz & McMullen, 2011; Creswell, 2012).

A phenomenological approach was the most appropriate research design for this study. Grounded in the philosophical work of Husserl (1931, 2012) and Heidegger (1953, 2010), the phenomenological approach to the study of society was introduced by Schulz (1899-1956) and more recently applied to social research by Moustakas (1994), who argued that social phenomena can only be understood from the perspectives of those who directly experience them.

Proponents of this method contend that this is crucial in order to avoid the risk of imposing “a fictional nonexisting world constructed by the scientific observer” (Schutz, 1967, p. 8). Leedy and Ormrod (2010) stated that the phenomenological approach is characterized by the researcher’s attempt to gain an understanding of individuals’ thoughts regarding a specific state of affairs. As Denscombe (2014) observed, phenomenological descriptions relate less to events themselves than to their interpretation by participants. It is argued that the world must be seen as “socially constructed” in order to acknowledge that different people can experience and interpret the same phenomenon in different ways (Denscombe,

2014). The phenomenological approach is considered appropriate for studying organizations as well as individuals (Holt & Sandberg, 2011).

Qualitative, phenomenological research is usually based on in-depth interviews, focus groups or other means of obtaining unstructured or semistructured information from the research participants, focusing on their own perceptions and interpretations of the phenomenon of interest. Data analysis focuses on examining the data for relevant recurring patterns or themes that enhance understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Other data collection methods used in qualitative research include participant observation, case studies, and reflective diaries (Wertz, 2010). Qualitative approaches are considered appropriate for studying organizations as well as individuals (Gill, 2014).

A number of other qualitative research techniques were considered for use in this study but were rejected in favor of a phenomenological approach due to the nature and purpose of the study. Specifically, narrative, ethnographic, and case study methods were deemed inappropriate for the following reasons. Narrative research methods, usually employed in biographical research, are more suitable for examining the lived experiences of a single individual, based on interviews or documentary evidence (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Green & Thorogood, 2009). This dissertation study focused on the decision-making processes of a number of individuals, so narrative methods were not appropriate.

In ethnographic research, the focus is on understanding a particular social group or culture, based on direct observation of and interaction with members of the group by the researcher. It usually involves extensive field research. The purpose of

ethnographic research is to generate a comprehensive understanding of the overall characteristics or culture of the group under study, rather than a specific phenomenon experienced by them (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). Because the focus of the current research study was to explore participants' understandings of a specific phenomenon, and because I was not able to observe the social contexts in which participants conducted their decision-making, ethnography was not a suitable approach.

Finally, the intention of the case study method is to provide detailed understanding of a time-bound group, event, or issue, using multiple methods of data collection (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). Although the present research explored a time-bound issue (municipal resource allocation, decision-making in the post-financial crisis setting), multiple forms of data collection were not employed. None of these qualitative approaches was deemed suitable for the study, in which the objective was to generate in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of municipal decision-making, and not a time-bound event, person, or group.

To summarize, there are five different qualitative approaches (Creswell, 2012), among which the phenomenological approach best allowed me to answer the research questions, which sought to understand multiple participants' perspectives of the phenomenon of municipal decision-making. Use of the phenomenological approach allowed me to gain understanding of the central phenomenon of the study, as Creswell (2012) stated.

In particular, this approach allowed me to investigate the perspective of each participant and use this to develop a more general understanding of municipal

decision-making that can be used to inform best practice guidance. I used phenomenological methods to identify the critical factors that influence the decision-making process among municipal leaders and within their organizations, and to understand the complex ways in which the participants prioritize nonmandated programs.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role in this study was that of an observer and an interpreter of the research data as contributed by the participants. Although there existed no direct connections between me and the participants, I disclose that I was a State Representative of the state of Magnolia at the time of this research, so participants may have been acquainted with me through legislative activities. Maxwell (2012) stated that the relationships create researcher develops with informants are central to the method; additionally, the way the researcher opens and navigates those relationships is also central. Therefore, if professional connections between the researcher and participants facilitate the data collection process, this could be considered part of the research design. As an elected official, who is interested in running for the position of Mayor, I disclosed this intention.

I managed researcher bias in this study by following Patton's (2014) suggestion of "emphasizing rigorous and systematic data collection procedures of cross-checking and cross validating sources during fieldwork and wherever possible, using multiple coders and calculating inter-coder consistency to establish the validity and reliability of pattern and theme analysis" (p. 545).

Another issue of concern related to my role was the possibility that participants would share information “off the record” due to professional familiarity. Additionally, there was a possibility that I might share personal experiences with participants in an interview setting, which could influence participants’ responses. The plan for addressing these issues was to expose all concerns before the interview session began and to follow a systematic and detailed interview schedule.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

As discussed earlier, the objective of phenomenological research is to achieve in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest from the individual perspectives of those directly experiencing it. This type of research is therefore usually based on a relatively small number of research participants that have the experience or the trait of interest to the researcher, and purposive sampling methods are often used to generate this sample of participants. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) stated that, in purposive sampling, participants be selected who personify a distinct perspective on a particular topic. This justifies the selection of mayors for this study, the aim of which is to understand municipal leaders’ decision-making processes.

In contrast to random sampling methods, which are generally used in quantitative research to ensure that the findings can be generalized to a wider population, purposive sampling involves “hand-picking” individuals who exhibit the characteristics of interest (Denscombe, 2014). Purposive sampling is appropriate for use in research when representativeness is not a primary concern and when a target sample can be identified and accessed relatively easily (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011;

Patton, 2014). However, it is important to use, where available, an appropriate sample frame or objective list of the target population (Denscombe, 2014) and to select the sample carefully. In general, the sample should be relatively homogenous in terms of having direct experience of the phenomenon of interest (Smith & Osborn, 2003), but sufficiently diverse to enable identification of different perspectives and experiences, and to allow for adequate exploration of relevant issues as identified from the literature or existing theories (Daly & Lumley, 2002).

The use of a small sample of carefully selected participants is important as the process of phenomenological data collection and analysis is resource intensive and time consuming. Five or six participants are often recommended as optimum sample sizes for phenomenological studies (Smith & Osborn, 2003). However, this will vary depending on the research issue and the characteristics of the target population. Polkinghorne (1989, cited in Creswell, 2012) recommended that, to achieve saturation, people doing phenomenological research should use a sample of 5 - 25 participants who have all experienced the situation or phenomenon of interest. Marshall et al. (2013) stated that for phenomenological studies, the sample size could range from roughly 6, to between 6 - 8 and between 6 - 10.

The target population for the study was mayors in Magnolia. In order to capture diversity of experience, a purposive sample of 15 leaders from different municipalities in the North, South, Central, East, and West regions of Magnolia was selected for this study. The sample was chosen in order to reflect, to the extent possible, the entire target population, since this was relatively small. This justified the purposive sampling technique, which allowed me to ensure that participants

were included who led municipalities of various sizes in various regions of Magnolia. The sample size was expected to be large enough to ensure diversity of characteristics and experience, but not too large that saturation, or the number of interviews it takes for information and themes to become repetitive, would be reached before all the participants had been interviewed (Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Mason, 2010).

I ensured that selected participants represented not only geographical regions but also municipalities of large, medium, and small size. These sizes were defined as follows: a large municipal area had a population of over 100,000, a medium municipal had a population of 40,000 to 99,999, and a small municipal area had a population of less than 40,000. In Magnolia, there were four cities at the time of this research with a population of 100,000 or more citizens, five cities with a population between 40,000 and 80, 000 citizens, and over 30 cities with a population of less than 40,000 citizens.

### **Instrumentation**

Leedy and Ormond (2010) stated that, in phenomenological research, the researcher depends primarily on in-depth interviews with a meticulously chosen group of contributors. These authors observed that, in a phenomenological research study, the outcome is dependent upon the participants as much as upon the researcher (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Through unstructured or semistructured open-ended interviews, the goal is to “arrive at the heart of the matter” (Tech, 1996, p. 147).

There are three main types of research interviews: unstructured, semistructured, and structured. Unstructured interviews are similar to an informal conversation, and can generate a wealth of detailed information on individual experiences, but it can be difficult to keep these focused on a specific issue of interest, and analysis of unstructured data is often complex and very time consuming. Structured interviews, at the other extreme, are based on a standardized, carefully worded questionnaire and are more commonly used in studies in which the issues are clearly defined and the objective is to compare the experiences of different research participants.

In semistructured interviewing, a number of questions are predefined to ensure that the main topics of interest are covered in the interview and to help reduce the possibility of researcher bias. These questions can be modified or used flexibly in order to tailor the interview to the specific experiences of each participant and allow additional exploration of relevant information volunteered by them (Chenail, 2011; Patton, 2014). As in unstructured interviewing, the questions are open-ended, and the research participants can talk at length about their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). However, the researcher can use the interview guide to ensure that the interview stays on track and that enough relevant information is collected from each participant to help answer the research questions.

This study used semistructured interviews based on a researcher-designed interview guide, the design of which was informed by the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the review of literature. In this way, it was anticipated that the interviews would generate useful data that would enable the research questions

to be answered. The interview instrument created by the researcher for the purpose of the study is included as Appendix B. Table 1 shows which sections of the interview guide correspond with each of the research questions of the study.

There are a number of advantages to the use of semistructured face-to-face interviews in qualitative research (Mojtahed, Nunes, Martins, & Peng, 2014). First, they enable the researcher to obtain a wide range and depth of information build a rapport with the research participant, putting them at their ease and encouraging them to talk openly about their experiences. Semistructured interviews also provide the researcher with the flexibility to adapt questions to the participants' own experiences and to probe and obtain further relevant information during the data collection process. The face-to-face nature of the interview may give the researcher an immediate means of validating the responses, since they can often discern whether the participant is being honest through observation of their body language or verbal tone, for example (Denscombe, 2014).

Table 1

*Research Questions and Interview Protocol*

Research Question	Interview Protocol Section/Item
1: What are the factors that influence municipal leaders' own decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in public sector management?	Section 3: Factors Influencing Decision Making Process: Item 8. Section 2: Influences on Goal Achievement: Items 4 to 7.
2: What are the factors that are perceived to influence overall decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in municipal management in Magnolia.?	Section 5: Factors Influencing Joint Decision Making Process
3: What organizational systems or processes are used in decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in municipal management in Magnolia.?	Section 4: Decision Making Systems and Processes: Items 11-15
4: How do the research participants perceive the effectiveness of current decision-making related to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in management of their municipal administrations?	Section 6: Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Decision-Making: Item 14
5: In what ways do the research participants perceive that decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in management of their municipality could be improved?	Section 6: Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Decision-Making: Item 15

In phenomenological research, face-to-face interviews offer particular benefits in providing information about the meanings that participants attribute to their experiences. This is because the tone of responses and facial or body language

of the participant are often as important as their actual responses in enabling the researcher to interpret and understand these attributed meanings and their implications for the individual (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2014).

What is learned in the earlier stages of qualitative research often influences how the data collection process proceeds. For example, if one research participant volunteered useful information about a significant factor influencing their decision-making process, this might be incorporated as a question or prompt in subsequent interviews to explore whether this factor was also important in the decision-making of other research participants.

For this reason, qualitative research does not necessarily follow a linear process; data collection and analysis might be conducted simultaneously, with each informing the other as the study evolves. Unlike quantitative research, in which it is crucial to use a standardized data collection instrument with all research participants, the interview guide or other qualitative research instrument is more flexible and can be modified over time to enable the researcher to explore unanticipated factors or issues emerging from the earlier stages of data collection. Similarly, the overall research design in qualitative research can be quite fluid in the early stages and become more systematic and structured as the research progresses (Sofaer, 1999).

The flexibility of semistructured interviewing techniques also means that it is not necessary to conduct a full pilot survey to ensure that the research participants understand the meanings of specific questions, and that they are clear and unambiguous. A pilot survey is necessary when using a more structured questionnaire in quantitative or mixed methods research, because it is essential that

respondents fully understand and interpret questions in a consistent way so that the responses of different groups can be accurately compared. However, it is still crucial that semistructured interview questions be clear, unambiguous, and not in any way leading (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011; Denscombe, 2014).

Probing is an important technique used in the semistructured interview process, which enables the researcher to seek additional information on relevant or important points that arise (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Patton (2014) identified three types of probes: detail-oriented probes, used when the researcher needs to obtain information that is more detailed from the participant on particular points; elaboration probes, when additional information is needed on these points; and clarification probes, when the researcher needs the participation to explain or clarify a particular answer.

It is also permissible for the interviewer to explain or clarify the questions if required to do so by the research participant. This should be done using wording as close as possible to the original question, to avoid the possibility of researcher bias and to help ensure that all participants have a similar understanding of the nature of the question.

Face-to-face interviews are sometimes inappropriate for use in research addressing very sensitive or controversial topics when anonymity of the respondents is more appropriate, but this limitation was not applicable to the current study. Other main drawbacks of using face-to-face in-depth interviews are that these can be very costly and time-consuming, difficult to arrange and subject to bias resulting from the

presence of the researcher and the flexibility of the data collection process (Patton, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

It is extremely important in face-to-face interviewing that the researcher be perceived to be as objective and nonjudgmental as possible, so that they do not influence the nature of the participants' answers. As noted in the section on role of the researcher, I anticipated that it might be difficult for me to remain completely neutral at all times while interviewing participants for this study, as some of them may already have been familiar with me and my political views. Nevertheless, attempts were made to ensure them that I conducted the study as an objective observer and to assure them that their answers would be used only for the purpose of the study and treated in complete confidence.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

In order to be selected for participation in this study, individuals must have currently been serving as elected mayors in Magnolia. After identifying potential participants through background data found on the web site and state archives, I sent them a letter inviting them to participate in the study (Appendix A). Because the initial recruitment efforts failed to yield 15 participants, invitation letters were sent to other municipal leaders. This process was repeated until the required sample size, with the required representative distribution, was obtained.

According to Polkinghorne's 1989 work, (as cited in Creswell, 2012), phenomenological research should engage up to 25 participants in the use of the interview protocol, with the added use of audio and video recorders if required. For the purpose of this study, the interviews were audio recorded, with the explicit

permission of the research participants; a professional transcriptionist later transcribed the tapes. The use of interview recording and transcriptions facilitated the data collection and analysis process since I did not need to take written notes of the research participants' answers, and these were captured in full in the recordings and transcriptions for use in qualitative coding and for subsequent reviews of dialogue and verbal tone.

The study also included a secondary data collection component for triangulation purposes. Triangulation is a well-established research technique that is used to help confirm the validity research findings by examining an issue using data from more than one source (Denscombe, 2014). In this study, I collected budgetary data from each participant's municipality to demonstrate the actual allocation of mandated services, as well as the services provided beyond the mandates. Formal public requests to obtain these data were made when necessary. The budgetary documentation was used when reporting the research findings to provide contextual and background information on any actual patterns or trends in funding by municipalities included in the study. Additionally, these were compared with the reported experiences of the research participants regarding funding decisions. For example, this triangulation of data enabled me to identify whether a mayor's personal funding preferences were generally achieved in practice and, where there are apparent discrepancies, to explore the reasons for these.

The procedure for data collection was as follows. I was personally responsible for conducting all the face-to-face interviews and for collecting all data, including secondary data, to answer the research questions. The duration of each

interview was approximately one hour, with additional time scheduled as needed. The interviews were recorded through audio recorders and then transcribed. One week was scheduled to obtain budget documentation for each municipality. These documents were scanned and transcribed if not received electronically.

After the data were collected, I debriefed participants. The debriefing consisted of an explanation of the research and an expression of thanks for participating in the process.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

In phenomenological research, a reflective and structured analysis process is used by the researcher to extract from the qualitative data the essence or central meaning of the phenomenon, as it is experienced by the research participants, and to develop more general findings relating to the research questions of the study (McCaslin & Scott, 2003; Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological researchers need to be able to suspend their own conception or pre-defined notions of the research issue in order to identify and understand the perspectives and interpretations of their research participants, in a process often referred to as “bracketing” (Finlay, 2011; 2012; Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). However, the researcher is directly involved in interpreting and drawing conclusions about the research findings. For this reason, it has been argued that phenomenological research involves a two-stage interpretation process, or double hermeneutic, in which the research participants first make sense of their individual experiences, and the researcher then interprets and makes sense of the research findings relating to the phenomenon as a whole.

For the current study, all data were analyzed in order to answer the research questions, as shown previously in Table 1. In order to analyze participants' responses to the open-ended interview questions, I used a process of inductive content analysis, also referred to as thematic analysis (Schreier, 2014). This involved a process of open coding and recoding individual sections of research data from the transcripts in accordance with emerging themes and findings relevant to the research questions (Price, 2010). This categorization also took into account the conceptual framework and previous literature on the issue. For data management and organizational purposes, the researcher used NVivo10 to code transcripts using thematic analysis. The analysis was aimed at comprehensively presenting the decision-making processes of the participants. The NVivo 10 qualitative analysis software made it possible to develop an initial coding tree based on the areas of interest to the study, and systematically to associate material from each transcript with these top-level codes.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) stated that analysis of qualitative content is a subjective research method by which the researcher identifies patterns in participants' responses and systematically codes these patterns. According to Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), the analysis of the content of a response involves much more than word counting. Instead, the goal of analysis should be to gain knowledge in a scientific manner (Kuckartz, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c).

Phenomenological analysis involves an ongoing process of reflection on the part of the researcher as they engage with the data and consider what it means from the perspective of the research participant, as well as its wider significance for

understanding of municipal decision-making. Finlay (2002) described this as a process of “reflexive analysis,” (Finlay, 2002, p.533), which involves moving back and forth in a kind of dialectic between experience and awareness; between studying the parts and the whole (Finlay, 2002; Hibbert, Sillince, Diefenbach, & Cunliffe, 2014).

In the first stage of the analysis process, each transcript was examined individually to provide an overview of each respective participant and their views and experiences. They were then re-examined several times in order to identify common themes, as well as other similarities and divergences between the interview findings.

A coding tree consisting of nodes and sub-nodes was developed in NVivo to reflect the themes and sub-themes arising from initial review of the transcripts, and the research material was coded in segments against these. As the analysis progressed and additional material was coded, the coding tree was revised and material re-categorized as necessary to reflect recurring themes and findings and ensure that the final categorization of research data was accurate and meaningful in relation to the research questions of the study. Notes and observations were recorded in the software, in order to facilitate as well as document the interpretation and analysis process.

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) said that the main task of the researcher when analyzing data is to find common ideas in participants’ accounts of their experiences. They described the data analysis process for phenomenological research as follows:

1. Identify statements that relate to the topic. The relevant information obtained during the interview process is separated from the irrelevant information and broken down into small phrases in order to develop one detailed concept.
2. Group statements into meaning units. Portions of the data obtained in the interviews are grouped into categories by the researcher, with the intention of revealing the different meanings contained within each participant's experience of the phenomenon.
3. Seek divergent perspectives. The researcher examines each participant's perceptions in various ways in order to identify possible differences from the original analysis.
4. Construct a composite. The many identified meanings identified in the process are developed by the researcher into a composite view that represents a typical experience of the phenomenon.

In analyzing the data, I sought to identify similarities and differences between respondents' answers as well as significant factors influencing their decision-making processes and the interconnections between these, to develop a set of generalized findings based on the entire sample that accurately reflected the municipal decision-making process as reported by the research participants. Unexpected or atypical findings were highlighted, in order to ensure that the diversity of the participants' views and experiences was properly reflected.

The analysis process focused, in particular, on three things. First was identifying examples of municipal decision-making that are perceived to have had

positive outcomes or other reported benefits. Second was understanding the factors influencing these. Third was developing good practice guidance and recommendations based on the research findings.

The results section includes descriptive results relating to the main characteristics of the respondents, by key characteristics such as type of municipality that they lead. The research findings are reported by the main themes and sub-themes, with the inclusion of selected verbatim quotes from the interview transcripts that illustrate the views and experiences of different types of respondents, as identified in the analysis process. The interpretation process is described in relation to each key finding, and the implications for good practice municipal decision-making are drawn out.

A discussion and conclusions section summarizes the key findings of the study and their significance and sets out best practice recommendations and other points for consideration by municipalities. The implications of the findings for the theoretical understanding of decision-making, particularly in the municipal context, also are discussed.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

In qualitative research, internal validity refers to the extent to which a study accurately reflects the phenomenon it is investigating. Another important concept relating to the value and usefulness of the study is external validity, which is closely related to the notion of reliability as used in quantitative research, and refers to the extent to which the findings are transferable to a wider population. Related concepts

that are important for evaluating the quality of a qualitative research study and establishing the “trustworthiness” of the findings include dependability, confirmability, and inter-coder reliability. In this section, I discuss these concepts and its importance in qualitative research, and highlight the ways in which they are addressed in the study.

The concepts of reliability and validity were originally developed in relation to quantitative research, and these represent key measures for assessing the quality of a research study. Quantitative research methods allow for the measurement of these concepts using statistical techniques. Traditionally, the concepts of reliability and validity were not generally regarded as relevant to qualitative research. Nowadays however, qualitative researchers are expected to meet equally high standards of rigor and research quality, though defined and measured in different ways, and often using alternative terms such as transferability, dependability and credibility (Barusch, Gringeri, & George, 2011; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012a).

When considering whether qualitative research is valid, Leedy and Ormrod (2010) stated that the researcher ask two questions: (1) are there enough controls associated with the study to make certain that the data produce valid conclusions, and (2) can the observed phenomenon be used to make generalizations when considering situations outside the study? To achieve credibility, the study and its research instruments should be based on a thorough review of existing literature, so that it is grounded in an accurate understanding of current knowledge about the issue, and collects relevant data that will enable the researcher to answer the

research questions. In the case of the current study, an extensive literature review was conducted, covering different aspects of the issue under study, such as theories of decision-making and the environmental factors affecting municipal administration in the current economic and political climate. Considerable care was also taken in drafting questions for the semistructured interviews, so that they were designed to capture as much relevant and accurate information as possible, for the purpose of addressing the research questions and developing good practice guidance on decision-making regarding the prioritization of municipal projects for funding.

Another important means of maximizing the credibility of qualitative research is by thoroughly documenting the data collection, coding, and analysis methods in detail, so that other researchers can evaluate these and determine whether the conclusions reached by the researcher are reasonable and justified. In order to maximize the validity of qualitative research, it is therefore crucial to ensure that the research activities, including data collection and analysis processes, are thoroughly documented in a research journal. Feedback from peers, which entails soliciting opinions from colleagues to ascertain whether the researcher's interpretation of the data is suitable, can then be used to confirm the study's credibility.

For a qualitative study to be regarded as credible it is not essential that a different researcher would have reached exactly the same conclusions, but it is important that other researchers can evaluate the methods used and confirm that the conclusions are reasonable and defensible based on the research evidence and on the methods used to generate this. In the case of this research study, a field journal was used to document the data collection process, and detailed notes and observations

were recorded within NVivo to record the process of coding, interpretation, and analysis.

It is especially important to be able to demonstrate that the data collection and analysis processes were free from any form of bias. Researcher bias is a common risk in face-to-face interviewing when the researcher inadvertently influences the participant's responses through their facial expression, tone of voice or use of wording when asking a question. The participant may then provide an answer that they feel is acceptable or expected by the researcher but does not accurately reflect their own belief or view. Bias may also arise in qualitative studies if the researcher selects research participants who are most likely to have experiences that fit a pre-conceived notion of the phenomenon being studied, or if they focus in the analysis on extreme or atypical cases (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

### **Transferability**

Although qualitative research findings are not strictly transferable beyond the sample of research participants, due to the small numbers and nonrandom sampling methods usually involved, it is important that a qualitative study should generate results that have wider significance and implications for understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Polit & Beck, 2010). Leedy and Ormrod (2010) claimed that the credibility or the internal validity of research involves whether the design yields sufficient data to enable the researcher to make truthful conclusions.

Pearson, Parkin, and Coomber (2011) stated that although qualitative research is more familiar, there are still some issues relating to applications from one

venue to an alternative venue. Polit and Beck (2010) recommended the use of “thick descriptions” in qualitative analysis in order to ensure transferability of the findings to other contexts. Daymon and Holloway (2010) observed that thick description includes not only detailed accounts of participants and the research, but also accounts of the participants’ views. This also involves presenting sufficiently detailed information to allow readers to draw their own conclusions about whether the research findings are likely to be relevant to other people and settings.

### **Dependability**

Additional strategies that help establish dependability within the current study included the use of triangulation and respondent validation. In this study, I used each of these strategies to help ensure validity.

Triangulation is the use of more than one source of data with the intention that they support the researcher’s hypothesis or theory (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Denscombe (2014) described this process as confirming information gained from one source by referring to two or more other sources. Triangulation can include the use of data from different sources, or data collected using a combination of methods, such as interviews and self-completion surveys (Olsen, 2004). Multiple or mixed methods have become relatively common in social research and are an important method of triangulation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In this study, I used data triangulation by incorporating the use of documentary evidence relating to municipal budget allocations and comparing this with the accounts of the research participants regarding the prioritization of funds for nonmandated projects within their municipality.

Respondent validation involves presenting conclusions to the participants and asking whether they are in agreement with the findings. This can be approached in two different ways, defined by Westbrook (1994) as “weak” and “strong” methods of respondent validation. In the weak method, research participants are asked to confirm that the record of their individual interview, such as a written transcript, accurately reflects what they said. In the strong version, research participants are asked to read a version of the final research report and evaluate whether the conclusions reflect their own experience.

### **Confirmability**

In order to address the issue of confirmability, I used the strategy of reflexivity (Shaw, 2010). This was especially important because of my own position as an elected official in Magnolia and my personal knowledge of some of the research participants. Reflexivity is important in any qualitative study because the researcher needs to reflect on his or her social and emotional involvement with the participants and the subject (Jones & Watt, 2010). Reflexivity involves considering any preconceived ideas that one may have about the participants or the issue being studied, and reflecting on any ways in which the researcher’s own characteristics, such as gender, age, or educational background, may affect the way they collect and interpret the research data.

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) wrote that in qualitative research, one uses reflexivity because the collection of data is unavoidably affected by one’s own preconceptions; for this reason, qualitative researchers should disclose their biases and discuss how the latter may have influenced the research.

This section has described various methods of maximizing the quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research, most of which were employed to some extent in the study. These helped to ensure that the research achieved high standards of rigor and that it generated findings that have relevance and value beyond the immediate sample of research participants. The next section discusses ethical concerns.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical treatment of the participants is an important consideration in social research, and especially in phenomenological qualitative research involving in-depth interviewing about personal views and experiences (Bevan, 2014). As Denscombe (2014) observed, it is important that social researchers respect the rights and dignity of the people involved in their studies, ensure they come to no harm because of participation, and act with honesty and integrity towards them. It is also important to ensure that the research does not contravene any laws or regulations, for example with regard to data protection and confidentiality, and that it is conducted to high levels of professional social research practice. Participants must be assured that their involvement in the research is voluntary, and that the information they provide will be treated in confidence and used only for the stated purpose of the study. If appropriate, their anonymity should also be guaranteed by the researcher.

When conducting a qualitative study, ethical concerns may sometimes develop with the identification of the problem and purpose. In addressing additional ethical concerns related to intervention activities, Creswell (2012) stated that, as researchers identify the problem of the study, the solution to the stated problem

should be beneficial to the participants of the study and the rationale should be made available to participants upon first contact. Ethical concerns can also develop in the data collection process, in the analysis of the data, or in the write-up of results (Creswell, 2012).

In relation to the present study, measures were taken at every stage to ensure that the research was conducted to high ethical standards. Before engaging with any participant or collecting any data, I sought and received authorization to conduct the study from the Walden University Institution Review Board (IRB) (Approval #11-05-14-0115307). This is a requirement of the institution and helped to ensure that the detailed research plans met the Board's required ethical standards.

To make certain that participants made an informed decision before agreeing to participate in the study, all necessary information about the purpose of the study was given to each participant with the invitation to participate (Appendix B). This document contained information on any potential risks, steps to take in case of discomfort, the procedures of the research, and a statement of confidentiality. Prior to the collection of any data, informed consent was obtained of each participant. Additional participant protection was provided through masking identifying information in the collected data.

In order to address ethical concerns in the process of collecting the data, a plan to preserve the privacy of each participant is of utmost importance. In addition, the minimization of any undue pressure that may prevent participation or compromise participants' ability to provide honest and open responses to the interview questions is equally important. Further, as a part of the plan to address the

ethical concerns, I made clear my role as the researcher and the roles of the participants so that there would be no misunderstanding regarding the collection of the data and my profession.

In describing the data treatment and the process of archiving the data, Creswell (2012) indicated that phenomenological research primarily relies on the data being collected through the in-depth interview process. I utilized audio recordings during the interviews. In order to capture the best sound, the recorder location was carefully determined. Duplicates of the audio were made at the completion of each session. In addition, a master list of the gathered information was developed. These methods of data collection have ethical implications since it was especially important to ensure that the recordings remain securely stored, with access to them restricted to myself and authorized individuals such as the transcriptionist.

All data considered confidential or obtained through anonymous sources are being kept secure. In order to protect the data, secured files were created on the computer with back-up files secured on an external drive and kept in a safe or another secured area (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). No confidential data have been or will be disseminated. All transcribed data are protected by a confidentiality agreement signed by the transcriber of the data. The data will be stored for five years, in accordance with the Walden Dissertation Guide Book (2012), after which it will be physically destroyed.

## Summary

In this chapter, I presented a comprehensive description of the method and procedures of this qualitative, phenomenological research study. The purpose of the current qualitative, phenomenological study was to identify the critical factors that influence elected municipal leaders' decision-making processes related to the prioritization of nonmandated projects, as well as the allocation of resources to fund these projects in the state of Magnolia, and to identify effective examples of decision-making systems and processes that can be used to develop best practice guidance.

In this chapter I reiterated the five research questions, which have been formulated with the objective of understanding the current effectiveness of municipal decision-making from the perspective of municipal leaders, and of identifying examples of good practice decision-making processes and systems that can be used to develop best practice guidance for management and prioritization of municipal funds.

Next, it was noted that this research study used a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach to investigate the decision-making processes relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated civic projects in Magnolia and identify factors that influence these. The study used in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of 15 municipal mayors from across Magnolia, supplemented by a small secondary analysis component involving the review of municipal budget allocation documentation.

Qualitative rather than quantitative research methods were used because the aim was to generate explanatory and illustrative information relating to municipal decision-making that can be used to achieve in-depth understanding of this phenomenon and how it can be improved in order to increase the quality and sustainability of outcomes. A phenomenological approach was adopted, as the intention was to examine municipal decision-making from the personal perspectives of the research participants and to explore the meanings that they attribute to their experiences of this phenomenon.

Next, I discussed my own role as a researcher, disclosed various personal characteristics and beliefs that might potentially influence the research and its findings, and highlighted the ways in which I attempted to minimize researcher bias. In the remainder of the chapter, I discussed in detail the research design and its rationale, along with the sampling procedure, sample size, and instrumentation. Additionally, I described the data collection process, data analysis process, ethical issues, and role of the researcher. Chapters 4 and 5 contain the results of the study and conclusions based on the findings.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to consider the decision-making processes involved in the prioritization and funding of nonmandated civic projects in the U.S. state of Magnolia (pseudonym). This investigation was informed by in-depth interviews of a purposefully selected group of 15 municipal leaders. The study was designed to explore the views of the effectiveness of leaders and their then-current decision-making processes, and to identify how these processes can be improved to enhance the consistency and quality of decision-making.

Five primary research questions served as the focal point and the primary direction for this study:

**Research Question 1:** What are the factors that influence municipal leaders' personal decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in public sector management?

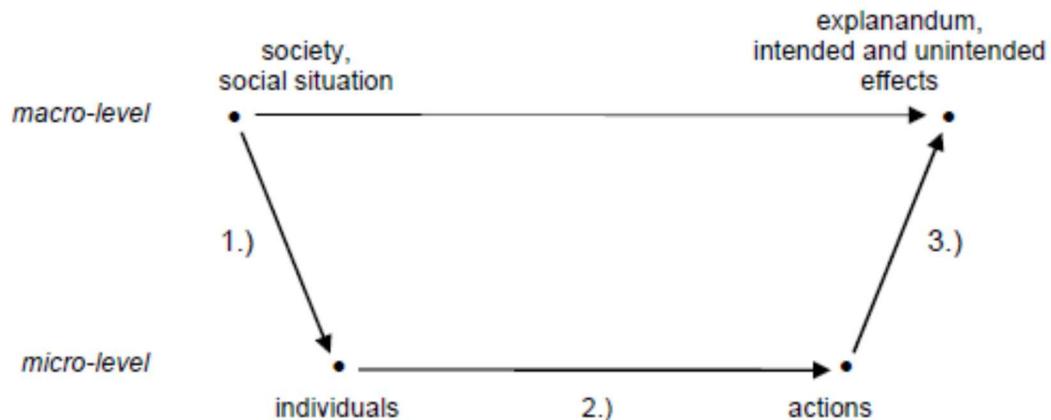
**Research Question 2:** What are the factors that are perceived to influence organizational decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in municipal management in Magnolia?

**Research Question 3:** What organizational systems or processes are used in decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in municipal management in Magnolia?

**Research Question 4:** How do the research participants perceive the effectiveness of current decision-making related to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in management of their municipal administrations?

**Research Question 5:** How can the decision-making processes of municipalities related to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects be improved?

This chapter begins with an overview of the research purpose, to include the research questions, which served as the guide for the study and a concise review of the findings. The remainder of the chapter covers a description of the research setting, the sampling procedure and final sample, the process by which the data were analyzed, and a comprehensive review of the systematic inductive analysis, including the bracketing experience and the macro-micro-macro model (see *Figure 1*).



*Figure 1.* A graphical depiction of the macro-micro-macro model. Reprinted from "Pourquoi pas? Rational Choice as a Basic Theory of HRM," Wenzel Matiaske, 2004, *Management Revue*, 15(2), p. 252, Reprinted with permission.

### **Research Setting**

The conditions of cities throughout the U.S., as in Magnolia, are changing. Ever-increasing populace expansion in municipalities leads not just to increased citizen demands on local government, but also to a new environment in which municipalities locally need to take action and adjust (NLC, 2014). Nationally, CFO's the nation reported in 2014 that fiscal conditions were on the rebound as the Great Recession diminished (NLC, 2014). However, the fiscal condition of the local municipalities has not yet regained pre recession status.

In terms of budgets, there has been an increase of revenues generated by taxes. However, there are even more increasing costs because of an increased need for services and an ever-increasing need for infrastructure improvement on a long-term basis, and responsibility for employee salaries, healthcare, and pension costs. Moreover, the outlook fiscally continued to be strained by decreases in state and federal funding (NLC, 2014).

To collect data regarding the types of funds available to the participating municipalities, I interviewed the Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) of the 15 municipalities in Magnolia whose mayors agreed to participate in the study. The information received from these CFOs varied in terms of the types of funds that were tracked and the types of revenues that were generated. Table 2 gives an overview of the data generated from each municipality.

Table 2

*Secondary Data of Budget Cuts From CFOs of the Municipalities*

Fund Type	% in 2012	% in 2013	% in 2014
General Fund	5%	< 1% >	1%
Special Revenue Fund	2%	1%	2%
Debt Service Fund	< .2% >	< .1% >	< 1% >
Capital Project Fund	3%	< 5% >	< 5% >
Enterprise Fund	27%	8%	7%
Internal Services Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
Pension Trust Fund	4.1%	1.5%	.5%

**Sample Frame**

Participants were chosen as representatives of specific geographic regions, including municipalities that were variously classified as being large, medium, or small in size. For the purpose of this study, a large municipal area consisted of a population that contained over 100,000 citizens. Several large municipalities included in this study operated under a parish city form of government, and included a combined total of more than 100,000 citizens. A municipality with a population of 40,000–99,999 citizens was considered medium, and a municipality with a population of less than 40,000 was categorized as small.

In Magnolia, there were four cities with a population of 100,000 or more citizens at the time of this study. I was precluded from conducting research in one of the larger cities because I knew the current mayor, and one of the municipalities was not able to participate. Of the five cities in the state with a population between 40,000 and 80,000 citizens, four participated in the study, with one city's leader electing not to participate. In order to obtain a sufficient sample, I sent out two mailings several weeks apart until 15 participants from had been recruited. The final

list of participating municipalities included two large cities, four medium cities, and nine small cities.

### **Demographics of the Sample**

The selection criteria of current elected officials in the leadership position dictated the selection process, which meant that that the potential participants from large- and medium-sized cities were male. However, for the smaller-size cities, where there were female leaders, those who were contacted did not respond to the invitation request. As a result, all of the participants were male.

Regarding years of service in their current positions, 40% of the sample had served in their current position for 4 years or less, and 60% had served more than four years (Table 3). Of the 15 participants, 13% had been in an elected position for less than 4 years. Of the 15 participants, six were first-time leaders in their current position and nine had served multiple terms in their current position. Forty percent of the participants had served in an elected role between five and 8 years, while 47% of the participants had served in an elected position for more than 8 years. Of the 15 participants, 20%, or three of the 15, had served over 20 years as an elected official.

Table 3

*Number of Years of Service as an Elected Official (n =15)*

Years Served as an Elected Official	<i>n</i>	%
≤ 4 years in current role	6	40
> 4 years in current role	9	60
≤ 4 years as an elected official overall	1	13
Between 5 and 8 years overall	6	40
> 8 years as an elected official overall	7	47
Over 20 Years as an elected official	3	20
Total	15	

## **Data Analysis**

### **Coding and Themes**

The coded units were based on the interview questions, which assisted me in answering the research questions. Table 4 shows the research question and the section of the interview where the question was answered. Through the analysis process, the themes that emerged were: (1) a commitment of stewardship; (2) the desire for stakeholder involvement; (3) a need for strategic planning; (4) tactical operations by departments; (5) information management; (5) policy upgrade; (6) need to share knowledge; (7) desire for better traffic flow; (8) better fund controls; (9) growth of the community; (10) adhere to EPA regulations; (11) growing general fund balances. I then consolidated the themes into dimensions, which consisted of Financial Stability; Infrastructure Upgrading; Economic Development; Policy Enhancement and Traffic Relief. Figure 2 illustrates the results of coding on the theme of infrastructure.

Table 4

*Research Questions & Corresponding Interview Sections & Items*

Research Question	Section & Item
1: What are the factors that influence municipal leaders' personal decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in public sector management?	3: Factors Influencing Decision Making Process: Item 8.
2: What are the factors that are perceived to influence organizational decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in municipal management in Magnolia?	2: Influences on Goal Achievement: Items 4 - 7.
3: What organizational systems or processes are used in decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in municipal management in Magnolia?	5: Factors Influencing Joint Decision Making Process
4: How do the research participants perceive the effectiveness of current decision-making related to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in management of their municipal administrations?	4: Decision Making Systems and Processes: Items 11-15
5: In what ways do the research participants perceive that decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in the management of their municipality could be improved?	6: Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Decision-Making: Items 14- 15

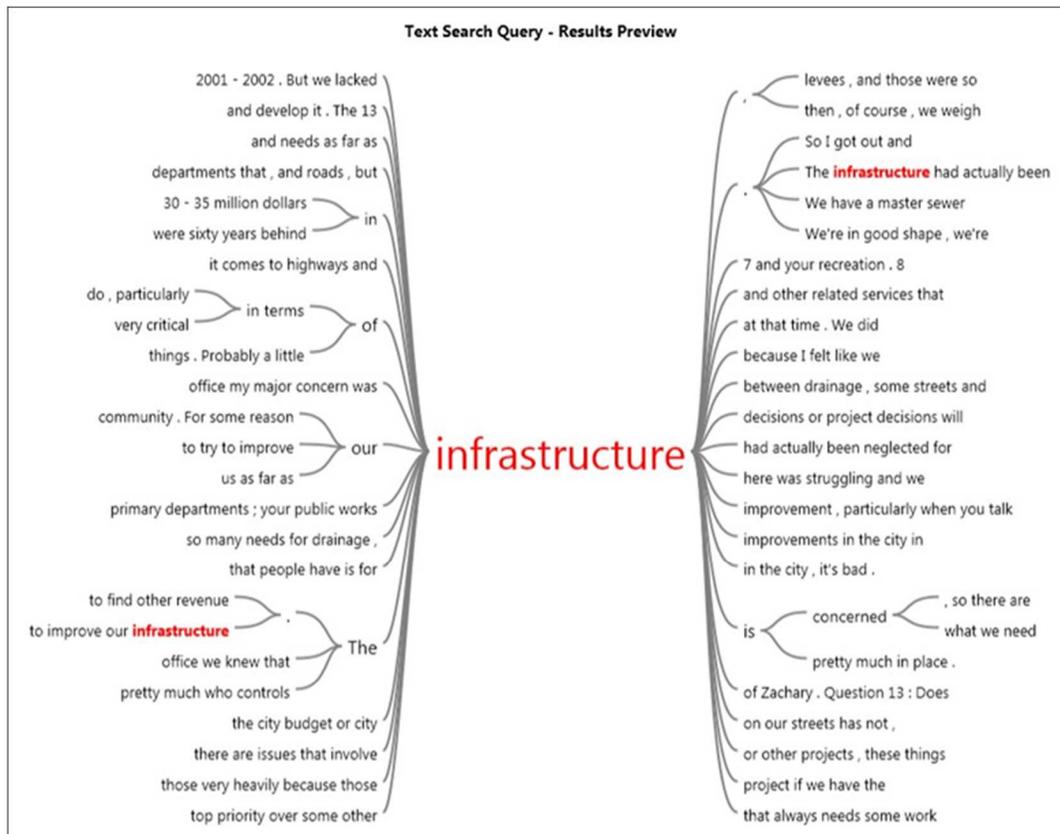


Figure 2. A visualization of the text search based on the theme of infrastructure.

## Evidence of Trustworthiness

### Credibility

Transparency assures quality and rigor (Bluhm, Harman, Lee, & Mitchell, 2011; Tracy, 2010). The process of gathering any data, by way of fieldwork, did not start until after I received permission from Walden's IRB. The notification of completion and approval was received on November 6, 2014 (Confirmation # 11-05-14-0115307).

I started collecting data with my first interview on 11-20-2014 and completed my last interview on 12-19-2014. Guest et al. (2012a, 2012b, 2012c) stated that researchers are compelled to reason rationally when recording the

analysis process of their research in an organized manner. I made three reviews of each transcript. Confirmation was given at the end of each interview that a full copy of the transcript would be provided. I did reserve the right to contact the participant if clarification was needed, based on Tracy's (2010) recommendation that researchers conduct member checking. On the first review, the task was to clean up the fillers and minor grammar issues, while maintaining the initial meaning of the participants' responses. Wu et al. (2011) stated that, "Speakers prolong the pronunciation of fillers (e.g., "UH" and "UM") as they maintain their turn to speak" (p. 62). Such fillers were removed from the transcripts.

I reviewed the transcripts a second time and replaced names with a coded description. The use of the data management tool, NVivo was engaged after confirmation of the completed transcripts and member check. I used an inductive approach as described by Kuckartz (2014a, 2014b, 2014c). From the third pass of the transcripts of hand coding, the information was then inserted into NVivo for data management. In this process, I created a node for each interview question. I transferred the hand-coded data into NVivo and ran a series of queries.

I conducted a matrix coding, which consists of cross tabulating the coded data between two lists. I also conducted a word frequency test, as well as a text search, to support the findings conducted by hand. The process of collecting the data and the use of the interview guide and protocol contributed to a research study that is trustworthy. See Table 5 for a breakdown of the process I followed to ensure qualitative trustworthiness within the research.

Table 5

*Trustworthiness Protocols*

Researcher activity	Study protocols	Trustworthiness contribution
Archive data	Retention of raw data is planned for 5 years, in compliance with Walden University requirements	Credibility
Observational journal	Researcher notes during interviews, follow-up impressions after interviews, document all decisions, and major milestones	Credibility/ transferability/ dependability/ confirmability
Audit trail	Process documentation, retention of all analysis and synthesis process steps, record why and when of all interview guide changes, all decisions, and research milestones	Dependability/ confirmability
Data source triangulation	Use of multiple participants from different temporal and spatial environments	Transferability
Thick, layered description	Provide detail necessary to other researchers to apply protocols elsewhere in similar locations	Transferability
Slow, open process	Suspending judgment about the observed phenomenon, exercising self-awareness, and set aside reference frames to address bias and potential for misinterpretation	Credibility
Iterative, scientific, and consistent process	Following an iterative and scientific process, NVivo content analysis software will support coding consistency in the systematic inductive approach selected for data analysis	Credibility
Data collection protocol and instrument	Interview protocol followed, interview guide includes questions that enable answers with appropriate depth and precision	Credibility
Data saturation	Purposive sample with a sample size large enough to assure data saturation and negative cases	Credibility
Member checking	For accuracy verification, participants will verify transcripts, codes, and synthesis results	Credibility

*Note.* Reprinted from *The Positive Deviance Phenomenon of Leading Successful Strategic Change* by G. Johnson Morris, 2014 (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University). Copyright 2014 by G. Johnson Morris.

### **Transferability**

Pearson, Parkin, and Coomber (2011) stated that, small sample sizes might limit transferability. As noted in Chapter 3, the purposive sampling procedure was also a potential limitation for the present study. I made considerable efforts to hold

fast to stringent criteria in the sampling process to limit individual bias. The purpose was to preclude the limitation of transferability with the findings.

Polit and Beck (2010) recommended the use of *thick description* when analyzing qualitative data to make certain transferability is possible when applied in other environments. Such description involves presenting sufficiently detailed information to allow readers to draw their own conclusions about whether the research findings are likely to be relevant to other people and settings. I used the words of the participants to paint a picture of the phenomenon as viewed by each.

### **Dependability**

Greener (2011) noted that dependability is achieved when the research process is transparent and lends itself to examination. I used the process articulated in Chapter 3 for the data treatment and the archiving process, and followed Creswell (2012) in using in-depth interviews as my primary source of data. I utilized an audio recording instrument during the interviews. The placement of the device was such that the best recording quality was achieved. Duplicates of the audio recording of each participant were made at the completion of each session.

I prepared and developed a master list of the participants and assigned an acronym to each one (e.g., P1, P2). This particular method of data collection has ethical implications, thus requiring secured and restricted storage. The recordings have been stored in a locked box within a locked safe, to which I only have the key. The files were transcribed by a professional court reporter who signed a confidentiality agreement, (see Appendix F). All data, audio, and written files have been stored on an external drive that is kept in a remote location. The data have been

stored in accordance with the Walden Dissertation Guide Book (2012) and Richards (2014). After five years, the files will be physically destroyed.

### **Confirmability**

As stated in Chapter 3, in order to address the issues of internal validity and confirmability, I used the strategy of reflexivity. I also disclosed, in the interests of transparency, that it was especially important to address the issue of confirmability because I am an elected official in Magnolia and I had personal knowledge of some of the research participants. I did run for another elected office, as I disclosed also. Chan, Fung, and Chien (2013) considered reflexivity as a major means of distinguishing and exposing the researcher's thought process and thereby reducing researcher bias.

Greener (2011) viewed reflexivity as the most important means of ensuring that a study can be verified by further later studies. The important elements of reflexivity are field notes, research diaries, and records of how the analysis developed (Greener, 2011). Throughout the data collection process, I maintained a set of notes taken as different thoughts occurred to me. During the interviews, I made notes of participants' body posture, inflections when speaking, and facial expressions.

### **Results**

According to Moustakas (1994) and supported by Finlay (2013), to reveal the lived experience of a person, the researcher must record the person's account of the lived experience, then perform an iterative process of analyzing the data, moving from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories. Following these

guidelines, I was able to uncover the needed information in order to give answers to the presented research questions posed by this study. The results of the study are revealed in the following manner. Each research question is presented with the interview question and the section of the interview that produced the data.

### **Influences on Goal Achievement**

In this section of the interviews, my goal was to acquire information pertinent to the goals and outlooks each participant had coming into office. Each of the participants indicated that they had major goals or objectives to achieve:

- P1: “My goal was to stop the rain from coming into the buildings. Every one of the buildings had a leak when I took over.”
- P2: “When I first took office—well, when I was running for office, I set some goals... I’m trying to, you know, continue what my predecessor, had started with a major issue with sewerage.... We started a lot of belt tightening in his administration. We saw the downturn in the economy in his term in roughly 2007, 2008.”
- P3: “When we took office one of our major goals was to try to improve our infrastructure. The infrastructure had actually been neglected for years. ...My biggest goal so far has been that we have been able to expend 30-35 million dollars in infrastructure improvements. We’ve improved sewer, gas, water and roads.”
- P4: “When I came in my major goal objective was to get the City in a better financial state. We’ve gone from deficits to a record budget fund balance or surplus. ...The other one was to construct a 21st-

century state-of-the-art airport terminal, and we've done that. ...And the other one was to construct a public safety center, and we've been able to do that. ...And the other one was to construct a public safety center, and we've been able to do that.”

- P5: “Well, we have purchased a new building and renovated a new building that we're going to move the Department of Motor Vehicles into. ...The state threatened to take the building, the department away from us unless we moved it to a new better building. ...So we spent quite a sum on that.”
- P6: “Well, first goal that we achieved was when I took office, we had no real policies in place. The city had been operating without any real policies. No policy manual and really no set of rules by which to operate. So the first undertaking was to get someone with the expertise to come in and put together a policy manual. We completed that probably within a year and a half and, of course, after that it certainly made our administration much more effective in terms of operation of city government. ...it outlined in every capacity the duties and responsibilities of those respective agencies.”
- P7: “I knew there was an out-migration problem. ...I was tired of politicians talking, talking, talking and never really doing anything to change anything in the system to make a difference. ....my goal was to make the city the best place to live and raise a family in the south.”

- P8: “A 10-point plan that mainly focused concerning drainage, roads, construction of levees, reducing insurance rates and matters like that.”
- P9: “One of the biggest problems as perceived and reality for the city was traffic congestion. ...putting in dedicated turn lanes, upgrading several of our city streets to four-lanes.”
- P10: “There was a hue and cry about traffic. ...There’s a major demand out here that we do something about traffic ....I also walked into an office that was under a consent decree by the federal government, the EPA, in regards to their sewer projects....we were 60 years behind in infrastructure. ...The other one is like everybody else, we’ve been telling people about healthy eating. ...So, therefore, we have a youth advisory council that took the obesity issue as one of their challenges.”
- P11: “Well, coming into office what we literally try to do is look at and prioritize some major projects.”
- P12: “Well, I would say that our major goals, you know, we’re like every other municipality our size and other, we’re looking for economic development.”
- P13: “One was jobs; there’s no doubt about that. ...Our traffic in our community.”
- P14: “I have emphasized economical development.”

- P15: “One of the big projects I had was to expand our water distribution system. ... The other thing is sewer. You can’t separate the two. ... This is the only community of its size that does not have a school within the town limits.”

Regarding the goal that was most important to participants personally that had not yet been achieved, there were two factors that had so far influenced progress, both positively and negatively. One factor was *funding* ( $n = 9$ ).

- P7: “If I was to be out of office today, that the greatest failure for me would have been able to have gotten something done as it relates to adjudicated properties and blight in neighborhoods. (politics).P9 - Well, as you well know, the bottom line seems to be money. All the mandatory requirements and then the actual funding to do the project are pretty common problems, I think, in most municipalities. (funding).”

Many administrations find that their available resources for nonmandated projects have been severely constrained because of the need to allocate resources to special districts, other unfunded mandates, employee pension schemes and so on. In the absence of federal grants, some administrations had been able to find funding for nonmandated projects through public-private partnerships, reserve funds, or other means.

- P1: “We’ve done a lot of nonmandated projects using grant money. Without the grants we’d be in bad shape. So everything that we’ve done as for as capital improvement basically has been grants.... Well,

the grant money is getting tighter and tighter now. You can't go to the federal government. They don't believe in the pork barrel stuff no more, so you can't get that."

- P3: "Obamacare has kind of hit us very, very hard, the Affordable Care Act....It's costing the city probably, roughly, \$100,000 of all the fees that we had to put in there for it. That's kind of a hard one. Nonmandated funds. Like I say, the retirement, to me my two biggest headaches are retirement and insurance. They're just eating up more and more of our funds."
- P4: "We have been able to do some projects through our, you know, taxes that we have, mileages that we have in place for capital projects in addition to capital outlay projects on projects that were nonmandated....They are limited projects but we've been able to use a diverse amount of revenue to be able to do projects....we partnered with the private community, with the business community. So that's how we have been able to do some projects."
- P5: "One of the things that's going to have to come about in the next four years is we're going to have to find other sources of revenue."
- P7: "We have six municipalities. Many of them have been very aggressive in their annexation policies over the years. So our budget today in 2014 is similar to the budget they had in 1975 because we're using the same amount of money they had back then and, obviously, the demands are greater."

- P8: “Certain requirements that we have for drainage and levees have really strained my budget. But for the most part the advantage we’ve had in the parish is the fact that our economy is so good.”
- P10: “Well, we’ve been fortunate in our budgetary process of where we have had extra dollars. So when we go through this we will go through and do a lot of things that this government was never doing before.”
- P11: “The available resources for nonmandated projects has changed dramatically to the point that we’ve had to change our mindset as to how we literally budget and prioritize projects to be very honest with you.”
- P13: “Well, I think we’re very fortunate. We have been paying on some bonds for a long period of time. ... We had some reserve money that kept, you always want to have reserves, what you call emergency funds; those reserves have built up pretty good over the years.”
- P14: “You know, we’re tied down. In fact, the city is in a deficit so any funds that we get in we use those funds towards decreasing that deficit. So right now we don’t have any money available for any outside projects.”
- P15: “Well, relying on grants is becoming a much more difficult process because the grant money is just not as readily available as it was.”

## Factors Influencing Personal Decision Making Process

In this section of the interview, my goal was to find out information about factors that have an influence on the ways that each participant and his administration determine how to prioritize nonmandated civil projects for funding, within the available budget. Participants considered factors such as whether grant funding is available, the project is something that will save the city money in the long run, or safety, legal, or environmental issues dictate that a problem be addressed. In some cases, political concerns, such as support from key constituencies or districts, played a role.

- P1: “Well, what I look at is part of the project funding with a grant.... We got a project and we got a \$24,000 grant. Well, we need \$11,000 more to go ahead and do the project, and that’s to build some rooms in the municipal building upstairs. Well, if I don’t get the \$11,000, I lose the 24,000. So, I mean, it’s simple. . . . We were paying \$35.11 to another City Sewer and that was based on water that was coming out of the well, divided by the number of homes. Well, there were no water meters. People were wasting water, toilet was running, leaking. They didn’t care. . . . This is the right decision. We saved \$21.7 million gallons of water that we wasn’t losing.”
- P2: “What are the repercussions if we don’t? You know, that’s the main factor. If we don’t fix sewerage, we’re going to be fined. . . . I always try to look at what the consequences will be on which priorities should be first.”

- P3: “If it’s for the betterment of the city, the whole of the city, not just one part of the city.”
- P4: “The opportunity or the options that we have of funds; i.e., taxes, fees, if the business community is involved. ... If we decide it has to be a tax, we consider whether we think that ... the business community and organizations and groups that they support it.”
- P5: “I think that the impact, how many people are involved in the impact. How much are they affected by the impact.”
- P6: “If it’s an issue that involves the public safety, we certainly would give that the top priority over some other infrastructure project if we have the latitude to make that decision.”
- P8: “It’s not the old police jury system where they get a certain amount of money they can spend in their district. I can put as much or as little in each of the districts as could be. . . .- I’ve spent more money in other districts; therefore, I felt an obligation to come back and spend money on some projects in some districts which the council member thought was important.”
- P9: “Well, for the big projects, it’s what kind of return is the city going to get in return on its investment and how long will it take.”
- P11: “Well, when you say personally, for the most part I try not to, as far as my personal beliefs, let that get in the way even though to some extent it does sometimes.... Recognize the needs that are in our city,

particularly in our low to moderate income areas. We base a lot of our decisions on that.”

- P12: “Well, I think the first thing that we need to look at or I always look at is what’s the need and how many people does this effect.”

As a follow-up to each participant, I asked why each factor was a consideration. In general the responses related to community priorities and the sense that everybody is important. Some of the responses were:

- P3: “No matter whether you’re in the rich section or a poor section, you are part of the city.”
- P4: “Because generally if you have it organized, as you know, there’s an organized group that’s opposed to it, most of the time it’s not going to pass. Especially if the business community comes out against it.”
- P14: “Because I’m here to make sure that the City increases its revenue.”

I went on to identify many other factors and gained insight as to the effect of each on the participants’ personal decision-making (see Figure 3).

	Interview Participants																		
	P 1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15	<i>n</i> = 15	YES %	NO %	Both %
s	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	-	N	N	N	N	Y	N	14	29%	71%	
Political																			
or experts	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	15	100%	0%	
the																			
le	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	15	20%	80%	
a particular																			
	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y/N	N	Y	Y/N	N	Y/N	N	N	N	15	33%	47%	20%
reputation or																			
	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	15	20%	80%	
ect can be																			
	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	15	80%	20%	
	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	15	100%	0%	
oney																			
	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	15	100%	0%	
ditional																			
	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	15	100%	0%	
rganization																			
	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	15	53%	47%	

s influencing the participants' personal decision-making process.

When I asked about whether the perceived benefits for a particular group was a factor, there was a mixture of responses:

- P1- "Well, we got a budget. We have to include that in the budget, the cost for doing business. It's a cost for doing business is basically what it is."
- P2: "Depends. It depends on how it affects, like if it's CDBG funding that will help, yes. Absolutely. If it's some type of project that will help something within the City and it can only be dedicated for that, yes, I will consider that."
- P3: "I would say yes from the standpoint of trying to, for instance, you know, I will ask myself how does this impact business."
- P6: "If we're talking about the issues that involve children, yeah, we will certainly, we want it to be beneficial to that particular group, or the elderly, yeah."
- P7: "It falls somewhere in the middle. That can mean a lot of things. So I think the answer is no on that but there are certain groups that we do have to go ahead and appease."
- P9: "Yeah, I think we do certain things for our aging population."
- P11: "No, that's not a factor."
- P12: "Well, you know, you're certainly influenced by the groups, but I still think you need to really look at overall what's best for all the citizens."

- P13: “When I came into office I felt like the African-American community felt like they had been forgotten..... I meet with people in district and ask what are your concerns, what do you want that you think you’re not getting and let’s talk about it.”

I asked about enhancing one’s own reputation or that of one’s party, as well.

Most indicated that this meant little to them, although a few admitted that it had occurred to them at times:

- P2: “No. My philosophy is very simple. There’s no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn’t mind who gets the credit. I stole that from my boy Mr. Reagan.”
- P3: “No. Care less.”
- P4: “Sometimes, yes. I mean, not all the time. ... some decision was going to be damaging to myself but it was the right thing to do. But I have considered, you know, how it impacted me on some things.”
- P6: “That’s, I guess in some capacity.”
- P7: “Zero.”
- P9: “Little to none.”
- P10: “Zero factor.”
- P11: “Absolutely not.”
- P12: “I’m not too interested in that. I’m old enough that I’m comfortable with who I am so I’m not trying to make a reputation.”
- P13: “That’s not a factor to me.”

## Decision Making Systems and Processes

In this section of the interview, I wanted to explore the systems or processes used in decision-making about project prioritization and resource allocation within the participants' administrations. I asked that each briefly describe the overall process by which decisions are made regarding which nonmandated projects to fund. A pattern emerged of not having any real processes in place, as illustrated in the following examples:

- P1: "My people, they don't live up to what they're supposed to live up to, so that's an issue.... They don't have the vision. They don't see the vision."
- P2: "I guess it all depends. Sometimes I will have a professional come to us with an idea on either cost savings or something within the city and we'll take a look at that. ... A lot of times we'll look at things other cities and parishes are doing. If we think it will work good for us, we'll explore it."
- P3: "The process is that I always include the director of administration who is over the money, the city attorney is over the legalities of everything."
- P5: "If the project is a minor one, it's between me and the person whose district is being requested. ... If it's involving a large amount of money and it affects a large amount of people, then of course the council comes together to make that decision."

- P6: “So it’s a long process. Some things that you just have to kind of plan, look at them, get them developed and it takes a long time. And finding the money is the biggest problem.”
- P7: “Somebody’s got to bring the project to our attention.... So once that project is on the radar and then we internally discuss it and evaluate it.”
- P8: “Truly, it usually comes with an idea from myself or a constituent. After that initial conception, then we try to get some type of anticipated cost and determine if it’s feasible and then appoint engineers and we proceed in that direction.”
- P9: “Usually I depend upon the department head who has a project that needs to be done.... We take it to you guys and the city council and see if y’all agree with the need that we, the administration has presented....Checks and balances of the executive and legal and judicial between the city council and the administration is a good checks and balance to see that we’re using the citizens’ money right.”
- P11: “You know, there’s a lot of conversations with staff. ...have that conversation with the legislative body.”
- P12: “Typically, I listen to department heads because they see the needs sometimes that we don’t see. ... I get their input because they also see needs that I don’t see.”
- P13: “I listen to our department heads and then, again, I take it, I’m a process guy. ... Get input from other people before we make that

decision....Some decisions are easy because they just make sense and you've got to do them quickly. Some are a process. ... But I listen to the department heads and the people and the city council and everybody to help me make decisions.”

- P15: “Well, I generally always run this by the board of aldermen. What I will generally do in a work session meeting most likely is just explain to them what I am contemplating. We need to put this up on a system. Call me, tell me, send me a note, send me an e-mail. Give me your feedback on it. I want them to be involved because I don't want them saying, well, he is over there making all the decisions.”

When asked if there were clearly defined decision-making responsibilities and accountabilities within the process described each participant perceived it to be clearly defined.

Regarding the participants' own role in the decision-making process, nearly all indicated that the ultimate decision-making responsibility resided with the mayor. Exceptions were Participant 5, who stated, “I generally give my point of view and then let them decide,” and Participant 15: “Well, my main role is to make the board aware of what I think we need to do. It's my responsibility to carry it out once the board has approved it.” Participant 2 indicated that he pushed his staff to present information that would influence his decision: “I will lean on my staff because I trust my executive staff level members because of their vast knowledge and experience working in all different types of governments.”

This does not mean, however, that the participants do not delegate decision-making authority when appropriate. One of the common phrases centered around the issue of micromanagement:

- P1: “If it’s department level, I let them run their department. I don’t micromanage.”
- P2: “I don’t delegate it, per se. I’m not a micromanager.”
- P12: “I wouldn’t say that I delegate decision-making; although, I’m not a micro manager.”

Each of the participants acknowledged that he did delegate decision-making with a clarifying statement generalized through each of the 15 participants. “I allow department heads to run their departments.” In reflecting on the interviews, this was a question that elicited reactions and passion from each participant. Some of the responses included statements such as:

- P1: “Because that’s not my job. If I got somebody that’s the department head that can’t make decisions, I fire them.”
- P2: “I allow my department heads to run their departments because I trust them. My deputy chief administrative officer is head of all the operations of the departments. My CAO, who’s over her, is really over a lot of special projects and big projects and he looks at the big picture of things we’re trying to accomplish in the City, so she handles the mundane things of the day-to-day operations of the departments, but I will definitely lean on them.”

- P3: “I just don’t see me as needing to tell the department head how to run their department. If I do that, I don’t need him or her.”
- P5: “I delegate decision-making to my department heads. However, to clarify that, when it’s a large amount of money that’s going to be involved, they always come to me.”
- P6: “My chief administrative office is one of, well, actually the person whom I delegate a significant amount of responsibility to. The reason I do it is because it’s impossible to be able to manage the day-to-day affairs of the city.”
- P9: “I delegate to the department heads a wide range of decision-making authority. But they know on the mega projects and all they have to come to me. I delegate to them the authority to acquire the contractor to do the job.”
- P12: “On major decisions, again, I’ll make the final decision, but I don’t do that without input.”
- P14: “I do delegate. But I was told a long time ago you don’t expect, you inspect.”
- P15: “Very little. Because that’s part of my job responsibility is to make those decisions. Now, I certainly ask for input.”

I asked if there was a specific committee or other group with responsibility for project prioritization and funding decisions, and if so, who were the members in this group. The common response to this question was either an economic

development group, the city council, or an advisory group. The larger municipalities had developed economic development departments and the chambers of commerce.

When I asked if a strategic approach to decision-making was followed, 60% of participants were not sure if they followed a strategic approach. Some responses were:

- P1: “I don’t know if it’s strategic. My brain just works like that. I mean, I’m focused on things that I like to get done and I weigh different things against each other and, you know, I’m not bragging but, God blessed me with a lot of common sense.”
- P5: “I would say generally we try to.”
- P7: “Yeah, I think so.... the strategic pieces, there’s multiple facets to that....it’s also strategic with getting votes from the council.”
- P8: “I hate to tell you but I don’t think it’s quite as strategic as maybe I would like.”
- P9: “I’m not too sure I understand totally what this strategic approach is. We know what we want for the city.”
- P11: “Not sure exactly what you mean by strategic so give me a little. We do what we can, and we spread that around. We don’t necessarily look at one particular part of town that needs something done. We try to do the most for everybody in town.”
- P13: “I don’t know if we have a strategic approach to decision-making. - I guess there’s a strategy behind everything. Like I say, it’s all a part of the process.”

- P15: “I guess to a degree, yes, we do have. The strategy that we have is I look at these projects. I see that we have issues, a lot of issues. So my thought, and the way to direct that is to make sure that the aldermen are fully aware of what is going on.”

On the other hand, there were other participants who were sure that their administration followed a strategic approach.

- P2: “Absolutely. Sure. We look at what’s the most important things we have to do. When we did the 2030 plan, of course, we wanted to make it all corridor redevelopment and enhancements to the City....we also had to look structurally at what does the City need first. So trying to accomplish the same goal but looking at what’s important to the City first, like structure.”
- P3: “When we came into office we knew that the infrastructure here was struggling and we were going to have to make it. We are one of very few cities that do all three utilities. We have water, gas and sewer. We’ve spent quite a bit of money in the last four years upgrading the gas and water systems here and we’re about 15 million dollars into a sewer rehab project.”
- P10: “Yes, because you can’t be everything to everybody. You have to go out and take a look and do an inventory of yourself. Then after you’ve done that inventory you need to see, okay, how many of these things, ranking wise, can we begin to actually do and take them off this list and move other projects up.”

- P11: “Yes. We try to follow a strategic approach with the idea if the time comes where you have to adjust the approach, you’ve got to be willing to do that. I don’t think you can be successful with a positive outcome if you don’t utilize an approach that everyone, you know, one, is aware of.”
- P14: “Yes, always. Again, we are strategic because we bring in people who are supposed to be experts in the field and we look at the pros and cons. We want to know that when we make a decision that, you know, that we’re doing it based on statistics, based on experts’ opinions, and make sure we do everything in an intelligent manner.”

Figure 4 summarizes participants’ responses regarding factors that influence the group decision-making process in their administrations.

Factors	Interview Participants															n = 15	Yes %	NO %	Both %
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15				
Personal or Political Preferences	N	Y	N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	15	40%	33%	27%
Input from specialists or experts	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	14	100%	0%	-
Perceived benefits for the municipality as a whole	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	15	90%	10%	-
Perceived benefits for a particular group	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y/N	N	N	Y/N	-	N	Y	-	N	13	30%	54%	16%
Enhancing the reputation of the current administration	N	Y	Y/N	Y	N	Y	Y/N	N	Y	N	-	N	Y	N	N	14	36%	50%	14%
How quickly the project can be completed	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	N	Y	14	71%	29%	-
Cost of project	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	15	100%	0%	-
Perceived value for money	-	Y	Y	Y	-	-	Y	-	Y	-	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	9	100%	0%	-
Whether there are additional sources of funding	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y/N	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	N	Y	Y	Y	13	85%	7.5%	7.5%
Familiarity with the organization or individual	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	-	N	N	Y	Y	14	64%	36%	-
Influence of local business or interest group	N	Y	Y/N	Y	Y/N	Y	Y	N	N	-	-	Y	Y	Y/N	Y/N	13	46%	23%	31%
Influence of higher elected leadership	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y/N	-	N	Y	N	N	14	50%	42%	8%
Trade off between short and long term needs	N	Y	-	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y/N	Y	13	69%	23%	8%
Is the decision making process working	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	13	100%	0%	-

Figure 4. Additional factors affecting participants' group decision-making process.

### Factors Influencing Joint Decision Making Process

In the previous section of the interview, I asked participants about factors that influence their own decision-making about the prioritization of nonmandated projects for funding. I wanted to delve deeper into the factors that influenced the overall decisions made by their administration. I wanted to compare the responses of factors that were not mentioned in the specific questions, (see Figure 5).

Drivers of Decisions	Interview Participants															n = 15	YES %	NO %
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15			
Are there clearly defined decision-making responsibilities?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	13	100%	100%
Do you delegate decision making to others?	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	15	73%	27%
Is there a specific committee for funding decisions?	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y		N	N	N	14	36%	64%
Would you say your admin. follows a strategic approach?	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	14	57%	43%
Is there a formal strategic planning process for funding?	N	N	-	N	N	N	N	Y	N	-	Y	-	Y	N	N	12	25%	75%
Are there clearly defined long term goals and objectives?	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	-	-	-	Y	Y	-	-	N	N	10	70%	30%
Are there formal guidelines criteria in prioritizing projects?	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	15	20%	80%
Are there separate budgets for types of projects?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	15	80%	20%
Are there any needs assessments for allocations?	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	15	87%	13%
Is the administration transparent?	Y	Y	N	Y	-	Y	Y	-	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	13	85%	15%
Is funding decisions made in a consistent way?	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	13	92%	8%
Do you feel the data information is adequate?	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	13	92%	8%
Is there a formal knowledge management system?	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	13	92%	8%
Do you monitor the impact of non-mandated projects?	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	13	92%	8%

Figure 5. Additional factors affecting interview participants' decision-making policies and processes.

### **Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Decision-Making**

Regarding participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of current decision-making related to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in management of their municipal administrations, some participants, such as P1, P6, P13, and P14, referred to constraints on their decision-making rather than to its effectiveness or how well it was working:

- P1: "Well, I got \$10 -- and I'm just using \$10. I've got a gas line that's leaking. I've got a water line that's leaking. You can only fix one. Which one am I going to fix? Is the water line a danger? No. Is the gas line? Yeah. I got to fix the gas line."

Another response was to describe their administration's accomplishments rather than focus on decision-making:

- P3: "I believe that we have kind of taken where we want to see the city go and allocated the funds there. We've gone out and looked for grant money. We've got right at 15 million dollars coming from DEQ at .95 percent. We waited probably an extra year to do it so we can pay cash for it. We just did an \$800,000 water improvement. Got a grant from Community Block Development for the low income area."

The remainder, who addressed the question more directly, indicated that their process was working well:

- P4: "We were able to pull the community together to work more as a cohesive group, because, understanding, nobody ever expected for that to happen. The groups were better as a cohesive group."

- P5: “Because it’s a decision that all the council makes together. We work closely together. We have a good working relationship.”
- P7: “Each councilman is one-ninth of a body. If it’s all legitimate out there, and on the other hand if they vote for something five to four that I completely disagree with and I think it’s horrible and I veto it. So I think the process lends itself, as much as I get frustrated with it sometimes, I think in the overall scheme of things it mostly works out okay.”
- P8: “I think that we’ve been able to go ahead and prioritize nonmandated projects relatively well. I’ve had no, you know, uprising of my council members. So I think at least or think that they are relatively pleased with the direction of which we’ve gone.”
- P10: “Communication is about the most important word that you can use in any organization. These silos begin to formulate their own plans and strategies which will destroy the total project. It’s not a monologue. Nobody can sit at this table and act like they know everything.”
- P11: “Here again, I believe it’s working well. And I say that in the feedback that we get from all of those who are involved is a very positive feedback. You know, it’s very tough to explain.”
- P12: “We don’t have a crystal ball, we don’t know what’s coming. But we’ve done the budget process enough that we’re pretty good in

including everything that needs to be done. But mandated things we tend to, and we always try to set aside some funds for, you know, things that we're not aware of."

- P15: "the way I have judged that is so many of the constituents have personally come to me and said, you know, you're doing what needs to be done."

### **How Decision-Making Can Be Improved**

The final question related to how decision-making regarding resource allocation for nonmandated projects could be improved. Some participants viewed their process as not needing improvement, or saw external circumstances as being to blame:

- P1: "I can't think of anything. One of the things you don't want to do is you don't want to get a lot of people telling you what you need to do because you're not going to get anything accomplished."
- P2: "If the City was properly funded, meaning if we had enough mills to cover the City, that would improve those kind of things, because we'd have the extra capital funds available to do things that would just pop up like that."
- P3: "I think we've done a pretty good job, I really do. Not that we can't get better."

- P5: “I think that the process that we follow is a very adequate one. We share in the decision-making, we share the pros and the cons of what’s going to come about, and then we all come to a consensus.”
- P9: “I don’t think there’s much we can do, Patrick, other than we try to keep the public aware of what’s in the budget and what’s available online, but quite frankly, a lot of people are just not too involved in seeking out that information. And to me, that goes back to the perception that things are either going well and they’re using the money.”

Ten of the 15, however, offered ways in which they thought their administration’s decision-making could be improved:

- P4: “Probably more consistent research.”
- P6: “One of the things that I think we probably could do a lot better would be to have a committee or commission, or perhaps even people within our own organization to be able to submit annually a list of those projects that would fall within their respective departments. each department head would come to the administration annually and present those projects that they would like to get funded and built in their respective areas - parks and recreation, public works, water. Those, because they are the experts within their respective areas, they would know or certainly would have some idea as to what that priority should be within those respective areas. bring them to the administration

who could then bring them to the council with the necessary background information so that they could make a somewhat educated decision on those particular items.”

- P7: “American form of government, I don’t think people voting, should be able to vote on what projects are being done unless they pay taxes towards that project.”
- P8: “I think probably, and of course I’m only going to be here one more year, but if I was starting all over again, I might even consider getting more of a committee approach on trying to determine the projects that are most significant. Similar to what we do on the quicker projects that come through for coastal restoration; whereas a bunch of agencies and they all vote on what they think are the most important.”
- P10: “You have to begin, you have to set up a gauge where you see how effective that allocation is. If you’re not receiving the desired result then you have to think about whether I should drop this, whether I should modify it, or are there some other things I may be able to add to make this work.”
- P11: “To be very honest with you, taxpayers’ dollars, back to here being the mayor, as a municipality, to us to be able to take care of some of what our people at the local level expect of us, we can

always improve upon what we're doing. And we can always do it better with that in mind."

- P12: "I just think the more information and the more input you can have from everybody that's involved in it, always helps you make a better decision."
- P13: "Probably more input from the community. I personally think, and that's what people tell us that they have faith in what we're doing, they just leave it up to us. They like the direction we're going with things. They think we're being fair, we're being transparent. So, I mean, we don't have anybody that comes to the meetings anymore. We used to have people come to the meetings and gripe and complain about everything. So I tell people, I tell our department heads and our council. They say, well, why isn't anybody here. I say, well, they trust us. That's a good thing."
- P14: "Well, again, we have not done anything formally. So maybe we would come up with a formal process that would be very helpful."
- P15: "One of the biggest things that I think that we need, and I haven't figured out how to do it, but I think that the public needs to be more involved in day-to-day operations and make the elected officials aware of what's going on."

### **Summary**

Guion, Diehl, and McDonald (2011) stated that the researcher should use "active listening skills" when conducting in-depth interviews. I followed the framework of Coleman's rational choice theory, Simon's model of bounded rationality, Pelikan's variation of this, and Marakas' theoretical processes related to group decision-making. Coupled with the integrative bracketing process (see Figure 6) of Tufford and Newman, (2012), I was able to conduct quality interviews and I was able to make informative interpretation of the findings. The results were grouped into six dimensions, following the interview protocol and interview questions.

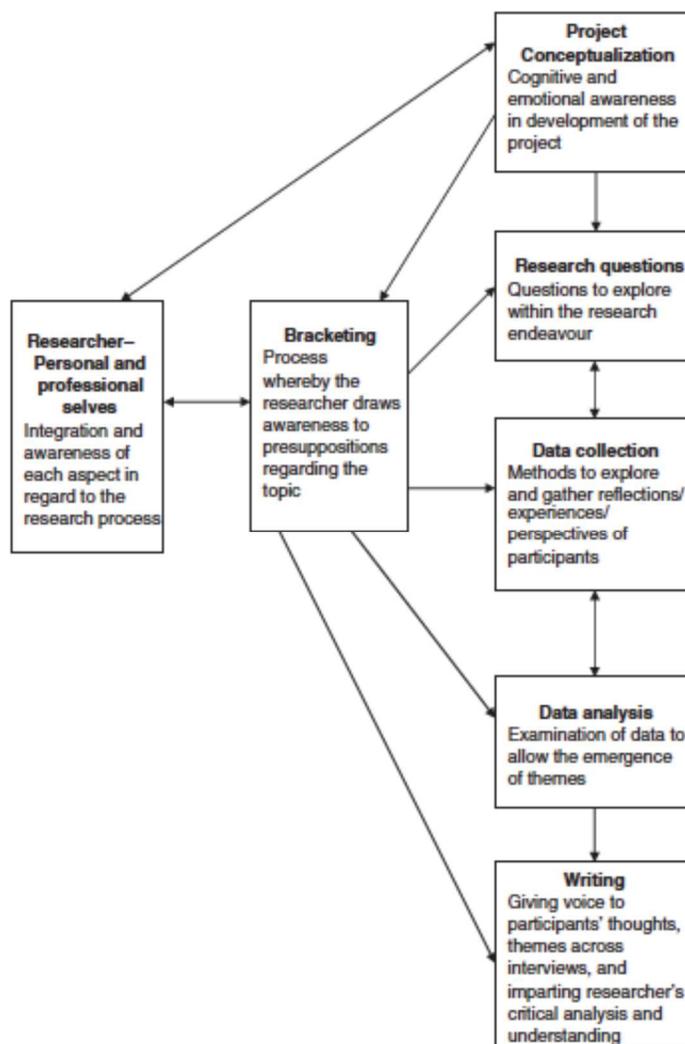


Figure 6. A schematic to demonstrate integrated bracketing. Source: L. Tufford and P. Newman, 2012, "Bracketing in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Social Work*, 11(1), p. 88. Reprinted with permission.

Research Question 1 was, What are the factors that influence municipal leaders' personal decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in public sector management? Sections 2 and 3 of the interview protocol helped me to elicit the necessary data. The participants identified around five different factors to include: Input from specialists or experts; How quickly the project can be completed; Cost of project; Perceived value for money;

and Whether there are additional sources of funding. There was a range of 80 - 100% alignment between the 15 participants on each of these factors.

Research Question 2 was, What are the factors that are perceived to influence organizational decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in municipal management in Magnolia? Section 5 of the interview protocol helped to elicit the data needed to answer the question. There was some deviation among the 15 participants regarding the personal factors that affected the decision-making process. These include the issues of clearly defined decision-making responsibilities; delegating decision-making to others; and making consistent funding decisions.

Research Question 3 was, What organizational systems or processes are used in decision-making relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in municipal management in Magnolia? There were no clearly defined processes in place in any of the administrations of the 15 participants. In some cases, ultimate responsibility rested with the participant, while in others, the decision was made by the city council or other elected body.

Research Question 4 was, How do the research participants perceive the effectiveness of current decision-making related to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects in management of their municipal administrations? It was evident that most of the 15 participants believed that their administrations were being as effective as possible, although a few focused more on the constraints they experienced.

Research Question 5 was, How can the decision-making processes of municipalities related to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated projects be improved? The common themes found in the question were the need for more research, community involvement, and formal processes.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the decision-making processes regarding the prioritization and funding of nonmandated civic projects in 15 municipalities in the U.S. state of Magnolia (pseudonym). This study was designed to identify the factors that influenced these decisions through in-depth interviews with municipal leaders recruited through a purposive sampling process. The study specifically investigated the participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the existing decision-making processes, so as to identify ways of enhancing these processes to increase the consistency and value of decision-making.

One of the key findings of this study was the influence of participants' use of input from specialists or experts in their decision-making processes. Although participants from some of the smaller municipalities had less access to experts than some of their counterparts, these participants nevertheless stated that they valued expert input and acknowledged that this was a major factor in the decision-making process. Other personal factors investigated in this study included how quickly the project could be completed, the cost of the project, the project's perceived value for money, and whether there were additional sources of funding.

When looking at the factors that affected the joint decision-making processes, there was some deviation among the 15 participants. Some of the key factors included the issues of clearly defined decision-making responsibilities, delegating decision-making to others, and making consistent funding decisions.

There were no clear-cut organizational processes in place in any of the 15 participants' municipal administrations.

Several themes emerged from these results. A predominant theme mentioned by all of the participants was the lack of available funding. Although the participants acknowledged this lack as a difficulty, each stated an impression that their administration was being as effective as its capabilities would allow. Other common themes found throughout the research were the needs for additional funds, for infrastructure improvements, to relieve traffic congestion, for community involvement, and to develop formal processes.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

This section is structured to analyze the findings by comparing the interview results with the literature review findings. This structure is arranged according to the themes critical success factors, political influence, special districts, politics, decision-making in municipal leadership, policymaking, scarce resources, resource allocation, and unfunded mandates.

### **Critical Success Factors Affecting Local Government**

Throughout the 15 municipalities included in the study, CSFs were a common factor revealed by each participant. Dubey and Bansal (2012) stated that leaders must consider endogenous and exogenous factors in order to understand CSFs. One of the main factors identified in the current research study was the issue of spending and the ability to fund each department to meet the needs of the citizens. Valles-Gimenez and Zarate-Marco (2011) argued that, within certain municipalities,

leadership's spending needs of government funds are critical factors, as is the municipality's capacity to fund each department's budget.

### **Political Influence**

The dynamics of political influence and their potential positive or negative effects on public services were another finding of the current study that was addressed in the literature (Mihaela & Tudor, 2013). The concern was more intense in administrations that relied heavily on outside funding. Many of the participants expressed how deeply the municipalities were affected when funding on the state and federal levels were reduced. Mihaela and Tudor (2013) further stated that local public services can be insufficiently or incorrectly addressed, leaving the true needs of the public neglected. This proved true in more than 60% of the municipalities, which according to their leaders were not equipped to deal with revenue shortages in the downturn economy occurring at the time of the study.

The ICMA (2011) stated that managers and elected officials are being challenged to move from a short-term crisis mode when it comes to the delivery of services. There was a consensus among the participants that they and their administrations had to reevaluate how best to meet the basic service needs of their communities. Further, as stated by Random and Newman (2010), municipalities were having difficulty coping with funding shortages that threaten their ability to pay for the cost of necessary public services. Here too, as uncovered in the literature, there were considerable concerns around this issue. Some of the larger communities that were able to find other means of generating funds were more able to deal with

the issue. However, the smaller communities in general had to make significant spending cutbacks.

### **Special Districts**

Special districts are important to municipal government in the United States because special districts may impede municipal leaders' efforts at reform (Killian, 2011). However, special districts were not noted as an important concern by any of the 15 participants in this dissertation study. This was most likely due to the low presence of special districts in Magnolia; Magnolia has two special districts per 100,000 residents, as opposed to Missouri's 30 per 100,000 (Killian, 2011). Consequently, the current finding regarding special districts is not generalizable to states where there are more special districts.

### **Politics**

Politicians within municipalities seek the support of the public so that influential groups outside the mayor's office must be deemed a critical factor in the process of decision-making (Baturu & Elkink, 2015; Caplan, et al., 2013; Chin, Hambrick, & Treviño 2013; Scholten, 2009). Participants' perception that political influence is a critical factor that can have an effect on the decision-making process of elected officials came through clearly in the present research. It was clear from the interviews that each municipality in the study had political interests that significantly affected the allocation of resources, prioritization of projects, and plans for funding. In this dissertation study, 93% of the participants stated that the influence of constituents and interest groups had some effect on the decision-making process within their administration.

### **Decision-making in Municipal Leadership**

The findings of this dissertation study on decision-making in municipal leadership broadly supported earlier findings in the literature. I used the interviews to assess the personal factors that affected the decision-making process of the participants as well as the factors that affected the joint decision-making process. Each of the major factors identified in the literature review was confirmed as having some degree of influence in participants' administrations. There were only slight differences in the two. The main differences centered around whether there were clearly defined decision-making responsibilities, the degree to which participants delegated decision-making to others, and making consistent funding decisions.

One of the most interesting areas of the research was engaging with each of the participants to gain a sense of their decision-making style. There was a wide variance among the 15 participants. A decision maker's style can influence the decision-making process; the style of the decision maker is linked with their inclination for risk. (Musso & Francioni, 2012; Zhong et al., 2012). These findings aligned with earlier literature.

This study confirmed that the structure of a governing body places some restrictions on its organizational decision-making process, a finding consistent with prior literature (Clement, 2010; Koliba, Mills, & Zia, 2011). In the present sample, at least 33% of the participants were in or were going through a consent decree that was enforced by the Environmental Protection Agency, the federal body that mandated that sewer and water issues be brought up to standard. As noted in the literature (Clement, 2010; Zia, 2011), the imbalances resulting from the 2008

financial crisis, the public, and politics will all have an effect on the local resources. Transparency was something that each of the participants stated that they wanted to make sure was taking place in their administrations as was pointed out in the literature review (Koliba et al., 2011).

Zaytsev (2012) stated that a variation of two forms of political movement exists. The first consisted of managing policy, solving problems, implementing programs, developing strategy for making decisions. Each of these areas was a focal point of the current research. The other type that Zaytsev pointed out was the development of ways to address social, economic, and political problems. In each of these areas involved the process of delegating responsibilities (Zaytsev, 2012). The current research showed that this was practiced by each of the participants to a certain degree, mostly to their department heads.

### **Policy Making**

As noted by Zaytsev (2012), an important aspect of decision-making is making policy, that is, the development of frameworks to guide decision-making. Current results showed that policy making in the municipalities was generally not conducive to achievement of long-term goals. In the larger more progressive areas, there was some effort to develop long-term strategies and policies. However, in the smaller more rural areas, the leaders seem to stick to the status quo presented by the existing governing body. Within the literature, the policy of an organization determines the structure. In municipal government, policy drives the delivery of the service to the public. Crozier (2010) pointed out the forms of older political policy are out dated and newer strategies are being recognized.

As noted by Hibbert and Huxhan (2010), through teamwork within an organization, that is structured, complex issues can be worked out. There was an openness to implement new strategies among the participants, but there was a lack of knowledge of how and what should be implemented, as the research presented. Still, regarding accountability, as pointed out by Koliba et al. (2011), constitutional issues may prevent leaders from reaching out to other governmental entities. These issues were more personal and offered an option of the leaders to make the necessary provisions.

Vall'es and Z'arate (2011) stated that leaders of municipalities have to consider rural areas in their decisions about policy to achieve the delivery of service that is consistent. The participants seemed to understand this concept and understood that the living standards of their constituents can be raised through policymaking.

### **Scarce Resources**

Edon and Landow (2012) stated, "Funding sources have been stagnant or declining in the current Great Recession, affecting essential services as well as capital financing" (p. 59). As the current research exposed, the issue of scarce resources was the single most repeated concern among the 15 participants in the present research. It was very evident that the unavailability of funding had a very heavy impact on each municipality, some, much more than others. As stated in the literature review, across the country, municipalities are facing diminishing operating dollars.

When resources are scarce, leaders must think rationally, as Pelika (2010) asserted. Of the 15 participants, 100% of them had to respond to the issue of scarce

resources and the adjustments that had to be made in the allocation of resources.

There was an adjustment made in each administration; however, the degree to which good judgment was used varied with each administration.

The literature review pointed to the issue of nonprofit organizations and their becoming a more important part of providing some of the human services needs of the municipalities. This issue was not so prevalent in the conversations during the in-depth interviews of the 15 participants of the study. However, some participants did mention that they were looking beyond federal grant monies to other entities as sources of funding for nonmandated projects.

Regarding the issue of partnering with private entities, Greenblatt (2007) asked, “Is there a point at which the flow of private dollars, however well-intentioned, amounts to undue influence over public policy?” (p. 59). This was truly a concern that was expressed by participants in the current research. The participants were open to potential partnerships. There were participants who had engaged in public-private partnerships. In addition, there were those had not had the opportunity, but were willing to entertain the possibilities.

### **Resource Allocation**

The issue of resource allocation was central to the study’s focus on how the leadership of various municipalities determines how and where scarce dollars are directed. Olurankinse (2011) stated that the leaders must be effective and efficient when it comes to the process of budgeting public dollars. All 15 of the participants were concerned with ensuring that services within their municipality were fairly distributed among the municipality’s citizens. Each of the 15 participants of the

study had a great understanding of economics and the importance of efficiently allocating the resources while balancing the budget.

### **Government Unfunded Mandates**

The subject of unfunded mandates was one of the central issues of the study. Municipalities use the term an unfunded mandate as defined by the NCSL, which is a more extensive definition that includes federal, state, and local requirements. These requirements also include any aid in the form of a grant. Each participant articulated how unfunded mandates affected their budgets, noting, for instance, that federal grant money is less available while federal laws such as the Affordable Care Act impose budgetary demands that some municipalities are ill equipped to pay for.

Beermann (2013) stated that an additional obligation municipal leaders will have to contend with is unfunded employee pension commitments: “unfunded employee pension will present a serious fiscal problem to state and local governments in the not-too distant future” (p. 108). The issue of employee pension is one of the single, largest unfunded mandates local governments are facing, and participants in the present study noted that pension benefits account for a greater share of municipal budgets as time goes on. Beerman (2013) further stated that health and pension plans will have a devastating effect on the financial strength of many governing bodies, particularly as leaders are under pressure not to raise taxes while continuing to maintain existing services. In the present research, this also was revealed as a political concern.

Increase in intergovernmental relations and management collaboration is a growing trend (Bel, Fageda, & Mur-Sangra, 2012; Feiock, Lee, Park, & Lee, 2010;

Gazley, 2010a, 2010b; Kincaid & Stenberg, 2011). Kincaid and Stenberg reported that this strategy was introduced by mayors of larger cities who had developed some political relationships. In contrast to this trend, participants in the present research did not mention participating in formal collaboration with the federal government. This could be an opportunity to improve the knowledge base of many of the municipalities if these types of collaborations can begin to take place.

The mandates handed down by federal and state governments are causing local governing bodies to think in a different way. Baker (2011) stated that the reduction of the municipalities' operating budgets is needed. However, budget cuts of this type will reduce allocations to parks and recreation programs in order to meet the mandates of police and fire protection, as well as render reform difficult, though not impossible (Hood, 2010), particularly if a long-term approach is used (Pandey, 2010). This conflict was a real problem confronting participants in the present research. The budgets of local municipalities have been significantly impacted by the need to fund mandated programs, and needed services to the community have been reduced as a result. The current situation points to the need for leaders of municipalities to make rational decisions to make effective use of scarce resources.

### **Limitations of the Study**

As noted, for the purposes of this study, a large municipality was defined as a city with 100,000 or more citizens; a medium municipality had between 40,000 and 100,000 citizens; and a small municipality had a population of fewer than 40,000 citizens. There were only three cities in Magnolia with a population greater than 100,000, which was a limitation in that I was able to obtain only one participant

from a large city. However, with the governing structure in Magnolia, a municipality was formed under a city/parish form of government with a population of more than 100,000 citizens. Therefore, I was able to interview two leaders of large municipalities.

Another limitation was the purposive sampling procedure used in the study. I was able to adhere to strict criteria in the sampling process, so that selection bias was eliminated. Personal bias arising from my having a political relationship with one of the potential participants was not an issue in the research because that individual was not able to participate in the study. The transferability of the study should not be limited.

An additional limitation was the possibility that participants' responses may have been distorted because of personal bias, politics, anger, or anxiety (Patton, 2014). Further, limitations may exist because the data obtained in the interviews are vulnerable to the inaccuracies of memory, the way the interviewee responds to the interviewer, and self-serving bias (Patton, 2014). This limitation was addressed by assuring each participant that his responses were going to be held in the strictest of confidence. I was able to build a rapport with each of the participants and each was very comfortable answering all of the interview questions.

In addition, as disclosed previously, I am currently an elected official of Magnolia. There were no direct connections between any of the participants, other than that one of the participants had served in the legislature before I was elected and was familiar with me because of that. I disclosed my position to each participant before the interview began. As well, each was familiar with my name, as I did run

for the position of mayor as I also disclosed. This, however, did not have any influence of any measure of the study.

### **Recommendations**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to consider the decision-making processes regarding the prioritization and funding of nonmandated civic projects in 15 municipalities in Magnolia. The research investigated the views of the effectiveness of leaders and the current decision-making processes with a goal of uncovering insight on how these processes might be improved to enhance the consistency and quality of decision-making.

There are a number of possibilities for continued research in order to expand and intensify the investigation. For example, the interview protocol was extensive, which as was required for the initial research. However, there is room to develop a more focused set of questions to bring about even more clarity. The participants were eager to provide any information that could potentially help future leaders in their decision-making and leadership abilities.

More specifically, as a part of the interview protocol, Section 3: Factors Influencing Personal Decision Making Process is an area I could have expanded more to delve deeper into the meanings of the factors. Further development of this section of the interview could produce more in-depth meaning. I was able to capture some good information from this section through the follow-up questions and by presenting some factors that were not mentioned by the participants originally. I noticed that this was one of the earlier questions and the participants were not as comfortable as with the questions asked later during the interview session.

As an opportunity for further research, the current approach could be repeated using a purposeful sample from the council chambers, department heads, and community leaders of the municipalities studied here. This would provide for a deeper understanding of the observations given by the elected leadership. These particular positions were most repeated by each of the 15 participants. It was obvious that the administrations' decision-making was affected by or was contingent upon one or all of the proposed areas for future research.

Each of the participants relied heavily on their department heads for presenting good information and making good decisions in their particular areas of responsibility. As reported by 86% of the participants, most of the work is either delegated to, or many of the nonmandated project originate from, the department heads. This finding indicates the importance of unelected department heads in the municipal decision-making process. I was able to triangulate the data through information obtained through the CFO's of each of the administrations. Delving deeper in the meaning of the responses given by the participants by including the particular department heads may shed more light on the areas presented by the participants. This was the response of the participants of the current study.

The participants, with the exception of P1, indicated that community involvement was one of the key components needed in the decision-making process. The other 14 participants spoke of the need to have much more community involvement. The participants wanted the input from the community; however, most of the council meetings were empty or the people in attendance were there to lodge only complaints.

As noted earlier, elected officials look to gain the support of the community (Caplan, et al., 2013; Baturó & Elkink, 2015; Chin, Hambrick & Treviño 2013). A research study looking into how best to achieve community input and support could be valuable to future leaders of any municipality. This particular area alone offers the groundwork for further research.

An additional area for deeper research could be to look at how reserved emergency funds or deposited funds can be used more effectively to support nonmandated projects. This was an interesting concept that was revealed by P9, who had effectively used the interest only from some particular funds in the budget. The process of using only the interest has proven to be a strategy that has worked well for that administration and has been very beneficial to the community. This particular municipality was one of the sample that had a surplus of funding and has had great success in providing for nonmandated projects. As expressed by P9, the process takes great discipline and the support of the elected council or aldermen to be effective.

There are many other areas mentioned by participants in the current study where further research can prove to be valuable. A few more areas of interest for future research can be considered in the areas of:

- How to live within means of a municipality
- How grants and relationships are developed
- Did time in office make a difference in growth of the municipality
- How public bid laws help or hurt the process and funding of nonmandated projects

- Does following the Civil Service protocol help or hurt the bid process.

As a final point, in qualitative research, there is a possibility of introducing a biased perspective. Thus, a meticulous quantitative examination can shed additional light on the process of deciding how to allocate funds for nonmandated projects. A quantitative approach could be used to model the factors that have the greatest effect on the decision-making process of elected leadership. Results of such a study may possibly inform existing leaders and future leaders as to the most effective and efficient decision-making processes.

### **Implications**

It was hoped that the present research would influence social change in the development of improved decision-making systems and processes, as well as contributing to a better theoretical understanding of organizational decision-making processes in the municipal context. Results of the present study will be disseminated to participants both as a courtesy to them and as a means of suggesting ways they can improve their decision-making processes.

One of the ways that leaders in the present research could bring about positive social change in their communities would be to develop more effective community outreach efforts. Successful efforts in other communities could be studied as part of a benchmarking process leading to an outreach program tailored to the participants' particular communities; such programs could be developed and initiated by nonprofit organizations, as such efforts have been shown to be more

successful than those initiated by local governments themselves (Kasymova, 2014). Some participants also noted that they could improve their decision-making by developing a more systematic approach. Such an approach could involve the use of citizen committees, which would be another way to improve community input.

It was stated by Taylor et al. (2011) that the people of the various metropolitan areas, both in the unincorporated, rural areas and within the city limits, are looking for and are expecting much more from government. The people want better delivery of public service through improved management of the scarce resources available in the budgets (see also Van Wart, 2013).

### **Positive Social Change at the Individual Level**

On the issue of social change, Levitt (2014) looked at three different authors (Fitz-Gibbon, 2010; Pittinsky, 2012; Roffey, 2012), and compared them from the standpoint of "positive peace." Roffey (2012) drew from Seligmann's (2011) model of positive psychology, which stated that "relationship-building is key to both human and community development, and ultimately one might infer, national and international peace" (p. 101). Roffey went on to expand Seligman's definition and reasoned that, "individual growth facilitates positive relationships, first at home, and then as we connect with others in our community and larger world" (p. 101).

Positive social change at the individual level starts with developing positive relationships. As the current research uncovered, some leaders had a bad relationship with the council as well as members of the community. As an example, when the question was asked, "How would you say the general public in your municipality currently views the administration," P1 responded, "They are hostile, hate me, don't

love me." This was the only participant to respond so candidly; however, other participants had issues with the public as well as the council or aldermen. A positive social change on the individual level may be achieved if leaders were to cultivate more positive relationships with their councils, aldermen, and the public.

### **Positive Social Change at the Family Level**

Giddens (2013) endorsed the connection between the government and the family and stated that, for a traditional social democratic system, having the government tied closely with the life of the family is essential. Giddens further stated that the conventional family is a necessary requirement for social order, which makes it important to the nation. The financial difficulties faced by local governments, as was evidenced in the current research, limits their ability to provide services, such as parks, recreation, and after-school programs, that are important to families.

Christensen (2013), reported that "The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's Workplace, Work Force & Working Families program spearheaded a national movement to create more flexible workplaces that effectively meet the needs of employees and employers" (p. 1). The initial goal of the program was to uncover the issues at each level of an individual from work to home. The research uncovered no flexibility in the system (see also Christensen, (2013; Galinsky, Matos, & Sakai-O'Neill, 2013) went on to report that after years of research on American families, through a group effort, the social movement and the workplace is set for the 21st century.

### **Positive Social Change at the Organizational Level**

The issue of social change has been a constant talking point for decades. With the many manmade disasters, such as the BP oil spill, the need for organizations to be more proactive when it comes to positive social change is more apparent. Benn, Dunphy, and Griffiths (2013) argued that a corporation or other social organization is embedded in the social order and rooted in social issues, and its purpose is to bring about positive social goals. Whether that goal is to produce goods that people want or provide services that they need, corporations and governments, as social organizations, exist to serve society. When they cease to do that, they lose their reason for existing and need to be reformed or dissolved.

When looking at the culture of an organization, the definition given by Li Yueh (2011) stated that organizational culture entails the habits displayed by an organization along with the systems of beliefs, the values of the organization, and the behaviors that are normal for its members. Roh (2013) conducted a study on how the cultural factors of an organization can be designed to lead to positive behavior changes among employees. Within the study, Roh used "decision field theory" as the conceptual framework to research the decision-making process within the organization.

The results of the study pointed to many factors to encourage organizational cultural change. These factors include allowing individuals in the organization to be flexible and independent thinkers when it comes to making decisions within the organization and allowing the employees of the organization to adapt to the many cultures that can be associated with the organization. All of the factors encouraged,

"team building, company fundraisers and public relations efforts" (Roh, 2013, p. 68).

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) used "Appreciative Inquiry" in a research study and discovered that people experience powers that are communal as well as personal. It was reported that, once these powers are experienced, the people involved are transformed, which in turn have an effect on the world as a whole. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) stated, "By liberating people's power, Appreciative Inquiry enhances an organization's capacity for positive change" (p. 283).

Additionally, Yafang, (2011) and (Yiing & Ahmad, 2010) stated that organizational cultures that are unproductive and inflexible are experiencing unenthusiastic responses from employees (see also, Christensen, 2013). Yafang (2011) stated that "organizations with inflexible organizational cultural design drive employees to display negative behaviors such as unethical behavior, not willing to collaborate with peers, and insufficient communication, which could all lead to poor decision-making" (p. 97). Yiing and Ahmad (2010) asserted that organizational cultures that are inflexible promote negative behavior.

### **Positive Social Change at the Societal/Policy Level**

The issue of positive social change can be addressed at the societal/policy level as well. Jimenez, Pasztor, Chambers, and Fujii (2014), stated, "social justice is the premise that everyone deserves equal economic political and social rights and opportunities" (p. 1). Jemenez et al. went on to state that "policies put in place years ago often remain unchanged-as if they were somehow inevitable, rather than socially

constructed answers reflecting the desires and shortcomings of the people who crafted them" (p. 1). As regards the findings of this study, participants who had been most successful at coping with tight budgets in the downturn economy had been the most willing to make changes, even unpopular ones, or whose administrations had been creative in finding new sources of funding.

Reeler (2015) stated that, "In our experience there is seldom one strategy that is sufficient to meet the complex processes of social change. And quite often several consecutive or concurrent strategies are called for" (p. 22). As uncovered in my research, leaders seldom follow consistent strategies or policies, and the lack of specific policies in organizations makes it difficult for participants to make decisions that are consistent. Gibbon (2010) stated, "Move from affinity for 'Us' to allophilia for 'Them,' that is, how a policy will benefit all groups rather than ration goods for some to the detriment of others" (p. 102). Relatively few participants in the current study specifically articulated a policy of extending benefit to all groups. The issue of positive social change is a concern and an effort worth fighting for.

### **Conclusions**

I made use of the qualitative, phenomenological to investigate the decision processes of 15 leaders in Magnolia. According to rational choice theory, shared affiliations work on a fiscal dimension, so exchanges between groups are guided by rational choices made by rational actors: "The individual is purposive and intentional; that is, actors have ends or goals toward which their actions are aimed" (Zey, 1998, p. 2). Specifically, individuals only react after taking into account the expenses and reward to establish the best results. The purpose of the qualitative,

phenomenological study was to consider the decision-making processes describing the prioritization and funding of nonmandated civic projects by elected leaders. The outcome of the study pointed to the need for leaders' decisions to be based on factors that support the rational choice to achieve goals such as financial stability, infrastructure upgrading, economic development, policy enhancement, and traffic relief. An environment that is change-friendly can result in a flexible culture, neighborhoods, and government.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

I am a PhD student at Walden University, and I am conducting a study of political leadership and its effects on management of civic services in a downturn economy. The goal is to identify the critical factors that influence elected municipal leaders' decision-making processes related to the prioritization of nonmandated projects and the allocation of resources to fund these projects in a state in the south. The intent is to provide current and future leaders with insight into long-term prioritization, which they could use to reduce existing inconsistencies in decision-making. Additionally, this study is designed to address a significant gap in existing research related to strategic decision-making and prioritization among municipal leaders in a state in the south.

The study will be conducted through a one hour in-depth interview. With your permission, I will record the interview in order that correct responses are captured. However, for purposes of confidentiality, your identity will not be disclosed to anyone. Only I, as the researcher, and the transcriber of the audio recordings will have knowledge of your responses. The transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement prior to transcribing the data. In addition, your individual response will not be detailed within any journal or publication. The findings will be collectively detailed, but the name of the municipality will not be revealed. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time if you decide you no longer want to participate.

Enclosed with this letter, please find a CONSENT FORM, which includes additional information about the study and the risks and benefits of participation. Please read the form thoroughly and contact me if you have any questions or concerns. If you agree to participate in the study, sign and return the form.

I look forward to your participation. A time and location that is convenient for you will be determined once you consent to participate. If additional information or clarification is needed, please feel free to contact me at 318-518-7535 or e-mail at: [pkwgroup1@gmail.com](mailto:pkwgroup1@gmail.com). Thank you, in advance, for your favorable consideration to participate in this study.

Patrick Williams  
Dissertation Student

Enclosure

## CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study to investigate the decision-making processes relating to the prioritization and funding of nonmandated civic projects in a state in the south and identify factors that influence these, based on in-depth interviews with municipal leaders. The researcher is inviting current mayors in a state in the south, with exceptions being granted to the mayor of a city in which the researcher plans to run for mayor, to be in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Patrick C. Williams, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as a State Representative, but this study is separate from that role.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to develop best practice guidance based on the findings that can be used by current and future municipal leaders to improve strategic decision-making and reduce inconsistencies in resource allocation decisions. This is expected to help maximize the value that can be generated from increasingly scarce municipal resources.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Provide one hour of your time for an audio-recorded interview which will take about an hour.
- Review a copy of the interview transcription for accuracy.

### **Here are some sample questions:**

1. Please, could you tell me what your role is within the municipality of \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of City)?
2. How long have you served in this capacity? Thinking of the goal most important to you personally that has not yet been achieved, what are the main factors that have so far influenced or affected your progress (please consider both positive and negative influences)?
3. How would you describe the current situation in your administration with regards to the availability of resources for nonmandated projects? Has this changed in recent years?
4. What would you say guides the decision-making process about which nonmandated civic projects to support?
5. Would you say that your administration follows a strategic approach to decision-making? Please explain your answer.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one in a state in the south or the City Government will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you

2

decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as the possibility that someone will be able to assume a local participant's identification on their own. The outcomes of this research study, nonetheless, are not anticipated to encompass harmful consequence on anyone.

The return to the community when government is performing at the greatest level of productivity and achievement is of immense benefit to any municipality. When government succeeds, the community succeeds.

**Payment:**

There will be no compensation for participating in the study; however, your participation will be well appreciated, and I thank you in advance.

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data and all recordings will be kept secure by locked files, accessible only to the researcher. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone at (318) 518-7535 and e-mail at [pkwgroup1@gmail.com](mailto:pkwgroup1@gmail.com). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is (612) 312-1210, and Walden University's approval number for this study is **11-05-14-0115307** and it expires on **November 4, 2015**.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below. I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

**Printed Name of Participant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Consent** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Guide

### Section 1: Background Information

1. Please, could you tell me what your role is within the municipality of \_\_\_\_\_(Name of City)?
2. How long have you served in this capacity?
3. How long have you been employed in municipal government roles overall?

Follow up questions if relevant:

- Was that just within Louisiana or in other states?
- Have you worked with other municipalities in Louisiana, or just this one?

### Section 2: Influences on Goal Achievement

4. During your time in office so far, have you had any major goals or objectives to achieve? Can you briefly describe these?
5. Thinking of the goal most important to you personally that has not yet been achieved, what are the main factors that have so far influenced/affected your progress (please consider both positive and negative influences)

Follow up prompts if not mentioned:

- To what extent have political influences affected progress?
- To what extent have budgetary factors affected progress?

Many administrations find that their available resources for nonmandated projects have been severely constrained because of the need to allocate resources to special districts, other unfunded mandates, employee pension schemes and so on.

6. How would you describe the current situation in your administration with regards to the availability of resources for nonmandated projects? Has this changed in recent years?
7. How would you say the general public in your municipality currently views the administration? Are attitudes generally positive, negative or mixed? Why do you say this?

### Section 3: Factors Influencing Personal Decision Making Process

In this section of the interview, I'd like to ask you about factors that have an influence on the ways that you and your administration determine how to prioritize nonmandated civil projects for funding, within the budget that is available for this purpose.

8. When considering whether to support the funding of a project, what types of factors do you, personally, take into account?

Follow up for each factor mentioned:

Why is this a consideration in your decision-making?

How does this factor influence your decision-making?

Does this factor usually have a big impact on your decision or a small one?

*Prompt if necessary for any factors not mentioned voluntarily by the interviewee:*

For example, what influence if any does each of the following factors has on your own decisions about project prioritization?

- Your own personal or political preferences
- Input from specialists or experts such as policy officials, advisors, or consultants
- Perceived benefits for the municipality as a whole
- Perceived benefits for particular groups in the population
- Enhancing your own reputation or that of your party
- How quickly the project can be completed
- Cost of project
- Perceived value for money
- Whether there are additional sources of funding (e.g. private sector) available
- Personal familiarity with the organization or individuals leading the project
- Any other factors not already mentioned

#### **Section 4: Decision Making Systems and Processes**

In this section of the interview, I want to explore the systems or processes used in decision-making about project prioritization and resource allocation within this administration.

9. First, can you please briefly describe to me the overall process within your administration within which decisions are made about which nonmandated projects to fund.

Follow up questions if not covered by the interviewee:

- Within this process, would you say that there are clearly defined decision-making responsibilities and accountabilities?
- What is your own role in this decision-making process?
- Do you delegate decision-making to others? If so who and why?

- Is there a specific committee or other group with responsibility for project prioritization and funding decisions? If so, who are the representatives in this group?
  - What would you say guides the decision-making process about which nonmandated civic projects to support?
  - Would you say that your administration follows a strategic approach to decision-making? Please explain your answer.
  - Is there a formal strategic planning process that guides project prioritization and funding decisions?
  - Are there clearly defined long term goals and objectives for the use of municipal resources?
  - Are there any formal guidelines or criteria for use in prioritizing nonmandated projects for funding?
  - Does your administration have separate budgets allocated to different types of nonmandated projects?
  - Are any needs assessments or other systematic evaluations of municipal requirements carried out which are used to guide resource allocation?
  - How transparent would you say the decision-making process is?
  - Would you say that funding decisions are made in a consistent way over time? If no, why not?
  - How does your municipality deal with unplanned demands on budgets?
10. What types of information or data are generally used in the decision-making process (e.g. standard bid form)? Do you feel this is adequate? What additional types of information or data would be helpful?
11. Does your administration have a formal knowledge management system? If so, please, could you describe this.
12. Does your administration monitor or evaluate the impact of funded nonmandated projects? If so, how is this done?

Prompt if necessary:

- Use of performance indicators

- Types of data collected for monitoring purposes
- Forms of evaluation (process, impact etc.)
- Whether independent evaluations of projects are conducted

13. Does your administration monitor or evaluate the overall use of the budget for nonmandated projects? If so, how is this done?

### **Section 5: Factors Influencing Joint Decision Making Process**

In the previous section of the interview, we talked about factors that influence your own decision-making about the prioritization of nonmandated projects for funding. Now, I'd like you to consider what factors you think influence the overall decisions made by your administration.

For example, what impact do you think the following factors have on the overall decision-making process within this administration?

- The personal or political preferences of officials involved in the process
- Input from specialists or experts such as policy officials, advisors, or consultants
- Perceived benefits for the municipality as a whole
- Perceived benefits for particular groups in the population
- Enhancing the reputation of the current administration
- How quickly the project can be completed
- Cost of project
- Perceived value for money
- Whether there are additional sources of funding (e.g. private sector) available
- Familiarity with the organization or individuals leading the project
- Influence of local businesses or interest groups
- Influence of higher elected leadership
- Trade off between short and longer term needs of the municipality
- Any other factors not already mentioned

### **Section 6: Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Decision-Making**

14. In general, do you think decision-making relating to prioritization and resource allocation for nonmandated projects is working well in your organization? Please explain your answer?

15. In your view, what could be done to improve decision-making relating to prioritization and resource allocation for nonmandated projects in your administration?

16. Do you have any other comments on the issues covered by this interview?

### Interview Protocol Research Checklist

**Participant's Code Name:**

Interview Date:

Participant's code:

Total Time:

1. Informed consent completed in advance of the interview: No  Yes   
If no, completed verbally or via e-mail now? Yes

2. Eligibility criteria met: Yes

3. Permission to record and transcribe interview received: No  Yes   
Confirm recordings on: Recording pen Yes  Backup Yes

4. Open with review of research:

Purpose Yes

Risks Yes

Benefits Yes

Participant confidentiality Yes

Right to withdraw Yes

5. Close with details of and estimates for:

Review draft transcript Yes

Date transcript completed Yes

Findings shared Yes

Participant confidentiality Yes

Data storage for 5 years Yes

6. Participant's support and participation thank-you: Yes

**Post Interview Items:**

7. Confirm post-interview observational journaling completed: Yes

8. Any follow-up questions? No  Yes  If yes, describe briefly:

9. Was backup recording required? No  Yes

If no, confirm destroyed: Yes

10. Draft transcript provided? Yes  Describe any changes:

11. Research précis provided to participant, after final approval at Walden: Yes

## Appendix C: Analysis of References for Dissertation

Reference Type	Dissertation Research				Proposal Literature Review			
	Sources Between		Total Count	Total %	2010 - 2015	Before 2010	Total Count	Total %
2010 - 2015	Before 2010							
Peer Reviewed Articles	23	0	23	100%	137	25	162	85%
Seminal Books	22	1	23	96%	20	10	30	67%
Conference Proceedings	2	0	2	100%	4	0	4	100%
Government Sources	1	0	1	100%	5	0	5	100%
Dissertations	11	0	11	100%	1	0	1	100%
<b>Sub- Total Count</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>83%</b>
	<b>All References</b>		<b>2010 - 2015</b>	<b>Total %</b>				
<b>TOTAL REFERENCES</b>	<b>262</b>		<b>226</b>	<b>86%</b>				

## Appendix D: Letters of Permission to Reprint

Permission to reprint Figures

**Patrick Williams** <patrick.williams4@waldenu.edu> 9:17 AM (6 hours ago)

to  
linda

**Dr. Finlay,**

**Greetings to you Dr. Finlay, my name is Patrick Williams and I am a doctoral student in the school of Management and Decision Science at Walden University. I am conducting a research study utilizing the qualitative phenomenological method investigating the Political Leadership and its Effects on the Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy. Each participant is serving as a leader in local government in a state in the south. I have referenced your work in my literature review and now at my data analysis stage, I would love to have your permission to use your Figure 1 as it appears in Finlay, (2013). Unfolding the phenomenological research process: Iterative states of “Seeing afresh” (p 175). This particular figure will serve as a visual to assist me in illuminating the iterative state within the process. I plan to cite the figure as:**

**Finlay, L. (2013). Unfolding the phenomenological research process: Iterative states of “Seeing afresh”. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 53, 172-201. doi:10.1177/0022167812453877**

**I would love to have you permission if you are willing to provide such. Thank you for your consideration and I await your response.**

**Regards,**

**Patrick Williams**

**PhD Candidate**

Walden University

[Reply](#) [Forward](#)



**Linda Finlay**

11:30 AM (4 hours ago)

to  
me

Dear Patrick

Thank you for your interest in my work. Of course you may use the diagram (referencing the source material as you have done). I wish you well in your research journey and outcome.

Best wishes

Linda

**Dr Linda Finlay**

**Integrative Psychotherapist and Academic Consultant**

**Scarborough, United Kingdom**

**[www.lindafinlay.co.uk](http://www.lindafinlay.co.uk)**

**[L.H.Finlay@open.ac.uk](mailto:L.H.Finlay@open.ac.uk)**

**Tel: [+44 \(0\)1723 501833](tel:+44(0)1723501833)**

matiaske@hsu.hh.de

Dr. Matiaske

I am a doctoral student of Management and Decision Science at Walden University. I am conducting a qualitative study utilizing the phenomenological approach into the Political Leadership and its Effects on the Management of Civic Services in a

Downturn Economy. In my literature review of your work, "Rational Choice as a Basic Theory of HRM, (2004), p.252. I am interested in using your diagram. The model presented is based on Boudon, 1980 and Coleman 1990 model. I would love to have your permission, for this particular diagram will serve as a visual to assist me in illuminating the Macro-Micro-Macro Model as a part of my dissertation. Would you be amenable in granting me your authorization? I will cite the diagram as presented below as: Macro-Micro-Macro Model, introduced by Wenzel Matiaske, "Pourquoi Pas? Rational Choice as a Basic Theory of HRM". Thank you for considering my request.

Patrick Williams,  
PhD Candidate, Leadership Specialization  
Walden University

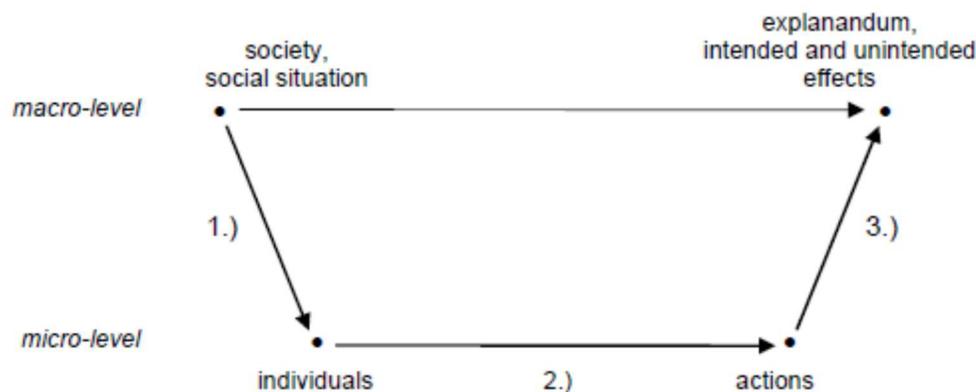


Figure 2. Macro-Micro-Macro Model introduced by Wenzel Matiaske, "Pourquoi pas? Rational Choice as a Basic Theory of HRM", (2004). Reprinted with permission, (see Appendix C).

Prof. Dr. Wenzel Matiaske, University of Flensburg, Institutes of International Management and Sociology, Munketoft 3b, D – 24937 Flensburg, Germany,  
Phone: ++49 461 805 2546. E-Mail: matiaske@uni-flensburg.de.

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[www.Hampp-Verlag.de](http://www.Hampp-Verlag.de)  
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Tel. +49 (0)8233 4783

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Dear Patrick,

thanks for your mail.

I'm glad to give permission to reprint the figure. Please cite as usual.

Best

Rainer Hampp

Freie Downloads auf [www.Hampp-Verlag.de](http://www.Hampp-Verlag.de).

Diese E-Mail enthält vertrauliche und/oder rechtlich geschützte Informationen. Wenn Sie nicht der richtige Adressat sind oder diese E-Mail irrtümlich erhalten haben, informieren Sie bitte sofort den Absender und vernichten Sie diese Mail. Das unerlaubte Kopieren sowie die unbefugte Weitergabe dieser Mail ist nicht gestattet.

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Am 19.02.2015 um 07:15 schrieb Wenzel Matiaske:

Dear Patrick,

thanks for your request. It would be my pleasure and I'm sure that our publisher Rainer Hampp will provide the permission to reprint the figure.

Best from Hamburg

Wenzel Matiaske

Helmut-Schmidt-University / University of the FAF Hamburg Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences IPA Institute for Employment Relations and Labour Holstenhofweg 85 D 22043 Hamburg  
+49 (0) 40 6541-3800 / -2232  
[www.hsu-hh.de/ipa](http://www.hsu-hh.de/ipa)

ps: please have a look at <http://www.management-revue.org>

Williams, Rep. Patrick (Chamber Laptop) writes:

Dr. Matiaske

I am a doctoral student of Management and Decision Science at Walden University. I am conducting a qualitative study utilizing the phenomenological

approach into the Political Leadership and its Effects on the Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy. In my literature review of your work, "Rational Choice as a Basic Theory of HRM, (2004), p.252. I am interested in using your diagram. The model presented is based on Boudon, 1980 and Coleman 1990 model. I would love to have your permission, for this particular diagram will serve as a visual to assist me in illuminating the Macro-Micro-Macro Model as a part of my dissertation. Would you be amenable in granting me your authorization? I will cite the diagram as presented below as: Macro-Micro-Macro Model, introduced by Wenzel Matiaske, "Pourquoi Pas? Rational Choice as a Basic Theory of HRM".

>> Thank you for considering my request.

>>

>> Patrick Williams,

>> PhD Candidate, Leadership Specialization Walden University

>>

>> [\[cid:image003.png@01D04B9D.15B1B1E0\]](#)

>>

>> Figure 2. Macro-Micro-Macro Model introduced by Wenzel Matiaske, "Pourquoi pas? Rational Choice as a Basic Theory of HRM", (2004). Reprinted with permission, (see Appendix C).

>

[lindafinlay.co.uk](http://lindafinlay.co.uk)

[linda@lindafinlay.co.uk](mailto:linda@lindafinlay.co.uk)

**Subject: Permission to use a Figure**

Dr. Finlay,

Greetings to you Dr. Finlay, my name is Patrick Williams and I am a doctoral student in the school of Management and Decision Science at Walden University. I am conducting a research study utilizing the qualitative phenomenological method investigating the Political Leadership and its Effects on the Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy. Each participant is serving as a leader in local government in a state in the south. I have referenced your work in my literature review and now at my data analysis stage, I would love to have your permission to use your Figure 1 as it appears in Finlay, (2013). Unfolding the phenomenological research process: Iterative states of

“Seeing afresh” (p 175). This particular figure will serve as a visual to assist me in illuminating the iterative state within the process. I plan to cite the figure as:

Finlay, L. (2013). Unfolding the phenomenological research process: Iterative states of “Seeing afresh”. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 53, 172-201. doi:10.1177/0022167812453877

I would love to have your permission if you are willing to provide such. Thank you for your consideration and I await your response.

Regards,

Patrick Williams

PhD Candidate  
Walden University

**Dr. Finlay,**

**Greetings to you Dr. Finlay, my name is Patrick Williams and I am a doctoral student in the school of Management and Decision Science at Walden University. I am conducting a research study utilizing the qualitative phenomenological method investigating the Political Leadership and its Effects on the Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy. Each participant is serving as a leader in local government in a state in the south. I have referenced your work in my literature review and now at my data analysis stage, I would love to have your permission to use your Figure 1 as it appears in Finlay, (2013). Unfolding the phenomenological research process: Iterative states of “Seeing afresh” (p 175). This particular figure will serve as a visual to assist me in illuminating the iterative state within the process. I plan to cite the figure as:**

**Finlay, L. (2013). Unfolding the phenomenological research process: Iterative states of “Seeing afresh”. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 53, 172-201. doi:10.1177/0022167812453877**

**I would love to have your permission if you are willing to provide such. Thank you for your consideration and I await your response.**

**Regards,**

**Patrick Williams**

Dr. Gail Johnson Morris,

Dr. Gail, my name is Patrick Williams and I am a doctoral student in the school of Management and Decision Science at Walden University. I am conducting a research study utilizing the qualitative phenomenological method investigating the Political Leadership and its Effects on the Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy. Each participant is serving as a leader in local government in a state in the south. I would love to have your permission to use your Figure 9 as it appears in your dissertation. This particular figure will serve as a visual to assist me in illuminating the data analysis process.

Also, your Appendix C, Doctoral study analysis. I understand that my numbers will not be the same, however, the concept comes from this diagram. I plan to cite the figures as listed below or in whatever manner you suggest. I would love to have your permission if you are willing to provide such. Thank you for your consideration and I await your response.

Regards,

Patrick Williams

PhD Candidate  
Walden University

Morris Johnson, G. (2014). "The Positive Deviance Phenomenon of Leading Successful Strategic Change". Walden Dissertation. Modified with permission.

**Gail Johnson Morris**

Feb 20 (2 days ago)

to  
me

**Patrick,**

**Terrific to hear from you again. I really enjoyed our discussion about the best means to leverage NVivo for deepening qualitative data analysis. You are well on your way to submitting an exemplary dissertation. I am pleased to provide you permission to use my Figure 9, a schematic of the end-to-end data analysis process incorporated in my doctoral study. I can see from your interest in the doctoral study references analysis table that you are planning a rigorous dissertation! Please also go ahead**

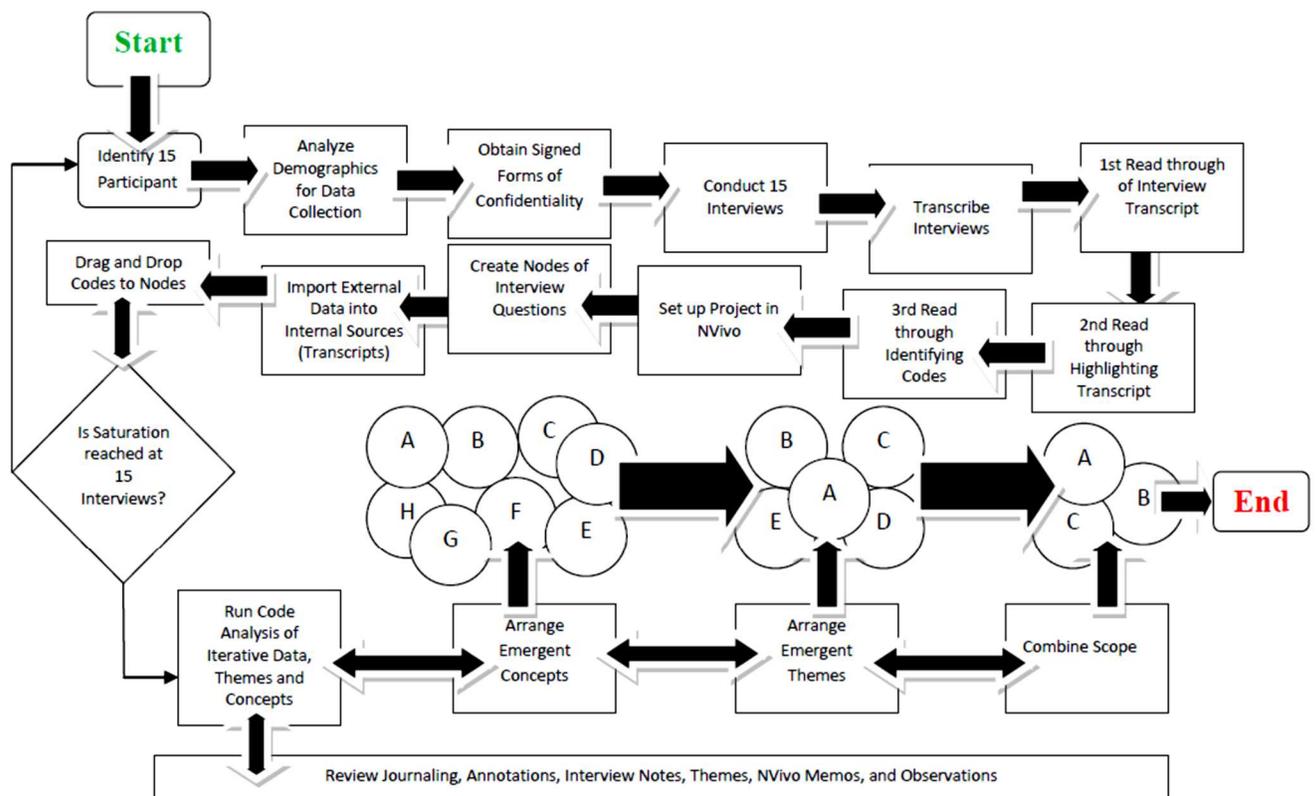
and use my sources analysis table, amended to reflect your own data. When citing me, please list both my last names without a hyphen, to appear as: Johnson Morris, G. (2014) etc.

Once you have a final PDF of your approved dissertation, I'd enjoy having a copy.

Regards,

Dr. Gail

Dr. Gail Johnson Morris, MBA, DBA | President & CEO | LeaderLink | B:  
416.471.0173 | gailjm@leaderlinkinc.com



1. [Michael J. Gill](#) ↑

1. *University of Oxford, Saïd Business School, Oxford, United Kingdom*

1. Michael Gill, University of Oxford, Saïd Business School, Park End Street, Oxford, OX1 1HP, United Kingdom. Email: [Michael.Gill@sbs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:Michael.Gill@sbs.ox.ac.uk)

- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Mr. Michael Gill. my name is Patrick Williams and I am a doctoral student in the school of Management and Decision Science at Walden University. I am conducting a research study utilizing the qualitative phenomenological method investigating the Political Leadership and its Effects on the Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy. Each participant is serving as a leader in local government in a state in the south. I would love to have your permission to use your Figure 1 as it appears in . Gill, M. J. (2014). The possibilities of phenomenology for organizational research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 1094428113518348. This particular figure will serve as a visual to assist me in illuminating the varies research methods. I will cite the figure as above or to your specifications. I would love to have your permission if you are willing to provide such. Thank you for your consideration and I await your response.

**Table 1.** A Typology of Phenomenological Methodologies.

	Phenomenology				
	Descriptive phenomenology (Husserlian)		Interpretive phenomenology (Heideggerian)		
	Sanders's phenomenology	Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method	van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology	Benner's interpretive phenomenology	Smith's interpretive phenomenological analysis
<i>Disciplinary origin</i>	Organization studies	Psychology	Pedagogy	Nursing	Psychology
<i>Methodology as</i>	Technique	Scientific method	Poetry	Practice	Craft
<i>Aims</i>	To make explicit the implicit structure (or essences) and meaning of human experiences	To establish the essence of a particular phenomenon	To transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence	To articulate practical, everyday understandings and knowledge	To explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world
<i>Participants (sampling)</i>	3-6	At least 3	<i>Unspecified</i>	Until new informants reveal no new findings	1 or more
<i>Key concepts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bracketing (<i>epoche</i>)</li> <li>• Eidetic reduction</li> <li>• Nomenadic/noetic correlates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bracketing (<i>epoche</i>)</li> <li>• Eidetic reduction</li> <li>• Imaginative variation</li> <li>• Meaning units</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depthful writing</li> <li>• Orientation</li> <li>• Thoughtfulness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The background</li> <li>• Exemplars</li> <li>• Interpretive teams</li> <li>• Paradigm cases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Double hermeneutic</li> <li>• Idiographic</li> <li>• Inductive</li> </ul>
<i>Applications in organization studies</i>	Kram and Isabella (1985)	McClure and Brown (2008)	Gibson (2004)	Yakhlef and Essén (2012)	Murtagh, Lopes, and Lyons (2011)

Email : mark.bevan@northumbria.ac.uk

Dear Dr. Mark T. Bevan,

Dr. Bevan, my name is Patrick Williams and I am a doctoral student in the school of Management and Decision Science at Walden University. I am conducting a research study utilizing the qualitative phenomenological method investigating the Political Leadership and its Effects on the Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy. Each participant is serving as a leader in local government in a state in the south. I would love to have your permission to use your Figure 1, a structure of phenomenological interviewing as it appears in A Method of Phenomenological Interviewing. Qualitative Health Research. This particular figure will serve as a visual to assist me in illuminating the interviewing structure. I will cite the figure as presented below, or to your specifications. I would love to have

your permission if you are willing to provide such. Thank you for your consideration and I await your response.

Patrick Williams,  
PhD Student, Walden University

Bevan, Mark T. (2014). A Method of Phenomenological Interviewing. *Qualitative Health Research*. Jan2014, Vol. 24 Issue 1, p136-144. 9p.  
DOI:10.1177/1049732313519710.

**Patrick Williams** <patrick.williams4@waldenu.edu>

Mar 7 (2 days ago)

to  
mark.bevan

**Dear Dr. Mark T. Bevan,**

**Dr. Bevan, my name is Patrick Williams and I am a doctoral student in the school of Management and Decision Science at Walden University. I am conducting a research study utilizing the qualitative phenomenological method investigating the Political Leadership and its Effects on the Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy. Each participant is serving as a leader in local government in a state in the south. I would love to have your permission to use your Figure 1, a structure of phenomenological interviewing as it appears in "A Method of Phenomenological Interviewing. Qualitative Health Research". This particular figure will serve as a visual to assist me in illuminating the interviewing structure. I will cite the figure as presented below, or to your specifications. I would love to have your permission if you are willing to provide such. Thank you for your consideration and I await your response.**

**Patrick Williams,  
PhD Student, Walden University**

**Bevan, Mark T. (2014). A Method of Phenomenological Interviewing. *Qualitative Health Research*. Jan2014, Vol. 24 Issue 1, p136-144. 9p. DOI:10.1177/1049732313519710. Reprinted with permission.**

[Reply](#) [Forward](#)



**Mark Bevan**

4:14 AM (4 hours ago)

to  
me

Hello Patrick

Thanks for your request. I would be happy to grant permission for you to use the figure from my article and so long as you cite it as per the journal requirements. I would also be happy to answer any questions should you have any.

Best wishes

Mark

Dr Mark Bevan  
Senior Lecturer  
Faculty of Health & Life Sciences  
Northumbria University  
Coach Lane Campus  
Benton  
Newcastle-Upon-Tyne  
NE7 7XA

tel: 0191 2156127

email: [mark.bevan@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:mark.bevan@northumbria.ac.uk)

Phenomenological Attitude	Researcher Approach	Interview Structure	Method	Example Question
Phenomenological Reduction (Epoché)	Acceptance of Natural Attitude of Participants	Contextualization (Eliciting the Lifeworld in Natural Attitude)	Descriptive/Narrative Context Questions	"Tell me about becoming ill," or "Tell me how you came to be at the satellite unit."
	Reflexive Critical Dialogue With Self	Apprehending the Phenomenon (Modes of Appearing in Natural Attitude)	Descriptive and Structural Questions of Modes of Appearing	"Tell me about your typical day at the satellite unit," or "Tell me what you do to get ready for dialysis."
	Active Listening	Clarifying the Phenomenon (Meaning Through Imaginative Variation)	Imaginative Variation: Varying of Structure Questions	"Describe how the unit experience would change if a doctor was present at all times."

Figure 1. A structure of phenomenological interviewing.

I do have one question. When conducting the in-depth interview utilizing a structure, as you suggest, "Apprehending the Phenomenon" through a method of "Descriptive and Structural Questions". Do you suggest a particular interview guide to follow? I have developed the interview protocol. I await your response.

Regards,

Patrick

lea.tufford@utoronto.ca

Dear Lea Tufford and Dr. Newman

My name is Patrick Williams and I am a doctoral student in the school of Management and Decision Science at Walden University. Lea, you were the only point of contact that I found an email address for, so please, if you would express my interest to Dr. Newman as well. I am conducting a research study utilizing the qualitative phenomenological method investigating the Political Leadership and its Effects on the Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy. Each participant is serving as a leader in local government in a state in the south. I would love to have your permission to use your Figure 1, "The Integration of Bracketing into Qualitative Methodology". This particular figure will serve as a visual to assist me in illuminating the bracketing process. I will cite the figure as presented below, or to your specifications. I would love to have your permission if you are willing to provide such. Thank you for your consideration and I await your response.

Patrick Williams,  
PhD Student, Walden University

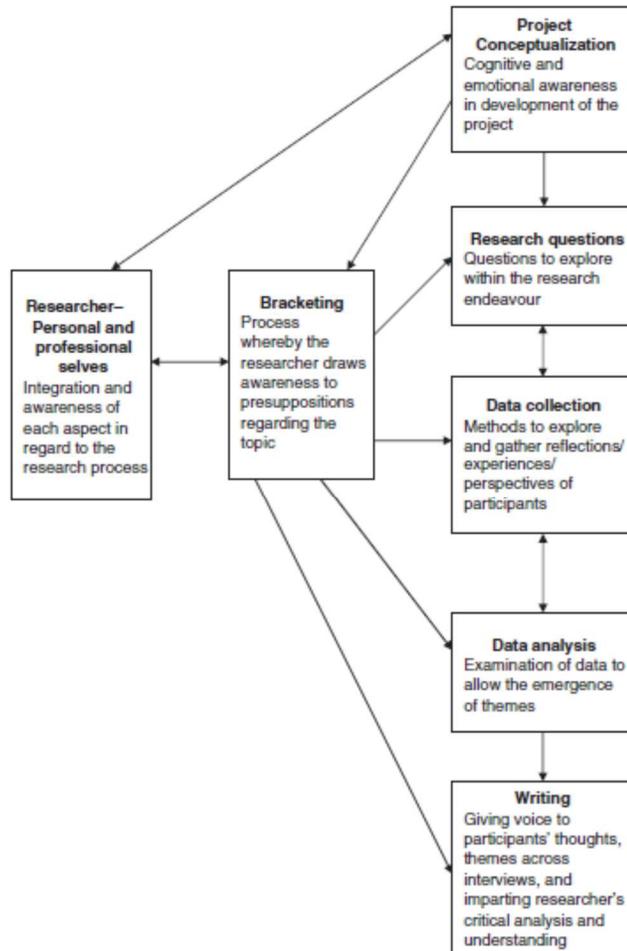


Figure 1 – The Integration of Bracketing into Qualitative Methodology.

Tufford, L., & Newman, P. (2012). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work, 11*(1), 80-96. (p. 88). Reprinted with permission.

lea.tufford@utoronto.ca

2:14 PM (41 minutes ago)

to  
me

Hello Patrick,

You have my permission to use my figure. Best wishes for your doctoral program.

Kind regards,  
Lea

Quoting Patrick Williams <patrick.williams4@waldenu.edu>:

Dear Lea Tufford and Dr. Newman

My name is Patrick Williams and I am a doctoral student in the school of Management and Decision Science at Walden University. Lea, you were the only point of

contact that I found an email address for, so please, if you would express my interest to Dr. Newman as well. I am conducting a research study utilizing the qualitative phenomenological method investigating the Political Leadership and its Effects on the Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy. Each participant is serving as a leader in local government in a state in the south. I would love to have your permission to use your Figure 1, "The Integration of Bracketing into Qualitative Methodology"\* \* This particular figure will serve as a visual to assist me in illuminating the bracketing process. I will cite the figure as presented below, or to your specifications. I would love to have your permission if you are willing to provide such. Thank you for your consideration and I await your response.

Patrick Williams,

PhD Student, Walden University

Dr. Gail Johnson Morris,

Dr. Gail, my name is Patrick Williams and I am a doctoral student in the school of Management and Decision Science at Walden University. I am conducting a research study utilizing the qualitative phenomenological method investigating the Political Leadership and its Effects on the Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy. Each participant is serving as a leader in local government in a state in the south. I would love to have your permission to use your Figure 5 as it appears in your dissertation. This particular figure will serve as a visual to assist me in illuminating the issues of Transferability and Confirmability in my dissertation research.

I plan to cite the figures as listed below or in whatever manner you suggest. I would love to have your permission if you are willing to provide such. Thank you for your consideration and I await your response.

Regards,

Patrick Williams

PhD Student, Walden University.

Table 5

*Trustworthiness Protocols*

Researcher activity	Study protocols	Trustworthiness contribution
Archive data	Retention of raw data is planned for 5 years, in compliance with Walden University requirements	Credibility
Observational journal	Researcher notes during interviews, follow-up impressions after interviews, document all decisions, and major milestones	Credibility/ transferability/ dependability/ confirmability
Audit trail	Process documentation, retention of all analysis and synthesis process steps, record why and when of all interview guide changes, all decisions, and research milestones	Dependability/ confirmability
Data source triangulation	Use of multiple participants from different temporal and spatial environments	Transferability
Thick, layered description	Provide detail necessary to other researchers to apply protocols elsewhere in similar locations	Transferability
Slow, open process	Suspending judgment about the observed phenomenon, exercising self-awareness, and set aside reference frames to address bias and potential for misinterpretation	Credibility
Iterative, scientific, and consistent process	Following an iterative and scientific process, NVivo content analysis software will support coding consistency in the systematic inductive approach selected for data analysis	Credibility
Data collection protocol and instrument	Interview protocol followed, interview guide includes questions that enable answers with appropriate depth and precision	Credibility
Data saturation	Purposive sample with a sample size large enough to assure data saturation and negative cases	Credibility
Member checking	For accuracy verification, participants will verify transcripts, codes, and synthesis results	Credibility

*Note.* The table includes protocol elements planned for the study, arising from recommendations of researchers Ali and Yusof (2011), Bernard (2013), Denzin (2012), Finlay (2013), Gioia et al. (2013), James (2012), Lietz and Zayas, (2010), and Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Morris Johnson, G. (2014). "The Positive Deviance Phenomenon of Leading Successful Strategic Change". Walden Dissertation. Reprinted with permission.

**Gail Johnson Morris**

10:08 PM (31 minutes ago)

to  
me

Patrick,

Congratulations on making the progress on your study that you have. I appreciate your kind words about the work I invested in my study. I am pleased to provide you permission to use my Table 5, which describes the trustworthiness protocols followed in my doctoral study. When citing me, please list both my last names without a hyphen, to appear as: Johnson Morris, G. (2014) etc.

I am certainly looking forward to reading your final dissertation Patrick!

Regards,

Dr. Gail

**Dr. Gail Johnson Morris, MBA, DBA | President & CEO | LeaderLink | B:  
[416.471.0173](tel:416.471.0173) | [gailjm@leaderlinkinc.com](mailto:gailjm@leaderlinkinc.com)**

**On Mar 24, 2015, at 1:39 PM, Patrick Williams <[patrick.williams4@waldenu.edu](mailto:patrick.williams4@waldenu.edu)> wrote:**

**Hey young lady, I pray all is well. I am still going full steam ahead on my research. I hope to turn it over to the editor next week and then on to my chair.**

**You have done a masterful job with your dissertation, all students should take a look at your work. I have another request for permission, please see below.**

**Again, thank you so much for your help.**

**Patrick**

**Dr. Gail Johnson Morris,**

**Dr. Gail, my name is Patrick Williams and I am a doctoral student in the school of Management and Decision Science at Walden University. I am conducting a research study utilizing the qualitative phenomenological method investigating the Political Leadership and its Effects on the Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy. Each participant is serving as a leader in local government in a state in the south. I would love to have your permission to use your Table 5 as it appears in your dissertation. This particular figure will serve as a visual to assist me in illuminating the issues of Transferability and Confirmability in my dissertation research.**

**I plan to cite the figure as:**

**Table 5: Johnson Morris, G. (2014). "The Positive Deviance Phenomenon of Leading Successful Strategic Change". Walden Dissertation. Reprinted with permission.**

**I would love to have your permission if you are willing to provide such. Thank you for your consideration and I await your response.**

**Regards,**

**Patrick Williams  
PhD Student, Walden University.**

Dear Patrick Williams,

Thank you for your email.

Please consider this email as written permission to include the article 'Figure 3.1' the SAGE publication Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide to Methods, Practice and Using Software as part of your forth coming Doctoral Research Study.

Please note:

This permission does not cover any 3rd party material that may be found in the work.

The author(s) of this work must be informed of this reuse.

A full reference to the original SAGE published work must be given.

Best Wishes,

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Thank you for considering the environment before printing this email.

**From:** Williams, Rep. Patrick (Chamber Laptop) [<mailto:pwilliam@legis.la.gov>]

**Sent:** 20 March 2015 21:16

**To:** PermissionsUK

**Subject:** I have a permissions enquiry

To Whom it may concern,

My name is Patrick Williams and I am a doctoral student in the school of Management and Decision Science at Walden University. I am conducting a research study utilizing the qualitative phenomenological method investigating the

Political Leadership and its Effects on the Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy. Each participant is serving as a leader in local government in a state in the south. I would love to have your permission to use your Figure 3.1, "General Process of Qualitative Text Analysis". This particular figure will serve as a visual to assist me in illuminating the text analysis process. I will cite the figure as presented below, or to your specifications. I would love to have your permission if you are willing to provide such. Thank you for your consideration and I await your response.

Patrick Williams,  
PhD Student, Walden University

*Figure 3.1 General Process of Qualitative Text Analysis*

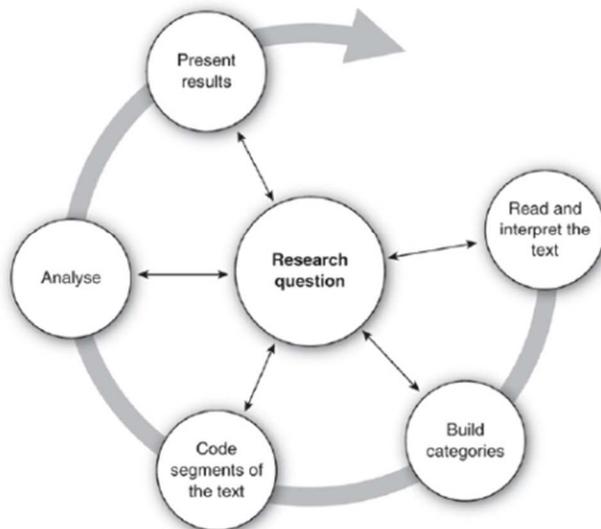


Figure X, Reprinted from: Kuckartz, U. (2014). Qualitative text analysis: a guide to methods, practice and using software. Sage. Reprinted with permission.

## Appendix E: Sample Size Justification

Sample Size	Citation for Dissertation
6	Carfang, L. J. (2015). <i>Choices, decisions, and the call to take action: A phenomenological study utilizing bounded rationality to explore complex decision-making processes</i> (Order No. 3681307). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1655594793). Retrieved from <a href="http://search.proquest.com/docview/1655594793?accountid=14872">http://search.proquest.com/docview/1655594793?accountid=14872</a>
9	McKenna, M. A. (2013). <i>Intuition in decision-making: A phenomenological study</i> (Order No. 3571474). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1419903864). Retrieved from <a href="http://search.proquest.com/docview/1419903864?accountid=14872">http://search.proquest.com/docview/1419903864?accountid=14872</a>
6	Clark-Holland, V. (2014). <i>A phenomenological study of african american female college presidents at historically black colleges and universities</i> (Order No. 3665468). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1640913353). Retrieved from <a href="http://search.proquest.com/docview/1640913353?accountid=14872">http://search.proquest.com/docview/1640913353?accountid=14872</a>
20	Harrison, J. L., Sr. (2011). <i>An interpretative phenomenological analysis of sense-making by department of defense employees</i> (Order No. 3528758). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1041090723). Retrieved from <a href="http://search.proquest.com/docview/1041090723?accountid=14872">http://search.proquest.com/docview/1041090723?accountid=14872</a>
23	Moussa, S. (2013). <i>Impact of involvement of chief information officer in strategic decisions: A phenomenological study</i> (Order No. 3574877). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1448891845). Retrieved from <a href="http://search.proquest.com/docview/1448891845?accountid=14872">http://search.proquest.com/docview/1448891845?accountid=14872</a>
10	Barsanti, B. J. (2014). <i>Concerning shared leadership development: A phenomenological study of administrator experiences within public-private partnerships</i> (Order No. 3618425). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1529434623). Retrieved from <a href="http://search.proquest.com/docview/1529434623?accountid=14872">http://search.proquest.com/docview/1529434623?accountid=14872</a>
10	Longhurst, T. (2014). <i>Emotional leadership: A phenomenological examination of emotions for leadership academy alumni</i> (Order No. 3672053). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1651557438). Retrieved from <a href="http://search.proquest.com/docview/1651557438?accountid=14872">http://search.proquest.com/docview/1651557438?accountid=14872</a>
10	Arnaud, D. (2010). <i>The development and testing of an emotion-enabled, structured decision-making procedure</i> (Order No. U517928). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (899750887). Retrieved from <a href="http://search.proquest.com/docview/899750887?accountid=14872">http://search.proquest.com/docview/899750887?accountid=14872</a>
5	Brown, B. A. (2014). <i>Influences and experiences of city council members on environmental policy decision-making</i> (Order No. 3667028). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1641981329). Retrieved from <a href="http://search.proquest.com/docview/1641981329?accountid=14872">http://search.proquest.com/docview/1641981329?accountid=14872</a>
20	Slenders, W. J. (2010). <i>Chief executive officers and their trusted advisor relationships: A qualitative study from the CEO's perspective</i> (Order No. 3418915). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (755017520). Retrieved from <a href="http://search.proquest.com/docview/755017520?accountid=14872">http://search.proquest.com/docview/755017520?accountid=14872</a>

## Appendix F: Confidentiality Agreement for Court Reporter

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENTName of Signer: Leigh G. Walker

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: "Political Leadership and its Effects on the Management of Civic Services in a Downturn Economy". I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

*By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:*

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

*Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.*

Signature: Leigh G. WalkerDate: 9-25-14

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SHREVEPORT, LA 71101-8282