

# An examination of factors impacting the Implementation of Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) in UK local government bodies

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of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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### **Declaration**

I declare that this project is wholly mine and that there has not been any duplication from any source unless where it has been duly acknowledged.

### **Acknowledgement**

*I would like to thank the Lord Almighty for granting me the breath of life at such a time as this, and to complete a major step in my academic life. Indeed Glory is to God. My dear wife Julian Miriam Okwaro, sons Clovis Eli and Shadrach Imani, daughter Mayfield Jemma, thank you for the sacrifices you made to enable me to complete my studies.*

*I am indebted to my supervisors, Dr. McBride N., and Prof. Hall R., who worked tirelessly to support, comment on my work and provide moral assurances throughout the duration of my PhD. I will forever be thankful to you for your input.*

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*To my Parents, Mr. and Mrs. Okwaro, my siblings, you have always been there and I could not have made it this far without you all. My Pastor, Mr. Kwame Boateng' and family, the community of House of Empowerment and my friends, I owe you for the moral support that you gave throughout the period of my research.*

## Abstract

The Conservative and Liberal Democrats coalition government was formed in the year 2010 and embarked on austerity measures aimed at reducing the UK's budget deficit. Among the measures that were proposed was the need for local governments to find ways of reducing their cost of operations. One way of reducing costs was through sharing resources. This measure was proposed in the Gershon report, commissioned by the central government.

Information technology is a vital resource for running the operations of local governments. Sharing of information technology became crucial in facilitating sharing of other resources by Local Government bodies. There is, however, the need to take into consideration a number of factors in order to ensure that sharing of Information technology (Information Technology Shared Services – ITSS) resources is successful. Factor consideration involves implementation processes that take into account the constraints or facilitators that can be categorised into Technological, Organisational and Environmental categories.

Through the review of academic literature, government records, news articles and from the interviews that were held with respondents from Local Government bodies, using advanced qualitative research method and Nvivo as an analytical tool, it was found that beside the reduction of costs and efficiency motives, sharing of Information Technology also impacted work culture and changes to internal processes. The main contribution of this thesis is that Information Technology Shared Services led to long term (or permanence of) association among Local Councils. This degree of permanence of association is beneficial for meeting the main objectives of each council, but also has the potential to lead to loss of autonomy by individual local authorities. Local government managers (management bodies) had to consider the 'How? When? What?' questions in order to implement the sharing of information technology resources. This research proposes further examination of the Technological, Organisational and Environmental (TOE) framework through the prism of a Technology Sharing Implementation Framework (TSIF).

The proposed framework examines the impacts of TOE factors on implementing sharing of information technology processes / resources and why these factors have to be examined jointly, not disparately, when seeking to implement information technology resources. Mention has been made about examining these factors by assigning weights on them and using quantitative measures to show the importance of the factors. Implementation process of ITSS has been proposed for local government managers.

## **Abbreviations**

AIM	Australian Institute of Management
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CC	County Councils
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSF	Critical Success Factors
DC	District Councils
DCT	Dynamic Capabilities theory
DoI	Diffusion of Innovation
EDI	Electronic Data Interchange
ERP	Enterprise Resources Planning
HC	Hermeneutic circle
IS	Information Systems
ITG	Information Technology Governance Theory
ITGT	IT Governance theory
ITIL	Information Technology Infrastructure Library
ITSS	Information Technology Shared Services
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LA	Local Authorities (also Local Governments)
LC	Local Councils
MC	Metropolitan Councils
MS	Microsoft
ONS	Office of National Statistics
PE-RM	Perceived E-Readiness Model
RBV	Resource Based View
RDT	Resource Dependency Theory

ROT	Real Options theory
SS	Shared Services
TCE	Transaction Cost Economics
TOE	Technology Organisation Environment
UA	Unitary authorities
UK.	United Kingdom
UNICORN	Unified Communities over Regional networks
UoA	Unit of Analysis
UTAUT	Unified Theory of Adoption and Use of Technology

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# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

## **1.0 Introduction**

This study extends Tornatzky and Fleischer's (1990) Technology, Organisation, Environment framework, by proposing a way of jointly examining the Technological, Organisational and Environmental factors that influence the implementation of information technology sharing in an organisation (Tornatzky and Klein, 1982; Li et al. 2010). The Technology, Organisation, Environment (TOE) theory used in the context of this study, shows how these factors influence the way the United Kingdom's (UK) Local Authorities (LA or Local Governments or Local Government bodies) manage sharing of Information Technology resources. In particular, this research examines the ways Technological, Organisational and Environmental forces lead to the tendency of 'permanence of association' through the sharing of Information Technology resources between two or more local authorities in the UK. The term 'permanence of association' refers to increased interdependence among Local Councils that has been brought about by increased investments in personnel, processes and infrastructure, to the point where the Local Councils involved will have their operations seriously disrupted if they attempt to pull out of the process of sharing. This chapter outlines the background information about Shared Services in Local Governments in the UK, the factors affecting the use of Information Technology (IT) as a shared services (ITSS) tool and the growth of ITSS over the past 5 years.

## **1.1 Research Overview and Background**

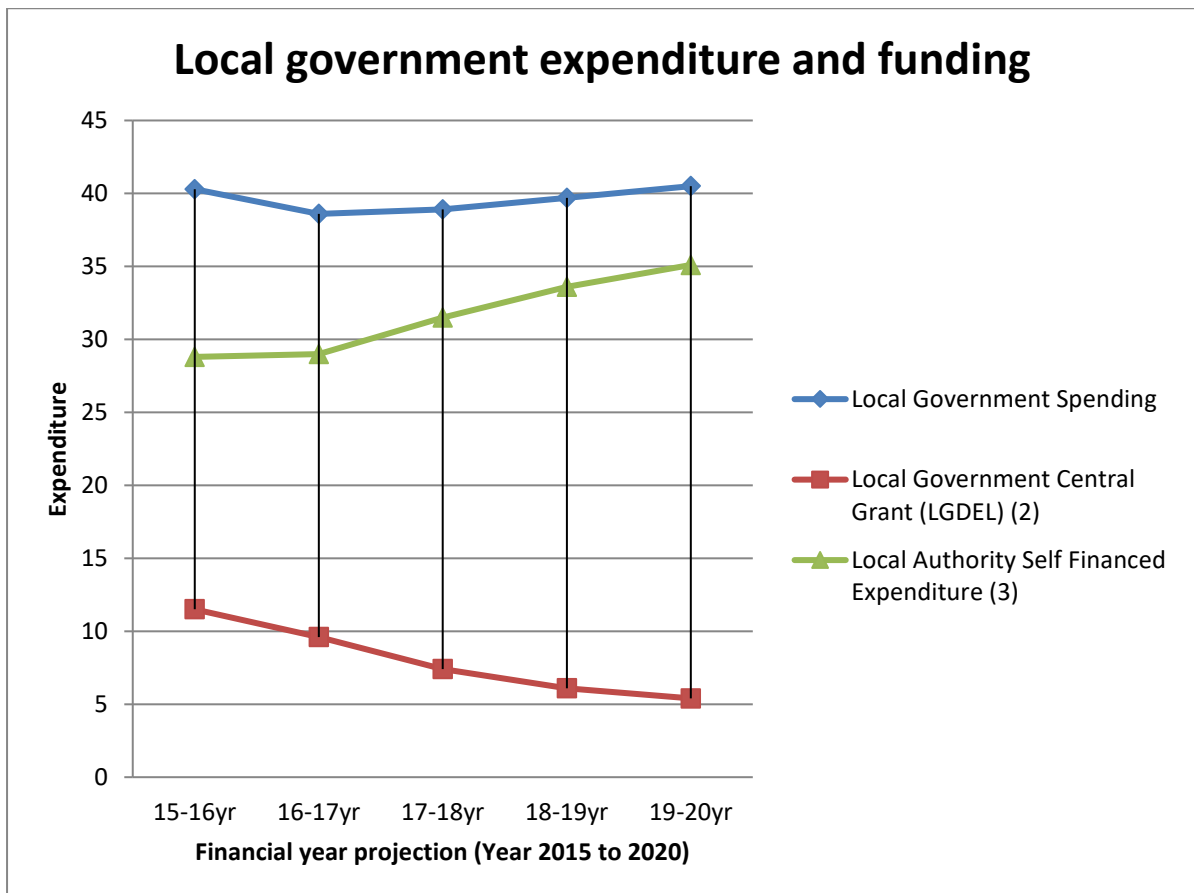
Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) have been described as the process of joining or consolidating operations and resources to enable organisations that are involved to have an effective management of their operations (Tomkinson, 2007; Ulbrich, 2009; Alt and

Smits 2007). The process of Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) has been necessitated by a number of motives including cost reduction, creation of jobs, increasing revenues and efficiency among others. The excerpt below shows the benefits of ITSS over a period of more than 5 years.

*By 2015, central government funding for councils will have been cut by 40 per cent over the period of this Parliament. The Institute for Fiscal Studies anticipates that the spending cuts will continue until 2020. This comes at a time when the impact of the economic downturn, demographic change, major government initiatives including Universal Credit and Troubled Families, new public health responsibilities, and fundamental changes to the local government finance system are compounding the pressures on councils.*

(Local Government Association 2014; pp. 6).

**Figure 1.1 Expenditure and funding outlook of local authorities**



Source: Gov.uk (2016).

Figure 1.1 above shows the level of projected funding and expenditure of the Local Government bodies in the UK over a period of 5 years. It can be seen that whereas funding is decreasing, expenditure is increasing. This trend is putting a lot of pressure on Local Government bodies to find ways of reducing costs (most favourable option) or increasing fees and taxes (less favourable option). In December 2016, it was announced that the UK government was considering allowing Local Councils to increase the council tax to cater for the rising costs of Adult Social Care (The Guardian 2016).

In all the cases of ICT sharing in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, it was found that all Local Authorities that are sharing resources sought to reduce their costs of operations and remain efficient in their operations (Ramphal, 2013; LGA 2016). According to Peter Fleming, who is the chair of the Local Government Authority's improvement and innovation board, the result has been found to be impressive<sup>1</sup> (LGA 2016). In the UK's public sector organisations (including Local Councils), sharing of information technology resources has increasingly become a necessity, not an option. Organisations in the public sector, for instance the Local Government bodies, are responsible or answerable to a large number of stakeholders whose interests must be taken into account in order to meet different expectations (LGA 2016). The UK Local Government bodies, like any other entity face many challenges; the most recent being the reduction of funding from the central government, hence lesser finances to run their operations.

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<sup>1</sup> 'But even at almost half a billion pounds, the savings from Shared Services simply do not match the scale of the 40% funding reduction councils saw during the lifetime of the last Parliament,' Peter Fleming – Chair of LGA's Improvement and innovation board (iGov news, 2015). He added, 'As councils continue to find new ways to share services and provide the taxpayer with value for money, we are optimistic other areas of the public sector will be inspired by this work and follow the trail blazed by local government.' (iGov news, 2015)

### 1.1.1 Development of the concept of Shared Services

Alt and Smits (2007) said that the concept of Shared Services emanated from the banking sector and it later became common in the field of finance (Walsh et al. 2008) when it became apparent that there was need to share resources to reduce the costs of operations between organisations. But earlier studies found that it emanated from the public sector, particularly in the USA when in 1961 the Federal Advisory Committee said there was need for cooperation at local level (Scannell and Bannister, 2012). Whereas research in the area of Shared Services is not as developed as in other areas of Information Technology (Tomkinson, 2007), there has been an increase in interest in this field, and this suggests a rise in its importance as a field of study (Ulbrich, 2006; Fielt et al. 2014).

Ulrich's views on Shared Services provides an insight on initial understanding about the concept of Shared Services especially from a management perspective (Ulrich, 1995; Ulbrich 2006, Ulbrich 2009). But it appears that Ulrich (1995) is mentioned widely in IT sharing area as a pioneer, yet within the manufacturing sector, the concept of Group technology, which was used by Tatikonda and Wemmerlow (1992), gave insights into the contextual usage of Shared Services, thus highlighting the attributes of SS<sup>2</sup>. Goh et al (2007) and Kamal, (2012) examined the issue of ITSS in the private sector, noting that its success depended on team management and how it fits within the overall strategy of an organisation. The issue that is arising borders on trust and power on one hand (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002) and criteria for sharing on the other<sup>3</sup> (KM Management Consulting 2005).

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<sup>2</sup> The attributes of Shared Services include: Distinct Governance (structure with dedicated management for the benefit of both organisations), Standard processes, Economies of Scale (through combination of processes), Customer driven and Continuous process improvement.

<sup>3</sup> In terms of trust, the need to open up books and the organisation to each other and engage in good discussion is itself a major challenge that can speak to the internal work culture of an organisation. Power on the other hand comes from the role played by managers in deciding how to share their resources.



To this extent, the views of these researchers (Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002; Quinn et al. 2000) about the need to incrementally share resources appear valid. Wagenaar (2006) advocated the need for joining similar operations and activities in such a way that complexities that arise in the activities of an organisation are reduced. It can be said that it is the build-up of trust that leads to increased sharing over a period of time (Quinn et al. 2000), but also serious vulnerability and risks (Edelenbos & Klinj, 2007; Berends and van Burg, 2011).

As trust and capabilities are enhanced, more resources are committed to sharing, creating strategic dependence among partner authorities (Alford and O'Flynn, 2012; LocalGov 2016). However, so far, the discussion about trust has been limited to individuals, not corporate entities (the Local Councils) (Berends and van Burg, 2011). This humanistic view to what an organisation is transformed into showcases the link between humanware and processes or resources of an organisation (Pettigrew, 2014).

Underpinning this view is the fact that organisations cannot run themselves (McCracken and McIvor, 2013), they depend on management approaches that are taken by those who run an organisation(s). Many organisations can adopt different approaches to managing their internal affairs on the basis of the challenges that they face in the course of their existence (Moe et al. 2012). As challenges mount, so does the need to seek to share resources. These resources can range from conceptual to material resources. Sharing of information or other resources can be necessitated by either availability of resources or ideas<sup>4</sup> or both, but behind all this is the existence of internal and external challenges facing an organisation.

Wagenaar, (2006), Janssen and Joha (2006a) have focussed their studies on public sector bodies by examining the trade-offs and dilemmas that are faced by public sector managers in

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<sup>4</sup> This implies that when local governments wish to share their resources they may consider sharing on the basis of either having information about how to share or having the resource for which they wish to share. For instance, if one council wishes to share its resources, it may share the idea with another council, or if a council wishes to have a certain resource, it may seek the help of another council so as to join in the sharing arrangement.

seeking to embark on Shared Services arrangements. Recently, Fielt et al (2014) provided an elaborate analysis of the number of studies that have been conducted on the issues of Shared Services and found that there is need for further studies in this area. Fielt et al (2014) said the reason for this is because it appears that while its importance is increasing in practical terms, there is generally a lack of interest in academic realms. These authors form an important reference point in examining current literature on Information Technology Shared Services, especially within public-sector bodies.

The concept of sharing of services encompasses sharing of various resources within an organisation; however, Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) focuses on sharing information technology resources among organisations. As local authorities seek to share their resources, they have to take into consideration the factors given above in order to make the process of sharing successful. The factors to be considered arise from both internal and external circumstances that a local authority may be faced with.

## **1.2 Motivation for conducting this research**

Local governments carry out an important function of complementing the central government in service delivery (Beaumaster, 2002). They are local to the people, implying that they bring services closer to the local population. The use of information technology by Local Government bodies in the UK spans many years since the publication of ‘The Modernising Government’s White Paper’ in 1999 that proposed electronic delivery of government dealings to be operationalised by 2008, brought forward to 2005 (The National Archives, 1999).

Due to this publication, measures (financial and consultative) were put in place to ensure that local governments are able to adopt ICT and use it for their operational efficiency<sup>5</sup>. There have been a number of strategy documents produced by successive governments, informing the need to be efficient in using ICT by local governments to meet their objectives.

Since the year 2010, in the quest to reduce the UK's debt burden in the light of the financial crisis of the year 2008, efforts have been made to ensure that the local governments not only remain efficient, but that they do so with limited budgets (Dunleavy et al. 2011). After winning the UK's general election in the year 2010, the coalition government (of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats) decided to reduce funding allocations to local governments and put a freeze on council tax increments (Dunleavy et al. 2011), although recently, there have been talks to allow such increments to fund adult social care programs (The Guardian, 2016).

Since the year 2010, there have been many cases of increased local governmental associations through sharing of their resources. Information and Communication Technology (hereafter ICT) resources, have become an important aspect of facilitating sharing of resources due to its usage in supporting internal operations in local governments (Hui et al. 2008; Borman & Janssen, 2012). Sharing of any kind of resources between local government entities, however, implies that two or more entities (with different internal structure, culture and management) are coming together to use a facility(ies) for their individual and common

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<sup>5</sup> Section 7.3: *Development Needs*: Developments in ICT now make it possible for archives to build on these strengths by pooling local and specialist resources in an inclusive national access network. Many of them will need significant investment in ICT in order to participate fully in the network and to make available their material to a much wider public for the first time. Some also require improved accommodation, so that their holdings survive in good condition and therefore remain available to future generations of users. Nearly all archives need special training programmes to cope with the challenges posed by electronic records and a stronger focus on the records management systems which electronic records require.

The regional structures for archives need to be able to influence cultural strategies and the allocation of resources at the regional level. The aim should be to increase the participation of archives in cross-sectoral programmes with libraries, museums and other cultural organisations, and at the same time to enhance the legal and administrative role played by archives in the efficient keeping of records, both paper and digital. In this connection, the sector should benefit from surveys and needs assessments conducted at a regional, rather than national, level. The question of an appropriate home for the records of regional organisations needs to be addressed jointly by the regional archive structures and the appropriate bodies in central government. (The National Archive 1999: pp. 11).

benefit. In such circumstances, challenges may arise that might put the entire sharing arrangement at risk. These challenges can be linked to factors that relate to the environment of the business, technological forces and factors relating to the internal environment of the organisation (Lyytinen and Hirschheim, 1987; Walsham, 1993).

In the United Kingdom, there have been instances of success and failure in sharing of resources among Local Government bodies. Information technology plays a vital role in linking the operations of Local Government bodies (Pudjianto et al. 2011) and yet studies on ICT Shared Services (ITSS) have been relatively limited. ICT is no longer just another resource of an organisation, but an important facilitator of Shared Services and other operations of an organisation.

Managers of local authorities are responsible for identifying potential partner local entities, organising staff members and evaluating outcomes of the processes of sharing resources against certain constraints. In other words, managers have to oversee the process of ITSS implementation with the view to meeting intended objectives. Challenges still exist as far as implementation of ICT resources in general is concerned. Internal and external environments of an organisation (including politics, information system failure, organisation environment, IT resources and the level of skills among the workforce), are major challenges when it comes to implementation of ITSS in public sector organisation (Keen, 1981; Walsham, 1993). As far as I know it, there is no literature that examines the way the benefits of ITSS lead to permanency or dependency of association among Local Government bodies in the midst of certain constraints.

Considering the context given above, this study sought to examine how internal capabilities of Local Government bodies are used to ensure that ITSS implementation is successful amid key constraints that a local government entity may face from time to time. The focus is on

how opportunities are identified in workforce training and work-culture improvement to overcome negative impacts of the organisational, environmental and technological forces. To this extent, I have sought to examine factors impacting implementation of ITSS in Local Government bodies in the UK. For the sake of clarity, the next sections outline the research problem definition, research aim, research objectives and research questions.

### **1.2.1 Problem definition**

The United Kingdom is one of the countries that have recently embarked on the process of encouraging its local government entities to share their resources. This practice is widespread in other parts of Western Europe (Netherlands, Austria, Germany), in the USA, in Australia and New Zealand. In some parts of the world, for instance in New Zealand and Australia, local authorities were encouraged to share their resources with the most immediate (neighbouring) local government body. However, the interest that has been shown by authorities for sharing of their services is mainly a response to organisational problems that are of management nature. Most of the studies conducted so far examined shared services as a response to or a preparation for dealing with potential management problems. Cost reduction and efficiency have been identified as some of the main or potential challenges that organisations face (Wang, 2007; Wang and Wang, 2007; Sorrentino and Simonetta, 2013).

Other issues that have prompted the use of Shared Services include consolidation of services, supporting workforce, and gaining access to resources that are limited (Wang, 2007). Public administration and the work of local authorities must focus on ensuring that efficiency is achieved through a number of measures, including; privatisation, decentralisation and outsourcing.

Privatisation, decentralisation and outsourcing imply the importance of cooperation as a new form of management in managing public sector organisations, especially local authorities.

There are however studies that suggest that shared services is not for these purposes, instead, it is for providing support to the bottom-line staff of an organisation, and that these management challenges are secondary to the reasons for implementation of shared services in an organisation (Godse, 2012; Janssen et al. 2007).

During the economic crisis of the yr2006 - yr2009, the UK government embarked on austerity measures that required government or public sector bodies to find ways of reducing their costs of operation. Local authorities were informed of reduced funding and the need to use their resources efficiently (McKeen and Smith, 2011), by among other ways, sharing resources with other Local Government bodies. While the requirement for sharing with the most immediate neighbouring council was not given to UK local authorities, in most cases the UK local authorities shared with others on the basis of proximity (Avgerou and Walsham, 2000).

The reason for this (sharing with most immediate Local Government bodies on the basis of proximity) is because it is easier to communicate, move resources between the councils and also there is an element of similarity (in operations) between Local Councils that are closer to each other (McKeen and Smith, 2011). Sharing of services mainly involve having back office operations of two or more organisations joined up together to form one back-office operation. It also takes the form of linking operations, moving data to be hosted at one place or / and having a new system to run the operations of one or two organisations. The examples that have been witnessed in this research about shared services have been of sharing across all functional departments for instance; Procurement, Finance, HRM and even outside-operations departments like garbage collection services. All these operations, however, tend to rely on Information technology infrastructure (which includes user involvement,

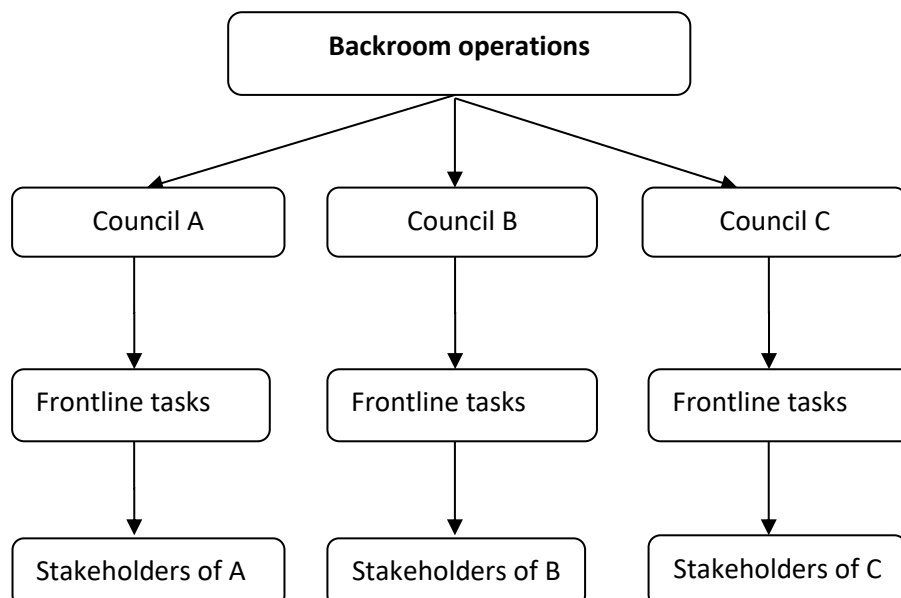
adaptability, connectivity, technology awareness and distributed computing) (Croteau et al. 2001), which when included becomes a key infrastructure in the organisation (Schellong *n.d*) and that is why, in this study, Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) is the focus.

In the UK, most functions of local authorities for instance; payment of council tax, hiring or requisition services, applying for benefits and bidding for council houses, are managed online. This has been necessitated by a high penetration level of the internet across the country which as at the year 2016 was 87.9% (Office of National Statistics 2016).

Most of the local authorities have their Information Technology Infrastructure that supports these operations. The move to embark on sharing is thus an activity of linking the operations of a local government in such a way that backroom functions are linked while the frontline operations remain distinct.

This can be shown in the diagram below;

**Figure 1.2 Functional association in Local Authorities**



The diagram shown above shows that each of the local authorities is sharing their backroom operations while separately serving their stakeholders (Zimmermann and Finger 2005; McKeen & Smith 2011). In sharing these operations, the stakeholders will include parent organisation (Ulbrich, 2006), Customers (Vaast and Binz-Scharf, 2008), Outsourcing (Sako, 2010a), Third party consultants and suppliers (Brown and Vessey, 2003; Lacity and Fox, 2008).

In the course of this study, data was gathered from those who are responsible for ensuring that ITSS process is successful among local authorities in the UK (managers and officials who run these authorities). Although Grounded theory motivated the approach and stages of examining data, systematic analysis of primary and secondary qualitative data was done. This study sought to examine how Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) is implemented across local government and the internal mechanisms that take place within an authority and activities taking place between local authorities or entities that have opted to share their IT resources. The study is a shift from general shared services which is a broader term that involves all elements or activities that can be shared, to Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS).

Underpinning the main aspects of discussion is the question of interaction among managers in the management process thus leading to a process of sharing IT resources in such a way that there emerges a virtual 'mega organisation' that exists only in as far as IT infrastructure is concerned (See section 2.5.2) for further examination of this aspect). Organisations that enlist in and continue to share their resources tend to start the process by sharing one aspect of their activities but gradually, through trust and realisation of benefits, among other factors, build on and end up sharing many other aspects of their activities<sup>6</sup>. Since sharing involves

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<sup>6</sup> Cllr Donna Jones, leader of Portsmouth City Council said: 'Whilst nothing is formally agreed yet, I am delighted by Gosport's confidence in our management team.



commitment to process, there tends to be increased inter-dependence by the entities involved in the process. The result becomes a state of permanence of reliance, which offers benefits of gradual cost reduction, capability improvements (Forst, 1997), but also risks associated dependency, for instance movement of problems across Local Councils<sup>7</sup>.

### **1.2.2 Aim, Objectives and Key questions**

On the basis of the background information on Shared Services and the problem that has been defined, the following are the aim, objectives and research questions:

#### ***1.2.2a Research Aim***

The aim of this research is to examine how local authorities in the UK implement information technology sharing among themselves by examining the internal mechanisms and the use of information technology resources in such a way that Local Councils increasingly depend on each other.

#### ***1.2.2b Research Objectives***

The research objectives of this study are given below:

- I. To examine the factors taken into account by local authorities when seeking to adopt Information Technology Shares Services between them.
- II. To examine the factors making Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) a long term endeavor among local government entities in the UK.
- III. To propose a framework of interpretation of factors that help understand and interpret issues of ITSS

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<sup>7</sup>It is important that both councils are comfortable with any arrangement. Each council will maintain its political independence but the move would help draw us together and open up opportunities for savings for both councils and their taxpayers in the future.' (LocalGov 2016).

<sup>7</sup> By movement of problems, I imply that the problems that affect one Local Council may soon be a problem of other Local Councils too. For instance, if the Information Technology system is affected due to server problems, the services that may be affected will not be limited to one local authority, but may spread to other authorities that are linked to the affected Local Council.

### 1.2.2c Key Research questions

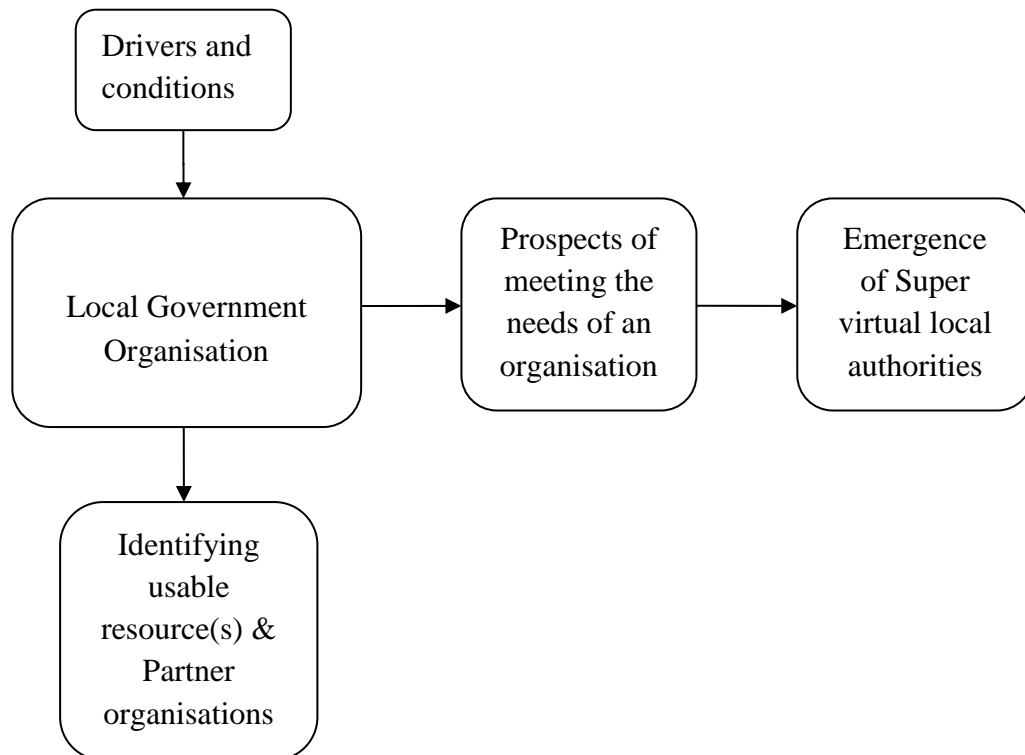
- I. What factors do local authorities consider when venturing into sharing IT resources?
- II. How important are emerging benefits and costs in driving Information Technology Shared Services as a practice among local authorities?
- III. In what ways are technological, organisation, environment and external factors important in informing Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) implementation?

## 1.3 Framework and Gaps in the study

### 1.3.1 Theoretical framework

This study is based on the assumption that has been described using the diagram below:

**Figure 1.3 Theoretical framework**



The theoretical framework in figure 1.3 above shows how certain factors (called drivers or conditions) can force local authorities to seek ways of saving costs, getting efficiency and other benefits. These drivers and costs have been found to include factors that can be categorised into Technological, Organisational and Environmental factors, thus highlighting a link with the Tornatzky and Fleisher's TOE framework (Tornatzky and Fleisher 1990). In the subsequent chapters (chapter 2 and chapter 4) these factors have emerged. The local authorities seek partnerships in sharing activities and sharing of other resources in order to meet their objectives.

One resource that remains crucial, has been information technology which includes the software, hardware and other IT related tools that are used jointly by local authorities. When seeking to share information technology resources as a service that facilitates operations, these organisations have to consider the position of IT to their activities (Bakos and Treacy, 1986; McKeen & Smith, 2011), consider their future (Brown et al. 1998) and remain linked up over a long duration because of the inevitable difficulty to separate.

I consider local authorities to be a branch of government that is, in many aspects, never independent, for instance budgeting for their activities (Drew et al. 2014). Increased usage of Information Technology to run the tasks of the local authorities imply that these local authorities are well automated internally, but their relationship with other local government authorities is linked to the point of correspondence (if any) (Brown et al. 1998).

By having, among others, identifiable needs, the pressure to share and meet prescribed objectives and physical or environmental forces like proximity, local authorities were led to embark on sharing their IT resources<sup>8</sup>. This activity of sharing develops in such a way that these local governments tend to have infrastructural linkage that gradually becomes

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<sup>8</sup> Peel et al (2012: 8) stated that proximity creates opportunities.

permanent association. Investment in things like training of workforce and infrastructure leads to changes in work culture which may result in cost benefits, job retention and better services (Tomkinson, 2007; Godse, 2012). This is, however, possible when available Information Technology resource(s) that is being shared has been complemented with leverage of skills of the employees involved.

The benefits that are experienced in one department and among few staff members soon spread to the other departments (or entities). With this spread, these benefits become a unifying factor that makes sharing of IT services to be a permanent activity of sharing between organisations, making information technology to create virtual mega local authorities. To this extent, the rigidity with which TOE is defined no longer persists and TOE framework is extended to depict its seamlessness in explaining interaction and association among Local Government bodies through information technology sharing.

The framework (in figure 3) can change but it provided me with an opportunity to limit or define the scope of data or literature that I considered in the course of this research. The changes (section 4.8), however, are not completely different from what I have highlighted in the framework above.

### **1.3.2 Gaps in the study**

Based on the data that was collected and the literature review that has been presented, it has been found that existing discourse on Shared Services (from literature materials) has looked at sharing of IT as a normal functional activity, with benefits of cost reduction and efficiency in service delivery. I have indicated that there is scope for further studies to be conducted in this field. In my research, it was evident that there are certain issues that have been given little attention in existing literature; employee interaction between work cultures, strategic

importance of IT in promoting better workflow between departments and organisations, and better implementation practices of the Information Technology Shared Services.

Fielt et al (2014), clustered areas of Information Technology Shared Services by identifying political establishments in different countries as areas where Shared Services are in use. In earlier studies by McKeen & Smith (2011) and Ramphal (2013), it is evident that the interest in Shared Services has been limited to benefits that most organisations envisage when they adopt a new system. In some cases, if expected benefits are not realised, the result can be a lack of trust (Hirschheim & Lacity, 2000).

There is even much difficulty in placing a clear definition of Shared Services in a way that encapsulates the kind of process that it is (McKeen & Smith 2011; Ramphal, 2013:1).

Contextualisation of the definition and the concept can thus allow researchers to examine the concept of Shared Services in general and Information Technology Shared Services specifically.

McKeen & Smith (2011) and later Ramphal (2013:1) stated that this;

*‘is still a relatively new concept with the understanding that Shared Services is basically about optimising corporate resources and processes into a new organisational entity and that its definition still remains unclear’.*

In this research, the context of study is placed within Local Government bodies in the UK, thus making it necessary to examine the factors that drive the need to implement sharing of Information Technology resources within Local Authorities in the UK. These factors emanate from different directions or environments and thus, the knowledge of what they are and how they influence implementation of Information Technology is important because with such knowledge, suggestions can be given on how to implement ITSS thus contributing to debate

on ITSS and providing insight to practitioners. In this research, through the analysis of qualitative data gathered using primary and secondary techniques, the theoretical framework that best explains the issues that have arisen in information technology sharing among Local Government bodies is the Technology Organisation and Environment (TOE) framework by Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990) this has been examined further in chapter 2 and 4 (see section 2.7, 4.7 and 4.8 of this report).

Since this study is about Local Government bodies, it is vital to contextualise the same by examining the background information about the local government organisations across the UK and how they operate.

#### **1.4 Background and types of UK local governments**

Modern local authorities in the UK and their operations date many centuries past. The four countries of the UK (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales) have the same types of bodies that represent local authorities (House of Commons Library, 2017). These bodies include; Unitary authorities (UA), County councils (CC), Metropolitan councils (MC) and District councils (DC). The county councils and district councils were established after a key reform of 1972. At present, there are 32 London Boroughs, 35 Local councils in England, 36 metropolitan boroughs, a total of 201 district councils and another 125 single tier authorities (House of Commons Library, 2017).

##### **1.4.1 County councils**

County councils provide vital services at county level. Their services include transportation, social care and waste disposal (Office of National Statistics 2014).

### **1.4.2 District councils**

The services of district councils are similar to those of county councils, however, district councils are bigger in their area of coverage compared with county councils. (Office of National Statistics 2014).

### **1.4.3 Unitary authorities**

The operations of unitary authorities are similar to those of county and district councils, but at a larger scale, for instance that of major towns and cities (Office of National Statistics 2014).

### **1.4.4 London boroughs**

The boroughs of London are essentially unitary authorities, and their services are similar to those of unitary, county and district councils (Office of National Statistics 2014).

### **1.4.5 Town and parish council**

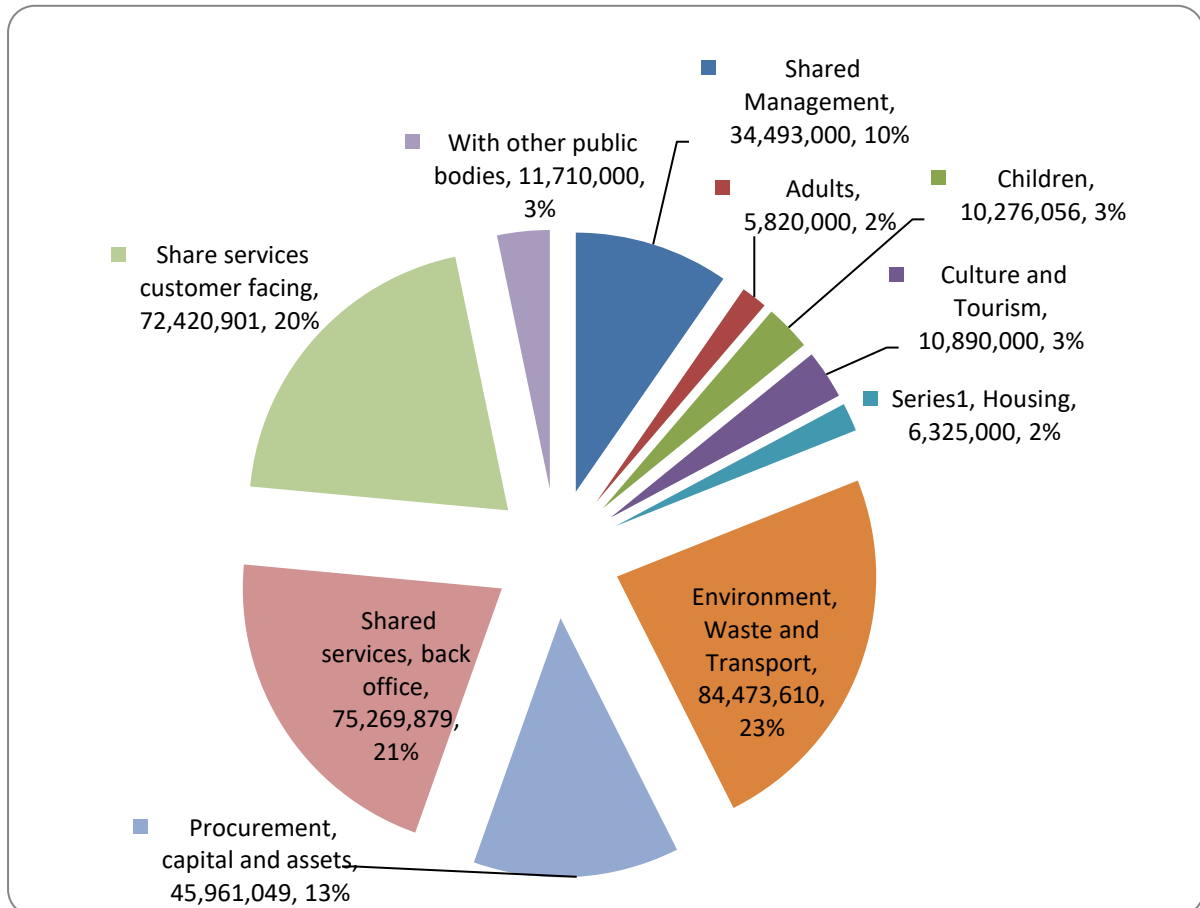
Town and parish councils are in tier three of the local government. Their operations are of a much smaller scope and scale than that of the unitary, county and district councils (given above). However, town and parish councils provide the same services as the other local authorities (Office of National Statistics 2014; Local Government Association, 2014).

## **1.5 Benefits of Shared Services to Local Government bodies in UK**

The majority of literature on Shared Services has focused on identifying or examining the kind of benefits that have accrued to the partner organisations. It is evident that Shared Services have led to enormous benefits for local government and the charts below show information on these benefits.

The following chart shows the benefits that have been realised in various areas of sharing up to 2015:

**Figure 1.4 The financial benefits of sharing among UK local authorities**



**(Local Government Association 2014)**

The chart above shows that Shared Services arrangements take place in different ways with Environment and Waste being the greatest beneficiary of this program. Information on the chart above shows the increase or otherwise in the amount of money saved through sharing arrangements between local governments in the UK<sup>9</sup> (CIFPA 2016).

<sup>9</sup> David Simmonds, the chair of the LGA’s improvement and innovation board, said a key development was that many councils are not now counting savings from shared services separately to other efficiencies. “This latest shared services map confirms that councils are working together to successfully save money,” he stated. “Shared services are no longer just the realm of the most innovative councils but rather standard practice for councils to improve services, increase resilience and save money in times of significant change, cementing councils’ reputation as the most efficient part of the public sector.” (CIFPA 2016).



These are examples of the benefits of sharing, however it can be seen that there are other areas where there were no benefits at all, for instance; in the housing sector. It can also be seen that ICT took the second slot in terms of accrued financial benefits, having accounted for 21% of the total benefits that Shared Services has provided to the local governments.

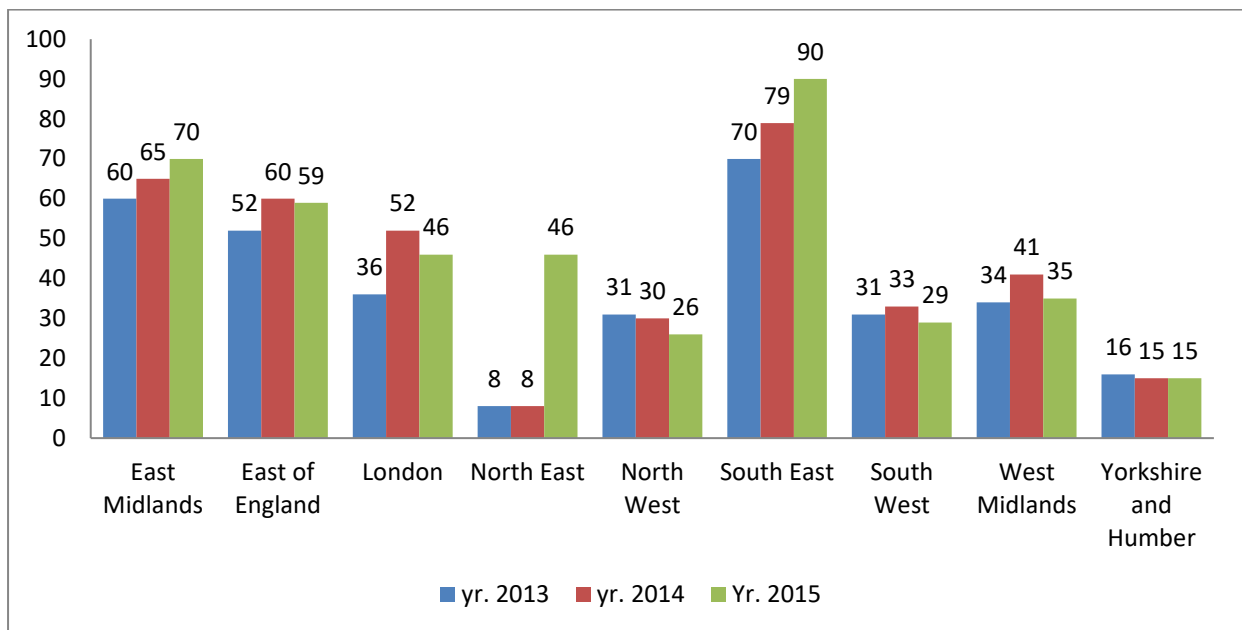
## **1.6 Number of Arrangements per region**

In the chart below, the number of arrangements and the changes to this number thereof has been provided. It can be seen that in general, there is an increase in the number of organisations joining the Shared Services arrangement. Whereas some regions have seen tremendous increases in savings (East Midlands, North East, South East), others have not (East of England, London, North West, South West, West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber). This difference in savings may be caused by a number of factors and not one particular factor being the only reason.

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CIFPA (2016) Shared services the new normal in local government, says LGA [Online] available from <http://www.publicfinance.co.uk/news/2016/06/shared-services-new-normal-local-government-says-lga> accessed on 12th Oct, 2016.

**Figure 1.5 Changes in sharing arrangements in England and Wales**



(iGov news, 2015)

### 1.7 Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS)

In many an organisation, Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) involves the use of information technology (or computer based) equipment to manage communication, data transfer, transaction processing and reporting of relevant information that an organisation(s) require from time to time in order to run its operations. When departments within an organisation or when organisations combine their Information technology resources in any form, a Shared Services environment is created (Tomkinson, 2007).

The scope of ITSS is wide, ranging from the complete overhaul of an organisation's computer system (Ulrich, 1995), joining systems between organisations (Thong et al. 2006), using or exchanging any particular software (Tomkinson, 2007), and moving an organisation's data to another organisation's system (Schwartz, 2008). ITSS thus carries a wide operation scope and different local governments engage in ITSS in different forms.

## **1.8 Contribution**

This sub section outlines the main contribution of this research. A further explanation of this contribution has been given in section 5.2.2.

### **1.8.1. Extension of Technology Organisation Environment Framework (TOE).**

This study has contributed to the theory of Technology Organisation Environment (TOE) in the field of Information Technology Sharing in Local governments. The quest by local governments to serve the interests of their residents means these authorities are increasingly being forced to consider sharing their information technology resources. There are, however, certain factors that impact (positively or negatively) to the level of success that these local authorities can achieve. Enhancing internal capabilities through leveraging of the skills of employees who form teams sharing partners is an important step toward overcoming the challenges posed by Technological, Environmental and Organisational factors that surrounds sharing arrangements of Local Government bodies.

Implementation of Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) calls for reorganisation of internal processes in local authorities. Such re-organisations may require an examination and alignment of objectives that local government entities are seeking to achieve in such a way that they can form working partnerships. Implementation is a process that goes beyond having a start and finish period as advocated by Walsham (1993) to the views that were held by Srinivasan and Davis (1987) who implied that implementation involves a vision where different users have access to tools, training and support that they need to perform their tasks. Walsham (1993: 214) has indicated that since implementation of information systems in general is political, it is managers, not subordinate staff (or other workers) who play a key role in the process because these managers have the necessary power to make certain choices.

In order to examine implementation of ITSS in local authorities, this thesis proposes the use of, albeit with modifications, a model called Technology, Organisation and Environment (TOE). The model provides a holistic view of the three factors that influence the adaptation and implementation of technology in the organisation. These include: Technological factors, Organisational factors and Environmental factors. Originally this framework was designed to show the link between contextual factors of technology adoption, thus it fits within the context of Information Technology Shared Services in local governments in the UK. In this study, however, the proposed model is Technology Sharing Implementation framework (TSIF), which identifies the issues that influence the use of technology between organisations and how the considerations of these factors and subsequent sharing of resources make organisations involved to be linked permanently. Identification of the factors has been done through a field study of 27 Local Government bodies, through the use of qualitative analysis method. When organisations are linked, it becomes difficult to pull out of the shared services without serious work disruptions and cost implications. Since two different organisations may have different reasons or motivations for implementing a certain technology, they have to take into consideration some factors relating to Technology, Organisation and External Environment (By identifying the factors that make local governments share their Information Technology resources, this study has also attempted to explain why sharing of Information Technology resources gradually becomes an irreversible process).

There is a relationship that exists between these factors, but existing studies on TOE have examined one of the three factors in greater proportion compared with the other two. Existing studies, having been done along certain premises for instance, with an inclination towards politics (focusing on external environment), an inclination towards technology (focussing on technological environment) and an inclination toward organisation (focussing on organisational environment), fail to provide a broad view about the effects of all these

environments to an entity, in this case that being Local Authorities. This study examines these environments together and proposes modification of TOE with specific reference to the implementation process that is driven by managers in Local Government bodies.

## **1.9 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis has five main chapters, each with sub sections for ease of organising and structure. This first chapter has outlined the background of the study, the aim, research questions and objectives, my motivation for conducting this study, the structure and functions of UK local governments and the concept of information about Shared Services.

The second is the literature review that examines the views of different authors on the topic of Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS). This chapter highlights these views through a critical discussion within the scope of the research objectives that have been set out in chapter one. This is important in setting the study into perspective and scope, thus identifying existing discourses and potentially identifying areas of knowledge gap. The third chapter explicates the methodology, and how data was collected and used throughout the process.

Chapter four presents the findings and analysis of the same. It shows the outcomes of the views held by the respondents in the question of ITSS among Local Councils in the UK. This is an important segment of this study as it demonstrates what has been said and how such relates to the question of ITSS. The last chapter (Chapter five) shows the conclusion, contribution and limitations of this research.

## **1.10 Summary**

This chapter has laid down the background issues relating to ITSS in the UK. It is evident that the question of Sharing IT services in the UK is important as a government operational

policy, mainly aimed at cost reduction and efficiency in the wake of the need to reduce public expenditure. Local governments have been encouraged to share their services and are engaged in the same, with other government and private sector bodies. IT sharing is part of the broader shared service activities that span procurement, garbage collection, policing, and other functions of local government. Focus has been placed on IT sharing because information technology forms an important functional area of local governance in the UK.

Secondly, the need to examine the usage of information technology and understand the issues that arise when technology is shared across large and small entities (in the context of entities that serve members of the public), potentially providing insights into operational activities that take place among those responsible for the sharing and how this can inform our understanding about the question of technology sharing across authorities. The next chapter provides academic views on the question of IT sharing in general and IT sharing particularly in UK based local governments.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0 Introduction**

The aim of this research is to examine how local authorities in the UK implement Information Technology among themselves by sharing the Information Technology resources that they intend to use for their operations. This section explores the views of different authors who have researched and written on the topic of Shared Services and Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS). Consequently, three paths were adopted in examining existing literature and filtering the same to the specific context of this study. It was necessary to consider the width of resources that can help build up this literature (Robson 2002). Glatthorn and Joyner (2005) have indicated that clarity over the subject of study is the first step to knowing what to include and what not to include.

In this thesis, guided by the need to examine the broad aspect of Shared Services (SS), I had to read and understand the concept of Shared Services in general and later, ITSS specifically. Firstly, the concept of ITSS is within the wider concept of Shared Services and there was need to provide a definition of the same and consider how this concept fits within the general concept of Shared Services. Secondly, it was necessary to examine motivations for ITSS in general and within local governments, and lastly, attempt to identify gaps in literature. This literature review followed a theoretical framework of, first, examining the reasons for implementing technology between organisations that are in the same area (for instance, offering the same kind of services), and secondly, understanding differences in motives for engaging in a collaboration between or among organisations.

## **2.1 Research Objectives**

The research objectives of this study are given below;

- I. To examine the factors taken into account by local authorities when seeking to adopt Information Technology Shared Services between them.
- II. To examine the factors making Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) a long term endeavor among local government entities in the UK.
- III. To propose a framework of interpretation of factors that help understand and interpret issues of ITSS.

## **2.2 Shared Services: Evolution and definition**

There seems to be a consensus that most organisations, in both public and private sector will adopt a new system or organisational process to deal with areas of interest or challenges, most notable of such being the costs factors. Many an organisation has objectives that they have to fulfil, some of these objectives include cost reduction, improving the wealth of their shareholders / serving the public and making profits. In order to meet these objectives, measures that are put in place to identify and use a certain process(es) are considered (Tomkinson, 2007; Ulbrich et al. 2010). As processes involving two or more organisations, Shared Service processes have been adopted by many organisations as tools that go beyond meeting one objective, but a number of objectives, which in most cases require formulation or definition by the personnel from each of the organisations involved.

Soalheira and Timbrell (2014; 69) stated that while there is general consensus that Shared Services can benefit an organisation, there is little agreement about what Shared Services is all about. Quinn et al (2000), in their book 'Shared Services: Mining for corporate gold'



stated that the concept of Shared Services had its origins from the General Electric company in the USA which had a group called Client Business Services in 1986 and the term was first used by A.T. Kearney in 1990 to refer to the association that a group of companies (IBM, Johnson and Johnson, AT &T, Nynex) in the USA, had.

Shared Services has been coined as a new practice in organisational management that evolved in the private sector in the year 1980 (Malcolm, 1999; Davis, 2005; Gospel and Sako, 2010), as a new form of corporate restructuring (Malcolm, 1999) and which involves joining of management functions of a number of independent agencies with an aim of achieving the respective objectives of the organisations involved (Janssen et al. 2012). These management functions include; procurement (Davis, 2005; Gordon et al. 2008), payroll, Information and Communication technology, marketing (Furtmueller, 2012, Tate and Furtmueller, 2013; Bondarouk 2014).

### **2.3 Strands of literature**

The historical perspectives of Shared Services enable us to understand the motives behind current trends of the same (Shared Services). Three key motives of Shared Services appear to have been identified in existing literature:

- I. Definitions and scope of Shared Services in organisations (Borman, 2010).
- II. The motives that drive the need for sharing of information technology resources by organisations (Janssen and Joha, 2006),
- III. The challenges that exist in implementing shared services (Pudjianto and Hangjung, 2009).

Borman (2010) noted that the question of definition has gathered interest because of the fine line that exists between centralisation and outsourcing. Other views have outlined Shared Services as a way of joining divisions (Janssen and Joha, 2006) or allowing multi-agency cooperation (Pudjianto and Hangjung, 2009; Pudjianto et al 2011).

On the question of motives, Resource Based Views (RBV) and Transactional Costs Analysis have been highlighted (McCracken and McIvor, 2013). This RBV influences our understanding of how resources are accessed and has provided an explanation about the UK government's Shared Services' push. In the USA, state government HR reforms have been mooted (Selden and Wooters, 2011) and in the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand, Shared Services in areas of processing services have been the main focus. Another area of research into Shared Services in government bodies focused on the challenges that are faced by vendors or those who are responsible for policy making when seeking to meet intended objectives. It is evident that the gap between theoretical benefits and real benefits showcases the interest that scholars have generated in this field (Borman and Janssen, 2013).

There is evidence that there were cases of missed targets, delays in project delivery among other challenges of Shared Services (AIM 2012; Commons Select Committee 2012).

Academically, evidence has been presented to showcase problems in Shared Services arrangements (Janssen and Joha, 2006; Wagenaar, 2006; Hafizi et al. 2016). There have been cases where Shared Services arrangements have been discontinued and policies reversed, for instance in Western Australia (AIM 2012). The Gershon report (2004) also cautioned against overt enthusiasm on Shared Services activities because of the failures experienced in other countries. It should be noted, however, that in the wake of all these challenges, the need to share the services require that better infrastructure be put in place and implementation arrangements should be a key focal point for the sharing partners. This calls for better

managerial programs, political will, internal changes in the work cultures of the organisations involved and in some cases mandatory participation (Knol et al. 2014; Burns and Yeaton, 2008; McCracken and McIvor, 2013).

## **2.4 Organisational deficiencies and need for Shared Services**

Existing literature on sharing of services identifies the need to improve performance and reduction of costs as the driving force behind seeking a system of sharing of resources that can support the operations of private and public sector bodies (Bondarouk and Friebe, 2014). Inefficiencies (in internal organisational processes) are a cause of concern for organisations (Ramphal, 2013), hence the need to consider ways of leveraging skills and building synergies by building partnerships. Building efficiencies in internal environment (work processes) is however not the only issue that can improve performance, there must be consideration of external factors surrounding organisations (Bondarouk and Friebe, 2014). A combination of internal and external factors can be a cause of inefficiencies in the way an organisation is run (Burns and Yeaton, 2008; McKingley, 2011; Dollery et al. 2012 and CIFPA 2010; Hafizi et al. 2016).

In order to overcome these challenges and to embrace or / and tackle productivity, re-engineering, service and technology concerns of management; sharing of operational services has gradually become necessary (Ulrich, 1995; Prickett, 2007; Gershon report 2004; Ali 2012). There are still relatively few published studies on ITSS, especially focusing on the combination of factors that impact on ITSS in organisations (Praditya & Janssen, 2015; Wang & Wang, 2015; Schulz and Brenner, 2010; Fielt et al. 2014). Others have focused on Shared Services in general (Cullen et al. 2014; Stemberger and Jaklic, 2007) and shared service

centres (Janssen and Joha, 2006). Whereas these two areas (Impacts of Shares Services and Shared Services in general) are within the broad context of sharing of services, other fields of study that have highlighted issues of technology usage in organisation are; governance (Dollery et al. 2012; CIFPA 2010), using Information Technology in government (Gospel and Sako, 2010) and private sector (Praditya & Janssen, 2015).

Studies on SS appear to be compounded by different perspectives that have been examined in its definition. Some studies consider SS to be concerned with sharing resources (CIFPA 2010), others studies consider SS to be related to cost reduction measures (Gospel and Sako, 2010) while other studies view it as a way of achieving operational efficiency (Cullen et al. 2014). Recently, however, it appears that there is a convergence in defining SS, because SS is viewed as a process involving the autonomy of a unit that serves two or more units (Ulrich, 2006; Ali, 2012). There is an alternative approach to examining SS and in particular its importance to an organisation(s) (Malcolm, 1999; Davis, 2005; Gospel and Sako, 2010). These elements of importance have, however, been viewed in terms of money or cost savings (Cullen et al. 2014), efficiency (Praditya & Janssen, 2015) and to an extent meeting government objectives of serving the public and working within limited budget (in case of public sector organisation) (CIFPA 2010; Paagman et al. 2015).

Fewer studies outline the disadvantages of SS, most notably the lack of autonomy and security of information (Sorrentino & Simonetta, 2012). There is, however, evidence that Information Technology is key to the operations of many an organisation or any system that is being put in place by an organisation (CIFPA 2010). The importance of IT in facilitating the implementation of new operations or systems go beyond the needs of a department in an organisation (Soalheira and Timbrell, 2014) to the entire organisation (Cullen et al. 2014) and even where organisations are sharing their resources (Praditya & Janssen, 2015).

Fielt et al (2014) noted that Information Technology is a facilitator of new operations and Miskon et al (2011) stated that no system can be put in place without IT infrastructure. There are other studies drawn from other disciplines that identify IT infrastructure as a key organisational tool that can no longer be infused within another department but must be managed within its own department (Pudjianto et al. 2011; Soalheira and Timbrell, 2014; Praditya & Janssen, 2015). This is not necessarily true for all organisations because there is need to consider what an organisation can afford or wants for its operations (Praditya & Janssen, 2015). On ITSS, Fielt et al (2014) enumerated the number of studies on ITSS and noted that studies on ITSS are increasing, an indication that interest is building in this field.

The interests that have been shown so far have closely placed ITSS (being an operation of an organisation) within the general functions of any organisation. The objectives given for having ITSS are not unique to any organisation. Attaining cost savings and operational efficiency has remained an important operational aspect for many organisations (Tomkinson, 2007; Hafizi et al. 2016). These are common objectives to many businesses and so, there is little evidence that there should be implementation of Information Technology resources to support cost savings or efficiency, because other measures can be used to achieve the same objectives. There should be a new aspect to ITSS that organisations should benefit from immensely and not what an organisation can still enjoy without having to share any of its services. This narrow approach to examining ITSS does not create an opportunity to identify areas of common interest that organisations that are partnering can look to or benefit from. On the contrary new challenges that emerge from the external and internal environments of an organisation will continue to arise. Whereas in the UK, Australia, Netherlands, New Zealand and other countries where SS has been on the rise, the global financial crisis was

identified as a significant motivator for SS, this crisis was temporary, raising the need for organisation to carefully consider what really draws them to sharing their IT or indeed other resources (Hafizi et al. 2016).

Several researchers have started to explore the issues of ITSS from the point of view of the users, mainly the workforce (Borman and Janssen, 2012; Soalheira and Timbrell, 2014). Their work highlights the challenges and opportunities that ITSS poses to the workforce (Soalheira and Timbrell, 2014). Several critical success factors of Shared Services have been given by a number of researchers (Tomkinson, 2007; Borman and Janssen, 2012; Miskon et al. 2011). These studies assume that ITSS will benefit an organisation however, among the benefits listed, cost savings and efficiency still appear to be the dominant driving forces (Soalheira and Timbrell, 2014). The benefits to workforce is not, however, viewed as a vital phenomenon as these studies suggest; because sharing also leads to job losses by councils that share their resources (Tomkinson, 2007). At a time when organisations in both the private and public sector seek to operate within a tight budget, cost savings appear to be the key driving force behind collaborative work. However, Janssen and Joha (2006) cautions that SS or ITSS should not be taken as a solution for everything.

The element of costing, however, as an area of business operation can only succeed when there is effective management of other functional areas of the organisation (Stemberger and Jaklic, 2007; Cullen et al. 2014). A strong leadership is necessary for ensuring that ITSS succeeds. This leadership is featured by an ability to take certain actions, but in public sector bodies, their ability is hampered by political and bureaucratic challenges (Pettigrew, 2014). Attention has been drawn to the role of managers in ensuring that they adopt the best management approach that will benefit their organisation through cost reduction and

efficiency, implying that managers play a key role in facilitating tactical and strategic plans in the organisation (Praditya & Janssen, 2015).

The reasons for implementing ITSS has thus started shifting beyond cost reduction and efficiency, and into the realisation that joint ownership of resources tend to lead to long term association (Tomkinson, 2007), which fundamentally call for a management approach that is bordered on other humanistic qualities, thus broadening our understanding about the ‘person<sup>10</sup>’ of the corporate body.

#### **2.4.1 Characteristics of Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS)**

In the course of its operations, an organisation may from time to time seek and utilise the best form of available resource(s) to meet its objectives. The importance of Information Technology as a resource has continually risen to an extent where an organisation that has experience (or lack of it) or sufficient (deficient in) Information Technology resources to its needs, may seek a partner to share with.

The features of Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) can be identified from its operational and implementation basis. On the basis of operation, the following have been described as the main features (Ulrich, 2006; Day and Norris, 2006):

- i. Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) remains an important resource that supports other resources within an organisation.
- ii. ITSS is a process that calls for gradual and incremental use for effectiveness.
- iii. Relies on market competitiveness, thus remains a dynamic resource that must be used to accommodate the needs that arise.

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<sup>10</sup> A corporate body is a legal person, although when human qualities for instance, trust between two or more bodies becomes important, increased understanding about the existence of the corporate body also increased. This cuts across public or private sector bodies.

In terms of implementation, there is very little discussion in literature apart from the industrial level implementation measures that have been presented by organisations (see section 2.8).

#### **2.4.2 Applications of Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS)**

As a process whose usage in an organisation was aimed at attaining efficiency (see section 2.5.1b), Shared Service operations and Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) processes have been studied from the perspective of their use within organisations. Research on Shared Services and consequently ITSS identifies the process of sharing as one that is aimed at ensuring that costs are significantly reduced (Tomkinson, 2007; Ulbrich et al. 2010). The need to reduce cost is driven partly by internal as well as external forces including re-organisation, competition, fiscal measures and supply conditions. This focus however limits the greater view of the reasons for sharing and blinds organisations to the potential of what sharing of IT services can achieve.

Organisations employ ITSS in a number of areas including; Finances, Human Resources, Procurement and Accounting, Resources allocation. These functional activities have been viewed as fundamental to the success of organisations, thus being the drivers behind the choice of ITSS partner within and between organisations (Leach, 2004). The field of ITSS has been covered in disparate measures including; definitions (Van der et al. 2006; Deloitte 2005, Godse, 2012; Janssen et al 2007 and Janssen et al, 2012), forms of IT Shared Services (Tomkinson, 2007; Jacobson, 2011; Whitfield, 2007; Borman, 2010; Kern and Wilcox, 2000 and Kern and Wilcox, 2001; Valle de Souza and Dollery, 2011; Bergeron, 2002) and benefits



of Shared Services (Wagenaar, 2006; Wang, 2007; Brown and Vessey 2003; Ulbrich, 2006; Borman and Janssen, 2012; Yusof et al. 2016).

Other areas that have been identified include; implementation framework of ITSS (Goh et al, 2007; Janssen and Joha, 2006a; Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000; Teece et al. 1997; Borman 2010; Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003; Sia et al. 2008; Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000; Schellong n.d). The opportunity that sharing ITSS may bring that has not been considered by all these studies means that this is an area that should be explored.

## **2.5 Factors to be considered when opting for ITSS**

The operations of any organisation are dictated by factors that might impact on some or all of its strategic objectives (including profitability, service provision, market or industry leadership) and hence continuity in business. As a resource that is required to support the functions of an organisation, sharing of Information Technology is motivated by some of the motives that guide Shared Services. Some of these factors include:

### **2.5.1 Key factors**

#### **2.5.1a Cost Consideration**

One of the most important factor conditions facing an organisation is the question of cost reduction. Organisations in the Private as well as the Public sector tend to identify cost reduction as key to meeting most of their objectives. In examining the motivations for ITSS, it was indicated that the need to cut costs has driven organisations to share resources. Most studies have identified IT and ITSS implementation as crucial if an organisation is to reduce its costs (Tomkinson, 2007; Ulbrich et al. 2010; Miskon et al. 2012; Yusof et al. 2016). Even

in cases where organisations appear to be forced to adopt ITSS, cost reduction was cited as the main driving force (Gershon review 2004; Dollery et al. 2011: 161).

### **2.5.1b Efficiency**

Other than cost factors, efficiency is another reason for opting for ITSS (Janssen 2005; Miskon et al. 2011). Efficiency in operations involves doing things in such a way that the right thing is always done (implying minimal errors). Grainger et al (2009) summed up the need for efficiency by explicating five aspects of failure of efficiency; first, makes the project come to be abandoned before completion, second, leads to failure to meet objectives, third, failure to do things at the right time, fourth, create negative user attitude or interaction failure and lastly, failure to meet the expectations of the stakeholder.

### **2.5.1c Mitigating risks**

With a view to ensure that risks are spread, organisations opt to share their systems in such a way that benefits both. Sharing of systems has been examined in terms of its added benefit, for instance, enhancing capabilities through learning (Janssen & Joha, 2006; Nasir et al. 2011).

Murray et al (2008: pp. 545) stated

*‘A procurement shared service could provide a number of benefits for smaller councils which may be able to justify employing their own procurement professional, of particular interest are the opportunities to provide access to procurement expertise and systems, shared risk, ...’*

Improvement of capabilities informs the need to develop the internal environment of the firm(s) (Tomkinson, 2007). These studies identify the need to balance the needs of one

organisation in terms of its internal environment with those of another in terms of the demands of external environment. Two issues have been raised; first, the environment that an organisation operates and secondly, the situation (processes) of the organisation that have to be enhanced.

### **2.5.1d Innovation**

Development of innovation is easier when there is joint effort which results in pulling of resources. For an organisation that has a technology, a sharing environment or agreement can be a place to deploy new technology (Ulbrich, 2006; Sako, 2010). Where one council has a technology that can benefit another, as has been seen in cases of Lead Organisation, deployment of technology is also a means of earning, integration and better information management between the local authorities (Cooke, 2006).

### **2.5.1e Process Standardisation**

Process standardisation involves streamlining of operations between organisations or within a department in such a way that allows for consistency in operations. It appears that organisations seek to have streamlined operations to provide greater control, which is increasingly becoming a prerequisite for good performance in the industry (Miskon et al. 2010). McIvor et al (2011 pp. 453) noted,

*‘The project team believed there was significant potential to eliminate outdated and idiosyncratic work practices, and achieve significant costs reductions via standardisation of duplicated processes’*

A report by Macfarlane (2012 pp. 21), indicated that;

*Shared Services could be more attractive to some council than outsourcing. One of the reasons for this is that the council can retain more control over the shared service than an outsourced service. If an outsourced service fails, the council has to find a different way of providing the service – either by taking the service back in house – if this is possible – or finding a different provider. Either option is likely to be expensive. Through the level of control and influence a council has over a shared service it can be argued this option provides a level of resilience an outsourced service does not.*

The factors given above provide clear indication that there are issues that are specific to an organisation (organisational issues), issues dictated by the environment (environmental forces) and issues that are supported by Information Technology systems, all play a crucial role in the way an organisation plans its future.

## **2.5.2 Emerging issues (benefits and challenges) of Information Technology Shared Services**

### **2.5.2a Permanency in ITSS in Local Government bodies**

Having identified the factor conditions for sharing Information Technology within and between organisations, the debate on Shared Services, especially the ITSS has gone beyond these factors. It should be noted that recently, the debate is moving from these factors to the benefits of ITSS. The reason for moving from factors to benefits is embedded on increased importance of Information Technology as a resource within an organisation. In fact, Yu and Buvya (2005) appear to suggest that organisations must have IT infrastructure as a key resource, not as an objective to be met. This IT infrastructure as a resource will help organisations reap some benefits. Studies on the benefits of ITSS have largely focused on the practical benefits within organisations (Tomkinson, 2007), economic benefits of cost reduction and resources leveraging (Ulbrich et al. 2010), technical benefits like standardisation, access to technology, improved ICT opportunities (Tomkinson, 2007). Others are process improvement benefits like; removal of duplication, standardisation of

processes (Doherty et al. 2008), strategic and organisational benefits such as Collaboration, professional service delivery, customer focused and lastly political benefits including appeal to the local population and compliance with a government's conditions (Wagenaar, 2006; Ulbrich, 2006; Borman and Janssen, 2012).

The benefits that have been presented above are not independent, they are linked in such a way that fulfilment of one benefit might imply fulfilment of others as well or the starting point of fulfilling the others (Wang, 2007; Brown and Vessey, 2003), except political benefits. Whereas the benefits have been outlined practically, their emergence is not automatic, and Doherty et al. (2008: 85) said, '*...it is unlikely that benefits will simply emerge, as if by magic..*' Doherty et al. (2008) suggests the need for planning and managing these benefits, implying the role of managers in formulating the ways of implementing Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) in their organisations. As the benefits are realised and resources are shared, the organisations involved in the process tend to increase their levels of dependence by increasing their associations to involve other areas of co-operation (McIvor et al. 2011). In Australia, the government provided guidelines to encourage local governments and central government to associate (Bel and Warner, 2015), however, other than the guided need to associate, the existence of conducive and at time adverse factors that can be traced to the organisation, the environment (of the organisation) and the ITSS process often tend to lead to long term association (Tomkinson, 2007).

### **2.5.2b Costs of ITSS to organisations**

So far, the discussion of Shared Services presented in existing literature has failed to show how sharing of services can have negative impacts to an organisation. The parochial view of Shared Services has been a result of political pressure (Sorrentino & Simonetta, 2012), which

was informed by the global financial crisis and its aftermath. Indeed, there are visible benefits that can be attributed to sharing of services in Local Government bodies (see section 1.5). These benefits accrue over time, but there is no guarantee that sharing will always be successful. Preparations have to be made through internal processes including developing workable changes to work culture, but such processes can be the starting point of losing an organisation's autonomy (Sorrentino & Simonetta, 2012). Local Government bodies are independent institutions, although working within the central government, therefore, the fact that their services are homogenous does not imply that their internal processes are or should necessarily be centralised. The question of loss of autonomy is directly linked to not being able to manage internal operations or their own resources exclusively<sup>11</sup> (Powell and DiMaggio, 2012).

The discussion on ITSS that has so far ensued, as practical as it has been, has not gone further to highlight the degree or permanency in association that ITSS is ushering to the organisations involved. Organisations that are joining the ITSS model of operation are increasingly becoming aware that their involvement is increasingly become permanent. As resources are joined up and internal capabilities enhanced in an intertwined way, it is becoming evident that dependency is getting more permanent. The need to examine why this permanency is achieved can be evaluated in terms of identifying why the need for sharing of resources arose in the first place, and whether those needs were achieved? If not, why were they not achieved? And what are the new objectives? All these questions are in line with Braun et al (2010 pp. 3) view who noted, 'benefits have to be evaluated, (ex-ante), realized and evaluated again (ex-post)'. These are issues that have, however, not been studied in depth within the discourse of ITSS.

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<sup>11</sup> See section 4.6.7

## **2.6 ITSS Implementation framework**

Implementation of IS has been a topic under research for many years. Keen (1981) is credited with looking at challenges facing implementation of IS in large organisations that are in the public sector.

During the early 1980s, IS was a growing resource in organisations and during this period, politics and technical challenges were viewed as major obstacles (Walsham, 1993 pp. 215).

What emerges from the discussions by Keen (1981), Markus and Pfeffer (1983), Willcocks and Mark (1989) Walsham (1993) is that there are forces that will often hinder successful implementation of information systems in an organisation. These forces are environmental (Politics, Economic, Social, Technological and Legal), organisational (capabilities and resources) and managerial (persons of authority in organisations).

### **2.6a Role of implementers of IS in an organisation**

The role of IS implementers and the nature of IS implementation remains an issue of importance to researchers over the years. In terms of the role of implementers, studies have identified issues like personal skills (Rivard and Lapointe, 2012), change agents, moral agents who must make ethical choices (Walsham, 1993 pp. 222). On the nature of IS implementation, it has been viewed as coalition building, political tactics, social change and production of new social structures as important factors (Walsham, 1993 pp. 222).

Discussion on IS has, however, moved from the nature of IS, which has remained relatively unchanged over the years (Tornatzky and Klein, 1982; Cooper and Zmud, 1990; Yuen et al, 2003), to who the implementers are and the change process that ensues (Borman and Ulbrich,

2012). Leadership and implementation responsibility have dominated the discourse of implementing IS strategies and resources over the years (Gichoya, 2005; Milis and Mercken, 2002; Wong and Li, 2008; Afshari et al. 2012).

The discussion of leadership and the responsibility of implementers of IS sharing in organisations has however been limited to implementation of IS sharing in one organisation. There have been attempts to explore implementation of IS between public and private sector bodies (Bovaird, 2004; Chong, 2006; Campbell et al. 2010). It should be noted that environmental forces that impact on leadership roles in implementation have increased, thus an important aspect of integration (Pudjianto and Hangjung, 2009). Competition, increased demands and security concerns, have all increased, thus implementation of IS project requires astute planning by those who manage such organisations or projects.

## **2.6b Challenges of implementation**

Where two or more organisations join their resources, two levels of challenges appear, first, existing challenges that have been highlighted in this section, and secondly, personal relationship challenges that are driven by the desire to meet ‘own<sup>12</sup>’ objectives. Two teams that are given the charge to implement a certain technology must agree on a number of things (Gargeya and Brady, 2005), for instance, how to implement the (chosen) technology, the cost, and timelines. Some studies have highlighted factors that are critical for the successful implementation of IT related projects, particularly ERP implementation (Nah and Lau, 2001; Burke et al. 2001). These include Teamwork, communication, project management, top management support (Burke et al. 2001), business plan and vision, project champion,

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<sup>12</sup> By own objectives I imply the objectives of the organisation that the representative represents.



appropriate system, business process and minimum customisation, change management program, effective testing, software development. Other factors have emerged, including organisational readiness and culture change (Gargeya and Brady, 2005).

### **2.6.1 Implementation in local government**

One of the earliest discussions of Information Technology use in local governments can be traced to the work of Kraemer and King (1977). Kraemer and King (1977) indicated that there is need for a reorientation of use and development of technology in two ways; first, use of data processing through integration and standardisation, and secondly aligning computerisation to the processes of management. It was considered necessary to organise information resources of local governments to facilitate management and planning.

A 'Manager's Guide' was given by Kraemer and King to support managers of local government entities in their quest to implement and use Information Technology, but subsequent literature did not really provide much information (Kraemer and King, 1997). Subsequent literature has focused on a 'how to' view which essentially considers problems and how to deal with them (Landsbergen and Wolken, 2001).

Literature on the implementation of Information Technology in local governments that followed were focussed on one issue of technology at a time, for instance, automation, training or cost issues. Although with such singularity in approach, some issues were addressed especially in the 1980s and 1990s literature (Campbell, 1984; Hackney and McBride, 1995; Willcocks, 1994; Heeks, 1999), growth of e-governance of the late yr1990s and the yr2000s saw an increase in studies that touched on a number of factors (cost and training, procurement and market analysis). It is, however, worth noting that gradual growth

of IT usage in local government entities did not change the view of IT infrastructure as was identified by Sjo and Biere “comprehensive management of information systems that provide anything more than assistance to conduct daily business.” (Sjo and Biere, 1981).

The growth of use of IT in the private sector on a strategic scale meant that public sector entities had something to learn from the success of private sector entities. Local Government bodies have, since early 2000 embraced the use of Information Technology for their operations because; they are dictated by politics, environmental forces and internal factors (Friend and Jessop, 2013; Pettigrew, 2014). The realisation that these challenges are enormous has meant that the need for joint acquisition and/or use of Information Technology resources is inevitable. The age of austerity became a defining moment in the nature of association between Local Government bodies.

Politically, Local Government bodies are forced to share their IT resources thus seeking ways of implementing the same. Economically, austerity measures have led to a period of cuts and hence forced sharing of resources (Hadfield, 2006), and internally, the need for efficiency means there is need to use what is necessary and leave what is not. Kris Hopkins, the UK’s minister for local government noted,

*‘Can-do councils are already delivering multibillion-pound savings through embracing the digital age and the efficiencies this new dawn offers to them. But as this report shows they can go much further and town halls should now be tapping into these new opportunities to make the necessary savings to protect...’*

(Policy exchange 2015)

With the need to join forces in sharing Information Technology resources, there are a number of factors to be considered when implementing Information Technology, particularly in the public-sector bodies. Trust and cooperation are crucial during implementation of Information Technology in organisations, denoting the importance of implementers in the process of

implementation (Janssen et al 2007; Janssen and Wagenaar, 2004; Kim and Lee, 2004; Alford and O'Flynn, 2012).

Prior co-operation among Local Councils is an aspect that has been highlighted (Niehaves and Krause, 2010) and which provides a new perspective of Information Technology Shared Services. This is based on the assumption of proximity between the Local Government bodies that are sharing their resources. However, whereas this trust may stem from individuals, it soon becomes embedded into the structures of the organisation. Trust is however, a delicate issue, whether at individual or organisational level, because if it is broken, the result may be dis-association or pulling apart of the entities from each other.

### **2.6.2 Theoretical frameworks**

A number of theoretical frameworks have been proposed, as will be discussed in this section. One of the theories that have been proposed for examining Information Technology Shared Services was Goh et al's Resource Based View (RBV) (Goh et al. 2007). This view denotes that Information Technology Shared Services is a resource that must be planned for, sourced and organised to provide optimal service to the organisation. It must also be within the overall objectives that an organisation seeks to achieve. As a resource, the nature of planning needed must be one that satisfies the strategic or long term needs of the organisation (Janssen and Joha, 2006a).

#### ***2.6.2a Resource based views and Dynamic Capabilities Theory***

In their discussion of Resource Based View, Janseen and Joha (2006a) proposed two theories; IT Governance Theory (ITG) and the Dynamic Capabilities theory (DCT). ITG examines the

kind of structures that should be in place to ensure that sharing of IT services is successful. It places Information Technology Shared Services as a functional service in an organisation. There have, however, been other frameworks and guidelines that have been considered more pragmatic and effective than ITG, for instance the ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) (Smits and Hillegersberg, 2013). On the other hand, DCT suggest the kind of governance that is necessary to ensure that I.T. Shared Services are successfully implemented in a public-sector body (Janssen and Joha, 2006a; Ulbrich et al. 2010). Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) and Teece et al (1997) stated that this ability dictates that an organisation in the public sector must be able to adapt to new demands as they arise from time to time. By doing so, organisations are able to respond to the demands or needs of their most important stakeholders, thus serving them better (Tomkinson, 2007). These two views, although outlining the structures and governance; fail to provide the role and view of humanware in supporting Information Technology Shared Services.

### ***2.6.2b IT Governance Theory***

Another theory is the I.T. Governance theory (ITGT) or IGT that suggests the kind of behaviour that is desirable to enhance better adoption of I.T Shared Services within an organisation (Sia et al. 2008; Weill and Ross, 2004). This theory presupposes that one of the failures of public sector bodies in adoption of IT in general is their inability to adopt new techniques (Sia et al. 2008; Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000). The theory however focuses on ability of the workers to behave in a manner that encourages adoption, such as planning, communication and involvement, not the entire organisation processes, which is the different point from what is suggested by DGT. The practicality of this theory may not be relevant in recent times especially with the emergence of other frameworks that are in use in the UK,

including ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library and ISO 20000 (International Organisation for Standardisation 20000), which provide guidelines that are widely used in the area of IT management.

### ***2.6.2c Resources Dependency Theory***

Another view that has been given is called Resource Dependency Theory (RDT), by Borman (2010). It posits that an organisation in the public sector, particularly in local government, depends on resources from other organisations and external power relations and constraints (Borman, 2010; Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003). This theory suggests that an organisation must create a hierarchy of important objectives to support its choices of partner organisations so that it can share its resources with them (Dollery et al. 2011). This is based on the need to create a strategic fit (Weber and Weber, 2010).

In this study, the shortfalls of this theory are hinged on one of its key assumptions: that organisations seek to acquire resources that will give them control over other organisations and make other organisations dependent on them (Medcof, 2001; Tillquist, 2002). This is not the case in this study, because Local Government bodies do not necessarily compete for leadership in the public sector and are not always seeking to gain control over other local authorities.

### ***2.6.2d Real Options theory and Transaction Cost Economic theory***

Other theories that have been given include the Real Options theory ROT by Su et al. (2009) that provided investment perspective to Information Technology Shared Services, and noted that an organisation must consider its options carefully, and evaluate what might happen should the option chosen fail (Adner, 2007). This theory raises the prospect of failure of

ITSS, urging caution (especially) in public sector organisations, because failure of a public-sector body can have a devastating impact on the private sector as well, and all the citizens. It has however not raised or indicated the role of facilitators or problem solvers in the organisation. Another theory that has taken a financial perspective is the Transaction Cost Economics or TCE theory, it denotes that the choices made by an organisation in seeking to share are governed by the Transaction cost differences; these costs include planning costs, monitoring costs and adaptation costs (Common, 1931; Yee et al. 2009).

Schellong (n.d) noted that enacted ICT is made up of perception, design, implementation and use. This echoes views by Chan et al (1996) who stated that usage of technology depends on user psychology, design process and the quality of the technology. These factors are important in understanding Information Technology Shared Services. The revised framework by Schellong (n.d) involves inclusion of citizens within the framework, but in so doing, this framework presupposes that public-sector bodies are primarily concerned with the views of their citizens, especially when designing their back-office operations like Information Technology Shared Services. This is not always the case, because politics at council level and patronage by central government plays a far greater role in IT implementation especially at the back offices (Finger and Genoud, 2000).

Finger and Genoud (2000 pp. 233) stated

*“...one can anticipate that either administrative reform will be pushing for political reform, thus significantly increasing the power of the administration over politics, or administrative reform will be slowed down, if not stopped, by political foot-dragging.”*

Whereas there are models that have been proposed, a number of frameworks have also been suggested for implementing Shared Services (The Scottish Government 2011; CIO Council 2013). There are other guidelines and strategy documents for implementing Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) (Federal Information Technology Strategy, 2012; Nagy and Larsen, n.d; Wilson and Howard, 2006).

### **2.6.2e Summary of the frameworks**

These frameworks identify the challenges that managers and implementers expect to face in implementing Shared Services in their organisations. All these guidelines identify implementation time, low morale, Information Technology system issues, and expertise as some of the main challenges that must be tackled if sharing of resources is to be successful. There is, however, no academic literature that proposes a guideline for implementing ITSS in local government organisations. In their paper on *Technological Frames: making sense of Information Technology in organisations*, Orlikowski and Gash (1994) highlighted the factors that dictate how technology is understood. In that article, the authors noted that assumptions that people make about technology usage can determine their attitude towards technology. This has bearing to the question of implementation of Information Technology being discussed in this section, but does not highlight the case where two entities are associating.

### **2.7 Technology, Organisation, Environment (TOE) context**

According to Lin and Wu (2014) there are many theories used in information system research. The interest of this literature review is the theories or frameworks about how technology is implemented in an organisation. The frameworks that have been presented in the previous section of this research provide an insight into the factors that lead organisations to seek to use certain technology(ies). The frameworks given in the previous section however do not provide a holistic view of the factor conditions that emanate from within and outside the organisation and which influence how technology usage is understood within the context of these environments.

Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990) proposed the TOE framework that explains the entire process of adoption and implementation of innovation by a firm, as a framework that assumes the generic factors to predict the likelihood of E-Commerce adoption. Theories that have been propounded with regards to technology usage often underscore the existence of factor conditions that motivate such uses. There are several factors (Technological, Environmental, Organisational) that can force managers of an organisation to consider the use of one technology as opposed to another (Kauffman and Walden, 2001; Chatterjee et al. 2002; Kowtha and Choon, 2001). This is because the needs of one organisation may not necessarily be those of another organisation, thus necessitating needed analysis with the view to identify key priority needs that must be responded to (Jeyaraj et al. 2006; Sabherwal et al. 2006). The theoretical frameworks given in the previous section are focussed on individual aspects that influence implementation or use of technology in organisations.

The TOE framework however draws into perspective key aspects of Technology, Organisation and Environmental forces and influences of these aspects in determining how Information Technology is used in organisations. Nkhoma et al (2013) have used TOE to showcase how it has become crucial in providing a holistic view of organisational forces that influence the management of technology. Picoto et al (2014) have also employed TOE framework to identify factor conditions influencing M-business adoption by organisations. Lippert and Govindarajulu, (2015) have also used TOE to examine adoption of web services in an organisation. In this study, TOE framework provides a way of examining the factor conditions that influence Information Technology Sharing among Local Government bodies, through the perspective of those who are responsible for managing processes and activities of sharing of services (and specifically sharing of Information Technology resources).



According to Kauffman & Walden (2001), the TOE framework affirms that technology adoption is driven by the development of technology, conditions of the organisation, organisational reconfiguration and business issues (Chatterjee et al. 2002), and the environment of the industry (Kowtha and Choon, 2001). The pool of technology in and outside the organisation plays a crucial role in the adoption together with perceived benefits of the technology when applied (gains), compatibility, trialability, complexity and observability. The context of the organisation gives the firm's business scope, top leadership support, culture of the organisation, sophistication of the structure of the organisation in terms of centralisation, vertical differentiation and formalisation, the human resource quality, and the internal issues like organisational resources (Jeyaraj et al. 2006; Sabherwal et al. 2006; Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990).

Existing literature on TOE has examined factor conditions of Technology, Organisation and Environment separately; however, since these factors relate to one entity, a link could be established. Organisational factors include intra-firm communication, culture, employee type, Technological factors include; kind of technology, automation level, trending technology and Environmental factors include; competition in the industry, politics, investment level (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990). The TOE factors that surround an organisation are dynamic and an organisation must be able to adapt to these factors if it is to remain in the industry and meet its objectives.

TOE framework has, by distinctly proposing the TOE factors, provided a way of examining the internal and external environment that an organisation operates in. There were, however, earlier studies that identified firm structure to innovation (Daft and Becker, 1978; Burns and Stalker, 1961), because such firms have some level of cohesiveness among employees and (with) improved communication channels as well. The role of the management is, however,

being seen as pivoting in supporting use of technology within an organisation (Tushman and Nadler, 1986). The TOE framework has thus been found to identify these factors and propose ways of linking systems and processes within and between organisations (Thong 1999; Mishra et al. 2007; Zhu et al. 2003; Ramdani, 2009).

Although the factors that define TOE are many, researchers have preferred different factors to explain the concept, the motivators or/and the inhibitors of technological innovation and implementation. There is a consensus that the three broad categories of TOE exist as stipulated by Tornatzky & Fleischer's (1990) TOE model. TOE model has however remained static in the sense that it has highlighted factor conditions but not proposed anything else; in fact, it was Zhu et al (2004) who have indicated that the existence of these factor conditions must provide the quest for technology readiness. In order to prepare an organisation for technology adoption or implementation, managers must provide effective leadership through planning, team organisation and skills development (Zhu and Kraemer, 2005; Mishra et al. 2007).

TOE framework, although proposed in 1990, has had little changes in its proposition since that time because its formulation makes it a generic framework (Zhu and Kraemer, 2005), from which other frameworks or theories can be developed. The three main factors that have been discussed in TOE framework have been expanded to formulate other frameworks, for instance Roger's Diffusion of Innovation (Rogers, 1995), Electronic Data Interchange by Iacovou et al (1995) and the Perceived E-Readiness Model by Molla and Licker (2005a, 2005b). The framework has also provided firm proof that in the quest to adopt technology, these factors may not necessarily have fundamental change, in contrast it is the way an organisation approaches any of them that can benefit or cost an organisation. By making this categorisation, it can be said that some factors can impact an organisation's quest to share IT resource positively, while others can impact negatively (see the table below):

The table given below helps to understand this:

**Table 2.1 Factors and cost / benefit factors of TOE**

<b>Aspects of TOE</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Costs or benefits</b>
Technological	-System used in the organisation -Need for efficiency and accuracy	- Obsolete technology - Standardisation of processes and activities - Quickens processes
Organisational	-Processes used by workers -Skills of the workforce -Leadership style -Financial position	-Lack of skills in the organisation -Poor financial position
Environment	-Political demands -Customer taste and preferences -Competition in the industry	-Stiff competition in the industry -Many demands by stakeholders

Most studies that have highlighted various strands of TOE have focussed on one or another variable using empirical or case studies to showcase how the variable has been important for the organisation (Lee and Shim, 2007; Zhu and Kraemer, 2005). It should also be noted that TOE framework examines technology adoption and implementation within an organisation. Baker (2012) suggested that inter-organisational implementation of technology poses important challenges, for instance, the need for collective planning (Spencer et al. 2013) in order to find out who has the biggest responsibility in the process determining how

technology is implemented. The next section outlines some of the views that are drawn from the industry on implementation of ITSS in organisations.

## **2.8 Industrial Perspectives**

The views given above are drawn from the academic realm; there are other views from within industry. Wilson and Howard (2006) and Nagy and Larsen (n.d), of Deloitte, expresses industry level implementation processes from a private sector point of view. The views given by Wilson and Howard (2006) and Nagy and Larsen (n.d) are however, a presentation that has no explanation, and are shown in the following stages:

- I. Opportunity (Business drivers, sourcing strategies, designing).
- II. Strategy and feasibility (create baselines, agree task split, leadership, organisational structure, road map.
- III. Design (organisations design, process frame, site selection, communication.
- IV. Build and implement (detailed process, process documentation, training, people plan, testing.
- V. Transition (going live, knowledge transfer, managing transition, post go live.

The stages given above are suggested for general Shared Services and not Information Technology Shared Services implementation by organisations in the consultancy industry. These views are important but they fail to highlight how to implement Information Technology Shared Services. There is however a guideline by the Australian local government association that has given a framework for implementing Shared Services in local authorities, to achieve greater efficiency in their operations (LGA 2016).

The implementation framework includes:

- I. Resourcing (secure funding, assign project officers)

- II. Project direction (establish program's sustainability)
- III. Project guidance (establish reference group, priorities services opportunities)
- IV. Council engagement (call council expression of interests for case studies, establish shared service network among councils)
- V. Financial estimates (establish methodology for cost estimation, establish methodology for estimating savings)
- VI. Evaluation (develop indicators for successful implementation)

The framework given by the UK Local Government Association (LGA) focuses on cost savings, an assumption that the Shared Services process is purely for cost savings or at least cost savings is the main motivator. In the literature presented, it has been seen that there are other motivations for Shared Services, cost savings being one of them. The views presented by these authors are however vital in providing insights into how Information Technology Shared Services can be implemented by examining the internal measures that are put in place between two public sector organisations. There are several guiding questions that are hinged on academic research and which form a vital scope of this study, these include;

- I. Is sharing taking place at department level or at organisational level and why is this relevant? (Quinn et al. 2000; Shulman et al. 1999; Schulz et al. 2009).
- II. How is sharing organised, is it centralised or decentralised and which form is best? (Frigbie, 2013).
- III. What are the key reasons for sharing, and core factors of success that determines sharing partnership? (Fielt et al. 2014).
- IV. In what ways do sharing arrangements inculcate a new way of working among backroom operations of the councils (this relates to organisation's work culture)? Or

how are new sharing arrangements impacting on teams and teamwork in the organisation? (Urithirapathy, 2011).

- V. Is cost of sharing important, and how do you gauge that this process is cost effective? (Olsen, 2012).

The studies given above raise the need to examine two questions; first, the issue of management planning in implementing technological changes in an organisation (based on internal and external environments of an organisation) and second, on how such plans impacts how technology is implemented. Many a study has identified the need for cost reduction, access to expert knowledge and efficiency as key determinants of good management practice in organisations that are involved in sharing their resources (Tomkinson, 2007 pp. 33; Becker et al. 2009; Alfoord & O'Flynn, 2012 pp. 87, Sako 2010, Scanner and Bannister, 2012). In implementing Information Technology sharing in local governments, there are a number of factors that appear to affect the process. These factors can be identified as factors that are within and outside the control of the organisations involved in this sharing arrangement. There is need to explore these factors (environments) with the view to deduce an understanding of the same with regards to Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS).

## **2.9 Role of Managers of Local Councils in the process**

Having identified the fact that for ITSS to succeed, it should overcome a number of obstacles, the role of managers of local authorities is crucial in making ITSS take place among Local Government bodies.

One of the main duties of any manager or leader in an organisation (private or public), is to provide direction to the organisation. For instance, the managers will ensure that there is

‘organisation’, where workforce and other resources are arranged in such a way that the work that is to be done is done in best possible way (Drucker, 2010; Mintzberg, 2008; Simon, 1997; Bazerman and Moore, 2012). The activities of the managers will be considered to have been successful if the organisations they formulated (of resources), results in profits or achieving intended objectives for their entities. Such organisation (of resources) will normally be done within specific constraints of Time, Politics, Finance and Information (Dillion et al. 2010). Success thereof can be gauged by the outcome of such actions (Pettigrew 2014). In the cases of Shared Services in general and ITSS in specific, that have been examined, the role of managers relates to choosing ‘who’ (which entity) to share with, how to share, and what extent has to be shared (Drucker 2009). In some examples, when the shared opportunities are not successful, managers have had to opt to pull out of the process (Cram 2012). This is a point of failure that has been caused by ‘the paradox of negative experience<sup>13</sup>’ (Louis 1980; Griffith & Northcraft 1996).

Recently, however, the role of managers is increasingly becoming hard to define because most organisations use or rely on Information Technology for their operations. Managers are no longer sitting behind desks and issuing directives or organising resources, they are expected to understand how the resources are working, can participate in operational activities and solve problems as and when they arise (Cordella and Tempini 2015). Gatenby et al (2015) identified three roles of managers of public sector bodies; government agent, diplomat administrator and ‘less convincingly, entrepreneurial leader’. Other studies have provided different perspective to the role of managers by highlighting that in the era of Information Technology, managers provide oversight of the organisation(s) by understanding the operations of information infrastructure that an organisation has (Cordella and Tempini 2015).

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<sup>13</sup> This implies that past experiences can hinder the desire to engage in new processes or projects because there is fear that failure will result again.

It is worth noting that whereas in the private sector, there may be changes to circumstances and such dynamics provides that managers should understand and take part in many activities taking place in their organisations (Sturdy et al. 2016), the public sector tends to remain bureaucratic (Gatenby et al. 2015; Hafizi et al. 2016). Gatenby et al (2015) suggested that in the public sector, roles are pre-defined and since the activities of civil servants may affect or be affected by political dynamics, hesitation to work across job roles tends to be high.

## **2.10 Managing Technological, Organisational and Environmental factors in local governments**

All organisations, both in private and public sector must operate within existing or emerging technological, organisational and environmental factors (Cordella and Tempini 2015). Some of these factors will be internal while others will be external to the functions of the entity in question. Many studies have highlighted the need for individual organisations to identify these factors (Tomkinson, 2007; Cordella and Tempini 2015). It should suffice to know that depending on the industry where an organisation operates, the magnitude of the effects of one, two or all the factors (Technological, Organisational and Environmental) may differ. Factors like politics, which are part of the environmental factors may however affect all organisations in all industries and are, as such, factors that managers must plan to mitigate-against through anticipation<sup>14</sup>.

Those who manage Local Government bodies may need to understand the implications of politics to their operations and be able to prioritise other factors in such a way that the focus of their managerial operations can be channelled towards being able to avoid negative effects of these factors. The discussion that has examined the factors of TOE (Zhu et al. 2003;

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<sup>14</sup> Anticipation here refers to being able to consider the political environment as it changes and make necessary adjustments to their operations accordingly.



Ramdani, 2009; Wan and Ali, 2013), are all placed on the assumption that the effects are negative. The debate has not provided extensive focus on positive impacts of these factors, and this biased focus has meant that exploring the importance of the TOE factors has remained relatively limited. A quest to understand the positive aspects of TOE factors can be drawn from the discussion on examining the importance of setting and understanding the Critical Success Factors (CSFs) of an organisation. Other views highlight the importance of developing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that an organisation must pursue.

Organisations in the public sector may have relatively standardised CSFs. The Central government provides the guidelines for other government bodies to follow, and in the case of Local Councils, government policies are always passed down to Local Councils alongside budgetary allocations (Janssen et al. 2012).

The factors that have been examined by many studies on TOE framework have mainly been categorised into three: Technological, Organisational and Environmental, a fourth dimension was introduced by Thong (1999). Thong (1999) and later Kuan and Chau (2001) introduced the role of managers in managing implementation of technology by examining factors that exist and which might impact on the ability of their organisations to implement intended technology.

Studies that followed Thong (1999) and Kuan and Chau (2001) tended to remove entities, managers and owners from the organisational factors of TOE (Seyal and Rahman 2003; Wan and Ali 2013). By creating a different factor for managers or owners or organisations, these studies have, however, taken a different approach of not considering ownership as part of the internal processes of an organisation. The position of managers of organisations in the public sector is that they are part of the organisational processes of these bodies. The Chief Executive Officers and departmental heads of Local Government bodies are part and parcel of these organisations (L.G.A. 2016), and as such remain part of the internal composition of

the local government body that they work for. To this extent, the original TOE framework remains relevant because it is without the need for adding additional dimension(s). What remains unclear is the importance of prioritisation of factor conditions in such a way that an alignment of factors leads to harmonisation of paths to meeting certain key objectives, especially where two or more entities (Local Government bodies) are to implement an IT resource (or IT resources) jointly.

The fact that Local Councils receive major policy objectives and guidelines from the central government may mean that the Local Councils have relatively common objectives (Janssen et al. 2012); however, execution of these objectives may differentiate the internal management and organisation of one local government entity from another. This is largely due to the geographical location of the local government entity, because geographical location may also determine the number of residents to be served by the local authority, jobs, finances and other resources (L.G.A. 2016). A key factor that brings the difference in the organisation and internal operations of a Local Council is the policies of the political party that runs the Local Council. It can be said therefore, that politics and policies of the government, coupled with resource allocations are a key factor in determining how Local Government bodies are managed.

When managers of local governments consider how to share Information Technology resources, they have to identify the factors that can make their individual entities operate jointly (Tomkinson, 2007). To this extent, a resources based view as was highlighted in section 2.6.2a, identifying the resources that can facilitate the operations of an entity is crucial. When organisations join their resources, they have to consider their motives and ability to benefit from joining of their resources. The managers of local authorities therefore seek to identify their partner organisations through proximity, needs of their councils and the ability of the new Information Technology resources to meet specific need(s) that they have.

For two or more entities to be able to work together there has to be trust that must cut across the factors of Technology, Environment and Organisation, and this leads to emergence of long term association that is operationalised by Information Technology resources that links two or more organisations.

## **2.11 Analysis**

Studies on ITSS have grown from studies and practical approaches to Shared Services. The underlying principle of sharing of resources dictated organisations to consider sharing in order to overcome challenges of costs and inefficiency. For a long time, discussion on Shared Services limited itself to how sharing meets these objectives (Ulrich, 2006). Analysis that has been done by some researchers on the question of Shared Services has found that there has been no development in discourse in the field of Shared Services. Preoccupation with economic crisis as a factor necessitating Shared Services (see section 2.5) (Ulrich, 1995; Prickett, 2007; Gershon report 2004) portrays an area of potential further study.

Economic crisis is an economic issue that is external to an organisation, there are other factors beyond economic issues, therefore greater understanding of or development of understanding of sharing of resources need to move beyond looking at it as a reactive measure to certain challenges.

Tomkinson and Ulrich have provided major contributions to the understanding of Shared Services, their studies have, however, not moved an inch from the practical cause - effect issues of the same (Tomkinson, 2007; Ulrich, 2006). Academic research in the field of Shared Services thus remains scanty because the path taken has focussed on the path to providing practical solutions (Wilson and Howard, 2006 and Nagy and Larsen, n.d). Being

that this study focuses on Local Government bodies, which are political administrative bodies (Tomkinson, 2007), the influence of politics on the way these bodies are run is anticipated. This brings to fore the importance of factors relating to the management that is occasioned when there is an introduction of Information Technology resource or capability in Local Government bodies during the period when political and economic environments are dynamic.

There are no studies that identify or look at the question of Shared Services within the prism of the roles played by managers of Local Government bodies and how their actions tend to create organisations that become increasingly dependent on each other. It is clear that Shared Services (involving two or more entities) calls for a collective approach to management.

Local Government bodies have such managers in the name of councillors who are politically elected and heads of various departments who are selected based on predetermined criteria.

These entities become important if information about what they do is to be sought. Ramphal (2013) and Bondarouk and Friebe (2014), have attempted to highlight the role of managers where partnerships (of organisations) are taking place, focusing on general management practices.

The literature has not highlighted how permanence of association among Local Councils is achieved through sharing of Information Technology resources (see section 2.5.2). Studies by Campbell (1984); Hackney and McBride, (1995); Willcocks, (1994) Heeks, (1999) (see section 2.6.1) on e-governance did not provide much that can be relied on regarding ICT governance, vis-a-vis the roles and actions of Local Council executives. There is also deficiency in literature about how managers consider a number of constraints from their ‘own<sup>15</sup>’ organisational points of interest and then form a collective point of interest when

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<sup>15</sup> Referring to the organisations that they represent, managers must first take into account the interests of their own organisations or departments, and then consider the interest of the groups they are sharing with. In this case they have to consider a number of factors not as disparate factors but as joint factors.

considering the entity to share their resources with. This is occasioned by existing literature that examines the causal factors of Technological, Organisational and Environmental forces disparately.

The table below shows the diverse literature on each of these factor conditions;

**Table 2.2 Existing TOE literature**

<b>Technology factors</b>	<b>Organisational factors</b>	<b>Environmental factors</b>
Bel and Warner 2015	Alfoord & O’Flynn 2012	Cram 2012
Davis 1986, Davis 1989,	Common 1931,	Dillon, et al. 2010
Davis et al. 1989	Day and Norris, 2006,	Drucker 2009
Kauffman & Walden 2001,	Sorrentino & Simonetta, 2012	Pettigrew 2014
Orlikowski and Gash 1993,	Sako 2010,	Tomkinson, 2007,
Finger and Genoud 2000,	Scanner and Bannister 2012,	Borman 2010:
Adner 2007,	Tomkinson, 2007,	Pfeffer and Salancik 2003
Kauffman and Walden	Ulrich, 2006,	
2001; Chatterjee et al 2002;	Yee et al 2009,	
Kowtha and Choon, 2001		
Rogers 1995,		
Sjo and Biere 1981,		
Tomkinson, 2007,		
Ulbrich, et al 2010,		
Venkatesha et al. 2003		
Lin and Wu 2014		

## **2.12 Chapter Conclusion**

On the basis of the discussion that has been presented in this chapter, a number of issues have arisen. First, existing literature appreciates the challenges of implementing Information Technology sharing as a service. Different environments that affect the ability of Council executives and officials to carry out the process of ITSS exist. Environments that can be categorised as Technological, Organisation and Environmental; all play a key role in influencing policy formulation in Local Government bodies. Managers must organise their teams to be able to engage with other entities (local authorities) effectively. Technology implementation depends on how teams can work together, and therefore identifying the needs of the teams is crucial. An examination of the role of managers and organising resources with the view to share while overcoming challenges of the environment is very crucial.

The limitations that have been identified with regards to Shared Services highlight the need to examine the external forces that affect ITSS. These forces relate to organisation forces, political forces and technological forces.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.0 Introduction

In this study, my epistemological base is hinged on interpretive research, where, as a researcher, there is no assumption that every aspect of ITSS is termed as a phenomenon that can be observed, and that some of the meanings that are subjective can give a sense of know how that is acceptable (Saunders 2009, pp. 119). It is imperative that an understanding of human behaviour is set out from the research questions that I proposed, and there must also be the clear recognition of the actions of human beings in a dynamic social setting.

According to Fisher (2007 pp. 21), human behaviour can be Gnostic, emphasises plurality, relativism and complexity. In this study, my ontological view is based on the premise that it is difficult to have a preconception of the future of ITSS, and hence it is vital to conduct an exploration of the perceptions and actions of the social actors, their relationship with situational social construction, make a clear understanding about the impacts of ITSS implementation in UK. Local Government bodies. It must be noted, however, that the phenomenon that has been adopted here is based on certain actions and meanings and due to this, they are then subjective to issues of what Saunders et al (2009, pp. 111) called social phenomenon, different points of understanding, and different meanings (Saunders, 2003; Yin, 2009; Yin, 2010).

### 3.1 Ontology:

Ontology is about the exploration of the nature of reality or life orientation, and in this research, it involves asking; *what does it mean to be a person?* Epistemology is a philosophical question of *how do we know what we know?* Methodology: This is the theoretical framework or a philosophical framework and assumptions that underpin that

framework. According to Grondin (1995) and Lavery (2003), Ontology makes our interpretations be part of our cultural self-understanding, by helping us to locate ourselves historically and culturally, and hence be in a position to articulate others from our positions. Lavery (2003) stated that it is important for us to know ourselves or what enables us to create sense out of the data items that we have gathered, and to identify the framework for interpretation that we need for our inquiry. It is therefore important that I clearly understand my position about the nature of reality in this study.

Reality constitutes many perspectives; one way is the teaching that is often given to us of looking at the world from a detached perspective and viewing ourselves as others are viewing us (Crotty, 1998). Reality can be viewed as self-existent and detached from us. To understand a phenomenon, therefore, an objective position can be taken to involve the Cartesian body-mind split or the objective and subjective dualism (Grondin, 1995; Moules, 2002; McDonough and McDonough, 1997). According to Descartes (Dul and Hak, 2008) and other philosophers who came after him, human beings only exist in a world full of objectives. However, Husserl gave a subjective view in which phenomena exists through conscious structures (Tellies, 1997), hence any inquirer taking Husserlian phenomenology is always focused on human experience.

The second position is where the inquirer is not in or out, but the inquirer is in their culture which is in them (Ghauri et al. 1995). This implies that there is no two-sided view of a phenomenon. This second view states that as we live in the world we live in; therefore, we are the world (Russell and Kelly, 2002). This is the position taken by Heidegger and Gadamer, which is a hermeneutical position (Russell and Kelly, 2002). This makes the researcher to have a starting point (prejudice), when thinking about the world.



Being guided by Gadamer's views, therefore as an inquirer, it was crucial that I engage myself fully in the process through an understanding of what is real to me and important in my life, hence, this sense of reality is what sets me as a human being in the world (Yin, 2009; George and Bennett, 2005). This meant that as the respondents are asked questions, their answers become the construction of reality (Russell and Kelly, 2002). Guba and Lincoln (1994) stated that reality is discovered through a compromise of information between participants, especially when they are in discussion. While this is a valid claim, it cannot satisfy the parameters for which my research is framed. This is because my method of inquiry involved seeking identified respondents and taking their views as real and logical because they are working in the 'field' and what they are saying in relation to the questions are their experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Truth therefore relates to the construction that is sophisticated and informed, and which gives rise to consensus (Russell and Kelly, 2002).

### **3.2 Epistemology: what is knowledge?**

According to Ghauri et al (1995), true knowledge separates meaning from being. It incorporates culture and nature, purpose and reason, ends and means, objective and subjective, and lastly, intellect and sensibility. An observer should be able to make the phenomenon be exteriorized (Crotty, 1998), in what is known as the object – subject dualism. In my research, my belief is that there exists no timeless truth that is independent of any scientific examinations.

In this research, I sought to examine the factors that can influence how managers of Local Government bodies manage sharing of IT resources. Therefore, the phenomenon is extremely complex because understanding the phenomenon requires clear understanding of all the underlying forces. It is important to get the views of the respondents by seeking clarifications and using personal assumptions about their roles and views in the process. While in my

research I have gathered ideas from the respondents, I am aware that I cannot get into the mind of the respondent and consequently, I cannot fully comprehend what has happened as the participation has it in its original format. None the less, I can also not dissociate myself from historical issues because it is through these that I understand what is happening around me (Russell and Kelly, 2002). I as both an inquirer and the participant share a few common aspects, for instance the world, the language and the culture. This therefore gives rise to 'Fusion of horizons' (Russell and Kelly, 2002).

By engaging the participants in interviews, through a common language and context, I am able to understand the meaning as it emerges from texts and dialogue and context. This gives rise to hermeneutical conversation (Russell and Kelly, 2002). This interaction with the participation is the link between the horizon of the respondent and me as an inquirer. As I interact with the participants, I then get to understand their position as respondents and through this dialogue, written information on selected literature articles and sources and what I listen to from some media, I can ask key questions;

- What is all this leading to?
- What should I make of it?

Interpretation of data that has been given involves seeking to examine what was said which I believed was true and to make sense of it. At this point, we draw into being the research question that we had in chapter 1 to lay meaning to and emphasis to the two terms given above.

### **3.3 The Research Framework**

It must be noted that due to the existence of a limited amount of literature given to address this concept, this study mainly uses a multiple case study approach (Yin 1981; Firestone 1983; Benbasat et al. 1987; Straus and Corbin, 1990; Saunders, 2003; Yin, 2009) Two key

ways that have been employed all along by researchers in their methodology, is the use of the Research ‘Onion’ by Saunders et al (2003; 2006) and Sexton Research Model (2007-1) (Danwood and Underwood, 2010), which has been explained below; this was developed by Saunders and it provides the stage-wise process of conducting a research. In this section, we examine all these stages in an attempt to explore the position of the current study.

### **3.3.1 Research Philosophy**

In seeking to examine the importance of research philosophy in any research, Smith (1998) says;

*‘...The uncomplicated style and innocent way of questioning, which produces confusion and instability in our assumptions and ideas about the world that makes the study of philosophy of special benefit’.*

An important aspect that a researcher must consider when conducting the study is to understand the aim, research questions and the methods that have to be used in the course of the researcher (Proctor, 1998). Alongside the three factors given above, the rationale for conducting a study should ideally be based on researcher’s own philosophy and the philosophy that underpins the research (Proctor, 1998). It is for this reason that it is crucial that we examine the research philosophy of this study, by focusing on two extreme research philosophies: Positivism and Post Positivism.

#### **3.3.1a Positivism**

According to Smith (1998), positivists assume the possibility of examining ‘hard facts and emerging relationship between these facts’ through existing scientific laws. Therefore, scientific laws that are used are factual and truth based. Since these laws are factual, they can also be used to study social phenomena. Positivism posits that there is an objective reality

that is in existence and which is totally separable and independent of human action and independent of the mind of mankind. Logical positivists emphasise the induction, verification and establishment of law (Bond, 1993).

Positivism possesses a number of implications including; Value freedom, causality, Methodological, Operationalization, Reductionism and Independence (Bond, 1993; Esterby – Smith et al. 1997; Hughes, 1994).

### **3.3.1b Post Positivism philosophy**

The main idea propagated by post positivists is that reality is the creation of those who take part in a research study. It places the central focus of the study on human participants who influence the outcome of the research study. In order to gain understanding of a certain phenomenon, therefore, there is need to explain the social aspects of the study by explaining the role played by human beings in the process. In this study, post positivism or interpretivism seeks to examine the ideas behind certain phenomena having been used. It was vital to seek to interpret the outcomes of this study from the perspectives of the respondents and to show how the views of these respondents map within the scope of our study.

### **3.4 Types of data**

There are two main kinds of data that the researcher might seek in research: Quantitative and Qualitative (Saunders et al. 2003). The type of data sought remains a crucial tool for the research and therefore, it is the onus of the researcher to carefully examine the research questions and objectives in order to be able to determine the kind of data to be sought and hence the method of analysis to be employed (Saunders et al. 2003).

### 3.4.1 Quantitative vs. Qualitative data

Quantitative data seeks factors that can be measured in discrete terms (Saunders et al 2003). These are normally given in terms of numbers for instance kilogram, kilometre, mile, height, and age. On the other hand, Qualitative data seeks to provide categorical measures; which do not appear in terms of numbers by like language (Clarke, 1998; Polit et al. 2001).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005 pp. 3) have stated;

*Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.*

A simpler definition was given by Nkwi et al (2001 pp. 1), who noted that;

*‘Qualitative research involves any research that uses data that does not indicate ordinal values’*

In this study, qualitative data was collected and analysed. Getting such views required collection of data from their experiences and work. The respondents were then allowed to give their points of view void of any limitations.

### 3.5 Reliability, Validity, Bias and Limitations

#### 3.5.1 Reliability in Qualitative research

Reliability is commonly used in evaluating quantitative research but the idea can be employed in qualitative study as well. Eisner (1991: pp. 58) noted that a good qualitative study helps us to ‘understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing’. To gauge how good a research is, reliability must be assessed, because through reliability, understanding is created. The term has been found to be confusing when used in the context of qualitative research (Stenbacka, 2001) and qualitative researchers are warned that they have to demonstrate great concern for reliability and validity when designing, analysing and judging the quality of research (Patton 1990; Patton, 2002).

It relates to how ‘a researcher can persuade his/her audience that the findings of the study are worth paying attention to?’ (Lincoln and Guba 1985 pp. 290). However, Healy and Perry (2002) noted that each study must be governed by its own paradigm’s terms. In qualitative research the terms reliability and validity have been replaced by other terms like Credibility, Neutrality, Consistency, Dependability and Transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). While Seale (1999) and Lincoln & Guba (1985) support the use of reliability in qualitative study, Stenbacka (2001) said that it should not since it corresponds to the issue of measurement.

Joppe (Stenbacka, 2001) defines reliability as:

*‘...The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable*

In qualitative study, the researcher must show that somehow the responses are similar.

However, this is difficult to do in qualitative study since the measures may not be required or

used (Walsh, 2003). The need to ask the right question is the start of meeting the test of reliability (Walsh, 2003). In this study, there were a number of things that had to be clarified;

- I. The reasons for conducting semi structured interviews and follow-up interviews
- II. The need to examine council reports, strategies and website information to understand what they were doing in terms of sharing their IT services

### **3.5.2 Validity in Qualitative research**

This concept examines issues of qualifying the checks used in the research (Winter, 2001), and mainly depends on the perception of the researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Other terms that have been used to examine this concept include trustworthiness, quality and rigor of the researcher (Mishler, 2000). Validity can be viewed into two ways; internal and external (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Internal validity relates to the truth found within the research, while external validity exists when generalisation can be done in a sample to a big or other unrelated study.

In this research, internal validity existed where that the assumption exists that the actions of the management of local authorities are geared towards achieving certain objectives. One of the objectives is the provision of better services to local residents. For this reason, it was considered vital to collect data using primary methods, thus the decision to visit local authorities in the UK was informed by this premise, and data was collected in England, Scotland and Wales. There was need to identify local authorities and to gather information from them. In order to do this, two approaches were chosen:

- I. In considering the issues of Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS), it was important to find Local Councils that are engaged in this arrangement. This meant

searching on the internet and reading news articles then once these authorities are identified, the next stage was to plan to visit them.

- II. There was need to examine the reasons behind sharing of Services and infrastructure by Local Government bodies through an examination of the policies of the UK's central government.

In terms of examining external validity, three key processes were considered;

- I. Selection: Only Local Government bodies were to be examined and they formed the scope of this research.
- II. Setting: Local Government bodies being examined were those in the UK alone (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). While literature was drawn from other situations for instance, cases in New Zealand, Australia and the USA, these sample populations were drawn solely from UK Local Government bodies (parishes, councils and boroughs). The idea was to gather data from as many Local Authorities as possible, until the point of saturation, where data recurrence was seen.
- III. History: It was necessary to consider what a change in circumstances might mean for the findings. In this research, it has been suggested that the future might dictate a different kind of sharing, or of association among Local Government bodies, the question then is, will the findings of this study be relevant at that time? The approach taken to deal with this situation was to ensure that the analysis that is proposed for this study can be applied in the future and that the unit of analysis (UoA) is clearly defined.

Having gone through these processes, the process of identifying and verifying the codes was done using Nvivo, qualitative analysis software. Nvivo has been used by researcher to create themes and identify codes and patterns that arise from their data and hence be able to



explicate the outcomes of field studies. This software collects the data and organises them in such a way as to provide the researcher with key fields within the scope of a study.

### **3.5.3 Bias**

Bias has been described as the Unknown or Unacknowledged error during the design, measurement, sampling, procedure or the choice of problem studied (Patton 2001). Bias is helpful to the extent of allowing the researcher to focus on what is relevant for the research and not 'all' about something. Thus, it allows for refined scope, making the research relevant to key questions (Saunders, 2003).

In this study, there were five issues that could be termed as biases and which guided the process of data management (collection and analysis). These include:

- I. Only Local Government bodies that share their IT resources were considered. It was found that Shared Services being a government policy that was passed down to local governments. Therefore, the policy was widely practiced, thus all authorities that were contacted engaged in the process of sharing an aspect or many of their IT resources.
- II. Consideration was given to respondents who hold positions of responsibility within their local authorities for instance, councilors or those who are charged with the task of implementing or explaining policies (in some cases official spokespersons were the point of contact, because their role was to explain what the council is doing, but their role was limited to information passage). The official spokespersons were viewed as people who are able to answer questions by virtue of their positions, hence likelihood of having or gaining access to more information as the organisation would like them to pass across, especially on implementation of policies (Sanders and Canel, 2013 pp. 269). It should, however, be noted that official spokespersons were sought when the

researcher was directed to them, but were not the first choice of contact for the respondent.

- III. It was important to consider any local authority thus all had equal chance of being included in the research. While the UK is made up of four countries (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales), major policies are made in Westminster that affect all the countries. To this extent, government bodies have the same functions in all the four countries, thus countries were not the main points of biases. In this study, the Local Councils that were studied by country have been given in section 4.4.
- IV. The questions that were asked to all the respondents were similar and this was to make it easy to analyse the same, besides, since the respondents represent several homogenous bodies (Dunleavy et al. 2011), it was considered necessary to ask the same questions to each of them.
- V. Based on the information given above, with regards to this study, the views by Patton (2001) stated that a qualitative researcher must use triangulation where methods are combined. This has been explained in the section below.

#### **3.5.4 Limitations**

In my research, qualitative approach was extensively used. This involved examining the responses given by respondents through semi-structured interviews and linking or identifying the differences that exist between these responses with the views expressed in or reported in reports (Central or Local governments' reports). The problem with such an approach is that there occurs a large amount of data that may not be relevant to the study, thus the researcher has to carefully identify what is and what is not relevant and remove the unwanted data, a process that can be time consuming.

Another issue that can be of concern is the problem of measurability (Dunleavy et al. 2011). In my research, although I had data that provided the value of savings that local governments are supposedly getting from sharing of services (see section 1.5); such measurements could not be extended to other activities or could not provide a way of making future budget estimations.

### **3.6 Triangulation**

According to Webb (1989), over the years, there has been an overstatement of the differences between Positivism and Post Positivism, yet these are two ‘sides of the same coin’. When researchers use quantitative methods, positivist paradigm or qualitative methods, or a post positivism paradigm, there is always a tendency to present these as two opposing blocks yet, it is now common to have these being used together in many a research through triangulation (Polit et al 2001).

Clarke (1998) emphasises this point;

*‘Though some distinction between methods is well placed ... it is being acknowledged that philosophically the qualitative and quantitative paradigms are not as diverse or mutually incompatible as often conveyed. Staunch identification of methods with particular paradigms may not be as accurate, or even as useful, an endeavour as past trends would indicate’.*

While positivism examines and emphasises the need for delineation between facts and human action, the major criticism levelled against this school of thought is that it does not provide a way of studying human action, behaviour or influence (Saunders, 2003). Mathison (1988), ‘Triangulation has risen an important methodological issue in naturalistic and qualitative approaches to evaluation [in order to] control bias and establishing valid propositions because traditional scientific techniques are incompatible with this alternate epistemology (p. 13)’.

### **3.7 How data was collected**

One of the most important things that a researcher can do in order to maintain the integrity of the data is to make prior preparation (Yin, 1994; Eisenhardt, 1989). Mintzberg noted that “No matter how small our sample or what our interest is, we have always tried to go into organisations with a well-defined focus — to collect specific kinds of data systematically.” (Mintzberg 1979, pp. 585). Data collection is primarily done to ensure that sufficient data on a phenomenon is gathered to create an understanding about the complexity of the situation (Benbasat et al. 1987). The researcher must have a way of collecting the data, and Yin (1994) suggested that a table can be used, because it provides structure and enables the researcher to start the process of organising the data.

The researcher must decide the method or source of data, but Yin noted that there is no source that has no flaws (Yin, 1994). Consider a case of Interviews, the limitation might include; response bias or failure to remember, and a case where the interviewee states which of his/her views should be told to the interviewer. In the case of journals and records, the problem might be in accessing the same, or finding a document that has biases based on the author (Yin, 1994; Flyvbjerg, 2006). In the case of observation, the limitation might be that the researcher fails to capture the whole moment as it unfolds and in the case of experiments, the tools might give a wrong reading (Ghauri et al. 1995). It is for this reason that a method that reduces all these limitations is considered, and such a method can be one that takes all the previous ones and triangulates them.

In this research, the researcher sought to use mixed methods of data collection. This involved various techniques including interviews, questionnaires, using journal articles, using council reports and strategy documents, newspaper information and from the internet (Yin, 1984;

Gomm et al. Eds. 2000; Eisenhardt, 1989). The need for all these techniques was informed by the need to gather relevant information as they become available (Yin, 1984). Yin (1984: 58) noted;

*‘The goal is to obtain a rich set of data surrounding the specific research issue, as well as capturing the contextual complexity.’*

Also, in some instances, it was not possible to hold interviews because the potential respondents requested questionnaires to be sent instead.

Where an interview was granted, the researcher prepared a list of questions that were posed to the respondents and the responses were either recorded or written in brief sentences (which formed part of the memo in Nvivo analysis). In the process of collecting the questions in interviews, there was a need to have the questions verified and this was done with the input from the supervisory team, who commented on the questions and where there was need, these were changed. Initially, the first interview had been conducted months before subsequent interviews and this helped to create the pilot study and to shape the view of the researcher hence also provide a guide about the broad area of research. It was important that the respondents were given the consent form and the participant information leaflet, which was to inform the participants about the level of confidentiality being guaranteed and the importance of their participation in the study.

In order to protect the respondents, and on the basis of Bishop (2005), anonymisation of respondents was considered. This is because, initially, when I was seeking audience with the ‘right’ person, I encountered hesitation from some Local Councils until I informed the contacts that everything will be anonymous and that the outcome was to be used for academic purposes only. Therefore, in the subsequent tables and in all other sections of this study, the

term 'Respondent' has been used instead of the name or specific designation of the respondent.

### **3.8 Qualitative Research**

Deciding on the methodology to be used in a research is of great importance (Padgett, 2016). In this research, qualitative research was considered. Flick et al (2004 pp. 1) indicated that '...makes use of the unusual or deviant and unexpected as a source of insight and a mirror whose reflection makes the unknown perceptible in the known...'. In this study, the thrust was to explore issues relating to Shared Services in an organisation and the choice of respondents was considered on the basis of previous studies by Ives and Olson (1981, pp. 49-63), Hirschheim (1985, pp. 295-304), Olson (1981, pp. 59-69) and Markus (1983, pp. 430-444.), Zhang (2012) and Tsang (2014). These researchers interviewed managers in organisations and analysed the views given by these managers to develop their conclusions.

In most qualitative studies, again the instrument of research is the researcher (Flyvbjerg, 2011). The reason for this is because often, the personality of the researcher and his or her interaction with the respondents will gauge his/her perception. Yin (1994, pp. 56) has therefore stated that it is crucial for the researcher to have certain skills for instance: a. should be inquisitive, b. be able to make significant inquiries for instance, very intelligent questions and manage to interpret the responses given, c. be a good listener, d. has keen attention to details, e. be able to pull off and maintain objectivity, and f. has to be good in communication.

### **3.9 Interviews:**

This was the main method of data collection and it was envisioned that in every local authority, there was a need to seek the key person(s) who is/are in charge of the process of Information Technology Shared Services or implementation of the same, because it would not have been possible to find a committee.

The researcher was also open to meeting different persons within the local authority, as long as they are involved with the process of implementation of IT shared service in their departments. In the cases where questionnaires were sent, the respondent was asked to answer these and send them back. In most cases, it was not possible to have more than one respondent, because most of the government bodies have a spokesperson or person who is responsible for communication with the external world and therefore, they were vital to providing the feedback. Out of a total of 27 Local Councils with which contact was made (either through physical visits or by phone), in five Local Councils, each council's spokesperson was the interviewee. As a researcher, having to interview the spokesperson was not my first preference (see section 3.5.3) because their position could be viewed as that of passing information about policies or program implementation (Sanders and Canel, 2013, pp. 269), which did not necessarily imply full (technical or procedural) knowledge of policies of their department (Sanders and Canel, 2013). To this extent, in order to clarify issues, the researcher made follow-up contacts where clarifications were sought.

On different occasions, when emails were sent to a person or different persons in a council, the response would be a re-direction to the 'appropriate person'. The choice of the respondent was based on Phillips (1981) and Campbell's (1955) criteria which advocates that the respondent:

- I. Must be in an authority position to give the feedback.
- II. Should be willing to do so.

There is, however, a major criticism for using one key person, because there may be chances of bias, but Campbell (1955) opines that these key informants can provide valid data items, especially if they are given questions that are simple, direct and very specific (Phillips 1981).

There was no need for meeting many respondents because the information given by the respondent was not used as it was, but other sources were also used to complement it, for instance, the corporate strategy of the council, internet sources, and even information that emanates from the partner organisations (Yin, 1984). Therefore, once the data was received, there was a need to triangulate these with other data items.

### **3.9.1 Key interview questions to the respondents;**

1. *Do you use your qualifications or other skill sets when making personal and corporate decisions?*

This question sought to find out the tools that are inherent to the respondents and if these were crucial in the time of making decisions. It was important that this question is asked to the respondents in order to find out how they employ their skills and thus, the kind of skills that they have.

2. *Do you consider your skills and years of experience to have played a part in you being part of the committee of Information Technology Shared Services?*

This question sought to find out if, by any chance, any of the respondents were recruited to the board responsible for ITSS implementation due to their skills. Assumptions cannot be made to the effect that people are or are not recruited based on their skills, it must be noted that it was found that most of the committee members are members of political parties, but in areas where committees were formed at different levels, hence not a councillor, it is worth knowing if persons were selected based on their skills.



**3. *Who decided on the number of people to form a committee?***

The importance of this question in this study was to examine where power lies in an organisation. Having the ability to decide on the formation of the team implies that the subject is able to or with a certain level of ability (cognitive, experiential), effect changes. It was important to know how teams were formed and who decided on the same, as the effectiveness of the team depended on the views of who composed such teams. In this study, it was important to examine this issue in order to help examine how a group is formed. It should be noted that such a team has to face another team thus leading to the effectiveness of the team.

**4. *What is your opinion about your authority having to share Information***

***Technology? Has your view changed from before?***

This question was aimed at establishing how the respondents thought about the process or processes of sharing. It examined the issues from the subject's perspective. By understanding what the subjects say it was possible to know their views on the whole process. This was important as it helped highlight issues of concern from the viewpoint of the respondents and not only from theoretical perspective.

**5. *Who has the final say in a decision, especially when the members do not agree on something?***

Crucially, the question also sought to understand who the main subject was and how the subject supported the sharing process. To understand this question also meant that the researcher could examine issues about the study that are crucial to the success of the study.

**6. *What factors did your authority consider before joining the shared arrangement with the partner authority?***

This was an important question that unearthed the less obvious issues about technology sharing within an organisation. Whereas there were obvious reasons for sharing, an assumption could not be made that all organisations were driven by these forces. Thus, by asking this question, other factors were highlighted. This question also enabled the researcher in the process of generating themes as it provided the hints that were crucial for developing these themes.

**7. *Do you always experience team conflicts? What is the main source of the same and how does the team deal with conflicts?***

It was important to evaluate the issue of conflict due to association by various departments or entities. This is a question of challenges that the councils faced in their quest to manage their Shared Services. Since it was evident that local governments joined hands through teams, the nature of conflicts between teams could explain the level or otherwise of success of ITSS.

**8. *How do you determine success, what do you consider to be success? Has the project been a success so far?***

It was vital to know the answers to the question above from the respondents' point of view. The success of a project is a crucial aspect and thus understanding what the views of respondents are in terms of the success or otherwise of engaging in Shared Services enabled me to understand if the process was good or not. But to do this, other views had to be considered.

**9. *How do you know if the shared arrangement is going according to plan?***

The question sought to find out if the respondents know if their arrangements are going according to plan. Technology implementation requires the adoption of certain plans and

timeframes and as such it was necessary to find out if the respondents could evaluate if their plans are going in according to what they need. The success or otherwise of an arrangement can be examined through the outcomes of the same. As such it was necessary to examine various functions of the organisation.

### **3.10 Access to the source of data**

One of the common assumptions in data collection is that the respondents are willing to offer the information required (Benbasat et al. 1987; Hamel et al. 1993; Onwuegbuzie et al. 2010), but this is not the case. This study could not have been completed without the participation of respondents from about 27 local authorities and the materials that were availed. Access to some of these local authorities was made possible through department contacts and other contacts that the researcher has. In all these cases, the researcher used his University's email address for instance, his student's email to send requests to the authorities, and then after being given feedback or consent, send the attachments and in some cases, requests for interviews were sent by email or made on the phone. In all the cases, a consent form and participant leaflet was sent.

It was vital to confirm the timing of the interview and to send mails or call on or before the material day to be sure that the interview will go ahead (Campbell, 1975; Babbie, 2001). This was also important because through this, the researcher would plan carefully for what is to be done. It was important to consider issues of confidentiality of the respondents. I had to inform them that their details would not be exposed, especially their names and designation. In this study, the terms respondents A, B, C up to Z1 have been used to identify them. However, for my own knowledge and to facilitate analysis, I had to identify these respondents on a separate piece of paper, which I later destroyed as it had served its purpose.

The reason for this was to ensure that information that I use in analysis is as accurate as possible.

### **3.11 Follow-ups**

In order to make clarifications on issues relating to the interviews, as the need arose, I made follow-ups with the relevant respondents through emails and phone communication.

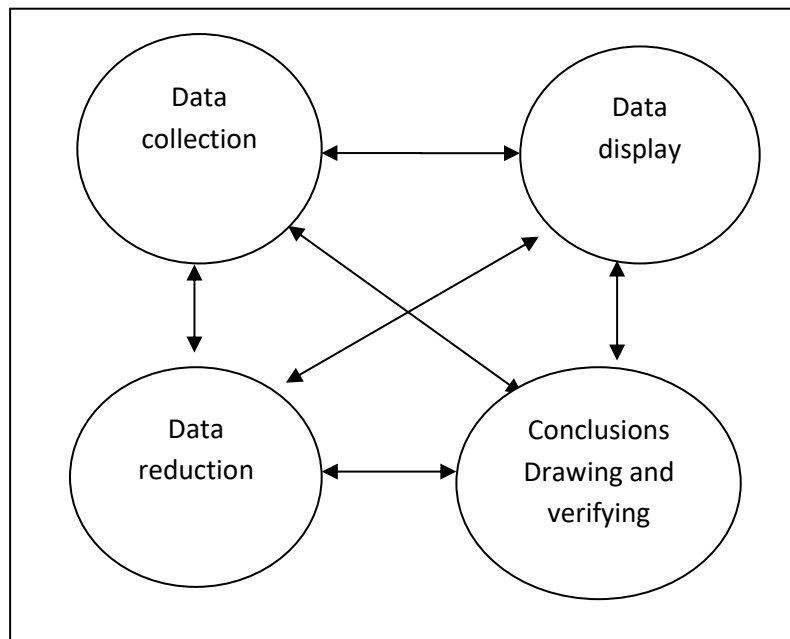
### **3.12 Data analysis**

#### **3.12.1 The following provides the steps in the process of data analysis:**

According to Miles and Huberman (1984); Huberman and Miles (2002); Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (1994), it is important to ensure that the data that has been collected can be combined, used and reused as evidence as and when needed, keeping in mind the objectives of the whole study. This is a very complex process and Eisenhardt (1989: pp. 539) stated ‘Analysing data is the heart of building theory from case studies, but it is both the most difficult and the least codified part of the processes.’

Three stages of data analysis were used for instance, reduction, display and explanation (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Yin (1994: pp. 106), stated that the researcher must consider ‘playing with data’ and through the use of comparative method as was given by Glaser and Strauss (1967). As a researcher, the importance of storing data was crucial if this process was to be successful. What I did was to ensure that I can keep the data on my computer in a secure way so that I can use it when needed. The process is shown in the Data analysis model given below;

**Figure 3.1 Data analysis model**



To ensure that all data is given equal treatment in the research, it is vital that manipulation of case study data is done carefully with no bias (Yin, 1994; Hamel et al, 1993). The aim of doing this is, according to Kerlinger (1986) and Yin (1994), to produce conclusions that are convincing and secondly, to do away with any alternative explanations.

### **3.13 How data was organised, validated and documented**

#### **3.13.1 Data reduction**

Due to the tendency to have open ended questions for case studies, often the data tends to be too voluminous (Eisenhardt, 1989; Kwon, 2014), therefore, there is a need to reduce the data, and hence remove the problem of overload. Data overload can easily lead the researcher to overlook crucial data items or even to lose some that could have been vital for the research. In this respect, therefore, data reduction becomes a crucial process that helps the researcher to condense, simplify and structure the data into unites that can easily be managed. Miles and Huberman (1994 pp. 11) stated that;

*‘Data reduction is not something separate from analysis. It is part of analysis. The researcher’s decisions—which data chunks to code and which to pull out, which evolving story to tell—are all analytic choices. Data reduction is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organises data in such a way that “final” conclusions can be drawn and verified.’*

According to Miles and Huberman (1984) and Proctor (1998), in so doing, it is possible for emerging patterns to be identified or for themes to emanate. It is vital for the researcher to keep the original meaning of the data and to ensure that the context is not blurred, and therefore there is need to use tools that can facilitate cross-referencing or even verification, for instance, bullet points, some diagrams, the mind map, or even a table that gives the summary.

### **3.13.2 Adequacy of data**

Data adequacy refers to the amount of data in a qualitative study and not the number of respondents, as it is employed in quantitative method (Morse, 1994 and Schwandt, 2007).

The data is adequate when there is cause to believe that what has been collected can answer the questions, or when there is a saturation point that has been attained (Morse 1994, pp. 230; Perry, 1998; Teddlie, & Tashakkori, 2006). There have been differences in opinion about the levels of saturation that a researcher should consider. This raises two concerns; first, the researcher should not just assume that richness in quality and thickness in quantity (Dibley, 2011) should be the only consideration, but the design of the research as well. In fact, Bernard says there is no way of dictating the appropriate number to which saturation can be attached and also the need to watch out so as not to fall into a *shaman effect* (Bernard, 2012), where one specialised information overshadows all other respondents’ views.

Other authors have given different suggestions vis-à-vis the number of interviews to be conducted, for instance, Creswell (2007) indicated 20 to 30, Morse (2000) noted about 20 to

30, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggested 20 to 50 and Yin noted that developing case studies requires a number of sources of at least 3 or 4 (Yin, 2009). Based on the information presented above there are a number of steps that were considered in collecting data and reaching saturation point in this study.

In this research, saturation point was considered as the point where there is no more new information coming up from the study and any extra data does not add to any new information. In this study, the researcher agreed with the supervisor to first collect data from as many authorities as possible. Later, I settled at 27 authorities, which I considered to be adequate for gaining understanding on a broad perspective in Local Councils. However, after collecting data from 14 local authorities and repeating the process in a number of authorities, it was evident that there was no new information coming. Nevertheless, I continued seeking more information by seeking to contact many local authorities and by the time 30 Local Councils had been contacted and interviews held with representatives from these councils, it was evident that there would be no more information and a point of saturation had been attained. This answered Marshal et al (2013: pp. 15-16) suggestion that studies should present a case as to how the sample size was reached in qualitative studies. I thus considered 27 Local government bodies for evaluation.

### **3.13.3 Method of Data analysis**

This has been described as the process of inspecting the data with the view of changing the data so that all crucial information can be found (Ghauri et al. 1995; Danwood and Underwood, 2010). In this study, the case studies were to be generated from the outcome of the data collected using primary and secondary data collection techniques. Being a qualitative study, qualitative data analysis techniques method is used. As a precursor, the words of Crabtree and Miller (1992) are crucial;

*‘...Interpretation is like a night at the big dance. The dance begins with an invitation to attend. These invitations state the intent, establish the context, determine the guests, suggest what to bring and wear, and propose boundaries for what to expect. It’s a senior high school prom or a community contra dance. This is the initial describing phase of interpretation.... Once at the dance and with the fun under way, however, the dance often changes. New partners appear, the music shifts, the unexpected happens, you and some of your closest friends change, and new relationships form. You must keep re-describing and adjusting, gathering new information; this is the iteration between data collection and interpretation. There is an opening dance that sets the tone for the evening, much as the initial organizing style frames the interpretive possibilities. The big dance event ends with a closing dance that, one hopes, resolves the evening’s tensions.’*

Crabtree and Miller (1992) have indicated that the process of qualitative data analysis techniques has five key stages;

- I. Describing: This stage is featured by self-examination, where the context of interpretation is given. At this stage, it is important to reflect on preconceptions and how these are important in the process. At this stage, the researcher must ask questions about the nature, direction and importance of the data and quality of the data thereof.
- II. Organising: This is how one ‘enters the data that re-organises it in a way that helps answer the questions’ (Crabtree and Miller, 1992).
- III. Connecting: This is like organising and it is where different items of data are linked. During the processes of organising and connecting, the researcher can input text like an editor ‘searching for meaningful segments, cutting, pasting and rearranging until the reduced summary reveals a helpful interpretation (Crabtree and Miller, 1992).
- IV. Corroborating and Legitimizing: This relates to validity of the interpretation in such a way that makes the work trustworthy. This can be done through re-examination of the materials or by using the team of researchers to examine the materials. In this research this stage was done by seeking clarification from some of the respondents, examining

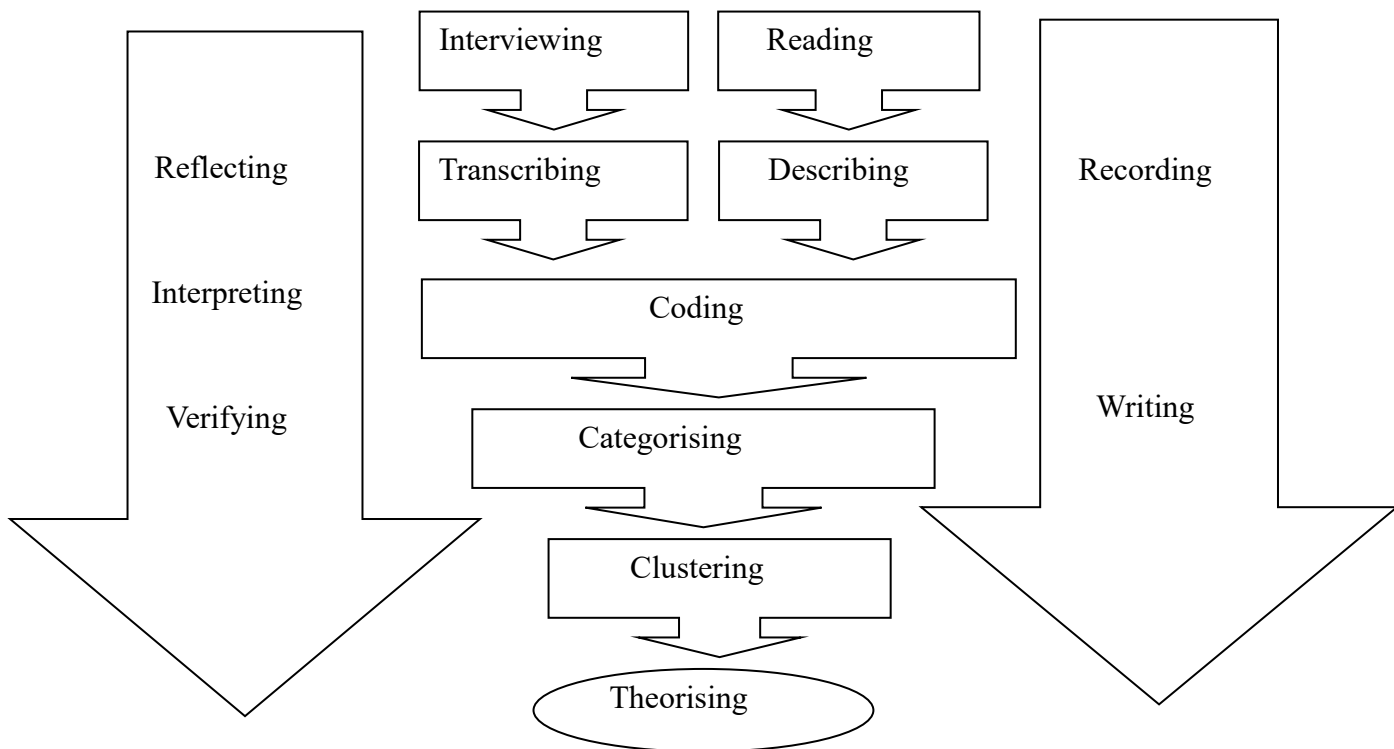


the records of the authority and examining news articles with the view to find out if the data items can be identified together.

- V. Representing the account: This is the final stage where the story is given in as a report.

The process has been shown below;

**Figure 3.2 Process of data collection**



### 3.13.4 Chosen data analysis method

In explaining my approach to data analysis, I will explain the process of the generic analytical cycle. The growth of the field of qualitative research has led to a wide scope of epistemological views. My approach was to consider three aspects that are integral to many methods of qualitative data analysis techniques: coding, categorisation and conceptualisation. In making meaningful analysis to qualitative data, it is crucial to make contact with materials from field research through careful reading (Geertz, 1973). In this study, such reading involves examining the interview materials, the council reports, figures and information on shared services as found on different websites. Notes can be included, to involve impression and thoughts of the researcher about these materials (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Once the notes have been highlighted, some patterns may emerge from the data. The next step is to categorise and conceptualise, with the aim of ensuring that there is further reduction of materials. I undertook this to classify the materials and be able to organise them into different categories in such a way that I am able to make sense and be in a position to start examining the general concepts in the light of theoretical basis.

It should be noted that the creation of themes, provides a researcher with a way of identifying the central meanings around which phenomenon can be explained. In this research, themes came from repeated views, words, ideas or even sentences (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Patton (2002) noted that these themes can come from the experiences that are given by individuals, while Strauss & Corbin (1998) indicated that these themes can be the *in vivo* codes. In this research, I used a table to show how these themes emerged (see chapter 4, sections 4.5 and 4.6.9).

### **3.14 Choice of qualitative data analysis techniques**

Based on the information that has been given above, the choice of the method of data analysis was advanced qualitative data analysis techniques. Dey (1993) indicated that the importance of qualitative data analysis techniques only arises when the need to summarise data from repetitive processes exists. With such summarisation, features that are common tend to arise due to such repetition, consequently leading to fewer larger categories (Patton 1990). Another reason that guided the choice of qualitative data analysis techniques was the fact that there was an existence of a structured approach to qualitative information (Geotz and LeCompte 1981).

### **3.15 Conducting qualitative data analysis techniques**

In this study my approach to analysing qualitative data involved considering data from various sources. I had interview data and I had reports from Local Government bodies, council strategic documents and internet sites like Local Government websites. These provided rich data sources for cross examining the views that I had gathered from my field study. In retrospect, having such a wide range of data sources was crucial because reliance on one data source could prove less reliable.

I drafted the responses in MS Word to enable me to input in Nvivo. The following stages describe what I did:

- i. Separate the questions and answers from individual respondents.
- ii. Having all answers to each question in a separate sheet of paper or separate document. The reason for this was to ensure that I would analyse each similar answer to identify codes. At this stage, information from the reports that are similar was also input alongside the responses (see section 4.5).

- iii. Run each of the categories of answers on Nvivo. This involved querying Nvivo for references (codes per paragraph).
- iv. Generate codes from the initial cycle.
- v. Consider similarity of the codes for instance 'it is good' and 'it is beneficial' in the context of this study is a positive outcome or factor, which I can term as 'benefit'.
- vi. Define the codes and describe them in the context of my research.
- vii. Once definition has been given, associations are made by using special functions on Nvivo to create links.
- viii. Then models are output (screenshots) to facilitate the creation of a pictorial representation of the factors.
- ix. Models are copied to MS Word and ready for further description.

Since I had the data, my analysis was inspired by Grounded theory methodology. However, I did not use grounded theory approach to analyse my data, I used advanced qualitative methods in conducting analysis.

I adopted some aspects of Chamaz’s guidelines for Grounded theory techniques (Chamaz, 2006) as given in the table below;

**Table 3.1 Chamaz’s guidelines**

Steps	Action
a.	Codes and categories from data not from hypothesis.
b.	Sampling for building theory.
c.	Data collection and analysis taken simultaneously to develop the theory.
d.	Constant comparison at various stages of the analysis.
e.	Writing memo to make all information clear, also creating relationships.
f.	Conducting literature review.

Based on the stages given above, in my research stages b, c and f were undertaken slightly differently, and as given by Walsham (2006) the researcher’s best tool of data analysis is his own mind supplemented by the minds of others. Also, since theory building was not prioritised, section b was also taken differently.

Due to these changes, the researcher had to examine the situation and be subjective about analysis, and on this basis, I will explain why the three stages were altered slightly;

- I. I did not focus on theory building. My approach was theory or framework expansion, for instance, I adjusted the TOE framework in section 4.8.

- II. While Charmaz (2006) stated that data collection and analysis have to be done simultaneously, in my research I had conducted data analysis and what could have been done simultaneously was from data from secondary sources, not a primary source. I had large amounts of data including council reports and council strategies that could not all be put in Nvivo. Therefore, at stage C of Chamaz, I did not do this simultaneously but analysis of primary data was done after it was collected.
- III. In stage f, while Chamaz (2006) states that the researcher should conduct literature reviews, in my work, I adopted Urquhart's view that states that it is wise to start a preliminary stage of literature with an open mind (Urquhart, 2001; Walsham, 2006; Urquhart et al. 2010). This implies that I had an idea of the area of my research. Urquhart (2001) says that the researcher should not have a blank mind, but an open one. Having an open mind allows the researcher to identify or have a prior idea of existing theories and hence has the duty to build on one of the theories. To this extent, Walsham (2006: 235) noted

*'for new researchers is for them to choose theories which they feel are insightful to them. Do not choose a theory because it is fashionable or because your supervisor likes it, if it does not really engage you'*

On the basis of the stages that were conducted differently, the question may be whether there was justification and most significantly, if the outcome can be relied upon. In this research, I have presented both the justification for such choices and why I consider the outcomes to be reliable (see my views on reliability) and see my literature review segment.

An important part of my research was to identify the most appropriate method of data analysis. Interests in proposing the most appropriate method of qualitative data analysis techniques has continued to grow. One of the most authoritative presentations of analysing

qualitative data analysis techniques was given by Onwuegbuzie et al, (2010), Onwuegbuzie et al (2012) and Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2015), in an extensive analysis of the importance of choosing the right method of analysing qualitative data. There appear to be no prescriptive proposal for analysing qualitative data, an indication of the versatility of qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2012), as opposed to quantitative research. The problem with such a wide spectrum from which to choose when seeking to analyse qualitative data raises concerns about the method that a researcher can settle for.

Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2015) suggested the use of Q-Methodology to analyse literary data, but they suggested that Q-Methodology may draw quantitative methods of analysis, which was not in the interest of this research. However, Onwuegbuzie and Frels highlighted 17 methods of qualitative data analysis techniques, of which the Qualitative comparative analysis and Constant comparison analysis (Onwuegbuzie and Frels 2015a pp. 94-95), were found to be relevant to my study.

During the course of this study, constant companion analysis was considered a vital tool to use with the aim of allowing data to guide the process of understanding the phenomenon and possibly generate a theory to explain the process of implementing ITSS in UK local government. It is also noted that the researcher has to use the data in a way that reflects the research objectives, for instance two studies may use the same data but for different objectives. With constant comparison analysis, the researcher should consider four key steps;

- Comparing incidents applicable to each category (see section 4.5).
- Integrating categories and their properties (see section 4.5).
- Delimiting the theory.
- Writing the theory.

Bruner et al (1972) in Sadler (2013) indicated that 'To categorise is to render discriminably different things equivalent, to group the objects and events and people around us into classes, and to respond to them in terms of their class membership rather than their uniqueness' (pp. 16). The researcher effectively makes complex data simple, provides direction to activity, identifies objectives of the world, reduces the need for constant learning and allows for ordering to be conducted. Dey (1993) indicated that it is these categories that form the basis for data conceptualisation, hence 'a crucial element in the process of analysis' (pp. 112), thus allows the researcher to make considered judgements about what is meaningful in the data (Patton, 1990). In this study, interviews and council reports were used to collect data. Following the use of Nvivo, patterns, themes and categories of analysis emerged out of the data (Patton, 1990). The importance of an analyst moving back and forth between logical construction and actual data becomes crucial (Patton 1990).

Dey (1993) noted that as the researcher analyses data, "inferences from the data, initial or emergent research questions, substantive, policy and theoretical issues, and imagination, intuition and previous knowledge" (pp. 100). I chose to consider Deys views that the researcher should be familiar with the data, sensitive to contestation of data, ready to extend and change categories and consider connections between data during the interpretation process (Dey, 1993). Throughout this process, the meaningfulness of categories should be a priority, and this called for reflection of what research questions were.

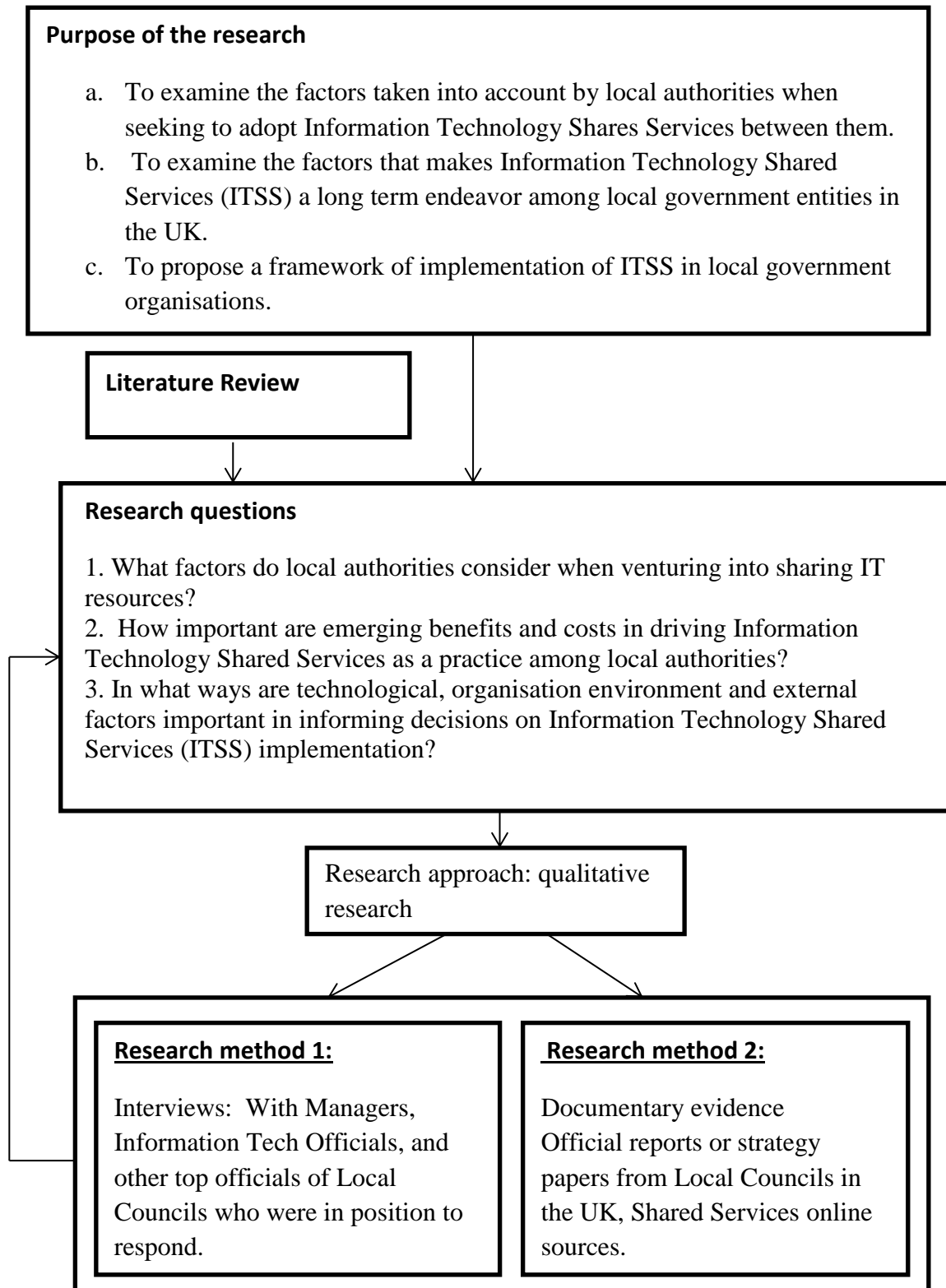
It is important that the researcher remains flexible to allow for new observations and directions in the analysis (Dey, 1993, pp.111).



### 3.16 Methodological framework

Based on the information presented above, the methodological framework has been presented below:

**Figure 3.3 Methodological framework**



### **3.17 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has outlined my approach to understanding, collecting and analysing data. I have explained the motives behind my choice of data collection techniques, my rationale for the same and how I did my analysis. The choice of data collection technique is dependent on many a factor, the researcher must, however, use a technique that is realistic and can provide answers to the research questions (Reed et al. 1993). By using semi structured interviews and review of documents (Government documents and Local government strategy papers), I combined the methods of data collection thus enabling me to identify and possibly question any discrepancies existing in information or to ascertain the responses given. The challenge in using two approaches as I have given is that often, it is easy to lose focus and spend much time in cross examining the materials at hand.

The analysis of the information that was collected and documented in papers and information that was collected from a number of reports as given in stage one of the processes that I used (see section 3.15). Where I found a response to one question is related with a response that I got from another question, it was necessary to examine the relationship and decide to either link the responses or leave them separate and discuss each separately.

In the next chapter, I present the findings and explanation of the same.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS and DISCUSSION**

### **4.0 Chapter introduction**

This chapter presents the findings that I have generated from the field study that was conducted and having applied the data items to Nvivo. This is an important chapter that highlights the information that came from the study and what such information says about the research problem.

### **4.1 Scope of analysis**

In this chapter, key issues relating to the use of analysis software, the way councils are organised, the views of the respondents, reasons for and problems of sharing have been discussed. The researcher sought to give clarification to some of the issues identified during the field study and examined these in the light of existing discourse in the literature.

### **4.2 Use of Nvivo for research.**

Nvivo is advanced computer based software for analysing different kinds of data, as it adds rigor to the process of data analysis (Richards and Richards 1991). It can be used to analyse pictures, charts, quoted information, reports and voice recordings. This makes it a robust tool of analysis that is vital for conducting a study that involves collection of data from various sources. There are other tools of data analysis for instance NUD.IST and CAQDAS that can be used to analyse qualitative data (Welsh 2002). Nvivo is however superior to these tools as it addresses the major shortcomings that certain software had. For instance, it is easy to use and also, documents can be imported in word form from other word processing software (Welsh 2002).

Nvivo also allows the researcher to view several screens at the same time and thus be able to make a number of self-directed manipulations to the data in a way that meets the needs of a particular research. Kelle (1997) stated that Nvivo has been proposed for use in studies involving qualitative data, because this is based on the view that the data has to speak for itself, thus Nvivo aids in enabling the data to do exactly this. However, Welsh (2002) warns that the researcher should use Nvivo carefully and follow all important guidelines for conducting the analysis rather than blindly relying on the outcomes of Nvivo in its entirety. In this study, the chosen method of data analysis was the advanced qualitative analysis as was outlined in section 3.14 and 3.15.

### **4.3 Analysis of findings**

#### **4.3.1 Introduction and background**

The analysis presented in this section encompasses the activities and storyline generated from the field study. I adopt Miles and Huberman's 'definition and context' (Miles and Huberman 1994) to outline the scope of this analysis.

The functions that most Local Government bodies have to perform relate to provision of services that are of importance to the local residents (see section 1.4). In the course of their operations, local government entities require resources that can be vital in managing their operations. Towards the end of the Labour government's third consecutive term in office (third term lasted 2005 – 2010), global economic crisis meant that the need for changes in managing government operations was inevitable. One of the key changes that the Coalition Government which took power in May of the year 2010 proposed was the need for local governments to share their resources (Dunleavy et al. 2011). Politically, the need to reduce costs of operations of Local Government bodies because the Central Government had

proposed a raft of cost cutting measures. The prevailing situation was a global financial crisis that had gripped global financial systems, and mainly the developed economies.

An important aspect of sharing of resources that was propounded was that local authorities should consider a number of factors when seeking which local authority body to share with. Such considerations included proximity (Avgerou and Walsham, 2000; Peel et al. 2012), resources availability (Bazerman and Moore, 2012) and also the political relationships that exist (Tomkinson 2007). One issue that is worth noting is that sharing of resources spans activities like garbage collections, sharing social resources and sharing IT resources. With all these avenues of sharing, there emerged many sharing arrangements across many parts of the United Kingdom.

The arrangements that emanated could be categorised into (Kotlarsky et al. 2016):

- I. Lead Authority: where one local authority has a resource that is needed by another and hence it offers (at a fee) this resource.
- II. Equal partnership: In this kind of arrangement, two local authorities contribute equally to the development and hence share the resources equally.
- III. Third party or Outsourcing: in this arrangement, an independent entity is charged with the responsibility of managing the resource on behalf of two or more local authorities.

#### **4.4 Problem area**

Generally, the main concern that led most of the local authorities to share their resources was to help reduce their costs of operations. Concerns were raised about the UK government's increased involvement in the way local governments run their affairs. The area of information technology sharing between local governments has become one of the key areas of sharing between local authorities. The issue of Information Technology Shared Services (hereafter

ITSS) has generated interest in academic and commercial quarters over the past few years. A look at the local authorities in the UK portrays ITSS as a process that seeks to generate efficiency and reduction in the costs of operation (McKeen and Smith, 2011). There are however thrusting conditions that can be traced from political, economic, social and technological forces that are often way beyond the reach of an organisation. These conditions are used to make policies and guidance that govern how local authorities implement their internal operations.

While it is expected that the implementation of ITSS will result in a public-sector body that is efficient and which provides better services to its masses, the reality is not as expected. In evaluating 27 local authorities in the UK (all of which were in varying levels of sharing, for instance, some had up to nine sharing Local Councils, and others were in multiple sharing arrangements), it was evident that there are varied results that can be attributed to these local authorities.

In the UK, there are more than 433 local government bodies (made up of boroughs, unitary authorities, parish councils, city councils and metropolitan authorities) (see section 1.4). In this research, the number of local authorities that were examined were 27, denoted as councils A, B, C...Z and lastly Z1 (see figure 12 below). Some of these councils are in shared service arrangements as a group, while others are in multiple shared services deals. Suppose there were more Local Councils than the ones studied above, the researcher could consider another method of coding these councils in a way that can accommodate all the entities in question.

In the table given below (see next page), the number of interviews that were conducted and follow-ups thereof has been presented. I have used alphabets (alphanumeric) instead of the names of the local authorities involved but retained the designation of personnel who were

interviewed or from whom data was collected. This is in keeping with the spirit of anonymity as advocated by Bell (2014).

In total, 27 (twenty-seven) local governments were visited, each of these were chosen on the basis of having pre-existing sharing arrangements or have had to share their IT resources in the past. The breakdown by country is given below;

- a. England 14 (fourteen)
- b. Northern Ireland 2 (two)
- c. Scotland 6 (six)
- d. Wales 5 (five)

**Table 4.1 Number of interviews and contacts made with respondents**

<b>Re</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Councils involved</b>	<b>Form of Shared Services arrangement.</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Follow ups</b>
A	HR manager and head of project	Two	Lead authority: HR payroll system	Four	Three
B	Consultant and head of project	Nine	Partnership / lead Common IT infrastructure	Three	One
C	IT manager and team leader	Two	Lead authority	Two	One
D	Finance official and head of project	Three	Partnership	One	Three
E	Head of the project	Three	Equal partnership	One	Three
F	Employee and Team leader	Two	Lead authority	One	Two
G	IT director and patron	Two	Third party contract	Two	Three
H	HR official and team manager	Three	Third party contract	Four	Two
I	IT official and project manager	Two	Lead authority – back office	Three	Five
J	IT manager	Two	Lead authority- back office	Two	Three
K	Purchase department manager	Three	Equal partnership	Two	Two
L	HRM manager	Four	Lead	One	One
M	ICT manager	One	Equal -Payroll	Two	Three
N	ICT manager	Two	Equal - Payroll	Two	Two
O	Head of services	One	Lead- Knowledge resource	Two	Four
P	ICT manager	Three	Lead- Knowledge resource	Two	Three
Q	IT official	Two	Lead- Knowledge resource	Two	Two
R	Head of ICT in HR	Two	Equal- ICT services	Three	Three
S	Council ICT manager	Two	ICT Services	Three	Two
T	ICT manager	Two	Lead – back office operations	Three	Four
U	ICT official	One	Lead – back office operations	Four	Two
V	Representative of joint ventures	Three	Equal partnership	One	One
W	Finance and ICT officials	Three	Lead – back office	Three	Two
X	ICT manager	Four	Lead – back office	Two	Four
Y	IT director	Four	Equal – Back office ICT	Two	Three
Z	Operations director	One	Equal - Back office	Four	Three
Z1	Consultant / ICT manager	Six	Lead / partnership	Three	Five



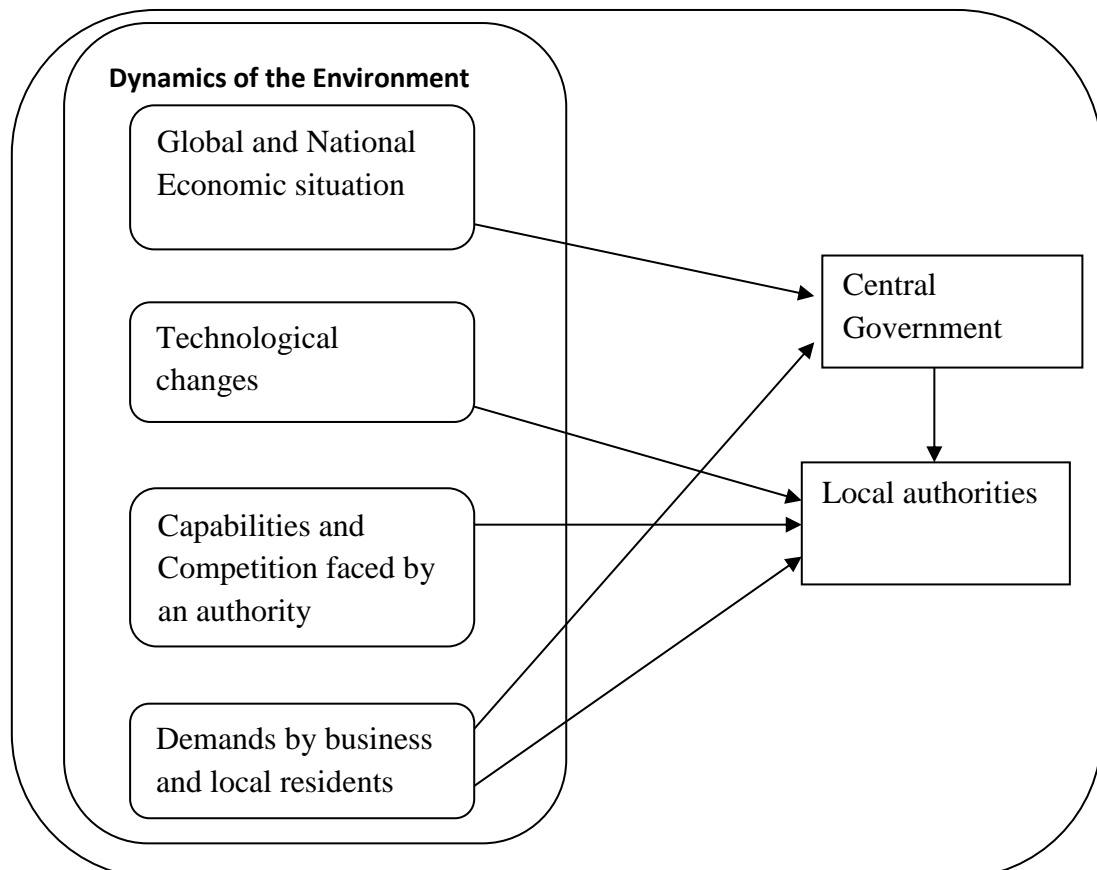
#### 4.4.1 Who are the stakeholders

Sharing of Information Technology among local governments is an activity that involved a number of stakeholders (Tomkinson, 2007; LGA, 2016a):

- Central Government / Political parties: Sets out policy and funding for the process
- Local authorities: Execute the process by redefining the process according to their needs and on the basis of their environment. Local governments also act as the beneficiaries of the process of sharing.
- Local population/and businesses: They are the beneficiaries of the process of sharing
- Private sector entities: Involved in the process on an ad-hoc basis

The information above can be presented in the form of a diagram to outline the interlink that exists between the entities:

**Figure 4.1 Interlink between entities**



The diagram above shows the nature of environment in which local authorities operate and the pressures that they face that forces or necessitates the need for sharing. It can be seen for instance, that external environment, harsh economic conditions, lack of funding, changes in technology and demands by residents and business are situations that have continued to put pressure on local and central government. The central government is also putting pressure on local authority bodies due to macro or global environment situation.

#### ***4.4.1a Recent political situation***

The government in the UK has continued to reduce or keep certain fiscal measures unchanged (The Guardian 2016a). Recently, the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated that funding for Local Councils will be reduced (The Guardian 2016a) and authority of Local Councils over schools will also diminish by 2020<sup>16</sup> (The Guardian 2016a). These pronouncements tend to imply external political pressure to local authorities. Of course, politics is dynamic and changes are imminent, however, these changes are a pointer to the fact that local governments have to comply with what the central government wants.

When Local Government bodies are faced with such enormous challenges that are largely beyond their control, the role of the heads of local government tend to be questioned. The stakeholders are linked at different levels, for instance, central government set out policies, and local governments are to adopt these policies by working with other local authorities at different levels and partnerships with organisations in the private sector and local businesses.

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<sup>16</sup> **Releasing schools from local authority control**

Osborne to focus budget on plan to turn all English schools into academies.

Draft legislation for radical shake-up of schools system could be expected as soon as Thursday, the chancellor is expected to announce. By 2020 every school in England will be in the process of becoming an academy, "setting schools free from local education bureaucracy", said Osborne. The Conservatives say that giving head teachers more control over their budgets and the curriculum demonstrates a commitment to localism.

With the dynamics in external environment occasioned by the global financial situation, one of the key issues arising was the need to seek how to share. The coalition government had proposed that local governments should share their resources and the formulation of the ways of sharing was left to the management or senior officials of the local governments. This led to a scramble for ensuring that any aspect of sharing that has been adopted is implemented.

One manager (council B) stated that

*'This is my child and its success is crucial not only to our department but to the whole council.'*

Another respondent (ITSS sharing team manager of council A) said that

*'Ultimately, the success of this project will also benefit the people we are serving, we might appear to be away from the frontline but in actual sense, what we do here with other councils, impacts directly to the people we are serving.'*

The realisation that central government was going to reduce funding to local authorities and at the same time put more demands on the local government to work towards efficiency was a major burden to managers of local governments who had to ensure that they can meet the demands that the central government is putting in place within a limited period of time (Dollery et al. 2011). The main objective that was prescribed to local governments was;

- I. Lower costs of operations.
- II. Identify areas of sharing with the view to improving efficiency.

As a response to the demands that were being piled on local governments there was need to manage internal organisations of local authorities in order to respond effectively to these demands. One way of responding internally was to reorganise teams or form teams that will spearhead sharing of resources, because, retrenchment was not a popular move politically and

economically. Formation of teams was a process that followed negotiations between local governments bodies at strategic level aimed at identifying areas where they could work together for the sake of their survival.

#### ***4.4.1b Strategic issues and teamwork***

In terms of strategic concerns that brought local governments together, the need to ‘permanently’ join certain operations such as garbage collection, cleaning and back office tasks, became crucial. It is at this point that the importance of ITSS became clear. Much of the operations of local governments tend to be managed online and having systems that facilitate this was found to be vital. While local governments were mooting the prospects of working together since the year 2010, it was evident that organising internal capabilities was necessary. One of the main challenges in realising internal capabilities was the fact that between and within local government, teams were found to be different in capabilities. For instance, in local government A with a certain work culture and focus, capabilities were high towards customer support, but this was not the case in local authority B, with capabilities on technical support.

The challenge of team reorganisation was compounded by the fact that the time for implementing sharing or association was limited, these local governments had to act within a certain duration<sup>17</sup>. Managers of many local authorities had to act fast and ensure that they can form teams that can start working fast. With such team gaps, the problem was in equipping the teams. In a total of 11 (eleven) different shared partners, it was found that independent offices were created and were to be run by these teams. The aim was to assure the independence of these teams.

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<sup>17</sup> It should be remembered that politics (through local election cycles) and budgetary cycles are crucial determinants of the operations of local government bodies.

In all Local Councils that were visited and where interviews were held, the issues were relatively the same; there were teams made up of different numbers of people that were charged with ensuring that the process of sharing is successful. In one local authority (represented by Respondent J), the teams were moved to work with another team that had been formed in the partnering local borough. The reason for this was to ensure that the support that was being offered was being beneficial in real time. The reason for moving staff is because during deliberations, the smaller borough had stated that there is space for the teams to work in their borough and so since the Local Council was offering a supportive product, the agreement reached was to ensure that the two authorities worked hand in hand but from the location of the (smaller) borough.

There were 11 (eleven) cases where the participating councils and boroughs had an independent office with teams that were running these offices, who had independent structures that were different from that of their own teams (in their departments). The reason for this was to ensure that the teams conducted their work uninterrupted.

Respondent J said,

*‘To ensure that this new venture does not have problems, we have to allow them resources and space so that they can work without hindrance’.*

#### ***4.4.1c The structure of participation***

The structure of participation that was formed in ITSS teams was not similar and most of the participants in the process of ITSS organised their participants in ways that fulfilled their own requirements. In one instance where there were 9 (nine) Local Councils that are sharing, the team was bigger as it had representatives from all the Local Councils that participated. In this instance, there were two teams; the key strategic team and the lower operational team. The

key strategic team was tasked with ensuring that the process has a strategic outlook that encompasses all the needs of participating councils.

The lower operational team had to conduct administrative and technical tasks of the team. In this arrangement, other than the participants of nine local authorities, a consultant was invited to sit in selected meetings and provide guidance about what has to be done to ensure that the process of sharing is running as expected for the benefit of all participating councils. The consultant indicated that his role was to bring his expertise of IT sharing that he has had in the private sector to public-sector organisations. He indicated that it is not unusual for councils to seek ‘outside’ help to run their operations, and he indicated that his role is that of a binding figurehead who is responsible for ‘troubleshooting and providing unbiased leadership’ for the sake of the councils.

In three cases involving six Local Councils (Respondents C, F and I) the participants included top managers of these local authorities, who occasionally sat during team meetings and ensured that the aspirations of their councils and their own experience and expertise were used and considered to support the operations of sharing IT services. These top managers also sat in other non-IT sharing arrangements.

One respondent (V) said,

*‘they had to, you can imagine you are the CEO and you want things to happen in a certain way, obviously, you will seek to have your input, especially where your reputation and your job is at stake’.*

There was also a case of participation by extension, because, in all the cases, there was reporting taking place from the ITSS teams to the local government committees. The teams had to ensure that occasionally they send their progress to their councils because, firstly, these sets of information had to be put in periodic reports that councils have to publish, and

secondly, the ITSS is a part of the broader functioning of local governments and their inclusion to the local government as a whole was necessary. One manager (respondent F) said

*'I have to send reports back to the CEO of X Local Council'*

Another respondent, manager K, had the responsibility of handing over tasks to other persons, indicating a process flow:

*'Usually, my task ends when I have passed any information that I have to other departments or persons who are designated to deal with such matters'*

Respondent Z indicated that:

*'I am the one who will decide what happens after a certain process has been completed... I have to be careful to support and gain the support of other staff members so that we can engage in any process in the right way'*

The need to pass the report was informed by the need to ensure that the authorities that are concerned understand the process of sharing services. These respondents highlight the importance of designation and internal process flow within their organisations. Similarly, the councils that had an external consultant within their team stated that the consultant had to talk back to his people (his managers or his organisation) and to the CEO's of each respective local authority.

This was done on a regular basis with the aim of allowing the councils to continue making necessary changes as and when needed regarding what is being implemented. Respondents B, S and V who had to provide consultancy services to various local governments sat within the committees and ensured that the outside view that they have of the concept of sharing was brought into the practice of public sector organisations.

Respondent V noted that:

*‘It is by appreciating what is taking place outside, that the government body can make improvements in its operations. This was, the possibility to improving services is high, but also the securing the survival of the councils. ‘*

Respondent S said:

*‘We see quick work turnover in terms of quick services and better backroom operations which are benefiting our council.’*

Respondent B had indicated that the councils must be ready to secure their future by allowing themselves to venture into agreements that can provide this assurance.

#### ***4.4.1d Business case for sharing***

On the issue of the business case for sharing, an overwhelming majority of the respondents agreed that in this age and time, councils must consider those partnerships. All the 27 (twenty-seven) respondents from the authorities that were sampled indicated that in reality, Local Councils have been sharing some of their resources over time. Respondent A noted that for a long time, his council was the same as that of council B. It was, however, recently split. The respondent noted that even after the division, councils A and B have continued to share other aspects of their operations and till recently the new area of sharing has been in Information technology, where council A supported council B by having a shared Information Technology system that was controlled by council A, but which was used by council B.

The respondent noted that during the negotiation phase, he selected a team from his council and council B also selected a team who were charged with ensuring that the system is useful for both the councils. Having teams to spearhead the process of ITSS was found to be a



common practice (not only in cases where councils have been split, but all cases of sharing of services and I.T. sharing). In particular, the respondent noted that his main task was to see that staff members in relevant departments in council B were able to understand how the new system works, and able to use it to make their work easy.

The respondent of council A indicated;

*My concern was to use our product to make the operations of council B easy, and the success of our project in council B would have enabled us to support other councils and even schools. I was looking at not from a cost savings point of view, but from a long-term benefit to our council, because, we had a hard choice of either keeping our staff members or sacking them. I did not want to lose any of the staff members.*

In council B, the new association was a welcome phase in their relationship. Since council B was a smaller council, it relied on A for most of its operations, especially at the time when council A had a system that could support most of B's operations. For these councils to associate, potential benefits and risk were considered from the perspective of each council.

There were two other cases of two councils that were once one; these had to be split to bring services closer to the local residents. In all the cases, the location where the main council was (before it was split), became a major partner, for instance if council A was split leading to A and B, B remained a smaller council and hence sought most of its services and support from A. There are, however, situations where partnering local authorities severed the association (in some aspects, not all), because the benefits were not being realised as were anticipated

In one such case, the council spokesperson stated in their website:

*We would consider sharing that level of management in the future, but the time is not right now. We will look at coordinating services such as waste with other councils including (name withheld), but don't wish to share strategic management on a permanent basis<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>18</sup> Great Yarmouth Mercury (2016) Vote ends shared services agreement between Norfolk councils [Online] available from [http://www.greatyarmouthmercury.co.uk/news/vote\\_ends\\_shared\\_services\\_agreement\\_between\\_norfolk\\_councils\\_1\\_4685801](http://www.greatyarmouthmercury.co.uk/news/vote_ends_shared_services_agreement_between_norfolk_councils_1_4685801) accessed on Oct, 2016

There were other cases where councils that were not split (each was and is still autonomous) and even geographically far apart, found themselves permanently joined up through the process of ITSS. For example, Council R and V are equal partners which incrementally joined services to the extent that they are so reliant on each other that they cannot pull apart without significant disruptions to their operations.

In another council, where a company was set up to provide services to a number of councils, the benefits gained from such endeavours were not as anticipated and one of the partnering councils decided to bring that operation back 'in-house';

*...But last Friday, (Council: name withheld) Shared Services joint committee agreed to bring the services currently provided by (name withheld) back in-house following a review. The company's long-term strategy was to win new business through providing services to other public sector organisations. News of the closure came as a bolt from the blue for staff, some of whom jokingly branded the company 'co-slow-cius' because of its ways of working<sup>19</sup>.*

All other councils also evaluated the risks of engaging other councils. One respondent said that,

*'Any other thing that we can do, we should do it for the sake of ensuring that we are successful.'*

Respondent G

The respondent said that the risks facing each local authority in the UK include having to content with political expectations, having to provide several services to their residents. On this issue, respondent I and V noted that residents have several demands and while the

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.chesterchronicle.co.uk/news/chester-cheshire-news/cosocius-firm-owned-cheshire-west-10224292>

council may seek to make priorities on which ones to provide, residents may have their own questions about the effectiveness of the councils. Respondent F said that there is;

*‘...fear among councils that we may do our best to provide a certain service, but the residents may be seeking a different service all together, which may put us on a path to confrontation with them. This can be compounded by media hype that often views the organisation as the failure, without considering what the organisation has done.’*

In the case given above, dynamism in environmental factors forced a change in strategy from sharing some aspects of operations to bringing such aspects in-house<sup>20</sup>. This indicates that environmental realities have an impact on the internal operations of the organisation. It is more so because external environments are hard to control (Tomkinson, 2007).

Another area of risk that has been given is on the view that quite often, monetary problems that a council have are not because of lack of money, but because of increased expectations by other stakeholders, including the government.

Respondent B indicated that;

*‘We have to have an IT system that can support our organisation, but, when we are asked to do something by the government, under current economic conditions, we have to ask yourself if that is in our best interest’*

The problem however, is that there was no choice other than to follow the directives from the government that linked economic crisis to Shared Services by way of asking the Local Councils to seek to work in sharing arrangement in order to reduce the costs of operation.

Sharing of services is deemed as a plan to support the economic recovery, and this implies that the initiative no longer takes a self-benefiting exercise; all the respondents were of the opinion that sharing of IT services has its share of risks but that gradually, the benefits tend to

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<sup>20</sup> The committee acknowledged that CoSocius had made progress in a number of areas and contributed to the success of other areas of both councils, however the changing environment meant that many aspects of the company’s original agreed business plan had needed revisiting

outstrip the risks. One respondent X noted that through sharing of services, internal management culture has improved,

*'We have seen employees are engage with each other more and can also teach one another....'*,

Another respondent A said that through sharing of IT services the teams have not only learnt how to relate to or work with other teams, but when they come back to the department, they inculcate new knowledge that they have learnt in their work, a situation that leads to collateral benefit for the council.

In council P, the respondent said that the Shared Services team has been instrumental in suggesting ways by which activities of the departments can be streamlined and made to be done in the most appropriate manner, and so:

*'We are learning not only how to share, but also how to relate with others within the department in a way that make us work faster and better'*.

Respondent P

Another respondent indicated that this is a question of capacity within a local authority

*'Capability building among the workforce is impressive and we can continue to build or dwell on that'*

Respondent C

A similar view was also presented by respondent W, who said

*'Most of the problems can be solved at work areas through discussion and brainstorming, which means that workers can associate more positively knowing that they can help each other solve issues'*

The constraints facing Local Councils in managing their affairs were identified to be of two different forms. There were general constraints that mainly related to the issue of finances that the local authorities had to deal with. Budgetary reductions by central government meant that Local Councils received less money for their operations. This affected their services because it meant differences in resources allocation meant that services would be affected. The other issues were internal organisation, multiple needs to fulfil for residents, duplication of services, and political influences in the operations of the councils. All these issues had effects on Local Councils because the Local Councils could not meet all their objectives.

In terms of constraints of implementing Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS), it was found that the main constraints included; skills of the workers, political influences, having the right platform, finding the right tools, lack of security in the system and system integration. Most respondents were of the view that these challenges can affect the ability of their authorities to benefit from the use of information technology. In order to deal with such challenges some of the measures that were considered by the local authorities ranged from; engaging in extensive negotiations, training of staff members, getting consultants to do the work, engaging in regular system reviews to ensure that the technology that has been put in place becomes successful in terms of meeting the needs of the organisation.

#### **4.4.2 Alternatives and trials**

Three local authorities, through respondents G, P and X have had internal sharing arrangements of the resources in their departments. Respondent G indicated that;

*'We have been sharing back rooms for a long time, thus being able to rent out or not take up rentals that were unnecessary. This has helped us to reduce costs. But as we try to share technology, my first view was, can this be avoided or is it the rule of the thumb?' he continued, 'you must remember that sharing with others is quite a challenge, you need to formulate policies, you have to see if what you are doing is not against the law, what if something goes wrong, so I was worried about*

*these issues, and I thought the best thing would be to think about what we can do within our own organisation.'*

Respondent G

This was an example of seeking other avenues to sharing that will reduce the risks of potential failures. Respondent P said that she could not understand why suddenly there is an insistence of sharing information technology and how this will add value to her council, which was already performing very well. The respondent noted;

*'... we are reducing our costs of operations gradually, and we are happy, so when you are asked to try and reduce further, through sharing, you wonder what ICT will do, I am not a sceptic, but am just worried that when new demands are created, and everyone is jumping to it, the failure can be enormous. In my view, measures like staff reduction, adjustments of council bands to rake in more money, and closure of certain services like some libraries can raise money by cutting costs.'*

Respondent P

This is a case where the respondent is not entirely happy with sharing technology, but it turned out that the shared arrangement was successful.

*At first, we felt that the need for sharing would interfere with our operations because we would have to make many changes to our operations. We are aware of the challenges faced by ourselves and other local authorities especially government cutting back expenditure due to economic challenges, but having to share some of our assets and responsibilities is something we were not prepared for. We have however seen the benefits of sharing with other councils.*

Respondent I

In councils K and W, it was found that the organisation was not keen on having to share their services because, they considered some of their operations and infrastructure to be adequate for their operations and as such were not keen to engage in an arrangement that would make them lose their independence or which might jeopardise their operations. This was found to be an important aspect of sharing that was considered to be a critical success factor. In this case, there was a sense of mistrust, and there were concerted efforts to delay processes with

the aim of making them remain with their own operations, but it was evident that such concerns were quickly overshadowed by the benefits that were accrued. One respondent noted that staff members of his department were happy with the way sharing was impacting the department that there were talks of sharing or associating with the other authorities beyond the areas of IT infrastructure.

Respondent A indicated;

*'We believe that the cooperation that we have with other Local Government bodies will continue for a long time. If we look at the amount of money we have committed in terms of processes and investments, we believe that sharing of services will continue for a long time.'*

Respondent Y also said;

*'I think we are yet to identify more ways of working together and I think this kind of association will not come to an end.... we will continue depending on each other, which is a good thing.'*

Respondent K also indicated;

*'...our agreements are crucial as they guide the way we shall work with our partners for a long time. But are mindful of the fact that these agreements may become restrictive in the future because suppose we are bound to perform certain tasks with partner Local Councils, future situations may call for a review of these agreements, which may not be possible.'*

Similar views were also given by respondent E

*We still strive to ensure that we can anticipate certain challenges in the future, but we must continue to work with other Local Councils to ensure that services that are offered are what residents expect.*

This is similar to the view on improved services that staff members noted in their work. By sharing with other local authorities, it was found that staff members had increased levels of interaction, and what they have learnt 'outside' through interacting with staff members of other organisations was demonstrated within their departments. To this extent, the staff

members gained from associating with staff members from other organisations. This implies that this process of sharing exposed and hence brought about new skills that are not necessarily related to Information Technology sharing. The skills gained related to interpersonal skills which improves work performance and hence service delivery.

#### 4.5 Insights and findings

On the basis of the information that has arose from the interviews that were conducted and the information that was collected from various sources including council reports and other secondary data sources, I have developed a catalogue of tabular outputs from these data.

This has been given below:

**Table 4.2 Codes generated**

Interview text	Codes
<i>This is my child and its success is crucial not only to our department but to the whole council.'</i>	Success Organisation
<i>Working with other Local Councils has helped make our employees know how to relate and learn from other councils and departments.</i>	benefit prospect internal challenges
<i>We have saved a lot of money from many activities over the past few years, but I can say that sharing of our work with others has been very helpful because it provides opportunity to learn and offer better services to our local community</i>	
<i>When the government is cutting costs, we have an opportunity to be innovative and thus be able to partner and gain from each other</i>	



Continued....

<b>Interview text</b>	<b>Codes</b>
<i>My, We , Them , They</i>	Pronoun shift
<p><i>Ultimately, the success of this project will also benefit the people we are serving, we might appear to be away from the frontline but in actual sense, what we do here with other councils, impacts directly to the people we are serving.'</i></p> <p><i>we are able to use extra savings to manage our projects and this is making the residents to see greater benefit in our work than before.</i></p> <p><i>as time goes by, as an organisation we are able to show greater accountability in a way that the costs and benefits of the project are greater than before</i></p> <p><i>I am sure both our councils are benefiting and we have to continue with this and other projects</i></p> <p><i>we have seen cost reduction and better services provided to the people</i></p> <p><i>Over the time, there has been better work ethics and improvement in association through communication and sharing of ways to deal with challenges.</i></p>	<p>Success</p> <p>Project or task</p> <p>Benefit to society</p> <p>Organisational benefit</p>

Continue....

Interview text	Code
<p><i>ensure that this new venture does not have problems, we have to allow them resources and space so that they can work without hindrance'</i></p> <p><i>Negotiations are a major headache for us, although we have always reached consensus, such stages are often difficult to go through... and we will still face many negotiations in the future because we intend to expand our cooperation with other Local Councils.</i></p>	<p>Confirmation Challenges Processes</p>
<p><i>they had to, you can imagine you are the CEO and you want things to happen in a certain way, obviously, you will seek to have your input, especially where your reputation and your job is at stake'</i></p> <p><i>Worker are particularly asked to show commitment to the work of the council at this time where we are sharing resources.</i></p> <p><i>... Of course there are job role changes because we have to form special teams that will work other external teams, and I think this is very important in making us be able to share in the best way possible.</i></p>	<p>Personal perspective Designation Effort and determination Job prospect</p>

Continued...

Interview text	Code
<p><i>My concern was to use our product to make the operations of council B easy, and the success of our project in council B would have enabled us to support other councils and even schools. I was looking at not from cost savings point of view, but from a long-term benefit to our council, because, we had a hard choice of either keeping our staff members or sacking them. I did not want to lose any of the staff members.</i></p> <p><i>We believe that the cooperation that we have with other Local Government bodies will continue for a long time. If we look at the amount of money we have committed in terms of processes and investments, we believe that sharing of services will continue for a long time.</i></p> <p><i>I think we are yet to identify more ways of working together and I think this kind of association will not come to an end.... we will continue depending on each other, which is a good thing.</i></p>	<p>Support and associations</p> <p>Capability</p> <p>Success</p> <p>Internal operations</p> <p>Strategic perspective</p> <p>Job retention</p> <p>Personal view</p>
<p><i>, 'any other thing that we can do, we should do it for the sake of ensuring that we are successful.'</i></p>	<p>Activity</p> <p>Considerations</p> <p>Success for organisation</p>

Continued...

Interview Text	Code
<p><i>fear among councils that we may do our best to provide a certain service, but the residents may be seeking a different service all together, which may put us on a path to confrontation with them. This can be compounded by media hype that often views the organisation as the failure, without considering what the organisation has done</i></p> <p><i>as we share, we have to realise that there are risks that we must face, such can have political challenges, for example, sharing is about sharing data, which can get lost or hurt some people.</i></p>	<p>Dim future prospects</p> <p>Expectations and pressure</p> <p>External forces</p> <p>Failure prospects</p>
<p><i>we have to have an IT system that can support our organisation, but, when we are asked to do something by the government, under current economic conditions, we have to ask yourself if that is in our best interest'</i></p>	<p>Information technology system</p> <p>Internal processes of organisation</p> <p>External conditions</p> <p>The best option</p> <p>Considerations</p>

Continued....

Interview text	Codes
<p><i>'we have seen employees are engage with each other more and can also teach one another'</i></p> <p><i>Capability building among the workforce is impressive and we can continue to build or dwell on that</i></p> <p><i>we see quick work turnover in terms of quick services and better backroom operations which are benefiting our council.</i></p> <p><i>Most of the problems can be solved at work areas through discussion and brainstorming, which means that workers can associate more positively knowing that they can help each other solve issues.</i></p>	<p>Observation</p> <p>Improved work culture</p> <p>Support for workforce in skills</p>

Continued...

<b>Interview text</b>	<b>Code</b>
<p><i>we are learning not only how to share, but also how to relate with others within the department in a way that make us to work faster and better’.</i></p> <p><i>There must be training to be done from time to time, because our workers are able to work together with persons who are from other organisation to serve their workers.</i></p> <p><i>improved communication between councils</i></p> <p><i>we have to ensure that our employees are aware of what the new system looks like and how to use it, otherwise we will fail</i></p> <p><i>when problems are identified, it is easy to deal with these through learnt experience</i></p>	<p>Skills improvement Good work culture efficiency</p>

Continued...

Interview text	Codes
<p><i>'We have been sharing back rooms for a long time, thus being able to rent out or not take up rentals that were unnecessary. This has helped us to reduce costs. But as we try to share technology, my first view was, can this be avoided or is it the rule of the thumb?' he continued, 'you must remember that sharing with others is quite a challenge, you need to formulate policies, you have to see if what you are doing is not against the law, what if something goes wrong, so I was worried about these issues, and I thought the best thing would be to think about what we can do within our own organisation</i></p> <p><i>...our agreements are crucial as they guide the way we shall work with our partners for a long time. But are mindful of the fact that these agreements may become restrictive in the future because suppose we are bound to perform certain tasks with partner Local Councils, future situations may call for a review of these agreements, which may not be possible.</i></p>	<p>Internal processes  Time duration  Waste elimination  Cost savings  Technology usage  Personal view  Rules and practices  Problems of sharing  External challenges  Possible solutions  Breaking up</p>

Continued....

Codes and identify factor	Memo or description
<p><i>We still strive to ensure that we can anticipate certain challenges in the future, but we must continue to work with other Local Councils to ensure that services that are offered are what residents expect.</i></p> <p><i>We had no choice but to consider if we can terminate some of the agreements we have had</i></p> <p><i>We have problems with some partners because we tend to have different objectives to meet, different internal mechanisms and different expectations. However, through meetings and discussions, we tend to overcome these challenges.</i></p>	<p>Problems of sharing</p> <p>Possible solutions</p> <p>Breaking up</p> <p>Internal processes</p> <p>Trust</p>



Continued...

Codes and identify factor	Memo or description
<p><i>‘... we are reducing our costs of operations gradually, and we are happy, so when you are asked to try and reduce further, through sharing, you wonder what ICT will do, I am not a sceptic, but am just worried that when new demands are created, and everyone is jumping to it, the failure can be enormous. In my view, measures like staff reduction, adjustments of council bands to rake in more money, and closure of certain services like some libraries can raise money by cutting costs.</i></p> <p><i>We know that having better systems in our councils is important. Of course there are costs and problems for instance in the beginning we faced problems migrating data, which affected our operations, these were challenges that we did not anticipate</i></p> <p><i>joining resources has been a vital part of our operations, and since our information and resources are held by our partner council, we must communicate all the time, but also learn from each other</i></p>	<p>Cost reduction,            Good prospects            Importance of ICT or technology            Prospects            Demands and expectations            Failure,            New practices,            Finances</p>

Continued....

Codes and identify factor	Memo or description
<p><i>any arrangement involves money</i></p> <p><i>We have been able to save a lot of money in the past 6 months and we hope that after 12 months when we review our operations, we will be able to save more and use the money on other operations.</i></p> <p><i>We know that political pressure due to the financial crisis have increased and we must do what the central government wants.</i></p> <p><i>As a council, the needs of our local residents are a key objective in determining how we manage our council's operations. We believe that sharing is currently the future of our engagement as it can help save money and offer better services.</i></p>	<p>Time frame</p> <p>Costs and expenditure</p> <p>Politics</p> <p>Future</p> <p>Supporting operations</p>

From the table given above, incidents that are applicable to each category are given (Geotz and LeCompte 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), there was need to identify the key points and these were then assigned with a letter for instance by removing the responses and remaining with the codes the next issue was to identify the codes in the light of the key factors that that these codes were informing; these can be shown in the table below:

**Table 4.3 Code descriptions**

<b>Codes and identify factor</b>	<b>Memo or description</b>
Success (S1) Organisation benefit (B1) prospect (B2) internal challenges (IC1)	Denotes that level of positive outcomes of sharing and also the problems that are encountered in the process.
Pronoun shift (P1)	Reference to self, opinion of self or others
Success (S1) Project or task (PT1) Benefit to society (B2) Organisational benefit (B1)	Positive outcomes, the task at hand
Confirmation (C1) Challenges (CH1) Processes (PR1)	Problems or externalities
Personal perspective (PP1) Designation (D1) Effort and determination (E1) Job prospect (B2)	Self-views, power, culture, team making and internal processes
Responsibility (R1) Designation (D1) Power and authority (D1) Internal processes (PR1)	Self-views, power, culture and internal processes

Continued...

<b>Codes and identify factor</b>	<b>Memo or description</b>
External forces (E1) Internal processes (PR1) Service improvement (B1) Continuity of the local authority (PR1)	External forces, power, culture and internal processes
Support and associations (B1) Capability (B1) Success (B1) Agreements (PR1) Internal operations (PR1) Strategic perspective (B1) Job retention (B2) Personal view (P1)	Self-views, power, culture and internal processes, personal views, longevity of the processes
Activity (PR1) Agreements (D1) Trust (W1) Success for organisation (B1)	Internal processes, internal environment

Continued...

Codes	Memo or description
Dim future prospects (PR1) Expectations and pressure (PR1) External forces (PR1) Failure prospects (PR1)	Challenges, external and internal environments.
Information technology system (T1) Internal processes of organisation (PR1) External conditions (E1) The best option (D1) Finalising issues or agreements (D1)	Technological environment, external environment issues
Observation (O1) Improved work culture (PR1) Support for workforce in skills (T1)	Personal view, internal process, positive outcomes, team selection, team work
Skills improvement (T1) Good work culture (W1) Trust (W1) Efficiency (PR1)	Internal environment, positive outcome, work culture

Continued...

Codes and identify factor	Memo or description
Internal processes (PR1) Time duration (T1) Wastage removal (B1) Cost savings (B1) Technology usage (T1) Personal view (P1) Rules and practices (PR1) Problems of sharing (CH1) External challenges (CH1) Possible solutions (D1) Breakup (PR2)	Self-views, power, culture and internal processes, external environment
Cost reduction (B1) Good prospects (B1) Importance of ICT or technology (T1) Prospects (P1) Demands and expectations (CH1) Failure, (CH1) New practices (B1) Finances (CH1)	Challenges, positive outcomes, internal processes, internal environment, external environment.

The table above integrates categories and their properties (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 339), (as was examined in section 3.15). On the basis of information in the table above, it can be seen that there are a number of issues that emanated relating to ITSS in Local Government bodies. There are a number of categories that have been identified (delimiting the theory, see section 3.15):

**Positive outcomes:** these relate to the benefits that have accrued from the use of ITSS in Local Government bodies. These outcomes relate to the benefits that Local Government bodies have identified, for example cost savings, efficiency and good working relationships.

*We have been able to save a lot of money in the past 6 months and we hope that after 12 months when we review our operations, we will be able to save more and use the money on other operations.*

Respondent Z1

*Capability building among the workforce is impressive and we can continue to build or dwell on that*

Respondent V

*As time goes by, as an organisation we are able to show greater accountability in a way that the costs and benefits of the project are greater than before*

Respondent Q

**Internal processes:** These aspects relate to the changes to processes within a department or an entity. Each party to local government shared service had to change some aspects of their internal management in order to share effectively. Internal processes also informed the question of power within an organisation. These are matters of ‘organisation’.

*It is by appreciating what is taking place outside, that the government body can make improvements in its operations. This was, the possibility to improving services is high, but also the securing the survival of the councils.*

**Environments:** there are environments that impacted on the ways organisations share their resources. Internal environment involved what is taking place in an organisation, while external environment represents those factors that are beyond the control of an organisation.

For instance, politics, economic situation, budget deficits and funding, all had impacts on how managers related or prioritised their operations. There are also technological forces that were identified as crucial to the process of sharing. The respondents identified the kind of technology in existence or the one that is desired to facilitate the process of sharing.

*'Fear among councils that we may do our best to provide a certain service, but the residents may be seeking a different service all together, which may put us on confrontational path with them (other councils). This can be compounded by media hype that often views the organisation as being a failure, without considering what the organisation has done'*

All the aspects given above are pointers to broader factors that relate to environment, technology and organisational forces that an organisation faces. They inform the broader aspect of TOE as examined in section 4.8.

During the analysis of data various issues became apparent that ITSS sharing was more than a concept of sharing. It supports the other aspects of sharing that local governments have engaged in. As mentioned in the previous sections of this study, where local governments share other aspects of their operations, it was found that IT supports most of the activities of the local governments and as such, Information Technology Shared Services provides a means through which other aspects of sharing was taking place (Stein & Zwass, 1995; Orlikowski & Barley, 2001). For instance, consider the aspect of sharing employee management processes, it was found that having to share HR payroll helped to make the activity of processing salary to be easier and cheaper. Another area where ITSS was crucial was in the area of procurement. Whereas procurement can be done manually within a local authority, sharing procurement software or procurement processes enabled councils to plan how to procure the needs of their authorities cheaply. Due to this enabling aspect of IT, it can be said that IT sharing supports other functional aspects of UK local governments.



Another aspect of ITSS that was found to be crucial to the operations of the local councils was the fact that through IT sharing, the staff members who were engaged in the activity of sharing gained better skills through association (Johnston & Vitale, 1988; Atkinson et al. 1997). The teams that were formed to implement that sharing arrangements had to work together with those of other agencies and hence were able to learn from each other. This is an employee development aspect of ITSS where, during implementing the operations of the council, employees gained skills that they can use in other aspects of their work. For instance, employees who worked in teams managed to gain better understanding about their job and how to relate with each other. Through association, employees in teams also helped one another to meet their targets and goals hence benefit themselves and their organisations.

In terms of constraints to Information Technology Shared Services, there were general and specific constraints. The general constraints were associated with all aspects of sharing, while specific constraints were associated with ITSS. The costs of implementing ITSS was both a general and specific constraint (Ravichandran et al. 2005; Czajkowski et al. 2001; Lee and Whang, 2000). It should be noted that one of the key reasons for venturing into sharing was to reduce the costs of operations for the councils (see section 2.5.1a). These are major factors that can be found in the internal and external environment where the organisation operates.

#### **4.5.1 Cost outlay**

Information Technology Shared Services involves a number of activities that involve money. Due to the involvement of money, Local Councils that take an active part in the process of ITSS implementation had to discuss the level of contribution and expected savings or cost benefits that they could gain. Cost involves the input that the councils had to put in order to source for and have in place the necessary infrastructure for sharing. It was found that a sharing arrangement could break down between two local governments because, in one

instance, one authority accused the other of having not presented honest information about the costs outlay and subsequent cost savings, this made the local government that pulled out of the arrangement to feel that it could lose out if it ventured into the arrangement. The representative of the authority noted that while they will continue with other aspects of sharing, they had to stop ITSS for the moment until they are assured of the costs-savings that they might gain from the arrangement.

#### **4.5.2 System compatibility**

The other constraint was found to be the incompatibility of the system, which related to the challenge of being in a sharing arrangement where the IT system in place does not support the needs of one or more of the partner organisations. During the interview with some of the respondents, concerns were raised that if the Information Technology system that has been put in place is not going to support their infrastructure, they will lose out. One manager (Respondent A – Codes S1, B1) noted that they have to be sure that the system that they propose to the other authority will meet the needs of the other authorities before rolling it out to other entities for instance, to schools. System incompatibility was a point of discussion in the cases where a third party was asked to provide IT infrastructure to two or more local governments. The reason for this is because, if a particular system (for instance, a payroll system or procurement system) is not compatible with the infrastructure of one or more Local Councils, there could be immense modifications to be put in place to support the operations of the councils and the fear of system failure could result.

### 4.5.3 Security and IT Constraints

There was also the constraint of security of the system in place, this related to the fear that since most local governments keep crucial data in secured systems, IT sharing, as opposed to any other form of sharing has the potential of compromising these data sets and therefore crippling the operations of the local governments involved. Since ITSS involves migrating data or uploading crucial information onto a system that is shared, during preliminary discussions about sharing IT infrastructure, it was found that security concerns took most of the discussion period because each of the potential partnering local authorities had its own expectations and fears vis-à-vis security of their data. This issue is linked to political jeopardy, where, should security of their data (which involves residents' information and tax) is compromised and should this compromise be made known to the public and central government, the political risks can be high. For this reason, there was need to embark on intense negotiations and ensure that adequate clarifications and assurances are given and potential challenges are addressed.

IT constraints are those factors that make IT adoption and usage to be extremely challenging, let alone IT sharing. In Local Government bodies the use of IT is increasing because it enhances service provision. However, the use of IT can be hampered by among others, internal challenges and dynamics, costs of implementation, government policy, budgetary limits, delays and internal conflicts, time constraints. These factors are numerous and every entity has to deal with one or more of these constraints. On consideration of whether Information Technology Shared Services is going according to expectation of the authorities that are involved, in this context the issues of expectation emanate from the objectives that the partner local government body had when they started partnering. Objectives that Local Government bodies or entities have set have been found to be of different levels (key

objectives and other objectives). Those sharing their IT services evaluate these objectives after a certain period of time and determine if they can continue with the process of sharing or not. It should be noted that these objectives, especially the peripheral objectives, can change from time to time. Key objectives like cost reduction, service provision and even job creation or retention tend to remain unchanged over a period time.

#### **4.5.4 Work culture and Skill-set**

The other constraint was the issue of skills that the employees should have in order to ensure that ITSS is done property. It was considered vital to not only have a team but have a team that will drive the arrangement to succeed. Lack of adequate skills among team members was viewed to be a cause of discontent and slowness in implementing ITSS. One manager (Respondent V, codes PP1, B2, T1 in section 4.5) noted that he had to choose his team carefully because; failure to do this would mean failure to implement ITSS successfully. It was also found that team members, when carefully picked and made to run the ITSS would come back with right skills that they can pass to other members of their departments in their respective councils. This is reason why the benefits of ITSS were found to go beyond the costs savings and to involve employee integration, internal informal training among employees.

#### **4.5.5 Considerations when sharing IT resources**

In examining the considerations that must be taken into account when seeking to share, the entities that are involved tend to examine these factors against potential benefits.

Compatibility between local government, political situation, costs, the needs of the residents, key objectives of the councils and the work cultures are all crucial considerations when choosing who to share with.

There are many factors that are taken into consideration by local authorities when seeking to join a Shared Services arrangement. These factors have been found to range from cost factors to employee related factors, a view shared by Lee and Whang (2000) and which Cordella (2006) categorised as search costs, negotiation costs and enforcement costs. It appears that generally, costs benefit factors play an important role in determining whether to join a Shared Services arrangement. As indicated in two sections of this report (section 1.1 and 1.3.1), the key emphasis for sharing was to reduce costs of operations in local governments. Cost savings have been realised among many local governments as shown in section 1.5. It was found that all the Local Councils tend to seek to know how they can reduce their costs of operations. The other factors that were given due importance were:

- I. Aligning operations to ensure that when councils share their resources, they do not encounter challenges. For instance; they do not face situations where system incompatibility occurs, because should this be the case the operations of the councils could be affected negatively. To this extent, it implies that when seeking to integrate operations using IT resources as a shared resource, the teams had to evaluate whether migrating their data will result in continuing operations or not.
- II. Proximity: Most local authorities considered proximity an important factor in determining who they share with. In most cases, local governments shared with authorities that were close by. Sharing with authorities that were nearby facilitated meetings, movement of resources and evaluation of benefits to the population that was being served. However, proximity is not an important factor as was seen in the case of some councils where one of the key participants in the Shared Services arrangement noted:

*“The innovation this time around is not just there are several councils joining up, but that we are geographically separate,” he says, adding:  
“One of the arguments councils put up for not sharing services is that*

*they ask their nearest neighbours and they're not interested, so they say they can't do Shared Services.*

*“This project demonstrates that you don't need to be near each other to set up, and if it succeeds no council in the country that can say it would like to share services but can't find a willing partner nearby.*

*You won't need to be nearby.*

*“Most of the services can be done remotely, which is why we attracted plenty of interest from the market, and clustered up so it doesn't matter if we're not geographically together.”<sup>21</sup>*

#### **4.5.6 How sharing takes place**

In terms of the kind of association between the councils, it is evident that sharing of ITSS takes place in two main models; Lead authority and Equal partnership. A third form of sharing that some local authorities use is that of third party or private sector providers (see section 4.4). In this form of sharing, councils invite a private sector entity to provide them with IT services that they both need for their operations. As mentioned in the previous sections of this thesis, lead authority involves a council that has infrastructure or IT resources and which shares the same with another council that does not have the services in-house (see section 4.3.1). In this study, it was found that most of the big councils, often share their resources with smaller local authorities or boroughs. The reason for this is to generate income through the process and to optimise the use of their resources.

In terms of equal partnership, the authorities involved develop a Shared Services item or centre, in which they eventually took part in as equal partners. Such an arrangement was particularly found among bigger councils that have resources that they can pull together for and use for their benefit.

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<sup>21</sup> UKAuthority (2016) <http://www.ukauthority.com/news/5985/five-councils-raise-shared-service-ambition>

#### **4.5.7 Benefits of ITSS**

There are many benefits of ITSS within local authorities. Indeed, as was given in chapter 1 (one), many local authorities were asked to share their resources with the aim of ensuring that they are in a position to reduce their costs of operation, avoid job cuts and to offer better services to the residents who they serve. It is also easy to associate the sharing of services in general or ITSS in particular to the patronage of central government at the height of the financial crisis. There are however other benefits that emerged and which relate to ITSS benefits that local governments clearly enjoyed.

One of the benefits of ITSS has been efficient resources utilisation between and among councils. It was found that when sharing resources, for instance, pay roll systems or accounting management systems, local governments shared the extra capacity they had with other local authorities; similar studies allude to this (Brueckner, 2003 and Zhang & Zou, 1998). This meant that there is greater efficiency. It was also found that the collateral benefit of local government employees associating led to increased knowledge because of information sharing and improved work ethics, which is good for the local government involved.

The benefits given above are vital for the management and the future of many local government organisations and as such should be encouraged.

## **4.6 Discussion**

Having presented the findings and used Nvivo-generated charts to showcase the relationships that exist and various models on the question of ITSS in local government, it is important to provide an explanation of these issues with relation to the objectives of this study and the position of this study within the literature on ITSS. The objectives that I sought to meet in the course of my research were:

- I. To examine the factors taken into account by local authorities when seeking to adopt Information Technology Shares Services between them.
- II. To examine the factors making Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) a long-term endeavor among local government entities in the UK.
- III. To propose a framework of interpretation of factors that help understand and interpret issues of ITSS.

These objectives guide an understanding of how Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) have been used, are understood and are impacting on mainly internal and external operations that local governments in the UK undertake. Local Government bodies provide crucial services that benefit local residents.

### **4.6.1 Factors taken into account when considering sharing of resources**

Generally, sharing of resources and IT sharing in particular are processes that appear to have been driven primarily by external forces. For instance, political (such as local elections of the councils that alter priorities and directions that the councils are taking) and economic factors. Sharing as a means of cost cutting became a major issue soon after the 2008 financial crisis



that had major financial repercussions in many countries and organisations around the world. The UK government like many other governments (especially in developed economies) were in the process of fiscal reorganisation, which involved asking government departments to find ways of reducing their costs of operations. Therefore, sharing of services was mainly aimed at ensuring that cost reduction is achieved. However, being that such a process was largely driven by the government, political pressure also impacts on the need to engage in sharing of services at local governments' level (DiRomauldo & Gurbaxani, 1998).

In responding to such pressures, local governments which are also formed of entities from different political parties tend to seek to respond to these demands by changing their internal operations and seeking ways to continue their operations (Thong et al. 2006; Fui-Hoon Nah et al. 2001).

What was witnessed in the UK is similar to cases of local governments sharing their resources as seen in other countries like Australia, USA and Netherlands, where local governments shared their resources with other local governments within certain close proximities. It was also found that having local governments which are sharing their resources within such proximity is beneficial and easy because of the need to establish close contact as and when required (Reich & Benbasat, 2000). In the UK, in particular, the need for proximity was specifically suggested by a government sponsored review (The Gershon Review 2004).

Most local governments were also found to associate with entities that were related to them previously, for instance some local governments were previously one local authority which had been broken into two or three, and therefore, they found it easy to associate due to internal alignments that already exist, which makes sharing of IT infrastructure and services quite easy (Orlikowski & Gash, 1994; Thong et al. 2006). This makes the case for being able

to share over a long duration of time. However, despite the existence of such factors that support the operations of local governments, there are a number of factors that were identified, that posed key constraints to the ITSS.

It was also found that political party control of a local authority was not an impediment to sharing<sup>22</sup>. These two councils were looking forward to expanding the process of sharing, if their initial arrangement would have been successful. The arrangement did not, however, materialise in cost savings as was envisioned (see section 4.4.1d). In another case, the council that pulled out cited different priorities at the time that made it impossible to join the Shared Services arrangement:

*'Given our council's present priorities and financial commitments, we feel we cannot commit fully to the Local Government Shared Services initiative'<sup>23</sup>*

In another case where a total of eight councils pulled out of a scheme, which eventually meant that the entire scheme could not go ahead, one councillor said<sup>24</sup>;

*I would like to acknowledge the detailed work undertaken across the (name withheld) on the four proposed Shared Services work streams. "However, as councillors our first priority is always to do what is right for (name withheld), and regrettably these proposals were not in the best interests of this council or the local area. "We believe there is far more potential in seeking local, bespoke partnership solutions for service delivery that can protect the quality of service, while providing better value for money for the tax payers of (the region).*

In the example given above, it can be seen that the councils involved viewed the proposals for sharing as not satisfactory to their immediate needs.

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<sup>22</sup> If the corporate services merger is successful, it is suggested that Tory controlled (name withheld) and Labour (name withheld) could extend their partnership to further areas like community budgets, public health and economic development and prosperity.

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1745:slough-bc-pulls-out-of-ground-breaking-shared-services-arrangement&catid=59:governance-a-risk-articles](http://www.localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1745:slough-bc-pulls-out-of-ground-breaking-shared-services-arrangement&catid=59:governance-a-risk-articles)

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/mobile/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-14724325>

#### 4.6.2 Long term importance of ITSS

Based on the findings above, the position of ITSS in local government is mainly strategic because many local authorities install Information Technology systems in their departments with the aim of ensuring that their future operations are conducted in the most efficient manner (O’Keeffe, 2011; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002). Studies on office automation have indicated the superiority of office equipment over human or manual operations (O’Keeffe, 2011). The process of installing information technology within an organisation involves some form of investment; on equipment, human and work environment, and which often means that once the installation has been done it can be very difficult to move away from the new system, at least within a foreseeable future.

Sharing of any kind of resource is a process and in Local Government bodies this process may involve huge investments thus implying that the longevity of the product or process has been considered. Investments can take the form of money, equipment, time and even cultural changes. Quite often, these investments are driven by the need to achieve the best possible outcomes amidst certain factors that may be external or internal to the organisation. While cost outlay, equipment and time can be quantified, internal processes like cultural changes can be necessary. These can be addressed through negotiations (Lacity and Wilcox, 1998) where external and internal factors facing an organisation are discussed.

The process of negotiation is a precursor to and a vital prerequisite for making term plans within and between organisations (Pettigrew, 2014). A report by LGA (2016) indicated:

*‘Simply ‘bolting together’ management structures to achieve short-term cost savings is a tactical solution, not a recipe for long-term success, and may leave the bigger strategic prizes of partnering on the table. ...Comfort with ambiguity, multiple relationships and flexibility in structure, skills and behaviours seem vital to longer-term partnering success. Leaders and their HR functions need to think*

*about developing and supporting the verb of 'partnering', rather than the noun of a single 'partnership'*

When officials of Local Government bodies meet to discuss and start the process of sharing, quite often they do so with the view to safeguard the interests of their local authorities. Besides, the entire process involves major investments which may have to be put in place in terms of money, personnel and time (Bitner et al. 2000). For this reason, according to DiRomauldo & Gurbaxani, (1998), there is a need to ensure that there is clear understanding among the parties involved about all that the process entails and the fact that such involvement may take a long time. It is also evident that the path generally followed by Local Councils in seeking long term engagement (of more than 1 (one) year) remains strategic, hence vital for the future of a local authority (Reich & Benbasat, 2000; Lacity & Willcocks, 1998).

My research also showed that the relationship that councils were forming with each other was leading them to remain permanently linked in one way or another. Key features of a strategic plan include; long term engagement and huge financial outlay (Bitner et al. 2000). Those local governments that ventured into any form of Shared Services were committed to the process over a long duration of more than 1 year in line with their financial reporting cycles.

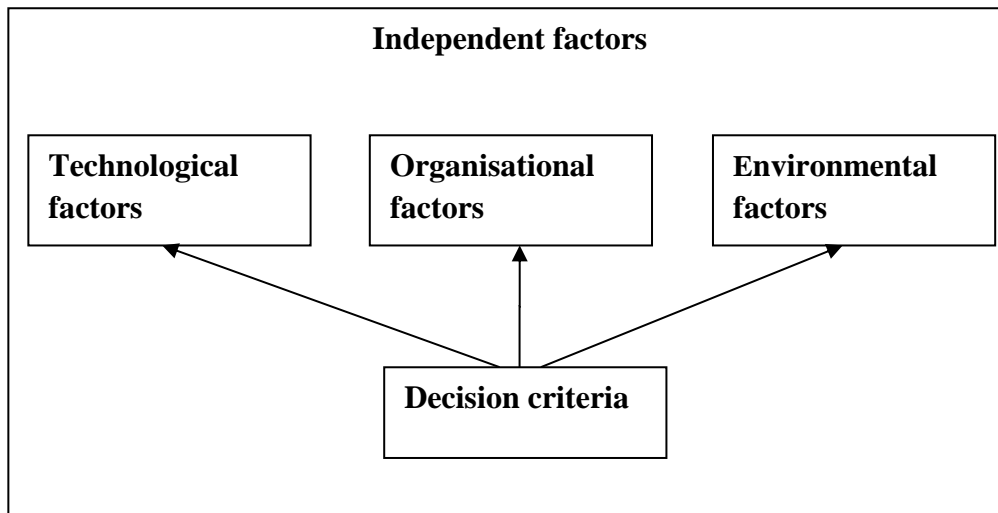
#### **4.6.3 Having internal systems in organisations**

The need to overcome operational and external challenges facing local governments led to the quest and desire to have Information Technology as a resource to aid operations (O'Keeffe, 2011; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002). Preparations that were necessary to make this process (sharing resources) a success must be put in place and they include changes to internal systems, work culture and more investments. The factors that affect the nature of sharing that is to be pursued or what local governments find themselves pursuing can be

viewed under the prism of technological factors, environmental factors and also factors relating to the operations of the local authority or an entity (O’Keeffe, 2011). These factors are independent of the plans taken by council managers who are in the Local Government bodies.

A schematic view of the relationship between these factors and a local government entity can be shown below:

**Figure 4.2 Factors in sharing environment**



From the diagram above, independent factors exist irrespective of the situations that local authorities face. On the other hand, plans that are made at local government level are dependent on the dynamics of independent factors. Technological factors, environmental factors and organisational factors all work in tandem to dictate what public sector managers make with regards to the implementation of Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS). IT environment involves the Information Technology resources that can be defined by terms like e-Governance, automation or using computer based systems to run operations in an organisation. Most local government activities are conducted using information technology

resources and this implies that most organisations find it inevitable to use information technology systems to manage their operations.

The reliance of Information Technology by organisation has been on the increase, not only in the UK, but in many parts of the world. This is based on the view that information technology makes work easier by allowing the workforce to be more productive and supports other aspects of the organisation (Asgarkhani, 2005; McKeen & Smith, 2011).

In the long run, local governments must invest in Information Technology to improve performance (McKeen and Smith, 2011). It has been found that generally, in many local authorities, there is a favourable attitude towards Information Technology as a resource, but this does not mean that there are no apprehensions about the same. During field study, fears about security of data, autonomy and costs of having Information Technology Sharing arose:

*'as we share, we have to realise that there are risks that we must face, such can have political challenges, for example, sharing is about sharing data, which can get lost or hurt some people'*

Respondent K

*'you must remember that sharing with others is quite a challenge, you need to formulate policies, you have to see if what you are doing is not against the law, what if something goes wrong, so I was worried about these issues, and I thought the best thing would be to think about what we can do within our own organisation'*

Respondent C

A study by Dewet and Jones (2001) and Jamieson and Hyland (2006), showed that these fears are real, but the benefits of having Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) have been more pronounced to the point that existential fears are not always considered. This is a question of trust, akin to the findings by Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) and Alford and O'Flynn, (2012) (see section 1.1.1).

#### **4.6.3a Importance of IT in many organisations**

Another important issue relating to ITSS was the fact that in most organisations, an IT department is not a mere section of another department. IT departments form the basis of operational ability of other departments and hence must have dedicated staff members (human resources) and other resources. There have been studies that have considered human aspect of IT usage, especially on hardware, software and human ware (Avgerou and Walsham, 2000; Berman, 1997). This informs the need to identify the level of integration between users and technology in an organisation. As seen from the way managers of local government run their entities, the first instance of how these can be viewed is at conceptual level, which is dependent on the experiences of the managers of partnering authorities. The second instance is on existing or potential skills of team member vis-a-vis the use of information technology that has been put in place in partnering local authorities. When seeking to identify 'what' and 'how' to share information technology, managers have to take into account internal capabilities and also look at external factors that might impact the chances of sharing effectively.

#### **4.6.4 The right team**

Another issue that became crucial was the need to identify and have in place the right team to manage a process. The training given to one team may not necessarily be the same as that of another, for instance, in one entity the certain skills are essential and in another entity, another set of skills may be essential. Having the right skill-set within a team is an internal capability of a team and of partnering organisations (Caudle et al. 1989; Fletcher et al. 1992).

Effective teams are developed through training, which is part of the culture that an organisation may have. Local Government bodies tend to have many training sessions to equip their workforce. Team training was considered especially when teams from different

authorities came together. Studies on team development identify skill leverage as a crucial part of team composition (Fletcher et al. 1992; Tsai et al. 2012). Tuckman noted that during the Forming and Norming stages, training is an essential aspect (Gong et al. 2013). There are however few studies on how organisations leverage team skills when members of two teams are joined into one team.

#### **4.6.5 Training and Skill-set**

This issue of improving skillsets or training is crucial as an internal enabling factor because, Caudle et al (1989) and Fletcher et al, (1992) have noted that training is often ignored when implementing projects that are related to Information Technology in most organisations. In this study, it was found that training is considered an important aspect of implementing ITSS in local governments:

*'There must be training to be done from time to time, because our workers be able to work together with persons who are from other organisation to serve their workers'*

Respondent S

*'We have to ensure that our employees are aware of what the new system looks like and how to use it, otherwise we will fail'*

Respondent N

In all the three main models of sharing that are commonly used (lead, equal partnership and outsourcing), the authorities had to ensure that the workforce chosen to work on the project had the minimum skills based on the objectives to be achieved, hence the work of the management was to select, plan trainings and necessary meetings and evaluate the way these teams will relate and work together. However, in examining literature on Shared Services in general and Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS), little was found on the need to level team skills for effective team working.



While the need to leverage skills is essential, there must also be certain internal changes that have to be undertaken to make the IT sharing successful. Processes like negotiations and team meetings aimed at ensuring that clarity is found. During such meetings, internal and external factors facing the councils had to be examined (Berman, 1997). Important meetings aimed at understanding these internal and external factors are also crucial in formulating ways of facing such challenges. It is during such meetings that investments are made.

#### **4.6.6 Internal processes**

Other than the need to leverage the skills of local government workers, there were other internal changes that had to be made to ensure that the process of ITSS is successful. Local authorities had to ensure that meetings are held on a regular basis to evaluate progress; necessary investments were done in the relevant Information Technology infrastructure and consider an organisation to share with on the basis of proximity. However, it was found that there are external forces that could affect, either positively or negatively, the process of Information Technology Shared Services (the needs of the 'clients' of the council) (Berman, 1997), funding from government or the level of association that has existed before, among other factors). These factors are external to a local government authority and so the authority should ensure that it can achieve its objectives within these external forces. Mention should also be made of the fact that each local government that is party to a sharing arrangement of any form must examine its own abilities, needs and infrastructure in order to determine how to engage in the process.

Once potential sharing partners (entities that are involved) have identified internal and external challenges, negotiation processes enable local governments to identify their strengths and thus set parameters on how to share infrastructure. What was found is that smaller Local Government bodies, including parishes and borough councils generally engage in 'Lead'

sharing agreement with big local authorities. Bigger Local Government bodies have larger investments and resources thus can offer support to smaller Local Government bodies. In one case, it was found that a Local Council offered its IT services to local boroughs and parishes. One reason that was given for this situation is that small local authorities did not see the need to invest in IT infrastructure, and it was easier for these Parishes to 'buy or seek' these IT services from bigger councils. The capabilities of larger councils include financial resources, human resources, political and professional leadership (Tomkinson, 2007).

#### **4.6.7 Emergence of Trust**

While these are resources that can be seen and quantified, another aspect, trust, emerged as a potential matter that can support or hamper IT sharing. Two scenarios occurred where the process of sharing had to stop because it was said that trust was lacking in that the information that was given about the benefits and outlay to be met was not clear or true. In this case, the issue was not cost, potential benefits nor proximity, but trust. Trust among organisations that are in the same 'business' is crucial but it is more pronounced when it has to do with spending of money.

As stated in section 1.1.1, the question of trust among team members within an organisation is a prerequisite for the success of an organisation (Tsai et al. 2012; Gong et al. 2013; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002). Trust must be an important prerequisite for team engagement (Tsai et al. 2012). Trust shows that an organisation is concerned about the information it receives, especially if such information will affect its expenditure (Edelenbos & Klijn, 2007). If the information is not favourable or is not trustworthy, sharing arrangements can fail. Such a case was seen where a potential sharing partner (authority) found that the cost savings were

in favour of the partner authority, and hence decided to pull out of the arrangement<sup>25</sup>. But what this might also imply is that at a time when funding has been cut, most local authorities are not in the appetite to spend more money than necessary, a situation that is not unusual, but cuts across organisations, communication is thus crucial to ensure that there is adequate information to support any arrangement to share services. This also implies that proximity<sup>26</sup> is not as important a factor for consideration as is costs and most importantly, information movement between local authorities.

#### **4.6.8 Leadership**

Another element that was of great importance to the success of sharing was the leadership of the process. It was found that in most of the successful local governments (in ITSS process), leadership was vital. The head of the council or heads of departments or even teams are all leaders (Joyce, 2015). These leaders provide vision, engage in negotiations and organise the whole process (Joyce, 2015). There are examples of Local Government bodies that benefitted from good leadership such as when a council executive manager was asked to take over the management of another local authority and he spearheaded the process of sharing on a large scale, turning around the local government's performance (BBC News 2013<sup>27</sup>; Great Yarmouth Borough Council 2015). Whereas most local governments are run by teams, in some cases the chief executive had the final say, but the ability of these leaders to have vision and ensure that teams are organised and Information Technology Shared Services

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<sup>25</sup> To address the concerns raised... in proportion to the relative size of the council and its strategic and operational role in the project, members of cabinet requested that (name withheld) be allocated the first £350,000 per annum of savings. "With the eventual approach being two thirds, one third split in (name withheld) favour." Unfortunately, (name withheld) found this approach unacceptable and we will, therefore, no longer be entering into the arrangement."

<sup>26</sup> Proximity was viewed by Peel et al, (2012: 8) as very important but this was probably important in areas that are vast like Australia and where it only makes sense to share with the neighbouring authority.

<sup>27</sup> West Oxfordshire District Council leader Barry Norton said: "These efficiency changes have gone by unnoticed locally and have enabled us to maintain major frontline service to the residents of our district." He insisted each council would keep its "independence [and] individuality". The two councils currently have four directors and 17 service heads with a planned reduction to three directors and 12 service heads. Two directors already work across both councils and the new set-up will have seven service heads working for both councils. (BBC News, 2013).

infrastructure has been planned for and put in place, is crucial. Where such leadership lacks, the process may not be carried through successfully.

Based on the information provided above, it can be seen that Information Technology Shared Services as an internal process of an organisation is impacted by internal and external forces. Sharing of information technology resources relies on external and internal factors, and as such, sharing activity is a process that gradually becomes a permanent business engagement between and among local government entities. This could be due to the fact that these local authorities are in the same sector and tend to face similar challenges that might also impact their functions similarly. By investing time, human resources, money and technology in the process of ITSS, pulling out of the process becomes difficult as time goes by. This leads to the creation of 'super virtual local authorities' linked by information technology that is shared by both or all. Local government bodies are linked using technology, the control of what each of these councils does is not diminished because they are managed through policies of central government and political parties that govern such councils.

Three main models of sharing that were identified including lead, partnership and outsourcing, and these were predominantly used among Local Councils. It was also found that most of the IT sharing activities were not necessarily developing new systems or buying new software but were mainly a realignment of the use of Information Technology as a service. Those Local Councils had to share their Information Technology resources; they had to either move their data or aspects of operations to be managed at a certain location. This meant that there was need to make certain changes internally and jointly. For this to be successful, there was a need to ensure that skillset, operations and other aspects of management are aligned to make this possible and successful, thus a realignment of information technology resources (Knoll and Jarvenpaa, 1994; Harrison, 2008) in such a way that the objectives of the entities involved can be achieved.

#### 4.6.9 Key issues arising from this discussion

There are a number of issues that have been identified in this study and which can be categorised as given in the table below. This is the stage of writing the theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 339);

**Table 4.4 Categories of TOE factors**

<b>External Issues</b>		
<b>Environmental</b>	<b>Organisational</b>	<b>Technological</b>
Government, expectations, Laws. Budgetary allocations. New regulations and laws.	Training, Right teams, Meetings, Cost. Leadership.	Responding to government and residents, Cost of the system, Investment in good system.

Underpinning an organisation’s internal issues (for instance, internal systems, meetings, costs and leadership) is the question of managing information technology sharing within an organisation (Galín, 2013). Managing information technology in general revolves around managing organisations amidst a number of factors (some may be positive while others are or can be negative), a practice that has continued for years (Hackman, 1987; Larson, 2007).

The function of a group of council executives and managers has continued to revolve around meeting internal demands and external expectations. External forces are beyond the control of groups as they are beyond the control of an individual (manager) (Galín, 2013). This raises an important issue; first, these executives should work within certain dynamics at all times and secondly, the executives have to anticipate changes to both internal and external environments in which they operate (Xia et al. 2013; Pettigrew, 2014). To this extent, the existence of an issue to be dealt with and the possibility of finding solutions through ‘collective action’ provides a glimmer of hope that eventually a solution can be found (Galín, 2013). This view, however, fails to consider the fear of complacency that can be attributed to

the ‘Garbage Can view’<sup>28</sup> in the general management sphere, where groups should not be formed to solve problems but to find ways of developing organisations. So far, this research has considered the implementation of ITSS, not as a solution to a problem, but as a way of developing an organisation.

In the implementation of a new system or approach within an organisation, it is expected that different views will be taken into account before the process or even during and after, thus establishing the collective management of the entities involved. The aspects of collective management within an organisation have often been discussed alongside the question of power within an organisation (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1974; Eisenhardt and Zbaracki, 1992; Pettigrew, 2014). In an organisation where politics determines certain actions, like a local government body (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994), power is tightly linked to politics (Pettigrew 2014). Management of local governments is about power and political influences. In contextualisation of the aspects of this discussion, within Local Government bodies, sharing a resource is an issue that can be influenced by specific factors about the resource, dispositions of those who manage the entity (council) including their affinity to and affiliations within certain persuasions (political, ideological among others) and objectives to be met (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012).

Studies on organisational power have for a long time been hinged on the fact that managers control the tools of power in an organisation, for instance determining budgets (financial or accounting managers), the future of the organisation (directors) or even marketing processes (marketing managers) (Pettigrew, 2014). This is the view that was propounded in modern

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<sup>28</sup> Cohen et al. (1972) argued that the decision-making process is really a meeting point of multiple actors, multiple goals, and multiple views. They define the garbage can as “the meeting point of a problem in search of a solution, a solution in search of a problem and actors whose attention is divided, who come and go, but who happen to be at the meeting place of the problem and solution.”

management practices by Peter Drucker and Fayol Henri (Edwards, 2013). In the field of information and communication technology, or in automation of office processes, the information technology system is being viewed as an aid to facilitating management (Simons, 2013).

Debate has, however, remained less progressive because information technology as a tool for supporting and aiding the efficient management of organisation has always been enumerated with among other tools like finances, which is why most organisations have IT departments, just like Finance, Marketing and Personnel management departments. There is however, the recognition of the fact that Information Technology offers support to other departments (Pudjianto et al. 2011), thus when organisations seek to share their resources, Information Technology facilitates a number of tasks, ranging from simple tasks like communication, to having revolutionary systems or processes like the Enterprise Resources planning or as in this case systems that facilitate sharing of other resources.

Managers of local government should deal with aspects of management amidst external factors (politics), and internal factors (for instance managing work cultures), thus operating within organisational and power influences. The role of local government managers involves understanding the dynamics of the environments that they operate in, first as civil servants and as facilitators of implementation of political objectives. Looking at the complexity facing local government managers within the realm of facilitating sharing of information technology, Simons (2013) attempted to showcase the differences between human workers and machines but could not articulate the boundaries of machines or limitations thereof of the tools that are used by managers to run organisations. This is not to imply that the resources that support the implementation of decisions implementation are flawed. In this study, it was

found that there are instances where Local Government bodies pulled out of Information Technology Shared Services arrangements because the benefits were limited (at least in the short run). In the figure that has been given in chapter 1 (section 1.5), the benefits of sharing have been quantified. These are general benefits, they are not benefits of ITSS, and however, all respondents of Local Government bodies admitted that Information Technology resources played a crucial role in facilitating the sharing of services.

Those who are responsible for running local government organisations also have the authority and resources to do the work, although in the recent past, owing to austerity measures by the UK's central government, the resources have been reduced by budgetary cuts. Their designations within their organisations are clear indicators of what they are supposed to do and how, yet decisions that they are to make must be aimed against challenges or towards certain objectives (Pettigrew, 2014). These local government managers must thus face certain challenges and take measures to help overcome these challenges. A recent study by (Simons, 2013) noted that managers must identify key challenges and focus on them. Such a view looks at managers as 'trouble-shooters', which is a reactive perspective. In this study, such a view is valid to a certain extent. Managers are not just supposed to face and dispel problems, they are also supposed to anticipate or make plans (Pettigrew, 2014).

The ability for managers of local governments to anticipate challenges and organise resources to meet these challenges is a question of power, experience and determination of which of the factors (internal or external) to tackle first. Prioritisation of the tasks to be considered along is partly determined by the needs of a local authority (on one side) and the opportunities or otherwise, presented by the kind of partnership that has been created by partner local authorities. The needs are generally presented by factors that can be categorised as



Technological, Organisational and Environmental factors. To this extent, it can be said that the management of organisations must therefore (in this context) look into the Technological, Environmental and Organisational factors that exist when determining how to share their resources.

#### **4.7 Theory identification and main contribution**

The essence of using advanced qualitative analysis in any research is to allow the data to guide the researcher in identifying the theory. The researcher should use the outcome of the research to link to the existing theory(ies) and provide justification for these. Bendassolli (2013) denoted that for a theory to be validated, it should be empirically evidenced. The data that has been gathered should provide key pillars for identifying the general explanation that a theory proposes (Hennink et al. 2011), and the researcher can include any other information to the theory that can give clearer contextual meaning to the issue(s) being studied.

Theory building is thus an inductive process (through observed data) leading to general statements or deductively where the theories are used to give an explanation to phenomenon that has been investigated (Egan, 2002; Hennink et al. 2011). Thus, qualitative research based on the deductive and inductive tendencies given, forms a generic analytic cycle, the researcher has to use the concept of Abduction<sup>29</sup> (Reichertz, 2009), to develop a theory. Reichertz (2009:7) noted that the researcher should exercise mental leap, where things that were not associated can now become associated. This calls for making the data and extant

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<sup>29</sup> The logical form of this operation is that of *abduction*. Here one has decided (with whatever degree of awareness and for whatever reason) no longer to adhere to the conventional view of things. This way of creating a new "type" (the relationship of a typical new combination of features) is a creative outcome which engenders a new idea. This kind of association is not obligatory, and is indeed rather risky. *Abduction* "proceeds," therefore, from a known quantity (= result) to *two* unknowns (= rule and case). Abduction is therefore a cerebral process, an intellectual act, a mental leap, that brings together things which one had never associated with one another: A cognitive logic of discovery. (Reichertz 2009: pp 3-4).

theory to be related (Kelle, 2005), through the creativity of the researcher (Pandit 1996; Reichertz, 2009).

Eisenhardt (1989: 545) said:

*‘Overall, tying the emergent theory to existing literature enhances the internal validity, generalisability, and theoretical level of the theory building from case study research ... because the findings often rest on a very limited number of cases.’*

To this extent, Bogan & Woodard (1988), and later Bendassolli (2013), gave an ‘axis’ of consideration, which they termed as the theory-phenomena-data model. In this model, it is imperative that the theory explains the phenomena, in which the data must provide an indirect justification for the same. Lynham (2002) provided a guideline for theory building by noting that the researcher should consider the following five phases; conceptual development, operationalisation, confirmation or disconfirmation, application and continuous refinement and development. All these take place in the course of conducting research from the moment data has been selected through to the time when the conclusion has been drawn for a particular study.

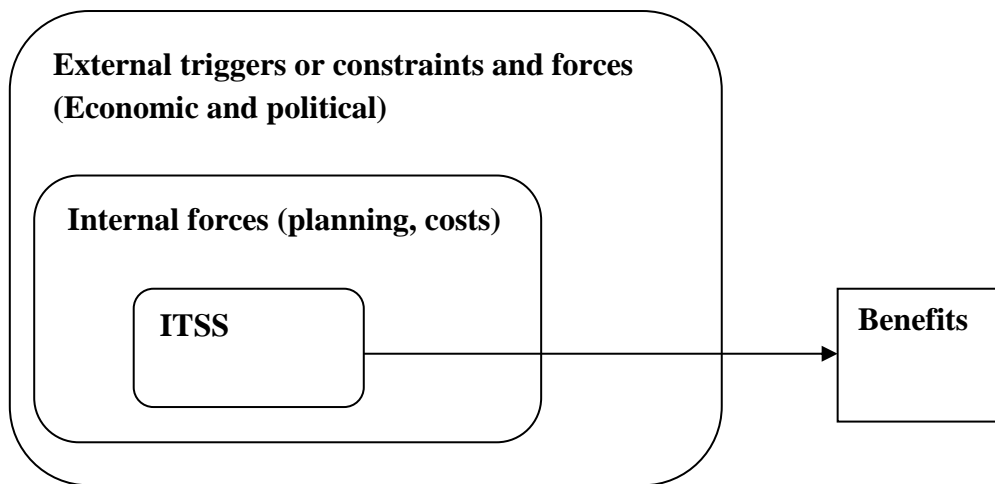
Based on the information given above, with relations to this research, there are a number of issues that have emanated:

- I. First, it is evident that the process of sharing information technology resources is a strategic issue in the local authorities. Sharing this resource is a trend that cannot be ignored because; there are many benefits to the same, although challenges also exist. Sharing of information technology resources is a management process and involves investments by the partners involved.

- II. It is also evident that politics play a key role in defining how entities shall engage with each other. Other than politics, economic circumstances are external forces that dictate to local governments the need to share resources.
- III. The other issue is the role of internal employees (mostly) management staff in defining the boundaries that must exist in any Shared Services arrangement. Managers of the local entities that share information technology provide the leadership that is required to make the process of sharing potentially successful.
- IV. Other factors that are evident include internal structure and duration for sharing of the resources.

These issues provided a conceptual framework that can be depicted below:

**Figure 4.3 Conceptual chart of issues surrounding ITSS**



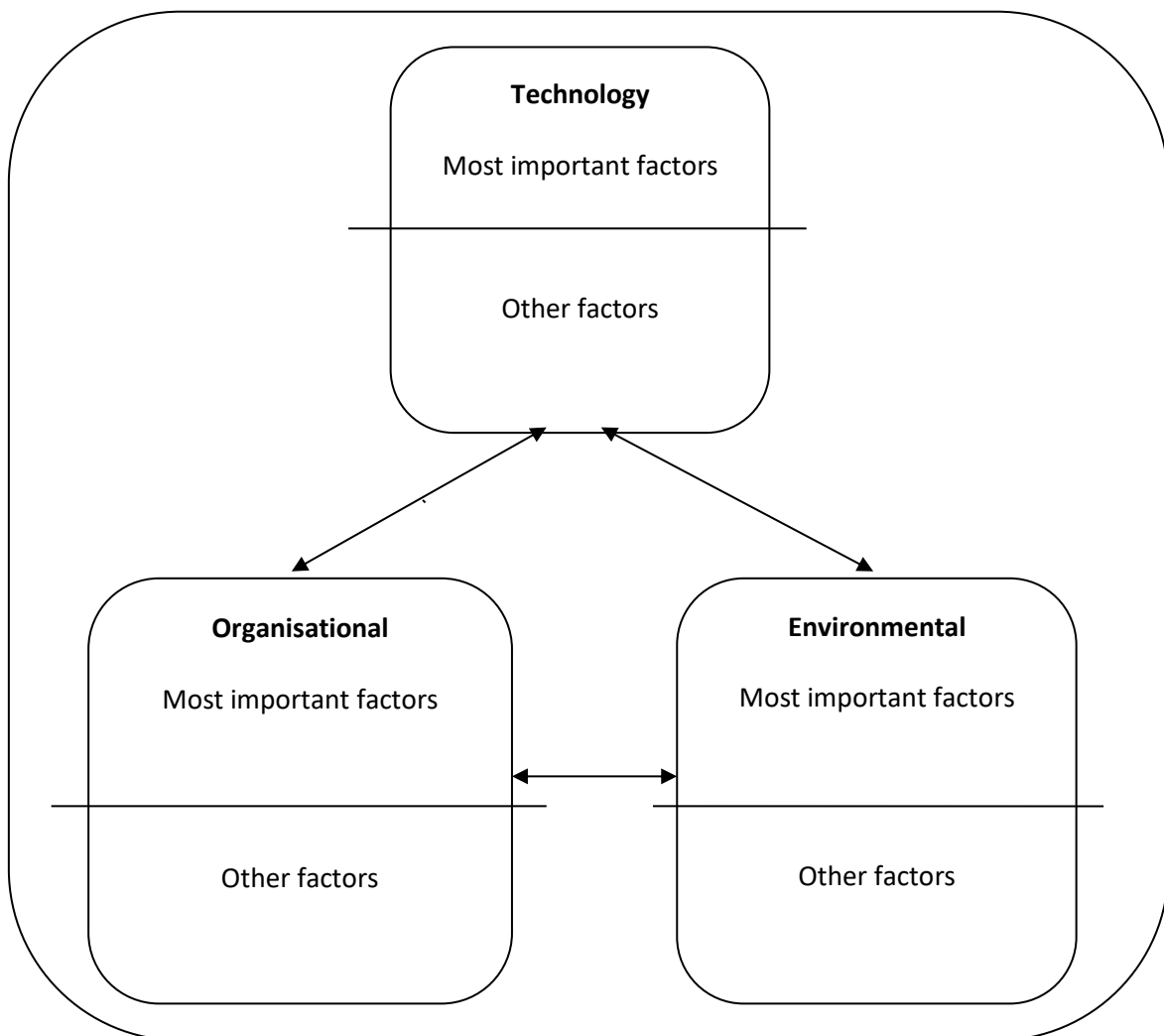
Based on the information presented in the chart above, the factors given can be associated with theories that have been developed by various authors in the field of I.T. (Dillon and Morris, 1996; Korperlainen, 2011). This study focussed on examining Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) and as such the issues that have emerged border on technology, the environment where the technology is used and the organisations as units or

entities. It was seen that there are a number of factors that can be placed at each of the three areas for instance, Technology, Environment and Organisation.

#### 4.8 Choice of TOE model and modification

Considering the information that has been given in sections 2.10, section 4.5 and section 4.7, the TOE model provides a potential lens through which ITSS implementation in a local government setting can be viewed. The model involves factors of Technology, the Organisation and the Environment and how these factors come into light when the local government organisation is seeking to engage in the ITSS process (see the diagram below):

**Figure 4.4 TOE MODEL IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**



The chart given above outlines a Technology Sharing Implementation Framework (TSIF), modified from the output of the Nvivo and aligned with the Tornatzky and Fleischer's TOE framework (Tornatzky and Fleischer, 1990). The factors outline the conditions that drive local government organisations towards sharing of their IT resources. It can be seen that there are three key categories of consideration that influence implementation of ITSS. These are environmental forces, technological forces and organisational forces. However, since implementation of Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) is a management driven activity as much as it is an operational activity, the managers who are involved in the process of evaluating and setting the conditions for sharing their Information Technology resources have to consider a number of factors.

The chart presented above shows the factors that exist in the implementation process of ITSS in the Local Government bodies within the UK. The chart shows two categories of factors that must be considered by individual sharing councils: Most important factors and Subsidiary (or other) factors. Most important factors relate to key considerations/factors by individual councils. Each local authority has its own priorities, which it must take into consideration when getting into a sharing services arrangement. To this extent, proximity between Local Councils does not become the key consideration, although it is one of the considerations that local governments have when seeking a partner local authority to share its resources with. The categorisation of factors implies that as priorities change, some factors that were not crucial may become important while others may not. The dynamism of the factor conditions is dependent on each local authority.

The chart is an extension of the TOE framework that has been presented as the framework for this study, however it can be seen that there is a need to link the factors in order to show how they relate and thus enabling us to understand that these factors cannot be explained as individual factors without creating a way of understanding them as a linked association of

factors. This explains why this framework was modified to include Implementation of sharing of Information Technology services. The chart encompasses the theoretical framework given in section 1.3.1 and conceptual framework in section 4.7. The frameworks have changed slightly in the following ways:

- a. Factor conditions are dynamic and dependent on the needs of an individual Local Council (factors that are important to one local authority may not be important to another).
- b. A look at one factor (for instance, environmental), necessitates a look at another factor(s) (organisational or/and technological).
- c. The model given above can describe two or more local authorities (because of factors a and b above). Thus, this model describes a situation of permanence in association of Local Councils as they share their ITSS resources.

The managers of Local Government bodies are responsible for ensuring that technology is shared among their Local Councils and as such they are expected to mobilise resources in such a way that two or more Local Councils will work together and benefit from the Shared Services process. For this to take place, there is a need to ensure that the factors that can impede implementation of Shared Services (of Information Technology) are reduced and that their entities take advantage of those factors that can improve ITSS Evaluation of these factors invokes another issue of consideration, weighing the value of each variable (this has been explained in section 4.8.1).

The managers of Local Government bodies are responsible for ensuring that they associate their authorities with or find who to associate with in a way that will benefit their Local Councils. They have to deal with both internal and external factors that can be categorised into Technological, Organisation and Environmental factors.

#### **4.8.1 Quantifying the factors**

As mentioned in section 4.8, that TOE framework has to examine each factor together and not focus on one of the factors over and above the others, the proposal to improve this perspective calls for weighing the factors and their components. It is true that the technological factors may be of greater influence compared with organisational or environmental (and vice versa) from the point of view of one of the partnering organisations. Therefore, it is vital that a quantification mechanism is put in place to give each variable equal representation in the evaluation mechanism.

There are a number of studies that have used quantification to examine how some factors affect certain processes (Peansupap and Walker, 2005; Gunasekaran et al. 2006; Mojsilović et al. 2007). In this research, mention has been made of Critical Success Factors (Tomkinson, 2007; Borman and Janssen, 2012; Martin, 2011) (also see section 2.4), however, these studies do not quantify these factors. These studies provide a bearing to the epistemological stance that this research has adopted (see section 3.2). The factors can be examined qualitatively, which is what this study has adopted, however, bearing in mind the studies that have used quantification (given above), consideration for quantification can provide a way of determining which factors are most important and which ones are not. Quantitative approaches that can be used include Chi-Square or Multiple Regression analysis (these methods are not explained further because they are outside the scope of this research).

By weighing these factors, a link will have been created between TOE factors and thus process of implementation will have been considered to have been all encompassing, therefore effective in considering the process of ITSS

## **4.9 Other Contributions**

### **4.9.1 Sharing cannot be dissociated from politics, especially in public sector bodies and political objectives form integral part of key objectives of the partner organisations**

One of the key aspects in understanding how public sector bodies work is an understanding about the role of politics in managing public sector bodies in a way that allows for the study to be complete and to answer the research questions that are at hand. During the course of this study, it was found that the activities that take part in local governments are greatly influenced by the political decisions that are made by the UK central government<sup>30</sup> (Lacity & Willcocks, 1998). One of the key decisions was to reduce grants for local governments<sup>31</sup>.

While some of these decisions are for the good of the county, or the locality, behind most of these decisions, there are political interests at play. Where there was no prospect for success, the sharing agreement had to stop, either in part or in full (code PR1, PR2).

It was found that as long as policies are passed down from the central government to local government, political interests will be seen at two levels, first, at the level of central government and secondly at local authority level (Perry, 1998). It has been found that even the decision to share IT resources is hinged on political interests, for instance the councils may be responding to their political aspirations, and only where these aspirations align will the councils continue with a sharing agreement. Indeed, political maturity is important to

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<sup>30</sup> By 2015, central government funding for councils will have been cut by 40 per cent over the period of this Parliament. The Institute for Fiscal Studies anticipates that the spending cuts will continue until 2020. This comes at a time when the impact of the economic downturn, demographic change, major government initiatives including Universal Credit and Troubled Families, new public health responsibilities, and fundamental changes to the local government finance system are compounding the pressures on council (Local Government Association 2014; pp 6).

• <sup>31</sup> Local authorities have had to cut spending in the face of falls in their main sources of revenue. Grants from central government to local government (excluding housing benefit grant and those specifically for education, public health, police, and fire and rescue services and the housing benefit grant) have been cut by 36.3% overall (and by 38.7% per person) in real terms between 2009–10 and 2014–15. Total council tax revenues have grown slightly in real terms over this period (3.2%), although this still represents a decline of 0.7% per person. Taking grants and council tax revenues together, local authorities' total revenues have fallen by 19.9% overall (or 22.9% per person) in real terms. Council tax revenues funded just over half of local government spending in 2014–15, up from 41% in 2009–10. (Institute for Fiscal Studies 2015).



consider how Local Councils interact, but in this study, two local authorities failed to agree on how to share due to political difference.

The influence of politics in local governments affected the way sharing of resources was practiced. Political infighting and the need to meet the political objectives of a party running a particular local government meant that prospects of sharing could not be good in some cases. The biggest challenge was mistrust when two or more local governments (each run by different political parties), attempt to share their I.T. resources. Lack of trust between councillors of different political parties could delay implementation of Shared Services arrangements within and between local authorities. The political environment can thus lead to delays or ultimate break-up (pulling out) of a sharing arrangement (section 4.6.1).

Based on these factors, this study has attempted to provide an understanding about how users of technology can have different understanding about its relevance when their objectives are different and if they must share technology for the benefit of their organisations. One main contribution of this research is the way the needs of an organisation(s) for meeting their objectives are forced to share Information Technology resources under different conditions. The use of information technology as a shared resource requires levelling of skills among concerned staff members, appreciating changes to the work environment and managing investments. Implementation of Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) calls for re-organisation of internal processes in local authorities. Such re-organisations may require an examination and alignment of objectives that the entities are seeking to achieve in such a way that they can work together.

To do this, the thesis proposes a model of Technology Organisation Environment (TOE). The model examines the three factors that influence the adaptation and implementation of technology in the organisation. These include: Technological factors, Organisational factors

and Environmental factors. In this study, however, the proposed model is Technology Sharing implementation framework (TSIF), which identifies the issues that influence the use of technology between organisations. Since two different organisations may have different reasons or motivations for implementing a certain technology, they have to take into consideration various factors relating to Technology, Internal Organisation and External Environment.

#### **4.10 Implementation process**

Being a study that focussed primarily on Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS), it was necessary to outline the scope by providing a brief outline on Shared Services in general, and then focus on Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS). I drew literature from Shared Services, but narrowed down to Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS). Since this is a concept that is gaining immense interest in the field of IT, it was found that the body of literature on Information Technology Shared Services is growing. Existing literature on IT sharing does not explicate the process of implementing IT sharing in a public organisation, except the work by Kukafka et al (2003), who gave the IT implementation framework, but focused on behaviour of individuals within an organisation.

The framework by Kukafka et al (2003) involves;

Phase 1: Organisation's needs and goals.

Phase 2: Organisation's needs amenable to IT-system solutions.

Phase 3: Behavioural and environmental.

Phase 4: Education and Organisational.

Phase 5: Points for system use inducing strategies.

The focus of this process is however on the unit of analysis of individuals and how they react to a new system and not at the level of an organisation or organisations.

There is mention of the process by two bodies (see section 2.8), which has been outlined below:

Process by Wilson and Howard (2006) Nagy and Larsen (n.d) of Delloite are given below:

- I. Opportunity (Business drivers, sourcing strategies, designing).
- II. Strategy and feasibility (create baselines, agree task split, leadership, organisational structure, road map).
- III. Design (organisation's design, process frame, site selection, communication).
- IV. Build and implement (detailed process, process documentation, training, people plan, testing).
- V. Transition (going live, knowledge transfer, managing transition, post go live).

The other framework by the Australian Local Government Association is given below:

The implementation framework includes:

- I. Resourcing (secure funding, assign project officers).
- II. Project direction (establish program's sustainability).
- III. Project guidance (establish reference group, priorities services opportunities).
- IV. Council engagement (call council expression of interests for case studies, establish shared service network among councils).
- V. Financial estimates (establish methodology for cost estimation, establish methodology for estimating savings).
- VI. Evaluation (develop indicators for successful implementation).

This study proposes a method of implementation that considers needs, culture, politics and outcomes, thus proposing the following stages:

- I. Need creation and scope of Information Technology Shared Services: The council should identify its needs, quite often these should be strategic needs for instance, improving service delivery through cost reduction, employee efficiency, and improved work culture.
- II. Identifying partner organisation(s): It involves seeking to know the organisations that can provide the best system that is needed or an organisation with which IT resource can be shared. The council should seek what the other council or organisation has or needs and if what they have can benefit them both.
- III. Defining scope and modalities: This involves setting the limits of sharing, for instance, how to share (department wise or whole organisation). It also involves the creation of boundaries that define the minimum conditions for sharing between the entities involved in the process. Some councils may seek to start at departmental level, while others may seek to roll out sharing throughout the organisation. It is vital to have clear a definition about how such levels of association may be integrated to allow for the sharing process to be successful. Another aspect is the definition and identification of what cannot be shared. It has been seen that different councils have different needs thus making the scope of what is or is not shared to be a loose boundary. It was found that sharing of services spans top management sharing, operational sharing, asset sharing, skills / resource sharing and financial sharing. This implies that sharing takes place across all aspects of local government organisations, mainly facilitated by having in place a good information technology infrastructure. The scope of sharing of resources is thus defined from the perspective of sharing by what each partner to ITSS arrangements wants and has agreed upon and not from a general perspective.

- IV. Defining internal operations: This involves that ‘look inward’ policy, where the council forms a team to spearhead the process and develops internal objectives that are clearly defined to the smallest detail. Such may include teams within a team, targets for each employee or team member and what the organisation has to do in order to work with the other organisation and to support success in the sharing process.
- V. Evaluation: this is the final stage where the organisation considers whether it is meeting its objectives.

#### **4.11 Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has presented the findings and analysis of the issues relating to ITSS within local governments in the UK. The outcome is a result of the information that was collected using primary and secondary research techniques. The outcomes given have demonstrated the process and outcome of various stages of analysis and selection of vital information that facilitated the explanation of the issues of ITSS in local governments. It has been found that with relations to the question of Information Technology Shared Services; different Local Councils have different priorities that dictate how they will share their resources.

The views held by the respondents allude to the fact that cost cutting, efficiency, team working, long term association, and training are all crucial in facilitating or leading to the sharing of information technology. The priorities of one Local Council may not be the same as those of another and this could also explain why sharing of resources attracts different councils irrespective of location. Thus although proximity remains an important consideration, it is not the key criteria for determining if sharing of resources can take place. Sharing of other resources is made possible by sharing IT resources as services. The

authorities that are engaged or seek to engage in sharing of IT resource(s) consider the likelihood of meeting their (individual and collective) objectives through partnering, which leads to investments in the required resources to make the process possible. The investments that have been placed in the assets, the personnel and the processes makes the partnering councils have a level of commitment to such an extent that pulling out of the process may gradually become very disruptive to their operations. A state of permanence is therefore created where Local Government bodies gradually develop into very big virtual entities. In this section, it has also been found that politics plays a crucial role in the ITSS of Local Councils. Local governments are political bodies, run by councillors who belong to different political parties. The activities of the local governments are thus controlled by councillors and other executives. To this extent, political party manifestoes influence how the councillors will vote to influence the activities of their respective local authorities.

The next chapter presents the conclusion, contribution and limitations of this research.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION, CONTRIBUTION AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

#### **5.1.1 Chapter Introduction**

The importance of Local Government bodies in the UK to share their Information Technology resources was given much attention by the Coalition government (Conservatives and Liberal Democrats) since the Coalition came to power in the year 2010 election. This was a period of harsh economic conditions that called for a raft of fiscal measures. Sharing of resources was one of the measures that was aimed at reducing the UK government's costs of operations. As already stated, the financial crisis affected many countries around the world. It has been seen that in many countries where local governments share their resources (including sharing of IT resources), sharing was not an option but a necessity, aimed primarily at cost reduction.

#### **5.1.2 Review of research questions and reflection**

In this research, I sought to focus on Information Technology sharing because Information Technology supports many operations of many local authorities in the UK. Through information technology, governments are able to manage other aspects of their operations, including procurement, financial management, human resources and communication. This study has found that IT sits at the centre of operations of many local governments because besides the operations given above, IT also offers a level of security and efficiency that far outpaces manual operations.

Information Technology sharing is a new phenomenon that was born out of necessity, where the advantages of sharing were deemed to be far greater than the disadvantages. In this study,

I paid attention to UK local authorities, which offer services to local residents. IT drives the activities of these authorities and the need to share their Information Technology systems or services was partly driven by the UK's central government. Local governments were urged to find other authorities with whom to share, a practice that was already taking place in Australia and New Zealand (McKinlay, 2011).

Here in the UK, unlike Australia and New Zealand, there was no requirement for the local authorities to share with immediate neighbouring authorities, although to a large extent, this was found to be the practice. While the local governments were urged to share, there was no known implementation regime for sharing, and this study sought to understand the following:

- i. What factors do local authorities consider when venturing into sharing IT resources?

To answer this question, combinations of primary and secondary data were collected from council reports, government records (like Office of National Statistics website), academic journals and through interviews. The factors that are considered by an entity when seeking to share IT resources include costs involved in the process, timeframe for implementation, proximity and prevailing financial and economic circumstances.

- ii. How important are emerging benefits and costs in driving Information Technology Shared Services as a practice among local authorities?

This question was answered through interview sessions, where respondents indicated that they prepared for the shared services program through a number of activities. Such activities included training, reorganising management across organisations, setting up infrastructure and even co-operating in reporting the progress of their engagements.

From the research, there is evidence that costs and efficiency have been a crucial factor for shared among Local Councils. It was however found that these are key objectives of many an organisation (private and public), and as such, can be pursued without the need to share



resources. There are, however, other issues that proved to be key motivators of shared services beyond the quest to reduce costs and achieve efficiency. Sharing of services involves pulling infrastructure together in such a way that there is progressive increment in the resources. Some of the ways through which infrastructure and other resources are pulled include training, joint reporting, having teams to work on the shared services unit. For the councils to work together after investing in infrastructure there has to be trust and there must be readiness to work together for a long period of time.

The emerging benefits and costs of sharing thus involve the certainty of long term engagement between Local Government bodies, built on trust. However, the challenge includes the creation of trust, possible political changes and failure to meet the objectives of individual councils.

- iii. In what ways are technological, organisational, environmental and external factors important in informing implementation of Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS)?

To answer this question, the findings of primary and secondary data were used. ITSS is conducted against the backdrop of conditions that can be categorised as technological, organisational and environmental. The TOE factors impact the operations of a council and its partners. Each local government that is engaged in the process face conditions that can be general to all partners, for instance reduction of funding by central government. However, there are other issues that are specific to councils, for instance one council may have sufficient infrastructure and resources for managing payroll cheaply compared with another. TOE factors thus affect Local Government bodies in two ways; general and specific. The questions given above underscored the importance of, and how sharing of, IT is implemented. There are numerous forms of general Shared Services which already exist within UK local authorities, and where prescribed guidelines for implementation are in place

in council strategies that are developed by each of the Local Councils. General shared service activities exist in the areas of sharing office spaces, garbage collection and IT infrastructure. To understand Information Technology Shared Services, it was important to examine key themes that emerged from the data, and I used Nvivo to generate themes that I associated with the research questions and objectives that defined the scope of this study.

Whereas the emphasis of the concept of Shared Services emerged and concentrated on sharing of resources, by drawing attention to the position of IT in the local government, it was found that the importance of IT department in any organisation is crucial. IT plays an enabling role, linking departments and supporting quick operations. This was the view given by Weill and Vitale, (2002). Information Technology department in many local authorities supports the operations of the entire council by supporting interaction, security, and other operations (Pudjianto et al. 2011). Information Technology resource is no longer a part of department, in most cases it is a major functional unit of an organisation. During the process of data collection, most of the communication with respondents was with IT officials in different local governments. It was also found that through Information Technology sharing, the users lay down the guidelines or their expectations of the process of sharing and evaluated the same over a period of time. In most cases, this duration was found to be aligned with other key durations of the local government body. For instance, the council's fiscal year, which is linked to central government's financial year.

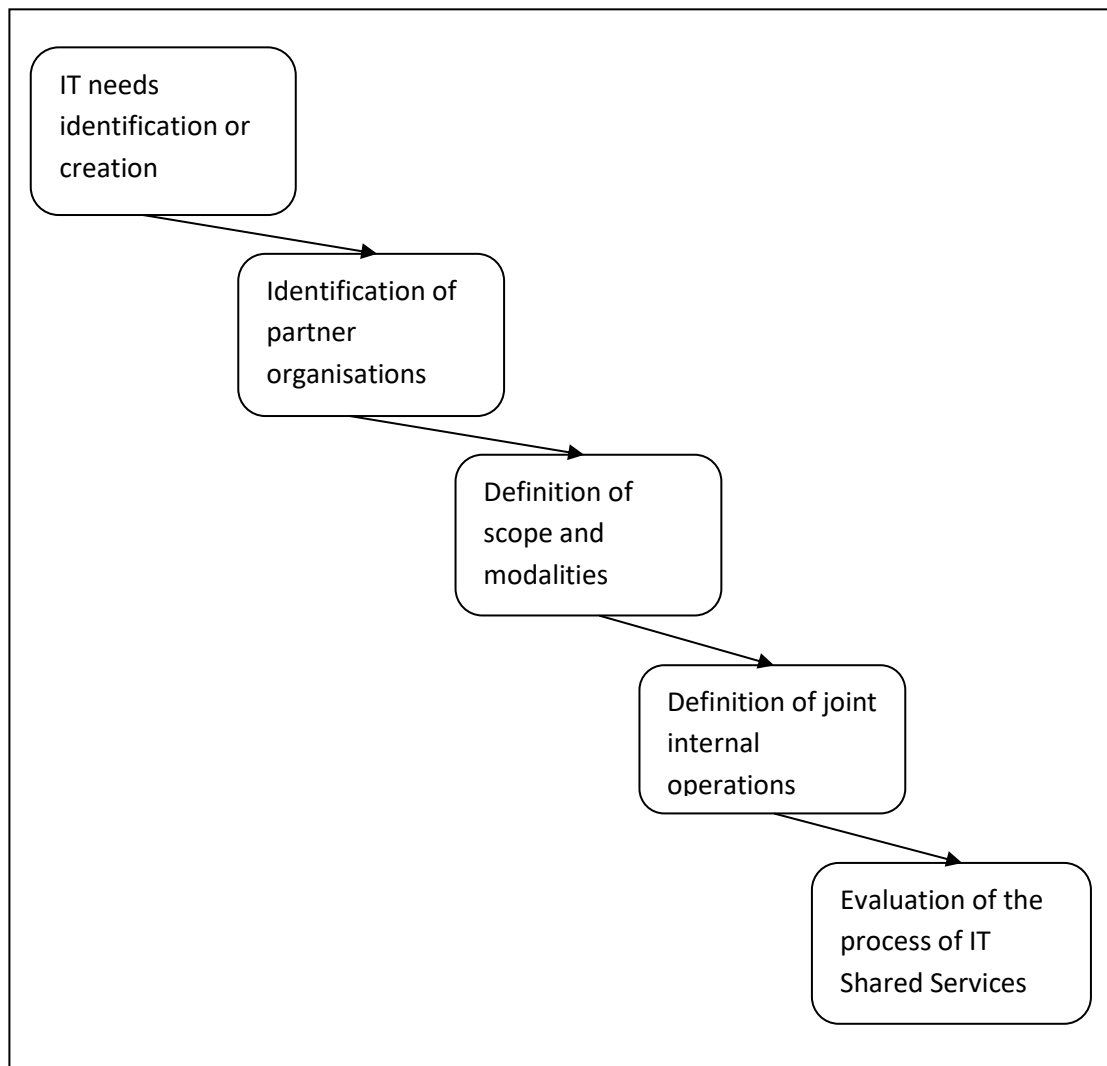
Despite being linked to other aspects of the council, IT sharing was also considered with no specific time frame, thus in most cases making it an open-ended association where councils can collaborate in resource sharing as long as they achieve their objectives. However, some respondents noted that general elections and local government elections play an important role in determining how local governments would share (see section 4.6.1). Most of the

partners of sharing IT services had specific needs (for instance, cost reduction) that they felt could be fulfilled by IT tools, and as such, it was found that if these needs were not being fulfilled, other factors played key roles in the same. For instance, politics interrupted trust between two local governments in Northern England, and lack of clarity affected another two local governments in the London area. It appears that for Information Technology Shared Services to be successful, the level of interaction between the users of the service must be done with clarity and void of vested interests, which in a political environment (local governments are formed of various political parties), such clarity may not always exist.

In local authorities, negotiations become crucial to reaching certain agreements, and while IT sharing is considered part of back office operations, the interest of the users and the residents was found to be paramount to the process of sharing. Eventually, sharing of services, including IT was aimed at ensuring that certain benefits were realised. This agrees with the views by Hirschheim & Lacity (2000) and also Doherty et al (2008), who indicated that anticipated benefits draw partners to share their resources. However, in this study, Information Technology Shared Services prompts trust between local government departments within and across the local authorities, but also led to a state of increase dependence, resulting in a long term relationship between the local authorities.

It was also found that sharing of IT services led to trust where local governments could now engage each other in other areas of operations not necessarily regarding IT aspects (Greenhalgh et al. 2004), and in times of need (Hassan-Ibrahim & Allen, 2012). The implementation process that has been identified from the information collected in literature and through field study can be outlined in the diagram below:

**Figure 5.1 Proposed stages of ITSS implementation in local governments in UK**



The stages given above have been examined below:

- I. IT needs identification or creation: The stage involves asking what the local government body needs. It was found that lack of resources, especially by smaller Local Government bodies, or the need for money by big councils, was cited as catalysts for seeking to share resources (section 2.2 and 2.3). In any form of sharing that was identified, partner organisations had needs that had to be fulfilled.

- II. Identification of partner organisations: During this stage, managers of Local Government bodies (or departments thereof that deal with ITSS) identify potential partners. This is based on information that they have, but it can also involve cases of being approached by other local government officials. This has been described as an important implementation stage that aims at accessing best value (Martin, 2000).
- III. Definition of scope and modalities: Once partner organisations have identified themselves or been identified, the next stage is to define scope and modalities of sharing. This is an important stage where negotiations rise and relationships are built based on trust and political affiliations. It should be noted that the need to provide services to local residents usually takes center stage during negotiations, however politics and other factors like proximity, costs involved, resources involved, internal management of respective Local Councils, all play a crucial role in defining the scope and modality of sharing.
- IV. Definition of joint internal operations: This is an extension of modalities where having identified the reasons why they must share, operational issues are discussed. At this point identification of skill differences and the need to leverage, rules that will govern operations, modalities of solving problems and evaluating successes are discussed. This is an important stage that will provide a reference point to evaluation of the next stage.
- V. Evaluation of the process of Information Technology Shared Services: This stage explicates the performance of the process. The period of evaluation and aspects of the same are agreed upon by partner organisations. A common criterion for evaluation is still based on cost savings, efficiency, revenues, trust.

Based on the stages given above, a confirmation has been given on how information technology has become a crucial resource in managing processes within an organisation. What I attempted to highlight was not a change of technology but realignment of processes and activities within a local authority (ies) with the view to ensure that the IT resources is adequately shared between the organisations involved. This realignment includes; identification and redefinition of objectives (partly caused by external forces), organisation of teams, changing processes, negotiating, communicating and choice of or modifying the existing Information Technology system to match the needs of the organisations involved. I am not suggesting a new system or an overhaul of the existing system, but it has been found that some councils had to adopt a new Information Technology system that is used by partner councils, in other cases, other councils had to rely on a system provided by third parties, yet others had to just move some of their operations to a new system, all which are activities that were aimed to ensure that they are sharing this resource.

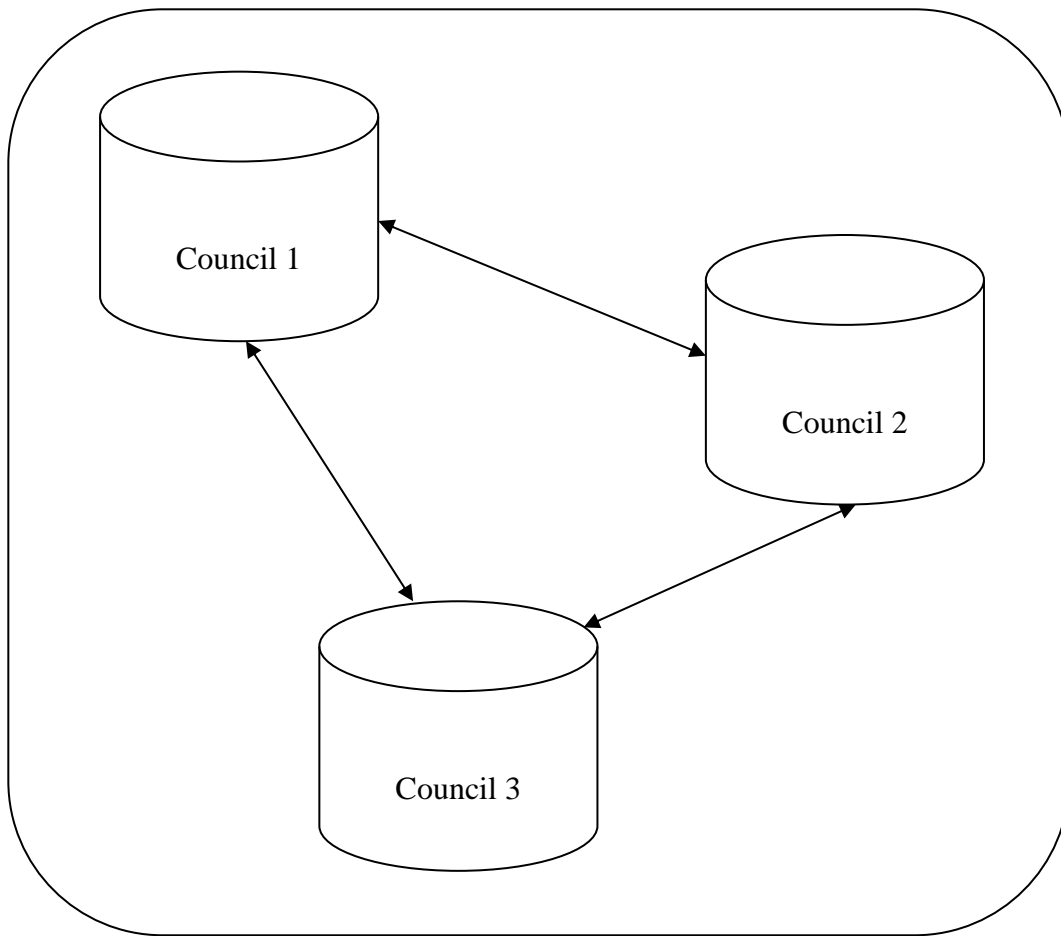
### **5.1.3 Benefits, internal arrangements and ITSS in Local Government bodies**

Information Technology as a resource has been found to be crucial resources that link organisations and its usage in the private sector and success thereof has made organisations in the public sector to seek some of the benefits or successes (Pudjianto et al. 2011). Based on the information identified (about cost benefits) of Information Technology Sharing and Shares services in general (in chapter 1), there are tangible benefits that can be quantified and this provided support for sharing to be expanded among local governments. Expansion of Information Technology Shared Services has led to a creation of these virtual entities that are essentially joined up by Information Technology, and as more resources are being invested and new areas of Information Technology Shared Services are identified, pulling out of the arraignment becomes an expensive endeavour than remaining in the arrangement. It should

be noted that in some cases up to nine local governments engaged in the process of Information Technology Shared Services, catalysed by common challenges and common objectives, thus making them ‘an expanded organisation’.

This trend is leading to having an organisation that is large and essentially linked by Information technology as shown in the diagram below:

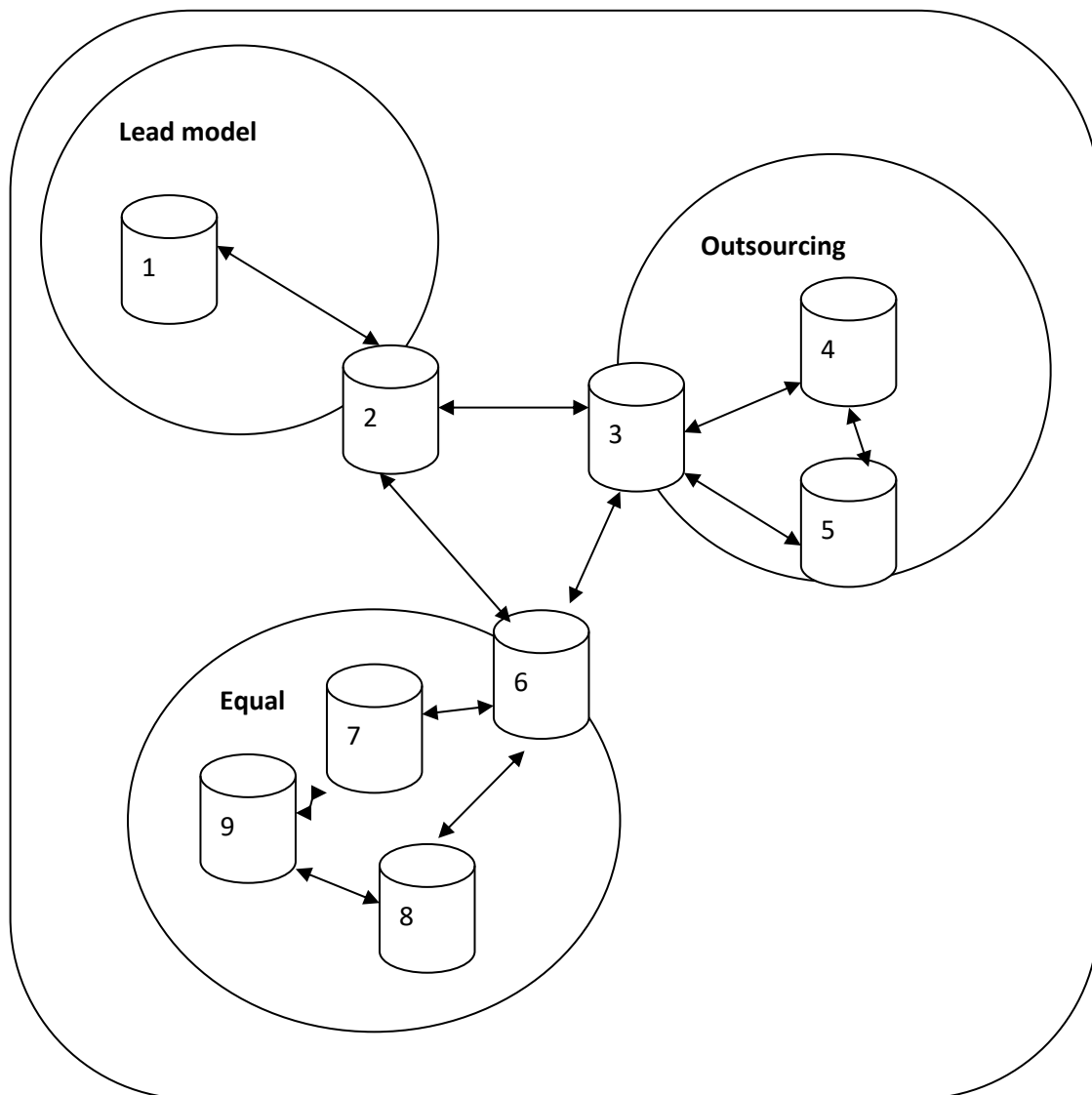
**Figure 5.2 Councils linked by Information Technology**



Considering the diagram given above, it can be said that in order for each of these councils to reach a point of sharing with each other, they had to manage certain changes to their internal working processes, thus realign their internal environments to the point where it is possible to share, and pulling out of this arrangement, especially as time goes by becomes almost impossible, indeed in the two examples where the pairs stopped the process of sharing services, it was earlier in the processes and it was only in some sections (or departments), not

entirely. Sharing of Information Technology as a service thus binds the Local Councils and leads to an array of joined up local governments as seen in the following diagram;

**Figure 5.3 Multiple links of local governments**



On the diagram above, the linking of council sharing processes results to a schema of a big sharing ‘web’, breaking of which becomes increasingly difficult. Each of these arrangements between and among Local Councils may be different, for instance in lead, equal partnership or outsourcing and between the councils, the same models may be replicated, but the most important aspects to note is that these Local Councils increasingly develop ‘bonds’ through



alignment of internal mechanisms and processes, including other resources, in such a way that they cannot pull apart so easily.

The diagram above can be viewed in the following ways;

In case of lead model: a council 1 (one) offers services to another council 2 (two).

In case of outsourcing model: councils 4 (four) and 5 (five) may enlist services from another council, but mostly from a private sector body.

In case of equal model: councils 6, 7, 8 and 9 (six, seven, eight and nine) pull resource together to have a common IT infrastructure that serves all of them.

The linkages between these models for instance lead, outsourcing and equal partnership can exist between councils that could be engaged in one or more of the other models. Consider the case whereby council 2 (two) is offering or taking services from council 1 (one), while at the same time associating with council 2 (two) or 4 (four) in outsourcing some of their operations. In the same line, council 2 (two) may also engage with councils 6 (six), as an equal partner. Such association makes the councils involved in the shared services arrangement to be intertwined in such a way that physically, they may be separate, but ‘virtually<sup>32</sup>’, they together present a ‘mega’ Local Council.

Having looked at the fact that Local Government bodies are bound together and increasingly become reliant or interdependent, on each other, it is clear that joint associations and planning becomes vital. Most important however, is that operational and management tasks in the quest to share IT services must consider certain issues, for instance factor conditions or key success factors span across economic factors, political factors, technological factors, and

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<sup>32</sup> As a group of linked networks

needs of the local residents. These factor conditions can be categorised into Technological, Environmental and Organisational factors (section 2.7).

The importance of these factors cannot be looked at separately anymore, they are all equally vital because, while one partner may consider political importance to a higher degree, the other partner may look at technological importance, and yet the other partner may consider financial importance. To this extent, an examination of TOE framework draws a new perspective: implementation of ITSS in a collaborative environment must identify all factors in equal measures. This study identifies ITSS as an activity of implementing information technology, not necessarily putting in place new technology. The main task therefore is to decide how to implement the technology and this is about ‘how?’, ‘what?’, ‘when?’ (highlighted in section 2.8), all being issue that must be taken care of by managers of Local Councils who must act in ways that will benefit their organisations.

The interview responses presented in chapter four (see section 4.5), the views of the respondents represent an identification of the importance of sharing of Information Technology resources. The respondents, most of who were managers and some were official spokespersons of their Local Councils, identified that while sharing of their I.T. resources is political as much as economic, the process of sharing called for changes to internal processes that involves training, team management and changes to work culture. Local Government bodies seek to reduce their costs of operations and improve efficiency, but these objectives do not necessarily require cross – council sharing.

Based on the information given above, and considering the objectives that have been sought, this study identified the following;

## **5.2 Meeting Objectives and summary of contribution**

### **5.2.1 How objectives were met**

- I. To examine the factors taken into account by local authorities when seeking to adopt Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) between them.**

With respect to the factors that are taken into account, it was found that there are internal as well as external factors that are taken into account when seeking to share IT services. Cost savings, team formation, proximity to other local authorities (see section 1.3.1, section 2.6, section 4.6.6). These factors are internal and external to the local government and must be harnessed systematically.

This research has found that these factors can be taken into account or influence the way councils are run. The persons running local authorities tend to consider a number of factors before using a given aspect of shared service that they may deem to be potentially good for their entities. Factor categorisation forms the starting point or basis for negotiations aimed at sharing resources between local authorities. Unlike most studies that have looked at these factors individually, in this study, the factors have been linked. Respondents highlighted the need for understanding the factors that exist in an organisation and how to face these factors. Managers of Local Councils must associate through information sharing and factor weighing for the sake of the organisations they represent. In such circumstances, Local Council managers have to consider both Technological, Organisational and Environmental forces that exist or likely to exist.

- II. To examine the factors making Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) a long term endeavor among local government entities in the UK.**

On the issue of local government sharing as a long-term endeavour, it was found that in the course of sharing resources, certain processes precede the sharing arrangements. These

processes include negotiations and investments. These activities and resources tend to bind the local governments to long-term interdependence. Local governments and other entities that are sharing their resources may start by sharing only one aspect of or one resource, but gradually they may share other resources. As resources, processes and activities become aligned, the entities become reliant on each other and it becomes virtually impossible to break them up.

In the course of this research, it was found that some local authorities were one entity before being broken up into either a local authority and a borough or parish council or two authorities. By joining certain aspects of their resources, and especially with regards to sharing IT resources, virtual mega councils tend to emerge. The factors that make these entities to remain in this state of permanence is the fact that it becomes increasingly difficult to not share some issues because internally certain aspects may be dependent on each other. The main question that emanates is that of trust (section 1.1.1, section 2.6.1 and section 4.6.7). Trust should be built to allow councils and other entities to increasingly share their resources. Trusting each other is an important issue in the entire concept of sharing. This implies that human aspects dictate the extent to which success can be attained in organisational processes.

### **III. To propose a framework of interpretation of factors that help understand and interpret issues surrounding ITSS**

This study has proposed a framework for understanding the implementation of ITSS in Local Government bodies. The proposed framework that has been given was modified from Technology Organisation Environment (TOE) framework. The framework explicates the alignment of resources that must be undertaken by local governments in ensuring that Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) as a process is successful. These resources

relate to factors that can be categorised into Technological, Organisational and Environmental factors, and can therefore be viewed from two perspectives: constraints and enablers.

The use of information technology (also called ICT) in organisations can be traced to many years back, this is not anything new. Many Local Councils use information technology to manage most of their operations. Therefore, this issue that was examined in this study was not related with adopting a new ICT; my focus was on implementation of Information Technology resources jointly between two or more local authorities. The study examined how local authorities approach this need. There exist factors that force organisations to share, and these factors can be categorised into certain groups. When these factors have been identified, decisions are made based on how to share an IT resource (s). This is the implementation aspect of IT sharing. Questions have to be raised on what to do when implementing IT sharing between entities. The proposed framework (see section 4.9), provides a lens through which an understanding of implementation process of Information Technology resource can be made.

This study met the objectives given above. The study also identified other issues, for instance, emerging debate as to whether ITSS is a strategic or tactical issue. During the course of my research I briefly talked about this (strategic or tactical aspects), however, it was not part of my objectives nor scope, but this requires more research than has been done in this study.

### **5.2.2 Contribution of the study**

In section 1.8, I have provided a brief discussion about the key aspect of contribution of this study. I set out to examine how ITSS supports operations of local governments in the UK. It

is evident that Local Government bodies operate in dynamic environments, for instance political, economic or technological. The study identified the TOE framework (Tornatzky and Fleischer, 1990) as a theoretical lens for examining the prevailing environment where local governments in the UK operate regarding sharing IT services.

The factors of Technology, of Organisation and of Environments, all play key role in determining how organisations in the public sector and in particular local authorities share their IT infrastructure. These factors were found to be numerous, including change in governments, electoral expectations, financial crisis, limited budgets, internal organisations and systems. In Local Government bodies, implementation of information technology shared service is crucial. Whereas every local government has its own objectives, when it comes to sharing, objectives have to be harmonised to a certain degree. This study has shown that harmonisation of objectives requires building trust, leveraging skills and information technology infrastructure, eventually leading to interdependence. Managers of local governments play a very important role in ensuring that this is done.

This study showed that technology implementation, if executed in a collaborative way is not a short-term endeavour; it is a long term process (section 2.5.2a). Systems like UNICORN (Unified Communities over Regional networks) have been developed out of trust, proximity and resources development among various public sector entities<sup>33</sup> (The longevity of the process of implementation calls for managers to build trust among themselves and be able to negotiate deals that are best for their entities, while at the same time realise that they (their organisations or departments) will be bound and remain dependent on each other for a long time. Successful implementation also calls for awareness of the dynamics of the environment

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<sup>33</sup> “The intent was to create a partnership of public sector organisations across Surrey and Berkshire to aggregate demand and purchase networking services collaboratively,” explains Paul Brocklehurst, Chief Information Officer of Surrey County Council. “UNICORN lays the foundations for ever-closer public service integration and achieves scale benefits that each participant couldn’t achieve alone.” (LocalGov, 2016).

(Technological, Organisational and Environmental factors) that can impact positively or negatively on the process (see section 4.6.9). Therefore, building trust and leveraging of skills are prerequisites for making good decisions that are of strategic importance. These 'humanistic' factors when embedded into the organisation necessitate consideration of factors / constraints that cut across internal and external environments of an organisation.

Technological, Organisational and Environmental factors are all important in determining how to implement a shared services arrangement in a local government organisation. The organisations involved in the process however have to consider factors that are most important to them individually, for instance, whereas there could be five crucial technology factors that can influence how and if council A can associate with council K, Council A could be having two very important factors out of the five, and these two cannot be compromised in any way during negotiations and subsequent signing of agreements to share. To this extent, I made attempt to include the term implementation in the framework thus giving rise to a framework called Technology Sharing Implementation Framework (TSIF) (see section 4.8) and highlight this dynamism.

### **5.2.3 Practical contribution**

This study has identified the importance of leveraging the skills of the workforce who have been drawn to manage or run sharing of resources. While members of a team may not all have same skills, and in fact difference in skillset is important, there should be minimal skill levels that can develop the effectiveness of the new group. As far as I am aware, no study has suggested leveraging of skillset of team members for the benefit of the new group (team) and the organisations they are working for. It should be noted that the role of managers or leaders to equip their groups is crucial.

### **5.3 Limitations of the research**

Limitations of a study enable the researcher to examine its weaknesses and present opportunities for improvement. This study is not an exception.

#### **5.3.1 Limitations of qualitative research**

This study sought to examine qualitative data in examining sharing of services in local governments in the UK. Qualitative research identifies one aspect of data that involves the views and disposition of the respondents about a phenomenon. Qualitative research considers the views that may not be replicated to other scenarios because predictions and generalisations are not easy to make without information that has been reduced using common variables as are quantitative data.

#### **5.3.2 Focus on local governments, not private sector**

The second limitation of this study is that the focus has been on Local Government bodies (outlined in section 1.4). Local Government bodies are not private sector organisations which have always shown dynamism and where competition is on the rise, on the contrary, the government as a whole, is a single unit (see section 1.2.1). I therefore recognised that there could be challenges in providing an explanation of phenomenon that can be applicable to the entire corporate world or where Information Technology is shared (whether private or public sector organisations). I have made it clear that this study is focused on local government and I made every effort to limit my scope to this. These narrow scope, although vital for this study sheds limited light to ICT Shared Services in the private sector. Mention has been made in section (1.1.1) about the genesis of ICT sharing in the banking sector, but the discussion did not move in that direction.



This means that this study may be of little help to private sector bodies, which share different dynamics from government bodies. The findings of this study can however, provide insights into explaining ITSS in the private sector as well. Along with this, it is worth noting that this study focussed on the situation in the UK. Although reference was made to cases in other parts of the world, particularly Australia, New Zealand and Netherlands, the limited scope of this study may imply that the findings in UK may not necessarily translate to other places. The findings of this study can, however, be used as a guide or help to understand ICT Shared Services in other parts of the world, especially in helping to formulate strategies of ICT in developing economies.

### **5.3.3 Considered managers, not electorate**

The third limitation of this study is that during this study, I limited my focus to the quest for Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) within and among local governments. I focussed my primary research on managers and persons of authority within local governments in the UK.

I sought to understand their views on how they have been sharing their resources, thus based on assumption that their views and experiences are crucial in providing an understanding about the issue at hand. There was one component of actors (stakeholders), who decide how local governments are managed. Extensive primary research was conducted and emerging views used for analysis, however, a better understanding about the operations involved in Information Technology Shared Services may call for knowing what the operational or line level staff members are doing within the ITSS projects. This study did not consider the views of line or operational level staff members. Another important entity could have been the electorate who place some local government officials in office. By not focusing on them, I

may have missed an important element of benefit that could be crucial to understanding the outcome (albeit indirect) to local residents.

Although I had stated that ICT is primarily used in back-office operations (especially the shared aspects of it), my basis for not involving the public is because I considered this aspect of sharing to be vital for operational work, not client-facing tasks, but eventually, benefits can be felt in the locality by local residents. Therefore, not involving local residents meant that I may have missed some aspects of benefits of ITSS that could add to the benefits already stated.

#### **5.3.4 Views of official spokespersons**

In the course of collecting data through semi-structured interviews as mentioned in section 3.10, there were situations where official spokespersons answered my questions. Official spokespersons represented their councils or departments (Sanders and Canel, 2013). In cases where they had to respond, they gave the views that are held by their local authorities. It would have been most ideal to gather data from the managers or persons responsible for ITSS in each of the local authorities contacted. In the cases where the spokespersons became the respondents, it was either their respective council's policy to use spokespersons or they had the relevant information to feed into my questions. One of the challenges of using an official spokesperson as a respondent is because they tend to give a good impression of their organisations by divulging information could not harm their organisations. Secondly, they may not be experts in the relevant field (see sections 3.5.3 and 3.10) and thus the level of their engagement may not be as exhaustive as could be desirable.

The use of official spokesperson can be a limitation because the expertise of the respondents (who are taking part in implementing ITSS process) could be crucial in enabling me to gather the right data. To deal with this challenge, it is necessary to consult other sources

(irrespective of who my respondents were), for instance council reports, news articles and council websites. In most of my encounters with local authorities, I made more than one contact and this enabled me to interrogate and collaborate information or get further clarification.

All these limitations are pointers to areas where improvements could be made.

#### **5.4 Area of Future research**

This study has examined the issues related to Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) in UK local governments. The question of sharing of services is vast, encompassing all aspect of joint association between two or more entities, where a service or infrastructure is shared. The definition of Shared Services as given by Ulrich (2006) demonstrate an underlying need(s) that prompts commercial or government entities to engage in sharing arrangements. This research did not study the entire concept of Shared Services, but I evaluated the concept of Shared Services from IT perspectives, for instance Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS). Information Technology resource is an important resource that facilitates the operations of many local governments.

Local Government bodies have been forced to start sharing resources by various circumstances. These circumstances can be placed into three broad categories; Environmental, Technological and Organisational. With pressure mounting from the UK government for local government organisations to seek efficiency through savings and restructuring, sharing of resources became inevitable. Local Government bodies embarked on the process of negotiations, changing infrastructure and processes with the view to remain operational in the midst of these challenges.

In this study, however, I did not give attention to the question of ITSS vis-à-vis the role of other external stakeholders in the process of implementation and on the status of ITSS as a tactical or strategic management aspect of local governments. Focus on external stakeholders has been limited to the political class and not the residents or business community. The assumption is that the residents tend to appreciate the services rendered by local governments. To this extent, it is suggested that future studies on ITSS within the context of local governments should focus on the role of other stakeholders in the process.

It will be worth examining how the stakeholders influence the implementation of ITSS within an organisation and these stakeholders can be deemed as external forces that influence how technology is used within an organisation, as such the networks that emerge among stakeholders and those that emerge among the councils can be expanded to explore the kind of holistic network that exists. Such a network can be evaluated on the basis of their formation, sustenance and dissolution, a prospective viable lens for examining changing functionality of Information system tools in a combination of units of study.

On the issue of tactical and strategic aspects of ITSS in local governments, this is an area that has to be examined further. Tactical and strategic durations are defined in terms of the length of time that it takes to invest in a certain infrastructure or to evaluate performance. While it was found that most local authorities have an accounting period of a year, the nature of investment in ITSS is in such a way that these associations could not be broken within a short duration of time. Eventually, it was found that these councils tend to expand their levels of association, making them form 'super virtual councils' linked by Information Technology shared resources. There is need therefore, to examine the concepts of ITSS as a tactical or strategic aspect of management.

## **5.5 Principles that governed my research**

Throughout the course of my research, I encountered a number of challenges soon after deciding on my research topic. Interpretive research was an area I needed to read more about. The need to develop my literature review, explain my methodology and present my findings called for better understanding of crucial processes that would enable me to address my research questions. The text by Klein and Myers (1999) was a vital source in making this possible because there are principles that have been given by the authors that informed some of the steps I undertook.

Below is a brief example of my engagement with the principles that they put forth;

### **5.5.1 Contextualisation**

This study has been framed on key space and time premise. I live in Coventry and having lived here for 9 (nine) years, and my interest in politics of local government, including ability to compare how local governments in UK and Kenya operate, I was at strength in spotting differences. I have managed to provide an overview of local government functions (in chapter 1) and areas of sharing that they engage in.

### **5.5.2 Interaction with participants and respondents.**

Klein and Myers (1999: 74) said that ‘interpretive researchers must recognize that the participants, just as much as the researcher, can be seen as interpreters and analysts’. In the course of my research I took cognisance of the fact that my respondents had experience (of different measures) about ITSS and their views were crucial, for instance, some respondents

were of the view that ITSS is not necessarily good in some circumstances, something that I had not given much thought before.

### **5.5.3 Hermeneutic circle**

The basis of this study is based on Hermeneutical Circle (HC), a premise that advocates the knowledge of whole as being dictated by the knowledge of part, but not always does knowledge of part mean knowledge of whole, thus as a researcher is considered a recursive approach. By using qualitative analysis, there was need to identify categories that can be interpreted and define these through code – memo - description analysis. The code – memo – description analysis was about what was taking place in local authorities including reasons for sharing IT resources, benefits of the same, and the whole – factors affecting implementation of ITSS in local governments in the United Kingdom.

### **5.5.4 Multiple interpretations**

As indicated in my methodology chapter three, I visited a total of 27 local authorities, some shared with 1, 2, 3 and up to 9 (one, two, three and up to nine) other authorities. Besides interviews, I consulted reports from local government entities for instance, the strategy papers, I read websites on local governments, seen research papers on Information Technology and ITSS. All these sources provided information that at times appeared contradictory, something which I thought could be a disadvantage, but rather became advantages, because it allowed me to look at an issue from different viewpoints. This prompted me to seek clarification by asking more questions, hence visiting most of the councils more than once and looking into my notes thus gaining better understanding about what was happening in Local Councils.

### **5.5.5 Dialogical reasoning**

This is a principle that gave me a lot of challenges; it called for examining my reasoning which was informed by my review of literature, thus led to questioning my original ideas and literature as well. It was crucial for me to be open to accept new ideas as were emanating from literature review (Onwuegbuzie and Weinbaum, 2017).

## **5.6 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter is a culmination of this report. The chapter has outlined the way I met the objectives of this research. In this research, I had three main objectives and I have indicated how I met all the three. I have provided a proposal of a practical implementation framework that local councils should consider, alongside the contribution of this research. My contribution proposes building of trust among local councils as an important basis for long term association in sharing of resources. Another issue that I have outlined in this chapter is the areas of limitations and which could consequently be of future interest for future studies. The key limitations that have been outlined are; focus on managers and not electorate, focus on qualitative approach to research, the position of official spokespersons in some local councils and lastly focus on local government bodies, not private sector organisations.

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