2018

What Matters Most To Mayors Making Interlocal Agreement Decisions

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

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Abstract

Local governmental units in the United States are struggling to cope with dwindling public resources and surging public demands. They often turn to interlocal agreements (ILAs) as a collaborative means by which to more effectively serve their constituents. Unfortunately, many ILAs never materialize or fail prematurely. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of 13 purposefully selected mayors in the State of Indiana to discover what factors they considered important when making their ILA entry and continuation decisions. It utilized a conceptual framework based on the transaction costs theory, as informed by the utility maximization, bounded rationality, social decision scheme, and groupthink theories. Interviews were transcribed, and data were subjected to an inductive analysis using idiographic interpretation to develop themes and to describe the essence of the ILA decision-making process. Key findings included that direct cost savings, a detailed, written agreement, contractual flexibility, an ability to perform, the effect on constituents and the current municipal workforce, and having a trusted, like-minded partner were important ILA entry factors. Furthermore, contractual flexibility, meeting constituent expectations, service effectiveness, relevancy, having a communicative partner, being able to measure an ILA service, and saving money were important ILA continuation factors, but that both service quality and doing the right thing trumped saving money. These findings have implications for positive social change because they can assist local leaders in achieving ILA success, with society benefitting from a commensurate increase in public value and in the more efficient and effective meeting of societal needs.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The United States is facing socio-economic challenges as severe as any that it has faced since the Great Depression. The political and societal decisions that led to this predicament, as well as their propriety and effectiveness, are the subject of much honest debate that is well beyond the scope of this study. However, the current reality facing all levels of government is that the demand for public services continues to increase while the tax revenue available to pay for those services continues to decrease. Although citizen dependence on government to provide them with public services is not a new phenomenon, and can trace its genesis back to at least the New Deal and Great Society initiatives, the number of persons seeking government assistance rose dramatically during the Great Recession, and the official end of this economic downturn has not resulted in a commensurate reduction in citizen demand for a variety of forms of government assistance (Hill, 2010; Muhlhausen & Tyrrell, 2013; Rampell, 2010; Social Welfare History Project, 2017).

In 2010, for the first time since the Great Depression, United States residents took in more aid from the government than they paid in taxes to the government (Hill, 2010). By the end of 2011, over 49% of United States households were receiving some type of government benefit (Murray, 2011). By then, the amount of federal resources alone that were committed to persons dependent upon the government was vigintuple the amount that the federal government had provided to dependent persons in 1962 (Muhlhausen & Tyrrell, 2013). That year also saw the percentage of United States tax units paying zero or negative federal individual income tax rise to over 54% (Tax Policy Center, 2015), and

Standard & Poor's reduce its global rating for the United States from AAA to AA+, indicating that the nation, as a debtor, now had a higher long-term risk of defaulting on its debt obligations (Goldfarb, 2011). Although a slow and incremental improvement has been achieved in some sectors of the United States economy since 2011, the federal government continues to record its largest budget deficits relative to economic size since the Great Depression.

Ominously, near future projections for the United States show a stubborn continuance of these economic woes. In this regard, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projected that 2016 would be the first year since the end of the Great Recession that the federal deficit would increase as a percentage of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (CBO, 2016). The CBO also projected that the federal government's spending on Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the Supplemental Security Income program, housing and educational assistance, rural and agricultural subsidies, and a plethora of other benefits and public aid programs would maintain an annual growth rate of over 5% through at least 2026 (CBO, 2016; Mulhausen & Tyrrell, 2013). By then, the CBO estimates that federal debt held by the public will exceed 86% of GDP, and will reach 100% of GDP by 2038 (CBO, 2016). By 2090, the national debt of the United States could triple GDP (Light, 2017). In the face of these projections, the CBO has termed the federal government's current tax and spending policies *unsustainable* (CBO, 2013), and warned that the country's projected future deficit levels will have significant negative budgetary and economic consequences (CBO, 2016).

If these budgetary circumstances were not dire enough for a country trying to accommodate the ever increasing needs and demands of its citizenry, the United States is also facing the largest generational retirement surge in its history (Mulhausen & Tyrrell, 2013). In this regard, it is projected that by 2050, the population of the United States will be 50% larger than it was at the beginning of the 21st century, and that this future population pool will be decidedly older, longer living, and more diverse (Copeland, 2014; Tonn & Peretz, 2009). Lastly, the United States is facing a nationwide infrastructure deficiency of over $3,000,000,000,000, a problem that it cannot long ignore (McFarland & Pagano, 2015).

Despite this approaching economic tsunami, the United States Congress has, to date, been unable to muster the political will to significantly reduce either the monetary benefits that a large percentage of the voting public has grown to rely upon or the scope of governmental services that the populous has come to expect. Instead, the federal government has attempted to right its own fiscal ship by reducing the amount of financial assistance that it provides to state and local governments, and by shifting some of its own public benefits burden to these governmental units in the form of unfunded mandates (Abels, 2012). State governments, in turn, have tried to adjust to this diminution in federal assistance by reducing the amount of financial assistance that they provide to local governments, both by limiting the revenue options available to these lesser units of government and by assigning to them what had previously been state benefits program responsibilities (Agranoff, 2014; Frederickson & O'Leary, 2014; Perlman & Benton, 2012; Pew Charitable Trusts, 2013; Williamson, 2014).

Local governments are faced with the reality that, either alone or together, they must devise ways to meet an increasing demand for local public services without significant financial assistance from their state and federal counterparts (Benton, 2013; Frederickson & O'Leary, 2014; LeRoux & Carr, 2007). This will be a formidable task, since many local governments today provide 40 or more distinct public services, ranging from police protection to water works, and from garbage collection to community parks (Levin & Tadelis, 2010). It is also a task for which local governments are now frequently looking to outside service vendors for assistance.

Of course, escalating citizen demands, mission creep, and unfunded mandates are not new obstacles for local governments (ACIR, 1994; Dilger & Beth, 2016; Frederickson & O'Leary, 2014). However, addressing these issues post-Great Recession is especially difficult, because the reduction in federal and state financial support that local governments are now experiencing has been coupled with a drop in their property, sales, and local income tax revenues, due primarily to the 2008 collapse of the housing market and a resulting decrease in consumer income and spending (Abels, 2012; Hoene & Pagano, 2011; ICMA, 2012; Martin, Levey, & Cawley, 2012; Williamson, 2014). A simultaneous drop in all three of these local revenue sources, which have traditionally been used to fund local government services, is very uncharacteristic, and signals an extraordinary period of financial turmoil in the United States (McFarland & Pagano, 2015). Moreover, unlike in previous economic recessions, new property tax caps and a resistant citizenry often prevent municipalities from taxing their way out of their financial predicament (LaPlante & Honadle, 2011).

The drop in local revenue caused by the Great Recession also exacerbated the economic problems that many communities were already facing due to years of budgetary mismanagement (LaPlante & Honadle, 2011; Perlman & Benton, 2012). Examples of the sort of poor financial decisions and unrealistic promises made by local governments prior to 2008, which obligations then became impossible to meet in the aftermath of the Great Recession, can be seen in the types of debt that cities sought to avoid by filing for bankruptcy protection once they began to feel the effects of this latest economic downturn.

For example, at the time it filed for bankruptcy in 2008, the city of Vallejo, California was paying its police captain over $300,000 a year and 21 of its firefighters over $200,000 a year, and had promised guaranteed lifetime health benefits to all of its police officers and firefighters who had 5 or more years of service (Will, 2008). Likewise, when the city of Detroit, Michigan filed bankruptcy in 2013, it had accumulated $9,500,000 in unfunded pension and healthcare obligations, and had accumulated a total debt that was seven times larger than its entire annual budget (Bomey & Priddle, 2013; Winegarden, 2014). All in all, these sorts of poor fiscal decisions have resulted in over 50 municipal units being forced to file for bankruptcy protection since the beginning of the Great Recession (Tax Foundation, 2013). In addition, on May 3, 2017, the Territory of Puerto Rico, in an effort to address its estimated $123,000,000,000 in debt and pension obligations, filed the largest government bankruptcy ever filed in the United States (Brown, 2017; Walsh, 2017).

Unfortunately, even local governments that have been prudent in their fiscal matters face significant post-Great Recession challenges. Many who rely upon property

tax revenues to fund their public services are finding that the number of manufacturing jobs, and the taxable manufacturing facilities in which they are performed, continues to shrink, while the number of local education and health care jobs, which are often performed in untaxed facilities, continues to grow (Williamson, 2014).

It is quite possible that, for some municipalities, their pre-Great Recession revenue levels will never return. Support for this inauspicious possibility comes from the historical fact that, during the economic recessions of 1990 and 2001, local general fund revenues recovered to their pre-Great Recession levels in less than six years. In contrast, a full eight years after the start of the Great Recession, the average municipality in the United States was still operating on less than 92% of its pre-2008 revenues (McFarland & Pagano, 2015). Yet, while local funding resources are either stagnating or decreasing, the local service expenditures in many communities are rapidly expanding (Martin, Levey, & Cawley, 2012). According to a recent National League of Cities survey, municipal expenditures outpaced municipal general fund revenues by 0.2% in 2014, but this revenue gap had increased to 1.89% in 2015, a 945% increase (McFarland & Pagano, 2015).

These circumstances have prompted some observers to postulate, and many local officials to believe, that the Great Recession signifies much more than another periodic economic dip. They suggest that it heralds a sea change in intergovernmental relations, the beginning of a *new normal* for local governments wherein they are left on their own, forced to address their financial and public service problems without any realistic hope of significant federal or state assistance (Abels, 2012; Ammons, Smith, & Stenberg, 2012; Martin, Levey, & Cawley, 2012; Perlman & Benton, 2012).

Facing this new reality, municipalities often try to address their economic imbalances through stop-gap measures, such as reducing their personnel levels, delaying infrastructure improvements, increasing service fees, tapping into rainy day funds, or ceasing to provide some public services (Hoene & Pagano, 2011; ICMA, 2012; Lamothe & Lamothe, 2016; Perlman & Benton, 2012). However, once they realize that these efforts will not provide a long-term solution to their financial woes that is palatable to their constituents, local government officials, out of necessity, begin to look for other ways to meet the needs of their citizenry, for ways to do more with less.

One option available to such municipalities is to physically consolidate into a larger unit that may be able to better address the complex and often boundary-spanning public service demands of a modern citizenry than can smaller local governmental units acting alone. However, independence, individualism, and competition are themes that run deep in the conscience and culture of the United States. This is seen not only in the lives of its citizens, but also in the fragmentation of the nation into the numerous local communities in which its residents live, work, and play (Feiock, Lee, Park, & Lee, 2010; Hefetz, Warner, & Vigoda-Gadot, 2012; Jacobs, 2004; Kwon, 2008; Visser, 2001). In this regard, there are a mishmash of approximately 39,000 general purpose local governmental units and 50,000 special purpose local governmental units that currently operate in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007), each with its own jurisdictional boundaries, leadership priorities, and constituent interests.

Therefore, despite the administrative logic of adopting a regional approach to regional issues, over a century of efforts to politically consolidate smaller units of government in order to take advantage of economies of scale, and to avoid the potpourri

of inequitable, inefficient, and incongruent approaches to public service issues that are currently being taken by competing localities, have been largely unsuccessful (Abels, 2012; Baldassare, 1989; Frederickson & O'Leary, 2014; Hamilton, Miller, & Paytas, 2004; Leland & Thurmaier, 2014; Savitch & Vogel, 2000; Visser, 2001;Warner, 2011).

These efforts are often doomed by the political turmoil that invariably accompanies any attempt to physically combine previously independent local governmental units (Feiock, 2009; Feiock, Lee, Park, & Lee, 2010; Leland & Thurmaier, 2014; LeRoux & Carr, 2009). Moreover, even in those rare instances in which regional consolidation efforts have been successful, it is questionable whether they have resulted in significant and sustainable improvements in the provision of public services (Leland & Thurmaier, 2014; Reese, 2004). Therefore, this approach to the provision of better, cheaper, and timelier local public services is often seen as being politically and practically unacceptable.

A more popular cost-saving option that municipalities often choose to address their financial difficulties is to rely upon outside vendors to provide one or more of their public services. According to some scholarly projections, up to 80% of all government human services are now being contracted-out (Clingermayer, Feiock, & Stream, 2003).

In one form, this type of collaboration looks to the private sector to provide public services that would otherwise have to be provided by a municipality. This approach requires a municipality to enter into a public-private partnership with one or more private entities that then provide public services on the municipality's behalf (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Broadbent & Laughlin, 2003; Graddy & Chen, 2006). Much recent literature has focused upon this form of collaboration (Kwon & Feiock, 2010).

Unfortunately, these partnerships have not proved to be a universal panacea for local public service problems, as this form of collaboration is either not available or not appropriate for many communities and types of service (Benton, 2013; Delabbio & Zeemering, 2013; Warner & Herfetz, 2001).

Another way for municipalities to contract-out the provision of a public service is through a private, not-for-profit corporation. However, this option is also of limited benefit, since not-for-profit entities do not provide many of the public services demanded by a modern citizenry (Brown, 2008).

Yet another way for municipalities to collaborate for the provision of public services is to enter into an interlocal agreement (ILA) with another governmental unit (Abels, 2012; ICMA, 2012; Lee & Hannah-Spurlock, 2015). By entering into an ILA, a municipality can either join forces with another municipality in order for them to jointly provide a public service to both of their constituencies, or contract-out a public service and have it provided entirely by its municipal partner.

ILAs have a long and rich history of use in many areas of the United States (Delabbio & Zeemering, 2013). Unfortunately, despite high expectations, this form of contractual relationship often fails to materialize or, once operational, is abandoned by the very parties who pursued it (Lamothe, Lamothe, & Feiock, 2008; Voges, 2014).

Past studies have identified, mostly in theory or by presumption, many of the costs and benefits that appear to be associated with ILAs (Carr & Hawkins, 2013; Carr, LeRoux, & Shrestha, 2009; Feiock, 2009; Hilvert & Swindell, 2013). Moreover, some research has identified what factors some local government officials believe to matter the most when they are making their ILA entry decisions (Chen & Thurmaier, 2009;

D'Apolito, 2012; Hawkins, 2009; Hawkins & Andrew, 2011). However, many of these studies ignore the role that local elected mayors play in these entry decisions (Andrew, 2009a; Zeemering, 2012).

On the contrary, very little academic interest has to date been directed toward what factors local elected mayors believe to be the most important when they must decide whether to continue an existing ILA. It is certainly not academically intuitive that the factors that induce a municipal manager or a local councilmember to support ILA entry are the same factors that are important to a local elected mayor when he or she is making an ILA entry decision, or that important ILA *entry* factors will retain their level of importance once an ILA is operating and a decision must be made as to whether to *continue* its use. There exists a need for further academic discernment on both of these issues (Zeemering, 2015, 2012).

From the perspective of the transaction costs theory, as applied to local governmental units, local government officials making contracting out decisions will consider the overall transaction costs of having a public service provided by an outside vendor. The higher these costs, the more likely that a local government official will decide to continue providing a public service internally (Brown & Potoski, 2004; Coase, 1937). From the prospective of the utility maximization theory, as applied to the public sector, local government officials making contracting out decisions may choose either the service method that is the least costly to their municipality or to them personally (McGuire, Ohsfeldt, & Van Cott, 1987).

In addition, the bounded rationality theory (Simon, 1972, 1957), recognizes that human beings make decisions without perfect knowledge, while the social decision

scheme theory (Davis, 1973) recognizes that decision-makers can be influenced by their advisors. Moreover, the groupthink theory (Janis, 1972) recognizes that decision-makers can also be influenced by their desire for group cohesiveness.

There is nothing in the current academic literature to suggest that the above theories do not apply with equal force to both mayoral ILA entry and continuation decisions. However, there is a pressing need for more primary research on what specific costs and benefits are most important to mayors, in practice, when they are involved in this decision-making process. There is also a need for this research in order to begin to create a practical, fact-based platform from which to develop a best practices approach to the negotiation and operation of ILAs. Only through such research can the framework provided by some or all of these existing theories be used to adequately explain this phenomenon.

In my qualitative, phenomenological study, I sought to fill this current gap in the literature, and to expand upon past scholarly contributions to the understanding of ILAs, by offering insight into what specific factors are most important to local elected mayors, in practice, when they are making their ILA entry and continuation decisions. I anticipated that the results of my study would assist local leaders who are considering entry into an ILA in crafting terms and conditions for their cooperative endeavor that will best avoid its future failure, as well as assist these individuals in administering an existing ILA in a manner that best ensures its long-term success.

In the remainder of this Chapter, I present the background of the problem and the problem statement in order to identify the reason for my study and the information gaps that it filled. These sections are followed by my study purpose statement, after which I

identify the research questions and the theoretical framework upon which my study was based, the nature of my study, and necessary study definitions. I also address my study assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations, and the significance of my study and its expected social change. Chapter 1 concludes with a summary and an overview of the contents of subsequent chapters.

Background of the Problem

Identifying, weighing, and understanding the factors that local government officials consider important when deciding whether to enter into, continue, or terminate an ILA is important to anyone who is or desires to become a party to this form of collaborative endeavor and wants that endeavor to be successful. Insight into these critical factors is especially important whenever municipalities are facing periods of economic uncertainty.

Past research has identified many factors that may be important to local government officials when they are making their ILA entry decisions (Chen & Thurmaier, 2009; D'Apolito, 2012; Hawkins, 2009; Hawkins & Andrew, 2011), although most of these studies have either not specifically focused on local elected mayors or have reached their conclusions as a result of deductive reasoning rather than as a result of actual interviews with these local officials. Very little research has been devoted to identifying what factors may be important to local government officials when they are making their ILA continuation decisions, although a few studies have tangentially addressed this issue (Zeemering, 2015, 2012; Chen and Thurmaier (2009). Therefore, while some prior research exists on the ILA decision-making phenomenon that is the focus of my study, there remains a need for further academic discernment as to the

factors that are important to local elected mayors when they are making their ILA entry and continuation decisions. In mys study, I addressed this research gap and contributed insight into the ILA entry and continuation decision-making process that should be of benefit to local government officials and the citizens they serve.

Problem Statement

The specific problem that my study addressed is the failure of many ILAs to meet the requirements, expectations and objectives of the local government officials who enter into and administer them, which often results in no ILA being created or in the premature termination of these collaborative endeavors. Little prior research has been conducted into what specific factors a local elected mayor considers to be the most important when deciding whether to enter into, continue, or terminate an ILA, although recent studies by Zeemering (2015, 2012) and Chen and Thurmaier (2009) provide some insight in this regard.

I built my study upon these earlier studies and specifically explored the factors that local elected mayors consider to be important when they are making their ILA entry and continuation decisions. By addressing this research gap, it is hoped that my study provides needed insight into how to structure and operate an ILA so as to best ensure its long-term success. By doing so, my study can affect positive social change by improving this form of intergovernmental collaboration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of ILA agreement entry and administration, and, more specifically, the experiences of local elected mayors in their entry and administration of ILAs, in order to better understand the

essence of those experiences and to discover what ILA factors these officials consider to be important to their ILA entry and continuation decisions. By doing so, it was my hope that local government officials will have available to them information that will allow them to create and administer ILAs in a manner that provides the most desired benefits and avoids the most serious risks to their continued viability and to the success of these collaborative efforts.

My study was one of a very few to have studied ILA entry decisions through the lens of an elected mayor. It was also one of the first to have addressed the issue of what is important to elected mayors when they are making their ILA continuation decisions.

Creswell (2014) stated that a qualitative researcher, in his or her effort to learn and interpret the meanings that others prescribe to a studied phenomenon, often adopts a social constructivist worldview, which posits that people seek to understand their world by developing subjective meanings for their life experiences,. I shared this worldview and adopted it for my study.

Patton (2002) stated that the foundation of a social constructivist worldview is the ontological assumption that reality is subjective and multiple. I made this assumption when I conducted my study.

Research Questions

In my study, I sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ 1): What factors do the study participants perceive as influencing their decisions to either enter into or forgo entering into an ILA?

Research Question 2 (RQ 2): What factors do the study participants perceive as influencing their decisions to either continue or terminate an existing ILA?

Theoretical Framework

Academic research on what factors are deemed by local government officials to be the most important to their ILA entry and continuation decisions is in its infancy. While academic attention has recently focused on identifying both the theoretical and empirically-based factors that may determine whether local decision-makers will initially decide to collaborate to provide public services (Carr & Hawkins, 2013; Hilvert & Swindell, 2013), scant research has been conducted to date to discern what factors are specifically important to local elected mayors when they make ILA entry decisions and what factors matter to them when they assess whether an existing ILA is worthy of continuance.

I adopted a theoretical framework for my study that incorporated several established models of decision-making. I did so to both ensure that my study was well grounded in the academic knowledge that currently exists in this area of inquiry, and to help guide my research design. I used the transaction costs theory (Coase, 1937) as the theoretical framework for my study. As applied to local governmental units (Bel & Fageda, 2006), this classic economic decision-making theory holds that when local government officials make contracting out decisions, they consider all of the transaction costs that will be incurred by using a specific service vendor. The higher these transaction costs, the less likely it is that the official will choose that vendor to provide the public service and the more likely that he or she will either choose another outside vendor or continue to provide the service in-house (Brown & Potoski, 2004).

I adopted this theoretical perspective and assumed for purposes of my study that local leaders make their ILA entry and continuation decisions based upon their analysis

of the total perceived costs and benefits of the collaborative effort. This assumption provided a useful theoretical perspective from which I explored and attempted to understand the thought processes of the local elected mayors whom I interviewed as part of this study as those thoughts related to their ILA entry and continuation decisions. However, I tempered my use of the transaction costs theory as the theoretical framework for my study by acknowledging that a mayor's decision-making process is also influenced by his or her own personal concerns, by a lack of complete information, and by other persons who are involved in this process.

In this regard, I was informed by the utility maximization theory (Lengwiler, 2008), as applied to local government officials (McGuire, Ohsfeldt, & Van Cott, 1987). This theory posits that a local government official will select the public service option that is the least costly to him or her personally, even if it is not necessarily the least costly option for the public entity that he or she serves.

I was further informed by the bounded rationality theory (Simon, 1972, 1957), which posits that local government officials are often limited in their decision-making process by a lack of complete information about the alternatives available to them and about the respective consequences of selecting each alternative when they make their decisions, and that complexity and time constraints can cause them to choose a satisfactory, but not necessarily optimal, alternative.

I was also informed by the social decision scheme theory (Davis, 1973), which posits that that administrative decisions are often group decisions and that the personal preferences held by the ultimate decision-maker can be over-ridden by the aggregate group opinion. Finally, I was informed by the groupthink theory (Janis, 1972), which

posits that the desire of a decision-maker to maintain group cohesiveness, or his or her unwillingness to make an unpopular decision, may affect his or her decision.

My use of a qualitative design and phenomenological approach to my study allowed me to examine the personal perceptions and experiences of local elected mayors as they related to their ILA decisions by building upon the previously established theoretical foundations and caveats set forth above. However, while being informed thereby, these theories were not used to otherwise constrain my examination of the mayoral ILA decision-making phenomenon under study.

As I more completely explain in Chapter 2, the theoretical framework that I adopted for my study allowed me to explore the mayoral ILA decision-making phenomenon by considering not only the economic transaction costs at issue in these decisions, but by also recognizing that mayors, as human decision-makers, could be affected by their own personal ambitions and interests, by time and knowledge constraints, by the opinions of trusted advisors, and by their desire to maintain group cohesiveness. This framework melded well with my qualitative, phenomenological study approach, because the personal interviews that I conducted with the mayors who were actually making these ILA decisions allowed me to explore these ILA experiences in depth, and to ascertain the factors that my study participants perceived as being the most important to those decisions.

Nature of the Study

Qualitative research is the study of things in their natural settings and the interpretation of phenomenon based upon the meanings that human actors subscribe to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The nature of my study was qualitative. A qualitative

design was appropriate for my study because through it I conducted fundamental research into the ILA entry and continuation decision-making process of local elected mayors, a phenomenon that has received little academic attention.

My other choice, a quantitative design, is a process for testing objective theories by examining the relationship between variables (Creswell, 2014). I believed that using either quantitative testing, or a mixed methods approach that involved quantitative testing, was premature because the ILA decision-making process needed to be better understood before the specific variables influencing those decisions could be identified and subjected to meaningful quantitative analysis. Moreover, quantitative research requires the use of standardized measures and predetermined response categories (Patton, 2002). I believed that the specific variables that influenced ILA decisions could best be identified through my qualitative exploration of the perceptions and experiences of the local government officials who were actually making those ILA decisions, without being quantitatively bound by such quantitative categories and measures.

Accordingly, using a qualitative approach allowed me to gather the in-depth and detailed information that was necessary for my development of the themes and patterns that described the essence of this decision-making phenomenon. This approach also allowed me to generate findings that were responsive to my study research questions.

I collected the information used in my study through my use of personal on-site interviews with purposefully selected local elected mayors. Although the findings of my study cannot be generalized to a larger population, as would be the case with properly formulated quantitative research findings, my rich and detailed findings regarding the ILA decision-making phenomenon, which were based upon the first-hand views and

experiences of a small but experienced group of local government officials who were directly involved in making those decisions, form a good foundation from which further qualitative and quantitative research can be conducted.

Contained within a qualitative research design are several research approaches from which to choose. Although Tesch (1990) stated that 28 such approaches exist, and Wolcott (2001) identified 19 such approaches, a more manageable five approaches to qualitative inquiry were described by Creswell (2007).

Creswell's five qualitative research approaches are narrative research, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and phenomenology, all of which I considered for this study. Narrative research involves the gathering of stories on life experiences from one person or a small group of persons (Creswell, 2012; Czarniawska, 2004; McCaslin & Scott, 2003). Grounded theory involves the gathering of information from generally a dozen or more study participants about a specific action or process with the intent of developing a theory based upon this information that explains that action or process (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Ethnography is an approach designed to understand and interpret the shared beliefs and behaviors of a distinct cultural group, and typically requires a researcher to immerse him or herself in and critically observe the daily lives of a large group of study participants (Harris, 1968; McCaslin & Scott, 2003). Case study involves the exploration of one or more contextually-bound cases over a protracted period of time, and the use of multiple sources of information in order to understand and describe a specific problem or issue (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003).

The remaining qualitative research approach identified by Creswell (2007) is phenomenology. This approach, which came into its own as a philosophic discipline

through the works of Husserl (1931) and others, can take two paths. Using a hermeneutic approach (Van Manen, 1990), a researcher reflects upon a certain phenomenon and interprets and mediates between various different meanings of a lived experience. Using a transcendental approach (Moustakas,1994), a researcher relies less upon data interpretation and mediation and more upon accurately describing the experiences of study participants as regards a studied phenomenon, after he or she suspends any judgment about the phenomenon that he or she might otherwise render as a result of his or her own real world experiences.

I utilized a phenomenological strategy of inquiry for my study because I believed that this approach best allowed me to reconstruct my study participants' realities and to identify the essence of their experiences with and regarding their own ILA entry and continuation decisions. As for my other qualitative research options, I rejected the narrative research approach because biographical examination was neither the focus nor the scope of this study. I rejected the grounded theory research approach because it is normally used with a larger participant pool than was to be used in my study and the data obtained is used to develop a grounded theory, whereas my study sought to describe the essence of the ILA entry and continuation decision-making phenomenon. I rejected the ethnographic research approach because my study was not culture-centric and utilized short personal interviews to focus upon a specific phenomenon, rather than a prolonged period of time in the field in order to generate a cultural portrait. Finally, I rejected the case study approach because a single time-bound event was not the focus of my research.

My study was bounded by time, seeking information only about ILAs that were in existence during the time in which a study participant served as an Indiana local elected

mayor; by setting, with interviews conducted on-site in the offices of the study participants; by actor, since only current Indiana local elected mayors, accompanied in two cases by their city attorney, were interviewed; by location, since it focused only upon relevant ILAs that existed under and pursuant to Indiana law; by context, since it sought information only about public service ILAs involving local units of government, and from local government officials who had administered one or more of these collaborative endeavors; and, by ethical considerations. My interest was only in the perceptions of Indiana local elected mayors as to what ILA factors were important to their ILA entry and continuation decisions.

It is important to note that what constitutes an ILA may differ from study to study, a point that has often been over-looked by scholarly writers, who, as in the case of Delabbio & Zeemering (2013), either lumped several forms of interlocal cooperation together or, as in the case of Andrew & Hawkins (2013), Blair & Janousek (2013), Chen & Thurmaier (2009), LeRoux & Carr (2007), and Minkoff (2013), ignored the specific ILA nuances that exist due to variations in state enabling legislation. My study explored only the experiences of local elected mayors as they related to written ILAs that were permissible under Indiana law.

Although, as noted by Creswell (2007), phenomenological research has been conducted using in-depth interviews with from one to over 300 study participants, the objective of qualitative data collection should not be to reach a specific number of data sources, but to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Theoretical data saturation is the point in which the collection of additional data becomes merely redundant, and does not shed new light on the phenomenon under investigation (Mason, 2010).

Operationalizing the concept of data saturation, so as to determine the optimal number of field interviews to conduct in a qualitative phenomenological study, is a process that does not lend itself to mathematical certainty (Patton, 2002). However, while academic unanimity does not exist as to the proper sample size for this study, my decision was nonetheless guided by the findings and recommendations of earlier studies and commentaries. In this regard, when conducting field interviews as part of a phenomenological study, Dukes (1984) recommended interviewing from three to 10 subjects, Morse (1994) recommended at least six subjects, Riemen (1986) recommended 10 subjects, and Polkinghorne (1989) recommended from five to 25 subjects.

However, a study by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) actually conducted an experiment so as to be able to make an evidence-based recommendation as to the optimal nonprobabilistic sample size for field interviews. As a result of their study, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) concluded that data saturation occurred within the first 12 interviews. Adopting this study conclusion, and being further informed by the findings and recommendations of Dukes (1984), Morse (1994), Riemen (1986), Polkinghorne (1989), and Creswell (2007), I chose to collect my study data from in-depth interviews with 12 Indiana local elected mayors.

However, as I neared the end of my interview process, an opportunity arose to interview one of Indiana's few multi-term female mayors, which allowed me to include her perhaps unique perspective in what was otherwise an exclusively male interview pool. Moreover, two of my interviewees brought their city attorney with them to their interview, and I permitted these individuals to also participate in their mayor's interview.

Therefore, my final study participant pool consisted of 13 Indiana local elected mayors and two Indiana city attorneys.

I purposefully selected the Indiana mayors who participated in my study so that I was able to speak with the most knowledgeable and information-rich individuals available. I conducted my study interviews on-site, either in a mayor's private office or conference room. My interviews were semistructured, I used open-ended questions, and I recorded my study participants' responses on audio-tape and in field notes.

Once gathered, I organized, had transcribed, and then read and coded my interview data. I chose the NVivo 11 software program to both assist me in my study data analysis and to provide me with a tangible record of that analysis that could be used by third parties to evaluate the validity of my study and the accuracy of its findings. NVivo is one of several computer software programs that are often used in qualitative data analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Creswell, 2007). I also developed a codebook.

I then conducted an inductive analysis of my research data, using idiographic interpretation to develop from my interviewees' own words and understandings the themes and patterns that I then used to understand the essence of a local elected mayor's ILA decision-making process and to identify those factors that mayors considered to be the most important to those decisions. I represented and expressed my study results in narrative form, accompanied by such demonstrative tables as I felt necessary to assist in a better understanding and expression of those results. Finally, I masked all of my study participants' names, and securely stored my study data, where it will remain until I destroy it at the end of the five year period that began on my dissertation publication date.

Definitions

The following terms have the following meanings throughout this dissertation:

ACIR: means the United States Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations.

Affordable Care Act: means that certain federal legislation enacted in the United States in 2010 that expanded Medicaid coverage to millions of additional low-income families and individuals, established health insurance exchanges, prohibited health insurers from denying coverage due to pre-existing conditions, and made numerous other national health care changes.

AIM: means Accelerate Indiana Municipalities, a non-profit organization, formerly known as the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns, that was established in 1891. The purpose of *AIM* is to educate and advocate for local government officials and the local governmental units that they serve on a wide variety of municipal issues.

Asset specificity: means the degree to which a public service asset is able to be adapted to a new use.

Cold War: means that state of political hostility but not overt military action that existed between the United States and the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1990.

Congressional Budget Office (CBO): means that certain United States nonpartisan agency that was established in 1974 to provide economic and budgetary information and analysis to the nation's federal legislative branch.

Contracting out: means the act by one entity of entering into a contractual agreement with another entity for the provision of a good or service. The research undertaken in my study focused upon a specific type of contracting out, that which

involved the entry by one Indiana local governmental unit into an ILA pursuant to which another Indiana local governmental unit, in whole or in part, provided to the constituents of the former unit a public service that had previously been provided in-house by the former unit or by another service vendor.

Council-manager: means a form of local government that is popular in the United States and under which publically elected councilors legislate and establish local governmental policy and normally appoint a professional manager to perform the administrative functions of their municipality. In this form of government, a mayor is either publically elected or appointed by the councilors, but normally performs no executive functions and holds ceremonial and persuasive power only.

Dillon's Law: means a state law that allows a local governmental unit to have only those powers that are expressly granted to it by state statute, that are necessarily implied or inherent in a power so granted, or that are indispensable to the declared purpose of the local governmental unit.

Ease of measurement: means the effort that a local government official must make in order to gauge the quality and quantity of a public service.

General fund: means the primary fund of a local governmental unit that covers all of its appropriation, receipt, and expenditure transactions, except for those which special fund accounting is required.

Great Depression: means the worldwide depression that was triggered by the crash of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) on October 29, 1929. At its height, almost 25% of the adult workforce in the United States was unemployed, and those

employed experienced a 60% drop in wages. The NYSE did not return to its pre-Great Depression level until 1954 (Margo, 1993).

Great Recession: means the economic downturn that officially existed in the United States from December, 2007 until June, 2009. Thought to have had its genesis in the bursting of the nation's $8,000,000,000,000 housing bubble, this economic event soon led to a severe downturn in domestic consumer spending and business investment, and resulted in the most drastic employment contraction that the United States had experienced since the Great Depression (Economic Policy Institute, 2016).

Great Society: means that collection of federal social welfare programs that were established during the administration of United States President Lyndon Johnson (1963-1969).

Gross domestic product (GDP): means the monetary value of all of the finished goods and services produced within the United States in a given year. It is commonly used as a measure of the nation's economic health.

Home Rule: means a state law that grants a local governmental unit all powers necessary for it to govern its own internal affairs, except for those powers that are expressly removed from it or forbidden to it by state statute or other applicable law.

ICMA: means the International City/County Management Association, an entity that conducts national surveys the results of which are frequently used in academic research.

ILA: means interlocal agreement, a contractual collaboration that is sometimes referred to as an intergovernmental agreement or an interjurisdictional agreement. When this term is used to describe a public service or mutual aid agreement that a local

government official entered into, administered, and/or terminated, and whose experiences in doing so formed the basis of my study, it means a written agreement between two or more Indiana political subdivisions that has been approved by each entity's executive and fiscal bodies and that complies with Indiana Code Title 36, Article 1, Chapter 7, as amended (I.C. §§36-1-7-1, et seq. (2016)). The terms of such an ILA must provide for its duration and purpose, the manner of its financing, staffing, supplying itself, and maintaining a budget, the manner of its termination and disposal of property, its manner of administration, and if administered by a joint board, the manner of its acquiring, holding, and disposing of property.

In-house: means the provision of a public service by a local governmental unit by using its own public sector employees.

Intangible property: means property that is created by action of law and that has little or no intrinsic value, but may have great market value, such as a copyright, trade mark, or service mark.

Local government official: means an elected or appointed member of a United States city, town, village, borough, county, or district and, when directed toward a participant in my study, means an Indiana local elected mayor and who was employed by an Indiana local governmental unit at the time of this study.

Local governmental unit: means a city, town, village, borough, county, or district that is either located within the United States or within the State of Indiana, depending upon context and, when directed towards a participant in my study, means an Indiana city that had a population of less than 600,000 persons at the time of this study.

MAD Doctrine: means the approach used by the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, by which each nation sought to dissuade the other from using nuclear weapons against it for fear of an equal and immediate response from the nation so attacked.

Marginal utility: means that extra satisfaction that a consumer enjoys from purchasing one more unit of a good or service. This concept is used by economists to help them determine how much of a given good or service a consumer will buy.

Medicaid: means a federal health insurance program that was created in the United States in 1965 to provide monetary assistance to eligible low-income families and individuals to help them pay for long-term medical and custodial care.

Medicare: means a federal health insurance program that was created in the United States in 1965 to provide monetary assistance to eligible elderly and certain other disabled recipients to help them pay for health care.

National League of Cities: means a United States advocacy organization that was founded in 1926 and that lobbies for and represents the interests of thousands of cities, towns, and villages, often in partnership with state municipal leagues.

Natural world: means all of the things existing in nature that are not made or caused by humans.

Naturalistic generalization: means the process of generalizing qualitative research findings to other similar people and settings.

New Deal: means the collection of federal government programs and policies that were established in the United States under President Franklin Roosevelt (1933-1945) in an effort to alleviate the societal effects of the Great Depression.

NVivo: means a computer software program produced by QSR International that supports qualitative research by helping a researcher organize, manage, store, and analyze qualitative data, such as that gathered from in-depth field interviews. My study utilized the NVivo 11 Starter for Windows software package.

Personal property: means property that is neither classified as real property nor as intangible property.

Piggybacking: means the use of an existing idea or work of another to form the basis of or to otherwise support one's own actions and endeavors.

Profit margin: means the amount by which business revenues exceed business costs when providing a public service to a local governmental unit.

Psychometric: means a description of the characteristics of individuals within a defined populous that are based upon psychological factors such as attitudes, opinions, motivations, values, lifestyles, and perceived needs.

Real property: means land, buildings, and structures that are permanently attached to either land or a building.

Social Security: means a federal insurance program that was first developed in the United States in 1935 and that provides monetary assistance to eligible recipients who are retired, disabled, or unemployed.

Special district: means an independent local governmental unit that is created by and superimposed within the corporate jurisdiction of another local governmental unit in order for the latter to be able to generate additional tax revenues to address a specific community need that is not otherwise being met by the former unit's existing tax base.

Standard & Poor's: means Standard & Poor's Global, Inc., a publically traded United States corporation engaged primarily in the business of financial information and analysis.

Standard & Poor's global rating: means the credit rating that Standard & Poor's assigns to an investment instrument. A global rating of AAA is the highest credit rating that can be assigned under the Standard & Poor's rating system, and signifies the recipient's extremely strong capacity to meet its financial commitments. A global rating of AA+ is the second highest credit rating that can be assigned under the Standard & Poor's rating system, and signifies the recipient's very high capacity to meet its financial commitments (Standard & Poor's, 2011).

Strong mayor: means a form of local government that is popular in the United States and under which a publically elected mayor normally holds all policy-making, administrative, and other executive power in a municipality, including, but not limited to, the authority to hire and fire all department heads and to prepare and administer the municipal budget. Under this form of government, a publically elected council exercises the municipality's legislative functions, which normally include the enactment of local laws and the approval of a municipal budget. All of the participants in my study were employed at the time of their interview by Indiana cities with a strong mayor form of government.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: means a federal nutrition assistance program in the United States that had its genesis as a New Deal food stamp program, was expanded in 1964 as a Great Society program, and was both renamed and expanded in

2008. The program provides monetary assistance to eligible low-income families and individuals, including certain non-citizens, to help them pay for food.

Supplemental Security Income: means a federal program in the United States that was created in 1972 to provide a monetary stipend to eligible aged, blind, or disabled individuals, including certain non-citizens.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families: means a federal assistance program that was created in the United States in 1996 to replace the federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children program that had been created in 1935. It is designed to provide monetary assistance to eligible low-income families with dependent children.

Transaction costs: mean those costs involved in a market transaction that are above and beyond the direct cost of producing or purchasing a good or service.

Study Assumptions

Throughout my study, I assumed that the research instrument designed for my study was effective in the collection from my study participants of meaningful, useful, reliable, and detailed information regarding the phenomenon I investigated. I also assumed that there was an essence or essences to the shared experience under study. I further assumed that my study participants would agree to voluntarily participate in this study, would all fully understand the interview questions that they were asked, and would answer all of these questions truthfully, accurately, and openly. In addition, I assumed that the attitudes and opinions of my study participants, as expressed in their answers to my interview questions, were fully formed and stable. Finally, I assumed that the form and content of the data generated by my study would have utility to local public officials or others interested in the use of inter-governmental collaborative efforts to provide

public services to local communities. These assumptions were necessary given the nature of study participation and my use of human responses to oral interview questions as the primary source of study data.

Study Scope and Delimitations

My study addressed the ILA entry and continuation decision-making processes of Indiana local elected mayors as they related to the greater overall problems of ILA non-entry and failure. I focused my study upon these problems because the identification of the factors that local elected mayors consider to be the most important when they are making their ILA entry and continuation decisions will provide significant insight into how best to create and administer ILAs in a manner that positively addresses these factors and thereby avoids these threats to ILA usage and success.

The principal delimitations within my study are that I chose to study the topic of ILA entry and continuation decision-making using a qualitative, phenomenological framework and a phenomenological-interpretive design. Other study delimitations include that my study was bounded by time and context, having sought only the perceptions of study participants whose municipalities were either currently a party to an ILA or had been a party to an ILA at some point during the participant's employment or time in office. It was also bounded by location, because it focused only upon selected adults who were currently employed as a local elected mayor in one of Indiana's cities that had at time of interview a population of less than 600,000 persons, accompanied by their city attorney when necessary. Finally, my study was bounded by a purposeful sample consisting of only 13 Indiana mayors, accompanied by their city attorney when necessary, and by only those selected officials who consented to participate therein.

In addition, because study data was collected from human beings, it is possible that important ILA entry or continuation factors were missed during my study because they were unappreciated, forgotten, or intentionally undisclosed by my study participants. My study also did not explore the temporal distinctions that may exist over an ILA's life, which may change the factors that a local government official perceives as being important when making an ILA entry or continuation decision.

Moreover, while an effort was made to identify those factors that were perceived by my study participants as being the most important to their ILA entry and continuation decisions, my study did not provide a strict statistical ranking of factor importance. In addition, *importance* is a subjective concept, and the psychometric weight given to the *importance* of an ILA factor may vary by study participant.

Finally, the qualitative results from my study are not generally transferrable, in the quantitative sense of that word, to other contexts or settings. This is because my study's sample population was too small, not properly stratified, and insufficiently random to satisfy the statistical requirements for generalization.

Study Limitations

My study design was limited by both its purposeful sampling strategy and by its relatively small sample size. In this regard, the perceptions of my study participants may have differed significantly from those of the local government official population in general, as well as from local government officials from Indiana communities with populations that were either too large or too small to be included in my study or that operated under other than a strong mayor form of government. Therefore, no

generalizations were attempted, because my study's sample population was too small, not properly stratified, and insufficiently random.

In addition, a methodological problem with my study could exist, since it relied exclusively upon individuals as the source of its base information. Moreover, my study design, although literature-informed, may itself have been too crude of an instrument to have accurately and effectively explored the complex and multi-faceted subject of human decision-making.

Other potential study limitations include the fact that the most important factors in ILA entry and continuation decisions could change with every ILA, and ILA relationships could evolve over time, making the *snapshot* design of this study ineffective because it did not consider the evolutionary stage in which a study participant existed at the time of his or her interview. Moreover, factors not obvious to my study participants, such as their educational level, ethnicity, and personal values, could have affected their understandings and perceptions, and thus their study responses. Further limitations could include distortions in study participant responses due to their personal biases, anxieties, fears, anger, recall errors, or desire to provide politically correct or self-serving answers.

One final study limitation that could be present in my study is researcher bias. Although there was no familial, work, or other direct connection between me and any study participant, it is a fact that some study participants had met or heard of me either as a result of my position as corporation counsel for a well-known Indiana municipality or through my involvement with AIM and with several other state and national legislative and municipal law initiatives and organizations. I have also had personal experience in drafting, negotiating, and assisting in the administration of numerous ILAs.

I attempted to mitigate or eliminate these potential study limitations by carefully choosing the most experienced and information-rich study participants available, by assuring them of the confidentiality of their responses and the need for them to provide full and frank answers to my interview questions, by respecting and developing a positive rapport with each study participant, and by forthrightly disclosing my position and status and by preventing the same from influencing this study. Moreover, I sought to enhance study dependability through the taking of researcher field notes, by audio-recording all participant interviews, by having all interview recordings transcribed, and by providing each study participant with his or her interview transcript to review for accuracy and completeness.

In addition, I employed data triangulation by using data from multiple study interviews, as well as from my field notes, in my analysis of the ILA decision-making phenomenon under study. I also created an audit trail to further ensure study dependability, and utilized member checking. I addressed my personal biases by disclosing them, reflecting on them, and bracketing them out of my data gathering and analysis process.

As noted by Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick (2008) and by Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey (2005), as well as by numerous others in the academic community, my study design, despite its limitations, is one of the most common and frequently utilized designs in qualitative research. In addition, Patton (2002) stated that, while qualitative study results may not be generalizable, they can still be applied by extrapolation or naturalistic generalization to other similar situations.

Therefore, the results of my study should be of general assistance to other local government officials when they are making ILA entry and continuation decisions.

Significance of the Study

At a time when ILAs are increasingly being considered for use in addressing local and regional societal demands, it is anticipated that the results of my study will be of interest to local government officials and others who are interested in this form of horizontal local governmental collaboration. My study is thought to be one of the first to have addressed the issue of what factors are most important to local elected mayors when they are deciding whether to either enter or continue an ILA. If my study results assist local government officials in achieving a greater rate of ILA success, society will be benefitted by both a commensurate increase in public value and by the more efficient meeting of societal needs.

The effective and efficient use of public monies by local governmental units is especially important during periods of economic turmoil such as the one in which the United States is currently embroiled, because it is during these times that municipalities are frequently called upon to provide more public services to a larger dependent citizenry with less resources. Moreover, if recent economic projections are accurate, the burden on local governments to do more with less may not be removed for decades, if ever.

Oftentimes, the collaborative benefits provided by ILAs prove to be an important tool that municipalities can use to both lower the cost and increase the quality of the public services upon which a modern citizenry both relies and has come to expect. However, these benefits only exist so long as an ILA remains viable. Under these circumstances, the findings of this study provide a unique contribution to the limited

body of knowledge that currently exists on what factors influence local government officials when they are making their ILA entry and continuation decisions. In so doing, my study also provides insight into which of the literature-informed factors thought to be important to ILA entry decisions continue to remain important once an ILA becomes operational. All of this ILA decision-making information will assist local government officials in the creation and administration of more successful ILAs, and can serve as a precursor to additional academic research on this important phenomenon.

Expected Social Change

Over 323,000,000 people currently reside in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Of this population, over 80% live in one of the nation's approximately 3,573 urbanized areas and urban clusters (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), the areas that are most likely to have the local resources, managerial savvy, political will, and available municipal partners necessary for collaborative efforts such as ILAs. Both past history and current population projections show a near future trend toward the even greater urbanization of the United States, with a commensurate increase in the public pressure placed upon local governmental units to provide their citizens with a vast array of services. However, at the same time that municipalities are being faced with growing service demands, they are also receiving less monetary support and more state and federal unfunded mandates.

Moreover, even rural communities in the United States are beginning to understand the need to band together to survive economically. Rural leaders are now facing pressure to overcome spatial obstacles and fear of change and to cooperate more

with neighboring communities in the provision of public services (Lackey, Freshwater, & Rupasingha, 2002).

Under these circumstances, it is very likely that most local governments in the United States will continue to be challenged in their ability to meet local public service demands for the foreseeable future. It is also very likely that they will frequently turn to ILAs to help them meet these challenges.

Citizens today expect their local governments to be efficient and effective, and to be entrepreneurial in their approach to societal demands (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Stenberg & Austin, 2007). To the extent that local government officials turn to ILAs as a means by which they can more efficiently and effectively meet the service demands of their constituents, the results of my study of the ILA decision-making process and the important factors that influence ILA entry and continuation decisions will assist them in structuring and administering these collaborative efforts in a manner that best ensures their long-term success.

Positive social change is achieved whenever government officials become better stewards of public monies, thereby maximizing the social benefits that can be provided with the resources on hand. The effective use of public sector resources is also likely to generate social capital and promote greater citizen trust and respect for local government, which enhances governmental effectiveness and democratic governance itself (Myeong & Seo, 2016; Putnam, 1995), and increases public value (Moore, 1995).

It is my expectation that the results of my study will help generate positive social change. They will do so by providing local leaders with the information they need to create and maintain more viable ILAs. These collaborative endeavors will, in turn, foster

greater inter-jurisdictional cooperation, increase citizen confidence in their local government, and allow for the more efficient meeting of societal needs.

Summary and Overview

In the United States, local government officials play a critical role in the provision of needed services to an often diverse and demanding public. Their ability to do so efficiently, effectively, and equitably is especially important given the nation's current economic turmoil, during which the demand for public services has increased while the monetary resources available to local governmental units to pay for these services has decreased. One of the most common methods utilized by local governmental units in their effort to provide less expensive and higher quality public services is to collaborate with another local governmental unit and to provide those services either through or together with that other public entity. The contractual document used to form this type of service arrangement is an ILA.

Unfortunately, despite the benefits provided by ILAs, they often fail to become operational or are abandoned by the very local government officials who sought their creation in favor of another form of service provision. Although some recent academic research has focused upon the factors that are involved in ILA entry decisions, the specific decision-making process utilized by local elected mayors when they are deciding whether to enter into an ILA, as well as the process used by these local leaders when they are deciding whether to continue or terminate an existing ILA, is less explored and little understood. The results of my qualitative, phenomenological study have helped to fill this knowledge gap, by exploring and explaining the factors that local elected mayors perceive as being the most important to their ILA entry and continuation decisions.

The conceptual framework for my study was based upon the transaction costs theory, as applied to local government units (Bel & Fageda, 2006; Coase, 1937). It was also informed by the utility maximization theory (Lengwiler, in press), as applied to local public officials (McGuire, Ohsfeldt, & Van Cott, 1987), the bounded rationality theory (Simon, 1972, 1957), the social decision scheme theory (Davis, 1973), and the groupthink theory (Janis, 1972).

Personal, on-site, and in-depth interviews with a purposefully selected sample of 13 Indiana local elected mayors who had personal experience with ILAs, as well as with their municipal attorney in two cases, were used to gather the data used in my study. Once gathered, this data was organized, coded, and analyzed in order to develop an understanding of, and to describe the essence of, the mayoral ILA entry and continuation decision-making process, including an identification of those factors that these local leaders perceive as being the most important to those decisions. The results of my study can be used to inform the actions of municipal leaders striving to create and operate ILAs that are successful and that generate the maximum public value.

In Chapter 2, I provide the reader with a literature-based synopsis of the theoretical framework for my study, followed by a rich summary of the current academic literature relating to ILAs and the factors that prior studies have found to be important to local government officials when they are deciding either whether to enter into an ILA or whether to continue providing public services through an existing ILA. I then provide an explanation of the research approach that I adopted for my study and the logic behind that selection, and close with a chapter summary.

In Chapter 3 I explain in more detail the data collection and analysis procedures that I utilized in my study. This includes a description of my research design and the rationale for choosing that design, as well as the methodology that I used in my study. Issues affecting study trustworthiness, as well as the ethical procedures that I employed in order to protect the rights of my study participants, are also discussed, and a summary ends this Chapter.

In Chapter 4, I refer the reader back to my study research questions, and then report, describe, and interpret my study findings. In Chapter 5 I summarize my study findings, address their implications for practice, and offer suggestions for future research.

I anticipate that the findings of my study will be disseminated through Walden University. I may also present excerpts from this study at a conference of the International Municipal Lawyers Association, as well as at one or more state municipal league conferences. Further dissemination is also possible.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

While not a panacea for the public service woes of local governments, studies have shown that contracting out can reduce the cost of providing many public services (Brown & Potoski, 2003a; Ferris & Graddy, 1986b; Globerman & Vining, 1996; Pack, 1989; Perry & Babitsky, 1986), as well as free up local governmental units to focus on their core activities (Brown & Potoski, 2003b). Common outside service vendors include private for-profit companies, private not-for-profit organizations, and other local governmental units acting as public service vendors. The use of each of these vendors by local governmental units has both academic and practical support. It is a rare locality today that does not consider all of these vendor options when deciding upon the mix of in-house and outside public service providers that is most appropriate given that locality's unique economic, demographic, and geographic circumstances.

One form of contracting out that is commonly used by local governmental units is the ILA. Many recent academic studies have examined the factors that are perceived or posited to be important to a local government officials' ILA entry decision. These include numerous legal, contractual, economic, interpersonal, and transaction cost factors. Studies have also identified numerous variables that are unique to the local government official or the local governmental unit studied, and that may also play a part in a local government official's ILA decisions.

However, very little academic interest has been specifically paid to date on the factors that local elected mayors perceive as important either when they are deciding whether to enter into an ILA or when they are deciding whether to continue with this

form of inter-governmental collaboration. This information is important, because studies have shown that local governmental units often change their method of providing public services (Hefetz & Warner, 2004; Lamothe, Lamothe, & Feiock, 2008; Voges, 2014).

The purpose of my qualitative, phenomenological study was twofold. It was to identify the factors that influence local elected mayors when they are deciding whether they should enter into an ILA. It was also to identify the factors that influence local mayors when they are deciding whether to continue an existing ILA or to instead seek another way to provide their constituents with the public services that they need or desire.

Content and Organization of the Review

In this Chapter, I identify and discuss the existing empirical and theoretical literature that was relevant to and that informed my exploration of the ILA decision-making phenomenon that was the focus of my study. I begin with a description of my literature search strategy and an explanation of my theoretical framework, after which I identify from the literature the various options that local government officials have when they are considering how best to provide public services to their constituents. I follow with a detailed description of the factors that prior studies have found, in theory or in practice, to be most important to local government officials when they decide whether or not to enter into an ILA. I then review the scant literature that exists regarding the factors that may influence local government officials when they decide whether to continue an existing ILA. Finally, I identify the research methodology that I employed in my study and close this Chapter with a summary.

Literature Search Strategy

As part of my study, I conducted an exhaustive search of recent academic literature on the following electronic databases: Academic Search Complete; Business Source Complete; Political Science Complete; ProQuest Central; and, SAGE Premier. In doing so, I used the following keywords and phrases, both individually and in various combinations: *bounded rationality, bounded rationality theory, collaboration, collaborative public management, contracting out, elected officials, groupthink, groupthink theory, intergovernmental cooperation, inter-jurisdictional agreement, institutional collective action, interlocal agreement, joinder agreement, municipal, municipality, municipal officials, mutual aid agreement, new regionalism, public service agreement, social decision scheme, social decision scheme theory, transaction costs, transaction costs theory, utility maximization*, and *utility maximization theory*. I limited all of the above searches to peer-reviewed articles and, with the exception of earlier seminal works and otherwise informative studies referenced therein, to articles published between 1995 and 2016.

I used each of the keywords and phrases identified above in each of the databases described above, using an iterative process that best ensured that all of the available literature relevant to this study was identified. I also conducted additional research using the Google Scholar database, scholarly books, organizational publications, government, advocacy, and industry websites, as well as articles from major national magazines and newspapers to obtain the historical and statistical facts that are primarily contained in

Chapter 1 of this dissertation. I reviewed a total of over 500 scholarly articles and other informational publications in the process of conducting my study.

Theoretical Framework

Transaction Costs Theory

Academic interest in organizational economy and efficiency is neither new nor limited to local governmental operations. The transaction costs theory (Andrew, 2009b; Coase, 1937; Hawkins, 2009; Stein, 1990; Williamson, 1981) has long been used to help explain why persons make certain economic decisions, including why business entities provide some services internally and contract-out others to external providers (Brown & Potoski, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Ferris & Graddy, 1991).

In his seminal work on economic theory, *The Nature of the Firm* (1934), economist Ronald Coase asserted that, assuming a completely competitive and free market, parties will naturally gravitate toward that distribution of property that will produce the most efficient and mutually beneficial outcome. However, he also recognized that, for a for-profit firm to enter into the marketplace to purchase a good or service, rather than providing it in-house, that firm must not only consider the direct cost of the good or service at issue, but must also take into account the indirect costs of entering into a market transaction, such as its search and information, bargaining and decision-making, policing and enforcement costs. For his development of this transaction costs theory, Coase was awarded the Nobel Prize in economics (Nobel Media AB, 2014).

Although the transaction costs theory was originally developed by Coase to explain the workings of commercial enterprises, it has subsequently been applied to the economic decision-making of non-commercial organizations. In this regard, the theory

has specifically been applied to local governmental units in many academic studies, wherein it was posited that, when local government officials make contracting out decisions, they consider not only the direct cost of having a public service provided by an outside vendor, but also the various indirect costs that their locality will incur by transacting for the provision of the service by that vendor (Bel & Fageda, 2006; Brown & Potoski, 2004; Brown & Potoski, 2003a, 2003b,2003c; Clingermayer & Feiock, 1997; Williamson, 1981). The higher these overall transaction costs, the less value that will be realized from an outside collaboration, and, according to this theory, the more likely that a government official will either choose a different outside service vendor or decide to forgo external sources altogether and instead provide a public service internally (Brown & Potoski, 2004; Coase, 1937).

Examples of these transaction costs, as identified in the literature, include those incurred in searching for and selecting a service provider (Brown & Potoski, 2005) and in planning, adapting, and monitoring the provision of public services by another party (Brown & Potoski, 2003b). Further examples include those cost incurred in addressing the displeasure of core constituencies or political allies with the choice of a service provider (Clingermayer & Feiock, 1997) and in dealing with coordination, disagreement, and defection disputes (Hawkins, 2009).

The transaction costs theory has also been used by many researchers to explain, in theory, why public services that require little asset specificity and that are easy to measure should be the best candidates for provision through an ILA (Carr & Hawkins, 2013; Feiock, 2007; Hefetz & Warner, 2011; Quelin, 1998; Williamson, 1981). In this regard, a public service's *asset specificity* is said to turn upon the degree to which it

requires the use of specialized skills, training, or systems, or involves a specific physical site or temporal specificity, in order to be performed. An asset that demands more of these requirements is more *specific* than one that can be provided using only those skills possessed by the adult population at large, from more locations, or at more times (Globerman & Vining, 1996; Nelson, 1997).

For example, a safe and continuously operating system that provides water for human consumption and for the sundry other household and landscaping purposes demanded by a modern citizenry is a public service that is provided by many local governmental units. Integral to any such system is one or more water towers, which provide the positive water pressure needed for taps to run and for water pipes to avoid the groundwater seepage that would contaminate their potable water supply.

If the hypothetical City of Alpha provides public water service to its residents and is experiencing a 10,000 person population surge that will require it to expand its water distribution grid, it will have to increase its water pressure and water supply in order to properly serve these new and more spatially distant residents. One way for Alpha to accomplish this is to incur the capital expense of building its own new water tower. Another way for Alpha to accomplish this would be to ask its only neighboring local governmental unit, in this case the hypothetical City of Bravo, if Bravo is willing to erect its own water tower and to then enter into an ILA by which it will provide Alpha with the additional pressurized water that Alpha's new citizens will need.

A local government official from Alpha who is faced with this decision must consider factors that would not exist if the ILA collaboration that he or she was considering was for the provision of grass-cutting services. This is because, unlike grass-

cutting, which can be performed by many vendors using readily fungible, relatively inexpensive, and easily portable equipment, as well as minimally-trained employees, providing Alpha's new residents with potable water continuously and at a useable pressure is a service that requires a large capital investment in a highly specific asset that cannot be quickly erected, easily moved, or realistically used for other purposes. It also requires personnel with specialized skills and the training needed to operate the water tower and water distribution system.

This being so, it is unlikely that any local governmental unit acting as a public service vendor, other than Bravo, will be willing or able to make the sort of time and materials investment that will be needed in order to provide additional water services to Alpha. Therefore, by relying upon Bravo to provide it with this service, Alpha will put itself at risk that Bravo will soon realize that it now controls the only available water supply that would meet the needs of Alpha's new residents, and that it can therefore exploit its monopolistic position by raising the price and lowering the quality of its water services. The only way for Alpha to prevent this type of opportunistic behavior while still relying upon Bravo for its needed water supply is to incur the costs of bargaining for very restrictive ILA terms, closely monitoring the water services provided by Bravo, and strictly enforcing any contractual breaches.

Pursuant to the transaction costs theory, the Alpha local government official in the above scenario, all other things being equal, will be less inclined to enter into an ILA with Bravo for the provision of water services than for the provision of grass cutting services, because the former service entails greater transaction costs than the latter. Instead, this official will likely decide that Alpha will be better served by constructing its

own water tower and by itself providing water services to its new residents, thereby avoiding the high transaction costs and loss of service control that will result by relying upon Bravo for this water service.

This analysis should hold true for other high specificity public services as well. However, a few studies have found that local government officials will contract-out for highly specific and capital-intensive services that carry with them substantial fixed operating costs (Brown, 2008; Brown & Potoski, 2003b; Carr, LeRoux, & Shrestha, 2009). Even in these instances, however, the specificity of the public service at issue remains an integral part of their ILA entry decision.

E*ase of measurement* is the other characteristic considered by researchers using the transaction costs theory to theoretically assess the optimality of using an ILA to provide a given public service. It is posited that the more difficult it is to assess the efforts of an outside vendor in providing a public service, the more likely it is that a local government official will decide not to provide that service through an ILA (Brown & Potoski, 2005, 2003a, 2003b; Carr & Hawkins, 2013).

For example, it is relatively easy for a local government official to determine whether the trash pick-up services provided to its citizens by another local governmental unit are meeting contractual and community standards. Either the trash is collected on time and without spillage, or it is not. It is much more difficult for that official to gauge the effectiveness of that same vendor in providing its citizens with drug counseling services, as drug abuse is not so readily visible and recidivism stems from many causes. Therefore, according to the transaction costs theory, since it is easier to accurately measure trash pick-up services than drug counseling services, these lower measurement

costs, all other things being equal, make trash pick-up a better candidate than drug counseling for provision through an ILA. This analysis should hold true for other public services as well.

Combining the two public service characteristics of *asset specificity* and *ease of measurement*, researchers have used the transaction costs theory to identify *low specificity, easy to measure* public services that should be amenable to external provision through an ILA (Brown & Potoski, 2005; Hefetz & Warner, 2011). However, and contrary to what the transaction costs theory would predict, a few studies have suggested that some *high asset, hard to measure* services may be as likely to be contracted out to other local governmental units as the predicted *low specificity, easy to measure* services (Brown & Potoski, 2003b; Hefetz, Warner, & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014).

There is nothing in the academic literature to suggest that the transaction costs theory is not applicable to a local government official's initial contracting out decision, or that it should not apply with equal force to that official's subsequent decision to change the method by which a local governmental unit provides a public service to its constituents. This is an important point, because, as several studies have noted, public service provision decisions are seldom irreversible (Brown, Potoski, & Van Slyke, 2005; Lamothe, Lamothe, & Feiock, 2008). To the contrary, researchers have found that local government officials frequently reconsider their service delivery choices and switch service delivery methods whenever they deem it advantageous to do so (Lamothe, Lamothe, & Feiock, 2008; Warner & Hefetz, 2002).

In this regard, Hefetz and Warner (2004) found that, during the five-year time period used for their study, while over 90% of the local governmental units they studied

contracted-out one or more public service, over 80% of these units also contracted back in at least one public service. Other studies have found that from one-half to over three-fifths of the local governmental units studied changed their method of public service delivery during the period of the study (Lamothe, Lamothe, & Feiock, 2008; Voges, 2014). Although studies have found that there are costs inherent in any change in public service delivery method (Brown, Potoski, & Van Slyke, 2005), they have also found that this has not proved to be an insurmountable barrier to local government officials who desire a service change (Warner & Hebdon, 2001).

In deciding upon the proper theoretical frame work for my study, I was informed by these prior studies. As a result, I determined that the transaction costs theory was a sound choice as the theoretical framework for my study of the decision-making process utilized by local government officials when they are determining whether to either enter into an ILA or continue an existing ILA relationship.

However, as recognized by Williamson (1981), the transaction costs theory fails to explicitly take into account that human beings are subject to bounded rationality. To address this omission, I supplemented my use of the transaction costs theory as the theoretical framework of my study with the bounded rationality theory.

Bounded Rationality Theory

The bounded rationality theory (Simon, 1972, 1957) posits that human behavior is not determined by rationality, but by the irrational and non-rational elements that bound an individual's rational behavior. It recognizes that humans making real world decisions suffer from limits both in their ability to resolve complex problems, and in their ability to

receive, remember, and relay information relevant to their decisions (Selten, 1999; Simon, 1957; Williamson, 1981).

Instead of perfect knowledge, decision-makers are often faced with risk and uncertainty, with vague, ambiguous, dubious, incomplete, and contradictory information about their alternatives, and with a plethora of externalities that prevent them from calculating their optimal course of action. They also suffer from emotions, attention limits, the need to balance the benefits and costs of seeking additional information relevant to their decision, their internal information processing flaws, and any problems that they may have in working with probabilities, assessing risks, and making inferences. Finally, their decisions may reflect the tensions that exist between their business goal of utility maximization and their self-interest and altruistic goals.

For these reasons, human decision-makers often engage in trade-offs, and settle for a satisfactory decision under the circumstances, rather than the theoretically best course of action (Carr, LeRoux, & Shrestha, 2009; Jones, 2003; Simon, 1972). These caveats raised by the bounded rationality theory informed my use of the transaction costs theory as the theoretical framework of my study.

In addition to the bounded rationality theory, three other academic theories informed my use of the transaction costs theory as the theoretical framework of my study. They were the utility maximization theory, the social decision scheme theory, and the groupthink theory.

Utility Maximization Theory

The utility maximization theory, in its classic form, is part of the core of modern neoclassical economics, and traces its origins as far back as Francois Quesnay (1694-

1774) and Adam Smith (1723-1790). This theory hypothesizes that rational consumers with finite budgets will attempt to obtain the greatest value for their money, and will allocate that money between alternative goods and services so that the last dollar that they spend on any good or service generates for them the same marginal utility (McCormick, 1997). Until this equilibrium is reached, a consumer will purchase more of the good or service that generates the higher marginal utility (Gossen, 1854; Lengwiler, in press; Quesnay, 1759; Smith, 1776; Steiner, 2011).

However, this theory about the behavior of individual consumers cannot simply be extrapolated to an organization in order to determine the utility-maximizing behavior of that organization, because the utility-maximizing goals of the individuals who make up the organization may differ from the utility-maximizing goals of the organization as an entity. For example, in addition to profitability, an individual's utility-maximizing goals may include a salary increase, more power and status, and professional excellence (Hayes & Wood, 1995; Kobayashi, 1975). An individual decision-maker may therefore choose an option that is the least costly to him or her personally, even if it is not the best choice for his or her organization (McGuire, Ohsfeldt, & Van Cott, 1987).

Pursuant to this theory, when applied to local government officials making ILA entry and continuation decisions, a local government official may select the public service delivery method that is the least costly to him or her personally, even if it is not the best choice for his or her municipality. For this reason, the utility maximization theory, as applied to local government officials, also informed my use of the transaction costs theory as the theoretical framework of my study.

Social Decision Scheme Theory

The social decision scheme theory (Davis, 1973) asserts that, although most organizations have a designated leader, many organizational decisions are not made by this individual in isolation. Instead, they are made by or in conjunction with a corporate board, ad hoc committee, trusted circle of advisors, or another form of decision-making group. In such cases, the final decision of the organization will not necessarily represent the preference of its leader, but the preference of the group. Moreover, many of these decision-making groups are governed by either formal or informal decision-making processes that allow them to come to a decision despite intra-group differences of opinion. Oftentimes, this is accomplished by the express or subtle exertion of social pressure by the majority on the minority in order to gain the eventual acquiescence of the latter to the majority viewpoint, thus arriving at a unified collective decision (Davis, 1973; Laughlin, 2011; Stasser, 1999).

To the extent that the local government officials interviewed as part of my study made their ILA entry or continuation decisions as part of or in conjunction with other stakeholders, the social decision scheme theory may apply. Therefore, it also informed my use of the transaction costs theory as the theoretical framework of my study.

Groupthink Theory

The groupthink theory (Janis, 1972) postulates that, when groups have a high degree of social cohesiveness, their desire for group uniformity may diminish or cloud the critical analytical abilities of their individual members, causing them to become closed-minded, unwilling to consider information that contradicts the consensus opinion, to ignore viable alternatives, to suppress dissent, and to over-estimate their combined

power and morality (Janis, 1972; Ntayi, Byabashaija, Eyaa, Ngoma, & Muliira, 2010). This same phenomenon can also make a cohesive group of decision-makers very reluctant to reconsider their prior decisions (Kowert, 2001). In either case, the benefits that result from an individual leader compensating for his or her own cognitive limitations by seeking the advice of others can be eclipsed by the inability of his or her decision-making group, when in the grip of groupthink, to assess issues rationally and come to an informed, reasoned decision after engaging in a principled debate.

Groupthink is thought to exist most predominantly in groups that work closely together, whose members like each other, and whose members neither want to leave or be removed from their group nor to be shunned or ignored by other group members. It may also exist in situations where an organization's nominal leader finds it hard to make courageous decisions, and would rather have a group decision absolve him or her from personal responsibility for choosing a particular course of organizational action (Kelman, Sanders, & Pandit, 2015).

To the extent that the local government officials interviewed as part of my study made their ILA entry or continuation decisions as part of a cohesive group, the groupthink theory could apply. Therefore, it also informed my use of the transaction costs theory as the theoretical framework of my study.

These selected theories related to my study and to its research questions because they identified and created a theoretical framework that informed my exploration of the ILA entry and continuation decision-making phenomenon that was the focus of my study. They also helped me to understand the considerations, pressures, and parameters that may face a local government official whenever he or she makes an ILA decision.

Public Service Vendor Attributes

When local government officials consider contracting out a public service obligation, the outside service vendors from which they can choose generally fall into one of three categories: private for-profit vendor; private not-for-profit vendor; and, another local governmental unit acting as a public service vendor. These public service providers all have positive and negative characteristics that affect their attractiveness to a local government official as being a viable alternative to the in-house provision of a public service.

Private For-Profit Vendors

Private sector for-profit vendors are often used by local governmental units to provide public services to their constituents. The strengths of this type of service vendor include lower costs and greater efficiency (Brown, 2008; Stein, 1990), as well as labor, budgetary, and managerial flexibility (Ferris & Graddy, 1991, 1986a). The use of local private vendors can also be politically attractive to local government officials (Briffault, 1999; Warner & Hefetz, 2002), especially when vendor competition is robust, transaction costs are low, and citizens are ambivalent about the method used by their local governmental unit to provide them with a desired public service (Hefetz & Warner, 2011). The types of public services that are often contracted-out by local governmental units to private for-profit vendors include public parking lot and meter management, and vehicle towing (Hefetz & Warner, 2011).

The downside to using private for-profit vendors to provide public services is that the cost and efficiency gains they generate may lessen over time, or prove to be non-existent (Carver, 1989; Girth, Hefetz, Johnston, & Warner, 2012; Pack, 1989; Warner,

2011; Warner & Hefetz, 2002). Moreover, any gains that are realized by using these vendors to provide public services may soon be over-shadowed by the opportunistic behaviors that they display. Driven by a profit motive, private for-profit vendors may soon seek to increase their own profit margin by lowering their service quality, increasing their fees, withholding important information, treating their service recipients unequally, or engaging in wasteful or fraudulent conduct (Brown, 2008; Feiock, Clingermayer, & Dasse, 2003; Morgan & England, 1988). This risk is heightened whenever a local governmental unit lacks the trained personnel needed to negotiate, monitor, and enforce private sector contracts (Clingermayer, Feiock, & Stream, 2003; Mohr, Deller, & Halstead, 2010; Warner & Hefetz, 2002).

In addition to the risk of being negatively impacted by the opportunistic behavior of private for-profit vendors, the privatization of governmental services may also lead to a decrease in citizen choice, voice, and satisfaction (Hefetz, Warner, & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014; Warner, 2011; Warner & Hefetz, 2002). A further impediment to the use of for-profit vendors for the provision of public services is that they may not be available in rural or other thin markets (Bloomfield, 2006; Brown, Potoski, & Van Slyke, 2006; Brown & Potoski, 2003c; Hefetz & Warner, 2011, 2004; Hefetz, Warner, & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014; Lamothe, Lamothe, & Feiock, 2008).

Private Not-For-Profit Vendors

Private not-for-profit vendors are viewed by some local government officials as being more trustworthy than private for-profit vendors in the provision of public services. This is because these vendors are assumed not to have the motivation to behave opportunistically in order to improve their profit margin (Brown, 2008; Clingermayer,

Feiock, & Stream, 2003; Lamothe & Lamothe, 2012). This makes them a presumptively better vendor fit, especially when a local government official is looking for an outside vendor to provide low competition, difficult to measure, or high interest public services to his or her constituents (Hefetz & Warner, 2011; Hefetz, Warner, & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014).

The strengths of private not-for-profit vendors are their small entity size, local community control, low labor costs, attractiveness to the local community, and emphasis on personalized service (Ferris & Graddy, 1986; Herfetz & Warner, 2011). Public services that are often contracted-out to private not-for-profit vendors include drug treatment and other health and human services, as well as arts and culture services (Ferris & Graddy, 1986b; Hefetz & Warner, 2011; Stein, 1990).

The downside to choosing private not-for-profit vendors to provide public services is that they are generally unavailable outside of the social and cultural service areas (Brown, 2008; Ferris & Graddy, 1991). Moreover, these vendors can, in practice, act just as opportunistically as private for-profit vendors when they feel that doing so is necessary in order for them to maintain a positive revenue stream or to generate the monies they need to support their core programs (Brown, 2008; Brown, Potoski, & Van Slyke, 2006; Van Slyke, 2006). For these reasons, private not-for-profit vendors are not often considered by local government officials as a viable alternative to the in-house provision of public services (Brown, 2008; Girth, Hefetz, Johnston, & Warner, 2012). Given their limitations, it is perhaps not surprising that these vendors account for only about 5% of the public services provided by local governmental units in the United States (Hefetz, Warner, & Vigoda-Gadot, 2012).

Local Governmental Units as Public Service Vendors

Local governmental units acting as public service vendors are often the vendors-of-choice for local government officials, because they are thought to allow a local governmental unit to take advantage of economies of scale and to otherwise lower its transaction costs without having to turn over control of public service provision to a private vendor and to the risk of opportunistic exploitation (Brown & Potoski, 2003b; Carr & Hawkins, 2013; Hefetz, Warner, & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014; Warner & Hebdon, 2001). Entry into an ILA with an adjoining community may also allow a local governmental unit to minimize the number of free-riders from that jurisdiction who are able to enjoy, tax-free, the extra-jurisdictional benefits that a public service may provide. These spill-over effects are common with local public services such as public transportation and water supply (Tavares & Feiock, 2014). Such ILA entry may also allow a local governmental unit to share with a neighboring community the cost of any negative externalities that are caused by the provision of a public service (Post, 2002).

In addition, for a local governmental unit that has no ready access to private service vendors, using another local governmental unit that is acting as a public service vendor can create an inter-jurisdictional quasi-market that allows it to take advantage of greater economies of scale than would otherwise be available to it as a single local community (Brown & Potoski, 2004; Hefetz, Warner, & Vigoda-Gadot, 2012; Morton, Chen, & Morse, 2008; Warner, 2011). Moreover, a service collaboration with another local governmental unit can provide intangible benefits that are not normally found when contracting with a private vendor, such as a common mission and service culture, a similar organizational structure, and an understanding of the need for both public and

political accountability (Brown, 2008; Shrestha & Feiock, 2011). Other often expressed benefits, perhaps attributable to the need for local governmental units, and the local government officials who manage them, to constantly interact with one other due to their geographic proximity and the extra-jurisdictional nature of many of their public service problems (Ferris & Graddy, 1986b), include trust (Andrew, Short, & Arlikatti, 2013; Lackey, Freshwater, & Rupasingha, 2002), and a spirit of reciprocity (Brown, 2008).

Finally, there is some evidence that public sector collaboration can be just as efficient as collaboration with private sector vendors in lowering the cost of public service provision (Bel, Fegeda, & Mur, 2013; Carver, 1989; Hirsch & Osborne, 2000; Stein, 1990), or can at least have a positive impact on service cost (Andrews & Entwistle, 2010). However, other studies disagree, finding that inter-governmental contracting is less effective than contracting with a private vendor in reducing public service costs, eliminating service inefficiencies, leveraging outside expertise, and spurring innovation. In the opinion of some researchers, the use of public sector vendors by local governmental units gives local government officials a false sense of security as to their true public service costs (Brown & Potoski, 2005; Brown, Potoski, & Van Slyke, 2006).

Most Utilized Outside Vendor

Recent academic studies have found that, when faced with a decision on whether to contract out a public service, and, if so, on what outside vendor to select, most local government officials opt to continue their in-house provision of public services to their constituents (Brown, 2008; Brown & Potoski, 2003b; Campbell & Glynn, 1990; Feiock, Clinger, Shrestha, & Dasse, 2007). However, these studies also find that, when a local government official decides to contract out a public service, the vendor most often chosen

by that local government official is another local governmental unit, with private for-profit vendors coming in a close second, and private not-for-profit vendors trailing as a distant third (ACIR, 1967; Delabbio & Zeemering, 2013; Hilvert & Swindell, 2013; Jossart-Marcelli & Musso, 2005; Warner, 2011). Nevertheless, the type of outside vendor chosen by a local government official to provide his or her community with a needed public service can vary by state (Blair & Janousek, 2013; Campbell & Glynn, 1990), by the geographic density of the local governmental unit (Post, 2002), and by the type of public service to be provided (Blair & Janousek, 2013; Brown, 2008).

When local governmental units do collaborate to provide a public service, they generally do so by entering into an ILA. The three most common types of ILAs are mutual aid, joint service, and pay-for-service agreements. All three of these contractual arrangements have long been thought to be a good way for local governmental units to address regional problems and to take advantage of larger scales of economy (ACIR, 1967; Hefetz, Warner, & Vigoda-Gadot, 2012; Hilvert & Swindell, 2013). These service options have been available to most local governmental units for at least the last 50 years. In this regard, Indiana, the state from which this study obtained its data, has authorized the use of ILAs by local governmental units since 1957 (Indiana Code §§ 36-1-7-1, et seq. (2016)).

However, being statutory creatures, ILAs can and do vary in their particulars from state to state. For example, Indiana law authorizes a local governmental unit to use an ILA to contract with another local governmental unit for the provision of public services only if that ILA is in writing and contains specific language as to its duration, purpose, finance, supply, manner of administration and staffing, identifies the manner in which its

parties will acquire, hold, and dispose of ILA property, and complies with certain specified approval and filing requirements (Indiana Code §§ 36-1-7-1, et seq.(2016)).

Moreover, some academic literature suggests that local governmental units may, over time, shift from a formal contract to an unwritten informal *handshake* form of collaborative arrangement (Blair & Janousek, 2013; Morgan & Hirlinger, 1991). While this is not legally permissible in Indiana, it may occur in local governmental units that are located in states that are subject to less restrictive enabling legislation.

Finally, while ILAs are frequently used by local governmental units to provide a wide array of public services (Chen & Thurmaier, 2009; Wood, 2006), not every commentator agrees that they are the best method by which to provide all public services for all localities (Hefetz, Warner, & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014; Hilvert & Swindell, 2013; Hirsch, 1995; McGuire, 2006). Be that as it may, the use of ILAs by local governmental units is trending upwards (Benton, 2013; Blair & Janousek, 2013; Hefetz, Warner, & Vigoda-Godot, 2014, 2012; Kwon & Feiock, 2010; Warm, 2011; Warner, 2011; Warner & Hebdon, 2001; Zeemering, 2012).

Recent studies have found that more than 50% of the local governmental units in the United States, and in some regions four out of five municipalities, now use ILAs to provide their constituents with at least one public service (LeRoux & Carr, 2009; Mohr, Deller, & Halstead, 2010; Peterson, 2008; Thurmaier & Wood, 2002). In many localities, ILAs are now the preferred method for local governmental units to provide their constituents with common public services such as libraries, jails, parks, emergency dispatch, building and code inspection, plan review, refuse pick-up, and public

transportation (ACIR, 1967; Blair & Janousek, 2013; Ferris & Graddy, 1986; Thurmaier, 2005; Wood, 2006).

ILA Entry Decision Factors

Introduction

Although ILAs have been used by many local governmental units for decades, academic research has only recently begun to identify in earnest those factors that, in theory or in practice, local government officials consider important when deciding whether to collaborate with another local governmental unit for the provision of public services. It is evident from a review of the literature that this process is much more complicated than just having a local government official select the local governmental unit with the lowest public service provision price. In fact, the decision to enter into an ILA, as is true with many types of inter-governmental collaboration (Gilbert & Behnam, 2012), may seldom involve an economic calculation alone (Brown & Potoski, 2004; Chen & Thurmaier, 2009; Hefetz, Warner, & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014; Kwon & Feiock, 2010; Morgan & Hirlinger, 1991; Thurmaier & Wood, 2002).

To the contrary, numerous factors that do not directly relate to the economic cost of a contemplated collaboration may weigh heavy in any ILA entry decision (Andersen & Pierre, 2010; Brown & Potoski, 2003b; Chen & Thurmaier, 2009; Morgan & Hirlinger, 1991). If the total costs of achieving the benefits afforded by an ILA exceed the gains realized by entering into this collaborative arrangement, ILA entry could, and should, be rejected (Feiock, 2007).

However, prior to a discussion of these factors, I believe that it is important to note that many of the academic studies that have identified ILA entry decision-making factors have reached their conclusions based upon the textual review of current ILAs, or by analyzing the responses that local government officials have made to ICMA survey questions. These academic approaches may provide insight, but may not provide researchers with as nuanced or complete an understanding of the ILA entry factors that are, in practice, important to local government officials in general, and to local elected mayors in particular, as would either personal interviews with these officials or the use of surveys that study a wider array of ILA entry factors and that seek respondents from a more demographically diverse sample of local governmental units. Important exceptions include the studies by Chen & Thurmaier (2009), Lackey, Freshwater, & Rupasingha (2002), Thurmaier & Wood (2002), and Zeemering (2015, 2012).

I also believe that it is important to note at the onset that much of the recent scholarly research that has been conducted on ILAs has considered only the viewpoints of appointed city managers or other administrative personnel working primarily under a council-manager form of local government. The viewpoints of elected officials, and especially those of mayors, have often been ignored (Andrew, 2009a; Lee & Hannah-Spurlock, 2015; Zeemering, 2015), although a few studies have sought their opinions (D'Apolito, 2012; Delabbio & Zeemering, 2013; Zeemering, 2015, 2012, 2008).

This is an unfortunate oversight, since local elected officials often have great interest in and influence over ILA entry decisions (Carr & Hawkins, 2013; LeRoux & Carr, 2010; Matkin & Frederickson, 2009; Zeemering, 2015, 2008). This can be true in council-manager forms of local government (Kearney & Scavo, 2001; Wikstrom, 1979),

and appears to be almost universally true in strong mayor forms of local government (Choi, Feiock, & Bae, 2013).

Moreover, the number of local governmental units that operate under a strong mayor system appears to be on the rise (Frederickson, Johnson, & Wood, 2004; Frederickson & O'Leary, 2014), making the inclusion of mayoral viewpoints in the academic study of ILAs even more appropriate. As a result, in my study I sought out and interviewed elected local mayors.

The factors that I have identified as being important to local government officials when they are making their ILA entry decisions fall into several distinct categories, each of which I discuss separately below. These categories are: legal factors, contractual factors, direct cost factors, and transaction cost factors, as well as factors that involve or pertain to the specific local government officials involved in an ILA entry decision, the public service being considered for ILA provision, and factors that relate to either the community that will be providing the public service or the community that will be served by the ILA.

Legal Factors

Not all public services can or should be contracted out to other local governmental units. Those that cannot be contracted-out include many of what are often considered to be *core* governmental services, such as legislative decision-making, establishing local tax rates, and exercising the power of arrest (Ferris & Graddy, 1986a). State civil service laws that limit the ability of a local governmental unit to terminate its public sector employees (Ferris & Graddy, 1991), state laws that mandate the use of local or minority-run businesses (Ferris & Graddy, 1991; Girth, Hefetz, Johnston, & Warner,

2012; Morgan & Hirlinger, 1991), and state law Home Rule or Dillon's Rule provisions (Feiock, 2007) can also limit the ability of local government officials to enter into ILAs with other local governmental units for the provision of public services. Likewise, state regulations that make the public service outsourcing process too complex or burdensome to economically pursue (Morgan & Hirlinger, 1991), and state grants and incentives that dictate the use of certain service providers (Hawkins, 2009; Joassart-Marcelli & Musso, 2005; Peterson, 2008) can also limit ILA use.

In addition to the legal restrictions that state laws place on the types of public services that can be contracted out to other local governmental units by means of an ILA, these laws can also impose funding restrictions on local governmental units that deprive them of the monies that they need to contract out public service obligations that do not otherwise suffer from legal restrictions. In this regard, while fiscal pressures can affect the use of any outside public service vendor, limitations on the funding abilities of local governmental units do appear to have their greatest effect on ILA use (Morgan, Hirlinger, & England, 1988).

Perhaps the most common type of funding restriction that prevents local governmental units from using ILAs to provide local public services is a property tax cap, because it prohibits them from utilizing their primary source of revenue to fund this use (Brown & Potoski, 2003a; Ferris & Graddy, 1991; Morgan & Hirlinger, 1991). Another revenue-limiting law that affects ILA use is one that restricts the ability of a local governmental unit to annex unincorporated land, because it prevents that unit from using this means to generate additional monies by increasing its tax base (Brown & Potoski, 2003a). Yet another law that affects ILA use is one that restricts the ability of a local

governmental unit to form a special district, a tool that is often used as a means by which a unit can collect additional tax revenues to fulfill a specific community service need (Krueger, Walker, & Bernick, 2011). Finally, while not explicitly limiting local revenues, state laws that deny local governmental units the fiscal flexibility to move monies between budget categories can also inhibit their ability to use ILAs (Ferris & Graddy, 1991).

Contractual factors

Restrictive collective bargaining agreements and personnel policies can also limit ILA use by limiting a local government official's ability to contract out those public services that are currently being provided by his or her municipality's own employees (Andrew, 2009a; Carr, Gerber, & Lupher, 2007; Ferris & Graddy, 1991; Hilvert & Swindell, 2013). Moreover, the mere fact that a local governmental unit is a party to an ILA may dampen the enthusiasm of its local government officials to enter into more of these contractual collaborations (Andrew & Hawkins, 2013; Minkoff, 2013; Wood, 2008).

Direct Cost Factors

Direct cost factors have been found to be important to a local government official's ILA entry decision (Ferris & Graddy, 1991; Hawkins, 2009; Kwon, 2008; Morgan & Hirlinger, 1991; Thurmaier & Wood, 2002). Many local government officials expect that ILA participation will result in these savings to their local governmental unit in the form of greater economies of scale, effectiveness and efficiency, and, when relevant, in the sharing of the capital assets and start-up costs involved in providing a

public service (Andrew, 2009b; Carr, Gerber, & Lupher, 2007; Chen & Thurmaier, 2009; Kwon & Feiock, 2010; Morgan & Hirlinger, 1991; Thurmaier, 2005).

Additional expected direct cost factors include saving money by reducing service redundancies (Carr & Hawkins, 2013; Carr, LeRoux, & Shrestha, 2009; Ferris & Graddy, 1991; Holdsworth, 2007; Miranda & Lerner, 1995). Further direct cost factors include providing a local governmental unit with the ability to leverage its ILA partner's specialized expertise, managerial support, information, innovations, facilities, and resources (Brown, 2008; Feiock, 2007; Hawkins, 2009; Morgan, Meyer, & England, 1981; Zeemering & Delabbio, 2013).

A final direct cost factor that may be important to a local government official's ILA entry decision is whether a public service, once out-sourced, will prove costly to bring back in-house or to be switched to another service vendor (Brown & Potoski, 2005; Lamothe, Lamothe, & Feiock, 2008). In this regard, one study suggests that a local governmental unit's switch back from an ILA to the in-house provision of a public service is more expensive than switching from one outside service vendor to another or from a pay-for-service ILA format to a joint service format (Brown, Potoski, & Van Slyke, 2005).

Indirect Cost Factors

Indirect costs may also be an important consideration whenever a local government official makes an ILA entry decision, since it takes a large amount of time and effort to plan and administer an ILA (Lackey, Freshwater, & Rupasingha, 2002). These indirect costs can be substantial, constituting up to 25% of the total cost of an ILA (DeHoog, 1990; Girth, Hefetz, Johnston, & Warner, 2012). Moreover, many of these

costs are incurred by a local governmental unit whenever it considers ILA entry, regardless of whether its contemplated ILA relationship is ever consummated.

As distilled from the literature, indirect ILA costs arise in stages. Although not always identically categorized, and subject to some blurring of category parameters, I summarize these stages as follows: the information stage, the agency stage, the negotiation stage, the implementation stage, the monitoring stage, the enforcement stage, and the division stage. I discuss each of these stages, and their distinct costs, separately below.

Information stage. Information costs can be considerable (Minkoff, 2013). They constitute the time and money that a local government official must spend in order to gather the information and conduct the feasibility study necessary for that official to make an informed decision as to whether ILA entry is an appropriate course of action for a particular public service. This includes gathering information about the other local governmental units that are potentially available to provide the public service at issue, as well as an analysis of their respective resources, competencies, and prior performances as public service vendors, and of their reputations as public service providers (Feiock, 2007). It also includes gathering information about the preferences of the other local government officials and public sector stakeholders who will be affected by the contracting out of a public service, since city council approval is often required before an ILA can be implemented (Feiock, 2007; Zeemering, 2006).

Information costs increase whenever potential public service vendors cannot be trusted not to hide or skew relevant information in an effort to gain a bargaining advantage (Inman & Rubinfeld, 1997). They decrease whenever prior positive

relationships exist between a local governmental unit and its potential ILA partner, or whenever the local government officials involved in a contemplated collaboration are both members of the same social or professional network (Gulati & Gargiulo, 1999; Granovetter, 2005; Lackey, Fishwater, & Rupasingha, 2002).

Finally, an often un-mentioned cost that will be incurred at this stage is that of gathering information as to the cost of not entering into an ILA. These non-entry costs can include the need to raise local tax rates, reduce staff, stop providing a public service, or even filing for bankruptcy protection (Holdsworth, 2007).

Agency stage. If a local government official, after gathering and reviewing the information that he or she considers necessary in order to make a tentative ILA entry decision, decides to further pursue this form of inter-governmental collaboration, the next costs that may be incurred are those necessary for that official to convince his or her constituents to support this proposed course of action. This is important to a local government official regardless of whether he or she is elected or appointed.

If the local government official is elected, it is important because, by entering into an ILA without first obtaining citizen buy-in, an official risks re-election defeat should the collaborative effort fail or prove unsatisfactory. If the local government official is appointed, it is important to first obtain citizen buy-in because the imprudent entry into an ILA may cost the local government official his or her job. To avoid these risks, a local government official intent upon pursuing ILA entry will likely first incur the costs necessary to ensure that this course of action reflects the will of the people it will affect (Feiock, 2007; Minkoff, 2013; Steinacker, 2002).

Negotiation stage. After a local government official has decided to pursue ILA entry, and is confident that his or her decision is supported by the relevant populous, the next costs that may be incurred are those related to the negotiation of the ILA itself and the closing of the deal. Local government officials who consider the terms of a proposed ILA to be unfair may reject the deal and seek another service vendor (Feiock, 2007; Roth, 1995).

The most obvious costs in this stage are the time and expense that a local government official and his or her entourage must spend in meeting with the other prospective party or parties to the ILA, in discussing, debating, and arriving upon mutually acceptable ILA terms and conditions, and in having an attorney or another professional reduce these terms and conditions to writing. In this regard, the need to clearly express and delineate the expectations and the respective roles and responsibilities of the parties to an ILA is crucial (Indiana University, 2014). However, the higher these negotiation costs, the more likely that the collaborative effort will be abandoned without a contract being executed (Kwon & Feiock, 2010; Minkoff, 2013).

The costs incurred in this stage will vary based upon numerous factors. These factors may include the relative political and economic strengths of the negotiating parties, the degree of asymmetry in their communication and negotiating proficiencies, the complexity and measurability of the public service sought to be provided, the risk tolerances of the parties, and the presence or absence of any relationship barriers (Feiock, 2007).

Implementation stage. Once an ILA is successfully negotiated and executed, the next set of costs that may be incurred center around the parties' implementation of their contractual agreement. Oftentimes, the transition from in-house to external public service provision entails significant operational, personnel and technological costs. These costs may include the expense of transferring all relevant information, materials, and technologies to the new public service provider (Indiana University, 2014), as well as those incurred in addressing employee terminations, transfers, and position modifications (Thomas, 2012). Another necessary implementation cost is the need for a local governmental unit to educate the public on upcoming service provision changes, and to address any negative reaction to those changes (New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, 2011).

Monitoring stage. Once an ILA is implemented, a local governmental unit must ensure that its ILA partner is actually complying with the terms of their contractual agreement. This necessitates the establishment of a compliance monitoring process and a feedback system through which service recipients can advise their local government officials of how well the new public service arrangement is working. Without a credible ILA monitoring system in place, the local governmental unit that is acting as a public service vendor will be tempted to engage in opportunism by reneging on some of its more costly contractual commitments (Feiock, Clinger, Shrestha, & Dasse, 2007). If that vendor is being paid a lump sum to provide public services, this can result in its attempt to increase its profit margin by reducing the quantity or the quality of the services provided. If that vendor is being paid a fixed rate for each unit of service provided, this can result in an effort to improperly increase its volume of services by providing them

when they are not needed, or by providing them to persons who are not entitled to receive them.

The degree to which monitoring costs is necessary will to some extent be a function of the prior relationship between a local governmental unit and its ILA partner, and of the extent to which a local government official trusts his or her ILA partner to fulfill its contractual obligations despite the presence of incentives to do the contrary (Granovetter, 2005). Monitoring can also lead to the re-negotiation or adjustment of ILA terms and conditions, along with the commensurate costs of doing so (Feiock, Clinger, Shrestha, & Dasse, 2007).

Enforcement stage. In even the strongest of inter-governmental relationships, the temptation will still exist for one local governmental unit to enrich itself at the expense of the other. Difficult economic times and changes in local government officials only increase this temptation. Moreover, even the best of contractual partners can have good faith disagreements regarding the scope and meaning of contractual language. In either case, once an ILA is operating, a local governmental unit must occasionally incur costs related to the enforcement of its contractual rights. These costs may include the expense of legal counsel, as well as the time and expense involved in arbitration, mediation, litigation, or another form of dispute resolution. They can also include the cost of bad publicity and strained relationships, and the loss of future partnership opportunities with neighboring communities. Finally, just the anticipation of future enforcement problems can increase ILA costs by increasing transactional uncertainties (Kwon & Feiock, 2010).

The above concerns can be reduced, and costs saved, if the ILA parties have had prior positive interactions with each other and have thereby created some positive social

capital, because this will allow them to make more credible commitments to each other (Kwon & Feiock, 2010). Prior positive dealings can also allow ILA partners to develop norms of behavior and a reciprocity relationship, which also help to reduce ILA enforcement costs (Feiock, 2007).

Division stage. The final stage at which ILA costs can be incurred by a local governmental unit is when the parties have to divide their ILA costs and benefits. Division can be complicated, and its costs can be high, especially when the parties have not identified in their contractual agreement how the real, personal, and intangible property and the proprietary rights that are involved in or that have been generated by their collaborative venture are to be distributed, or if this original distribution scheme is now seen by one of the parties as being inequitable or otherwise unfair (Indiana University, 2014; Minkoff, 2013; Roth, 1995).

Decision-Maker-Specific Factors

An analysis of ILA entry factors should not be limited to cost-efficiency and financial matters (Andersen & Pierre, 2010; McGuire, Ohsfeldt, & Van Cott, 1987). Although an ILA is technically entered into by and between local governmental units, it is obviously negotiated by humans. The role that the individual plays in this process has perhaps been under-appreciated in the literature (O'Leary & Vij, 2012). Nevertheless, the research that does exist identifies a plethora of non-economic decision-maker-specific factors that may be relevant to an ILA entry decision. These factors can be loosely categorized as involving a local government official's personal beliefs and values, skills and personal characteristics, professional education and experience, job position, and desire for reputational enhancement. Each of these categories is separately discussed.

Beliefs and values. A local government official's ILA entry decisions may have ramifications not only on that official's political or managerial future, but also on the local governmental unit that he or she serves. Nevertheless, entry into an ILA remains a voluntary act by a human decision-maker. Therefore, a deciding official's fundamental beliefs, values, and ethos can be important ILA entry factors (Carr, LeRoux, & Shrestha, 2009; Feiock, 2007). For example, the official can be influenced by his or her own political ideology as to the proper role of government in society (Berman & Korosec, 2005). An official can also be influenced by his or her belief as to whether ILA entry is needed in order to promote equity, equality, citizen voice, or another public good (D'Apolito, 2012; Matkin & Frederickson, 2009; Warner & Hefetz, 2002). In addition, a local government official who holds small town parochial values favoring non-participation and passivity in governance may be less inclined to enter into an ILA than an official who holds more cosmopolitan values (Andersen & Pierre, 2010).

As suggested by Feiock (2007), a local government official's professional values and norms may also lead that official to seek out collaborations with individuals who share these attributes, and to reject inter-governmental relationships with persons who do not. Other factors that have been identified as possibly being important to a local government official's ILA entry decision include the extent to which an official fears that, by entering into an ILA, his or her community will lose its local identity, its autonomy, or its control over service quality and timeliness (Andrew, 2009b; Andrew & Hawkins, 2013; Carr, Gerber, & Lupher, 2007); D'Apolito, 2012; Zeemering, 2015).

Skills and personal characteristics. Every local government official has his or her own unique set of skills and characteristics that may influence his or her ILA entry

decisions. In this regard, research conducted by O'Leary & Vij (2012) found that personal characteristics, interpersonal skills, and group process skills are twice as important to collaborative efforts as expertise. Their research suggested that important personal characteristics for a local government official to possess include open-mindedness, patience, flexibility, unselfishness, honesty, trustworthiness, respectfulness, decisiveness, and friendliness. It also suggested that important interpersonal skills for a local government official to possess include good communication, listening critically, and an ability to work with others, and that important group process skills for them to possess include facilitation, collaborative problem-solving, an ability to compromise, and an understanding of group dynamics, culture, and personalities.

Other decision-maker skills and characteristics that may affect an ILA entry decision include a willingness to take service delivery risks (Delabbio & Zeemering, 2013; Warner & Hebdon, 2001), and to devote the time and effort necessary to develop an ILA collaboration (Huxham, 1996; Lackey, Freshwater, & Rupasingha, 2002; McGuire & Silva, 2010). According to McGuire and Silva (2010), an individual's administrative capacity, as evidenced by his or her managerial and technological capabilities, can also influence collaborative activity. Finally, the level of political will that a local government official possesses may also affect his or her ILA entry decisions (Hilvert & Swindell, 2013).

Education and experience. A local government official's professional education and experience are both factors that may affect his or her ILA entry decisions. This is true for several reasons. Experienced and highly educated decision-makers are more likely to be innovative and to have developed an insight into how to make local

governmental units more efficient and effective than their less experienced and educated contemporaries (Warner & Hebdon, 2001; Zhang & Feiock, 2009). In addition, these decision-makers are also more likely to have developed the work-related knowledge, attitudes, interpersonal skills, and professional relationships that will assist them in determining the feasibility of an ILA relationship, in obtaining stakeholder buy-in to the idea, and in engaging in successful negotiations with potential ILA partners (Lubell, Schneider, Scholz, & Mete, 2002; Warner & Hebdon, 2001; Zeemering, 2008; Zhang & Feiock, 2009).

Local government officials with a professional education and orientation may also tend to align themselves with others who seek out and share their enthusiasm and preference for efficiency and collective problem solving. This may give officials who share these traits, but who have not previously collaborated for the provision of a public service, a common ground from which to negotiate an ILA (Carr, LeRoux, & Shrestha, 2009; Feiock, 2007).

Job position. The position held by a local government official, be it elected mayor, appointed city manager, or directed contract administrator, may be a factor important to ILA entry decisions. So too, whether a local governmental unit is operated pursuant to a strong mayor or a council-manager form of government may influence ILA entry decisions. Nevertheless, how these factors influence ILA entry is still the subject of scholarly debate.

Some scholars posit that elected mayors are more likely to enter into ILAs, either because they likely grew up in the area and are invested with a regional sense of community (Wheeland, Palus, & Wood, 2014), because they can use a regional

agreement to promote themselves to a larger constituency (Feiock, 2009), or simply because their frequent elections require them to be able to take credit with their electorate for doing something (Hawkins & Feiock, 2011). However, this may only be true when the benefits of an ILA are jurisdiction-wide, are quick to develop, and create minimal political risks (Feiock, 2007; Feiock, Steinacker, & Park, 2009; Hawkins & Feiock, 2011; Matkin & Frederickson, 2009). Local governmental units with a strong mayor governance format are also thought to be more favorable to ILA entry than those governed under a council-manager format (Brown & Potoski, 2003c).

In addition, to the extent that elected local government officials other than mayors are involved in an ILA entry decision, those officials who are elected at-large are thought to be more likely to share the preferences of their mayor, and to therefore generally favor ILAs (Feiock, 2007; Kwon & Feiock, 2010). Contrarily, those local government officials who are elected by district are thought to generally disfavor ILAs, because these agreements cause them to lose control over the direction of services to, and the protection of the interests of, their specific district, yet open them up to criticism for regional policies that contradict the preferences of their own constituents (Feiock, 2009; Feiock, Steinacker, & Park, 2009; Kwon & Feiock, 2010).

Other scholars posit that non-elected professional managers are more likely to favor ILA entry. This may be because their education and training make them more inclined than their elected colleagues to think regionally when trying to solve community problems, even if this assists persons who are not members of their own jurisdiction's electorate (Wheeland, Palus, & Wood, 2014), or simply because ILA entry will build their reputation and further their managerial career (Feiock, 2009; Hawkins & Feiock,

2011; Matkin & Frederickson, 2009). These scholars believe that local governmental units with a council-manager governance format are more favorable to ILA entry than those governed under a strong mayor format (Kwon, Feiock, & Bae, 2014).

Desire for reputational enhancement. The impetus behind an ILA entry decision may be a local government official's desire to increase the visibility of his or her local governmental unit (Hawkins, 2009; O'Leary & Vij, 2012), or to increase its reputation and prestige as a proactive and progressive local entity (Hawkins, 2009). ILAs can help achieve these objectives by stimulating local innovation (Hilvert & Swindell, 2013; Sharma & Kearins, 2011), by piggybacking upon recent ILA successes in other local communities (Hilvert & Swindell, 2013), or by building positive social capital and better relationships with decision-makers from neighboring jurisdictions (Andrew, 2009b; Hawkins, 2009).

However, and consistent with the utility maximization theory (McGuire, Ohsfeldt, & Van Cott, 1987), a local government official's ILA entry decision may turn on less altruistic factors that have little bearing on whether that official's decision is the most economical for, or furthers the interests of, the community-at-large (Feiock, 2009, 2007; Feiock, Jeong, & Kim, 2003; Feiock, Lee, Park, & Lee, 2010; Frant, 1996; Vining & Boardman, 2008). One of these less altruistic factors may be the desire of an official to maintain control of, and thus be able to claim credit for, politically sensitive local public services (Carr, Gerber, & Lupher, 2007; Feiock, 2009; Feiock, Clinger, Shrestha, & Dasse, 2007; Feiock & Clingermayer, 1986; Feiock, Lee, Park, & Lee, 2010; Hawkins, 2009; LeRoux & Carr, 2009). Other such factors may include an official's desire to preserve a crucial voting bloc (Feiock, 2007), to generate temporary cost-savings that

align with a local election cycle (Hawkins, 2009; Feiock, 2007), to reward political supporters (Clingermaier, Feick, & Stream, 2003), to avoid the political fall-out from an unpopular service provision decision (Clingermayer & Feiock, 1997), or to advance his or her career (Andrew, 2009a; Feiock, 2007; Kwon, 2008; Kwon & Feiock, 2010).

Partner-Specific Factors

In addition to factors specific to the local government official who is making an ILA entry decision, factors specific to that official's prospective ILA partner may also have a significant impact upon an ILA entry decision. I have loosely grouped these partner-specific factors into the categories of trust, harmony and cohesiveness, homogeneity of preferences, and credible commitments. I discuss each of these categories separately below.

Trust. A factor that has been frequently identified in the academic literature as being important to ILA entry is whether a potential partnering local governmental unit, as well as its local government officials, can be trusted to fulfill the terms and conditions of the ILA without shirking or abandoning their contractual obligations (Burke, 2014; D'Apolito, 2102; Thurmaier & Wood, 2002). This trust factor may be important to an ILA entry decision because trust facilitates partner communication and commitment and reduces conflict and opportunistic behavior (LeRoux, 2008; LeRoux, Brandenburger, & Pandey, 2010; Oh & Bush, 2014; Sharma & Kearins, 2011). This, in turn, lowers transaction costs and fosters better ILA results (LeRoux & Carr, 2007; O'Leary & Vij, 2012).

Closely related to trust is whether a potential ILA partner has a good reputation for honoring its commitments, acting in good faith, and reciprocating efforts to further a

collaborative endeavor (Kwon & Feiock, 2010; Thomson & Perry, 2006). Yet additional factors that are related to trust include whether a potential ILA partner is perceived as someone who is cooperative, flexible, and open (Huxham, 2000; Lackey, Freshwater, & Rupasingha, 2002; O'Leary, Choi, & Gerard, 2012; O'Leary & Vij, 2012).

Many local governmental units hold Cold War feelings toward their neighboring communities (Lackey, Freshwater, & Rupasingha, 2002). Perhaps the optimal way for local government officials to ameliorate their feelings of mutual distrust, and to learn to actually trust each other, is through successful ILA collaborations (Brown, Potoski, & Van Slyke, 2007; Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Hawkins & Feiock, 2011; Poppo & Zenger, 2002). However, even if no such prior positive business relationship exists, collaboration risks can still be diminished and trust enhanced if the local government officials who are contemplating entry into an ILA know and like each other personally (Lackey, Freshwater, & Rupsingha, 2002; Perlman, 2015).

Nevertheless, despite the benefits of personal friendships, academic studies suggest that the most effective way for local government officials with no history of prior ILA collaboration to gain each other's trust is through their membership in the same social, political, or professional networks (LeRoux, Brandenburger & Pandey, 2010; Brown & Potoski, 2005; Carr & Hawkins, 2013; Carr, LeRoux, & Shrestha, 2009; Feiock, Lee, & Park, 2012; Hawkins & Andrew, 2011; LeRoux, 2008; LeRoux & Carr, 2010). These forms of network membership are thought to be especially helpful in developing trust between local government officials because these networks exert informal pressure on their members to resist the temptation to behave opportunistically

toward one another lest they be subsequently shunned by other network members as being untrustworthy or dishonest (Feiock, 2007; LeRoux, 2008).

Network membership is also thought to bring together local decision-makers who share the same education, training, experience, goals, professional norms, and disciplinary values. These factors may also serve as an informal check on opportunism and other improper conduct by and between network members (Carr & Hawkins, 2013; Carr, LeRoux, & Shrestha, 2009; LeRoux, Brandenburger, & Pandey, 2010; LeRoux & Carr, 2009).

Although networks impose time and resource costs on their members, they can prove especially important when local government officials with no prior business or personal relationship are contemplating entry into an ILA that involves a lack of information symmetry, when few other public service vendor options exist, or when high asset specificity is present, because in these cases networks can assist these officials in finding trustworthy ILA partners (Anderson & Pierre, 2010; Brown & Potoski, 2004; Krueger, Walker, & Bernick, 2011; LeRoux, Brandenburger, & Pandey, 2010). This is important, because monitoring an untrustworthy ILA partner can prove to be both difficult and expensive, constituting up to 15% of an ILA's total costs (Pack, 1989; Warner & Hebdon, 2001; Zeemering, 2012).

Absent a viable network or past history of successful ILA collaboration, local government officials who want to enter into an ILA relationship may still be able to overcome the trust issues between their respective local governmental units by entering into off-setting ILAs, whereby each party is reliant upon the other for the provision of a needed public service (Carr & Hawkins, 2013; Shrestha & Feiock, 2009). Similar to the

MAD Doctrine followed by the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, this approach can be used to dissuade either local governmental unit from engaging in opportunistic conduct against the other. Finally, in some situations, trust in a local governmental unit itself can replace personal trust between local government officials (Gilbert & Behnam, 2012).

Harmony and cohesiveness. In addition to trust, another partner-specific factor that may be relevant to an ILA entry decision is whether a potential partnering local governmental unit is of roughly equal size, status, and power as the local governmental unit seeking the collaborative endeavor (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Lackey, Freshwater, & Rupasingha, 2002). For ILAs that involve more than two participants, another important ILA entry factor may be whether adding another ILA partner will enlarge the ILA to a point where it will become difficult for the parties to reach a consensus on their goals and priorities, or make it too easy for an ILA partner to shirk its contractual obligations (Andrew, 2008; Feiock, 2007; Hilvert & Swindell, 2013).

Homogeneity of preferences. Once a local government official has tentatively selected an ILA partner, his or her entry into an ILA will depend upon whether he or she and his or her potential partner can agree upon the terms, conditions, and objectives of their ILA. I have identified from the literature numerous homogeneity factors that may hamper ILA entry. These include the degree to which potential ILA partners are of one mind as regards ILA goals (Huxham, 2000; Lackey, Fishwater, & Rupasingha, 2002), costs (Chen & Thurmaier, 2009; Hawkins, 2009), benefits distribution (Carr & Hawkins, 2013; Hawkins, 2009), timing (Carr & Hawkins, 2013; Feiock, 2007; Kwon & Feiock, 2010), contractual restrictiveness (Andrew & Hawkins, 2013; Gordon, 2007), and

contract monitoring and enforcement (Feiock, 2009; Hawkins, 2009; Hawkins & Andrew, 2011).

Credible commitments. No matter what other favorable factors a potential ILA partner may possess, it is unlikely that a local government official will decide to enter into an ILA with another local governmental unit unless and until that unit is able to make a credible commitment to the parties' contemplated endeavor, and is able to show that it can meet its contractual obligations (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Feiock, Clinger, Shrestha, & Dasse, 2007; Hawkins, 2009; Kwon & Feiock, 2010; Williamson, 2010). Such a credibility showing may include proving that the local governmental unit has sufficient fiscal resources and the flexibility to satisfy its ILA commitments (Carr, Gerber, & Lupher, 2007; LeRoux & Carr, 2007). It may also require a potential ILA partner to demonstrate that it has both the technology and the professional expertise needed to provide the public service at issue (Brown & Potoski, 2003b; Pardo, Gil-Garcia, & Luna-Reyes, 2010; Wood, 2006).

Locality-Specific Factors

Factors specific to a particular local governmental unit may also, either consciously or subconsciously, influence a local government official's ILA entry decisions. I have categorized the locality-specific factors that I have identified from the literature as those involving demographics, psychographics, and a local governmental unit's location, status, operational culture and capacity. I address each of these categories separately below.

Demographics. Some researchers have found a positive correlation between a variety of demographic factors and ILA entry. These correlations do not necessarily

prove influence, but that does not mean that these factors are unworthy of mention. They include the age (Delabbio & Zeemering, 2013; LeRoux & Carr, 2007), education (Nelson, 1997), ethnic make-up (Carr, Gerber, & Lupher, 2007; LeRoux & Carr, 2007; Zeemering, 2009), and socioeconomic status (Joassart-Marcelli & Musso, 2005; Morgan, Hirlinger, & England, 1988) of the citizenry of a local governmental unit. They also include population homogeneity and homophily (Feiock, 2013, 2009; Kwon, Feiock, & Bae, 2014; Nelson, 1997), as well as political lean (Delabbio & Zeemering, 2013; Feiock, Clinger, Shrestha, & Dasse, 2007; Levin & Tadelis, 2010).

Additional factors specific to a local governmental unit that may influence an ILA entry decision include its population size and density (Delabbio & Zeemering, 2013; LeRoux & Carr, 2007), whether its local population base is growing or shrinking (Kwon, Feiock, & Bae, 2014; LeRoux & Carr, 2007; Peterson, 2008), the percentage of its residents who work outside of its borders (Lackey, Freshwater, & Rupasingha, 2002), and the number of public sector employees who work within its borders (Delabbio & Zeemering, 2013; Feiock, Clingermayer, & Dasse, 2003).

Psychographics. In addition to demographical characteristics, the size, strength, and direction of public sentiment toward a local governmental unit's outsourcing of a public service may also influence a local government official's ILA entry decision (Delabbio & Zeemering, 2013; LeRoux & Carr, 2007; Levin & Tadelis, 2010). For example, although the public may not even know by whom a local public service is being provided (Thompson, 1997), or may support the general use of ILAs (D'Apolito, 2012), its support may not extend to the outside provision of police, fire, emergency medical,

streets, planning and development, and other lifestyle or community-identity services (D'Apolito, 2012; Morton, Chen, & Morse, 2008; Wood, 2006).

Moreover, even if the provision of these services through an ILA makes perfect economic sense, this cost-effectiveness may be overshadowed by a community's desire for service equality, equitable access, and local accountability (Hefetz & Warner, 2004; Warner & Hefetz, 2002), or by a desire by suburban taxpayers not to subsidize their center city (D'Apolito, 2012.

A local government official's ILA entry decision may also be influenced by the disapproval of local political opponents (Hilvert & Swindell, 2013), affected unions (Hirsch & Osborne, 2000; Jossart-Marcelli & Musso, 2005; Morgan & Hirlinger, 1991; Warner & Hefetz, 2002), or the local government official's own public employees (Morgan & Hirlinger, 1991; Ugboro, Obeng, & Talley, 2001; Warner, 2011). Conversely, a local government official's ILA entry decision may not be influenced by these factors to the extent that he or she is insulated from them (Feiock, Jeong, & Kim, 2003; Hawkins & Feiock, 2011).

Location, status, operational culture, and capacity. Location-specific factors may also be relevant to an ILA entry decision. These factors include a local governmental unit's metro status (Hefetz & Warner, 2011; Mohr, Deller, & Halstead, 2010; Nelson, 1997; Warner, 2011) and spatial proximity to other potential ILA partners (Feiock, 2009, 2007; Feiock, Lee, Park, & Lee, 2010; Hawkins, 2009; Kwon, 2008; Kwon, Feiock, & Bae, 2012; Post, 2002).

In addition, a local governmental unit's general status may also affect its participation in an ILA. In this regard, status factors that researchers have identified as

having a positive correlation to ILA entry include political power (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Carr & Hawkins, 2013), fiscal capacity and wealth (Carr, Gerber, & Lupher, 2007; LeRoux & Carr, 2007; Minkoff, 2013; Steinacker, 2004), level of fiscal stress (Thurmaier & Wood, 2002), and incorporation history (Clingermayer & Feiock, 1997; Jossart-Marcelli & Musso, 2005; Peterson, 2008).

Factors related to a local governmental unit's organizational culture may also have some effect on an ILA entry decision. These factors include institutional rigidity (Jossart-Marcelli & Musso, 2005; Lamothe, Lamothe, & Feiock, 2008), bureaucratic routines (Brown & Potoski, 2003b), professionalism (Minkoff, 2013), environment (Feiock, Clinger, Shrestha, & Dasse, 2007), and culture (Huxham, 2000; Lackey, Freshwater, & Rupasingha, 2002).

Finally, capacity factors may also influence ILA entry decisions. These factors include a local governmental unit's internal contract management capacity (Lamothe, Lamothe, & Feiock, 2008; Wood, 2006), technological expertise (Zeemering, 2012), and leadership and managerial stability (Clingermayer & Feiock, 1997; Feiock, Clinger, Shrestha, & Dasse, 2007).

Public Service-Specific Factors

In accordance with the transaction costs theory, the type of public service at issue may also influence a local government official's ILA entry decision. In this regard, researchers have used the two public service characteristics of "asset specificity" and "ease of measurement" to identify "low specificity-easy to measure" public services that should be considered by local government officials as being amenable to ILA provision, as well as "high specificity-hard to measure" public services that local government

leaders should consider to be poor candidates for ILA provision (Brown & Potoski, 2005; Feiock, 2009, 2007; Hefetz & Warner, 2011).

These "low specificity-easy to measure" public services are thought to include street cleaning, parking meter collections, parking lot operation, utility meter reading, parks and landscaping, and vehicle towing (Brown & Potoski, 2005; Hefetz & Warner, 2011). Conversely, "high specificity-hard to measure" public services are thought to include police patrol, emergency medical services, crime investigation services, hazardous waste disposal, human welfare services, sewage and water treatment, legal services, and the operation of local hospitals, airports, and jails (Andrew, 2009b; Brown & Potoski, 2005; Hefetz & Warner, 2011).

ILA Continuation Factors

Significant academic progress has been made in identifying the factors that appear to be most important to at least some local government officials when they are making an ILA entry decision. This is important, because local governments now shoulder much of the burden of servicing a modern citizenry, and public value is increased whenever public services are provided in a more economical, efficient, and equitable manner. Providing local government officials with this ILA entry information allows them to better determine if and when to utilize an ILA as an alternative to the in-house provision of public services, and when to seek another type of outside public service vendor.

However, knowing the factors that are important to an ILA entry decision is only part of the puzzle. As prior academic research has shown, local government officials are constantly re-assessing and changing the means by which they provide public services to their constituents. Yet, despite this fluidity, scant attention has been paid to date to what

factors are most important to local government officials, and specifically to local elected mayors, when they are deciding whether to continue an existing ILA relationship.

It is not empirically obvious that the same factors that induce a mayor or another local government official to enter into an ILA are the same factors that will be most important to them when it comes time to renew or terminate that collaborative endeavor (Takahashi & Smutny, 2002). This is especially true when one considers that economic conditions, local government officials, relationships with neighboring jurisdictions, and community preferences can and do change over time (Feiock, 2007).

Chen and Thurmaier (2009) took perhaps the first step toward the identification of the factors that are most important to local government officials when they are deciding whether to continue an existing ILA relationship. Although not directly focused upon ILA continuation decisions, their quantitative research used the results of surveys sent to Iowa county auditors, city managers, and city clerks to study the relationships between seven literature-informed ILA entry factors and the perceptions of these local government officials as to whether their operating ILAs were a success. The factors that Chen and Thurmaier considered in their analysis were: (a) fiscal condition; (b) suggestion by another government official; (c) effectiveness; (d) efficiency; (e) the equitable sharing of costs and benefits; (f) population; and, (g) service type. They measured ILA success by (a) goal achievement; (b) service efficiency; and, (c) service effectiveness.

Using the survey data obtained from their survey responses, Chen and Thurmaier found that the local government officials they studied considered whether there was an equitable sharing of ILA costs and benefits to be a significant factor influencing their perception of whether an ILA was a success. Their study was limited, however, by its

inability to ascertain what kinds of ILA costs and benefits matter the most to local government officials when they are judging an ILA's success and, presumably, whether it is worthy of continuation.

Zeemering (2012) also conducted research that may be useful to identifying those factors that are most important to local government officials when they are deciding whether to continue an existing ILA. Although the focus of his qualitative study was on the perceptions of local government officials as they related to the democratic anchorage of ILAs, the results of Zeemering's study appear to address factors that would also be important to local government officials when they are involved in ILA continuation decisions.

In this regard, Zeemering interviewed local government officials, and specifically a random mixture of city councilmembers and mayors from 47 Michigan municipalities operating predominately under a council-manager form of government, in order to discover the specific ILA concerns that they had about their existing ILAs. On the basis of these interviews, Zeemering identified, in descending order of importance, the following concerns that these local government officials had about the ILAs that they were administering: (a) whether an ILA's benefits exceeded its costs; (b) an ILA's effect on local government employees; (c) whether an ILA provided services in line with local community preferences; (d) ILA service level and capacity; (e) whether an ILA served as a mechanism for inter-jurisdictional cooperation; (f) ILA service quality and control; (g)(tie) how an ILA's benefits were distributed to the local community; (g)(tie) how an ILA dealt with asset ownership and control; (h) whether the parties to an ILA communicated effectively and shared necessary information; (i)(tie) whether a local

governmental unit had the technology necessary to maintain an ILA relationship; (i)(tie) whether an ILA relationship was congenial; and, (j) uncertainty about the future and fears that an ILA may generate unanticipated consequences.

Zeemering concluded from these study results that elected local government officials are interested in the benefits the ILAs provide to their own constituents, but understand the need for mutual advantage in these collective endeavors. He also concluded that these officials may desire transparency in the costs and benefits that their ILAs provide to the public they serve. His study is limited, however, in that it does not explore in depth the importance of the various interests and concerns of local government officials as they relate to ILA service evaluation and continuation decisions, and relies almost exclusively upon interviews with city councilmembers and city managers operating under a council-manager form of government, instead of mayors operating under a strong mayor form of government.

In my study, I built upon and was informed by these earlier academic studies. I explored in greater depth, more directly, and with different study participants, the factors that local government officials, and specifically local elected mayors operating under a strong-mayor form of government, perceived as being the most important to their ILA entry and continuation decisions.

Research Methodology

Many academic studies have used a quantitative research approach to study ILAs and the factors that may be important to ILA creation and success. The data used in these quantitative studies comes from a variety of sources.

Many recent quantitative studies of ILA entry decisions have relied upon ICMA survey data (Brown & Potoski, 2005, 2003a, 2003c; Feiock, Clinger, Shrestha, & Dasse, 2007; Hefetz & Warner, 2011, 2004; Kwon & Feiock, 2010; Lamothe, Lamothe, & Feiock, 2008). For example, a recent academic study conducted by Warner (2011) used the results from a 2007 ICMA survey, wherein 1,474 city managers indicated which of six specified motivators and seven specified obstacles they considered to be important to their ILA entry decisions, to calculate which of these factors appear to be the most important to an ILA entry decision.

Other recent quantitative studies of ILA entry decisions have relied upon state-mandated data submissions or other state-wide public sector data sources (Campbell & Glynn, 1990; Carr, LeRoux, & Shrestha, 2009; Mohr, Deller, and Halstead, 2010). For example, a recent study by Andrew & Hawkins (2013) used data derived from reports that Florida law requires to be filed by all Florida municipalities that are parties to an ILA to calculate the theoretical influence that the *asset specificity-ease of measurement* characteristics of various public services have on whether these local governmental units entered into an easily adaptable or a more restrictively-worded ILA.

Still other quantitative studies of ILA entry decisions have used data collected through survey questionnaires that utilized Likert-type and categorical scale questions (Berman & Korosec, 2005; Chen & Thurmaier, 2009; D'Apolito, 2012; Delabbio & Zeemering, 2013; Feiock, Lee, Park, & Lee, 2010; Hawkins & Andrew, 2011; Thurmaier, 2005). For example, a recent study by LeRoux & Pandey (2011) used data derived from the responses of 134 city managers to a web-based survey that utilized Likert-type and categorical scale questions and asked these city managers to indicate

which of five independent variables were important to their ILA entry decisions. Based upon these survey responses, they concluded that city managers may be influenced by their own personal ambitions, but probably not by a sense of the common good, when they are making their ILA entry decisions.

All of the recent quantitative studies of ILAs that my research identified were limited by their use of a research approach that did not permit a detailed exploration into the perceptions of, and the motivations and logic behind, the decisions of local elected mayors to enter into, continue, or terminate an ILA. Many of these studies were also limited by their use of a large data set or survey data that did not lend itself to an empirical assessment of the specific factors that may influence a local elected mayor's ILA continuation decisions. For these reasons, I decided not to use a quantitative approach for my study.

Instead, I used a qualitative approach for my study. This approach allowed me to develop a rich and detailed understanding of the ILA decision-making phenomenon from the first-hand views and experiences of a select group of local elected mayors who were directly involved in these decisions. Also informing my research methodology decision was the fact that the academic literature is replete with examples of the recent academic use of qualitative research to explore ILAs and ILA decision-makers. Moreover, many of these academic studies have relied upon qualitative data that was gathered through a researcher's personal interviews with local government officials (Gordon, 2007; Hilvert & Swindell, 2013; Jacobs, 2004; Lackey, Freshwater, & Rupasingha, 2002; Lee & Hannah-Spurlock, 2015; Perlman, 2015; Wood, 2008, 2006; Zeemering, 2012).

One recent example of such a qualitative study is that of Thurmaier and Wood (2002). In this study, these researchers conducted face-to-face, semistructured interviews with a purposeful sampling of 12 local government officials, primarily the appointed chief administrative or financial officers of selected Missouri municipalities. Their interviews took place in the officials' offices, and each interview lasted about one hour. These interviews consisted of a combination of pre-determined and open-ended questions that were all designed to elicit information from and probe the answers given as to the experiences of these officials with ILAs and ILA relationships. This interview data was then used by Thurmaier and Wood to develop themes and to reach conclusions as to the rationales and motivations behind the ILA entry decisions made by these local government officials.

Similarly, in a recent qualitative study by Zeemering (2012), he conducted face-to-face, semistructured interviews with 47 local government officials, primarily elected councilmembers, in order to explore their ILA experiences. These interviews were memorialized on a digital audio recorder and then transcribed. Zeemering then reviewed these interview transcripts and coded the interview answers contained therein into categories in context with the theoretical framework of his study. He then interpreted this data in order to develop broad themes about how individual ILA factors were related to a local government official's ILA decisions. Excerpts from interview texts that supported each study theme were also provided in order to allow Zeemering's readers to derive their own understandings and meanings from these excerpts as to their relevance to the ILA decisions made by these local government officials.

In this study, I generally followed the qualitative research approach used by Thurmaier and Wood (2002) and by Zeemering (2012), as further informed by the qualitative design and phenomenological study data collection and analysis guidance provided by Creswell (2009, 2007) and Patton (2002). My study participant interview questions were informed by and sought to explore the relevance of the legal, contractual, direct and indirect cost, decision-maker specific, ILA partner-specific, locality-specific, and public service-specific ILA entry factors identified in the academic literature as being potentially important to a local elected mayor's ILA entry and continuation decisions, as well as the nine factors identified by Zeemering (2012) in his recent qualitative, phenomenological study as being of concern to local government officials regarding their existing ILAs. In Chapter 3, I discuss in greater detail the research methodology that I used in my study.

Summary and Conclusions

Local governmental units and the local government officials who lead them have three popular and commonly used options to choose from when they are deciding how best to out-source the provision of a public service. They can use a private, for-profit service vendor, a private, not-for-profit service vendor, or another local governmental unit acting as a public service vendor. Each of these options has its own benefits and burdens. However, the outside service vendor that is the most commonly used by local governmental units today is probably another local governmental unit acting as a public service vendor. When a local governmental unit outsources the provision of a public service to another local governmental unit, it normally does so by entering into an ILA.

I used the transaction costs theory as the theoretical framework for this study. That theory, when applied to local governmental units, posits that when local government officials make contracting out decisions, they will consider not only the direct cost of having a public service provided by an outside vendor, but also the various indirect costs that their locality will incur by transacting for the provision of the service by that vendor. Pursuant to this theory, the higher these transaction costs, the less likely that the local government official will decide to enter into or continue an ILA with this service vendor.

However, I was informed in my use of the transaction costs theory by the bounded rationality theory, which posits that a decision-maker will make his or her business decisions without full knowledge or an understanding of all of his or her options. I was also informed by the utility maximization theory, which posits that a local government official's ILA decisions may be made based upon what is best for him or her personally, instead of what is best for the community that he or she serves. I was further informed by the social decision scheme theory, which recognizes that decision-makers do not often make important decisions without first consulting with their board of directors or with other close advisors, and that they can be influenced in their decisions by the opinions of these advisors. Finally, my use of the transaction costs theory was informed by the groupthink theory, which posits that decision-makers can be influenced in their decisions by a desire to reach a resolution that maintains group cohesiveness. I assumed that this same theoretical framework, as appropriately informed by the other theories discussed above, applied equally to both mayoral ILA entry and continuation decisions.

Researchers in many academic studies have addressed, either theoretically or empirically, the factors that may influence a local government official's ILA entry

decisions. These factors have been found to include legal and contractual factors, such as state laws and collective bargaining agreements that limit a local government official's ability to enter into or fund an ILA. They may also include direct cost factors, such as the economies of scale and the efficiencies that can be gained through a reduction in service redundancies and the cost savings realized through the leveraging of another municipality's expertise, experience, and innovations. Many indirect cost factors related to ILA entry have also been identified, such as the informational costs incurred in determining an ILA's feasibility and in searching for potential ILA partners, the agency costs incurred in gaining citizen buy-in to such a collaborative effort, the numerous costs incurred in ILA negotiation, implementation, monitoring, and enforcement, and the division costs incurred in apportioning ILA costs, benefits, and property interests.

Additional literature-informed factors found to potentially influence a local government official's ILA entry decisions include the beliefs, values, skills, personal characteristics, education, experience, job position, career goals, and aspirations of this decision-maker, as well as the trustworthiness, personal appeal, and collaborative goals of the local government official whose local governmental unit is being considered for ILA partnership. Researchers in some academic studies have also identified locality-specific factors, such as whether a local governmental unit is located near a potential ILA partner, has sufficient financial resources, and has a citizenry whose demographics and ethos support intergovernmental collaboration, as well as public service-specific factors, such as asset specificity and ease of measurement, as being relevant to a local government official's ILA entry decisions.

Although the academic study of ILA continuation decision-making factors is embryonic, the academic literature that does exist on this phenomenon has identified several factors that may influence an ILA continuation decision. In this regard, local government officials appear to be concerned about whether the benefits received from an ILA exceed its costs, about whether an ILA's costs and benefits are being equitably distributed, and about ILA service capabilities, quantities, qualities, and control.

Local government officials also appear to be concerned about how this out-sourcing of services is affecting their public sector employees, about community public service preferences, and about ILA asset ownership and control. Finally, they appear to be concerned about inter-jurisdictional communication, cooperation, and congeniality as it relates to an ILA relationship.

Prior academic research has not determined if these ILA continuation factors duplicate, complement, or replace some or all of the factors that have previously been identified as influencing or at least being relevant to ILA entry decisions. Therefore, I used both ILA entry and continuation factors, as identified in the literature, in my study.

In my study, I adopted a qualitative, phenomenological approach to the exploration of the phenomenon of ILA entry and continuation decision-making as it related to local elected mayors. I did so in order to begin to fill the literature gap that currently exists in this area of academic concern.

I used the data that I gathered from my in-person semistructured interviews with 13 Indiana mayors and two Indiana city attorneys to develop themes and patterns that explained and described the essence of this decision-making phenomenon. This included my identification of those factors that my study participants indicated were the most

important to them when they were making ILA entry and continuation decisions. In Chapter 3 I describe in greater detail the research method that I utilized in my study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of my study was to explore ILAs, and more specifically, the decision-making experiences of local elected mayors as they related to ILA entry and continuation, so as to better understand the essence of those experiences and to discover what ILA factors these officials consider to be the most important to these ILA decisions. The results of my study should assist local government officials in administering ILAs in a manner that better ensures their long-term success.

Recent academic literature has identified numerous factors that may, to some degree, influence a local government official's decision to enter into an ILA, although earlier studies did not generally focus upon the experiences and perceptions of local elected mayors in regard to those decisions. Moreover, one study by Zeemering (2012) did identify a dozen factors that were deemed important by the local government officials that he studied when those officials were administering existing ILAs. Nevertheless, the decision-making process undertaken by local elected mayors when they decide whether to either enter into an ILA or to continue an existing ILA is still not well understood. I designed my study to add to the academic knowledge that currently exists on ILA entry decisions, and to begin to close the research gap that currently exists as to the factors that are important to local government officials, and specifically to local elected mayors, when they are making ILA continuation decisions.

I begin this Chapter with a discussion of the research design that I used in my study and the rationale behind its use. I then address my role as the researcher. Next, I describe my research methodology, which includes a discussion of my study participant selection logic, the instrumentation that I used in this study, my participant recruitment, participation, and data collection procedures, and my study data analysis process. I then discuss study trustworthiness, including the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability issues that arose in my study. Finally, I address ethical considerations, followed by my disclosure of the expected dissemination of my study findings.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

Moustakas (1994) suggested that a qualitative study should be guided by one or two central research questions. I followed his advice and used two central research questions in my study.

In formulating my research questions, I had two goals in mind. First, I wanted those questions to help me explore and understand the use of public service ILAs from the perspective of the local government officials, and specifically from the perspective of the local elected mayors, who administered them. Second, I wanted them to help me identify those factors that these local officials consider to be important when they decide whether to enter into, continue, or terminate an ILA. As such, both of my research questions focused upon the ILA decision-making phenomenon under study.

Qualitative research questions should begin with words that convey an open and emergent study design, and that use exploratory and non-directional verbs that convey this design (Creswell (2009). I crafted my research questions in this manner.

Initially, I wrote my first research question very broadly, seeking simply to discover how my study participants generally described their ILA experiences. However, after further consideration, I decided that a research question that explored the factors that my study participants perceive as influencing their ILA entry decisions, coupled with a second research question that explored the factors that my study participants perceive as influencing their ILA continuation decisions, would accomplish the same objective in a manner that better aligned with the existing literature and that would make it easier for me to describe the ILA decision-making phenomenon.

Therefore, the final central research questions that I designed in order to explore the ILA decision-making phenomenon that was the focus of this study were as follows:

RQ 1: What factors do the study participants perceive as influencing their decisions to either enter into or to forgo entering into an ILA?

RQ 2: What factors do the study participants perceive as influencing their decisions to either continue or terminate an existing ILA?

I used these central research questions as a framework and catalyst for the additional probing questions that I asked of my study participants in order to ensure that my study comprehensively addressed, to the extent possible in a 60-to-90-minute interview, the factors that were previously identified by the literature as being potentially important to local government officials when they are making ILA decisions, as well as any relevant but previously unidentified decision-making factors.

Design and Design Rationale

I employed a qualitative, phenomenological research design for my study**.** I also adopted a social constructivist worldview and an over-arching pragmatist paradigm. I made the ontological assumption that reality is subjective and multiple.

Qualitative research is used to explore and develop an understanding of a human phenomenon, while quantitative research is a method by which researchers can test the relationship between known variables using predetermined categories and standardized measures (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). I determined that a qualitative design was appropriate for my study because I was using it to conduct fundamental research into the ILA entry and continuation decision-making process of local elected mayors. I believed that this ILA decision-making process needed to be better understood and the specific factors involved in ILA decisions identified before those factors, as decision-making variables, could be subjected to meaningful quantitative analysis. I felt that these factors could best be identified by exploring the perceptions and experiences of the local government officials who were actually making ILA entry and continuation decisions, without being bound by the predetermined response categories and standardized measures that constrain quantitative research.

As Borland (2001) noted, much qualitative research involves the purposeful selection of a small study sample with the intent of acquiring from those study participants an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. My use of a qualitative design for my study allowed me to develop a rich and detailed understanding of the ILA decision-making phenomenon based upon the first hand experiences and perceptions of a limited number of decision-makers who were directly involved with it. I used this

approach to gather in-depth information that I then coded and analyzed in order to develop the themes and patterns that I used to describe the essence of the ILA entry and continuation decision-making phenomenon under study.

The qualitative research approaches that I considered for my study were: narrative research, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and phenomenology. After careful consideration, I determined that a phenomenological research approach was the most appropriate for my study.

Narrative research involves the gathering of stories on life experiences from one or a small group of persons (Creswell, 2012; Czarniawska, 2004; McCaslin & Scott, 2003). I rejected this approach because the biographical examination of the life experiences of one or two individuals was neither the focus nor the scope of my study.

Grounded theory involves the gathering of information from persons about a specific action or process, with the intent of developing a theory based upon that information that explains the action or process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Creswell (2007), this form of research normally involves interviews with from 20 to 60 persons. I rejected this approach because it is normally used with a larger participant pool and because the participant information obtained is then used to develop a grounded theory. My study sought instead to describe the essence of the ILA entry and continuation decision-making phenomenon.

Ethnography is used to understand and interpret the shared beliefs and behaviors of a distinct cultural group in order to generate a cultural portrait (Harris, 1968; McCaslin & Scott, 2003). I rejected this approach because it involves prolonged cultural immersion and critical observations in order to discover culture-related themes. My study was not

culture-centric, did not involve cultural immersion and utilized short personal interviews in order to describe the essence of the ILA entry and continuation decision-making phenomenon.

Case study involves the exploration of one or more contextually-bound cases over a protracted period of time, using multiple sources of information (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). I rejected this approach because it seeks to understand a single time-bound event using a variety of data collection sources. This was not the focus of my research or the primary data collection technique that I intended to use in my study.

Phenomenology involves the study of several individuals who have all experienced the same phenomenon in order for a researcher, after bracketing out his or her own beliefs and feelings, to reconstruct their realities and to thereby understand and describe the essence of their shared phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Nieswindomy, 1993). I chose to utilize the phenomenological research approach for this study. I did so because I believed that this approach would best allow me to reconstruct and interpret my study participants' realities and to thereby identify the essence of their experiences with and regarding their own ILA entry and continuation decisions. This approach is frequently used in social research (Patton, 2002; Smith, 2007).

Although phenomenological research has been conducted using in-depth interviews with from one to over 300 study participants (Creswell, 2007), the objective of qualitative data collection is not to reach a specific number of data sources, but to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Following the recommendation of Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), and being informed by the findings and recommendations of

Creswell (2007), Dukes (1984), Morse (1994), Patton, 2002; Polkinghorne (1989), and Riemen (1986), I chose to collect my primary study data from the in-depth interviews that I personally conducted with 13 Indiana mayors and two Indiana city attorneys. The mayors involved in this study were purposefully selected in order for me to be able to locate and speak with the most knowledgeable and information-rich individuals possible, while my city attorney participants were involved because they accompanied their mayor to an interview.

My study interviews themselves were conducted on-site, in either a mayor's private office or private conference room, and I recorded all study participant responses on audio-tape and in my field notes. All of my interviews were semistructured, wherein I utilized open-ended questions and an interview protocol. This interview approach, as noted by Hoepfl (1997), allows a researcher to probe and explore within predetermined areas of interest, yet ensures that interviews are thorough and focused in order to make the best use of limited interview time.

Once I had gathered my interview data, I organized, transcribed, read, and coded it. I then conducted an inductive analysis of this research data. I used idiographic interpretation to develop from my study participants' own words the themes and patterns that allowed me to understand and describe the essence of mayoral ILA entry and continuation decisions, as well as to identify the factors that my study participants considered to be most important to those decisions.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher in this study was that of an observer, describer, and interpreter of the information provided to me by my study participants. In order for a

researcher to be open to the phenomenon he or she is studying, he or she must remain fully present to his or her study participants and to the experiences that they are describing, while putting aside, as much as possible, his or her past knowledge, beliefs, value judgements, and ontological assumptions regarding these participants in, and the subject matter of, his or her research (Finlay, 2012). As much as possible, a researcher must put his or her own views aside and describe his or her participants' experiences objectively, as they would have been expressed by these participants without the researcher's presence (Haggman-Laitila, 1999).

Although it was impossible for me to fully detach myself from my own life experiences, I consciously strove to suppress my own viewpoints and beliefs when I conducted my research interviews. I also strove to objectively and without bias or predilection describe the experiences of my study participants exactly as they were related to me.

Although no familial or employment relationship existed between me and my study participants, some of my study participants did know me or of me as a result of my extensive involvement in Indiana local politics, legislative initiatives, and professional development activities. I addressed this issue by openly disclosing my concerns before each interview, and by following a systematic and semistructured interview approach throughout my study.

Possible researcher bias, through my selective observation, recordation, and analysis of interview data, was also addressed. Johnson (1997) suggests that one way to maximize the validity of qualitative research is for a researcher to engage in critical self-reflection about his or her potential prejudices, preconceptions, and predispositions, in

order to become more self-aware and to be able to control for these biases. I followed this suggestion throughout my study. In addition, I employed a systematic and semistructured interview approach, asked open-ended, non-leading questions, used an interview protocol, recorded all of my study interviews, and used member checking in an effort to ensure my unbiased gathering and analysis of study data.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The purpose of the phenomenological approach to qualitative research is to understand a lived experience, using primarily face-to-face interviews with individuals who have shared that experience in order to gather information that is then searched to discover and develop themes that allow a researcher to describe the essence of that experience (Creswell, 2007). The academic literature is replete with examples of the use of qualitative phenomenological research to explore ILAs and ILA decision-makers (Gordon, 2007; Hilvert & Swindell, 2013; Jacobs, 2004; Lackey, Freshwater, & Rupasingha, 2002; Lee & Hannah-Spurlock, 2015; Perlman, 2015; Wood, 2008, 2006; Zeemering, 2012). I chose this approach because of the unique opportunity that personal interviews provided me to delve deeply into the human perceptions and reasoning behind ILA entry and continuation decisions.

When using a phenomenological study approach, researchers often choose a purposeful sampling strategy to select their study participants. This is because it allows them to interview information-rich individuals who have had direct and personal experience with the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Such a strategy is warranted when a random and statistically representative

population sample is not needed because the study objective is to locate persons that a researcher can learn from, rather than to generalize research findings to an entire population (Patton, 2002). Mine was such a study, and I used a purposeful sampling strategy to select all of my mayoral study participants.

The primary form of purposeful sampling that I used in my study was snowball sampling. This form of sampling is often used when a researcher wants to locate information-rich individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under study (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1982; Patton, 2002). My selection of study participants in this manner was appropriate, because the purpose of my study was to understand the ILA entry and continuation decision-making processes of local elected mayors.

Using this procedure, I contacted well-situated people and asked them to recommend for interview those Indiana mayors who had significant experience in ILA administration. To assist me locate these high-information individuals, I also used, with permission, an AIM listserv to solicit study participant recommendations from the approximately 120 knowledgeable Indiana mayors who communicate with each other by this means. The AIM letter of cooperation that I obtained as part of my study was in substantially the same form as the document that is included as Appendix I. I also contacted the AIM general counsel to obtain her study participant recommendations, and utilized my own knowledge of which Indiana mayors were long-serving, knowledgeable, and experienced in ILA administration. Before I interviewed a study participant, I confirmed that he or she was a current Indiana mayor or, in the case of an accompanying city attorney, a current local government official.

Although qualitative, phenomenological studies have been conducted using in-depth interviews with from one to over 300 study participants (Creswell, 2007), academic unanimity as to the proper sample size for such a study does not exist. In this regard, Dukes (1984) recommended interviewing from three to 10 subjects, Smith and Osborn (2003) recommended interviewing from five to six subjects, Polkinghorne (1989) recommended interviewing from five to 25 subjects, Morse (1994) recommended interviewing at least six subjects, Riemen (1986) recommended interviewing 10 subjects, and Thurmaier and Wood (2002) interviewed 12 subjects in their research. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) also recommended 12 subjects as being the optimal non-probabilistic sample size needed to achieve data saturation when conducting field interviews as part of a qualitative research study.

Following the practice of Thurmaier and Wood (2002) and the recommendation of Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), I determined that a sample size of 12 Indiana local government officials was appropriate for use in my study. However, as my interview scheduling neared its end, an opportunity arose to interview one of Indiana's few multi-term female mayors and to include her potentially unique perspective with the perspectives of my otherwise entirely male study participant pool. I therefore added a thirteenth mayor to my study. In addition, two of the mayors that I interviewed brought along their city attorney. In order to not upset these mayors, as well as to obtain the informed viewpoints of these other local government officials as to the ILA decision-making process, I also included these attorneys in my study. This brought my final study participant pool to 15 Indiana local government officials.

After I had met my study participation pool quota, I did receive an interview offer from a fourteenth Indiana mayor. I declined this offer, reasoning that an additional interview was not necessary in order for me to reach data saturation.

Instrumentation

In qualitative phenomenological research, the researcher is the key instrument, collecting data primarily through in-depth interviews with a small group of purposefully selected participants (Creswell, 2009, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Simon, n.d.). In order to do so, he or she normally chooses from one of three interview alternatives: an unstructured conversational interview, a semistructured interview, or a structured open-ended interview (Patton, 2002). Each interview alternative has its unique strengths and weaknesses.

A conversational interview is the most informal interview approach, utilizing no predetermined questions and allowing the conversation to essentially flow wherever the interviewee leads. This flexibility can be a strength, because it allows for greater spontaneity and allows for the tailoring of an interview to individual idiosyncrasies. However, this flexibility can also prove to be a weakness, because it may take several interviews before salient information is gathered, the data gathered from each study participant will be different, and emergent themes may be difficult to develop (Patton, 2002).

A semistructured interview approach is one in which a researcher uses the same interview protocol for each interview. This protocol lists in skeletal form the questions to be asked and the topics to be discussed during an interview. Although a researcher is free to ask follow-up questions and to otherwise expand upon a study participant's initial

interview answers, this approach helps ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each interviewee, and helps to keep an interview focused upon the phenomenon being explored. This approach also helps ensure that the interview questions asked of each study participant are open-ended, neutral, non-dichotomous, and clear (Patton, 2002). The downsides to this approach are that the subject matters open for discussion are delimited, and thus an important area of inquiry may be missed, as well as that the interview is generally less sensitive to the individual proclivities of each study participant (Patton, 2002).

An open-ended interview is the most structured interview approach. It generally requires each study participant to be asked the same pre-determined and standardized questions in the same manner and in the same order. This approach best ensures that there will be little or no variation between interviews. It is perhaps most appropriate when the topic being explored is controversial or intrusive, study participants are vulnerable, or interview time is severely limited and strict interview priorities must be set (Patton, 2002; Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003).

When considering the appropriate interview approach to use in my study, I rejected the conversational interview approach. I did so because I was not conducting multiple interviews with each of my study participants, because this approach did not allow me to sufficiently focus upon the decision-making phenomenon that I was studying, and because my development of subjects and themes would be unnecessarily difficult given the data that would be generated in this manner.

I also rejected the open-ended interview approach. I did so because this approach would not have given me sufficient flexibility to explore the mayoral ILA entry and

continuation decision-making phenomenon that I was studying. In addition, my study participants were not vulnerable and would not be asked any especially provocative or intrusive questions.

I chose a semistructured interview approach for my study. I did so because this approach allowed me to utilize an interview protocol whose design was informed by the purpose of my study, my research questions, and the literature, but also allowed me the flexibility to adapt my follow-up questions to further probe each study participant's initial interview answers. Probing is an important component of a semistructured interview, because it allows a researcher to obtain more detailed information on points of particular interest and allows study participants an opportunity to expand upon or clarify their initial answers (Patton, 2002). A semistructured interview approach, coupled with face-to-face interviews, also allows a researcher to obtain some immediate validation of each study participant's interview answers through the researcher's observation of the participant's body language and tone of voice (Fink, 2000; Polkinghorne, 2005; Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003).

Phenomenological research is frequently used in and is thought to be best suited for exploring the experiences and perceptions of several individuals regarding a common phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). I used this interview approach to gather the salient data that I needed in order to answer my research questions and to accurately describe the ILA decision-making phenomenon under study. As suggested by Jacob & Furgerson (2012), I developed and used an interview protocol that contained open-ended, literature-informed questions, as well as prompts that I could use as necessary in order to keep an interview

focused on the phenomenon under study. The interview protocol that I used in my study was in substantially the same form as the document that is included as Appendix A.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

In order to be eligible for selection as a participant in my study, I required an individual to be currently serving as an Indiana mayor, although I subsequently permitted any city attorney who accompanied his or her mayor to an interview to also participate therein. With the exception of these city attorneys, I further limited my study participation eligibility to those otherwise qualified study candidates who were currently the elected mayor of an Indiana city having a population of less than 600,000 persons. Although the objective of my study was not to generalize my research findings to an entire population, I nevertheless decided to use these sample population narrowing criterion in order for me to better explore the often-ignored ILA experiences of local elected mayors, and to avoid ILA decision-making factorial differences that could be caused by governmental structural anomalies rather than as a result of a study participant's actual ILA experiences.

I limited my sample population to the mayors of cities because Indiana municipalities that are not cities operate under a council-manager, rather than a strong mayor, form of government, and mayors serving under the former local government structure do not generally have ILA decision-making authority. I limited my sample population to cities with a population of under 600,000 persons because the only Indiana city with a population of 600,000 or more persons operates under a unique city-county consolidated form of government, whereas all other Indiana cities operate under a strong

mayor form of government (I.C.§ 36-4-1-1(2012); I.C.§ 36-4-5-2 (1987); I.C.§ 36-5-2-2 (1989); and, I.C.§ 36-3-1-5 (1980)).

Limiting my study participant selection pool in this manner allowed me to explore the ILA experiences of mayors representing cities with different demographics, cultures, and concerns, but lessened the risk that my research results would be unnecessarily discounted because I interviewed mayors operating under different local governmental structures. Future researchers can determine whether my study results are also applicable in council-mayor municipalities and in consolidated city-county jurisdictions.

After identifying potential study participants, through snowball sampling when possible, and through convenience sampling as necessary, I sent an invitation letter to those mayors whom I considered to be the most promising potential study participants. This letter was preceded by a courtesy telephone call that I placed to each such mayor's office in order to alert him or her that my letter would be forthcoming. I continued this process until I had secured my target study sample size of 12 participants, and also used it to secure a thirteenth mayor for the reasons previously discussed. The invitation letter that was used to recruit my 13 mayoral study participants was in substantially the same form as the document that is included as Appendix C.

My study participants received no compensation for their participation on my study. However, I did send each of my 13 participating mayors and two participating city attorneys a $5 *Arch Card* that they could use to purchase foodstuffs from *McDonald's* restaurants as a token of my appreciation for their study participation and to in a small way reimburse them for their time and research-related inconveniences.

I personally collected all of the data used in my study, which was obtained through or as a result of my on-site, face-to-face personal interviews. Prior to each interview, I provided each of my study participants with a consent form that ensured that he or she understood the nature of my study and the voluntary nature of his or her participation therein. This consent form contained all of the elements suggested by Creswell (2009) and Sarantakos (2005). All of my study participants signed this consent form and returned it to me before they were interviewed. I conducted each interview using an interview protocol, audio-recorded each interview, and then had each audio-recording professionally transcribed. I also took field notes during each interview.

I strove to put all of my study participants at ease during their interview, and to exhaust their recollection of the facts and their expressions of opinion as to each interview question before I moved on to the next question. As suggested by Patton (2002), I also allowed each of my study participants an opportunity to supplement or amend his or her responses to my interview questions, and to add anything that he or she felt was important to my research topic but that I neglected to ask them, before I end the interview session.

At the conclusion of each interview, I debriefed each study participant by reminding him or her of the purpose of my study and of my confidentiality promises, and then thanked him or her for his or her study participation. I also instructed each participant not to discuss his or her interview with any other local government official until my study was completed so as not to influence other potential study participants. My giving of these instructions was confirmed on an interview protocol checklist, and also in the cover letter that I later sent to each study participant along with a copy of his

or her interview transcript. The interview protocol checklist and cover letter that I used in this regard were in substantially the same form as the documents that are included as Appendices B and D, respectively.

Each of my study interviews was scheduled to last for between 60 and 90 minutes and, being mindful of my interviewees' other work and life obligations, I finished all of my interviews in the time allotted. My longest interview lasted approximately 89 minutes. My shortest interview lasted approximately 48 minutes, its shortness prompted by an unforeseeable event that required the prompt attention of the mayor being interviewed. The average length of my study interviews was approximately 68 minutes.

Patton (2002) and Polkinghorne (2005) both recommended that a researcher follow a qualitative interview by conducting a post-interview review, during which he or she could record details about the interview setting, his or her observations of the interviewee, and his or her impressions of the interview itself. I followed these recommendations. Promptly after exiting each interview site, I conducted a post-interview review, during which I recorded my personal observations and impressions of the interview and the details of the interview setting. I recorded each post-interview review on a document that was in substantially the same form as the document that is included as Appendix E. I also made back-up copies of all of my interview audio-recordings and field notes, and stored these copies in a secure, off-site location.

Data Analysis Plan

I generated the interview data that I used in my study from study participant responses to interview questions that were themselves derived from my research questions. In this regard, I designed my interview questions to gather detailed information

regarding how my study participants described their ILA experiences and what factors they perceived as influencing their ILA entry and continuation decisions. I also used my interview notes to inform my participant interview data.

After gathering my study data, I organized, transcribed, read, and coded it. I used a computer software program to assist me in this process, as well as to provide me with a tangible record of my coded study data that can be used by subsequent researchers to evaluate the validity of my study and the accuracy of my study findings. After reviewing four of the commercial software programs referenced by Creswell (2007) as being popular and appropriate for qualitative data analysis, I chose the NVivo 11 software program. NVivo software is frequently used in qualitative studies (Crowley, Harre, & Tagg, 2002), including phenomenological studies (Khor & Mapunda, 2014). My data analysis using NVivo was informed by the comprehensive NVivo guides prepared by Bazeley & Jackson (2013) and Edhlund & McDougall (2016).

To ensure study participant confidentiality, I required my court reporter to read and sign a confidentiality agreement wherein she agreed to keep all of the information contained on my interview recordings strictly confidential. This confidentiality agreement was in substantially the same form as the document that is included as Appendix F. I also sent each study participant a copy of his or her interview transcript, and asked him or her to review and edit it for accuracy and completeness.

To assist in this process, I provided each study participant with blank interview transcript errata sheets on which to make and return to me any necessary corrections or additions to his or her interview transcript These errata sheets were in substantially the same form as the errata sheet that is included as Appendix G.

Two of my study participants did use their errata sheets to request minor textual changes to their interview transcripts, which changes I incorporated into my final study data. Then, after analysis and my masking of all study participant names, I placed all of my study data in a secure location. After five years, I will destroy this data.

In order to analyze the data generated from my study, I used a process of thematic content analysis. This process, as its name suggests, involves using inductive reasoning to analyze and describe data content by the common themes that are identified as emerging therefrom (Nicholas & McDowall, 2012; Oliveira, Bitencourt, Santos, & Teixeira, 2016). Thematic analysis is frequently used in qualitative research (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Using this process and an idiographic approach, the themes that I developed from my study data were data-driven and emerged from my interviewees' own words as contained in their interview transcripts. My development of these themes allowed me to better understand and describe the essence of a local elected mayor's ILA entry and continuance decisions, as well as to identify those ILA factors that these local leaders consider to be important to those decisions.

To engage in this analytical process, I employed the six-step technique utilized by Braun and Clarke (2006). In Step One, I read my study interview transcripts several times, writing down my initial thoughts and the ideas that emerged from those readings.

In Step Two, I identified interesting aspects of my study data and used both structural coding and emotion coding to code each transcript extract that might later support a data theme. Structural coding is particularly useful in studies such as this, where a semistructured data-gathering protocol was employed and large data sets were

created (Namey, Guest, Thairu, & Johnson, 2008; Saldana, 2016). Emotion coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, and especially when some aspect of human decision-making is being explored (Saldana, 2016). I also created a codebook that identified and described each code that I used in my study data analysis. I then collated each of my transcript extracts by its designated code.

In Step Three, I sorted my coded extracts into potential themes, and then sorted those individual themes into main theme and sub-theme categories. I accomplished this by first determining both the number of my study participants who mentioned each particular theme during their interview and the emotional emphasis that my interviewees placed upon each, and by then inductively ascertaining common study themes, looking for representative interview quotes to support each theme.

In Step Four, I critically reviewed my potential themes. I discarded those that were not sufficiently supported by my study data, collapsed separate themes into one theme, and split single themes into multiple themes, until I was satisfied that my themes, when considered together, provided a comprehensive description of my study data as it related to the phenomenon of ILA entry and continuation decision-making by local elected mayors.

In Step Five, I considered my themes and the data within each theme to identify the essence of what each theme individually, and all of my themes collectively, were about. Finally, in Step Six, I wrote-up my thematic analysis of my study data for inclusion in this dissertation.

I used NVivo 11 software throughout this analytical process, primarily in the development of a coding tree consisting of nodes and sub-nodes that reflected both the

code categories and themes that emerged from my study data and the strength of each within and between my interview transcripts. I added relevant transcript excerpts and field notes to each node and sub-node to assist me in my data description and analysis.

Once my data analysis was completed, I engaged in member checking. Member checking is a commonly used qualitative research validation strategy wherein researchers solicit the view of one or more of their study participants as to the credibility of their tentative study themes, findings and interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

In this regard, I sent two of my study participants a draft copy of my study data analysis and emergent themes and soliciting their comments as to whether my analysis and themes reflected their understanding and perceptions of the ILA decision-making phenomenon, and whether my study data interpretation matched their own understanding of that data. The study review request letter that I enclosed with my draft study data analysis and emergent themes and sent to these study participants was in substantially the same form as the document that is included as Appendix H. Neither study participant involved in my member checking exercise found either my draft study data analysis or my emergent themes to be incomplete, inaccurate, or incompatible with their own perceptions, understandings, or beliefs about the ILA decision-making phenomenon under study.

After my member checking efforts were completed, I represented and expressed my study results in narrative form, accompanied by demonstrative charts as I believed necessary to complement my narrative. I reported my research findings by emergent themes, with verbatim quotes from my study data included to identify and highlight the experiences, viewpoints, and perceptions of my study participants as they related to those

themes. I also disclosed and discussed any study data that did not support my research findings. In addition, I undertook a study findings analysis in the context of the theoretical framework within which my study was conducted. Finally, I discussed the implications of my findings as they related to local government officials and the ILA decision-making process, and made several *best practices* recommendations.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

The standards of validation in qualitative research differ from those used in quantitative research, although scholars have attempted to create qualitative validity terms that match those used in the evaluation of quantitative studies. For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the qualitative validity terms that parallel the quantitative validity terms of *internal validity*, *external validity*, *reliability*, and *objectivity* are, respectively, *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability.*

As for the credibility of a qualitative study, Patton (2002) suggested that credibility depends upon three independent but related elements: *rigorous methods*, *researcher credibility*, and a *philosophic recognition of the value of qualitative inquiry*. Using these criteria as a framework, I employed a variety of strategies in order to enhance the credibility of my study.

Rigorous methods.

Study credibility requires rigorous methods to be employed in both the collection of study data and in its analysis. As to the rigor of my data collection procedures, I utilized an interview protocol that provided me with a subject matter structure that was sufficient to ensure that my interviews remained focused upon the issues that related to

my research questions, but left me free to explore those issues in depth. In addition, my use of carefully thought out, worded, and literature-informed initial interview questions, combined with probing follow-up questions, helped me to make the best use of my limited interview time so that I could gather from each study participant as much relevant and detailed information as possible. My study protocol also helped me ensure that my interview questions were open-ended, clear, singular, unbiased, respectful of my interviewees, and designed to enhance the quality of my study participants' interview answers.

I further enhanced the rigor of my data collection by ensuring that all of my interviews were conducted with the informed consent of my study participants, and by both stressing and observing strict confidentiality as regards my study data. In addition, while I maintained control of my interview sessions, I also attempted, and believe that I succeeded, in both establishing a good rapport with each of my study participants and in maintaining a neutral and respectful attitude toward his or her responses. Moreover, I attentively listened to each interview question response in order to assess its relevance and responsiveness, and to guide my follow-up questions. Finally, I audio-recorded each of my study interviews, took field notes, and made post-interview notations of my interview observations and reflections. Prior to my study data analysis, I also checked each interview transcript against its interview recording to ensure accuracy in transcription.

My study data analysis techniques were equally rigorous. I began by using thick descriptions of my interview data as the foundation of my analysis. I made my data coding system fully transparent and recorded it in a written codebook. I also strove to

create data categories that were both internally and externally plausible, grouped homogeneous data in the same category, and created clear and distinct differences between each of my code categories. Furthermore, I made my coding system consistent, reproducible, and as inclusive as possible, so that it allowed me to tell the whole story of the ILA decision-making phenomenon that I was studying, and to disclose any information that diverged from the norm.

In addition, in grouping my study data by category and theme, I carefully considered the significance of all available data, took all participant responses seriously, and analyzed all information critically. This included my consideration and inclusion in my study narrative of potentially disconfirming data. As recommended by Patton (2002), I also engaged in triangulated reflexive inquiry. This involved my being reflexive of me, my study participants, and my anticipated audience when reaching my study findings. I also ensured that the interview excerpts and other study data that I used to support my findings were solid, logical, and coherently presented and explained. Finally, I enhanced the credibility of my study analysis by obtaining the reactions to, and confirmation of, my data analysis and themes from two of my study participants.

Researcher credibility.

Researcher credibility is very important in qualitative phenomenological research because the researcher is the research instrument. This form of credibility is dependent upon a researcher's training, experience, status, and presentation of self (Patton, 2002).

To address this concern, I disclose that I am a licensed attorney who has practiced law, and interviewed witnesses, for the past 35 years. As an officer of the court, I have filed hundreds of pleadings, affidavits, and other documents that rely upon my honesty

and a proper factual foundation. As an attorney, I have never had a complaint filed against me for any alleged impropriety or misstatement of fact. Moreover, my professional experience includes 20 years of involvement with Indiana municipal law and local public officials, during which time I have served as the chief legal officer for an Indiana municipality, as chair of the Governmental Practice Section of the Indiana State Bar Association, and as an appointed member of both the AIM Legislative Committee and the AIM Administration Policy Committee. Since 2006, I have been certified by the International Municipal Lawyers Association as a municipal law expert. I have also negotiated, drafted, and enforced the provisions of numerous ILAs.

In addition to this disclosure of my learning and experience, I also disclose that, although there is no familial or employment relationship between any of my study participants and me, some of my study participants had, prior to their interview, either met me or heard me speak at one or more municipal law seminars or public official workshops. I also disclose that I received no funding for my study, admit that I am personally ambivalent toward the use of ILAs by local governmental units but want them to succeed when their existence is in the best interests of the parties involved, and affirm that I am aware of no personal changes that occurred during the course of my study that could have reasonably affected my data collection or analysis. Finally, I strove to be intellectually honest in my data collection, analysis, and reporting, by following my research design, methodology, and protocols, and by maintaining my professional integrity throughout my study.

Philosophic recognition of the value of qualitative inquiry.

Quantitative research, which relies upon numerical data and mathematical analysis techniques, has a long and storied academic history. This research method places great weight upon objectivity and generalizability, and attempts to verify relationships, not discover new factors, that help explain the many phenomena that exist in our world (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995).

However, there is more than one way of knowing (Kuhn, 1970). Unlike in much of the natural world, human conduct is seldom two-dimensional, able to be wholly explained by scientific cause-and-effect relationships, or subject to a singular objective reality (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Moreover, the factors that explain human behavior are not often analytically distinct and separate, but are instead extremely complex and inter-related. They are also subject to societal context, cognitive error, and subjective bias, making their reduction to scientific formulae difficult, if not impossible.

For these reasons, an understanding of human experiences and human perceptions is not always well-suited for a rigid quantitative inquiry. This is because the depth of description and scope of examination needed to grasp the idiosyncrasies of human behavior are not easily obtained through the structured research instruments that are available to a quantitative researcher (Myers, 2000).

The rich, thick descriptions and probing inquiries into the human psyche that help explain human behavior are instead found in the realm of qualitative research. It is qualitative research that can provide insight into the human experience in ways that recognize and account for the fact that truth in this context may not be logical, objective, mathematically measurable, or constant, but nonetheless true as regards the actions and

perceptions of a people at one time and place. This is because, under the ontological assumption upon which my study was based, reality is subjective and multiple, as uniquely seen by each study participant.

Qualitative research provides both the academic community and society at large with knowledge and insight into the substance of life that is different from, but equally important to, the contributions of quantitative research. As such, it has both philosophic and practical value and utility, as has long been recognized by the academic community (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002).

Transferability

My study results are not generalizable, and therefore not transferrable, in the quantitative sense of that word, to other contexts or settings. This is because my sample population was too small, not properly stratified, and insufficiently random to satisfy the statistical requirements for generalization.

However, qualitative study results can often be applied to other similar situations by extrapolation or naturalistic generalization (Patton, 2002; Murphy, 2001; Stake, 1995). In this manner, my study results should be able to be applied to other situations involving local government officials and their ILA entry and continuation decisions. The rich, thick descriptions and interview quotations supporting my study findings will allow those who read my study to make their own determinations as to whether and to what extent my study information can be subject to extrapolation or naturalistic generalization and thereby transferred to other similar settings and circumstances. Thick description supports a claim of transferability (Tuckett, 2005).

Moreover, my use of purposeful sampling in order to locate and interview those local government officials who were the most information- rich and otherwise knowledgeable and experienced in ILA administration should also increase the likelihood that my study results can be used to inform local leaders administering ILAs in other jurisdictions. In addition, my study specificity and particularity provide readers with a full and detailed understanding of the unique phenomenon of local elected mayor ILA entry and continuation decision-making in a specific context, something that quantitative generalization does not typically provide.

Dependability

I employed several strategies and procedures in order to establish the dependability of my study and my study data. Researcher field notes contribute to study credibility because they are themselves analytical and contain perceptions and thoughts about each interview and study participant (Tuckett & Stewart, 2004). I took field notes at each interview and analyzed them along with the other interview data that I collected as part of my study. In addition, I audio-recorded each study interview, had each interview recording professionally transcribed, and audited each interview transcript for accuracy. These procedures have been found to enhance study dependability (Creswell, 2007; Tuckett, 2005).

In addition, I used data triangulation to increase my study dependability, using data from multiple study interviews, as well as from my field notes, in my analysis of the ILA decision-making phenomenon. Triangulation has been identified by many researchers as being a popular and cost-effective validation strategy (Creswell, 2007;

Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1984; Johnson, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tuckett, 2005; Yin, 2003).

I also created an audit trail that accounts for all of my important research decisions and activities, and that maintains my raw study data, field notes, and other relevant study documents. An audit trail is another common method used to ensure study dependability (Anney, 2014; Carlson, 2010).

Finally, I used member checking as yet another study dependability strategy, with feedback on my interpretation of study data and the themes that emerged therefrom being solicited from two of my study participants, received, reviewed, and incorporated into my study. Member checking is often identified as a strategy used to enhance rigor in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Johnson, 1997; Tuckett, 2005).

Confirmability

Confirmability, as the qualitative equivalent of quantitative objectivity, required the application of reflexivity to my study. This involved my use of reflexive triangulation throughout my research. Reflexive triangulation, as stated by Patton (2002), requires a researcher to be ever mindful of the cultural, political, social, ideological and other bases of his or her own perspectives and voice, as well as of those of the persons being interviewed and the persons who will be reading a researcher's study results.

I engaged in reflexive triangulation throughout my study by constantly reflecting upon how my own cultural, social, gender, age, personal beliefs, values, biases, emotions, and motivations for conducting my study could affect my data gathering, upon how the beliefs, values, biases, emotions, and motivations of my study participants could affect their responses to my interview questions, and upon how my study participants and I

could affect each other during the period of my research. I also reflected upon how my own beliefs, values, biases, motivations, and emotions could affect my research assumptions, data interpretations, and study narrative, as well as how my narrative could affect my study participants and readers.

In order to assist me in my study reflexivity, after each interview I recorded how I could have influenced a study participant's interview answers, or been influenced in my interview questioning by that study participant. This reflexive record not only helped my objectivity by sensitizing me to these influencing factors, but also served to memorialize them for later consideration by readers of my research so that they can better assess the confirmability of my research results. The post-interview review form that I used for this purpose was in the substantially the same form as the document that is included as Appendix F. I also enhanced my study confirmability through my use of an audit trail that will allow future researchers and reviewers to confirm my study data, analysis, and findings.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical issues are always present in academic research (Colnerud, 2013). This can be especially true in qualitative, phenomenological research, because personal interviews are a form of active intervention wherein the researcher is the key research instrument and his or her primary source of information is other human beings who can be negatively affected by participating in the research project. According to Creswell (2009, 2007) and Patton (2002), the ethical issues involved in such research include obtaining informed consent, avoiding deception, maintaining confidentiality, protecting autonomy,

providing reciprocity, being respectful, and providing study participants with an accurate voice. I adopted an interview protocol that addressed each of these ethical issues.

I addressed the issue of informed consent by obtaining both verbal and written consent from each study participant before I interviewed him or her. The consent form that I provided to, and that was read by, each study participant prior to his or her interview, was in substantially the same form as the document that is included as Appendix D. By its terms, this consent form ensured that all of my study participants were fully aware of: (a) who I am; (b) how and why they were selected for my study; (c) the purpose of my research; (d) the scope, time commitment, benefits, and risks of their involvement in my study; (e) my promises of confidentiality and autonomy; (f) that they could withdraw from my study at any time; (g) that I would own the data generated from their interview; and, (h) the name of a person whom they could contact should they have any questions or concerns about me or my study.

Research deception occurs whenever a researcher intentionally deceives an interviewee in order to obtain information (Creswell, 2007). To avoid a deception issue, I was fully open and honest with my study participants throughout my study, as well as in my study narrative.

On the issue of autonomy, the names of my study participants are known to me, and thus are not completely autonomous. However, I did not mention any study participant names in my interview audio-recordings and did not place any personal identifiers in either my interview transcripts or my field notes. In addition, Creswell (2009) recommended that a researcher use pseudonyms for persons and locations in order to protect identities. Following this recommendation, I was careful to use pseudonyms in

my study narrative in the place of names or specific facts that would reasonably allow an interviewee to be identified.

I also informed each of my study participants that if he or she wanted to have his or her name known I would agree to do so consistent with the context and reporting style utilized in my study narrative, after advising him or her of the potential risks of identity disclosure. No study participant indicated to me that he or she wanted me to disclose his or her name in my study.

Similarly, on the issue of confidentiality, Creswell (2009) recommended that researchers keep their research data for a reasonable period of time and then destroy it to prevent its misappropriation or misuse. Following this recommendation, I have securely stored all of my research data. At the end of that five year period beginning on the date on which my dissertation was published, I will completely destroy this data.

Neither autonomy nor confidentiality was or should become a problem in my study. I routinely maintain client confidences, mask and redact document identifiers, store confidential documents in a locked safe whose combination is known only to me and is itself located in a secure building, and destroy confidential documents as part of my job duties as an attorney. Nevertheless, during my study participant recruitment efforts, I did have two mayors express some concern over the confidentiality of their participation in my study. On each occasion, I assured the mayor that he or she was free to withdraw from my study at any time, that I would not disclose his or her participation decision to anyone, and that no adverse actions whatsoever would be taken against him or her should he or she decide not to participate therein. One of these mayors thereafter

agreed to participate in my study, while the other declined. No mayor whom I selected and who agreed to participate in my study subsequently withdrew therefrom.

As regards the issue of respect, Patton (2002) stated that to be a good interviewer, you must have respect for those who are willing to give up some of their time to participate in your study, while Creswell (2009) cautioned researchers to leave their research sites undisturbed. Following this advice, I was respectful in my entry and exit from each interview site, and took reasonable efforts to prevent any disruption to those sites during my interviews. In addition, I respectfully treated each of my study participants during his or her interview, in all of my correspondence, and during my narrative accounting of his or her interview data.

As for reciprocity, I provided each of my study participants with a copy of my dissertation, as well as a written copy of his or her study interview transcript. I also strove to provide each of them with an accurate voice both in my narrative accounting of his or her interview responses and in my data analysis. This effort was aided by my use of member checking to ensure that my data interpretations were congruent with the actual experiences and perceptions of my study participants. Finally, I provided each of my study participants with a $5 *McDonalds* gift card.

In order to ensure that ethical procedures were followed throughout my study, I sought and obtained written approval from the Walden University Institution Review Board (IRB) to conduct it. My IRB approval number is 02-14-17-0181768. In seeking this approval, I provided the Board with copies of all of the agreements and other documents that are included as Appendices A through I, inclusive, and answered all IRB questions regarding participant access, recruitment and treatment, data collection,

analysis, and storage, and about any other substantive or procedural ethical issues relevant to my study.

Summary

I adopted a social constructivist worldview and an over-arching pragmatist paradigm for my study, and I made the ontological assumption that reality is subjective and multiple. I employed a qualitative research design because I was conducting fundamental research into the ILA entry and continuation decision-making processes of local elected mayors. I decided that I could best identify the factors involved in those decisions by quantitatively exploring the perceptions and experiences of these individuals without being quantitatively bound by predetermined response categories and standardized measures. I also selected a phenomenological research approach. I did so because I decided that this approach allowed me to best reconstruct my study participants' realities and to identify the essence of their experiences with and regarding their own ILA entry and continuation decisions subject to my study constraints and parameters.

I was the key research instrument for my study. Although phenomenological research has been conducted with from one to over 300 study participants, I made a literature and situational-informed decision to collect my study data from in-depth, face-to-face consensual interviews with 13 Indiana local elected mayors that I had purposefully selected from my sample population as being the most knowledgeable and information-rich individuals available to me. I also interviewed two city attorneys when they accompanied their respective mayor into the interview room. I conducted my interviews on-site and I recorded all participant responses on audio-tape and in my field

notes. My interviews were semistructured, using open-ended questions and an interview protocol, so that I could explore within my predetermined areas of interest in a thorough, focused, and efficient manner.

Guiding my study were two central research questions, both of which were designed to allow me to explore and understand the use of public service ILAs from the perspective of the local elected mayors who administer them, and to identify those factors that these officials consider to be of importance when they decide whether to enter into, continue or terminate an ILA. These questions were:

RQ 1: What factors do the study participants perceive as influencing their decisions to either enter into or to forgo entering into an ILA?

RQ 2: What factors do the study participants perceive as influencing their decisions to either continue or terminate an existing ILA?

I probed the responses to these central questions with follow-up questions that helped ensure that my study comprehensively addressed the factors that my study participants perceived as being important to their ILA decisions.

Once gathered, I organized, transcribed, read, and coded my interview data with the assistance of NVivo 11 software. I then conducted an inductive analysis of this research data, using idiographic interpretation to develop from my interviewees' own words and understandings the themes and patterns that allowed me to understand and describe the essence of their ILA entry and continuation decisions. I also used member checking to help ensure that my data interpretation and emergent themes comported with the understandings of my study participants.

In addition, I identified and addressed issues of study trustworthiness. I enhanced the credibility of my study by using rigorous methods in both my data collection and analysis, by identifying my training and experience in order to establish researcher credibility, and through my philosophic recognition of the value of qualitative research. In addition, I identified and addressed the transferability, dependability, and confirmability issues that were relevant to my study.

Furthermore, I identified and addressed the ethical issues that are present in all qualitative, phenomenological research. I did so by obtaining informed consent from all of my study participants, as well as by avoiding deception, maintaining confidentiality, protecting autonomy, providing reciprocity, being respectful, and providing my study participants with an accurate voice. I describe my study results in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of my qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of ILA entry and administration, and, more specifically, the experiences of local elected mayors as they related to their ILA entry and continuation decisions, so as to better understand the essence of those experiences and to discover what ILA factors these local officials consider important when making those decisions. By doing so, I hoped to provide local government officials with information that will assist them in making these decisions in a manner that allows them to maximize ILA benefits and minimize risks to continued ILA viability. To the extent that this occurs, positive social change will result through an increase in public value and by the more efficient meeting of societal needs.

The central research questions that this study sought to answer were:

RQ 1: What factors do the study participants perceive as influencing their decisions to either enter into or to forgo entering into an ILA?

RQ 2: What factors do the study participants perceive as influencing their decisions to either continue or terminate an existing ILA?

I chose my study design and approach based upon what would best allow me to answer these research questions.

I begin this Chapter by describing the research setting and by identifying any circumstances that may have affected or influenced the experiences of my study participants at the time of my study. Subject to the confidentiality promises that I have made to these study participants, I then disclose salient participant demographics and characteristics relevant to my study, followed by a description of the data collection,

recordation, and processing procedures that I used in my study and any data collection variations that differed from the procedures that I initially envisioned and proposed.

I then continue with an explanation of the data analysis process that I used in my study, which includes a description of the inductive process that I used to move from coded units of study data to categories and themes, as well as an identification of the themes that emerged from that data, supported by quotations from the interview transcripts of my study participants themselves. I also identify and discuss discrepant cases. I then describe the efforts that I took to ensure study trustworthiness, including my implementation of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability strategies.

I follow with a disclosure of my study results as relevant to each of my research questions, and close this Chapter with a summary of the answers that my study data provided to these research questions. I will provide an interpretation of my study findings, a description of my study limitations, my recommendations for further research, and my study implications in Chapter 5.

Research Setting

I used purposeful sampling to identify and recruit participants for my study. During the months of February and March, 2017, I used an AIM listserv post to solicit study participant recommendations from the approximately 120 knowledgeable Indiana mayors who communicate with each other by this means. I also contacted the AIM general counsel during this time period to solicit her study participant recommendations, and drew upon my own general familiarity with knowledgeable Indiana mayors. Once I had identified my potential study participants, I made a short telephone call to the assistant of each, identified myself, advised the assistant that the mayor he or she served

had been recommended for my study, and said that I would be sending a formal study invitation letter to that mayor. I then promptly sent an invitation letter, which was in substantially the same form as the document that is included as Appendix C, to each study candidate. I followed this recruitment procedure until I had secured the 13 mayors who participated in my study.

Each mayoral interview that I conducted as part of my study was conducted face-to-face and on-site, in either the mayor's office or conference room. This setting provided privacy, convenience, comfort, and confidentiality for my interviewee. In two cases, the mayor whom I interviewed brought along his city attorney, who I permitted to attend the interview. I did not interview these city attorneys directly, but permitted them to interject as they saw fit and as the mayor whom they represented allowed. These attorneys did, on a few occasions, provide informative detail to or affirm a mayoral statement, but did not dominate the interview, improperly interrupt my questioning, or appear to influence any mayoral answers.

I conducted all of my study interviews between the hours of 9:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., local time, on mutually convenient dates during the months of March and April, 2017. I audio-recorded all of my study interviews on both a primary and a back-up digital recorder.

On two occasions, an interview that I was conducting was briefly interrupted. On one occasion this occurred by a knock on the door and the need for the mayor whom I was interviewing to sign an official document, and on the other occasion it occurred when the mayor whom I was interviewing answering a ping on his cell phone and read, but did not respond to, a text message. In neither case did this short interruption appear

to affect or influence the mayor's answers to my interview questions. In addition, in one case, a mayor's unexpected family obligation caused my interview of him to be conducted in a compressed time period, which prevented me from fully establishing a strong rapport with him before beginning my interview. It is possible, but unlikely, that this shortened interview period influenced the depth of my questioning or the mayor's answers to my interview questions. In all other cases, I was able to fully establish a strong and positive rapport with each study participant before beginning my interview.

Prior to each interview, I obtained both oral and written consent from each interview participant to conduct my interview. I conducted each interview pursuant to a written interview protocol, which was in substantially the same form as the document that is included as Appendix A. Following this protocol, prior to beginning my interview questions, I introduced myself and explained to my study participant the purpose of and procedures that I would follow during my interview. I also reminded each study participant that, despite my professional role as corporation counsel for an Indiana municipality, and my long involvement with AIM and other local government education and advocacy organizations, both my study and my role therein were wholly separate and un-related to these other roles and entities and that my study was being undertaken solely as part of my Ph.D. studies at Walden University.

I further advised each study participant of the voluntary nature of his or her participation in my study, of any potential risks that could arise by virtue of his or her study participation, and that he or she could choose not to answer any question I asked, or end the interview, at any time for any reason and without penalty or negative consequence. In addition, I informed each study participant that I was audio-recording

his or her interview, that this recording would be transcribed, and that, although I owned my research data, I would provide him or her with a written copy of his or her interview transcript so that he or she could review it for errors and omissions. I also assured each study participant that his or her identity would be kept confidential and that I would not disclose his or her name or the city that he or she represented in my study narrative.

At the conclusion of each interview, I debriefed each study participant, reminded him or her of the confidential nature of my study, gave him or her an opportunity to ask questions or make additional comments, and informed him or her that he or she might be chosen to member check my study conclusions. I also assured each study participant that his or her interview responses would remain confidential, that nothing that he or she said would be directly attributed to him or her or to his or her city, that all of my study data would be securely maintained and then destroyed, and that he or she would be provided with a courtesy copy of my study findings once completed and approved. In addition, I admonished each interviewee not to discuss his or her interview with any other local government official, so as to avoid the possibility that their comments could influence future study participants. I then thanked each interviewee for his or her time and study participation.

No study participant asked to withdraw from my study or expressed or exhibited any discomfort or stress during or as a result thereof. To the contrary, each study participant thanked me for providing him or her with an opportunity to participate in my study, many expressed a desire to obtain a copy of my final study results and findings, and several indicated that my study interview process alone had equipped them to better administer their own ILAs.

Demographics

The 13 mayors who participated in my study were, at the time of their interview, all currently serving as the elected chief executive of an Indiana city. I chose them because of their lived experiences with the ILA decision-making phenomenon under study.

At the time of my study, these mayoral study participants represented a combined total of 160 years of mayoral experience, with individual levels of experience ranging from 5.5 years to over 21 years. The experience range for these mayors was 16 years, with a statistical median and mode of 13.5 years of experience and a mean of approximately 12.25 years of experience.

The total number of ILAs administered by the mayors whom I interviewed in my study exceeded 200, with a range of 88 ILAs, a mean of 16 ILAs, and a median and mode of 12 ILAs. The various public services provided by the ILAs administered by these mayors included fire protection, police protection, emergency medical, emergency dispatch, water utility, parks, roads, bridges, sidewalks, trails, and recycling.

The demographic data relating to my mayoral study participants is summarized in Table 1 below. However, this demographic summary does not include the years that the mayors whom I interviewed served their respective cities in other elected or appointed capacities. It also does not include the number of potential ILA relationships that the mayors whom I interviewed considered but chose not to enter.

Table 1

Mayoral Study Participant Demographic Data

Participant Identifier	Gender	Education/ Training	Years Mayor	Geographic Location	ILAs Administered	Political Party	City Population
A	M	Masters	9.5	West-Central	12	R	46,000
B	M	Associates	9.5	North-West	5	R	10,000
C	M	Professional	13.5	North-West	8	R	33,000
D	M	Professional	17.5	North-East	6	R	13,000
E	M	Some College	13.5	North-West	10	D	5,000
F	M	Professional	5.5	North-Central	24	R	15,000
G	M	Bachelor's	21.5	North-East	12	D	10,000
H	M	Bachelor's	5.5	South-West	6	R	6,000
I	M	Technical	5.5	South-Central	5	R	57,000
J	M	High School	13.5	South-East	10	R	8,000
K	M	High School	13.5	East-Central	12	R	4,000
L	F	Some College	13.5	North-East	2	R	10,000
M	M	Associates	17.5	North-East	90	R	9,000

I note that I derived the education and training levels of my mayoral study participants from the online biographical information that was available to me. In order to maintain participant confidentiality and autonomy, and so as not to make my study participants defensive, I did not ask any participant about his or her educational and training experience during his or her interview.

Data Collection

Phenomenological research is often used to explore the experiences and perceptions of information-rich individuals regarding the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). I collected the primary data that I used in my phenomenological study from the 13 Indiana mayors who met my study criteria and who consented to participate in my study.

I limited study participation eligibility to those current Indiana mayors who operated under a strong mayor form of local government. I selected my study participants through purposeful sampling, using a combination of snowball and convenience sampling techniques.

After receiving written permission from the Walden University IRB, I identified and recruited my study participants through a combination of an AIM listserv posting, my discussions with the AIM general counsel, and my own familiarity with Indiana mayors and their experience with ILA administration. In many phenomenological studies, researchers have used variants of the sampling strategy that I utilized in this study to select the most information-rich, highly qualified individuals available for inclusion in their studies (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002).

Once I had identified qualified study candidates, I mailed each of them a study participant invitation letter that was in substantially the same form as the document that is included as Appendix C, and a study participation consent form. However, in recognition of the political and community standing of these study candidates, I also placed a telephonic courtesy call to the mayoral assistant of each candidate before sending him or her study participation documents. During these telephone calls, which lasted approximately 10 minutes each, I identified myself to the mayoral assistant, briefly explained the nature of my call, and advised the assistant that the mayor he or she served would be receiving a written invitation to participate in my study.

In two cases, the mayoral assistant asked me to reiterate what I told her in an e-mail transmission, and I complied. In one case, the mayor whose study participation I was seeking personally answered his assistant's telephone, and I provided the same

information directly to him. In all cases, I followed my courtesy call by promptly mailing a formal study participation invitation letter and consent form to the study candidate.

I followed the study candidate solicitation process outlined above from February 23, 2017 to March 30, 2017, by which time I had filled, and actually exceeded, by one, my 12-person study participant quota. I added an additional study participant because, only a few hours after a 12th mayor had consented to participate in my study, one of Indiana's few multi-term female mayors indicated that she would like to participate therein. Rather than either miss this opportunity to add a woman to my otherwise all male participant pool or drop from my study a mayor who had already consented to participate, I added a 13th mayoral study participant.

I conducted my study participant interviews between March 22, 2017 and April 12, 2017. This somewhat lengthy time period was necessitated both by my study participants' own calendars, and by my need to drive a total of approximately 2000 miles in order to conduct these interviews. I conducted each interview in-person and on-site, either in the mayor's private office or conference room. I interviewed each mayor once.

In two cases, the mayor whom I was to interview came to the interview room accompanied by his city attorney. Although I did not directly interview these attorneys, I did allow them to attend their mayor's interview and to provide additional insight and clarification as they felt appropriate and as permitted by their mayor. In both cases, these attorneys did interject occasionally with their own comments, but in neither case did they interrupt the flow of the interview or attempt to dominate or influence the testimony of their mayor.

I conducted each interview pursuant to a written interview protocol that had been pre-approved by the Walden University IRB. The substantive portion of this protocol consisted of 24 primarily literature-informed, neutral, and open-ended questions, in addition to 70 primarily literature-informed and related prompts, all of which I designed to facilitate an in-depth exploration of my study participants' lived experiences and perceptions regarding ILAs and ILA entry and continuation decisions. Using this protocol, I asked each mayor that I interviewed the same initial questions. My follow-up questions, and the degree to which I used prompts, varied depending upon an interviewee's initial responses.

Prior to each interview, I required each mayor who had not already returned to me a signed consent form to read and sign a new copy of the study participant invitation letter and consent form that I had previously mailed to him or her. I also required each city attorney who attended an interview to read and sign this letter before I began my interview.

At the beginning of their interview, I reminded my study participants that the purpose of my research was to explore the decision-making process that mayors go through when deciding whether to enter into and thereafter to continue participating in an ILA. I also told my study participants that their interview would remain confidential, that their study participation was completely voluntary, and that they could decline to answer any interview question or end their interview at any time. I assured them that neither their name nor the name of their city would be disclosed in my study, and that I would not directly attribute any interview quote to them.

In addition, I informed my study participants that I would be audio-recording their interview, that I would have that recording transcribed, and that I would provide them with a copy of their interview transcript so that they could review it for accuracy and completeness. Finally, before I began substantive questioning, I asked my study participants to orally confirm that they understood my introductory statements and consented to my proceeding forward with their interview. In an effort to better ensure their autonomy, I did not mention the names of my study participants or the names of their respective cities at any point during their interview.

At the conclusion of their interview, I debriefed my study participants by again reminding them of the purpose of my study, that their participation therein was and remained completely voluntary, and that I would preserve their confidentiality by not identifying them by name or city in my study narrative. I also told them that I would retain all of my study data and materials in a secure location for five years and at the end of this retention period I would destroy it. Finally, I gave my participants another opportunity to expand upon or correct their interview statements, thanked them for their time and courtesies, and informed them that I would be forwarding them a copy of their interview transcript to review and, as necessary, correction or elaboration.

My 13 study interviews varied from approximately 40 minutes to approximately 89 minutes in length, with an average interview time of approximately 68 minutes. I recorded each interview verbatim on two portable digital recorders, and took field notes throughout each interview session. I also observed, as much as possible, the non-verbal gestures, facial expressions, and other body language exhibited by each participant and noted any significant changes in his or her verbal tone or intensity, in order to obtain

some immediate validation of his or her interview answers. Immediately upon exiting each interview site, I sat in my car, critically reflected upon the just-completed interview, and recorded my personal observations and impressions of the interview and interview setting on a post-interview review form that was in substantially the same form as the document that is included as Appendix E.

As soon as I returned to my office from an interview, I assigned the audio-recording of that interview a pseudonym, to wit: *Mayor A*, *Mayor B*, *Mayor C*, etc., that I subsequently used to identify all of the records, recordings, and other documents and data pertaining to that specific interviewee. I then submitted each interview recording for professional transcription, and checked each transcription against the audio-recording of the interview from which it was generated to ensure its accuracy. I then promptly mailed a paper copy of the interview transcript to the study participant to whom it related, along with a post-interview cover letter and transcript errata sheet that were in substantially the same form as the documents that are included as Appendices D and G, respectively. In this manner, I invited each study participant to review his or her own interview transcript for accuracy and completeness, and to inform me of any necessary transcript corrections or clarifications.

As a result of this process, two study participants did return an interview errata sheet to me containing minor transcript corrections and clarifications, and I modified their interview transcripts accordingly. The remainder of my study participants either indicated to me that no changes to their interview transcript were necessary, or chose not to return their errata sheet. After I had analyzed my study data, I retained and stored it in a secure and climate-controlled location, where it will remain until I destroy it.

Data saturation was achieved through the 13 interviews that I conducted as part of this study. By the end of my 13th interview, I found that common experiences and perceptions were being expressed by my study participants, that I was recording consistent codes and emergent themes, and that I was identifying no new codes or themes.

Data Analysis

The data that I analyzed as part of this study consisted of my study participants' responses to my interview questions, as informed by my field notes, interview observations, and impressions. Once my interview data was transcribed, I organized, read, and coded it. I used NVivo 11 software to assist me in this process, and to provide a tangible record of the same. To analyze this data, I engaged in thematic analysis, analyzed inductively, and used idiographic interpretation, with the themes and patterns that I developed being data-driven and emerging from the words of my study participants themselves. This process allowed me to understand and describe the essence of the ILA entry and continuation decision-making phenomenon. It also allowed me to identify the factors that my study participants perceived as being important to those decisions.

My data analysis began by me engaging in epoché. As noted by Moustakas (1994) and Sheehan (2014), epoché is the conscious process of suspending one's own beliefs and judgements in order to perceive phenomenon anew and without preconception. I engaged in epoché by consciously identifying and pushing aside in my mind, as much as possible, my own beliefs, biases, preconceptions, and judgements regarding ILAs and the ILA decision-making process under study. In this regard, I personally believe that ILAs can be beneficial to municipalities and that their most important benefits are economic in nature.

I suppressed these personal viewpoints throughout my data analysis and interpretation and kept an open mind as regards ILAs and the ILA decision-making phenomenon.

Following epoché, I conducted my data analysis using the six-step technique suggested and employed by Braun and Clarke (2006). In Step One, I read a printed copy of each of my interview transcripts at least twice, and then wrote down my initial thoughts and impressions as and to the extent they emerged from these readings.

In Step Two, I identified interesting or insightful interview extracts, using horizonalization to give each interview statement equal value. I then used structural coding to label and group these interview extracts so that I could subject them to further analysis. Structural coding is particularly appropriate in studies where a semistructured data gathering protocol is used to generate interview transcripts, because it allows a researcher to index and categorize study data by literature-informed topic (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; MacQueen & Guest, 2008; Namey, Guest, Thairu, & Johnson, 2008; Saldana, 2016). This is such a study.

Using structural coding, I initially coded my interview data by sorting each individual study participant's interview transcript extracts into one of the 25 literature-informed categories contained in my interview protocol. These categories included, by way of example: (a) contractual factors considered in ILA entry decisions, (b) economic factors considered in ILA entry decisions, and (c) political factors considered in ILA continuance decisions. This process resulted in my grouping of 1,012 individual transcript extracts into11 coded categories that pertained to my research question number one (RQ 1), 11 coded categories that pertained to my research question number two (RQ

2), and three coded categories that pertained to ILAs and the ILA decision-making phenomenon in general.

After completing this initial categorical grouping of my interview data, I reviewed the interview extracts that I had placed within each coded category. I further divided these extracts into primarily literature-informed coded sub-categories within their main coded category. For example, I placed the transcript extracts contained within my *economic factors considered in ILA entry decisions* main coded category into one of the following coded sub-categories: (a) cost of ILA planning, negotiation, and administration, (b) economies of scale, (c) leverage resources and experience; service effectiveness, (d) service efficiency, or (e) other economic entry factors.

Using this process, I divided the 1,012 interview extracts that I had grouped within one of my 25 main coded categories into one of a combined total of 110 coded sub-categories. The use of 25 main categories and 110 sub-categories is consistent with the numbers of codes and categories suggested by Friese (2014), Lichtman (2013), and Saldana (2016) as being workable in qualitative phenomenological research.

After concluding my structural coding, I engaged in secondary data analysis by using emotion coding. Emotion coding is a process by which a researcher labels the emotions that he or she infers about a study participant based upon the participant's choice of words and non-verbal cues (Goleman, 1995; Kahneman, 2011; Prus, 1996; Saldana, 2016).

Using this process, I focused my attention on the words used by my study participants when they answered my research questions and my recollection of their tone of voice and other non-verbal cues at the time they gave these answers to infer the

emotional strength and importance that they attached to those answers. In this manner, I re-read each interview transcript extract identified, coded, and categorized during my initial structural coding and color-coded them based upon the emotional tone that I perceived as attaching to that extract. In doing so, I color-coded each extract based upon whether its speaker's emotional tone, as it applied to the issue addressed in the extract, was: (a) strong, (b) moderate, or (c) weak.

Throughout Step Two of my data analysis, I used a codebook to record each of the coded categories and sub-categories that I utilized during my structural and emotion coding analysis of my study interview transcripts. I also used this codebook during my development of the themes that emerged from each participant's interview, and during my development of my overarching emergent study themes.

In Step Three, I sorted my coded extracts into potential study themes. There does not appear to be a consensus as to how often a code must be shared by study participants in order for it to merit further consideration in data analysis and in the generation of study themes. Academic advice ranges from a sharing by three-fourths of a study's participants to a single mention by one study participant (Harding, 2013; Saldana, 2016). In my data analysis, I considered a structural code that was shared by at least six -- approximately 46% -- of the mayors that I interviewed at a *moderate* or *strong* emotion coding level to merit my further consideration in the generation of the themes that reflect the essence of the ILA decision-making phenomenon that was explored in my study.

Using this process, I initially identified a total of 15 main themes and 43 sub-themes initially that I perceived as emerging from my study data. This included eight main themes and 27 sub-themes relating to important ILA entry decision-making factors

and six main themes and 16 sub-themes relating to important ILA continuation decision-making factors.

In Step Four, I critically reviewed my initial themes and sub-themes to ensure that they were all substantially supported by my study data and that, when considered together, they provided a comprehensive description of my study data as it related to mayoral ILA entry and continuation decisions. As a result of this critical analysis, I decided to add two new main themes and two new sub-themes relating to important ILA entry decision-making factors and my research question number one (RQ 1), and to delete one main theme, as well as add four new main themes and one new sub-theme relating to important ILA continuation decision-making factors and my research question number two (RQ 2). This brought the total to 10 main themes and 29 sub-themes relating to ILA entry decisions and my research question number one (RQ 1), and nine main themes and 17 sub-themes, relating to ILA continuation decisions and my research question number two (RQ 2), for a study total of 19 main themes and 46 sub-themes.

Once I had established my study themes and sub-themes, I used quotations extracted from the actual interview statements of my study participants to substantiate and emphasize the importance of each emergent main theme. I also used study participant quotations to substantiate the importance of each emergent sub-theme that had garnered sufficient study participant support.

In Step Five, I considered my main themes and their sub-themes and the study data that was relevant to each in order to identify the essence of what each individually, and all of them collectively, were about. In Step Six, I expressed in narrative form my

thematic analysis of my study data, accompanied by verbatim quotes from my study participants, for inclusion in this dissertation.

I used NVivo 11 software effectively throughout my data analysis process. This use consisted primarily in my creation of coding trees with nodes and sub-nodes that reflected the codes, categories, themes, and sub-themes that emerged both from my analysis of each of my study participants' interview transcript separately, and from my collective analysis of the merged codes, categories, and themes generated from these individual experiences. Once I had created these coding trees, this software also allowed me to insert relevant transcript excerpts, as well as my research memos, into each applicable tree node or sub-node. My use of NVivo 11 software aided me considerably in my data analysis and description.

Once my data analysis was completed and reduced to narrative form, I engaged in member checking, by sending a draft copy of my study analysis and description to two of my study participants. I solicited the comments of these study participants as to the accuracy of my study data and as to whether my analysis and emergent study themes reflected their own understanding and perceptions of the ILA decision-making phenomenon under study. Both study participants responded, but neither indicated that my study data, analysis, or emergent themes were incorrect, incomplete, or inaccurate.

Discrepant Cases

A discrepant case refers to study data that departs from, cannot be accounted for by, or appears to contradict the patterns and interpretations that are otherwise emerging from that data (Glaser & Laudel, 2013; Maxwell, 2005). Any academic analysis of study data should include a consideration of discrepant cases. These cases should be addressed

and accounted for by explanation or analysis refinement, in order for both the researcher and the reader to fully understand and appreciate the complexity of the phenomenon under study (Bashir, Tanveer, & Azeem, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Morrow, 2005; Patton, 2002; Mays & Pope, 2000).

In my study, there were 14 instances in which a statement by a mayoral study participant varied to some degree from the statements of my other study participants. Twelve of these discrepant cases involved ILA entry decisions, and two of them involved ILA continuation decisions. In this regard, one mayor indicated that the cost of ILA negotiations could be an important factor in his ILA entry decisions, two mayors indicated that, in some circumstances, they would be comfortable entering into an ILA that did not spell out the parties' contractual obligations in great detail, and four mayors indicated that, while the effect of a proposed ILA on their municipal workforce would be an important entry decision factor, it would not alone sway their decision.

In addition, five mayors indicated that, for a variety of reasons, it was not important to their ILA entry decisions that their ILA partner be a member of their professional or social network. Finally, two mayors indicated that their ability to measure ILA services with great specificity would not be an important factor in their ILA continuation decisions.

Each of these discrepant cases contradicted, in whole or in part, the emergent themes that I had developed and that were otherwise supported by the weight of my study data. However, I did not consider any of them significant enough to justify revising my analysis or discarding any theme that emerged from the overall corpus of my study data. I

identify each of these discrepant cases in greater detail during my discussion of the specific emergent theme to which it applies.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

The credibility of a qualitative study depends upon the use of rigorous methods, coupled with research credibility and a philosophic recognition of the value of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). I am aware of nothing that occurred during either the collection or the analysis of the data generated by my study, or in the academic community, that called into question my personal integrity or ability to remain unbiased in conducting or reporting my research, or that impugned the long-standing philosophic and practical recognition of the value of qualitative research in probing the human psyche in order to help explain human behavior.

As for the use of rigorous methods, I fully implemented my study credibility strategy by utilizing an interview protocol that provided me with the subject matter structure and tailored preliminary questions that I needed in order to keep my interviews focused upon the issues and perceptions relevant to my research questions, yet gave me the freedom to further probe study participant responses with salient follow-up questions. My use of this protocol during each of my study interviews helped me to both make the best use of my limited interview time so as to gather as much relevant information as possible, and to ensure that my interview questions were open-ended, clear, unbiased, singular, and respectful.

I enhanced the rigor of my data collection process by ensuring that my interviews were conducted only after I had received informed oral and written consent from each of my study participants, and by maintaining confidentiality in my interview settings and with my study data. I further enhanced the rigor of this process by establishing a good rapport with my study participants by listening carefully to their interview responses in order to assess the relevance, responsiveness, and completeness of these responses and to guide my follow-up questions. I also maintained a neutral and respectful attitude toward all of my study participants and their interview responses.

In addition, I audio-recorded verbatim all of my study interviews, took field notes during each interview, and recorded my post-interview impressions. I also had each of my interview recordings professionally transcribed, checked each interview transcript against its audio-recording to ensure transcription accuracy, and then forwarded each of these transcripts to their respective study participant for his or her review, revision, and clarification. Finally, I retained all of my study data in a secure and confidential location, where it is available for further independent academic review and analysis.

The data analysis techniques that I implemented in my study were equally rigorous. In this regard, I preceded my study data analysis by engaging in epoché in order to sensitize me to and allow me to suppress or acknowledge and manage any personal preconceptions or biases that I had regarding the ILA decision-making phenomenon. In addition, I have provided a thick description of my study participants, of context, and of my study phenomenon. Furthermore, my data coding processes were fully transparent, and my codes were identified and were consistent, reproducible, inclusive, and described in my codebook. Moreover, my coded data categories were plausible, allowed me to

group homogeneous study data together, and created clear and distinct differences between categories.

My emergent study themes and findings were also solid, logical and coherent, were clearly stated, and were supported by verbatim interview excerpts. In addition, when conducting my data analysis, I considered the significance of all of my study data, took each of my study participant's responses seriously, gave each response equal weight, and critically analyzed all of my study data. I also identified and gave serious consideration to all discrepant cases, and included them in my study narrative. Finally, I engaged in member checking to confirm that my study themes were shared by my study participants.

Transferability

Although not transferable in a quantitative sense, qualitative phenomenological study findings can often be applied to other similar factual situations by either extrapolation or naturalistic generalization (Patton, 2002; Murphy, 2001; Stake, 1995). My study findings should be able to be thusly applied to other local government officials and their ILA decisions. In this regard, my interviewing of knowledgeable and experienced local elected mayors, my use of thick descriptions, and the verbatim interview transcript excerpts that I provided in support of my study themes and findings all increase the likelihood that my study themes and findings can be transferred and applied to other similar settings.

Dependability

Numerous academic suggestions exist as to how to enhance the dependability of a qualitative study. Popular strategies include establishing an audit trail (Anney, 2014; Carcary, 2009), engaging in member checking, using multiple information sources, providing thick descriptions, and checking interview transcripts for accuracy (Creswell, 2007; Tuckett, 2005), and taking field notes and audio-recording interviews (Tuckett, 2005). I implemented all of these procedures in order to enhance the dependability of my study.

In this regard, I audio-recorded verbatim all of my study participant interviews, had each interview recording professionally transcribed, checked each written interview transcript for accuracy against its interview recording, and then forwarded the transcripts to their respective interviewee for review, correction, and clarification. I also took field notes and recorded in writing my post-interview impressions of each interview, and I consulted these documents during my data analysis.

In addition, I used data triangulation by carefully reviewing all of the data that was independently generated by the 13 mayors and two city attorneys that I interviewed. I did so in order to corroborate from several independent sources the themes, sub-themes, and findings that emerged from my study data. I also created an audit trail that summarized my major research and data analysis decisions and actions, and contained my interview recordings, field notes, computer software files, and other study data and documents. Finally, I employed member checking to confirm the viability and validity of my study data, analysis, and emergent themes.

Confirmability

Confirmability requires the application of reflexivity to an academic study (Cunliffe, 2004; Patton, 2002). I took efforts to enhance the confirmability of my study by engaging in reflexive triangulation throughout my research. I did so by constantly reflecting upon how my own demographic make-up, beliefs, values, and biases could have affected my data gathering, how these characteristics and considerations, as held by my study participants, could have affected their responses to my interview questions, and how my study participants and I could have affected each other over the course of my research. I also critically reflected upon how my own cultural, social, religious, and other personal beliefs, values, biases, motivations, and emotions, as well as my gender, race, and age, could have affected my research assumptions, data understandings and interpretations, and my study narrative.

In addition, I used my post-interview review forms and the reflexive information contained thereon to assist me in my study reflexivity. Both these forms and my audit trail will assist future researchers and reviewers in confirming the accuracy of my study data, analysis, and findings.

Results

I conducted my qualitative phenomenological study in order to explore the lived experiences of elected Indiana mayors as regards the factors that they perceived as being important to their ILA entry and continuation decisions. The 13 mayors that I interviewed were all actively engaged in the interview process, were open and forthcoming, and were willing to speak candidly to me about their ILA decision-making experiences. I gave all relevant interviewee statements equal consideration. I then critically analyzed these

statements, identified commonalities, and used them to formulate meaning units, which I consolidated into organized study themes.

From my 13 verbatim interview transcripts, I identified 1,012 significant coded extracts that, after further categorization and analysis, resulted in my creation of 19 emergent study themes. Ten of these themes related to my research question number one (RQ 1) and nine of these themes related to my research question number two (RQ 2).

The emergent study themes that I identified as being related to ILA entry decisions were as follows: (a) direct cost saving is important, (b) up-front, indirect cost saving is not important, (c) a detailed, written agreement is important, (d) contractual flexibility is important, (e) ability to perform is important, (f) effect on workforce is important, (g) having a trusted, like-minded partner is important, (h) effect on constituents is important, (i) political party affiliation is not important, and (j) ILA entry is a group decision.

The emergent study themes that I identified as being related to ILA continuation decisions are as follows: (a) meeting constituent expectations is important, (b) contractual flexibility is important, (c) service effectiveness is important, (d) whether an ILA is still needed is important, (e) having a communicative partner is important, (f) service measurement is important, (g) saving money is important, (h) service quality trumps saving money, and (i) doing the right thing trumps saving money.

In addition to identifying emergent study themes, I also identified several sub-themes that existed within these themes. I will identify each of these sub-themes during my following discussion of the emergent study theme to which it applies.

In Table 2, set forth below, I have identified in summary fashion the mayoral study participants whose interview statements supported each of my emergent study themes. I have also identified those mayors whose interview statements either only partially supported or contradicted one of my study themes.

Table 2
Mayoral Study Participant Support for Emergent Study Themes

Emergent Study Theme	Mayors Providing Supporting Statements	Mayors Providing Discrepant Statements	Total Supporting Statements	Total Discrepant Statements
RQ 1: Factors influencing mayoral ILA entry decisions				
Theme one	A,C,D,E,F,G,H,J,K,L,M		11	0
Theme two	A,D,E,G,H,K,L	C	7	1
Theme three	A,B,C,D,F,G,H,I,L	E,K	9	2
Theme four	A,B,C,D,E,F,H,I,K,M		10	0
Theme five	A,B,C,D,F,G,H,I,L		9	0
Theme six	D,E,I,K,L,M		6	0
Theme seven	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J,K,L,M		13	0
Theme eight	A,C,D,E,F,H,I,J,K,L,M		11	0
Theme nine	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J,K,L,M		13	0
Theme ten	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J,K,L,M		13	0
RQ 2: Factors influencing mayoral ILA continuation decisions				
Theme one	A,C,D,E,F,G,H,J,L		9	0
Theme two	B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J,K,L,M		12	0
Theme three	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,J,K,L,M		12	0
Theme four	A,D,F,G,H,I,J,K,M		9	0
Theme five	A,B,C,D,F,G,H,I,J,K,L,M		12	0
Theme six	D,G,H,I,J,K,L	E,M	7	2
Theme seven	D,E,G,H,J,K,L,M		8	0
Theme eight	C,D,E,G,H,M		6	0
Theme nine	A,C,D,E,F,G,I,J,K,L,M		11	0

It should be noted that, in a few cases, a study participant's statements did not support one or more sub-themes contained within an emergent study theme, but, by his or her interview statements, that participant evidenced his or her general support for the over-arching theme itself. In those cases, I did not list this mayor in Table 2 as having made a discrepant statement against an emergent study theme. Instead, I disclosed his or her non-conforming statement regarding a study sub-theme during my discussion of the emergent study theme to which it applied.

Each of the main study themes set forth above are discussed below as part of my discussion of its applicable research question. I supported each of my emergent study themes by one or more verbatim quotes from the interview transcripts of my study participants. In addition, I discussed each discrepant case as part of my discussion of the main study theme to which it applies.

I made no attempt to determine the relative intrinsic value that my study participants placed on each emergent study theme discussed below, or to rank these themes in order of their perceived importance. On the contrary, I afforded each emergent theme equal value. I did, however, note the few instances in which a study participant himself or herself indicated the weight that he or she personally placed on a themed subject in relation to the other themed subjects that emerged from my study.

Research Question No. 1: Important ILA Entry Factors

Emergent theme one: direct cost saving is important.

The theme of *direct cost saving is important* emerged as one of the predominant factors considered by my mayoral study participants when they are making their ILA entry decisions. As Mayor D stated, "money, dollars and cents, economy is always up at

the top," while Mayor M noted that "things are tough in small communities, so every dollar means something. … it all boils down to the money."

This concern about direct cost saving was expressed in several ways. Ten of the 13 mayors who participated in my study considered the achievement of better economies of scale to be an important factor in their ILA entry decisions, with Mayor F stating that economies of scale are "oftentimes what drives these [ILAs]," and Mayor D saying that "economies of scale, we could save money." In addition, nine of my mayoral study participants indicated that the economic benefits of service effectiveness, as well as the ability to both leverage the resources of their ILA partner and avoid service duplication, are important factors in their ILA entry decisions. Mayor A remarked that, as regards service effectiveness, "sometimes it's the reason for the agreement itself," while Mayor E stated that, as regards the ability to leverage resources, "you're always looking for some sort of … leverage on resources with your partner. I think that's probably the number one factor for everybody." Mayors H, L, and M also agreed that the ability to leverage resources from an ILA partner is "absolutely" or "definitely" an important factor in their ILA entry decisions.

Moreover, seven of the mayors whom I interviewed indicated that the savings derived from the more efficient delivery of services is an important ILA entry factor. In this regard, Mayor E stated that "you're always looking for … efficiency," and Mayor F remarking that "it's improving efficiencies, without question." Mayors H and L both stated that one reason they join ILAs is to avoid "duplication of services."

The emergence of economics, and specifically direct cost saving, as an important theme in ILA entry decisions is consistent with the utility maximization theory as

formulated by Quesnay (1758) and Smith (1776). It is also supported by previous academic studies that have found direct cost factors to be important to ILA entry decisions (Ferris & Graddy, 1991; Hawkins, 2009). It is further supported by studies that have found that local leaders expect their ILA participation to result in direct cost saving in the form of greater economies of scale, effectiveness and efficiency, by reducing redundancies, and by leveraging an ILA partner's assets and experience (Carr & Hawkins, 2013; Chen & Thurmaier, 2009; Hawkins, 2009; Zeemering & Delabbio, 2013). Clearly, whether an ILA is expected to result in direct cost saving is a factor that looms large in the minds of my study participants when they are called upon to make ILA entry decisions.

Emergent theme two: up-front, indirect cost saving is not important.

The theme of *up-front, indirect cost saving is not important* emerged from my study data as a partial counter-weight to the otherwise prominent role that economics plays in my mayoral study participants' ILA entry decisions, as was discussed above. Eight of the mayors whom I interviewed indicated that the up-front, indirect planning and negotiation costs incurred in bringing an ILA partnership to fruition was not an important factor -- or not a factor at all -- in their ILA entry decisions. Mayor D indicated that these up-front costs were "very minimal compared to the benefit [of an ILA]," while Mayor G stated that these costs "don't loom large in the thought process," Mayor A said that these costs are necessary "to protect our interests," and Mayors E and L did not see these costs as an important factor "at all."

Other study participants simply acknowledged that these costs are, as Mayor H put it, "kind of part of the process," with Mayor K acknowledging that "a fair amount of compensation needs to be put up front to make the interlocal happen, yeah, we're OK with that." Only one mayor, Mayor C, indicated that, at some point, if it is costing too much to negotiate an ILA, this might become an important factor in his ILA entry decision.

The relative unimportance of up-front, indirect cost saving, as expressed by the majority of my mayoral study participants, appears to conflict to some degree with the transaction costs theory (Coase, 1937) as applied to the economic decision-making of non-commercial organizations by Brown & Potoski (2003) and Williamson (1981). In this regard, the transaction costs theory posits that, when local government officials make public service contracting out decisions, they will consider the various indirect costs that their locality will incur in transacting for the provision of a public service by an outside vendor. These indirect costs could include those incurred in searching for and selecting a service provider (Brown & Potoski, 2005) and in gathering information about the preferences of other stakeholders who will be affected by the contracting out decision (Feiock, 2007; Zeemering, 2006). These costs could also be incurred in planning for the provision of a public service by another party (Brown & Potoski, 2003b) and in negotiating the ILA itself (Kwon & Feiock, 2010; Minkoff, 2013).

My study data did not appear to support this contention. At a minimum, it suggested that these up-front, indirect costs, if considered at all, are not determinative when ILA entry is being contemplated.

Emergent theme three: a detailed, written agreement is important.

The theme of *a detailed, written agreement is important* emerged as another prominent factor that is considered by my mayoral study participants when they are making their ILA entry decisions. Mayor F summed up the opinions of the majority of my study participants when he said that "the handshake thing may get us to the table, but once we get to the table it's critical that those things [the ILA terms] are spelled out," while Mayor G noted that "I've seen a lot of handshake agreements kind of blow up on us or fail."

The reasons given by my study participants for desiring a detailed, written ILA included a recognition that the inevitable change that occurs in city leadership over time requires ILA terms to be memorialized in writing to ensure that future local leaders knew of and can be held accountable for these contractual commitments, or, as Mayor C said "the more you put on paper, the more you define the stuff, hopefully the less problems you'll have down the road," and as Mayor D said "you gotta put it on paper because we're gonna have turnover in people."

These thoughts were seconded by Mayor H, who felt that the existence of a detailed, written agreement leaves "little or less chance of misunderstanding what the agreement is," and by Mayor J, who said:

> I think it's important in an interlocal agreement to look at the fact that the two elected officials that are making the agreement are not gonna be the ones to administer till it's end. So it has to be rigid enough that everybody understands the expectations of it.

More bluntly, Mayor L said that a written ILA is important because "I guess I'm not that trusting," while Mayor M wants all ILA terms to be in writing to ensure that "nobody can weasel out of it [an ILA]." This desire to clearly express and delineate the expectations and respective roles and responsibilities of the parties to an ILA, in order to prevent misunderstandings and promote fair dealing, is consistent with the literature (Feiock, 2007; Indiana University, 2014; Roth, 1995).

Specific contractual terms that my study participants indicated they want to have in writing include language describing how decisions are to be made under an ILA (Mayors H, I, and K), how ILA services will be provided to the public (Mayors A and D), how ILA costs and benefits will be allocated (Mayors A, B, C, D, F, G, I, and L), how to ensure that each ILA participant pays its fair share of the ILA costs (Mayors C, F, G, and H), how ILA assets will be owned and divided (Mayors B, C, F, G, H, and I), and how and when an ILA can be terminated (Mayors C, E, I, K, and M).

Finally, while no study participant indicated that he or she would be willing to enter into an unwritten ILA, both Mayor E and Mayor K indicated, in partial conflict with this emergent theme, that so long as they trusted their ILA partner or could quickly exit a failing ILA, they would be willing to enter into an agreement that did not describe in great detail all of the parties' contractual obligations. As Mayor E explained, "I would be perfectly comfortable with a handshake agreement to say let's go through this, let's cover our high level risks with some agreement on paper, but let's try and see how it works out."

Emergent theme four: contractual flexibility is important.

The theme of *contractual flexibility is important* emerged as another predominant factor that is considered by my mayoral study participants when they are making their ILA entry decisions. Prior academic research had not identified this theme as being especially important to these decisions. This theme emerged from my study data in two ways: either through a study participant's desire for specific contractual language that provides the flexibility needed to address future uncertainties (Mayors A, B, C, D, F, I, K, and M) or through a study participant's desire for a short term but renewable contract (Mayors H and M).

The first prong of this theme was expressed by Mayor H, who said "there needs to be that flexibility," by Mayor I, who said "all of ours [ILAs] can be modified … we always leave room to modify if necessary," by Mayor M, who said "I want as much spelled out as we can have spelled out. But I know things change and we try to be flexible … I just want to be flexible," and by Mayor A, who stressed the need to have "the agility to possibly make shifts when publically mandated." The second prong of this theme was expressed by Mayor H, who said "there needs to be that flexibility… I would be more open to shorter terms of the agreement and … given the opportunity for adjustment and flexibility at that point … structured flexibility," while Mayor M indicated that, as regards the ILAs that he enters into, "most of these things are one, two, or three years at a time."

Emergent theme five: ability to perform is important.

The theme of *ability to perform is important* emerged as another factor that is considered by my mayoral study participants to be important to their ILA entry decisions. In cases where a mayor's city will be the party that is contractually agreeing to assume the responsibility for providing a public service to the residents of another local community, this mayoral concern focused upon the ability of his or her city to provide those services without negatively affecting its own residents and on the ability of the receiving community to pay for those services. For example, as regards this ability to perform, Mayor C stated that, when considering whether to enter into an ILA to provide a public service to another community, an important factor is "do we have the additional capacity to meet that additional need? … Sustainability's a big issue." Likewise, when making her ILA entry decisions, Mayor L said that she asks herself "do I have the manpower … that we can commit to helping that community? If we can't do it properly then we wouldn't want to put them at risk. And then, do we have the equipment … and can we afford this?"

In addition, Mayor E expressed concern that, by entering into an ILA to provide services to another community, he could negatively affect his own constituents, when he said that "the whole interlocal agreement would collapse amongst your constituency if you're not providing at least the basic level of service that you were providing before you entered into it." Moreover, as to the ability of an ILA partner to pay for the services it is being provided pursuant to an ILA, Mayor L stated that she has to make sure that the resources exist "for someone that was going to be paying us."

In cases where a mayor's city will be the recipient of a public service being provided by an ILA partner, this mayoral concern about ability to perform shift, focusing upon the ability of an ILA partner to perform its service obligations, and his or her own city's ability to pay for those services. As Mayor H said, "Their ability to deliver on their side is something that has got to be weighed. Very important." Mayor K mirrored this concern when he said that he worries about whether his ILA partners are "in a position to fulfill their promises if we enter into this interlocal agreement. Do they have the resources that I think we need for our city if we enter into it?" As to the ability to pay an ILA partner for the provision of a public service, Mayor L stated that "if we were entering into it [an ILA] where we're making the payment … we have to make sure that we can afford to sustain that."

In cases where two cities are contemplating entering into an ILA pursuant to which they will jointly provide a public service, my mayoral study participants had an additional concern. This mayoral concern is whether their ILA partner will provide the public service at as high a standard, and with the same level of consistency, as they themselves are currently providing that service to their constituents.

As Mayor A stated, "you have to get down to the understanding of consistency of resources… There has to be understandings between the agencies that they're gonna handle situations in a similar fashion," and as Mayor G said, there will need to be "a uniformity of delivery of services." Mayor E considered this to be the most important factor when he is considering entry into this type of ILA, stating that "I think the biggest one [the most important ILA entry factor] is to make sure that the standard of care for your partner that you're entering into the agreement [with] may be different than your

standard of care." Mayor C also gave this concern great weight, stating that: "So we're gonna be very careful that if we do any kind of mutual aid, that people live up to our standards … In some sense, we don't want mutual aid, because it lowers our standards."

The emergence of ability to perform contractual obligations as an important ILA entry factor is supported by the literature (Hawkins, 2009; Kwon & Feiock, 2010; Williamson, 2010). In this regard, several academic studies have found that it is unlikely that a local government official will enter into an ILA absent a credible showing that the fiscal resources, technology, and expertise needed to fulfill its terms and conditions exist (Carr, Gerber, & Lupher, 2007; LeRoux & Carr, 2007; Wood, 2006; Zeemering, 2012).

Emergent theme six: effect on municipal workforce is important.

The theme of *effect on municipal workforce is important* emerged as another factor that is given considerable weight by my mayoral study participants when they are making their ILA entry decisions. Many ILAs generate cost-savings and other benefits through consolidation, the elimination of redundancies, and the greater use of technology and other efficiencies. Unfortunately, these economic improvements may be achieved at a human cost, through the down-sizing or job re-assignment of members of a city's current municipal workforce.

In cases where an ILA is expected to have this sort of negative effect on current municipal employees, most of my study participants indicated that this factor is important to their ILA entry decisions. For example, Mayor D stated that "oftentimes it doesn't come up, but when it does, it is a major factor and consideration." This sentiment was echoed by Mayor H, who said that he "didn't want somebody to lose their job over this [ILA] decision," by Mayor K, who said that "taking care of our employees is very, very,

very important in the [ILA entry] decision-making," and by Mayors L and M, who said that a proposed ILA's effect on their current municipal workforce is an "important" consideration because, as Mayor M said "our employees don't quit, they retire."

Finally, both Mayors D and F indicated that a proposed ILA that negatively affects their current municipal employees will not normally even make it to their desk for consideration unless and until that issue is vetted and resolved, with Mayor D stating that, unless the impact of a proposed ILA on his municipal employees is at least "neutral, it's probably not going to work." The emergence of the effect of a proposed ILA on existing municipal employees as an important ILA entry factor is supported by previous research (Thomas, 2012).

However, there was some hesitation on the part of several of my study participants to place too great a weight on this factor. While no study participant indicated that he or she would not in their ILA entry decisions consider, to some degree, the effect of a proposed ILA on his or her municipal workforce, Mayors E, G, H, and L did say that this factor alone will not sway their decision if entry into an ILA is otherwise in the best interests of their community.

Emergent theme seven: having a trusted, like-minded partner is important.

The theme of *having a trusted, like minded partner is important* emerged as another factor that my mayoral study participants consider to be important when they are making their ILA entry decisions. As Mayor A put it, "the relationship between the parties entering into these [ILA] agreements is almost as important as the words on the piece of paper that you sign." This study theme was expressed in many ways.

In this regard, one ILA entry factor that was considered important by all of my study participants is the need to have an ILA partner that they can trust. As Mayor C stated, "I really only want to do business with people … I can trust," and Mayor G said, "I can't think of an agreement that we have that if we didn't have a high level of trust we'd even think about getting into." Similar sentiments were expressed by Mayor H, who said that "the credibility of your partners is absolutely essential," by Mayor J, who said that "trustworthiness, to me, would be number one," by Mayor M, who said that, regarding a potential ILA partner, a major factor will be to "be able to trust them," and by Mayor A, who stated that, when considering ILA entry, it is important that "there's a level of trust amongst the partners."

It is not surprising that this concern over being able to trust an ILA partner was universally expressed by my study participants. Trust has been frequently identified in the literature as being important to an ILA entry decision (Burke, 2014; D'Apolito, 2102; Thurmaier & Wood, 2002).

A second concern consistent with this theme that strongly resonated with my study participants is the need to have an ILA partner who shares their goals and objectives. As Mayor A stated, "a shared goal ... if that's not agreed upon, regardless of cost, regardless of design, regardless of what the efficiency or the effectiveness of the agreement is … then I don't think we have a deal." Likewise, Mayor B said that "if another potential [ILA] party maybe has a different objective or goal, that'd be a negative," while Mayor H said that "having a like goal is the basis, I think, of all those [ILA] agreements." In addition, Mayor J stressed that "having the same goal overall,

same goals in what we're entering into would be important," and Mayor D agreed that an important ILA entry factor was "goal congruence."

Finally, Mayor C simply stated that he did not "want to waste my time when people don't share the same perspective." This concern about goal homogeneity also finds support in the literature (Huxham, 2000; Lackey, Fishwater, & Rupasingha, 2002).

A third concern related to the issue of trust that was expressed by a majority of my study participants is whether a potential ILA partner is a member of their professional or social network. Mayor F explained this desire to have an ILA partner who is part of his network by saying "It's like anything else, it's the trust you develop in someone and I know if I go to them with an issue and they don't agree with me, I have full confidence they're gonna tell me." Mayor J remarked similarly, saying, "you're gonna go to familiarity and trust, and people that you've developed relationships with already," while Mayor L felt that being part of the same network is important because "you know their reputation, you have the ability to ask your, in your network, how do they perform?"

Consistent with these statements, Mayor E said that "if you know somebody well and you're close colleagues, you certainly would … gravitate toward them," while Mayor B added that being part of the same network is "absolutely" a big ILA entry factor for him. Finally, and also consistent with this concern, Mayor K stated that "you know, our kids play sports together, might have a drink together occasionally, go to a[n Indianapolis] Colts game together. So, that makes it easy, cause we, you know, we know each other, we trust each other." The desire to have an ILA partner who is in your social or professional network finds support in the literature (Brandenburger & Pandey, 2010;

Carr & Hawkins, 2013; Feiock, Lee, & Park, 2012; LeRoux, 2008; LeRoux, & Carr, 2010).

However, despite the importance of network membership, as expressed by the majority of my study participants, this sentiment was not unanimous. In this regard, Mayor A stated that network membership is "not really" important, because he has a good working relationship with the leaders of his neighboring communities without it, while Mayor H stated that network membership will not generally be "a large factor" for him, although at times it will be important. Mayor M said that network membership is not a big factor to him because he is a Democrat in a Republican county and is therefore not included in the local network. Finally, Mayors D and I stated categorically that having an ILA partner who is in their network is not an important factor in their ILA entry decisions.

A final concern raised by a majority of my study participants was whether a potential ILA partner is willing and able to communicate with them. Mayor L expressed this concern when he said "if you don't have good rapport and good communication prior to entering into it [an ILA], I think that would definitely be a big factor in making that [ILA entry] decision." Mayor I agreed, remarking that "if you don't have good communication … it can have a very negative impact," while Mayor F called good communication "really important …critical," Mayor M called it "a major factor," and Mayor D said that being able to communicate with your partner is "obviously" an important ILA entry factor. Prior research has also found that having an ILA partner who possesses the interpersonal skills necessary for him or her to be able to listen critically

and communicate effectively is important to local government officials (O'Leary & Vij (2012).

Emergent theme eight: effect on constituents is important.

The theme of *effect on constituents is important* emerged as a factor that my study participants also consider to be important when they are making their ILA entry decisions. This theme was expressed in three ways.

First, eight of the 13 mayors I interviewed indicated that the potential effect of an ILA on their constituents' service expectations is an important factor in their ILA entry decisions. Mayor C expressed this concern when he stated that "we're gonna be very careful that if we do any kind of mutual aid, that people live up to our standards." This sentiment was echoed by Mayor E, who said that "you certainly wouldn't want to sign into an agreement to provide a service at a much lower level than you're providing now, even though you save money." Likewise, Mayor D stated that, as regards an ILA entry decision, "money's always a piece and the level of service or quality of service…it's a combination."

Second, six of the mayors I interviewed felt that the potential tax impact that entry into an ILA will have on their constituents is an important decision-making factor. Mayor H stated that, as regards an ILA's tax impact, "I think that's a major factor. Because, and again, that's the question you answer all the time. Are we making good decisions with the, being good stewards of the money that we've been given to manage?", while Mayor K said "well, definitely, we think about tax impact." Similarly, Mayor C explained that "we always have to ask ourselves, are we going to be able to deliver the quality for what we're gonna, for the amount of funds we're gonna raise," while Mayor M said that "we

try to keep our tax rate down," and Mayor D stated that tax considerations "are always" a consideration.

Third, and perhaps most importantly as regards this emergent theme, 11 of my 13 mayoral study participants specifically indicated that an important factor in their ILA entry decisions is whether that agreement will benefit not only their city and its constituents, but also their ILA partner's city and its constituents. For example, when explaining what ILA entry factors are important to him, Mayor J said "is it a beneficial thing for your citizens and for the region," Mayor M said "is it good for … our citizens? Is it good for the other side," and Mayor F said "is it best for the community, for both communities, for the city and our partner?" Similarly, Mayor I said "I think about what's best for the communities," and Mayor E remarked that "there's a huge opportunity for them [ILAs] to be beneficial to all the parties involved."

Interestingly, several study participants, when discussing the importance of having a potential ILA benefit the citizenries of both ILA participants, stressed that such benefits need not be economic in nature. For example, Mayor J said that an ILA's benefit need not be "necessarily in money, but maybe it's quality of life," Mayor D, said "it may be economic or it may be level of service," and Mayor M, said that "if it works right, you are gonna get a return, but it's not … dollars, its family and health and safety."

This theme of *effect on constituents is important* is supported by the literature. This occurs in two ways. The first way is through the recognition that parties naturally gravitate toward that distribution of property that will produce the most efficient and mutually beneficial outcome (Coase, 1934). The second way is through the recognition that the decision to enter into an ILA seldom involves a calculation of direct economic

costs alone (Brown & Potoski, 2004; Hefetz, Warner, & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014; Thurmaier & Wood, 2002). On the contrary, it frequently also includes a community's desires (Hefetz & Warner, 2004; Warner & Hefetz, 2002), the need to obtain citizen buy-in (Feiock, 2007; Minkoff, 2013; Steinacker, 2002), or the need to satisfy a crucial voting bloc (Feiock, 2007).

Emergent theme nine: political party affiliation is not important.

The theme of *political party affiliation is not important* also emerged from my study data. Although political polarization is considered to be on the rise nationally (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Pew Research Center, 2014), this does not seem to be the case when it comes to local ILA entry decisions. On this issue, my mayoral study participants were unanimous. Mayor A said "we don't play Rs and Ds and Independents," Mayor B said "it has nothing to do with Republicans and Democrats … I can't play that game here," Mayor C said "whatever party you're from, local politics, is almost irrelevant," and Mayor E said that "mayors don't really care if you're an R or a D." In addition, a variant of the statement "There is no 'Republican' or 'Democrat' way to build a road or to remove snow" was made by several mayors.

Emergent theme 10: ILA entry is a group decision.

ILA entry is a group decision is the final theme that emerged from my study data as it related to research question number one (RQ 1). Although this theme does not address any specific ILA entry factor that was deemed to be important by my study participants, it does shed light on the dynamics of that decision-making process itself. All 13 of the mayors whom I interviewed indicated that they consult with others before making an ILA entry decision, although just whom they consult with varied by mayor

and by ILA subject matter. For example, Mayor A said "I rely upon my department heads," while Mayor D said "I bounce it off people I have faith in," and Mayor E said "I go to different people and I have people outside of city hall too that I can call and I think the mayors talk more than people think."

In a similar vein, Mayor H said: "I … have a strong network of other contemporaries that I feel very comfortable about reaching out and getting their opinion," Mayor J said that "every great leader has to have … those confidants and then recognize that you gotta have them in different sectors of life too because they all represent valuable opinions." Mayor F said that "mayors are in a position where they require counsel from everybody to come up with a good decision."

In addition to consulting with others before making an ILA entry decision, 11 of my 13 mayoral study participants indicated that they will generally change their initial ILA entry inclination if it is not shared by many of their advisors. Importantly, this change of opinion apparently does not occur because these mayors want to please their advisors, or to be seen as joining with their consensus opinion, but because they trust and rely upon the expertise and experience of these advisors.

As Mayor A said "a lot of the department heads are hired because of their expertise. So, if they provide sufficient enough support for a particular agreement, I'll generally respect their skill and go with it." Similar expressions came from Mayor D, who said "I'm not perfect. I make mistakes and if you can find them out before you do them, better for me", Mayor E, who said "I got a good enough … core of people to tell me I'm a knucklehead if I'm a knucklehead … I certainly am open-minded enough to

listen to everybody, and I've had my mind changed many times," and Mayor G, who said "I've been wrong a lot … It's a decision, a group decision."

Likewise, when asked whether they would ever change their ILA entry decision based upon the recommendation of their advisors, Mayors B, C, F, I, J, K, L, and M replied "Yeah;" "Yes;" " Absolutely;" "That's pretty fair to say;" "It happens all the time;" "Sure;" "Oh, absolutely;" "I think I would have to;" and, "Chances are pretty good," respectively.

The fact that all of my mayoral study participants indicated that they do not make their ILA entry decisions in isolation, but in conjunction with a trusted circle of advisors, and that their final entry decision may not represent their individual preference but the preference of their advisory group, is supported by the social decision scheme theory (Davis, 1973). However, the fact that none of my study participants indicated that they make their ILA entry decisions out of a desire to obtain or maintain uniformity within their advisory group suggests that the groupthink theory (Janis, 1972) is not applicable to this decision-making process.

Research Question No. 2: Important ILA Continuation Factors

Emergent theme one: meeting constituent expectations is important.

The theme of *meeting constituent expectations is important* emerged as one of the predominant factors that my mayoral study participants indicated that they consider when they are making their ILA continuation decisions. Unlike ILA entry decisions, where, as Mayor J observed, "it's expectations," once an ILA is operational and a continuation decision has to be made, as Mayor C said "you're gonna assess … the actual impact [of the ILA] on the citizens," and as Mayor J stated "after you enter into it [an ILA], its

performance." As suggested by my study data, this mayoral concern over meeting constituent expectations has two aspects.

First, the mayors whom I interviewed indicated that they are concerned about whether an ILA is providing services at a level and of a quality that met constituent expectations. As Mayor E explained "if the quality or standard of [an ILA] service drops from what was anticipated … you certainly would look at that saying, can I save the agreement … or if you can't … we need to do something different. Let's break the agreement." This concern was also expressed by Mayor G, who said "our people reward quality. …The quality of service becomes more important in relationship to all the other factors," by Mayor E, who said "its standard of care," and by Mayor H, who said that he considers whether ILA "service is at a high level and meeting the expectations of the constituency."

A second aspect of this mayoral concern over meeting constituent expectations appears to arise in circumstances where an ILA is providing services at the level and quality the parties originally anticipated, but where their constituents, over time, have come to expect an even higher level or better quality of service. As Mayor G explained, "over 30-40 years, the public's expectation has changed … from the time we first drew up the agreement until what the public expects, and nearly demands that we provide, has changed," Mayor H said "as needs change in a community you just don't want to continue to do it this way because we've always done it that way," and Mayor J remarked, it's "customer satisfaction." Mayor F made this same point in a slightly different way, when he said that his concern is whether an ILA "has it stood the test of time? … Has it, have the needs of the community changed to make it irrelevant."

This theme is consistent with the findings of Zeemering (2102). He found that local government officials, in administering ILAs, are concerned about an ILA's service level and about whether it is providing services in line with community preferences. However, the level of importance that my mayoral study participants assigned to this concern appears to be greater than that assigned to it by Zeemering's study participants.

Emergent theme two: contractual flexibility is important.

The theme of *contractual flexibility is important* emerged as another predominant factor in my mayoral study participants' ILA continuation decisions. Mayor G stated that, if an ILA's language is not flexible enough to allow for future modifications, this "certainly would" be a reason to terminate it, because "the world changes, and you need … some flexibility." Mayor L felt the same way, indicating that, "if something changes where we may need to alter or amend the contract at some point, we should have that flexibility,", as did Mayor D, who said that, when considering ILA continuation, an important factor is "is there a way we can amend it and change it? … Is it amendable?", and Mayor M, who simply said that, as regards the need for contractual flexibility, "things do change." Mayors E, H, I, J, K, and M also stated that the absence of the contractual "flexibility" they need to amend an existing ILA in response to changing conditions will cause them to re-negotiate or terminate that agreement.

Importantly, when pushed to identify more specifically what future changes cause their concern about contractual flexibility, the change most frequently mentioned was ensuring that, as an ILA continues to operate, each party continues to pay its "fair share" of the ILA costs. As Mayor I said "its key [that] everybody pays their fair share," and if an ILA partner is "unwilling to [do so], then that will totally change the circumstances"

and would "absolutely" be an important factor when he decides whether to continue or terminate that agreement. Mayors K and M also mentioned this "fair share" concern. Chen and Thurmaier (2009) also found this concern over the equitable sharing of ILA costs to be an important ILA consideration of local government officials.

Emergent theme three: service effectiveness is important.

The theme of *service effectiveness is important* also emerged as an important factor in my mayoral study participants' ILA continuation decisions. Expressing this concern was Mayor F, who said "I think that's really the most important factor, the effectiveness of it. Is it [the ILA] doing what it was supposed to do and what it's set up to do?" Raising this same concern was Mayor H, who explained that, when facing an ILA continuation decision, he asks himself "are we providing the service in an effective way and … is it worth the cost to continue the agreement in order to provide the service we've agreed upon."

Similar sentiments were expressed by Mayor D, who said that "if the service disintegrates, it would be … a reason [for ILA termination]," Mayor E, who said that if services being provided through an ILA are not being provided effectively, "that would have to be" a reason for termination, and by Mayor M, who remarked that, when making ILA continuation decisions, service effectiveness "has to be very important. If you're not doing it … effectively, you're just wasting taxpayer money." More bluntly, Mayor L simply said "I don't want to stay in a commitment that is not cost effective." Service effectiveness was also identified by Chen and Thurmaier (2009) as a factor that is important to local leaders when they are deciding whether an ILA is successful.

Emergent theme four: whether an ILA is still needed is important.

The theme of *whether an ILA is still needed is important* emerged as a common sense factor that many of my mayoral study participants indicated is important to their ILA continuation decisions. Many of the mayors whom I interviewed indicated that the first thing they do when deciding whether to continue an existing ILA is to determine whether it is still "relevant." Addressing this concern, Mayor F said that he asks himself "have the needs of the community changed to make it [the ILA] irrelevant, or has it been written well enough that it's been able to withstand those changes, and that's why … it's still viable and valuable." Similarly, Mayor D said that he asks himself "has the cheese moved, is it [the ILA] pertinent today, is it outdated, is it just time to move on … relevancy, yeah is it just wore out." Moreover, when Mayor A was asked to identify what he felt is the most important factor influencing his ILA continuation decisions, he said "probably relevance."

Other mayors expressed this same concern but used variants of the word "necessary" instead of "relevant." For example, Mayor H said that "one of the [ILA continuation] factors that you would certainly want to look at as a high priority would be the necessity. … You know, you don't want to continue an agreement just by the fact that we've always had this," while Mayor F said that an important factor influencing his continuation decisions is "whether ... the service is necessary anymore."

Finally, Mayor K expressed this same concern in yet another slightly different way. In considering whether to continue an ILA, he said that he will focus upon whether the public service currently being provided through that ILA can now be provided "in-house."

This mayoral concern about ILA relevancy does not appear to have been identified by previous research as being important to ILA continuation decisions. Neither Chen and Thurmaier (2009) nor Zeemering (2012) identified it in their study.

Emergent theme five: having a communicative partner is important.

The theme of *having a communicative partner is important* emerged as another factor considered by my mayoral study participants to be important to their ILA continuation decisions. This concern was bluntly stated by Mayor M, who said that, if his ILA partners will not talk to him or give him the information he needed in order to assess an ILA's performance "they'll be done." Mayors A, B, D, F, G, H, I, J, K, and L also said that the ability of an ILA partner to communicate well is an important factor ILA continuation factor to them, although most of these mayors tempered their statement by saying that, if communication problems arise, they will first reach out to their ILA partner and try to repair the communication disconnect before terminating an ILA.

Several mayors further conditioned their statement about the importance of communication as an ILA continuation factor by saying that, if the service being provided by an ILA is crucial to their community, they might adopt a longer viewpoint and bide their time rather than ending the contractual relationship. As Mayor K said, he might "just suck it up and deal with it," because, as Mayor C remarked "who knows if this guy is going to win [the election] next time."

This concern about communication finds some support in the literature. Zeemering (2012) also identified effective communication and information-sharing as concerns that local government officials have about the ILAs that they administer.

Emergent theme six: service measurement is important.

The theme of *service measurement is important* emerged as another important factor that my mayoral study participants indicated that they consider when making their ILA continuation decisions. As Mayor K said "it's important, because I have to be able to measure the services because there's people out there that are gonna ask me questions and I have to be able to answer them." Mayor D felt likewise, stating that "accountability always comes into the picture," while Mayor L said that measurement is important so that she can determine if her city is getting it's "bang for the buck." The importance of ILA service measurability was also expressed by Mayors G, H, I, and J. Zeemering (2012) indirectly suggested that ILA service measurability is an important concern of local government officials when he found that the local leaders he studied are concerned about the service level of the ILAs that they administer.

However, there were also mayors whose statements did not fully support this theme. In this regard, Mayor M, while concurring with his fellow mayors that measurement is an important ILA continuation consideration, qualified his concurrence by stating that, in cases where his city "might not be able to truly measure [ILA services]," he will still "have a real good gut feeling" of whether an ILA is "working or not," and that he will rely on that "gut feeling" when making his ILA continuation decision. Mayor E made a similar point when he said that "if you just couldn't determine the measurability, I think you have to rely on some common sense and instinct [as] to whether or not the overall value [of the ILA] is OK."

Emergent theme seven: Saving money is important.

The theme of *saving money is important* emerged from my study data as another factor that many of my mayoral study participants consider to be important to their ILA continuation decisions. This concern is different depending upon whether a mayor's municipality is an ILA service provider or an ILA service recipient.

In cases where a study participant's municipality is receiving services provided by an ILA partner, this mayoral concern over saving money centers primarily on whether the mayor's municipality is saving money by purchasing those services instead of providing them in-house. For example, Mayor K stated that, when deciding whether to continue receiving services through an ILA, he asks himself "can we provide [these] services in-house and … does it make sense economically."

In cases where a study participant's municipality is providing services to an ILA partner's community, this mayoral concern over saving money centers primarily on whether the mayor's municipality is being fully compensated for the services it provides, and also around whether its ILA participation allows it to provide those same services to its own constituents at a lesser cost. This concern was expressed by Mayor G, who said that "we certainly factor in costs and are we being compensated the right amount," as well as by Mayor J, who said that, once an ILA is signed, his focus shifts to 'is it [the ILA] making economic sense to us … is the rate of return what we expected'."

Other study participants who indicated that saving money is an important ILA continuation factor included Mayor K, who said that he is concerned about "making sure it [an ILA] saves money," as well as by Mayor M, who said that saving money is "one of the things you gotta consider, because this is your taxpayer's money." In addition, Mayor

D said that "money's … certainly a factor" in his ILA continuation decisions, while Mayor L said "I don't want to stay in a commitment that is not cost effective." Zeemering (2012) also found that whether an ILA's benefits exceeded its costs is an important concern of local government officials who administer ILAs.

Emergent theme eight: service quality trumps saving money.

The theme of *service quality trumps saving money* emerged from my study data as yet another important factor considered by my mayoral study participants when they are making ILA continuation decisions. While saving money emerged from my study data as being an important ILA continuation factor, that data also suggested that attempting to do so by reducing ILA service quality is a disfavored approach.

In this regard, as Mayor C's city attorney stated, and as Mayor C confirmed:

> [I]f may be the numbers don't come in as well as they should have for various reasons, but yet it [the ILA] was still working in a way that the mayor and the city felt that it should be working … the fact that when our financial consultant ran the numbers it wasn't exactly on spot, that probably wouldn't be the point you'd pull the plug.

Likewise, Mayor H said that "I think that effectiveness might be a little bit higher than cost, than cost savings. I think if you're providing effective services you can, there's a justification to the cost," while Mayor M said that money is "not necessarily" the most important factor in his ILA continuation decisions. In addition, Mayor G said that "quality of service delivery is probably more important than cash. … Our people reward quality and hold that higher than cash. … The quality of services becomes more important in relationship to all the other factors."

Finally, in support of this theme, Mayor H said:

> If the cost savings aren't there but the service is at a high level and meeting the expectations of the constituency … the measurement is not always the cost … and the expectation is that we're [providing a service]. Well, this may not be the most cost efficient way, but … [the constituents] are very pleased with the type of service … [they] are getting. You gotta make that weigh.

Zeemering (2012) also found that ILA service quality is an important concern of local government officials who administer ILAs.

Emergent theme nine: doing the right thing trumps saving money.

The theme of *doing the right thing trumps saving money* was the final theme that I identified as emerging from my study data as it related to ILA continuation decisions. The majority of the mayors whom I interviewed indicated that, if they are faced with an ILA that is not saving the money that they hoped and expected it would, but the ILA is otherwise providing a needed public service, they will *do the right thing* and continue the ILA despite its neutral or even negative economic performance.

For example, Mayor M said that "if you're just looking at the bottom line, a lot of things that need to be done don't get done." His city attorney advanced this thought by adding perhaps the definitive statement in support of this study theme when he said:

> So oftentimes you hear government should be run like a business … [but I believe that] government should be run like a family. If your child needs a new pair of shoes, you get him a new pair of shoes. You don't cost-benefit analyze it… There are certain things that, in and of themselves, are a benefit to everyone even though they're not showing a direct, tangible return.

Mayor A further advanced this thought and applied it to his trash recycling ILA when he said:

> Even though it's [recycling's] not economically feasible anymore … it's a service our community is very strong on, very supportive of … and this is a good example of the greater good … it is good to do. It's better for the community, it's better for the environment, it's better for us all.

Mayor L expressed the same mindset when she said that "there are some issues that, no matter what, must be provided … so we're going to have to bite the bullet somewhere else and make sure that [we provide them], because it is the right thing to do," while Mayor E applied this theme to the community park ILA to which he was a party when he said:

> I could make a sound argument that it's [the park ILA's] costing me money … but at the same time the community spirit, and everything that's happening in the community with that park, there's so much benefit … [it would] be very difficult for me to pull that away.

Confirmation of this theme was also found in Mayor L's statement that, in making an ILA continuation decision, if she has to choose between "economics" and "it's the right thing to do," the latter will "absolutely" win.

Further support for the importance of this theme to mayoral ILA continuation decisions came from Mayor M, who said that "even though it may look like a nasty amount, more than you think you ought to pay [for an ILA service], there's some things that are priceless," as well as in Mayor E's statement that "if there was an interlocal agreement that was beneficial to two parties and my economic return dropped off, I don't

think that's the sole reason I'd say 'OK, I'm cutting', because there's probably intangible benefits to that interlocal too."

Yet additional support for this theme was found in Mayor C's statement that, as to whether an ILA should be continued, what is important is "if it's creating public value and it's the right thing to do ... whether or not it meets its initial cost saving." It was also found in Mayor F's statement that "there is a goodwill aspect that you're working together with another entity to provide something, and you might not be saving money, but you're working together and maybe that fosters further cooperation" , and in Mayor I's affirmation that, when it comes to an ILA continuation decision "money isn't everything."

Finally, Mayor K appropriately expressed this theme when he said:

> Most things have to make sense economically. Sometimes on quality of life issues, there might be a little wiggle room … The exception would be, and I'm just gonna say, 'it's the right thing to do' … I think about the economic cost and the impact it has on the city, but then I think inside …, Is it really the right freaking thing to do? … Is it going to make my city a better place to live … a more enjoyable place to live?

The research findings of Zeemering (2012) provide general support for this theme. In this regard, he found that local government officials who administer ILAs are concerned about whether an ILA's benefits exceed its cost, whether an ILA provides benefits in line with local preferences, how an ILA's benefits are distributed to the local community, and whether an ILA serves as a mechanism for inter-jurisdictional cooperation.

Moreover, and importantly, my study expanded academic knowledge at it relates to this aspect of ILA decision-making by finding that this mayoral concern about doing the right thing may extend beyond a mayor's own constituents. In this regard, my study data suggested that even if an ILA is not saving a municipality any money, and perhaps even if is costing a municipality additional money, if it is otherwise providing a necessary public service to a mayor's constituents *or to the constituents of an ILA partner,* that mayor might nevertheless continue the ILA relationship just because it is the right thing to do.

For example, Mayor I stated that, as regards an ILA that he had entered into with an adjoining community:

> That stipend [ILA payment] doesn't cover my losses. I know that. But the service that we provide is one that can't be provided by anyone else, so it's a need not a want. So I have to make sure that, even though in that situation I know that it's a loss to our community, it's a plus to that community.

Mayor M expressed a similar sentiment when he said that, even if he wasn't sure that a certain ILA partner was paying enough for the services it was receiving from his city, he knew "that that's about all they can pay…and we don't want to break them."

Summary

My focus and intent in conducting this phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of interlocal agreement entry and administration, and, more specifically, the experiences of local elected mayors in the entry and administration of ILAs. My goal in doing so was to better understand the essence of these experiences and to discover

what ILA factors these local leaders consider to be the most important to their ILA entry and continuation decisions.

To accomplish these objectives, I used a written interview protocol and literature-informed questions to conduct in-person, on-site, semistructured, and consensual interviews with 13 information-rich Indiana local elected mayors. I then used structural and emotional coding to inductively develop from the verbatim transcripts of these interviews the 10 main themes and 29 sub-themes that related to my first research question, and the nine main themes and 17 sub-themes that related to my second research question.

My first research question was:

RQ 1: What factors do the study participants perceive as influencing their decisions to either enter into or to forgo entering into an ILA?

One answer to this research question that emerged from my study data was that direct cost saving is important to an ILA entry decision, but that the up-front, indirect costs incurred in locating potential ILA partners and in negotiating the terms of an ILA are not.

Other important ILA entry factors that emerged from my study data and that helped answer my first research question included the need for a detailed, written agreement that provides the parties with the flexibility they need to amend an ILA to reflect future changes in circumstances, as well as for a trusted, like-minded ILA partner that has the ability to perform its ILA obligations. Additional emergent factors of importance were the effect that a contemplated ILA will have on a mayor's existing municipal workforce and on the constituency that the mayor serves.

On the other hand, one factor that my study data found to be decidedly unimportant to an ILA entry decision is the political party affiliation of a potential ILA partner. Finally, another factor relating to ILA entry decisions that emerged from my study data is that local elected mayors consult trusted confidants before making their ILA entry decisions, and are often persuaded by the consensus opinion of these advisors to change their initial ILA entry position.

My second research question was:

RQ 2: What factors do the study participants perceive as influencing their decisions to either continue or terminate an existing ILA?

In answer to this question, my research data suggested that, while whether or not an ILA is meeting constituent expectations is important, so too is ILA service effectiveness and the ability of a local leader to measure ILA service performance. At a more basic level, whether an ILA is still needed is also an important ILA continuation decision-making factor.

Additional factors that emerged from my study data as being important to ILA continuation decisions included whether the parties' ILA language is flexible enough to allow for contractual modifications to address changed circumstances, as well as whether an ILA partner communicates well. Finally, as to the effect that economics has on ILA continuation decisions, my study data indicated that, in the minds of my study participants, saving money is important, but ILA service quality and doing the right thing are both generally more important than whether an ILA is actually saving as much money as anticipated.

In Chapter 5, I interpret my study findings. I also describe my study limitations, make recommendations for further research, and discuss study implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of my qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of interlocal agreement entry and administration. I examined the experiences of 13 local elected mayors as they related to ILA entry and continuation decisions, so as to better understand the essence of those experiences and to discover what ILA factors these local officials consider important when making those decisions. I chose these mayors because they were the most experienced and information-rich individuals regarding the ILA decision-making phenomenon under study that were available to me at the time of my research.

Based upon the academic literature that I reviewed, I appear to be one of only a few researchers to have phenomenologically studied ILA entry decisions through the lens of an elected mayor. I am also one of the first to have studied the factors that local elected mayors perceive as being important to their ILA continuation decisions.

The results of my study provide local government officials with additional information that they can use to make better-informed ILA entry and continuation decisions and to craft ILAs in a manner that will better ensure their viability and long-term success. To the extent this occurs, positive social change will result both through an increase in public value and through the more efficient meeting of societal needs.

One finding that I identified as having emerged from this study in relation to ILA entry decisions was that mayors highly value the prospect of using these contractual collaborations to generate direct cost savings, primarily through the realization of greater efficiencies, service effectiveness, leverage of resources and expertise, and economies of

scale. I also found that these local leaders want to partner with other local leaders from municipalities with sufficient capacity and the financial wherewithal to perform their ILA obligations.

However, I found that my study data suggested that non-economic factors also play a large role in ILA entry decisions. I found that mayors want a detailed, written ILA that spells out their contractual benefits and responsibilities, but that also provides them with the flexibility they need to modify their ILA as circumstances change. In addition, I found that mayors want to partner with other local leaders whom they can trust, who belong to the same social or professional network, who have good communication skills, and who are entering into an ILA to pursue alike goals.

I further found that, notwithstanding any potential cost-savings or interpersonal preferences, mayors are concerned about the projected net effect of an ILA on their municipal workforce and on the constituents that they serve. Finally, I found that mayors seldom made ILA decisions alone. Instead, they consult with their department directors and other trusted confidants, whose opinions often weigh heavy on their final ILA entry decisions.

When it comes to ILA continuation decisions, my review of the literature suggested that little academic research has, to date, focused upon the factors that mayors consider important to these decisions. One of the most basic factors that I found to have emerged from my study data as being important to these mayoral decisions, but that had not previously been identified in the literature, is whether an ILA is still relevant. ILAs that have become outdated, that no longer provide a needed public service, or that

provide a service that can be better provided in-house, are generally seen by my study participants as being expendable.

In addition to relevancy, I found that a mayor faced with an ILA continuation decision will place significant weight on whether an ILA is effective in meeting his or her constituents' service expectations, as well as on the ease by which he or she is able to measure that ILA's performance. As was the case with ILA entry decisions, I also found that having the flexibility to modify an ILA's terms in order to respond to changing circumstances, and having an ILA partner who communicates well, are important ILA continuation factors.

Finally, I found that, while saving money is important, the quality of the public service provided by an ILA is more important to a mayor than whether an ILA is saving as much money as anticipated. This finding suggests that an ILA partner who wants to avoid ILA termination should be hesitant about adopting an economic approach to ILA administration that involves sacrificing service quality in order to temporarily improve the venture's financial bottom line. I also found that, in instances where an ILA is providing a public service that is perceived as being necessary to the maintenance of a community's quality of life, mayors might forgo economic cost savings altogether in order to do the right thing for not only their constituents, but also for the constituents of their ILA partner.

Perhaps as important as the factors that I found to be important to a mayor's ILA entry and continuation decisions are the factors that I found not to be an important consideration in these decisions. Significantly, the findings of this study diverged in several respects from the findings of earlier academic studies. For example, I found that,

when making ILA entry decisions, mayors do not consider important the costs of planning and negotiating an ILA, their community's loss of autonomy and control over service provision, the demographics of a partnering community, or the political party to which the mayor of a partnering community belongs. Likewise, I found that neither a mayor's ability to satisfy an important voting bloc, nor the risk to his or her reputation, nor the presence of political opposition, weighs heavy in his or her ILA entry decisions.

Moreover, when making their ILA continuation decisions, I found that some factors that are not important to mayors when they were making their ILA entry decisions remain unimportant to their ILA continuation decisions, while others that are important to their ILA entry decisions are not as important once an ILA becomes operational. I found that mayors continue to give little weight to their ILA partner's community demographics, their own community's loss of autonomy in service provision, to any risk to their reputation, to the satisfaction of an important voting bloc, or to the presence of political opposition when making their ILA continuation decisions.

However, I also found that the cost savings that result from greater economies of scale, resource leverage, better service efficiencies, and the elimination of redundancies, which are all important factors in mayoral ILA entry decisions, appear to diminish in importance when it comes time to make mayoral ILA continuation decisions. This diminution becomes especially pronounced when the importance that mayors ascribe to cost savings is compared with the importance that they give to whether an ILA is meeting community service expectations and whether keeping it operating is the right thing to do. Finally, I found that network membership, municipal employee resistance, a congenial relationship, and even community preferences also appear to lessen in importance, at

least in relation to the importance ascribed by my mayoral study participants to service quality and effectiveness, once an ILA is signed.

Interpretation of the Findings

The ILA Entry Decision-Making Phenomenon

Previous researchers who had explored the ILA entry decision-making phenomenon found, or theorized, that numerous factors may affect local government officials when they are making ILA entry decisions. In Chapter 2, I grouped these literature-informed factors into the following eight categories: (a) legal, (b) contractual, (c) direct cost, (d) indirect cost, (e) decision-maker specific, (f) partner-specific, (g) locality-specific, and (h) public service-specific.

The first of these categories focuses upon the various existing state laws and regulations that limit a municipality's ability to use an ILA to provide a public service to its citizenry. Contained within this category are legal limitations on the types of services that can be contracted out, requirements as to the use of certain service providers, and restrictions on potential ILA funding sources. Also contained within this category are legal processes that are so cumbersome and complex that they inhibit the use of an ILA to engage in inter-governmental collaboration.

As the factors within this category are neither affected by nor dependent upon the subjective preferences, preconceptions, prejudices, practices, and personalities of the local leaders who have to abide by them when making their ILA entry decisions, I did not specifically explore them as part of my study nor include them in my study findings. Nevertheless, I note that a few of my study participants did volunteer that Indiana's

statutory limitations on Home Rule are an unfortunate and in their view unnecessary impediment to their use of ILAs to better serve their community.

The second category of ILA entry decision-making factors that I identified in Chapter 2 pertain to contractual restrictions on ILA use, such as collective bargaining agreements and personnel policies that limit a mayor's ability to contract out certain public services that are already being performed in-house by his or her municipality's own workforce. Similar to the legal factors that impact ILA decisions, these contractual factors are also not affected by a mayor's own subjective perceptions and preferences. For this reason, I did not explore these factors as part of my study and did not include them in my study findings. However, other contractual concerns, such as contractual specificity and the presence or absence of particular substantive contractual terms, are addressed below during my discussion of the remaining categories of ILA entry decision-making factors that I identified in Chapter 2.

I did explore as part of my study the remaining categories of ILA entry decision-making factors that I previously identified in Chapter 2, and many of the literature-informed factors contained in these categories were either confirmed or disconfirmed by my study findings. Each of these decision-making categories and the factors contained within them are discussed below and compared to my study findings. I also discuss instances in which my study findings appear to extend current academic knowledge as regards important ILA entry decision-making factors either within or beyond the factorial categories that I previously identified.

Direct cost factors.

Direct cost factors, such as the savings realized by a municipality through greater economies of scale, service efficiency and effectiveness, the ability to leverage another's expertise and resources, and the elimination of service redundancies, have previously been identified by the literature as being important to ILA entry decisions (Ferris & Graddy, 1991; Hawkins, 2009; Kwon, 2008; Morgan & Hirlinger, 1991; Thurmaier & Wood, 2002). My study findings confirmed these earlier academic findings in regard to the desire of mayors for their ILAs to save money for their municipality through greater economies of scale, by the leveraging of ILA partner resources, the avoidance of service redundancies, and by obtaining better service effectiveness.

However, the academic suggestion that service efficiency is an important ILA entry factor (Andrew, 2009a; Chen & Thurmaier, 2009) was not generally supported by my study data. Although the importance of service efficiency was not specifically disconfirmed by my data, this factor was not mentioned by any of my study participants as being an important ILA entry factor.

Indirect cost factors.

Indirect economic costs, such as those incurred whenever a local government official considers entry into an ILA, have been found in several studies to be important decision-making factors (Lackey, Freshwater, & Rupasingha, 2002; Feiock, 2007; Minkoff, 2013; Steinacker, 2002). These indirect costs often occur incrementally, such as when a mayor has to gather the information necessary to make a tentative ILA entry decision, then has to convince others of the sagacity of that decision, then has to negotiate

ILA entry terms, then has to implement actual contractual entry, and then has to monitor and enforce the results of that decision.

My study findings appeared to disconfirm the importance to mayors, when they are making their ILA entry decisions, of the initial indirect costs that will be incurred in order for them to enter into an ILA relationship. In this regard, my study data suggested that these up-front costs are simply accepted by mayors as being necessary and appropriate to ensure that they make a well-informed and prudent ILA entry decision. As such, these costs are either not a determinant factor or not a factor at all in their ILA entry decisions.

Decision-Maker-Specific factors.

Several previous studies have suggested that factors personal to a local government official have an important impact upon his or her ILA entry decisions. These personal factors have been found to include an official's personal beliefs and values, personal skills, job position, educational level and work experience, willingness to take risks, and desire for reputational enhancement (Berman & Korosec, 2005; Delabbio & Zeemering, 2013; Feiock, 2007; O'Leary & Vij, 2012; Warner & Hebdon, 2001; Wheeland, Palus, & Wood, 2014). They have also been found to include the degree to which a local government official fears that ILA participation will cause his or her municipality to lose its local identity, autonomy, or control over public service provision (Andrew, 2009b; Andrew & Hawkins, 2013; Carr, Gerber, & Lupher, 2007); D'Apolito, 2012; Zeemering, 2015).

My study was not designed to delve deeply into the subconscious underpinnings of human decision-making, and thus provided no guidance as to whether, for example, a

mayor's general willingness to take risks is an important factor in his or her ILA entry decisions. It is also questionable whether any local leader would openly admit that his or her ILA entry decisions are prompted by a desire to pad his or her reputation and to thus advance his or her political career. Finally, as all of my mayoral study participants held the same job position, the importance of that job position as contrasted with other job positions could not be and was not assessed.

Subject to the above caveats, my study findings did not support an assertion that a mayor's level of formal education has an important impact upon his or her ILA decisions. In this regard, my study participants' educational experience ranged from a high school diploma to a college program certificate to an associate's degree to a bachelor's degree to a professional degree, with no appreciable difference in their attitude toward ILAs or in their perception of what constitutes an important ILA entry decision-making factor. This held true for study participant job position and personal skills as well, with similar attitudes expressed and perceptions held by mayors whose prior work experience and skill sets varied from small business owner to military veteran to professional engineer to police officer to lawyer.

Likewise, my study data did not generally support a contention that a mayor's personal beliefs and values are important ILA entry decision-making factors. However, there was some recognition in my study data that a mayor's personal belief in the degree to which local government should help people plays a role in ILA entry decisions that involve essential services, and that a mayor's personal values could come into play if a proposed ILA involves illegal, unethical, or immoral conduct.

Regarding the importance of reputational enhancement to a mayor's ILA entry decisions, while several mayors indicated to me that this factor is always in the back of their mind, no mayor indicated that it is an important factor in his or her ILA entry decisions. In addition, when I considered years of mayoral experience, I found that the attitudes and perceptions of the mayors whom I interviewed, who had all served in office from between 5 and 21 years at the time of their interview, did not differ significantly when it came to ILAs.

However, I also found that some of these mayors had been more concerned about the need to show their voting public that they were doing something during their first term in office. This finding suggests that these mayors, at an earlier stage in their political career, may have been more willing to enter into ILAs as long as they received public credit for doing so. Thus, although not directly confirmed by my study data, using ILAs as a reputational enhancement tool could be important to first-term mayors because these contractual agreements could serve as a ready substitute for a new leader's lack of a proven track record and his or her inability to have otherwise earned the public's confidence and trust in his or her leadership capabilities.

Partner-Specific factors.

The literature is replete with examples of factors specific to potential ILA partners that may prove to be important to ILA entry decisions. Previous studies have found that these factors may include an ability to trust a potential ILA partner to fulfill its contractual obligations without evasion (D'Apolito, 2012; Thurmaier & Wood, 2002) and to have the resources and commitment necessary to do so (Carr, Gerber, & Lupher, 2007; Feiock, Clinger, Shrestha, & Dasse, 2007; Hawkins, 2009; Kwon & Feiock, 2010;

LeRoux, Brandenburger, & Pandey, 2010; Oh & Bush, 2014). Other potentially important entry factors have been found to include having an ILA partner who is a member of the same social or professional network (Brandenburger & Pandey, 2010; Carr & Hawkins, 2013; Feiock, Lee, & Park, 2012; LeRoux & Carr, 2010), who is the leader of a municipality of roughly the same size, status, and power (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Lackey, Freshwater, & Rupasingha, 2002), and who is cooperative and like-minded when it comes to the terms, conditions, and goals of a contemplated ILA (Huxham, 2000; Lackey, Fishwater, & Rupasingha, 2002; O'Leary, Choi, & Gerard, 2012; O'Leary & Vij, 2012).

I found that my study data appeared to confirm that having an ILA partner who is like-minded as to an ILA's goals, who is a good communicator, who has the demonstrated capacity and ability to perform an ILA's contractual obligations, and who can be trusted to keep these contractual commitments are all important ILA entry factors. Furthermore, I found that my study data appeared to confirm that mayors often seek out ILA partners from within their own social or professional network because they already know and trust these individuals and are able to easily inquire of other network members as to a potential ILA partner's reputation and past performance.

However, I also found that mayors apparently do not consider a potential ILA partner's political party membership as even relevant, much less important, to their ILA entry decisions. Finally, I found that my study data appeared to generally disconfirm the contention that mayors seek out ILA partners from municipalities of roughly the same size, status, and power as their own municipality. To the contrary, no study participant indicated to me that this factor was important to his or her ILA entry decisions, and many

were able to identify positive ILA relationships that currently existed between their municipality and municipalities of different sizes, statuses, and power.

Locality-Specific factors.

Some prior academic studies have suggested that a community's demographic composition, psychographic characteristics, organizational culture, location, status, and capacity could be important ILA entry decision-making factors (Carr, Gerber, & Lupher, 2007; Delabbio & Zeemering, 2013; Feiock, 2009; Hefetz & Warner, 2011; Huxham, 2000; LeRoux & Carr, 2007; Wood, 2006; Zeemering, 2012).

The mayoral interviews that I conducted and that provided the primary data used in my study were not designed to identify and explore all of the various locality-specific factors that could, consciously or subconsciously, impact ILA entry decisions. Nevertheless, I found that my study data suggested that mayors consider the economic status of their community, whether their community's tax base is growing or shrinking, the tax impact of a contemplated ILA on their constituents, the support or opposition of their municipal employees, and their own managerial and technological capacity to all be important factors when they make their ILA entry decisions. I also found that my study data suggested that mayors can be hesitant to enter into an ILA just prior to leaving office, so as not to foist a new contractual obligation upon an incoming administration that may have a different vision for their community.

However, I also found that my study data appeared to disconfirm the importance of community demographic characteristics such as race, sex, age, marital status, education, religion, ethnicity, and political lean to a mayor's ILA entry decisions. I also found that neither the presence of political opposition nor the machinations of a small but

vocal cadre of community activists are factors that mayors consider to be important to their ILA entry decisions.

Public Service-Specific factors.

Some literature has suggested that the asset specificity and ease of measurement characteristics of a public service could influence a local leader's ILA entry decisions (Brown & Potoski, 2005; Feiock, 2009, 2007; Hefetz & Warner, 2011). I found that my study data appeared to confirm that asset specificity is a factor that mayors consider when they make their ILA entry decisions, but that it is not generally a major factor in those decisions. Conversely, I found that my study data suggested that mayors do not generally consider the ease of measurement of a contemplated public service to be an important ILA entry factor.

Other important ILA entry factors.

In addition to the literature-informed factors discussed above, my study findings extended academic knowledge regarding the ILA entry decision-making phenomenon by identifying two additional factors that may be of importance to mayors when they are making those decisions. The first of these factors is *mutual benefit*. Whether out of a desire to have an ILA engender inter-jurisdictional cooperation, to help ensure that an ILA partner remains committed to a joint endeavor, or to observe a personal or professional norm, I found that mayors contemplating ILA entry consider it important that a proposed ILA benefited not only their community, but their ILA partner's community as well.

The second of these factors is *advisor buy-in*. Although the mayors that I interviewed reserved for themselves the power to make final ILA entry decisions, I found

that they rarely exercise that power unless and until they havegained at least the tacit approval of a majority of their senior staff and of their other trusted advisors and confidants. I also found that this mayoral need for advisor buy-in is perhaps due to the fact that the idea to enter into an ILA often has its genesis with these individuals, which makes their input and guidance valuable and persuasive when the time comes for their mayor to make a final ILA entry decision.

The ILA Continuation Decision-Making Phenomenon

Although I found a paucity of prior academic research on ILA continuation decisions, I did find a few studies that had tangentially addressed factors that, by analogy, could be applied to an analysis of those decisions. In Chapter 2, I identified 12 such factors that Zeemering (2012) found to be important to local government officials who were administering ILAs. Those factors, in descending order of importance, were: (a) whether an ILA's benefits exceed its costs, (b) the effect of an ILA on municipal employees, (c) whether an ILA is meeting community preferences, (d) ILA service level and capacity, (e) whether an ILA is achieving inter-jurisdictional cooperation, (f) ILA service quality and control, (g) ILA benefit distribution, (h) ILA asset ownership and control, (i) effective communication between ILA partners, (j) the technological capacity of ILA partners, (k)whether a congenial ILA relationship exists, and (l) uncertainty about the future. I addressed all of these factors in my study, and I either confirmed or disconfirmed many of them in my study findings.

I separately discuss each of these Zeemering (2012) factors below. In addition, I identify and discuss those instances in which my study findings appeared to extend

current academic knowledge regarding the ILA continuation decision-making phenomenon.

Whether benefits exceed costs.

I found that my study data confirmed that mayors are generally concerned about whether an ILA's benefits exceed its costs, about whether an ILA is saving their community money, and over whether an ILA service is being provided in an effective manner. However, I also found that my study data appeared to indicate that, as long as an ILA's net economic return is positive, mayors making ILA continuation decisions are generally willing to accept the loss of the direct cost savings that originally prompted them to enter into an ILA so long as their constituents' service expectations are being met by that ILA. I found that this is apparently because mayors consider the quality of an ILA service to be a more important continuation factor than whether an ILA is actually saving their community money.

Furthermore, and somewhat disingenuously given their general expressions of concern about saving money, I found that mayors are willing to continue an ILA that they perceive to be providing a necessary service, such as trash recycling or a public park, even if it is costing their municipality more money than it is saving, if they believe that this course of action is the right thing to do to enhance their community's quality of life. I found that this is apparently because mayors recognize that an ILA's benefits are not entirely economic in nature, but include intangibles such as inter-community cooperation, regional harmony, community spirit, and the satisfaction of a public need. Thus, I found that when making an ILA continuation decision, mayors apparently consider both the

monetary and non-monetary benefits of that ILA in determining whether its benefits exceeded its costs.

Finally, my study data provided further elucidation to the finding by Zeemering (2012) that local leaders are concerned about whether an ILA's benefits exceed its costs. I found that my study data suggested that ILA benefits do not necessarily have to inure to the benefit of a mayor's own constituents in order for them to be considered an important factor in his or her ILA continuation decision, so long as they benefit an ILA partner's constituents or inure to the benefit of the entire regional community.

One additional ILA continuation factor that is related to a mayor's determination of whether an ILA's benefits exceed its costs, and which is thus included in my discussion of this factor, is the measurability of ILA services. I found that, while ILA service measurability is apparently not an important ILA entry factor, once an ILA became operative, the ability of a mayor to accurately measure the amount and effectiveness of an ILA service becomes an important ILA continuation factor. I found that the importance of this factor is apparently due to a mayor's need to know whether an ILA is meeting its contractual obligations and the community's service expectations.

As for the indirect costs incurred in making ILA continuation decisions, I found that my study data did not directly confirm or disconfirm the importance of this factor. However, no mayor interviewed as part of this study identified any indirect cost as being important to his or her continuation decisions.

Effect on municipal employees.

I found that while my study data confirmed that the effect of an ILA on municipal employees is an important mayoral ILA entry decision-making factor, it did not confirm

that this factor, absent the emergence of some large and wholly unforeseen ILA consequence, remains an important factor once an ILA is signed and becomes operational. On the contrary, while I found that the mayors whom I interviewed expressed a keen interest in treating their municipal employees fairly, I also found that they believe that any negative ILA ramifications that affect their municipal employees should be vetted and addressed during contract negotiations, and not after an ILA is signed. For this reason, I found that post-ILA execution complaints about an ILA's effect on municipal employees do not appear to weigh heavy in mayoral ILA continuation decisions.

Meeting community preferences.

I found that my study data supported the contention that mayors consider meeting community preferences to be an important ILA continuation factor, but only to the extent that those preferences are genuinely and thoughtfully shared by a large majority of the voting public. I also found that this support is further moderated by a belief expressed by almost all of the mayors that I interviewed that they are elected to lead their community according to their own vision and not according to the latest public opinion poll, that community preferences are fluid, and that the preferences expressed by a few vocal advocates rarely reflect those of the community at large. These mayors felt that the best judge of the wisdom of their ILA decisions is the ballot box.

Service level and capacity.

I found that my study data supported the contention that local leaders are concerned about whether their ILA partner has the capacity and willingness to commit the resources needed to fulfill its contractual service obligations. In fact, I found that

providing ILA services at a level that meets or exceeds constituent expectations is one of the most important factors considered by mayors when they are making their ILA continuation decisions. Finally, I found that this factor has two elements: (a) whether an ILA is providing services at its contractually-mandated level, and (b) if so, whether it's doing so is still sufficient given any changes that may have occurred in the community's service expectations since the ILA was originally signed.

Achieving inter-jurisdictional cooperation.

I found that my study data generally supported the contention that achieving inter-jurisdictional cooperation is a factor that is important to mayoral ILA continuation decisions. In this regard, the mayors whom I interviewed appeared to recognize that, in a modern society, adjacent communities and their residents frequently interact, and that the maintenance of a good working relationship with other local leaders is desirable because it creates political capital and fosters a regional problem-solving mindset that will assist them in dealing with future problematic issues. These mayors also appeared to recognize that the inter-jurisdictional sharing of public resources generates a spirit of cooperation and mutuality of purpose that raises the quality of life for all participating communities. Moreover, I found that the desire to maintain inter-jurisdictional cooperation is one reason why mayors decide to continue ILAs that are not generating the cost savings that were expected at the time of their creation.

Service quality and control.

I found that my study data supported the contention that an important ILA continuation factor is whether an ILA is providing services at the level of quality expected by the community. I also found that this concern, which is closely connected

with a mayoral concern over ILA service level, appears to be more important to a mayor's ILA continuation decisions than whether an ILA is actually saving his or her municipality money. Finally, as was the case with ILA service level, I found that, in determining service quality for purposes of an ILA continuation decision, mayors consider both whether an ILA is providing services of the contractually-mandated quality and whether that level of quality is still sufficient given any changes in constituent expectations that may have occurred since the ILA was originally signed.

My study data only partially supported the contention that mayors, when making ILA continuation decisions, are concerned about whether their municipality maintains control over the provision of the ILA services at issue. This appears to be true for those mayors whose municipality is the more powerful partner in the ILA partnership and is providing public services to the constituents of its ILA partner. To these local leaders, I found that service control is an important ILA continuation factor. One reason why this factor is so important to these mayors is apparently because maintaining control over the provision of ILA services allows them to ensure that the quality of service that they provide to their own constituents will not diminished by the expansion of their service area to the constituents of their ILA partner. Another reason for the importance of this factor to these mayors is apparently because maintaining control over ILA service provision helps them ensure that an ILA relationship does not tarnish their community's regional reputation.

Contrariwise, I found that service control is not an important ILA continuation factor for the mayors of those communities that are ILA service recipients. I found that the mayors of these communities appear to be willing to allow their ILA partner to

continue providing public services on their behalf so long as they trust their partner and the services being provided by that partner meet their contractual and constituent expectations.

Benefit distribution.

I found that my study data provided some support for the contention that a mayor whose municipality is a party to an ILA is concerned about the distribution of ILA benefits to and between ILA members, and that this is an important factor in his or her ILA continuation decision. I found that mayors want to continue with ILAs that provide benefits effectively and in conformance with contractual obligations. I also found that mayors want their ILAs to contain language that gives them some say in deciding ILA priorities and how ILA benefits are distributed, and for that distribution to be fair, albeit not necessarily equal. Finally, when deciding whether to continue an ILA, I found that mayors consider it important that the ILA contains a termination clause that allows them to promptly end the agreement should the parties subsequently become unable to agree on an equitable scheme for the distribution of ILA benefits.

Asset ownership and control.

I found that my study data confirmed the contention that mayors making ILA continuation decisions consider ILA asset ownership to be an important decision-making factor. In this regard, the mayors whom I interviewed indicated that they want contractual language in their ILA that protects their community's ownership interests in ILA-dedicated property should the ILA be later terminated.

However, similar to my findings regarding the importance of maintaining control over the provision of ILA services, I found that my study data showed that only mayors

whose municipality, pursuant to an ILA, is providing services to the constituents of another community are generally concerned about who controls an ILA's assets while the ILA is operational. To these mayors, I found that asset control is an important ILA continuation factor. This is apparently because, by maintaining control over an ILA's assets, they are able to ensure that a high level of quality service is being provided to all ILA service recipients, that the expectations of their own constituent expectations are being met, and that their community reputation for providing good public services is not tarnished.

Conversely, I found that my study data indicated that the mayors of ILA service-recipient municipalities do not generally consider ILA asset control to be an important ILA continuation factor. In fact, I found that the mayors of these communities appear to prefer ILA relationships in which their entire obligation is to pay their service-providing ILA partner a fair fee for providing an ILA service. They apparently prefer to leave the equipment, personnel, logistical, and administrative problems associated with actually providing that service to their ILA partner.

Effective communication.

I found that my study data generally supported the contention that the ability of an ILA partner to communicate effectively is an important ILA continuation decision-making factor. However, I also found that most mayors reach out to a non-communicative ILA partner and try to repair their communication disconnect before terminating an ILA. Moreover, in cases where an ILA is providing a service that a mayor perceives as being crucial to the community, I found that he or she might simply tolerate the poor communication rather than end the contractual relationship.

Technological capacity.

I found that my study data confirmed the contention that mayors whose municipality is providing an ILA service to another municipality consider their own municipality's technological capacity to continue doing so without negatively affecting their own constituents to be an important ILA continuation factor. I also found that mayors whose municipality is the recipient of an ILA service provided by an ILA partner consider whether that partner has the technological capacity to continue providing those services at the level and quality specified in their agreement to be an important ILA continuation factor.

Congenial relationship.

I found that my study data appeared to disconfirm the contention that maintaining a congenial relationship with an ILA partner is an important concern of local leaders, at least in the context of mayoral ILA continuation decisions. Perhaps in recognition of the fact that local leaders change frequently, and that the mayor who originally enters into an ILA will likely not be the same mayor who will be administering it 10 years hence, I found that once an ILA is operative, mayors appear to be willing to tolerate a trying and truculent ILA partner so long as the parties' ILA is otherwise performing in an acceptable manner.

Uncertainty about the future.

I found that my study data confirmed the contention that mayors are concerned about future uncertainties. In the context of ILA continuation decisions, I found that this concern is reflected in the importance that mayors place on having an ILA that provides them with the flexibility they need in order to react to changing circumstances. The

mayors whom I interviewed expressed his concern in two ways. First, they want an ILA with either a short but renewable term or an easily invocable termination clause. In addition, they indicated that, given the frequent turnover of elected officials, and the risk they face that a new mayor will take office embracing different priorities and allegiances, they want their ILAs to specify in detail each ILA partner's contractual benefits and obligations.

Other important ILA continuation factors.

In addition to the literature-informed factors discussed above, I identified two new factors that do not appear to have been addressed in earlier studies. These additional factors add to the academic knowledge that currently exists regarding the ILA continuation decision-making phenomenon.

The first of these new factors is "relevance." I found that this basic and seemingly self-evident ILA continuation factor is important to mayors because they realize that many ILAs, once operational, become institutionalized and all but forgotten unless they are identified and re-assessed to determine their current necessity. I found that if an ILA has not been written and administered in a manner that keeps it relevant and vital to the fulfillment of a current societal need, mayors consider it to be a good candidate for termination.

The second of these factors is what can perhaps best be characterized as whether the continuation of an ILA is the right thing to do. In this regard, I found that mayors faced with ILA continuation decisions might, at least temporarily, go against their own community's economic interests and continue a costly ILA that is providing a necessary

or desired public service. I found this to be true even when a mayor knows that the service being provided primarily benefits the citizens of his or her ILA partner.

Findings Analysis in Context of Theoretical Framework

I conducted my study within the context of the transaction costs theory that, when applied to municipalities, posits that a local leader making an ILA decision will consider all of the transaction costs involved in that decision and select the option with the lowest transaction costs. However, my reliance upon this theory was tempered by the bounded rationality theory, which recognizes that a decision-maker will, in the real world, have to make decisions without fully knowing or understanding all of his or her options.

I was also informed when conducting my study by the utility maximization theory, which posits that, while consumers will try to obtain the greatest value for their money by purchasing that which generates the highest marginal utility, decision-makers in organizations may be conflicted by whether to make a purchase that provides the greatest value to him or her personally, or that provides the greatest value to the entity that he or she represents. Finally, I was informed by both the social decision scheme theory, which recognizes that leaders faced with an important decision often consult with and may be influenced by their close advisors, and by the groupthink theory, which posits that leaders can be influenced in their decision-making by their desire to maintain cohesiveness within their group of advisors.

In conformance with the transaction costs, utility maximization, and bounded rationality theories, I found that my study data supported the contention that mayors consider the direct costs involved in the entry into or continuation of an ILA. In this regard, I found that economies of scale, resource leverage, service efficiencies, and

service effectiveness are especially important to mayoral ILA entry decisions, while service effectiveness is the direct cost factor most important to mayoral ILA continuation decisions.

I also found that mayors consider some of the indirect costs of ILA entry and continuation to be important when they make their ILA decisions. These important indirect costs include those incurred in monitoring an ILA's performance, in enforcing an ILA's terms, and in protecting the rights of each party in and to ILA assets. I found that mayors frequently address their concerns over these indirect costs at the beginning of an ILA relationship by choosing a trusted ILA partner with a proven track record of successful ILA involvement, and by insisting upon a written and detailed ILA that clearly states the parties' respective rights and obligations.

However, I also found, in contravention of the transaction costs and utility maximization theories, that my study data did not support the contention that mayors consider all of an ILA's up-front indirect costs to be important when they make their ILA entry decisions. On the contrary, I found that mayors tend to downplay or ignore the indirect costs incurred in searching for and selecting an ILA partner, in gaining buy-in from the political, municipal, and community stakeholders who will be most affected by ILA entry, in negotiating the ILA itself , and in making the ILA fully operational.

Moreover, and again in conflict with the transaction costs and utility maximization theories, I found that, when making ILA entry and continuation decisions, while mayors generally want to save their community money, they might nevertheless consciously choose a less economical ILA option in cases where they believe that doing so will engender inter-jurisdictional goodwill, create political capital, or serve a regional

goal. This appeared to be especially true when a mayor believes that an ILA is satisfying a societal need rather than a societal want and that the service being provided by the ILA cannot otherwise be provided to its necessitous recipients.

Furthermore, depending upon its interpretation, my study data could be seen as either conforming with or contravening the utility maximization theory as it is applied to mayoral ILA decisions. In this regard, I made two findings.

I found that mayors frequently think about their own re-election, but nevertheless base their ILA decisions upon their understanding of what is best for their community and not upon any thought of personal gain, reputational enhancement, or political advancement. Viewed independently, this finding arguably conforms to the utility maximization theory as it was originally applied to an individual consumer, but contravenes this theoretical postulate to the extent that it suggests that a mayor will make his or her ILA decisions based upon what he or she perceives to be in his or her own best interest.

However, I also found that, by making ILA decisions that prove to be good for their community, mayors believe that they will benefit personally, because these wise ILA decisions will increase the public's confidence in their leadership vision and abilities. When my first finding was informed by my second finding, I found that these findings, considered together, can be reconciled with and conformed to the utility maximization theory as it is applied to the leaders of corporate entities.

In addition, I found that the conduct of the mayors whom I interviewed, as expressed in my study data, appeared to conform to that predicted by the social decision scheme theory when it comes to their ILA entry and continuation decisions. These

mayors unanimously acknowledged that they do not make their ILA decisions in a vacuum. Instead, they consult with other mayors, with trusted confidants, and with their department directors prior to making these decisions. In fact, they indicated that many of the ILA proposals that they consider have their genesis at the municipal department level, and are only elevated to their desk for a final decision after being discussed and debated amongst and between the municipal employees and officials who will be most directly impacted by that decision.

I also found that mayors rely heavily upon the advice and guidance of their department directors when they make their ILA decisions. They will only decide against the advice and guidance of these individuals in the rare instance when an ILA proposal does not support their mayoral vision for the community.

Finally, my study findings did not support the application of the groupthink theory to mayoral ILA entry and continuation decisions. I found that, while the mayors whom I interviewed often rely upon the advice of their department directors and other advisors when they make an ILA decision, there is often strong disagreement within this advisory group as to the proper course of action to take. I found that any influence that mayoral advisors have on their mayor's ultimate ILA decision stems not from any mayoral desire to maintain group cohesiveness, but instead from a recognition that these advisors are often more knowledgeable than the mayor about the ILA issues at hand.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by its purposeful sampling strategy and by its relatively small, unstratified, and non-random sample size. For these reasons, no generalizations, in the quantitative sense of that word, should be made from my study observations, since the

perceptions of my study participants may differ significantly from those of mayors in other states, as well as from mayors serving Indiana municipalities with a population size or form of local government that I excluded from this study. Nevertheless, my study results might still be able to be applied by extrapolation or naturalistic generalization to other local government officials in other jurisdictions and, in this manner, help inform their ILA entry and continuation decisions.

In addition, two of my study participants suggested that their perception of important ILA decision-making factors may have evolved over time. To the extent that this is true, it would make the *snapshot* design of my study less reliable.

No other specific limitations to the trustworthiness of my study arose during its execution. Nevertheless, a methodological problem could exist if, although literature-informed, my study was itself too crude an instrument to accurately and effectively explore the complex and multi-faceted subject of human decision-making. It is also possible that the factors most important to mayoral ILA entry and continuation decisions change depending upon the current financial condition of the municipalities involved, the present political climate, or another factor that I did not consider in my study. Moreover, the personal biases, anxieties, recall errors, and motivations of my study participants could have affected their study responses. Finally, the possibility of researcher bias exists.

The efforts that I took to mitigate or eliminate possible limitations to this study included carefully choosing the most experienced and information-rich mayors available, assuring them of the confidentiality of their responses and their need to provide full and

frank answers to my interview questions. They also included identifying myself and my role in my study, and developing a respectful rapport with each of my study participants.

The efforts that I took to enhance the dependability of my study included taking field notes, audio-recording all of my participant interviews, transcribing all of these interview recordings, and having each study participant review his or her interview transcript for accuracy and completeness. In addition, I employed data triangulation by using data from multiple study interviews, as well as from my field notes, in my study analysis. I also created an audit trail and used member checking. Finally, I addressed my own researcher bias through epoché.

Recommendations

The academic study of those factors that local government officials consider to be important to their ILA decisions is in its infancy, especially as regards ILA continuation factors. I believe that there exists many opportunities for the further research of this phenomenon.

My first recommendation is to replicate my study using both the literature-informed factors that I identified in Chapter 2 and those additional factors that I have identified in this dissertation. These additional factors include a local leader's desire for mutual benefit, advisor buy-in, continued ILA relevance, and doing the right thing.

My second recommendation is to replicate my study in other local jurisdictions that differ in population size, demographic mix, and geographic location from those Indiana communities whose mayors participated in mys study. It is possible that participant responses will differ in other study settings.

My third recommendation is to replicate my study in local jurisdictions that operate under the council-manager form of government, since all of the municipalities represented in my study operated under a strong mayor governance structure. When doing so, city and town managers should be interviewed instead of mayors, since mayors in a council-manager jurisdiction do not normally negotiate, execute, or administer ILAs.

My fourth recommendation is that, if my study is replicated, the local leaders that are interviewed should be encouraged to bring along their municipal attorney or other close advisor to the interview. While my study did not ask the mayors whom I interviewed to do this, two of my mayoral interviewees nevertheless arrived accompanied by their city attorney. In both cases, the presence of this knowledgeable and trusted confidant resulted in a notable improvement in the level and depth of mayoral responsiveness over that I experienced in the interviews that I conducted without such an individual being present. Of course, injecting another participant into an interview creates the risk that he or she will either dominate the interview or improperly influence the local leader whose viewpoints are being sought. However, properly managed, this risk may be worth taking.

My fifth recommendation is that future studies explore the ILA decision-making opinions of local leaders who have served in their position for less than five years. My study sought the most knowledgeable mayors available, under the assumption that these individuals would have the most experience, and thus the most insight, into the ILA decision-making phenomenon. While this was likely a correct assumption, this approach prevented me from exploring the viewpoints of new local leaders. This may be an important omission, because the perception that local leaders have of ILAs may be

influenced by their time in office and the extent to which they still need to establish their public reputation and earn the public's trust.

My sixth recommendation is that future studies utilize a more demographically diverse sample pool. Although I did not identify the existence of any substantive difference in ILA perceptions between my male and female study participants in my study, it is possible that local leaders from different demographic groups do perceive ILAs differently. This possibility should be further explored.

My seventh recommendation is that future studies explore any differences that may exist in the factors that local leaders perceive as important to their ILA decisions based upon the subject-matter of the ILA at issue. While I identified in my study factors that mayors generally consider important to their ILA decisions, I did not explore in great depth how those factors might change as the subject matter of an ILA changes. However, statements made by a few of my study participants suggested to me that the importance that these mayors assign to factors such as *asset specificity*, *cost effectiveness*, and *service control* may vary depending upon the subject matter of an ILA.

My final recommendation is that future studies explore whether the ILA factors that local leaders consider important to their ILA entry and continuation decisions differ based upon whether their municipality is or will be the provider or the recipient of the ILA service at issue. I did not explore this issue in my study. However, statements made by a few of my study participants suggested to me that the importance that mayors assign to factors such as *asset ownership* and *service control* may vary depending upon the ILA service responsibilities of his or her municipality.

Implications

Municipalities are struggling to solve the conundrum of how to provide more local public services with less funding. One method they often employ is to collaborate with another local jurisdiction through the use of an ILA to provide one or more of these services. Unfortunately, despite the many benefits that can be derived from this form of inter-jurisdictional collaboration, many proposed ILAs fail to materialize and many extant ILAs suffer an early and untimely demise. My purpose in conducting this study was to understand why this occurs, what can be done to bring more ILAs to fruition, and what can then be done to keep them viable until the public purpose for which they are formed is achieved.

On the basis of my study data, I identified 10 themes and their related factors that pertain to what local elected mayors consider to be important when they make their ILA entry decisions. I also identified another nine themes and their related factors that pertain to what these leaders consider to be important when they make their ILA continuation decisions. By crafting and administering ILAs in a manner that addresses these themes and factors, I anticipate that local leaders will be able to make better use of this public service provision tool. If this proves to be true, positive social change should occur at the organizational level, as well as at the family and individual levels.

At the organizational level, I believe that the implications for positive social change that flow from this study include the realization of the benefits that result from the more effective and efficient use of public monies and resources to provide needed local public services. I believe that this goal can be achieved by using my study results to provide local leaders seeking to enter into ILAs with a better understanding of what

factors are important to their potential ILA partners. This knowledge should lead to shorter and more successful ILA negotiations and to more communities enjoying the economic and societal benefits that ensue from these contractual arrangements. For example, as derived from my study data, I believe that when local leaders understand the importance of having a detailed, written ILA with language that allows them to adapt it to changing circumstances, as well as the importance of obtaining senior staff buy-in on a proposed ILA collaboration, they will be better prepared to achieve their ILA entry goal.

I believe that this organizational goal can also be achieved by using my study results to provide those local leaders who are administering existing ILAs with a better understanding of what ILA continuation factors are most important to their ILA partners. This knowledge should lead to less ILA terminations and avoid the commensurate loss of the societal benefits that these ILAs provide. For example, as derived from my study data, I believe that when local leaders understand that meeting constituent expectations is probably more important to their ILA partner than saving as much money as the parties hoped to save when they entered into their agreement, they will be better prepared to administer their ILAs in a manner that will prove to be more palatable to their ILA partner.

In addition, I believe that municipalities that become parties to successful ILAs will benefit from the business and personal relationships and positive synergies that should develop between their communities and local leaders. This generation of social capital may, in turn, lead to even more interjurisdictional cooperation, and allow these communities to better serve their respective constituencies and to compete in an increasingly global economy. Moreover, if these municipalities use ILAs to become

better stewards of the monies and other resources entrusted to them by their citizens, this should generate increase public trust in their responsiveness to societal needs and in the democratic form of government that gave their local leaders the power to address those needs.

At the family and individual levels, I believe that the implications for positive social change that flow from this study include the saving of taxpayer monies and the ability to meet more societal demands through the use of ILAs to more efficiently and effectively provide municipal public services to those in need. Doing so should, in turn, raise the quality of life within communities, and provide the objective and subjective benefits that a better life entails.

In addition to the social change implications discussed above, I identify one methodological implication that I believe emerged from my study. This implication is that researchers who are intent upon exploring the phenomenon of ILA decision-making should be hesitant to rely solely upon IMCA and similar survey results as their data source. Instead, they should consider also conducting in-depth, in-person interviews with individual municipal decision-makers. While I am not denigrating these surveys, many of which have become research data mainstays, I raise this implication because these surveys are not always methodologically designed to allow for the nuanced, follow-up questioning that is needed in order to more fully understand the ILA decision-making phenomenon.

I also identify one theoretical implication that I believe emerged from my study. Based upon my study data, I did not find the application of the groupthink theory to mayoral ILA entry and continuation decisions to be warranted or informative. I found no

instance in which any mayor that I interviewed indicated that he or she is influenced by a desire to maintain group cohesiveness, is unwilling to consider information regarding an ILA that contradicts the consensus of his or her advisory group, or is hesitant to reconsider a prior ILA decision out of a desire to maintain group uniformity. To the contrary, these mayors uniformly indicated that they expect and respect the discordant opinions of their trusted advisors and that they accept intra-group disagreement as a necessary part of the ILA vetting process.

Finally, for local leaders who wish to use ILAs to provide one or more public services to their constituents, I offer the following practice recommendations:

1. Use this study to inform your future ILA entry negotiations and ILA drafting, as well as in your administration of existing ILAs.
2. Join a network that contains other like-minded local leaders who will be able to assist you in locating able and trustworthy ILA partners.
3. View ILAs as win-win opportunities for all participants, and act accordingly.
4. Review your current ILAs to ensure that they remain relevant, necessary, and effective instruments for achieving your community goals.

I derived each of these recommendations directly from my study data. They should assist you in using ILAs to better and more prudently serve your constituents and the regional community of which they, and you, are a part.

Conclusion

My purpose and goal in conducting this study was to explore the experiences of local elected mayors in the entry and administration of ILAs, so as to better understand the factors that they perceive to be most important to those decisions. My study findings

confirmed the importance of many literature-informed decision-making factors, especially as they relate to ILA entry decisions, and appeared to disconfirm a few literature-informed decision-making factors. My findings also advanced academic knowledge about this decision-making phenomenon by identifying several additional factors that may be important to mayoral ILA entry and continuation decisions.

Based on my study data, I found that mayors prefer to enter into ILAs with like-minded partners who have a proven ability to perform, and that they often seek out other local leaders from amongst the members of their own professional or social network to become their ILA partners. I also found that these leaders like their ILAs to be written with enough detail to bind their ILA partners to their contractual obligations and in this manner ensure that their constituent expectations are met, but that they also want contractual flexibility so that they can adapt to future changes in circumstances. In addition, I found that mayors want their ILAs to save their municipality money, but also want them to provide a positive benefit to their constituents and the constituents of their ILA partner.

In addition, I found that when making ILA entry decisions, mayors do not care about whether their ILA partner is a Republican or a Democrat, and are not very concerned about the up-front, indirect costs that they will incur in negotiating a new ILA. They also become less interested in entering into an ILA if they believe that it will significantly and negatively affect their existing municipal employees. Finally, I found that mayors do not make their ILA entry decisions in a vacuum, but seek out and are often influenced by the opinions of their department directors and other trusted confidants.

When it comes to ILA continuation decisions, I found that mayors prefer to remain in those ILAs that effectively meet their constituents' expectations, that provide them with the means to measure the ILA services being provided, and that are written with enough flexibility to allow them to react to changed circumstances. I also found that mayors do not want to continue ILAs that have become irrelevant or that are no longer needed to address a current public need or desire. Mayors also want their ILAs to save their municipality money, but do not give that factor as much weight as either ILA service quality or, in the case of a perceived public necessity, doing the right thing. Finally, I found that mayors prefer to maintain relationships with ILA partners who are willing to take the time to communicate with them about on-going ILA issues.

It is my hope and expectation that local leaders, armed with the information provided by my study, will be able to attract more potential ILA partners and to successfully conclude more ILA entry negotiations. It is also my hope and expectation that these leaders, thus informed, will be able to administer their existing ILAs in a manner that better ensures the continued viability and success of these collaborative efforts. If this occurs, society will be benefitted by an increase in public value and by the more efficient and effective meeting of both societal needs and community expectations.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Introduction

Good (morning) (afternoon). My name is Douglas Haney, a Ph.D. candidate at Walden University who is studying interlocal agreements.

You may know me in my role as Corporation Counsel for the City of Carmel, Indiana, or on account of my involvement with IACT (now AIM) or another organization that educates or advocates for local governmental units. However, this study and my role herein are purely academic, and wholly separate and distinct from my other roles and these entities.

The purpose of my research is to explore the decision-making process that mayors go through when deciding both whether to enter into, and whether to continue as a party to, an interlocal agreement.

When I use the term "interlocal agreement", or "ILA", I am referring to any mutual aid or other agreement that allows public services to be jointly provided by two or more Indiana political subdivisions, or that allows one local Indiana political subdivision to provide public services on behalf of another.

Very little academic research has been geared toward identifying those factors that local government officials consider to be important when making their ILA decisions, and I am confident that by listening to your experiences and perceptions, this gap in knowledge can begin to be closed.

This interview is and will remain confidential. Neither your name nor the name of your city will be disclosed in my study report, and no quotes from your interview will be attributed to you.

I will be recording this interview, will have that recording transcribed, and, although I will own my research data, will provide you with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can review it for accuracy and completeness.

I am not aware of any risks to you from participating in this study, although it is theoretically possible that, despite my best efforts at maintaining confidentiality, someone could guess your involvement from my study narrative.

On the other hand, I expect that this study will provide actual benefits to local government officials, by providing them with information that will allow them to create and administer ILAs in a manner that will better ensure their success.

Finally, I want to remind you that this interview is voluntary. You can choose not to answer any question asked, or to end the interview at any time.

Do you consent to all of this?

Thank you.

Then let's begin.

Involvement with Interlocal Agreements

You have served as your city's mayor for approximately ___ years, is that correct?

As mayor, are you involved in the decision to enter into new ILAs? How so?

As mayor, are you involved in the decision to terminate ILAs? How so?

Approximately how many ILAs have you been involved with as mayor?

General Perception of Interlocal Agreements

What is your general impression of ILAs?

In your mind, what do you see as the main benefits of an ILA?

In your mind, what do you see as the main drawbacks of an ILA?

Perception of Important ILA Entry Factors

When deciding whether your city should enter into an ILA, what factors do you consider?

What else? [Why is that factor important to you?]

Some studies have suggested factors that may or may not enter into ILA entry decisions.

Let me go through them and see if any of them apply to your decisions:

--- What, if any, economic factors do you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your ILA entry decision?

- economies of scale
- service effectiveness
- service efficiency
- Ability to leverage resources and experience
- cost of ILA planning, negotiation, and administration]

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, factors related to your own city do you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your ILA entry decision?

- city culture
- effect on city employees
- city's fiscal condition
- loss of control over service provision
- loss of autonomy
- city employee/union opposition]

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, factors unique to the public service to be provided do you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your ILA entry decision?

- asset specificity (water tower vs. lawn mowing)
- ease of measurement (trash pick-up vs. mental health counseling)]

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, factors regarding your potential ILA partner do you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your ILA entry decision?

- Trustworthiness
- political/professional network member
- congruent goals
- good communication skills
- similar demographics
- Commitment
- sufficient capacity]

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, factors specific to your city do you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your ILA entry decision?

- citizen preferences
- tax impact
- demographics
- citizen service expectations]

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, contractual factors do you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your ILA entry decision?

- formula for sharing costs/benefits
- asset ownership/division
- contractual flexibility]

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, political factors would you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your ILA entry decision?

- re-election/political advancement
- presence of political opposition
- ability to satisfy an important voting bloc]

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, personal factors do you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your ILA entry decision?

- view on government's role in society
- personal values or professional norms
- risk to reputation]

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, other factors would you consider?

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- Considering all of the factors that we have just discussed which factors are the most important to your ILA entry decisions?

--- Why are these factors so important to you?

Perception of Important ILA Continuation Factors

Now let's switch gears and discuss the factors that are important to you when deciding whether to continue or terminate an existing ILA.

I am interested in both the factors that you consider important when making an ILA continuation decision, and in whether these factors differ in identity or importance from those that you consider important when making ILA entry decisions.

When deciding whether your city should remain in an ILA, what factors do you consider?

What else?

[Why is this factor important?]

--- What, if any, economic factors do you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your continuation decision?

- economies of scale
- service effectiveness
- service efficiency
- ability to leverage resources and experience
- cost of ILA administration]

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, factors related to your own city do you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your continuation decision?

- city culture
- effect on city employees
- city's fiscal condition
- loss of control over service provision
- loss of autonomy
- city employee/union opposition]

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, factors unique to the public service to be provided do you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your continuation decision?

- asset specificity (water tower vs. lawn mowing)
- ease of measurement (trash pick-up vs. mental health counseling)]

(Prompts: For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your ILA entry decision? – asset specificity, ease of measurement)

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, factors regarding your ILA partner do you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your continuation decision?

- Trustworthiness
- political/professional network member
- congruent goals
- good communication skills
- similar demographics
- commitment
- sufficient capacity]

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, factors specific to your city do you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your continuation decision?

- citizen preferences
- tax impact
- demographics
- citizen service expectations]

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, contractual factors do you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your continuation decision?

- formula for sharing costs/benefits
- asset ownership/division
- contractual flexibility]

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, political factors would you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your continuation decision?

- re-election/political advancement
- presence of political opposition
- ability to satisfy an important voting bloc]

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, personal factors do you consider?

[For example, what influence, if any, would ___ have on your continuation decision?

- view on government's role in society
- personal values or professional norms
- risk to reputation]

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- What, if any, other factors would you consider?

--- Why is this factor important to you?

--- Considering all of the factors that we have just discussed, which factors are the most important to your ILA continuation decisions?

--- Why are these factors so important to you?

Influence of Others

Leaders often seek the opinion of others before making important decisions.

--- Do you seek the opinion of others before making ILA continuation decisions?

--- If so, how does the opinion of others affect your ILA decisions?

Best Practices

If you were asked to advise another local government official on what to do to best ensure that any ILA that they entered into was successful, what would you say?

Close

That covers the issues that I wanted to discuss with you today.

What should I have asked you about ILAs or your ILA decisions that I did not ask?

Is there anything else that you would care to add?

If not, I will send you your interview transcript as soon as it is prepared.

My goal is to understand and accurately reflect your thoughts and perceptions regarding ILAs and to incorporate them in my study narrative and findings.

I will also be asking a few interviewees to review my study conclusions to ensure that they capture their perception of ILAs.

If asked, I would very much appreciate receiving your comments in this regard as well.

I want to again assure you that your interview will remain confidential, and that nothing you have said today will be directly attributed to you or to your city.

All of my study data will be securely retained for five years, and then destroyed.

You will also be provided with a courtesy copy of my study once it has been completed and approved by Walden University.

In the interim, please do not discuss your interview with other local government officials, so that they will not be influenced by your comments should I choose to interview them.

If there is nothing further, I want to be respectful of your time and close this interview.

Thank you for your time and for your contribution to this study.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol Checklist

Date: _____ Participant Code Name: _____ Interview Date: _____

□ Invitation letter sent

□ Signed participant informed consent form received

□ Consent to record and transcribe obtained

□ Purpose of study explained

□ Risks and benefits of study explained

□ Confidentiality explained

□ Voluntary participation explained

□ Right to withdraw from study explained

□ Request made to review interview transcript

□ Promise to share study findings made

□ Data secure storage for 5 years and then destruction explained

□ Request not to contact other local government officials made

□ Purpose of study and confidentiality promises restated

□ Participant thanked for time and study participation

□ Post-interview review form completed

□ Back-up recording made

□ Transcriber confidentiality agreement signed

□ Interview recording transcribed

□ Interview transcript review letter sent to study participant with reply instructions

□ Follow-up questions, if any, asked of study participant

□ Interview transcript corrections/additions, if any, added to study data

□ Study review letter sent to two study participants with reply instructions

□ Study review comments incorporated into study analysis

□ Copy of published study sent to study participant

Appendix C: Study Participant Invitation Letter

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

Name and Address: _____

Dear Mayor _____:

By way of introduction, I am a Ph.D. candidate at Walden University. I am conducting a study on interlocal agreements and, specifically, on the factors that Indiana local government officials consider important when deciding whether to continue or terminate an existing interlocal agreement ("ILA"). My intent is to provide current and future local government leaders with insight into how to draft and administer ILAs so as to best ensure their long term success. This study will also address a significant gap in the current academic literature on ILAs that has identified numerous factors that may influence a local government official's ILA entry decision, but has not considered whether those entry factors may assume different priorities, or be replaced by other factors, once an ILA becomes operational.

My study will involve interviews with Indiana local government officials whose municipality is currently a party to one or more ILAs. You have been recommended to me by _____as a potential study participant who could provide vital information and insight on this issue. Your involvement in this study will be limited to one personal interview that will be from 60 to 90 minutes in length and that, with your permission, will be audio-recorded to ensure its accuracy. Shortly after your

interview is completed, I will send you a copy of your interview transcript to give you the opportunity to confirm its accuracy and to clarify your answers. This transcript review should take less than an hour to complete. One out of six study participants will also be asked to review my final study findings to ensure that I have captured the essence of his/her interview and perceptions of ILAs. This study review should also take less than an hour to complete.

Unless you desire otherwise, your name and your municipality's name will remain strictly confidential and not be disclosed in my study or to anyone. Only I, as the researcher, and the transcriber of your interview recording will ever have knowledge of your responses, and the transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement before being allowed to type your interview transcript. In addition, unless you desire otherwise, your interview responses will not be attributed, and my study findings will be collectively described so that the identity of any particular speaker or municipality will remain unknown. All study data will be stored in a locked safe in my office for five years, and then completely destroyed.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from it at any time, even after you have agreed to participate in it. Whether your decision is to participate, not participate, or withdraw from participation in this study, that decision will remain confidential and will therefore have no effect upon your employment, reputation, or standing, or on that of the municipality you serve.

Enclosed with this letter of invitation is a consent form that includes additional information about this study and your participation therein. Please read this form completely and contact me directly at: ( ) _____ or at: _____ if you have any questions or concerns. If you agree to participate in this study, please sign and return this form to me in the enclosed stamped, self-addressed envelope.

I look forward to your participation in this study. I know that your time is valuable, and will respect my interview time limit. After receiving your executed consent form, I will be able to proceed forward with your interview, which is currently scheduled to be held in your offices beginning at _____ (a.m.) (p.m.) on _____, 2017.

Very truly yours,

Enclosure

Douglas C. Haney

Appendix D: Study Participant Post-Interview Letter

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

[Insert name and address]

Dear Mayor _____:

Enclosed please find a copy of your interview transcript. Please review it and, if necessary, use the enclosed errata sheet to make any corrections to your interview statements that you feel are necessary in order to ensure that your statements are accurate and complete. You may return your errata sheet to me electronically at: _____ or by mail at: _____. A self-addressed, postage paid envelope is enclosed for your convenience should you decide upon the latter delivery option. You may keep your interview transcript.

Please review your transcript and send me your errata sheet (if necessary) no later than _____, 2018, so that any corrections you make can be included in my study analysis and findings. If you wish to speak with me regarding your transcript, please call me at: ( ) _____.

I want to again assure you that, unless you have specifically requested otherwise, I will not disclose either your name or the name of your city in my study, and will not attribute any quotes that I use from your interview to you. I will also provide you with a

copy of my study once it is completed. I do ask that, until my study is completed, you do not discuss your interview with any other Indiana local municipal officials. This is so that, if I happen to interview them, their responses will not be influenced by your conversation.

Finally, I want to sincerely thank you for your time and other courtesies in participating in this study. I firmly believe that the information that I have gathered from you and from other experienced local leaders will help Indiana municipalities to develop and administer their interlocal agreements in a manner that best ensures their viability and success. I have also, as promised, enclosed with your interview transcript a $5.00 McDonald's Arch Card as a token of my appreciation and to reimburse you for your time and any research-related inconveniences.

Very truly yours,

Douglas C. Haney

Enclosure

Appendix E: Post-Interview Review Form

Post-Interview Review Form

Date: _____

Study participant code name: _____Title: _____

Interview date: _____ Interview location: _____

Interview conditions: _____

Degree of rapport: _____

Interviewee reaction to questions: _____

_____

Main points made by interviewee: _____

_____

New information gained from this interview: _____

_____

My possible influence on interview responses: _____

How interviewee may have influenced me:_____

Other interview problems, remarks, or reflections: _____

Appendix F: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, _____, have been retained to transcribe certain audio-recordings taken by Douglas C. Haney ("Haney"), a doctoral student at Walden University, during his interviews with certain research study participants. I understand that, in doing so, I will have access to certain information that is confidential and that should not be disclosed ("Confidential Information"). I acknowledge that this Confidential Information must remain confidential, that Haney's study participants have been promised that this Confidential Information will remain confidential, and that any improper disclosure of this Confidential Information can be damaging to these study participants and/or to their employers.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement ("Agreement"), I thereby acknowledge and agree as follows:

1. I am signing this Agreement voluntarily and of my own free will, and understand that it may hereafter only be modified by means of a separate written document signed by both Haney and me.
2. The audio-recordings that I am provided to transcribe, as well as all of my transcriptions and transcription drafts, are the sole property of Haney, and I will immediately surrender them to Haney upon request.
3. I will not disclose or discuss Confidential Information to or with anyone, including my friends and family.

4. I will not divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter, or destroy any Confidential Information except as properly authorized by Haney in advance.
5. I will not discuss Confidential Information where anyone other than Haney may overhear my discussion, even if I do not mention any study participant's name.
6. I will not make transmissions, copies, inquiries, modifications, deletions, or purges of any Confidential Information without Haney's prior written authorization.
7. I agree that my obligations under this Agreement will survive and continue indefinitely after the cessation of my transcription services.
8. I understand that any violation of this Agreement will have legal implications.
9. I agree to only access or use systems and devices that I am expressly authorized to access, and will not demonstrate the operation or function of such systems or devices to anyone other than Haney.
10. I hereby hold harmless and indemnify Haney from any and all claims, causes of action, damages, and expenses, including attorney fees, which may result in whole or in part from my negligent or intentional violation of this Agreement.

By signing this Agreement, I acknowledge and affirm that I have read and understand it, and that I agree to comply with all of its terms and conditions as set forth above.

Printed Name: _____ Address: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix G: Interview Transcript Errata Sheet

ERRATA SHEET FOR THE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT OF:

INTERVIEW # (enter participant code number here)

TRANSCRIPT CORRECTIONS AND ADDITIONS:

Page & Line: Now Reads: Should Read:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____ _____

Signature of Interviewee Date

Appendix H: Study Review Request Letter

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

[Insert name and address]

Dear Mayor _____:

Thank you again for your recent participation in my academic study exploring the factors that local government officials consider important when making ILA entry and continuation decisions. I have chosen you to review the draft of my study data analysis to ensure that it reflects your understanding and perception of this decision-making phenomenon. Please do me the added courtesy of reviewing this draft and of providing me with any comments that you have thereon. You can do so either by writing your comments directly on the "study comments sheet" that is enclosed with this letter and by returning that page to me in the enclosed, self-addressed envelope, or by simply e-mailing your comments to me at _____.

Please provide me with any comments you may have no later than September 18, 2017, so that I can timely finalize my study data analysis, findings, and conclusions. Rest assured that any comments that you provide will remain confidential, will not be attributed to you, and will be placed with my other research materials in a secure location until the time comes for all of these materials to be destroyed.

If you wish to speak with me regarding this matter, please call me at: ( ) _____.

Very truly yours,

Enclosure

Douglas C. Haney

STUDY COMMENTS SHEET

Signature of Interviewee Date

Appendix I: AIM Letter of Cooperation

Letter of Consent

[Letter must be on AIM letterhead with original signature of authorizing official]

Date: _____

Douglas C. Haney

_____

Carmel, Indiana 46033

Re: Consent To Use AIM Mayor Listserv

Dear Mr. Haney:

I represent Accelerate Indiana Municipalities ("AIM"), formerly known as the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns ("IACT"). You are a doctoral student at Walden University, and you have contacted AIM and asked for permission to use its mayor listserv to assist you in identifying Indiana mayors and other local government officials who have experience in administering interlocal agreements and who may be interested in participating in your academic research into the experiences of local government officials with these collaborative efforts. Your research study is entitled: "After The Honeymoon: What Matters Most When Making Interlocal Agreement Continuation Decisions."

You specifically request permission to place the following listserv post:

> **Dear Mayors:**
>
> **I am Douglas Haney, a doctoral student at Walden University, and I am conducting an academic study of interlocal agreements ("ILAs") and the experiences of Indiana local government officials with these collaborative efforts. At this time, my research is limited to Indiana cities, but I expect future research to include Indiana towns. I am in the processes of locating twelve mayors (or other city officials/employees as recommended by them) to interview, on a confidential basis, regarding the factors that they consider important to their ILA entry and continuation decisions. I hope that the results of my research will provide local government officials with information that will assist them in creating and administering more successful ILAs. If you know of a mayor (how about you?) or another city official/employee whom you believe has experience with ILAs, I would appreciate it if you would pass his/her name on to me so that I can extend an invitation to that individual. I sincerely thank you for your recommendations.**

This letter is to inform you that based on my review and understanding of your research proposal, I give you permission to use the AIM mayor listserv to place a post containing the above or substantially similar language. Should either Walden University IRB or you need to contact me regarding this matter, I can be contacted by telephone at: _____ or by e-mail at: _____.

Sincerely,

[Insert name and title of authorizing AIM official]