

## The role of the workforce as 'drivers' of information technology in a shared service environment: a concept paper

*Don't forget the messenger*

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### **Abstract**

*Sharing of information technology became crucial in facilitating sharing of other resources by Local Government bodies. There is, however, a 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 paper 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.*

**Keywords:** Shared Services, Technology Organisation Environment, Local Governments, Cost Savings, Permanence.

## 1.1 Introduction

Since the year 2006, the UK government sought to encourage government departments to find ways of reducing their costs of operations. *The 2006 Local Government White Paper entitled 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' highlighted the potential for shared management to drive the efficient provision of public services, and to ensure, as much as possible, that one is able to get 'more for less'.*

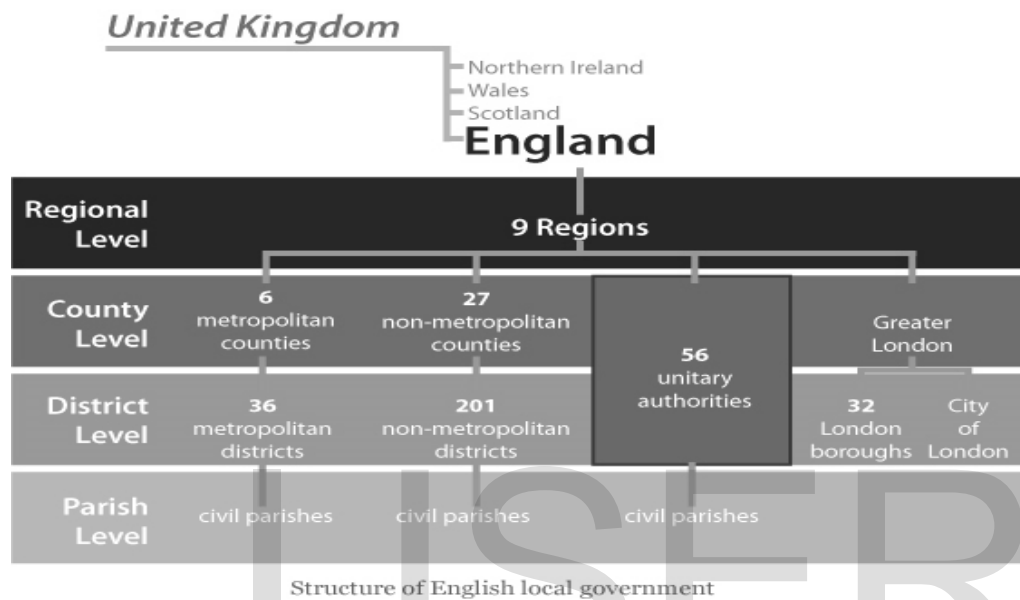
At a time when the scramble for office automation is on the rise, focus is slowly changing from the teamforce efficiency to the efficiency of the information technology resources. Concepts like 'internet of things' have attracted immense interest in academic and work spaces. There is little exhaustion of what a concept is nor how a workspace infuses with a particular concept, before a migration is made to the new concept. In a way, changes in workplace outcomes are viewed as an end to justify the means for the use of any such automation, thus the need to move to the next one.

In the recent past, harsh economic realities have meant that organisations (in private and public sectors), have sought ways of collaborating their work effort, to access 'economies of scale'. Shared services has become an important inter-organisational culture that emphasizes on using resource between and among organisations. Information technology has been a major facilitator of shared services. To improve the efficiency of information technology tools for sharing of services, new tools are continually being availed through resources and hardware / software improvements. These tools are then given to the users to employ in their workspaces.

There has, however, been the realisation that it is crucial to identify areas of sharing at personnel level, besides sharing of assets that are owned by local government bodies or government departments. The approach to sharing has thus been twofold:

- Reduction of redundancies through sharing management tasks
- Cross council collaboration aimed at ‘tackling the problems with more ammunition’

The general structure of UK local government bodies is given below;



Source: <http://www.sshls.port.ac.uk/hub/public-policy/structures/local-government/>

## 1.2 The Context

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).

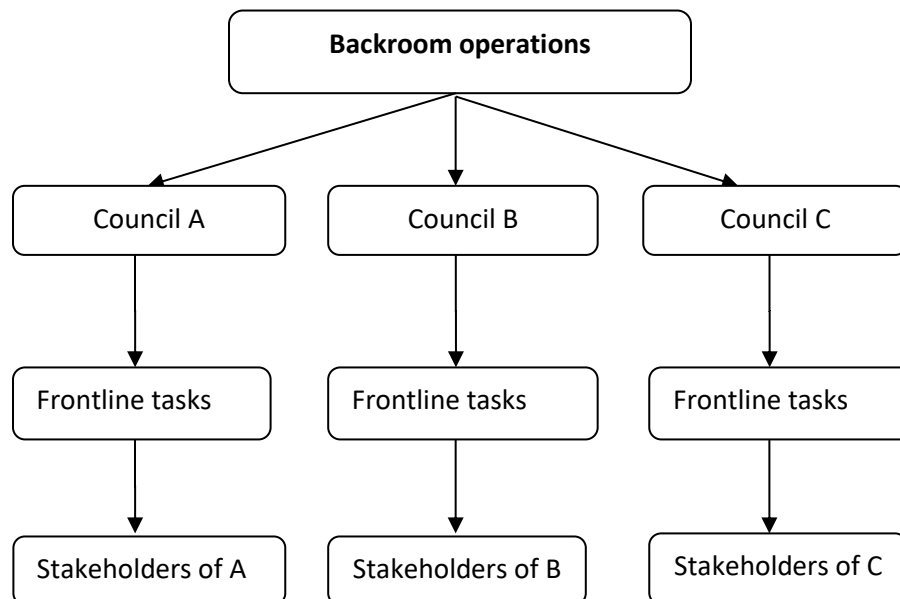
The reason for this (sharing with most immediate Local Government bodies on the basis of proximity) is because it is easier to communicate, move resources between the councils and also there is an element of similarity (in operations) between Local Councils that are closer to each other (McKeen and Smith, 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 are, however, controlled by 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 are managed online, for instance; payment of council tax, hiring or requisition services, applying for benefits, bidding for council houses, to mention but a few. 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;

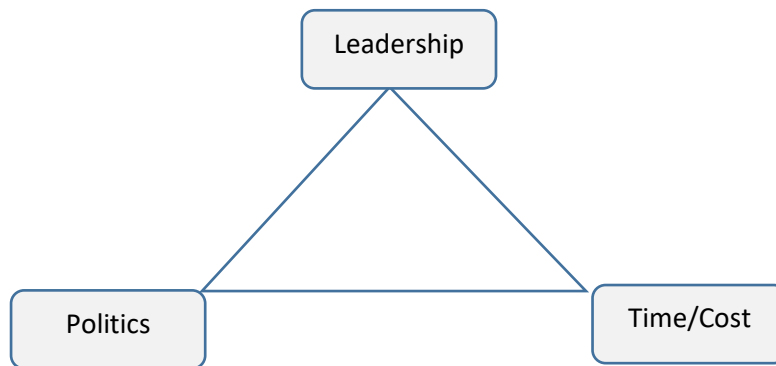
### Functional association in Local Authorities



The diagram 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).

There are a number of models of shared services that have been proposed and are widely used: some of these include, the lead, equal partnership, outsourcing, all of which have proven beneficial in one way or another. There is however a clear disconnect between the advancements in information technology resources for facilitating sharing of services and the skills of the workers to use these technologies effectively and efficiently. Quite often, the ways of preparing the workforces to use a piece of technology is to make technology available, then provide training to the workforce. Could it be that this approach is no longer effective and needs re-thinking?

The problem can be viewed from three angles:



Leadership:

Different UK councils have different leadership structures. The leadership of Parishes is certainly not same as to that of Boroughs and County councils.

Politics:

Difference councils are led by different political parties. These parties have priorities that are set bordering on party manifestos and for party interests.

Time / Cost

The time duration for council representation tend to be shorter than time duration for central government. This situation mean that quite often, councils tend to have less stability to implement projects that require long time durations.

Long term projects tend to be costly, besides the need for accountability to the local residents imply that opportunities for saving costs is always welcome (in certain circumstances), but the paradox of losing money through such 'cost saving' initiatives make the processes for the same, risky.

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 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>1</sup>. Since sharing involves 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, but also risks associated dependency, for instance movement of problems across Local Councils<sup>2</sup>.

### 1.3 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:

<sup>1</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.

'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>2</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 IT 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.

### 1.3a 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.

### 1.3b 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

### 1.3c 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 I.T. 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?

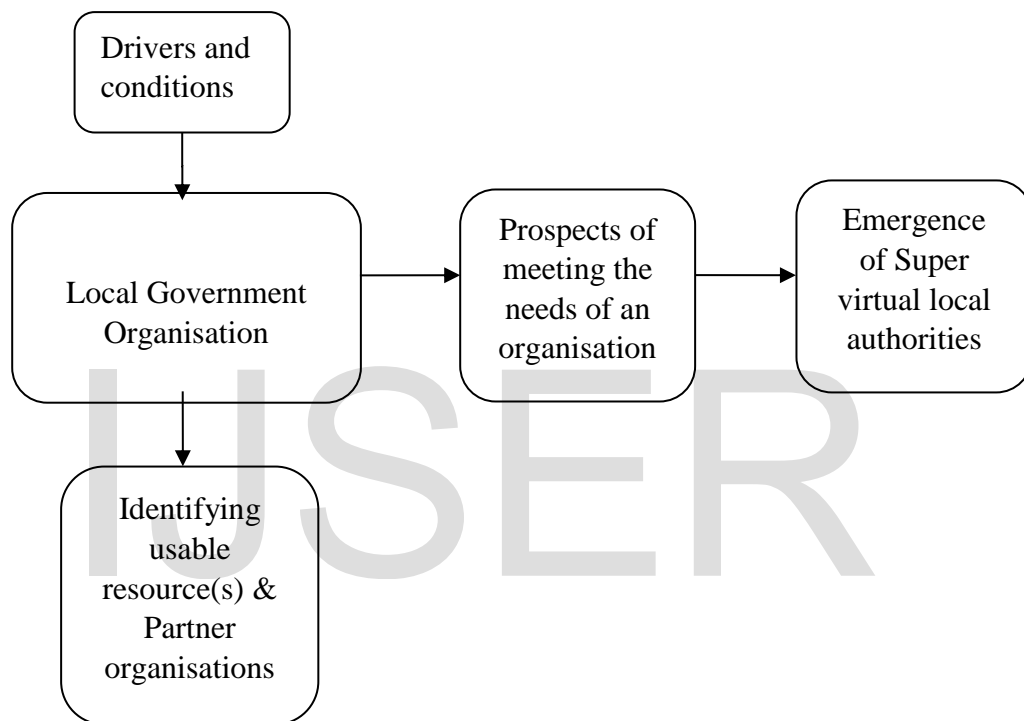


## 1.4 Framework and Gaps in the study

### 1.4.1 Theoretical framework

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

#### Theoretical framework



The theoretical framework 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) 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). The local authorities seek partnerships in sharing functions and other resources in order to meet their objectives.

One resource that remains crucial has been Information Technology which are; 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 and remain linked up over a long duration because of the inevitable difficulty to separate.

### **Literature Review**

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 a rise 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 provide 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>3</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>4</sup> (KM Management Consulting 2005).

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).

<sup>3</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>4</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.

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>5</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 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 IT Shared Services, especially within public-sector bodies.

The concept of sharing 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.

<sup>5</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.

## Methodology

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.

## 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; such measurements could not be extended to other activities or could not provide a way of making future budget estimations.

## Findings and Conclusion

Councils and sharing of services

Sharing of services became the most feasible way through which councils could save their costs of operations. It has been recorded that there are a total of 486 shared service arrangements which have delivered £643m in efficiency savings.

William Nunn, chair of the LGA's improvement and innovation board, said:

*"Our latest shared services map confirms that councils are working together to successfully save money."*

*“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.”*

According to the data, 98% of councils are now involved in some form of sharing arrangement.

By any standard, the amount of savings given here are a welcome news for the essence of shared services. With such savings, councils and the central government have a reason to continue supporting the shared services initiatives.

Where are we and where should we go

When technology is given, then training for the same follows, there may exist a ‘blind’ spot that has not be reached by technology, nor is within the reach of potential skills improvements. Overlooking such a spot for the sake of business continuity and status quo has all along worked for organisations. However, there is need to consider the position of users when technology is developed as opposed to when the technology has been brought to existence.

The need to ensure that technology is ergonomically developed to enable users to employ it effectively has never been paramount. The work culture should not be made to ‘fit’ technology but to complement technology. This will imply growth in technology and skills for efficiency within workplaces.

Where is this study situated?

The need to improve effectiveness of technology usage calls for an understanding of the needs of the workers. To align such needs to the technology is important but this alignment should be done at the early stages of the development of technology. The environment surrounding organisations in the private as well as public sector is never the same. The nature of skills requirement and alignment required is however same. An identification of these skills will call for talking to decision makers, workers and technology owners with the view to creating working tools that are aligned and thus can support each other.

### Code descriptions

Codes and identify factor	Memo or description
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
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

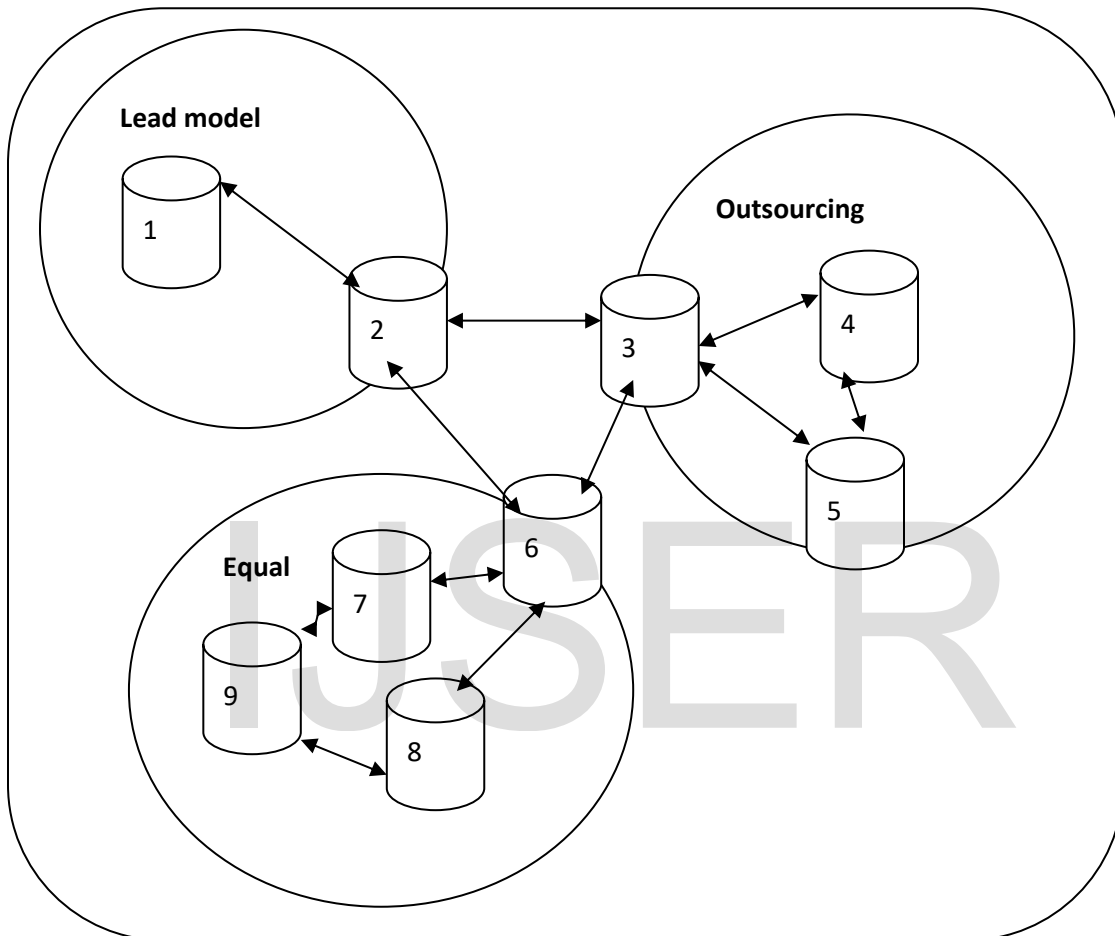
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Codes and identify factor	Memo or description
Internal processes (PR1) Time duration (T1) Wastage removal (B1) Cost savings (B1) Technology usage (T1) Personal view (P1) Rules and practices (PR1) Problems of sharing (CH1) External challenges (CH1) 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



## 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.

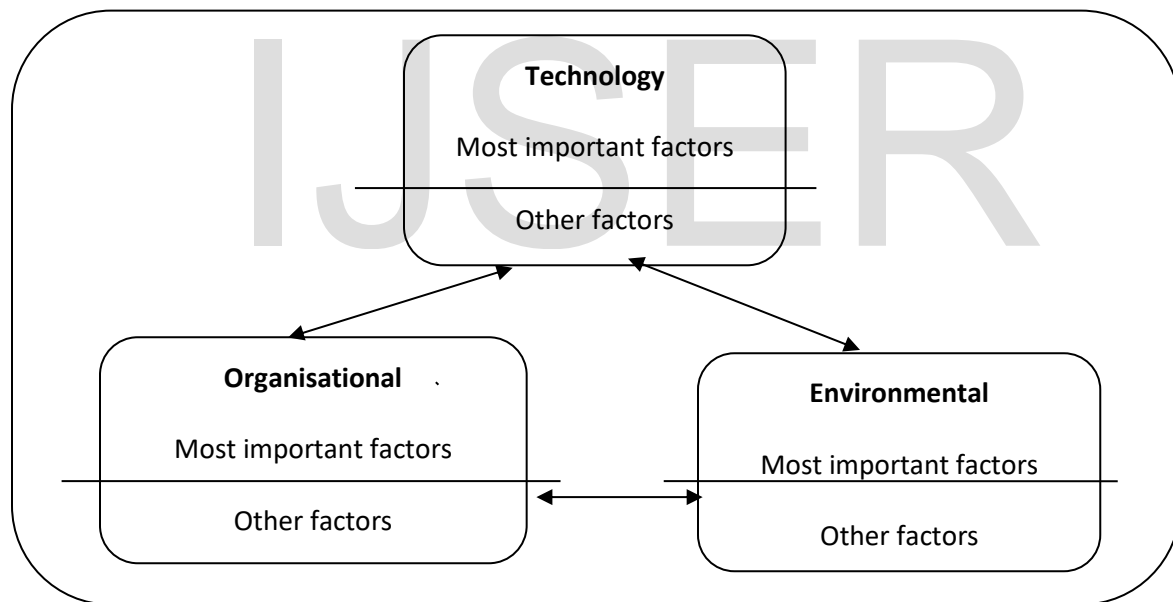
The linkages between these models for instance lead, outsourcing and equal partnership can exist between councils that could be engaged in one or more of the other models. Consider the case whereby council 2 (two) is offering or taking services from council 1 (one), while at the same time associating 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>6</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 needs of the local residents. These factor conditions can be categorised into Technological, Environmental and Organisational factors.

<sup>6</sup> As a group of linked networks

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?’, all being issue that must be taken care of by managers of Local Councils who must act in ways that will benefit their organisations.

### T.O.E 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. 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.

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.

Looking back: Challenges

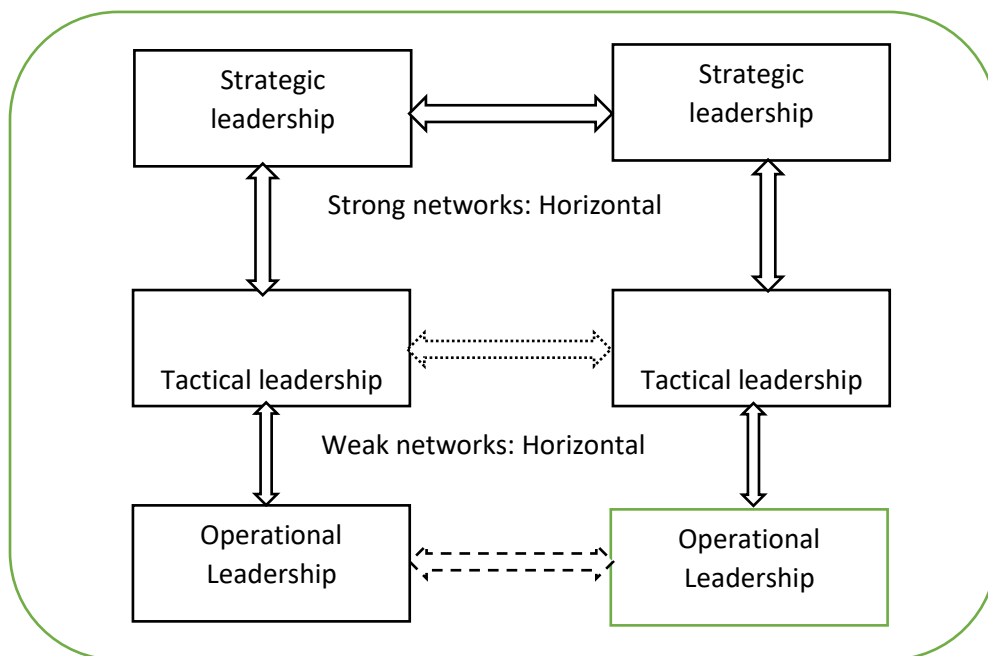
Sharing (general operations) and IT services in specific poses the following challenges:

- Sharing is a new concept, its success in other countries does not guarantee success in the UK

- Councils are focused on cost savings. This is the overriding objective for many sharing ‘partners’, it is, however, a false ‘end’.
- Political interference overshadows much of the activities related with sharing of services (SS).

#### Looking forward: Opportunities

- Realisation that Information Technology is a major resource that supports all shared services operations.
- Identify SS model that best works for the ‘partners’ involved.
- Invest in the workforce to develop skills that are dynamic and which can enable them to adjust to different demands that are posed by the need to be ‘outward facing’. This implies the importance to train the workers to be adaptable, team players and get technical skills that.
- Level of interaction between ‘partners’ should be very strong at the top:



- Pragmatism: If the process of sharing is complicated and not prospective, it must be stopped.

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