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EXPLORING LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS' CAPACITY TO GOVERN EFFECTIVELY

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EXPLORING LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS' CAPACITY TO GOVERN
EFFECTIVELY

by

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ABSTRACT

A successful local government exemplifies inclusivity, innovation, and deliberate decision-making, all advancing responsible management of taxpayers' resources. In this qualitative investigation, a phenomenological approach is employed to delve into the lived experiences of local elected officials. The aim of this study was to gain insights into the capacity of these local elected officials for success in governance. Subsequently, the insights from these local elected officials' experiences are harnessed to evaluate their influence and impact on municipal performance.

The management of municipal performance encompasses the provision of social services, the maintenance of fiscal operations, and adherence to statutory obligations (Avellaneda, 2008). Existing literature predominantly addresses external factors affecting governmental performance, such as political, legal, natural disasters, and sociodemographic factors, which operate outside the confines of the municipality and are not controlled by local elected officials. However, this research centers on internal factors, which the literature suggests wields the most substantial influence on municipal performance and are controlled by the local elected official (Svara, 2003). As per the literature on local government performance, the most pivotal factor is the role played by "local elected officials" (Svara, 2003). More precisely, this study explored the human capital of local elected officials, encompassing their educational background, life experiences, and job-related history as it pertains to their capacity to govern effectively within the sphere of the local authority.

The study employed interpretative phenomenological analysis to assess and comprehend the real-life experiences of local elected officials regarding their

effectiveness in governance. The findings indicate that education influences the capacity of local elected officials to govern effectively. Furthermore, this capacity directly affects the overall performance of municipalities. Consequently, it is recommended that federal and state legislators consider policies that enforce mandatory training and ongoing education for local elected officials.

Keywords: capacity, education, organizational performance

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Frequently, we hear the phrase that God never burdens us beyond our capacity to endure. Yet, in moments of testing our faith, we may find ourselves tempted to yield or abandon it. I'd like to begin by reaffirming the concept of God's eternal grace and mercy. The scripture tells us in Hebrew 13:6 so that with good courage we say. "The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

My journey from the beginning to the end has been a profound life lesson. Reflecting on the challenges I've overcome, the word "perseverance" feels like an understatement. It's difficult to express the depth of my gratitude for the individuals who have been there for me throughout this journey, unwavering in their passion and support. Dr. Cyndi Gaudet, my original advisor, I cannot thank you enough for allowing me an opportunity to shine by supporting my entry into this program. Your advocacy for me, even after your retirement, has meant the world. Dr. Hamett Q. Brown, my current advisor, Ph.D. therapist, and hometown hero, I want to express my gratitude for everything, from the knowledge you've shared to simply being there as a listening ear. You embody what I consider to be the ideal chair. To my committee, thank you for your continued support, your commitment to sticking with me through thick and thin, and for just being there when I needed you.

For those men and women who find themselves behind bars or entangled in the justice system, let me be a testament to the unwavering belief that, no matter how distant your life's inception may seem, the final chapter has not been written. Today is the day to embrace your purpose with fervor. I am impassioned to offer my encouragement and heartfelt gratitude for the immense value you've brought to my purpose and passion

during my incarceration. Use each day as an opportunity to read, write, listen, and meticulously prepare for the life you've always envisioned. Your journey can be one of remarkable transformation.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to my dearest friends, Jonathan Bennett, Christopher Williams, and my brother and best friend, Datren Williams. Jonathan, thank you for your unwavering presence and the safe space you provide for me to vent and be vulnerable. Your constant support means the world to me, and I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have you as a friend. Chris, thank you for everything; no matter how hard life becomes or what nobody says, you're right there shouting from some country I got you. Datren, you're not only my brother but also a true friend who pushes and challenges me in the best ways. I know that no matter how tough you can be, you always have my back at the end of the day. Your authenticity and your willingness to question and challenge me in all aspects of life demonstrate your deep love for me and my family, and I appreciate it more than words can convey.

"A teacher is the foundational cornerstone, elevating and enriching an individual's human capital." Sonja Boone, you have been the bedrock beneath my educational journey. Your unwavering commitment to my academic growth, dating back to my fourth-grade year, has always been tailored to my unique learning capacity. I am deeply grateful to you for paving the way, fueling my motivation, instilling confidence, and ensuring my competitive edge both academically and personally. Your love and enduring support for not only me but also for countless other students exemplify the true essence of an educator. I want the world to recognize that Mississippi boasts some of the finest elementary school teachers globally. I also wish to express my appreciation to Evelyn

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I want to express my deep love and heartfelt gratitude to my cherished family and friends for your unwavering support on this journey. No words can capture the love, concern, and care you've shown me. You complete me, and it's your presence that keeps me strong. I thank the heavens for having you in my life. Special thanks to my mother, Sharron A. King, and my wife, Natasha R. King, for their remarkable patience and enduring love.

DEDICATION

With the utmost reverence and passion, I dedicate this dissertation to the six most important people in my life whose profound influence has significantly shaped the trajectory of my life.

Foremost, my beloved wife, Natasha R. King, deserves my deepest gratitude. Throughout this academic journey, you have been an unwavering wellspring of encouragement, consistently by my side, motivating me even during late nights of toil. We began this Ph.D. journey with one child and have been blessed with two more and one in route. My affection for you transcends bounds, and there is no commitment too great to express my love and appreciation for the phenomenal woman you are.

To my four remarkable children, each of you is a priceless gem, bearing unique and invaluable contributions to the world. Princess K. King, your potential at the tender age of 16 is a marvel. Your capabilities are boundless, foretelling a luminous future. Karleigh G. King, your vibrant spirit and graceful growth bring immense joy, radiating goodness to those around you. Ascher K. King, you already reflect my image at just four years old, exuding exceptional confidence and determination. To my unborn child, as I patiently wait for your arrival, I am filled with boundless excitement. Know that you are embraced by a robust support system, steadfast and unwavering. The love I have for each of you is limitless and has no ending.

To my mother, Sharron A. King, you have always been my most ardent supporter. No individual or collective could supplant your unwavering allegiance. Your resolute principles of independence, consistency, and giving one's best have served as the impetus behind my unwavering determination. Your approach to dissuading any inclinations

toward quitting, comprising a stern admonition followed by a well-deserved reprimand, has continually motivated me to persevere.

Upon achieving my Ph.D., I wish to convey to each of you that I cast aside concerns about earthly matters. Success resides within the realm of one's heart and mind. The indomitable combination of passion and purpose can surmount any obstacle. This academic accomplishment signifies our collective resilience as a family unit, thriving even in the face of adversity. Your existence fills my life with eternal joy and serves as a perpetual reminder of the unwavering pursuit of our goals. This dedication encapsulates the profound love I hold for all of you.

Lastly, this work is a tribute to all elected officials who dare to challenge the status quo and make principled decisions, even in the face of unpopularity. I extend my heartfelt appreciation for your steadfast commitment and resilience in making arduous choices and standing resolute for the greater good.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HRD   Human Resource Development

IPA   Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

IRB   Institutional Review Board

USM   University of Southern Mississippi

LEO   Local Elected Official

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

Competent local elected officials can positively impact their constituents' lives (Bullock, 2021). They have a greater capacity and are often more effective in governing and making decisions that benefit the community (Bullock, 2021). Conversely, incompetent officials can hinder progress and even cause harm to their constituents, potentially leading to irreparable damage (Bullock, 2021). Scholarly researchers and practitioners consensus that there is a connection between capacity and effectiveness (Avellaneda, 2008), capacity and municipal performance (Capiku, 2015), and capacity and local elected officials influence (Savara, 2003). Nevertheless, there has been a recurring public opinion over the past two decades that most local elected officials rule without the capacity to govern (Avellaneda, 2008; Bullock, 2019; Jaspers, 2023). People are dissatisfied with public institutions' performance, which creates mistrust for leaders in local government (Svara, 2003). Political polarization, racial strife, identity-based politics, the influence of money in politics, societal fractures, and economic inequality are some of the challenges undermining the effectiveness of the democratic process in the United States. These issues collectively erode the capacity of American democracy to function smoothly. As undemocratic strategies gain traction as substitutes for ineffective governance, public discontent with local authorities intensifies, further destabilizing the foundations of democracy. (Nielsen & Moynihan, 2017). Local Elected Officials' capacity greatly influences the effectiveness of municipal governance and the welfare of their communities. Academic research supports this view and includes widespread agreement among practitioners, highlighting the significance of good local leadership (Nielsen & Moynihan, 2017; Svara, 2003)

Nonetheless, some cities and towns continue to have local prosperity despite this nation's democratic and economic challenges (Benty, 2023). Some factors citizens consider upward trends in local governments' performance include affordability, local housing, low crime, neighborhood diversity, public schools, walkability, and infrastructure (Fernandez, 2023). These aspects are intricately linked to the ability of local elected officials to enact effective policies and exercise informed judgment. Fernandez (2023) states a minimum of three or more of these factors can be found in the most affluent cities across America. Conversely, the absence of these community elements gives rise to a perceived decline in the community's well-being, ultimately resulting in negative perceptions of governance among residents, as noted by DeSantis (2002). Nonetheless, the disparities in municipal performance indicate the significance of local elected officials' competence, as highlighted by Ramutsheli and Janse (2015).

Due to their underperformance, municipalities have become prominent subjects of national news and media headlines in the United States. Chicago, Illinois, grapples with a surge in murders and gang-related activities (Bhatt et al., 2023). Jackson, Mississippi, struggles to provide its residents with clean and safe drinking water (Meng, 2022). Financial mismanagement issues afflict several communities, most notably Detroit, Michigan, which declared bankruptcy (Garvey, 2013). These challenges are the direct outcome of decades of ineffective leadership by local elected officials and a history of public mismanagement (Bhatt et al., 2023; Garvey, 2013; Meng, 2022). When incompetent leadership exists, communities' vulnerability to financial, emotional, and mental harm increases (Bloom, 2023). These social characteristics serve as significant predictors of municipal performance and, when present, have the potential to foster

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mistrust and drive voters away from participating in the democratic process. Reduced

levels of democratic involvement result in issues with municipal performance and little to

no accountability for locally elected leaders (Svara, 2003). As a result, this lack of

confidence in local elected officials prompts efforts to find remedies to win back public

confidence while enhancing government effectiveness (Avellaneda, 2008).

The most important predictors of success for municipal performance include

internal factors (Svara, 2003). This study explores the human capital of local elected

officials, specifically how their education, life experiences, and employment history

shape their competence to carry out the responsibilities of the elected position. The most

influential internal factor of municipal performance is the capacity of the manager(s) and

the local elected official(s) (Avellaneda, 2008). Furthermore, the study examines formal,

nonformal, and informal education as factors impacting local elected officials' capacity.

Chapter I summarizes the most relevant research and theories about the topics of the

study (Roberts 2019). The remaining sections of Chapter I include the background,

statement of the problem, statement of purpose, research objectives, significance of the

study, conceptual framework, limitations, delimitations, assumptions, study organization,

key terms, and finally, the chapter's summary.

<p align="center">Background</p>

Municipalities have suffered historic financial stability losses due to the COVID-

19 pandemic, citizens' anger about social injustice, and increased crime over the past

decade (Rajala et al., 2018; Smith, 2022; Vadrot, 2020). According to Smith (2022), most

municipalities fear 2023 and 2024 because of inflation and a possible recession. The

responsibilities placed on public sector leaders have evolved significantly over the last 10

<p align="center">3</p>

years, along with government and public services. The literature suggests that local elected officials should possess five essential skills to be effective stewards of the taxpayers' dollars. The first is the ability to (a) understand and manage budget restraints, (b) exhibit personal resilience and understanding of when, where, why, and how to get help, (c) manage a diverse portfolio of projects, including public health, education, transportation, housing, infrastructure and industrial strategies (d) ambiguity and drive organizational effectiveness and efficiency, understanding the capacity needed to perform and make decisions, (e) lastly, understand the importance of team building, identifying skills needed to build the right team that supports the organization's mission and goals (George et al., 2019).

The existence of local government evolves from decentralization. Decentralization focuses on creating a more supportive rural America regarding development and local controls (Qiao et al., 2019). The act of decentralization, which leads to the development of cities, towns, villages, and other municipal government structures, includes handing over specific operational responsibilities of central government authority to local management (Miron, 2017). Decentralization is a response to a more inclusive and participatory government, whereas centralization is a response to national unity (Qiao et al., 2019). Decentralization's core concept is delegating federal and state government responsibilities to local authorities (Miron, 2017). Since the 1980s, there appears to have been an agreement between central authority and local rural leaders that excessive centralization and complete local autonomy are both detrimental and improved systems of cooperation between the national, regional, and local centers of decision-making are required (Miron, 2017; Qiao et al., 2019; Rumbach, 2016).

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Decentralization is a state structure that gained popularity due to the realization that less centralized decision-making would increase the effectiveness of national public institutions and the management skills of local governments and civil society (Rumbach, 2016; Qiao et al., 2019). Research affirms decentralization has strengthened democracy nationally (Qiao et al., 2019). Historically and presently, literature also confirms that decentralization continues to progress rural America's development, a commitment from the central government (Chandler, 1956; Qiao et al., 2019). For example, decentralization aided the elimination of the preference for urban areas in terms of development and improved management of the coordination of integrated rural development initiatives; it ensured the sustainability of those programs (Qiao et al., 2019). The progressive extension of development initiatives and encouraging collaboration between the government and non-governmental organizations have been made possible by decentralization (Juon & Bakke, 2023). Decentralization has also been attributed to decreasing poverty investigated by regional inequalities and enhancing institutional responsiveness, accountability, and transparency (Juon & Bakke, 2023). These outcomes in developing settings serve as the foundation of decentralization, which prompts states to adopt a decentralized strategy for development, particularly considering the solid democratic norms and the aspirations of emerging civil society organizations for decision-making participation (Miron, 2017).

Local citizens choose the direction of their development and implement it through the local structure, which no longer serves as the venue for implementing development policies chosen by external and central authorities (Rumbach, 2016; Manu). This deconstruction of administrative, fiscal, and developmental authorities rests at the core of

the success and failures of decentralization. While creating autonomy enacted more participation at the local level, changing the venue for funding opportunities and forcing cities to collect and levy their taxes decreases the chance for development (Juon & Bakke, 2023). More than 80% of cities in the United States have populations of less than 50,000 people (Smith, 2022). These jurisdictions face issues with local tax collection and accessing state and federal funding opportunities due to the inability to meet matching fund requirements (Smith, 2022; Svara, 2003).

Numerous resources are needed when establishing government entities, making the execution of decentralization challenging (Miron, 2017). The three essential components of decentralization include financial, political, and administrative authority transfer to local governments from a central authority (Rumbach, 2016). Decentralization proponents argue that the process boosts community resilience in addressing various complex issues, including managing risks, disasters, and the effects of variables that affect local performance (Rumbach, 2016). However, increasing the responsibilities of municipalities does not guarantee a homogeneous or positive response from residents.

Residents actively engaged in structured democracy stand at the forefront of decentralization efforts. In pursuing successful decentralization, it is imperative to recognize that the managers responsible for overseeing goods and services play a pivotal role (Miron, 2017). The citizens bear the responsibility of establishing a democratic framework, procedural guidelines, and administrative structures to assume the role of fiscal stewards for goods and services, thereby fostering the growth of local government (Miron, 2017).

During the 1980s and, more notably, the 1990s, governments sought to address the adverse consequences of decentralization (Miron, 2017). One of the most prevalent negative outcomes of devolution was the shift of decision-making authority from centrally based government bodies or partially autonomous public institutions to local elected officials and civil society organizations ("A History of Decentralization," n.d.). For instance, introducing newly elected positions for county administrators, city clerks, tax assessors, and other authorities overseeing specific local government areas aimed to mitigate some of these drawbacks (Schnelder, 2019). These drawbacks often pertained to services requiring intensive oversight or opportunities for local governments to generate additional revenue (Schnelder, 2019). This approach introduced an additional layer of governance, thereby complicating the consensus-building process concerning fiscal responsibility and development (Gibson & Lehoucq, 2003).

The transfer of functions and resources between national government levels becomes increasingly complex as decision-making power and resources shift from the central government to civil society (Schnelder, 2019). This diversion of attention from areas where power is concentrated, such as tax collection, wastewater treatment, recreation, and public safety, postpones meaningful discussions on allocating such power within civil society (Miron, 2017; Schnelder, 2019). To establish credibility in shaping future social structures and related government settings, decentralization must adhere to specificity requirements (Schneider, 2019). Additionally, it is vital to recognize that decentralization cannot supplant the need for centralized planning unless accompanied by suitable mechanisms for accountability.

However, accountability is limited when leaders need more understanding, direction, and capacity. Local government's performance (municipal performance) has many challenges due to the delegation and transfer of powers absent of participation, partnership, and understanding. The development of roles and responsibilities for civil society and local managers should enhance the goal of popular participation and the aim to establish a functional government at all stages ("A History of Decentralization," n.d.; Schnelder, 2019). Decentralization would prioritize citizen participation by ensuring and developing a framework to satisfy the populace's needs ("A History of Decentralization," n.d.; Schnelder, 2019). This framework should enable citizens to conduct businesses with the assistance of public management and resources ("A History of Decentralization," n.d.; Schnelder, 2019).

Decentralization ideologies with the prefix "de" frequently emphasize freedom from rather than freedom to (Schnelder, 2019). Furthermore, the history and environment of decentralization emphasize the opportunity to exit or reject centralized control and build capacity surrounding local authority rather than promoting citizen engagement at the central level (Schnelder, 2019). Therefore, at the foundation of decentralization is the freedom from central controls and citizens' freedom to operate, control, and engage locally. However, citizens must consider how new contact mechanisms combine during decentralization and what resources they provide to citizens for the internal molding of local administration (Gibson & Lehoucq, 2003). As these local systems develop and these alliances of power form, who controls them and how they are managed continue as critical internal factors that could determine the success of the municipal organization (Miron, 2017; Schnelder, 2019).

Managing municipalities within local government can be inherently challenging. However, attempting to govern cities without the requisite capacity can lead to disastrous outcomes (Avellaneda, 2008; Campbell, 2006; Svara, 2003). Decentralization introduces a set of characteristics that place additional burdens on municipal managers, local elected officials, and public administrators, thereby complicating the efficient delivery of goods and services (Avellaneda, 2008; Miron, 2017). Furthermore, various external factors impacting local government operations, including geographic location, population, tax revenue availability, budget constraints, and other internal variables, should be carefully considered (Jones et al., 1978).

Due to preexisting community conditions, certain subpopulations face disproportionate challenges in accessing funding, education, and disaster relief (MacDonald, 2005). These challenges, coupled with the frequent turnover of local elected officials, adversely affect municipal performance (Evans & Clayton, 2019). Additionally, the primary external determinant of geographic location often results in uneven allocation of social services and financial resources (Evans & Clayton, 2019). This observation highlights the connection between the disparities experienced by many rural communities and the economic freedom in certain areas, where increased tax revenue leads to more opportunities (Sujarwoto, 2017). These decentralization-related factors contribute to the complexity of the role of local elected officials and render performance evaluation more challenging, especially in developing environments (Gibson & Lehoucq, 2003).

The responsibilities of local elected officials in governing municipalities remain difficult and demanding (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). Their decisions become increasingly complex as they navigate a shifting national economy, address social justice

reform, respond to natural disasters, combat rising crime rates, and adapt to technological advancements (Avellaneda, 2008; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). Successful municipal governance necessitates specific skills, specialized knowledge, and leadership training related to the democratic political system (Blair, 1999). While ongoing education and skill development are not mandated by local, state, or federal governments (Cohen, 1995), many local elected officials may not feel compelled to enhance their governing capacity. This limitation hinders their ability to grasp the complexities of regional challenges and the issues that impede the performance of towns and municipalities (Avellaneda, 2008; Svara, 2003; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999).

Research shows that government practices are decades behind the business community when enacting business principles (Yared, 2018). Researchers argue that formal, nonformal, informal, and continuing education are essential and contribute to overall business success (Arnaboldi et al., 2015). These principles are necessary to maintain performance in government. In theory, the municipal government functions as a business led by the people through their elected leaders to act solely for the common good (Smith, 1895).

Many problems, such as infrastructure, economic development, public safety, and other fiscal matters, remain fundamental to municipal operations (Behn, 2003). The issue of deteriorating infrastructure represents a common and significant challenge that municipalities frequently encounter and grapple with (Neeson et al., 2018). The aging of this infrastructure, such as bridges, roads, municipal buildings, and different public assets, is at the forefront of municipal issues surrounding performance (Neeson et al., 2018). New legislation imposed significant tax cuts that greatly impacted state and local

authorities; federal programs such as the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 reduced

municipal organizations' funding (Gale et al., 2018). Cities respond differently to

structural shifts and potential devolution within American federalism due to the

population makeup influencing the overall municipality's budget (Hoene, 2018).

Municipal taxing authorities gain revenue based on the available number of taxes a city

has authorized by its state legislature to collect, such as property taxes, sales taxes, or

income taxes (Gale et al., 2018). While collected by the municipality and within the

corporate limits of the cities, the funding remains divided based on state laws (Stumm &

Khan, 1996). Some municipalities can levy individual taxes on food, beverages, or hotels

to increase revenue (Gale et al., 2018; Hoene, 2018; Stumm & Khan, 1996). These

revenue streams incentivize economic development, help rehabilitate infrastructure, and

hire public safety personnel, all leading to a quality of life for the constituency (Stumm &

Khan, 1996). Taxation and expenditure constraints impede municipalities' ability to

sustain and predict future revenue streams (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999).

Moreover, fiscally aligning the revenue base with economic priorities can be an

additional challenge due to service demand.

Maintaining current and future infrastructure requires best practices for

municipalities to meet user needs with fewer financial resources (Bolte, 2019).

Infrastructure systems include but are not limited to buildings, roads, wastewater systems,

gas systems, trash, and other networks that facilitate citizens' everyday lives (Bolte, 2019;

Neeson et al., 2018). Servicing, maintaining, and improving infrastructure are standard

practices in measuring municipal performance (Bolte, 2019; Vogelsang-Coombs &

Miller, 1999).

Nevertheless, the demand for those goods and services ranks at an all-time high (Ohio University, 2022; Park et al., 2022; Pribble et al., 2009). Some municipalities use new tax credits and incentive programs to address these issues and help balance regional budget inequalities (Gale et al., 2018; Stumm & Khan, 1996). Stabilizing local governments' expenditures over time remains essential to maintaining public goods and services; nevertheless, a consensus vote on public service provisions is limited (Park et al., 2022). Although the plans are available, education and financial barriers keep some municipalities from competing with each other for grant funds and other resources (Behn, 2003). Many local elected officials are aware of common problems that hinder public performance; nevertheless, the desire to reach a consensus on corrective measures has been averse to political debate rather than public interest (Avellaneda, 2008). Municipal performance is contingent on the local elected official's actions and influencing internal factors (Avellaneda, 2009). Without intentional decision-making that improves performance, city goods and services continue to decrease (Avellaneda, 2009; Savara, 2003; Smith, 1895). Eliminating goods and services creates mistrust and disruptions in the democratic process (Avellaneda, 2008). Municipal budgets are the foundation of the city's measurable performance goals, such as recreational activities, housing, infrastructure, and recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce, essentially the provider of goods and services (Feiock & Yang, 2005; Hoene, 2018).

Existing research offers theories related to public performance (Arnaboldi et al., 2015). Nevertheless, while these theories have an explanatory approach relevant to local government, these theories are not specific to municipal government and have emerged through a national context (Hoene, 2018; ICMA, 2019; Nielsen & Moynihan, 2017).

Before making improvements, towns must first comprehend the elements that affect organizational effectiveness (Arnaboldi et al., 2015). Local elected officials' motivation and morale must be supported by ensuring they understand their role and its impact on municipal operations (Penner & McClement, 2008). Furthermore, municipalities must determine their problems, how to correct them, and prioritize corrective actions based on the most significant impact on municipal performance (Avellaneda, 2008). Finally, researchers must use capacity as a vehicle for understanding the municipalities' performance (Campbell, 2006; Fiszbein, 1997; Kahn, 1990).

Decentralization policies were developed to help rural development, make local governments more responsive to unforeseen issues, enhance service delivery, and boost local governments' efficiency and effectiveness (Miron, 2017; Rumbach, 2016). Decentralization does not claim to provide local government with an organizational framework. However, an expectation for local leaders to create a local democracy persists. A common metaphor and depiction of decentralization, drawing a line in the sand between ideologies and social groups, breeds radicalization (Rumbach, 2016). When people with varied skill sets who are well-informed and actively engaged agree on policies, decentralization may work successfully. However, the development of laws and regulations must adjust to the new living standards as communities expand and populations increase or decrease.

Moreover, the capacity of local elected officials remains at the foundation of local prosperity (Boyne, 2004). The role of local elected officials has become increasingly challenging due to the rise in natural disasters, technological advancements, and the

constant change and velocity of the economy. At the core of municipal performance, the American people are displeased with the outcomes (Avellaneda, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Ideally, the minimum capacity of a local elected official embodies formal education and work experience related explicitly to government and leadership (Avellaneda, 2008). According to Chaskin (2009), these tools entail the application of critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and reasoning. With these skills, local elected officials gain credibility from the constituency by implementing a balanced budget and policies that encourage economic growth and support upward-trending municipal operations (Chaskin, 2009; Park et al., 2022).

In reality, local governments experience problems that hinder performance, such as increasing public safety concerns, failing infrastructure, and unethical organizational culture that condones the use of municipal resources for personal gain (Ramutsheli & Janse, 2015). The impact of inflation, untimely warnings of non-achievement of goals, and budgetary constraints increase the provincial government's ability to maintain a stable tax structure, causing local elected officials to enact ineffective performance management policies and systems that hinder progress and eradicate programs (Ramutsheli & Janse, 2015).

The consequences lead to municipal government needing more human resources and skills to ensure the efficient and effective achievement of municipal performance objectives (Ramutsheli & Janse, 2015). In the United States democratic system, an individual registering to vote should not guarantee an individual's name on the ballot as the sole qualifier (Avellaneda, 2008). Policies should consider the capacity and

competence required to generate effective and efficient results, or the nation's democracy may not be able to evolve. (Ramutsheli & Janse, 2015). In addition, the absence of quality management systems and policies creates an unethical organizational culture, and performance is unlikely to improve and become fully functional without competent leadership (Arnaboldi et al., 2015; Hays, 1964; Ramutsheli & Janse, 2015). Therefore, to understand what impacts municipal performance, This study must focus on the internal factors, specifically, local elected officials' capacity to govern.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the internal factors that impact municipal performance. Moreover, the study explores local elected officials' expectations of their roles and responsibilities in alignment with their capacity. Local elected officials' capacity and municipal performance are linked in this study based on the internal factors explored.

Research Objectives

Successful research projects depend on clearly defined, well-structured, and intentional research objectives, a critical element of a well-conceived research project (Roberts, 2010). Objectives describe the areas of inquiry a researcher is most interested in exploring (Miles et al., 2014). In addition, the research objective guides the methodology, data collection, analysis, and other aspects of the study (Creswell, 2013). Four research objectives guide the study:

RO1 – Describe the demographic characteristics of the participants, including

gender, work experience in municipal government, work experience in accrual

budgeting, education background, age, years of experience in their current or previous elected role, and race.

RO2 – Explore factors influencing municipal performance.

RO3 – Explore the participants' expectations regarding their capacity required to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the elected post.

RO4 – Explore strategies municipal organizations use to prepare local elected officials for their role.

<div align="center">Conceptual Framework</div>

Two theories serve as the foundation for this study. First, this research explores the theory of human resource development (HRD) (Swanson & Holton, 2009). The HRD theory is supported and explained through the three contributing core theory domains of psychological theory, economic theory, and systems theory (Passmore, 1997; Swanson & Holton, 2009). According to Swanson and Holton (2009), "The theories have been visually presented as a three-legged stool with three legs providing great stability for HRD as a discipline and field of practice required to function amid uneven and changing conditions" (p. 102). The researcher applies the human resource development theory to determine education's influence on capacity.

The HRD, as an emerging field, has borrowed theories from other disciplines, such as systems theory, psychological theory, and economic theory (Swanson, 1999). Although often, when exploring a domain of assumptions and theories, the focus on human capital plays a significant role in developing HRD (Nafukho et al., 2004). In the 1950s, the core performance factor consisted of physical capital, labor, land, and management (Becker, 1993). In this 21st century, the initial core factors are accompanied

by financial means, organizational capital, intellectual capital, innovative capital, and process capital (Hejase et al., 2016).

The second theory serving as the foundation for this study, human capital theory (HCT), is predicated on the notion that investing in people has financial benefits (Becker, 1993). Education constantly stands out as the most critical human capital investment for empirical study, even though types of human capital investments often include those in health and nutrition (Becker, 1993). The core tenet at the foundation of Human Capital Theory (HCT) is the conviction that individuals' learning abilities hold an equivalent worth to other factors engaged in the creation of goods and services. (Becker, 1993; Lucas, 1988; Nafukho et al., 2004). HCT explains the benefits of education and training initiatives as a human resource investment that benefits both self and society (Aliaga, 2001). According to Schulz (1971), Effective use of human resources produces beneficial outcomes for the individual, the organization, and society. For example, implementing policies might help to activate individuals' skill sets and encourage learning (Aliaga, 2001).

The purpose of this study is to explore the capacity of municipal elected officials and the factors that impact municipal performance. This study uses the model shown in Figure 2 to illustrate factors that influence municipal performance. The conceptual framework provides more examples of perceived conceptions that constitute the basis for municipal performance.

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│ Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993)                               │
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│  │  │        RO 1. Participants Demographics             │   │     │
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│  │   │ RO 2. Factors│  │ RO 3.        │  │ RO 4.        │   │     │
│  │   │ Influencing  │  │ Expectations │  │ Strategies   │   │     │
│  │   │ Municipal    │  │ LEOs capacity│  │ used to      │   │     │
│  │   │ Performance  │  │ regarding    │  │ prepare LEOs │   │     │
│  │   │              │  │ roles and    │  │              │   │     │
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│  │  │      Outcomes of Municipal Performance             │   │     │
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│         Human Resource Development Theory (Swanson, 2001)         │
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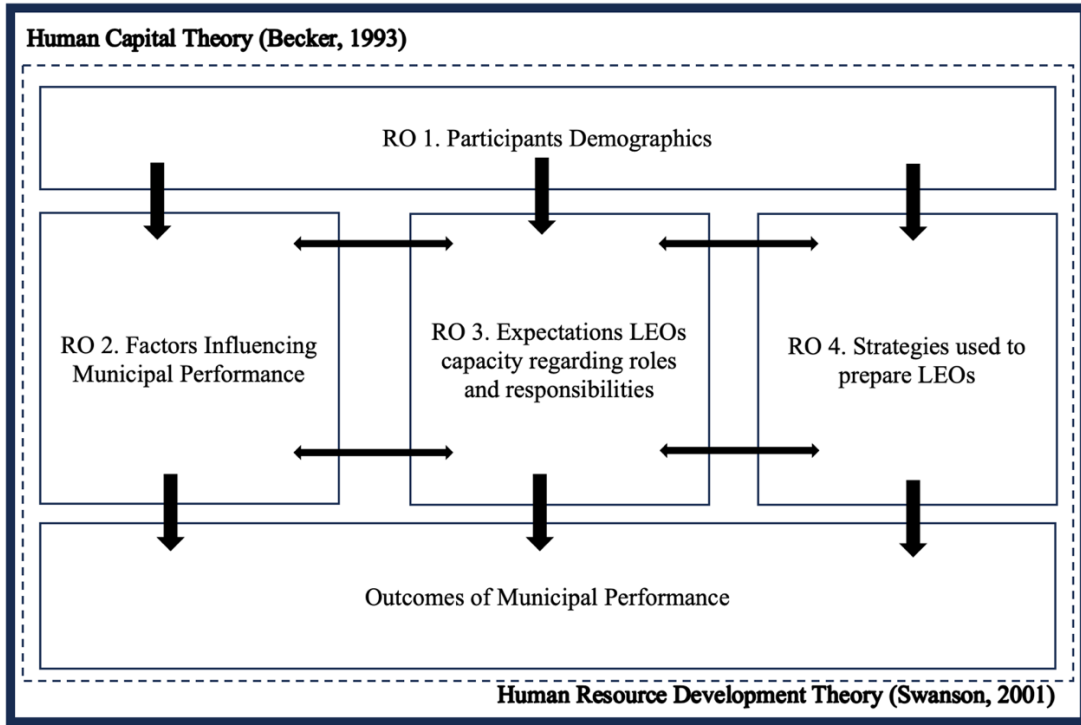
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Significance of the Study

The study explores local elected officials' capacity to govern municipal performance. There are three critical benefits to the study. First, the researcher explored the internal factors that impact municipal performance. Several hypotheses explain how governments function in the literature currently available. Notably, these theories have their origins in the United States but are not exclusive to the local level of government (Avellaneda, 2008). These institutional, political, demographic, and socioeconomic theories categorize municipal performance (Avellaneda, 2008). As a result, the initial phase of the study entailed an examination of the interrelationship between internal factors and municipal performance, as well as assessing how each theoretical framework impacts the ability of local elected officials to execute decisions.

First, according to one school of thought, how well a government performs depends on the institutional settings in which it functions (Avellaneda, 2008). The most common themes surrounding institutional explanation are the party, nepotism, and career politician ideology (Avellaneda, 2008). Second, there is political support, which posits that local elected officials may not perform well. (Avellaneda, 2008). Third, The makeup of the constituency is the deciding factor of growth and performance outcomes (Avellaneda, 2008; Svara, 2003). This factor would suggest that the economics and demographics are the foundation of a municipality's operation.

While the prevailing arguments predominantly highlight external factors in the context of municipal organizations, a substantial organization-specific element affecting municipal performance pertains to the manager, also known as the local elected official. This study explores the local elected official's human capital: their educational, job-related, and life experiences. This study sought to understand each participant's experience, favorable and unfavorable. Leading this study with the HRD theory allows the researcher to link capacity to municipal performance. Linking capacity to municipal performance ascertains whether education and training influenced local elected officials' capacity, ultimately impacting municipality performance.

Delimitations

The delimitations of a study clarify boundaries (Roberts, 2010). This study has three delimitations. First, this analysis exclusively focused on the municipalities in Mississippi. State laws, policies, and formats governing municipalities may differ. Focusing solely on one state allows the researcher to focus on a specific set of laws,

policies, and regulations that govern local government. Therefore, the researcher

provided a uniform interview protocol and questions for the participants.

Second, the study includes local elected officials who served after 2017. The

researcher captured current information by concentrating on local elected officials who

began service after 2017. Legislation is often changed and amended; the impact of

current events, natural disasters, and economic opportunity are critical factors in

understanding municipal performance (Davis and Camp, 2021). Therefore, the researcher

isolated the population to cover only a 5-year gap.

Finally, Zoom Video Conferencing software provides the researcher the format

for conducting live video conferences. Local elected officials are extremely busy and

frequently work multiple jobs. Flexibility provided a level of comfort for both the

researcher and the participants. Convenience is essential when asking participants

personal questions (Suri, 2011). The researcher used video conference software to give

the researcher flexibility and ensure the interviews were conducted on time.

Assumptions

Most researchers value assumptions about the accurate or plausible explanations

necessary for the study's sake (Roberts, 2010). Assumptions are realities often taken for

granted but required for the study's purpose (Roberts, 2010). This study sought anecdotal

data by interviewing current and past local elected officials. The researcher considered

the following: (a) assume that each participant was open and honest about their

perception and experiences, (b) all participants understand the study and its entirety, and

(c) all participants spoke freely without pressure to provide specific responses.

Definition of Key Terms

The definition of key terms section identifies terminology used to assist the readers with concepts, particularly unfamiliar ones. This study focuses on commonly used terms but very different meanings, e.g., education, formal education, and informal education. These terms are aligned with the study's purpose and connected to the field of practice in the study. Therefore, using a key term helps the reader understand the study's context and specific meaning.

1. *Accrual accounting* – "Accrual accounting is a financial accounting method that allows a company to record revenue before receiving payment for goods or services sold and record expenses as they are incurred (Hayes, 2023)."

2. *Capacity* – the facility or power to produce, perform, or deploy (Merriam-Webster, 2022)

2. *Education* – the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally preparing oneself or others intellectually for a mature life (Dictionary.com, 2023)

3. *Formal education* – "the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded 'education system,' running from primary school through the university and including, in addition to general academic studies, various specialized programs and institutions for full-time technical and professional training (Kotinsky, 2021)."

4. *Human Resource Development* (HRD) – is a process of developing and unleashing expertise to improve individual, team, work process, and organizational system performance (Swanson & Holton, 2009).

5. *Human Capital Theory* (HCT) – is the universal standard of competencies, physical and mental knowledge, and social and personal contributions embodied in the ability to create intrinsic and measurable economic value (Becker, 1993).

6. *Informal education* – "the truly lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills, and knowledge from daily experience and the educative influences and resources in their environment – from family and neighbors, from work and play, from the marketplace, the library, and the mass media (Kotinsky, 2021)."

7. *Nonformal education* – "any organized educational activity outside the established formal system – whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity – intended to serve identifiable learning clientele and learning objectives (Kotinsky, 2021)."

8. *Organizational performance* – "comprises the actual output or results of an organization as measured against its intended outcomes (Richard et al., 2009)."

9. *Public servant* – a government official (Merriam-Webster, 2023).

Organization of the Study

This qualitative phenomenological study has five chapters structured so that the reader can gain an inclusive understanding of the research. Chapter I provides an overview of the study, which includes the introduction, background, statements of the problem, study's purpose, research objectives, significance of the study, conceptual framework, limitations, delimitations, assumptions, and conceptualized definitions. Chapter II reviews the literature on the research and relevant topics that align with the

study. The literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the subject used to provide background, clarity, and purpose for the overall problem of the study. Chapter III presents the methodology used to conduct the qualitative research.

Summary

Understanding the factors that influence municipal performance can be difficult. However, suppose local elected officials want to improve their municipalities and be good stewards of taxpayers' dollars by providing the highest level of goods and services available. In that case, they must build their capacity to understand how to control the factors influencing municipal performance (Svara, 2003). While the phenomenon that local elected officials' capacity influences the municipal version is not new, there is minimum literature that addresses internal factors (Avellaneda, 2008). When discussing inferences, growth, and measurable success for municipal leaders, future research studies contribute to a broader understanding of the factors that influence municipal success. Moreover, the internal factors explored in this study impact municipal performance, and the development could assist local, state, and federal governments in new ways to view opportunities and improve them. Finally, this study contributes to the research on organizational performance.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

Many factors account for variations in municipal performance, including political, economic, and sociodemographic characteristics of the constituency (Avellaneda, 2009). While all the arguments mentioned above strongly emphasize issues outside of the organizations, the literature contends that internal factors, often known as organizational factors, influence municipal performance most. The current literature has not considered the influence of internal factors, such as the individuals who create and dictate policy, "the local elected official," or the capacity needed to govern a municipal organization (Burke & Litwin, 1992). In this study, the researcher addresses two lines of explanation: (a) local elected official(s)' capacity and functionality of the municipality and (b) municipal performance.

This literature review will develop the credibility required to establish this study (Creswell, 2013; Machi & McEvoy, 2016). The literature review will sufficiently position the study to focus on the local elected officials' capacity and its potential impact on municipal performance (Creswell et al., 2007). Chapter II includes sections on the history and creation of local government, forms of municipal governments, municipal performance, municipal capacity, education, and an overview of the associated theories.

History and Creation of Local Government

Today, roughly 2% of the American population resides on farms or ranches, while back in 1790, a substantial 90% of the populace did so. (Recchiuti, 2007). Americans today look to local governments to achieve romantic nostalgia that has not yet materialized (Janiskee, 2010). In 1790, the centralization of power was a successful method of governance (Gibson & Lehoucq, 2003; Janiskee, 2010). As the United States

was much more rural in the 1700 -1800 made, life for Americans was much simpler (Janiskee, 2010). However, the emergence of local economies made it more difficult for leaders to engage with their constituents by deploying centralized policies (Gibson & Lehoucq, 2003). This growth reduced governmental responsiveness, efficiency, and effectiveness, making it challenging or impossible to administer social programs and prepare for long-term growth (A History of Decentralization, n.d.).

The development of municipal authorities became increasingly obvious over time, and local resources increased (Juon & Bakke, 2023). For municipalities to grow economically and move toward more urban lifestyles, local democracy became critical to local residents (Janiskee, 2010). Political scientists and historians encourage this idea of a decentralized government as a participatory tool for the local constituency, known today as an inclusive democracy (Janiskee, 2010). Local governments were held up as a model for deference in the past compared to governments today, essentially the idea of a decentralized government (Rumbach, 2016). Nevertheless, today's local government frequently abuses individual rights, most visibly in the heavy-handed regulation, seizures of private property, policies tailored for large/private corporations, and political influence (Avellaneda, 2009; Janiskee, 2010). History and research of the writings and experiences of the American founders urge the American people to question the idealistic notion of government (Fleischacker, 2002). The prudent jealousy of the founding fathers of America wrote explicitly about the danger of liberty observed at the local level, including those in the idealized townships praised by French aristocrats, diplomats, political scientists, and historian Alexi de Tocqueville in the 1800s (Janiskee, 2010). Through the writings and research of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, the qualities that made the

local colonial government democratic also made it vulnerable to tyranny (Janiskee, 2010). Some of these are the same behaviors we witness today on all three levels of government. James Madison, also known as The Federalist, labeled these characteristics as the "tyranny of the majority" for small democracies (Janiskee, 2010).

The development and foundation of American municipal governments derive from England (Rumbach, 2016). Initially, Europeans' colonization of North America in the 17th century lacked control by the central government (Beckenbach & Prevosti, 1986). The English system from the 15th century served as the foundation for the local rules of the American system, which strengthened the foundation for local government—today's features of local municipalities parallel English and American systems (Davis & Camp, 2021). The authority and control granted to local elected officials and their functionality are powers and critical features we still see today mirror the English democratic system for local government (Fufa, 2006). Amongst these is the power of the mayor, the composition of the city council, the board of aldermen, and the functions of the judiciary, which includes all three branches of government known as the executive, legislative, and judicial branches (Davis & Camp, 2021). In addition, the level of citizen participation and the adoption of parliamentary procedures are critical features and powers used to navigate the democratic system (Davis & Camp, 2021).

When examining the historical evolution of English and American scientific developments, the United States shares certain functionalities with unique characteristics (Davis & Camp, 2021; Jung, 2006). The cornerstone of this connection was the rule of law, which played a pivotal role in aligning the legal foundations of England and the American Colonies (Jung, 2006). The Rule of Law, encompassing accountability,

equitable laws, transparent governance, and accessible justice, serves as the fundamental framework (Tamanaha & Z, 2004). In contrast to the state and federal government systems, local government authority historically lacked a role in the American constitutional structure (Williams, 1986; Sujarwoto, 2017). Additionally, the "rule of law" exclusively applies when a state's constitution acts as the supreme law in the absence of local laws, such as during a state of emergency (Tamanaha & Z, 2004).

Introducing Municipalities

The 1920 census marked a pivotal moment in U.S. history as it revealed that, for the first time, more Americans resided in urban areas rather than rural regions (Bowers, 1971). This census underscored a notable population shift from the initial 1790 census, which reported slightly over 4% of the population living in cities (Bowers, 1971). With 82% of the nation's population now residing in metropolitan areas, most Americans first encounter various types of municipal governments, such as cities, towns, boroughs, or villages (Davis & Camp, 2021; Svara, 2001).

According to the 2011 Statistical Abstract of the United States, published by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1878, there were 19,492 municipal (city) governments and 16,519 township and town governments in the United States in 2007 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). During this period of American history, rural areas experienced significant reform efforts (Bowers, 1971). Some of the factors contributing to the transformation of rural America included the decentralization process, aimed at enhancing the social, intellectual, and economic aspects of rural life and improving funding availability and educational opportunities (Svara, 2001; Bowers, 1971).

Decentralization

The United States adopted decentralization to improve local government's effectiveness, responsiveness, and efficiency (Rumbach, 2016). Decentralization's components were once touted as a practical supply of more natural resources (Svara, 2001). The competition for political office opened doors to responsible and innovative local leadership that, in turn, drove economic development, more widespread community participation, voicing demands, and constituents' engagement with projects (Fiszbein, 1997). Local governments became more accountable through leadership participation that consolidated federal, state, and corporate strength (Fiszbein, 1997). Most local governments have improved their resources and capacities, including personnel expertise, professionalization, tools, materials, structures, organization, planning, and execution (Svara, 2001; Fiszbein, 1997). Many resources were available but needed to be part of the old system before decentralization (Rumbach, 2016). However, doubts and uncertainties with citizens materialized over time. Constituents became concerned with the rapid expansion of legal and regulatory frameworks, time constraints due to the availability of resources and intergovernmental relations, and worry over financial prudence (Fiszbein, 1997)

While decentralization alone does not guarantee effective municipal government, it facilitates and provides a framework for assisting communities in developing a governance structure (Avellaneda, 2009; Osborne, 1993). While some literature favors decentralization, there is also literature against it. According to Peterson (1987), decentralization is neither good nor bad because it can have positive and negative effects depending on those in a position to lead. Leadership in local government is essential to

high-performing local governments (Svara, 2001). Although decentralization aims to improve the local government's performance, it cannot be implemented without competent local leadership (Peterson, 1987; Svara, 2001; Rumbach, 2016).

Increased municipal responsibility and resources do not guarantee residents a homogeneous or positive response (Blair, 1999). There are many factors to consider regarding the actions and reactions of municipalities that exceed the implementation of decentralization. Decentralization will increase public services at a sub-national or local level when the proper conditions exist (Sujarwoto, 2017). For example, smaller municipalities could experience growth limitations, particularly regarding hiring a team of adequately compensated professionals due to insufficient scale (Fiszbein, 1997). Empirical findings of decentralization from studies within the last 10 years agree with Sujarwoto's conclusions (Sujarwoto, 2017). These conclusions make it evident that local governments will gain by enhancing local services during competitive and fair elections, transparency, checks and balances, public participation, and when there is a strong sense of community. (Sujarwoto, 2017). The capacity of local leaders and public servants is essential to the conditions for effective decentralization measures taken (Sujarwoto, 2017). Sujarwoto's (2017) research suggests that the capacity of the local elected officials substantially influences the effectiveness of the municipality as an organization.

Forms of Municipal Governments

There are five general forms of municipal government most common in the United States today: the mayor-council, council-manager, commission, town meeting, and representative town meeting form (DeSantis & Renner, 2002). Municipalities are created and facilitated by law and possess the powers delineated by statute to operate

under a specific form of government (Keyes & Benavides, 2019). The legal requirement is allocated by law and can stem from various sources, including state constitutions, state statutes and legislation that pertain to all municipalities or specific categories of cities, local and private acts that apply to particular municipalities, municipal charters, and the inherent rights of self-government (Keyes & Benavides, 2019). A municipality charter is an act of the General Assembly particular to that local authority, identifying the form of government in which the authority can operate (Bluestein & Joyce, 2019). Each form of government retains distinct structural characteristics (Frederickson & Johnson, 2001). Over the past several decades, a general merging of the different forms of government has prompted many municipalities to adopt either the mayor-council or council-manager systems (DeSantis & Renner, 2002; Frederickson & Johnson, 2001). However, these are only a few identified forms of government structure in the United States (DeSantis & Renner, 2002; Davis & Camp, 2021). The most recent ICMA National Municipal Form of Government Survey indicates that a vast majority of municipalities in America operate under the following two forms of government mayor-council or council-manager system (DeSantis & Renner, 2002). The mayor-council can also be titled the mayor board of alderperson form of government (Avellaneda, 2008).

Official forms of government cannot change; however, the municipality can choose which government they will operate under by referendum or designation by the state legislature in some states (Andersson, 2003; Bluestein & Joyce, 2019; H. K. Smith, 1895). The characteristics of municipal forms of government result from legislative acts; it usually would take another action of the legislature to change any of them (Avellaneda, 2008; Davis & Camp, 2021; Svara, 2001). However, the General Assembly of some

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states has enacted a "charter change" statute that permits a city, town, village, or its voters to amend or add a provision to the municipality's charter by referendum (Bluestein & Joyce, 2019). In general, choosing the form of government depends on how much legislative and administrative authority the city or town will give the local elected officials (ICMA, 2019). City charters can create an unbalanced system by changing how the city drives day-to-day operations and enacts policy (Jung, 2006; MRSC Empowering Local Government, 2018). The primary distinctions arise from the allocation and dispersion of authority among legislative and executive officials (MRSC Empowering Local Government, 2018). Forms of municipal government are the tools used to govern the municipality and identify the roles and responsibilities of the local elected officials' (Feiock & Yang, 2005; Jung, 2006). The form of government can determine the capacity required to perform the duties of the charter as it outlines the general functionality of municipalities (Osborne, 1993).

Municipal Performance

This literature review section focuses on internal factors that impact or influence municipal performance. Decentralization is merely one method of improving local controls (Wu et al., 2020). Greater research into the internal factors that affect performance is necessary to comprehend municipal performance properly (Avellaneda, 2008; Wu et al., 2020).

Amid the political influences, scholars refer to government ideology as influential to the elected leaders, performance improvement, public participation, psychological conditions, civic education, politicians' motivations, electoral competitiveness, and the capacity of elected leaders (Andersson, 2003; Avellaneda, 2009; Gibson & Lehoucq,

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2003; Holbrook & Van Dunk, 1993; Kahn, 1990; Svara, 2003; TSai & McMurry, 2018).

In addition, studies include economic determinants such as budget inequalities, available

occupations, and population size (Avellaneda, 2009). However, the most significant

influence on municipal performance is not outside the organization's administrative

structure, such as political, socioeconomic, and institutional factors (Avellaneda, 2008;

Feiock & Yang, 2005; Svara, 2003). Although these are important to the success of a

municipality, research on municipal government's performance has neglected to consider

the possible effects of public management (Avellaneda, 2009; Burke & Litwin, 1992).

Factors Influencing Municipal Performance

Most of the literature focuses on the external factors of municipal organization

performance, such as political party influence, urban growth, industrialization, and

topographical (Avellaneda, 2009; Wu et al., 2020). External factors are those that have an

impact on or exhibit socioeconomic, political, economic, and financial factors to account

for variations in municipal performance (Wu et al., 2020). Organizational internal factors

are the most influential factors in municipal performance (Svara, 2003). The

qualifications of elected officials are internal factors in municipal performance, including

human capital attributes, formal education, and job-related experiences (Avellaneda,

2009). These qualifications are proven foundational platforms for leaders that take

advantage of an organization's institutional, political, demographic, and socioeconomic

factors, all favorable to municipal performance (Avellaneda, 2009; Campbell, 2006;

Smith, 2002). While all these factors can be advantageous to interpretation, if the elected

leaders cannot explore them, they will be unrealized opportunities and untapped potential

(Arnaboldi et al., 2015).

In municipalities, there is a stigma that government leaders lack competence and fail to produce appropriate outcomes (Svara, 2003). Citizens across the country are displeased with the performance of their public institutions, and this discontent extends to the local governments' (Svara, 2001). Citizens' reaction to the lack of performance can result in undemocratic alternatives in search of change (Feiock & Yang, 2005). This considerable failure in performance alludes to internal factors contributing to the performance of a municipality (Greytak, 1976). Educated and experienced municipal elected leaders produce more significant results, thus improving the performance of the municipal organization (Avellaneda, 2008). Although the government's performance on the local level is a function of collective action, all of the responsibility for the actions implied through policy is of the legislative body, controlled by the local elected officials' (Meier, 1991; Svara, 2001). By emphasizing local elected officials' capacity, the literature will further demonstrate that managerial quality exerts more influence than other external factors.

Exceptional circumstances such as legal, budget, or staff issues decrease the effect of managerial quality, reducing the municipality's performance (Svara, 2003). That is when the municipal context impedes local elected officials' maneuverability to improve performance (Avellaneda, 2009; Svara, 2003). The unfavorable context could result from natural disasters, crime, and other unpredictable and uncontrollable actions (Svara, 2003). In these circumstances, the local elected official is responsible for managing the impact and employing corrective action as needed (Fiszbein, 1997).

Public Management

Public management is widely accepted by scholars and practitioners in the public

sector as the key to the success or failure of government programs (Greytak, 1976;

Richard et al., 2009; Svara, 2001). The act of exercising judgment or discretion by actors

playing executive roles is how management is portrayed (Brudney et al., 2001). Ordinary

management deals with things or controls people (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Furthermore,

public management frequently improves the quality and efficiency of services delivered

by public organizations (Ohio University, 2022).

Public managers carry out the organizational operations of the municipality,

interpret policies, and identify services to achieve the most desirable outcome (Ohio

University, 2022). Public managers can operate in two different areas of municipal

operations: internal and external management (Arnaboldi et al., 2015). Internally, public

managers must understand how to reduce managing organizational risk and change in an

unpredictable environment (Leland & Thurmaier, 2004). This factor necessitates that they

know about societal problems and circumstances that affect performance (Ohio

University, 2022). By acknowledging risk and change, public managers can prepare for

instability and adverse conditions that may affect performance (Arnaboldi et al., 2015).

Externally, general management can focus on the municipality's economic and

sociodemographic factors (Svara, 2003). Collaborating with private groups on economic

development opportunities, connecting with other public organizations on policy

development, and coordinating human resources to secure the necessary financing to

implement public programs (Ohio University, 2022). Internal factors require local elected

officials and public administrators to primarily use the same essential skills, including

knowledge of public finance, leadership abilities, interpersonal skills, communications skills, and strategic thinking (Avellaneda, 2008; Ohio University, 2022)

Nevertheless, the fundamental purpose of general management research is to gauge public performance's determinants (Boyne, 2004; Osborne, 1993). The goal is to understand what are the determinants that impact performance. To what extent and under what circumstances does general management make a difference in the outcomes of municipal performance (Boyne, 2004)? There is a difference between the policymaking and management of day-to-day responsibilities; however, the difference between the elected and appointed officials is inevitably fuzzy in practice (Boyne, 2004). To what extent does the research conceptualize and measure performance elements such as quantity and quality of outputs, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity (Boyne, 2004)? We intend to illustrate the consequences of factors such as budgetary constraints, spending wisely, tax increases and decreases, increased utility services, and other burdens that directly impact the constituency and are the responsibility of the local elected official (Brudney et al., 2001). Both public management and management constructs are continuous rather than categorical (Almond & Verba, 2019). However, the purpose of the study is to evaluate the construct validity or empirical accuracy of performance measures (Boyne, 2004).

Public management operates under legal authorities and structure, which delegate roles, responsibilities, and constraints and oversees the administrators (Almond & Verba, 2019). The core of general management is the administration (Avellaneda, 2008). Public management's goal is not to control the bureaucracy but to manage it as set forth when decentralization was initially adopted (Arnaboldi et al., 2015; Sujarwoto, 2017).

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Managing is a performance-based process and should focus solely on that task and how to achieve and improve the results (Avellaneda, 2008; Greytak, 1976; Swanson, 1999). Common themes developed from management research, bureaucratic administrations protect the state, and managerial administrations cover the constituency (Avellaneda, 2008; Pereira, 1999).

In linking public management to performance, one must first look at the capacity of those managing the public sector (Arnaboldi et al., 2015). The general manager's jobs are to research, create, and implement the process and policies that improve the overall quality of services (Hoene & Pagano, 2018). While this takes time and effort, managerial administrations must be flexible to allow this work to occur (Arnaboldi et al., 2015). With flexibility, managerial administration deviates from the rigid nature practiced by municipal governments under a bureaucratic administration (Avellaneda, 2008). This type of leadership is becoming a universal ambition for the public sector as confidence in the elected leaders as managers are quickly deteriorating (Arnaboldi et al., 2015; Svara, 2001). Management uses three broad strategies to improve performance: change the environment, change the organization, and change the product (Meng, 2022). These strategies are pending the assumption that public sector managers have some ability to maneuver that is within their control (Meng, 2022; Svara, 2023).

In municipal government, the public manager is the local elected official whose key responsibility is delivering goods and services (Svara, 2003). The city charters delineate the roles, obligations, and powers (Bluestein & Joyce, 2019). However, local elected officials still exercise judgment and discretion in asserting authority (Svara, 200). Maneuvering under some charters can only be possible if there is a consensus within the

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elected leadership (Arnaboldi et al., 2015). It is also relevant to understand capacity as some charters designate legislative and executive authority to the same body of individuals, e.g., the city council, the board of alderman, and the mayor (Arnaboldi et al., 2015).

Management improves performance in numerous ways; however, the literature still needs to include a framework for measuring direction in the public sector (Pereira, 1999). Managerial influences work through many different causal pathways to make the explanations more specific regarding quality management (Pereira, 1999).

Many studies explore management alongside the impact of a single factor. (Greytak, 1976). Many factors are associated with management, such as engagement, attitude, stability, sustainability, representation, and capacity (Holbrook & Van Dunk, 1993; Justus & Uma, 2016; Meier, 1991; Pereira, 1999; Svara, 2003). Contrariwise, in order to establish a connection between management quality and comprehensive performance, a model that delves into multiple internal management subsystems, including human resources, financial management, information technology, code enforcement, recreation, and policy, is imperative (Greytak, 1976; Svara, 2003). When exploring the management subsystems, what leads to performance is the integration of simultaneously applying these models, the job of the local elected official (Avellaneda, 2009). The guiding coalition is the leader, the policymaker, and the critical influencer of these management systems (Kotter, 2012). Most significantly, within a coherent and cohesive administrative framework, sound leadership positively impacts competent management, thus, performance. This link operates through systematic performance-based activities (Cepiku, 2015; Greytak, 1976; Justus & Uma, 2016).

Research on empirical evidence of management and performance explored organizational performance to establish a foundation that managerial strategies are helpful across a range of public sector organizations (Boyne, 2004). A common question asked in a vast amount of the research explored is, "Does management matter?". When evaluating the impact of public sector performance and management, a common theme surfaces "leadership" (Davis & Camp, 2021; Cepiku, 2015; Nielsen & Moynihan, 2017).

When considering public sector management and leadership, a pragmatic approach relates to the overall impact on the performance (Legg & Hookway 2019). A practical approach to knowing the world sees it as inseparable from the agency it contains (Legg & Hookway 2019). Pragmatism suggests that even if the local elected officials are external to the organization, they influence its performance (Legg & Hookway 2019). As Peirce originally conceived it, pragmatism's core was the Pragmatic Maxim, a rule for clarifying the meaning of hypotheses (Legg & Hookway 2019). He traced their 'practical consequences and implications for experience in specific situations (Legg & Hookway 2019). He was referring to the repercussions of clarifying the foundation of truth regarding management and performance (Legg & Hookway 2019). To address public administration and link it to performance, we must view the local elected officials as "the managers," who must be incorporated to achieve this notion (Greytak, 1976; Svara, 2001).

Public management's core is administration, which shifts the focus from bureaucratic to managerial administration (Legg & Hookway 2019). We move from controlling bureaucracy to managing it through performance-based processes in public management (Svara, 2001). In administrative administrations, the focus is on

achieving results, unlike in bureaucratic organizations, which leave taxpayers vulnerable and protect the state (Legg & Hookway 2019).

Managers adopt economic and administrative reforms to protect consumers. One of those reforms is reducing prices, which enables managers to produce more with less (Park et al., 2022). A manager in a managerial context is flexible and uses multiple strategies to implement processes and actions to improve performance; this allows managerial administration to deviate from the rigidity of bureaucracy (Park et al., 2022). Management is universal to performance through multiple functions, such as: carrying out the mission, vision, and core values of the organization, in addition to leading, organizing, planning, and strategic decision-making of the organization (Meier, 1991). The integration of management functions has received much attention from scholars and practitioners, emphasizing that policy, finances, information, and human resources are the foundation of public organization, which directly connects to performance (Meier,1991).

Even with this generalized notion that public management ignored, particularly the principal agents: the local elected officials' model neglects the government's management impact on performance and policy (Ramutsheli & Janse, 2015). Public agents' ability to translate the principal intentions into goals depends significantly on organizational arrangements and factors, but the nature of public management also plays a significant role (Arnaboldi et al., 2015). The literature even suggests that management should be the intervening variable in the policy and performance equation, making the manager's capacity influential to municipal performance (Arnaboldi et al., 2015; Avellaneda, 2009; Ramutsheli & Janse, 2015). Therefore, for this dissertation, local

elected officials' capacity may significantly impact all the potential management mechanisms for influencing performance.

Public Administrator

Political leaders (local elected officials) and the public (the electorate) are at the forefront of quantifying municipal success through their perceptions of measurable results. The interaction among officials, political figures, and the public is at the heart of public administration (Svara, 2001). For years the nature of that relationship and the proper role of administrators in the political process have yet to be explicit (Svara, 2003). There are several reasons why the dichotomy idea has persisted when focusing on the administrative role of the public sector government and the elected leader's role (Svara, 2001). It is beneficial to elucidate the division of functions through a framework of complete separation because it offers a simpler explanation compared to a model centered on shared roles. Importantly, the separation model does not constrain the practical policy contributions of administrative functionality (Peters, 1995).The dichotomy persists as it functions under the same public sector organization's umbrella. However, the two structures are different and separate based on the municipality's charter and separation of powers doctrine (DeSantis & Renner, 2002). Simultaneously, the dichotomy idea can shield the administrators from scrutiny but serves the agenda of the local elected officials, who can pass some responsibility for unpopular decisions to administrators (Peters, 1995).

Perceptions of organizational politics frequently exhibit subjectivity and are closely associated with the conduct of employees within the workplace setting (Grimland

et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the employee's sole duty is to carry out the wishes of the legislative body (Davis & Camp, 2021).

Work adjustment theory suggests that when an organization becomes overly focused on political issues, it can jeopardize its resources (Williams, 2015). This shift in focus detracts from the primary mission of government, which is to deliver goods and services (Grimland et al., 2012; Williams, 2015). It halts performance when the employees lose confidence in the political leaders of the municipal organization (Richard et al., 2009). Professional growth is often difficult to achieve when organizational politics between employees occur (Williams, 2015).

Further, strengthening the personal agenda for career employees and politicians yields moderate to no progress surrounding municipal performance (Hargrove & Glidewell, 1990). Public administration produces many theories of political control; one is that the administration can be accountable and subordinate to democratic decision-making (Fredrickson et al., 2016). However, most people see democratic decision-making as a dual responsibility of the administrator and the local elected officials (Fredrickson et al., 2016).

Leadership and Performance

Learning is a process that takes time and can be complex depending on the subject matter and the individual's background and experience; personal and interpersonal leadership skills can be even more demanding for an individual to develop (Crosbie, 2005). Management is subordinate to leadership, which implies that it is not the leader's task to perform but critically think (Fredrickson et al., 2016). This view would characterize the responsibilities of leaders as motivating, directing, and setting values and

goals, while management focuses on controlling, budgeting, and getting things done in developing settings (Hooijberg & Choi, 2001). Applying generic organization and management theories to public sector organizations is criticized because these theories need to pay more attention to significant differences between the public and private sectors (Hooijberg & Choi, 2001). Despite the different views on management and leadership, general theories on leadership apply to the public sector (Crosbie, 2005). A similar theme regarding the importance of management on performance and the leaders was discovered when reading the management literature (Crosbie, 2005). Research tells us that the organization's guiding coalition is the most important source of leadership (Kotter, 2012). The managers are the most influential asset to the organization as the influencers, creators, and implementors of program effectiveness, policy, sustainability, and other subset management functionality (Cepiku, 2015; Parker et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, the centrality of management has posed issues for some researchers that believe public management should focus on the frontline worker instead of the manager (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012). Investing time in understanding the manager gives an understanding of how the organization performs in the long run (Morse, 2010). Managers aim to obtain knowledge and insight from the material and human resource subset, including the frontline worker (Avellaneda, 2008; Greytak, 1976). Managers work to simultaneously explore, develop, and seek to create corrective and sustainable actions for day-to-day organizational activities (Morse, 2010). These decisions drive municipal performance and sometimes could interfere with public administrators' role (Fiedler, 1986; Hendrix, 2010; Rajala et al., 2018). Ultimately, the

underlying difference between the manager and administrator is that management is the

planner and is concerned with acting (Ohio University, 2022).

In contrast, the administrator applies policies dictating how day-to-day operators

manage the work (Ohio University, 2022). Administrators are generally used to carry out

policies, control rules and regulations, and communicate orders from the institution and

its leaders (Ohio University, 2022).

The Role of the local elected officials in Municipal Performance

The role of local elected officials varies depending on several factors, such as the

municipality's charter, position, and bureaucracy (Svara, 2001). Nevertheless, in

municipal government, bureaucracy and the power invested through the bureaucracy to

the local elected officials are the source of management and municipal performance

(Cohen, 1995; Hofer & Pintrich, 2004; Miron, 2017). For example, the elected body of a

municipality decides and interprets important decisions on what services to deliver, how

to provide the service, and how much the service is worth (Svara, 2001). These decisions

would limit a street-level bureaucrat from engaging or affecting the service structure of

democracy; however, street-level bureaucrats are not uncommon to disrupt service

delivery (Miron, 2017). Therefore, some government public policy outputs are the

product of a consensus-driven action by the local elected officials that shape the

performance of the public sector (Meier, 1991). Specifically, in municipal settings, the

individual identified as the single actor is often the local elected official (Avellaneda,

2008).

As we explore the charters and format of how municipalities enact their governing

structure and individual cities, the local elected officials become the executors and

legislators of the municipal organization (Davis & Camp, 2021; Sujarwoto, 2017). Fiszbein (1997) points out that the smaller the community, the more influence the local elected officials have on performance. Individual local elected officials can significantly impact the majority, if not all, operations in towns with poor human capital, populations under 25,000, and scarce resources (Fiszbein, 1997). The bureaucratic system's focus on these delineated powers is independent of population, demographic, or qualifications (TSai & McMurry, 2018). However, the statutory requirements of the local elected officials provide a certain degree of capabilities due to the nature of the duties, for they are mandatory and responsible for executing governance (Fiszbein, 1997). If the frontline and public sector employees perform poorly in carrying out the task of the local elected officials, it makes the elected leaders' position more complicated; simultaneously, they acquire more authority (Fiszbein, 1997; Leland & Thurmaier, 2004). In the literature review, the theme relevant to local elected officials is that "capacity matters" (Avellaneda, 2008; Cohen, 1995; Fiszbein, 1997; Hendrix, 2010; Parker et al., 2019). The scholarship also documents local elected officials' influence on overall performance during day-to-day operations. As enacted by decentralization, the political influencers, "local elected officials," are the initial and final determining factor of municipal performance (Gibson & Lehoucq, 2003; Morse, 2010). For example, statutes require local elected officials to develop settings to recruit, retain, and hire effective, qualified talent (Cepiku, 2015; Fiszbein, 1997; Hendrix, 2010). Nevertheless, the local elected official is the author and enforcer of the policies created to recruit, retain, and hire effective, qualified talent (Morse, 2010). When lacking services in some capacities, the local elected officials may resort to bidding services (Osborne, 1993). This direct impact

of decentralization is often omitted when discussing municipal performance (Gibson & Lehoucq, 2003). For example, the local elected officials can bring in independent contractors, outsource services, partner with private organizations, or become trained and developed in a specific role to improve results (Gibson &Lehoucq, 2003). This format would further support the notion that the local elected official is the most influential resource for performance. Also, the local elected officials decide on the budget and can allocate resources for these tasks at their discretion (Aliaga, 2001; Devas, 2003; Hoene, 2018). Sharing resources and establishing memorandums of understanding with other regional service providers helps cut costs (Avellaneda, 2009). Those services could include public safety, legal, utility services, and accountants (Stumm and Khan, 1996). The capacity of the local elected officials creates the framework for the municipality's performance since they regulate the organization's success through policy (Avellaneda, 2008). Local elected officials' primary responsibilities include motivating their constituents and delivering customer-focused performance, such as encouraging people to pay their taxes and utility bills and use all available services. They also mobilize economic growth, public safety, and financial support using political skills (Fiszbein, 1997).

Although there is a decline in confidence in local elected officials, they are still the leaders and influencers of our democracy. The perceived value of local elected officials is at a different significance level than they once were. Early on, the founders of the local government faced issues and conflicts in setting up decentralization in America (Janiskee, 2010). The prevalent governmental structure in Latin American countries typically involves a robust elected mayor who is supervised by an elected council

(Janiskee, 2010). In the USA, there are multiple forms of local governments and additional operation factors within each (Avellaneda, 2008; Jung, 2006; MRCS Empowering Local Government, 2022). There are other types of municipal governance, but the two most frequently employed are mayor-council and city manager (DeSantis & Renner, 2002; Svara, 2003). Studies on the connection between local elected officials and local performance in the US focus on whether city-manager cities (reformed) are more effective than mayor-council cities, which is understandable given the existence of the two most popular systems of local government (unreformed);(Cepiku, 2015; Justus & Uma, 2016; Svara, 2003). The reform government enacts in the best interest of the citizens as the bureaucratic professionalism, thus, removing the interest of a group and political pressure (Avellaneda, 2008). Some scholars have studied labor costs, wage increases, fringe benefits, and cost of service provision to determine the best approach to municipal government (Avellaneda, 2008; Greytak, 1976). The efforts surrounding this topic have yielded inconclusive results in both quantitative and qualitative studies (Avellaneda, 2009; Boyne, 2004; Svara, 2003). Recent literature that studied wages and salaries (Jung, 2006) and government expenditures aligned in both forms of government (Avellaneda, 2009; Jung, 2006; Svara, 2003) found little to no difference in the spending in local government. However, Ehrenberg (1973) said reformed cities spent more than unreformed cities.

The most common form of government used across the United States is the council-manager form of government (Nollenberger & Simmons, 2016). Under this model, the council and mayor are the most powerful and have the most significant responsibility (Nollenberger & Simmons, 2016). The city appoints a manager responsible

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for day-to-day operations, and the council and mayor may remove him upon a majority

vote (Davis & Camp, 2021; Jung, 2006). In addition, the city manager guides policy

under the council's direction, which is led by local elected official (Davis & Camp, 2021).

This process is considered the reformed government format, although its existence is a

century old (Jung, 2006). This form of government portrays a restrictive and insignificant

role for the mayor and council (Jung, 2006). The mayor, who performs ceremonial

functions as head of the local government and may preside at council meetings,

represents the city on public occasions and signs legal documents for the town

(Nollenberger & Simmons, 2016).

 Nevertheless, each local elected official has a management mechanism vital to the

municipality's performance. Some charters give the mayor equal standing with the

council and additional ceremonial duties (Avellaneda, 2009; Davis & Camp, 2021;

Greytak, 1976). The level of equity shown in the context of the municipal charter and the

separation of powers doctrine creates legislative authority (Davis & Camp, 2021). This

authority allows local elected officials to dictate policy under any form of government as

the head and manager of legislative power, e.g., creating policy, budget, organization

goals, and core values (Davis & Camp, 2021). Scholars and practitioners view strong

leadership from local elected officials as a positive construct since it can counterbalance

the perceived imbalances between the executive and legislative branches of government

(Boyne et al., 2006). After depicting the strengths and weaknesses of local elected

officials in municipal performance, the literature supports the notion that local elected

officials are public managers (Gibson & Lehoucq, 2003).

Characteristics of local elected officials that Influence Performance

Public organizations continuously work to transform and reach higher productivity. This effort justifies the need to evolve and adapt to our post-industrial, technology-driven society (Grimland et al., 2012). Focusing on crucial management programs that are growing efforts, such as planning, controls, budgeting, and reporting, which are led by local elected officials, exacerbates the performance movement's actions in the public sector (Cepiku, 2015). Focusing on improving public sector performance has caused conflicting ideas, considerations, demands, structures, and cultural elements, making it more complicated for local elected officials to develop a consensus impacting the municipality's performance (Kickert, 2001). It is common for cities to experience performance issues due to a lack of agreement with the local elected officials (Holbrook & Van Dunk, 1993; Nielsen & Moynihan, 2017). The private sector has introduced new logic into government administration, including a cluster of theories and studies regarding modernization called the New Public Management System (Kicker, 2001). This logic suggests that the capacity of a manager in the public sector shall be that of equal or higher value than those in the private sector (Cohen, 1995; Kickert, 2001). The main goal is public service quality improvement, public spending, savings, more efficient administrations, and more effective public policy implementation, the inclusive roles of the local elected officials (Kickert, 2001).

Avellaneda (2008) poses the question, "What characteristic(s) is/are most likely to influence organizational performance" (pp. 56)? One school of thinking holds that municipal performance is influenced by the drive and dedication of the local elected officials, while other states that the municipality's institutional strength influences it

(Arnaboldi et al., 2015; Boyne et al., 2006). In public sector management, local elected officials get criticized for demonstrating a lack of honesty. According to the study, local elected officials' dishonesty appears to be motivated by personal interests and gains (Gibson & Lehoucq, 2003). Furthermore, the practice of dividing officials into opposing groups based on political party and socioeconomic status leads to inefficiency, imbalanced budgets, and a failure to reach a consensus among municipal elected officials (Avellaneda, 2008; Boyne, 2004; Cepiku, 2015).

These group managers can be categorized into four types: administrative survivors, generalist managers, loyalists, and zealots (Marmor & Fellman, 1986). Administrative survivors exhibit low commitment to the process, while program zealots display high programmatic potential but limited managerial skills. Generalist managers possess strong managerial skills but must align with all program goals, while program loyalists are highly skilled managers with unwavering programmatic dedication within the overall process (Marmor & Fellman, 1986).

To enhance research on performance, it is crucial to identify concrete measures for the skill set and attributes required of managers that directly impact performance (Marmor & Fellman, 1986). Researchers suggest that managers' motivation and commitment may have a potential influence on performance, but measuring this effect is challenging due to numerous contributing factors (Richard et al., 2009). The existing literature has shown limited concern for the direct relationship between management behaviors and performance-influencing factors (Svara, 2003). Leadership literature remains intricate and inconclusive, primarily because no single leadership quality has received unequivocal confirmation at the theoretical level (Fufa, 2006). This suggests the

need for extensive research on leader and manager qualities and their direct impact on performance (Fufa, 2006).

This study significantly contributes to the literature by operationalizing leaders' capacity through their human capital, encompassing education, job-related experiences, and perceptions influencing organizational performance (Keys & Benavides, 2019). Furthermore, this dissertation enriches the debate and literature by operationalizing the capacity of local elected officials through their human capital, including education, work experience, and lived experiences, and how these factors influence municipal performance.

Municipalities Capacity

Adopting decentralization improves local government efficiency, responsiveness, and effectiveness (Avellaneda, 2008). The creation of municipal governments, decentralization, increased resources, and political reform created an environment conducive to the emergence of effective local governments (Miron, 2017). These factors' success comes from adding administrative responsibilities, establishing municipal governments, and providing financial resources (Fiszbein, 1997). This framework also assessed the capacity concerning goals of production and allocative efficiency (Fiszbein, 1997). Municipalities have the tools to measure performance by using goals and output. According to Fiszbein (1997), "Capacity for production efficiency is manifested in the presence of performance-oriented government" (pg. 1031). A local elected official should use organizational performance measures to evaluate, control, budget, motivate, promote, celebrate, learn, improve, and governance (Behn, 2003). To optimize the use of resources

in the production or provision process, leaders must have the proper tools (Fiszbein, 1997).

The capacity for allocative efficiency and achieving the highest performance level manifested in the presence of a customer-oriented and constituent-engaged government (Avellaneda, 2008; Boyne, 2004; Jung, 2006). It involves the existence and adequate functioning of the original purpose of decentralization through a mechanism that the community can exercise their right to quick services by voicing demands, networks, and easy-to-use channels that allow the authorities to translate those demands into actions and tools for government accountability (Chaskin, 2009; Ehrenberg, 1973; TSai & McMurry, 2018). The presumption is that failure in any of these elements would diminish the capacity to achieve the allocation of public resources that maximizes the welfare of the residents (Fiszbein, 1997). For a municipal government to exercise effectiveness, it must have high levels of understanding to ensure capacity within the legislative authority (Justus & Uma, 2016). Among the political influences, scholars refer to government ideology (Anderson, 2003), partisan support (Hargrove & Glidewell, 1990) legislative oversight (Justus & Uma, 2016). divided government (Rumbach, 2016), citizens' participation (Blair, 1999), politicians' motivation (Gibson & Lehoucq, 2003), and electoral competitiveness (Holbrook & Van Dunk, 1993). Although the literature recognizes the importance of a manager's skills, there is no consensus on specific qualifications that influence performance (Justus & Uma, 2016).

Local Elected Officials' Capacity

Citizens across the country are trying to ascertain ways to have improved outcomes in their respective cities; for many municipalities, training, education, and

citizen engagement influence overall municipal performance (Brinkerhoff, 2016). A construct linked to organizational performance is the "capacity" of the local elected official (TSai & McMurry, 2018). Capacity is the facility or power to produce, perform, or deploy cognitive resources (Merriam-Webster, 2022). local elected officials are the trustees for the voters, acting as lawmakers, policymakers, and fiduciary agents of the municipality (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). Of the three levels of government structure, including local, state, and federal, the local (municipal) level has the most eminent and irreparable effect on its citizens (Leland & Thurmaier, 2004). They have a statutory commitment to make laws, policies, and budget allocations as authoritative decision-makers of the municipalities (Boyne, 2004; Davis & Camp, 2021). A vast amount of literature classifies the municipal elected official as the manager of public goods and services (Nollenberger & Simmons, 2016; Pereira, 1999). The local elected officials set the mission and vision for the municipalities (Cady et al., 2011). local elected official decisions may involve long-term options involving a variety of complexities, such as zoning, code enforcement, state and federal legislation, educational initiatives, tax collection, millage setting, development of comprehensive plans, financial forecasting, hiring, and talent acquisition (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). Their decisions can also involve narrowly focused issues and opportunities, such as creating a tree committee or recognizing a citizen for achievement (McGlynn & Sylvester, 2010). In most municipal organizations, most decisions taken by the elected body of a municipality must be institutionalized in the form of a policy or ordinance (Davis & Camp, 2021; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999).

Citizen's expectations of local elected officials' collective decisions to produce positive outcomes such as safety, health and welfare, environmental services, economic development, affordable housing, broker relationships, infrastructure development, recreation, service innovation, affordable services, and sustainability surrounding a diverse and inclusive while planning for the future are often unrealistic (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). Capable local elected officials work together and coordinate decisions and opportunities with other jurisdictions for regional progress (Vadrot, 2020; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). Nevertheless, once elected, local elected officials' priority sometimes changes and conflict with the preferences of their constituents or the campaign promises (Hooijberg & Choi, 2001). Understanding the difference between enacting decisions and making statutorily designated choices rather than doing what the people want to be completed has been an obstacle for local elected officials (Morse, 2010). Conflict management is a necessary tool identified as an internal factor in municipal performance; conflict management is a skill needed to bring people together in governance coalitions to support their policies and allocations (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). Political conflict makes local elected officials uncomfortable, causing them to withdraw from decision-making and avoid learning (Lasswell, 1930; Marvick, 1980; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). When local elected officials allow personal, self-driven motivation and conflict to interfere with their statutory commitment "to govern," they neglect developing good governance and capacity, creating obstacles that hinder performance (Cepiku, 2015; Hendrix, 2010; Parker et al., 2019).

Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller (1999), state that five factors influence governance capacity problems. Local elected officials serve part-time or do not have specified

working hours for a job that requires consistent attention (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). Most elected positions are part-time and used as supplemental income to fulfill a personal purpose or commitment (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). While there is a vested interest in a selected role, the direct interest of the individual serving sometimes becomes a habitual position (McGlynn & Sylvester, 2010). Proponents of term limits argue that they bring innovation, ideas, and new energy to the government (McGlynn & Sylvester, 2010). The opposition speaks to consistency, not shifting powers, special interests, and bureaucracy (McGlynn & Sylvester, 2010). local elected officials have a resentment centered around training (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). The world has witnessed popularity shocks within local, state, and federal elections that are crucial for electoral accountability beyond their effects on voters' behavior (Cavalcanti et al., 2018). In municipalities, this is a more common theme than what we see on the national stage due to the size of the population, and the victory margin can be that of one vote (Cavalcanti et al., 2018). However, this represents that the favorite candidate might not be the best candidate for the position (Avellaneda, 2008). Municipal candidates are not experts but based on name recognition, campaign, and notoriety (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). While learning is optional for local elected officials, their capacity has been cited as a pivotal contributor to municipal performance (Svara, 2003). Cities perform poorly without related capacity (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). This behavior is a state sanction and does not require or encourage learning for the local elected officials (Svara, 2001). State municipal leagues spend millions of dollars on informal training curriculums for local elected officials but cannot hold them accountable as their customer base is the local elected officials (Avellaneda, 2008; Svara, 2001). local

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elected officials quickly become overwhelmed by the technical complexity of municipalities' public issues (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). Using technology is a necessity for leading today. Most local elected officials are generalists that have difficulty asking for assistance (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). Effective local elected officials are engaged and have foundational knowledge about each department they govern (Avellaneda, 2008). While ineffective local elected officials rely heavily on the public managers to take on the responsibilities of the elected officials, and in extreme cases, they become subordinates to the staff they are essentially responsible for (Avellaneda, 2008; Boyne, 2004). local elected officials tend to overmanage and underlead their communities (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). local elected officials often focus on the latter responsiveness, the primary management source for the local elected officials (Svara, 2003). local elected officials choose not to develop their governance capacity concerns on the supply side of development. Most new local elected officials receive nonformal training administered by their state municipal league (Avellaneda, 2008; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). While this is a form of informal education, it is a format developed to give the local elected officials insight on passing legislation, details of a municipal budget, and other information that the staff deems necessary for them to know (Avellaneda, 2008; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). Due to cost, time commitment, and budget, many local elected officials receive additional training from the National League of Cities (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999).

There is a need for more training and formal education programs to increase the capacity of local elected officials (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). Universities and junior colleges operate more advanced traditional education programs that many state

leagues and local elected officials have used for training (Cavalcanti et al., 2018; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). While there are formal academic degree programs, the numbers for enrollment could be higher, and the requirements for prerequisites can exclude local officeholders who might be interested in development but need more academic credentials (Campbell, 2006; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999).

Cities commonly suffer when elected leaders cannot govern effectively (Svara, 2001). The significance of capacity suggests that to distinguish between developing societies and advanced civilizations' governments should focus on their institutions' capacities and their citizens' skills (Esman, 1991). Furthermore, focusing on the skills of the manager(s) rather than on their "culture," natural resources, capital availability, or the soundness of public policies should be considered (Esman, 1991). More influential in shaping the destiny of the municipality than the policies themselves are the distinctive attributes of the local elected official (Avellaneda, 2008; Fiszbein, 1997). Therefore, the proposal of this dissertation suggests that local elected officials' capacity explains local government performance.

As scholars call for more integrated models of governance that connect capacity and performance, there is still a gap and a growing need for analysis in the literature on the concept of capacity (Christensen & Gazley, 2008). As such, some research finds that capacity is only sometimes universal. According to (Eisinger, 2002), disagreement in the literature exists as to whether organizational capacity has latent universal attributes common to most organizations or is a set of qualities tailored or unique to a specific organization. In contrast, some value the term as much less comprehensive (Chaskin, 2009). Some scholars contribute that any quality that impedes or promotes success in

achieving organizational objectives to capacity (Chaskin, 2009). In municipal government, we sometimes view capacity as a purely internal corporate quality that compromises management subsets that work simultaneously to achieve organizational success. The capacity consists of human and capital resources, and other times as a concept with internal and external dimensions (for example, external financial support, networks of supportive relationships, sources of training, and political support); (Boyne et al., 2006; Brinkerhoff 2016).

Research demonstrates that capacity matters as it relates to performance and achievement in organizations; while studies discuss many ways to achieve capacity, formal education results in a higher capacity for civic leaders (Boyne et al., 2006; Cavalcanti et al., 2018; Chaskin, 2009; Christensen & Gazley, 2008; Eisinger, 2002; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). Developing governance capacity for local elected officials will improve performance and the constituents' quality of life (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999).

Local Elected Officials' Human Capital

At the core of Human Capital Theory (HCT) lies the conviction that individuals' learning capabilities hold an equal significance to other resources engaged in the production of goods and services (Becker, 1993; Lucas, 1988; Nafukho et al., 2004). Good public management applies the latest administration techniques to government, such as management by objectives, as the pragmatic solution to proper management (Avellaneda, 2008; Becker, 1993). Further, the foundation of human capital identified by Becker, 1993, is that individual learning impacts performance when paired with the proper resources.

Human capital can be identified as individual capacity in an organization and may result directly or indirectly in the performance (Becker, 1993; Nafukho et al., 2004). An individual's specific knowledge of their job can indicate direct performance to organizational outcomes (Rajala et al., 2018). However, the skilled workforce can complement the indirect impact on administrative performance (Svara, 2001). Therefore, the local elected officials' human capital is directly involved with the technical parts of the programs to implement and the budget's direction, creation, and allocation. Indirectly, local elected officials complement organizational practice by welcoming administrative and management operations that are more supportive and inclusive of the sustainability of program objectives (Banerjee, 2006; Brusati et al., 2018; Eisinger, 2002). Overall, creating a response system and producing improved outcomes for the organization (Banerjee, 2006; Brusati et al., 2018; Eisinger, 2002).

Research tells us that human capital has significantly contributed to overall organizational performance (Becker, 1962), suggesting that individuals' level of human capital impacts performance. For local elected officials, human capital is crucial in determining administrative outcomes (Avellaneda, 2008). The higher the human capital for a municipal elected official, the higher their capacity and the chance the organization has for improved results. Higher human capital contributes to quality training and education, leading to higher engagement for subordinate employees (Becker, 1962; Swanson & Holton, 2009). Furthermore, cognitive capabilities create a higher level of competence within leaders that trickles down to employees, creating a cycle that makes up a highly engaged workforce (Swanson, 1999; Swanson & Holton, 2009).

Education and training can overcome knowledge deficiencies within subordinate employees (Svara, 2003). Nevertheless, leaders and managers have improved performance they have formal education, are skilled, and are trained in the work that they are leading (Deno & Mehay, 1987). In municipal government, education and training also build institutional capacities such as citizen participation, policy development, and improving education and training programs internally and externally (Christensen & Gazley, 2008).

While human capital is at the forefront of organizational strength and related to the mission and objective-driven performance, some research arguments debate this (Swanson & Holton, 2009). Measuring human capital is complex outside of the formal education system. The intangibles of human capital make the rationale challenging to prove. Nevertheless, it does not negate or fail to recognize the relevance of the research (Avellaneda, 2008; Svara, 2003). The most conclusive research takes the measurable factors of human capital, education, and training and builds proxies for the human capital (Svara, 2003). This research uses the capacity and cognitive representation of the local elected officials, which embrace the formal, informal, and nonformal educational backgrounds of all individuals. While this approach has strengths and weaknesses, its applicability to context is the most significant power. Avellaneda (2008) posits that the education and experience of managers ought to enhance their performance across various levels, encompassing the local, state, national, and international domains, as well as in both private and public sectors.

Education and expertise are quantifiable and observable homogenously. Formal education for local elected officials serves as a foundation for enhanced organizational

outcomes. For example, Avellaneda (2008) says, "Having either primary, secondary or university education in the United States of America should mean the same in any other country" (p. 38). Nevertheless, the research recognized that variations in this type of data could create insufficient findings in statistical data. The study seeks to understand the qualitative data to add to the overall literature on this topic.

Local Elected Officials' Educational Experience

Securing votes stands as the sole prerequisite for ascending to the role of a municipal elected official. Consequently, many newcomers to these positions commence their duties with a limited grasp of their responsibilities (Avellaneda, 2008; Svara, 2001). The fundamental intention behind these uncomplicated qualifications lies at the heart of our democracy, aiming to ensure a system characterized by equitable and impartial conduct, with the election process strictly adhering to the law. It's important to emphasize that election administration and politics are not synonymous concepts.

The regulations and policies governing eligibility criteria do not prioritize educational qualifications; instead, they tend to focus on demographic factors, usually excluding individuals with a criminal conviction, as mandated by law.

Many different training programs exist for municipal employees, such as police chiefs, fire chiefs, and city clerks. Many of those programs have mandatory completions to assume the role and maintain a level of competence needed to perform their duties; however, there is no requirement for the local elected officials to learn about the government structure for which they now have leadership responsibility (Andersson, 2003; Avellaneda, 2008; Davis & Camp, 2021; Feiock & Yang, 2005). However, most

other municipal government positions require specific education and experience (Svara, 2001).

According to the cognitive resource theory, more capable and informed leaders make more improved plans and decisions than less capable and knowledgeable ones (Fiedler, 1986). While policymakers widely recognize that education serves as an engine for economic growth, a duty designated to the local elected officials, apart from accruing human capital, education is strongly linked to elevating levels of social capital. (Campbell, 2006). In the realm of development policy, there is a growing conviction that local community involvement in providing fundamental services helps advance development goals (Campbell, 2006). Educated electorates bring a diverse knowledge base that allows for a more significant social impact that contributes and adds value to the economic foundation of a municipality (Campbell, 2006). This factor suggests that education's effect on people's lives goes far beyond what can be measured by labor market earnings and economic growth (OECD, 2007). Writings over 30 years ago memorably described the close link between education and engagement, dealing with cognitive matters, information about politics, or conceptual sophistication in its assessment (Campbell, 2006). This theory hypothesizes that motivation is important in local elected officials' political engagement and emotional involvement (Andersson, 2003). It influences their decisions and can manifest in various political activities, from party involvement to voter turnout. Education consistently acts as a universal catalyst in this relationship, always driving the same direction. (Andersson, 2003; Hooijberg & Choi, 2001). The higher the education, the greater the 'good' values of the factor (Campbell, 2006). The educated citizen is attentive, knowledgeable, and participatory,

and the uneducated citizen is not. This factor makes it difficult for municipalities to succeed as the organization is led by the citizens and chosen by them (Campbell, 2006).

Municipal performance is fundamentally shaped by the laws and regulations established by various governing bodies such as the legislative body, council, board, or mayor (Davis & Camp, 2021). The overall success of a municipality is greatly influenced by the perspectives and actions of its electorate (Fiszbein, 1997). Learning is not confined solely to formal educational settings such as schools. Education is a continual endeavor that unfolds within diverse settings such as workplaces, households, and social circles. It encompasses the act or progression of sharing or acquiring universal knowledge, honing the faculties of logical thinking and discernment, and generally equipping oneself or others intellectually for the challenges of adult life (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

Education

Many debates focus on nonformal, informal, and formal education due to a need to understand the foundations' (Smith, 2002). Formal education includes interactions with schools and other learning facilities; nonformal education includes participation in community groups and other organizations; and informal education includes interactions with coworkers, friends, and family (Smith, 2002; Campbell, 2006). The concept of education in informal, nonformal, and formal contexts is often used. This literature review section focuses on and explores education and its impact on leadership, engagement, and organizational performance. Almond and Verba (2015), in many studies, educational attainment appears to have the most critical demographic effect on political attitudes. The demographic factors usually investigated are gender, place of residence, occupation, income, age, and nonformal and informal education. The formal

educational component of the comparison, which appears to influence political sentiments, is absent. A significant amount of literature demonstrates that the non-normally educated man with a restricted education is a different political actor than the man who has achieved or completed a formal educational program (Almond & Verba, 2015; Campbell, 2006; Svara, 2003). In their research, Almond and Verba refer to individual capacity as education greater than individuals without those characteristics. When using educational attainment as a factor, the focus is on formal and nonformal educational approaches instead of the experiences of the individual over a lifetime.

There is still a strong emphasis on the relationship between success and education (Putnam, 2011) reiterating the link between education and almost any imaginable civic and social engagement process. Education is commonly identified as one of the most significant predictors, usually, in fact, the most important predictor of a diverse array of social participation (Putnam, 2011). This statement implies that voting for associational membership, chairing a local committee, serving on community boards, and hosting a dinner party to donate plasma yield more participation when communicated by someone with a higher level of education (Becker, 1993; Hofer & Pintrich, 2004; Putnam, 2011). This same basic pattern applies to men and women of all races and generations (Svara, 2001). Education, in short, is a potent predictor of civic engagement (Putnam, 2011).

Cognitive characteristics are tools for local elected officials that extract from all the contextual components of the municipal organization they are responsible for (Kotter & Lawrence, 1974). Educated leaders have higher expectations of contribution to the organization's performance, mainly when communicating plans, decisions, and strategies (Avellaneda, 2008; Kotter & Lawrence, 1974). Leaders should be able to think critically

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and possess reasoning skills. In municipal settings, without a city manager, the local

elected officials are responsible for setting policies and dictating rules, decisions, and

strategies for implementing programs, processes, and procedures (Avellaneda, 2008;

Svara, 2001). When assessing the municipal elected offices' ability to perform and

articulate a vision for the municipalities, many leaders assume that the elected leaders are

competent (Fiszbein, 1997). Educational experiences could contribute to anticipating the

consequences of both the actions and omissions for organizational performance

(Avellaneda, 2009; Campbell, 2006). One empirical finding is that the educational

background of the local elected officials influences municipal performance.

Education serves as a confidence foundation for decision-making, recognized by

subordinate employees. Formal education establishes credibility and effective

communication with employees, partners, and other municipal organizations

(Avellaneda, 2008). Municipalities with local elected officials with a formal educational

background enhance performance and are more progressive than those that do not require

it (Gibson & Lehoucq, 2003).

Education has no boundaries. Informal education influences performance like

intuitive and artistic knowledge (Banerjee et al., 2006). While formal education is learned

in a structured accredited university or other traditional academic institutions, informal

education is attained based on lived experiences (Fiedler, 1986; Smith, 2002). Informal

education also contributes to the overall municipality's performance as experiences can

teach vital soft skills that contribute s directly to a successful organizational (Svara,

2001). There are three apparatuses through which relevant work experience contributes to

a manager's performance, providing managers with practical and job-related knowledge,

enhancing the manager's ability to cope with stressful conditions, and engendering a feeling of greater self-confidence that controls the leadership (Fiedler, 1986). These elements support managers' confidence, enable them to handle increasingly challenging jobs, and make them more receptive to cutting-edge and technology instruments. Studies have also shown that local governments with elected officials who have expertise in local government, particularly municipal government, perform more effectively than those without it (Hargrove & Glidewell, 1990).

Within the realm of law, few concepts are as enigmatic and elusive as the definition of the legal attributes of a municipal corporation (Garvey, 2013). This elusiveness arises from the intriguing paradox that characterizes municipal performance—a paradox rooted in the dual lenses through which we view the roles and responsibilities of municipal leaders, considering both the historical legacy and the contemporary origins of municipal governance (Tamanaha & Z, 2004).

<center>Demographic and Socioeconomic Influence</center>

There are many factors to consider when viewing municipal performance. Finance and budget drive the municipality's ability to initiate programs and policies. Demographic and socioeconomic influence often droves the needle in municipal performance, population size matters, and the more significant the population, the higher the tax revenue for the municipalities. The total collection of property taxes is also an economic driver for the city to increase revenue. According to the literature, government assistance programs for those in entitlement communities warrant more spending (Aronsson & Wikstrom, 1996). The higher the population's need for welfare, social security, and other government programs, the higher the expenditure. However, the

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original condition for the decentralizing government was to spend more on education, the elderly, recreation, and public safety (Gibson & Lehoucq, 2003; Miron, 2017). Nevertheless, this would suggest that demographic and socioeconomic factors are the primary influencers in the spending (Bach et al., 2004). Finally, demographic and socioeconomic influence the overall performance of the municipal organization as it is the foundation for funding, leadership, and host for the resident's quality of life (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012; Vadrot, 2020).

Human Resource Development Theory

This research explores the theory of human resource development (HRD) (Swanson, Holton, 2009). The three contributing core theory domains of psychological, economic, and systems theory provide support and explanations for the HRD theory discipline, definition, and model (Swanson & Holton, 2009).
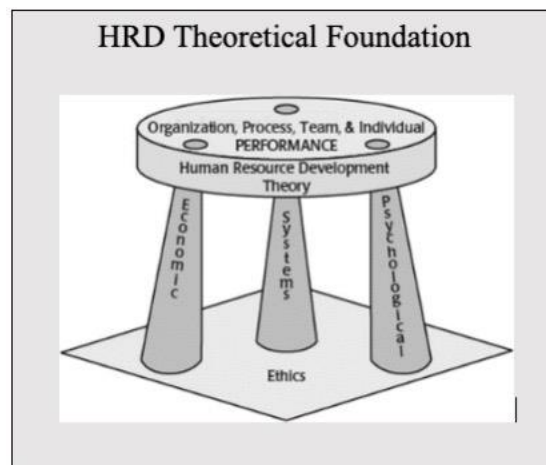
Figure 2. The Theoretical Foundation of Human Resource Development

Note. Adapted from Three Legged "Foundations of Human Resource Development," The figure illustrates information about HRD's theoretical foundation, including the abbreviations Swanson & Holton, 2001, p. 102, Foundations of Human Resource Development 1(1), 1 – 25 (2nd ed.). Copyright attributions for reprinted or additional information 2001 Berrett-Koehler Publishers (Appendix A).

Therefore, this HRD theory works as an additional guide to the capacity needed for municipal leaders to function in their roles as elected officials. According to Swanson & Holton (2009), "The theories have been visually presented as a three-legged stool with three legs providing great stability for HRD as a discipline and field of practice required to function amid uneven and changing conditions" see Figure 1 (p. 102). The researcher will apply the human resource development theory to determine education's influence on capacity. Overall, the theoretical framework used to interpret the capacity of local elected officials' perceptions and experiences in their current environment impacts engagement and municipal performance.

Emerging as a dynamic and interdisciplinary field, HRD draws inspiration from diverse disciplines, including systems theory, psychological theory, and economic theory. (Swanson, 1999). Although often, when exploring a domain of assumptions and ideas, the focus on human capital is also influential and plays a significant role in developing the HRD (Nafukho et al., 2004). In the 1950s, the core performance factor comprised physical capital, labor, land, and management (Becker, 1993). In the twenty-first century, the initial core factors are accompanied by financial, organizational, intellectual, innovative, and process capital (Hejase et al., 2016).

<center>Human Capital Theory</center>

Because the study focuses on the capacity of individuals' behaviors surrounding drivers related to performance, the second theory of human behavior derived is Human Capital Theory (HCT). The foundational tenet that forms the basis of Human Capital Theory (HCT) is the conviction that individuals' learning capabilities hold an equivalent worth to other resources engaged in the creation of goods and services. (Becker, 1993;

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Lucas, 1988; Nafukho et al., 2004). HCT pursues to explain the gains of education and training programs as a form of investment in human resources (Aliaga, 2001).

Summary

Chapter II organizes a literature review that gives credibility to the overall study (Creswell et al., 2007). The literature review introduces the study's topic and supporting factors that contribute to it. The most significant facts found in this review of literature were decentralization, the impact of education, and the fact that there are no qualifications for electorates to run for municipal office. Every municipality in the nation follows this same procedure.

The study explores the form of government and the structure of municipal government. The literature review defines local government and focuses on the municipal formation of local government. Furthermore, the literature breaks down the role and qualifications of perspective, past, and current serving local elected officials.

While many studies stood out and represented the external and internal factors that influence municipal performance, the most inclusive with a centrality surrounding performance, the outcome of her investigation determines that more research on the internal influencers of municipal performance is needed. In Avellaneda (2009), the need to understand the lived experience of local elected officials contributes to the literature.

Chapter II also identifies capacity as the driving force behind the municipal performance (Fiedler, 1986). The study explores local elected officials' formal, informal, and non-formal capacity representations. The review of literature also identifies enablers and barriers to municipal performance. Finally, Chapter II concludes with relevant information about HRD and HCT.

CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study explored the factors that impact municipal performance, specifically the *internal* factors that influence municipal performance. The interpretative phenomenological research approach explored the lived experiences of local elected officials. The study also examined the factors affecting local elected officials' capacity, particularly how their employment and educational backgrounds affect their decision-making ability to improve municipal performance.

The purpose of the phenomenological study was to capture the lived experiences of individuals through a universal essence (Creswell, 2013). The qualitative study utilized the phenomenological methodology to investigate the lived experiences of local elected officials. This examination aimed to enhance the comprehension of the capacity exhibited by these officials. Subsequently, the gathered information was employed to evaluate the influence and impact of their capacity on municipal performance. Additionally, the study delved into the alignment between local elected officials' expectations of their roles and responsibilities and their actual capacity. In conclusion, the study scrutinized the capacity of local elected officials for municipal performance based on the explored factors.

The researcher uses Maxwell's (2008) interpretative strategy as a guide in understanding and explaining the human experience and actions. According to Maxwell (2008), there are four significant components of a researcher design decision that the researcher should consider: (a) research relationship, (b) site and participant selection, (c) data collection, and (d) data analysis. Interpretive methodologies focus primarily on understanding and accounting for the meaning of human experiences (Penner & McClement, 2008). The method employed a phenomenological design that allowed the

researcher to gather descriptive data directly from the participants (Moustakas, 1994). This approach enables participants to speak openly and expand on their experiences (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, the qualitative interpretive strategy allows participants to teach, share experiences, and talk freely about the topic investigated (Penner & McClement, 2008).

According to current literature, local elected officials' capacity to govern significantly affects municipal performance (Avellaneda, 2009; Svara, 2001). Local elected officials should increase their capacity to broaden and aid municipalities to ensure they prosper economically (Savara, 2001). The rapid development of technology and the growing demands of local governments and other local authorities make managing a municipality challenging without advancing capacity (Parker et al., 2019). Local elected officials are also mentioned in the literature as internal factors, leading causes, or reasons for the failures of municipal performance. This study explores local elected officials' capacity and potential influence on municipal government. The remainder of Chapter III includes the research purpose, research objectives, research design, population and sample, instrumentations, research procedures, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, the role of the researcher, limitations, and summary concluding the chapter.

Research Objectives

According to the literature, strong, energizing, mission-driven leadership is essential for organizational success and change (Gabris et al., 2001; Justus & Uma, 2016). This study explores the lived experiences of local elected officials. The local elected official's capacity is a tenet of municipal performance (Savara, 2021). To

understand municipal performance and how to measure municipalities' success, one must first understand the lived experiences of the local elected official (Avellaneda, 2009). Four research objectives explore the factors influencing the capacity of local elected officials and their lived experiences. These research objectives guided the interview protocol by revealing the elected leaders' key concepts, ideas, and thought processes.

RO1 – Describe the demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, work experience in municipal government, work experience in accrual budgeting, education background, age, years of experience in their current or previous elected role, and race.

RO2 – Explore factors influencing municipal performance.

RO3 – Explore the participants' expectations regarding their capacity required to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the elected post.

RO4 – Explore strategies municipal organizations use to prepare local elected officials for their role.

Research Design

This study used a qualitative interpretive phenomenological design. In this study, exploratory, naturalistic, subjective, inductive, ideographic, descriptive, and interpretative qualitative research is best for conducting formal analyses of human capital (Chenail, 2011; Swanson & Holton, 2009). The fundamental goal used to approach phenomenological studies is to describe the nature of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

This qualitative phenomenological study design rests on the assumptions of a worldly depiction using theory and exploring research problems to provide a practical interpretation of individual or group perspectives about a particular phenomenon

(Creswell, 2013). The researcher explores education's impact on the local elected

officials' capacity. The literature informs us that making decisions necessary for success

is difficult without education when there are internal factors and competing priorities

(Williams, 2015).

This study aimed to investigate the capacity of local elected officials and assess

their influence on municipal performance. Furthermore, the research examined the factors

that contributed to municipal performance, including internal factors that bolstered the

capacity of local elected officials. Gaining insight into the roles and responsibilities of

local elected officials aided in comprehending the outcomes of municipal performance.

Collecting data from local elected officials about their lived experiences allows

the social phenomenon to emerge through this research design (Creswell, 2013).

Constructing the research around a qualitative approach was centered around magnifying

the participant's voice and understanding the participant's views, revealing success factors

(Williams, 2015). In this research, the study sought a holistic approach to the participant's

in-depth experiences, as shared by (Moustakas, 1994). The touchstone of the local elected

officials' expertise is a valuable indicator of a potentially successful research endeavor.

Population

The research population comprises individuals, objects, or specific factors with

similar or comparable characteristics studied (Suri, 2011). The sample is the group of

participants extracted from the population (Suri, 2011). Therefore, the population derives

from Mississippi's 298 incorporated places (U. S. Census Bureau, 2023). Incorporated

places are considered decentralized governments (Miron, 2017). For example,

Mississippi's geographic land area is divided into 362 places; of those places, 298 are

recognized by the federal and state governments as municipal governments and operate under one of the eight Mississippi Municipal Charter Laws (U. S. Census Bureau, 2023). The breakdown of the 298 incorporated places is 110 cities, 169 towns, 19 villages, and one inactive charter (U. S. Census Bureau, 2023). There is a minimum of three local elected officials per municipal operation.

This study includes local elected officials who served after the year 2017. The population and sample size came from the Southern Region of the United States, specifically focused on Mississippi's local elected officials. The researcher can capture more current information by concentrating on local elected officials who began service after 2017. Legislation is often changed and amended; the impact of current events, natural disasters, and economic opportunity are critical factors in understanding municipal performance. Therefore, the researcher isolated the population to cover only a 5-year gap, i.e., 2017 – 2023. The qualifying criteria for participants in this study follow:

- Must have served in municipal government as defined by Mississippi Code Annotated.

- Must have served after January 1, 2017.

- Must have served for a minimum of 1 year.

Moreover, the researcher focused on a single state in light of the varying state laws, aiming to sidestep potential confusion when discussing policies associated with different forms of municipal governance. Furthermore, as part of the research methodology, the researcher plans to conduct interviews with 4 City Clerks to employ triangulation. Triangulation involves utilizing multiple techniques or data sources in qualitative research to understand a phenomenon (Patton, 1999) comprehensively. City Clerks serve

as key administrative figures within local governments who directly engage with the public, legislative, and executive branches (Gordon, 2011). Their responsibilities encompass managing the city's official records, compiling agendas, documenting minutes, handling payroll, settling bills, formulating budgets, and overseeing tax and fee collections (Gordon, 2011). City Clerks are elected officials in some municipalities, and given their financial and fiduciary duties, their role closely mirrors that of local elected officials (Gordon, 2011). Additionally, City Clerks perform a wide array of functions within municipalities, placing their roles close to those of City Managers and Chief Administrative Officers (Gordon, 2011). The decision to select City Clerks for triangulation over City Managers and Chief Administrative Officers is primarily grounded in their potential elected status within certain municipalities.

<p align="center">Sample</p>

Purposive sampling is a widely utilized method in qualitative research to select individuals with in-depth knowledge of a specific topic (Shaheen et al., 2019). In this study, the researcher employed purposive sampling to engage participants, as it is rooted in the idea that it yields rich information about a phenomenon (Shaheen et al., 2019). This approach is particularly common in phenomenology research because it enables the recruitment of engaged participants, thus providing a diverse range of experiences related to the topic (Shaheen et al., 2019). It's important to note that there are various strategies to implement purposive sampling (Thomas, 2022). Additionally, qualitative sampling designs enable the researcher to tailor data collection to align with the research objectives (Suri, 2011).

Purposeful sampling narrows the pool of potential participants quickly and effectively (Suri, 2011; Thomas, 2022). One of the initial stages of research is identifying people willing to share their experiences (Suri, 2011). The sampling process achieves maximum variation by selecting a diverse pool of participants from the recruitment email (Thomas, 2022). Maximum variation captures diverse perspectives on a specific topic from various angles (Thomas, 2022). Complete variation sampling recognizes the vast and varied sampling that captures a mixed view of the topic and undertakes different points of view that seem separate or detached from the standard or fundamental focus of the study (Suri, 2011; Taherdoost, 2016). Nevertheless, the researcher chose purposeful sampling as a method used to intentionally identify and capture participants willing to share their experiences (Thomas, 2022). This task of purposeful sampling allows the researcher some autonomy to rely on personal judgment when determining the participants for the study (Thomas, 2022).

While the population is homogenous, topic titles and elected roles may differ depending on the city's charter (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The approach and sampling procedure guided the population size for this study (Dworkin, 2012). The degree to which a sample represents the population or the population's generalizability happens using a suitable instrument (Bastos et al., 2014).

Instrumentation

Selecting an instrument is the most critical step in the data collection process (Bastos et al., 2014). Prioritization during this stage emphasizes the validity and reliability of the information collected and, more importantly, their possible comparison with data from other studies (Bastos et al., 2014). One of the main components of the

semi-structured open-ended questionnaires, which are used to explore different areas of interest among participants in phenomenological studies, is the instrument for data collection (Bastos et al., 2014).

Research shows that in-depth interviews are the most effective instrument for collecting data for phenomenology studies (Creswell, 2013). Information about respondents' life experiences, families, educational backgrounds, and employment histories was gathered via semi-structured open-ended questionnaires. The tool also acts as a guide for exploring the connection between the phenomenon under study and the association of these factors (Bastos et al., 2014). In-depth discussions are standard and allow participants to be more open-minded about their experiences. The instrument's primary objective is to unveil any explored phenomenon's core or fundamental structure (Creswell et al., 2007). The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews using a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire to elicit anecdotal accounts from participants regarding their experiences as local elected officials (Creswell et al., 2007). The interview process involved a set of 17 questions, as detailed in (Appendix B, Appendix C). The study's core focus and questions is to explore how the alignment of local elected officials' expectations regarding their roles and responsibilities with their actual capacity impacts municipal performance (Avellaneda, 2007). These inquiries, shaped by relevant literature, are designed to delve into real-life experiences in this regard (Avellaneda, 2007).

The researcher used a survey mapping tool to assist with creating the research questions (Phillips et al., 2013). This process of survey mapping provides the study with

additional content validity (Phillips et al., 2013). Table one shows a depiction of the survey mapping tool.

Table 1 *Mapping of Research Objectives to Interview Questions*

Research Objectives	Interview Questions
RO1	Interview Protocol (Appendix C)
RO2	(Appendix B) Q3, Q5, Q6, Q8, Q10, Q12, Q13, Q16, Q17
RO3	(Appendix B) Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q15, Q16, Q17
RO4	(Appendix B) Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q18

Phenomenological studies do not theorize the data from the participants (Turner, 2010). The participants' data describe what they have in common as they experience a phenomenon such as embarrassment, anger, or fear (Creswell, 2013; Turner, 2010;). The research design isolates the participants' experiences into a universal essence that can articulate and determine local elected officials' capacity's impact on municipal performance (Creswell et al., 2007). The participants' knowledge was grouped based on excerpts from the interview transcripts (Moustakas, 1994).

Institutional Review Board

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a committee created by The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) to renew and monitor research conducted at USM that involves or discusses human subjects (The University of Southern Mississippi, 2023). The IRB is the authoritative organization that approves, modifies, or disapproves the requested research proposal. The overarching goal of the IRB at USM is to ensure that all research conducted protects the rights and welfare of human research subjects. Further, it

is the responsibility of the IRB to protect the privacy and maintain the confidentiality of all participants and data collected. When conducting a study involving human subjects at USM, researchers must gain approval from the IRB. The analysis gained approval from the IRB and proceeded immediately after (Appendix D).

<div align="center">Role of the Researcher</div>

Using the phenomenological qualitative design, the researcher's role in this study is to recognize the practical reality of meanings and concrete particulars from the participants (Polkinghorne, 1989). Efforts supporting the research construct all collected data to ensure consistency and adequately capture data (Polkinghorne, 1989). Following this, the researcher effectively analyzes the data for reliability and validity. This data includes ensuring that the structure of the experience was based on the reflection and interpretation of the study's participants and delving deeper into the general meanings they provided (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher employs a naturalistic interviewing technique to acquire perspective on the participants' educational background, individual goals, preferences, and professional experiences (Creswell, 2013). To summarize, the methodology utilized in this study provided participants with the opportunity to actively engage in exploratory interviews, which were coupled with a rigorous analysis of the collected data (Chenail, 2011).

The researcher acknowledges the potential for bias in qualitative research and has taken measures to implement validation strategies to maintain research objectivity, as suggested by Creswell (2013). In the process, survey mapping is employed to craft interview protocols, ensuring accuracy and consistency, in line with recommendations by Phillips et al. (2013).

It is important to note that the researcher possesses personal experience, having served as both a city administrator and a local elected official. This firsthand experience provides valuable insights into municipal performance across various regions. To mitigate potential bias arising from this experience, the researcher has adopted several procedures to ensure bias is limited. These include allowing participants to review the collected data, employing data triangulation, applying relevant theories to organize the results, and seeking peer input when reviewing the findings.

Furthermore, the researcher understands the need to conduct this study to provide accurate and unbiased findings in this field of research. Lastly, the researcher interviewed many of his peers and former coworkers throughout Mississippi. Therefore, the researcher acknowledges his bias as he has vast experience as a local elected official. Qualitative research needs to include comments by the researcher on how their background shapes their interpretation of the findings, such as culture, gender, history, and experiences (Creswell, 2013). Although the researcher is aware of this bias, there is a plan to eliminate and control bias for the duration of the study. The researcher also employs a standardized, consistent method for collecting participant data to reduce researcher bias.

Data Collection Procedure

The phenomenological study aims to understand the participants' lived experiences relating to the phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 2013). As a part of the qualitative data collection procedure, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with each participant (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological studies often utilize one-on-one dept interviews to obtain thick, rich data (Creswell et al., 2007). The interview

protocol is a more popular area of interest in the qualitative research protocol (Turner, 2010). An in-person interview is a purposeful conversation between participants physically or virtually connected during the interview (Phillips et al., 2013). Therefore, the study's primary data collection instruments include semi-structured open-ended interviews and reflective journaling (Williams, 2015). While reflective journaling isn't required for IPA, the researcher uses it as a tool of support for the data collection process (Williams, 2015).

Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured open-ended interview is a formal interview between the participant and the researcher (Creswell, 2013). An interview guide was created and used by the interviewer. The dialogue covers a list of 15 open-ended questions and subjects. The interviewer adheres to the script but can also explore relevant lines of inquiry in the conversation when deemed suitable, even if it deviates from the predetermined script (Creswell, 2013).Nevertheless, the researcher did not deviate or go beyond the 17 initial questions for this study.

The adaptable interview style allows the researcher to prompt or encourage interviewees if they require further elaboration or if the content of their responses piques interest. This approach empowers the researcher to delve deeper into a topic for additional insights or to explore new lines of inquiry prompted by the interviewee's comments. In semi-structured interviews, study participants can express their viewpoints in their own words.

Data Collection Plan

   The researcher used a five-phase data collection plan to conduct the research. Phase 1 preparation allows the researcher to reengage with the interview guide and prepare and execute written and verbal consent (Appendix E). In addition, the researcher checked for errors in the documentation before sending it out. The researcher began purposeful sampling techniques by soliciting participants through email and phone calls. Phase 2 setting: Virtual settings can cause many opportunities; however, ensuring technology functions properly so participants can access portals is critical to the study's success. Phase 2 is the initial phase of data collection. Phase 3 is collecting data: Phase three discusses how the data was collected, while Phase 2 asserts for interview preparation. The researcher used Zoom to record actively and simultaneously transcribe the interviews. Phase 4 role of the researcher: The researcher began by briefly outlining the study so that the participant is aware of it and provides verbal consent to participate. Following this, the interviewer introduced the topic, followed the script to ensure efficiency, journaled (be sensitive to body language and nonverbal cues), provided prompts to assist the participant, and ensured critical points were captured and highlighted. Phase 5 post-interview: the researcher follows up with the participants through email on the final outline of the Data Collection Plan depicted in Table 2.

Table 2 *Data Collection Plan*

Week	Task	Action
Zero	Submit IRB Approval	Fill out the University of Southern Mississippi's Institutional Review Board. application and submit.

Table 2 (continued).

One	Pilot Study	Test out all equipment used for the interviews.
		Perform two pilot interviews to ensure all equipment functions properly.
	Post IRB Approval	Begin study after receiving approval from the University of Southern Mississippi's Institutional Review Board.
	1st Recruitment Email	The recruitment process is initiated with the invitation email (Appendix F) sent to prospective participants and City Clerks.
	Start Reflective Journaling	Begin to utilize the reflective journal.
	2nd Recruitment Email	The second invitation email (Appendix G) is sent to prospective participants and City Clerks. based on responses from prospective participants if the recruitment goal has not been achieved.
		Receive emails from targeted participants acknowledging their willingness to participate in the study.
	1st Initial Recruitment Phone Calls	PI makes phone calls (Appendix H) from a list of potential participants, "Mississippi's Local Elected Officials," obtained from the municipalities, including all cities, villages, boroughs, townships, and contacts shared with the PI during the recruitment stage for both local elected officials and City Clerks.
		Receive emails from targeted participants acknowledging their willingness to participate in the study.

Table 2 (continued).

	1st Consent Email	Send the first email to all responding prospective participants and City Clerks with the Informed Consent document attached with directions.
Two	2nd Consent to participant	Send a second email to the participants if the PI does not achieve the recruitment goal for local elected officials and City Clerks.
	Call Follow-Up on Consent	Call/email respondents of Informed Consent form email if there are errors or incomplete forms if the recruitment goal has not been achieved for both local elected officials and City Clerks.
	Schedule Interviews	Schedule interviews with all of the respondents who have sent back signed Informed Consent forms for both local elected officials and City Clerks.
	Schedule Interviews	Continue to schedule interviews with all of the respondents who have sent back signed Informed Consent forms for both local elected officials and City Clerks.
		Final day to schedule interviews if recruitment goal has been achieved.
	Schedule Interviews	Schedule final interviews with all of the respondents who have sent back signed Informed Consent forms for both local elected officials and City Clerks.
		Reach out to the chair to update on project participation.

Table 2 (continued).

	Test Equipment	Test out all equipment used for the interviews prior to all interviews.
		Begin to send out interview reminder emails to participants.
	Interviews	Begin interviewing, recording, and transcribing simultaneously with both participants and City Clerks.
	Audit Transcripts	Begin to check the transcripts for audio and transcription errors after each interview.
		Upon receipt, email transcribed data to participants for verification of accuracy.
		Review the transcribed data and identify relationships and themes after each interview.
		Identify points of saturation and notes in the journaling process.
		Document self-reflection regarding each interview in the journal.
		Journal throughout the analysis process.
		Begin the hand-coding process. Follow-up with participants and City Clerks with a thank you email.
Three	Data Analysis	Member Checking Email Conduct the data analysis, hand code, and determine themes from data collected during interviews. Complete data analysis. Finalize results and research conclusions.

Reflective Journaling

In qualitative research, reflective journaling is beneficial, especially when examining individual experiences and feelings (Penner & McClement, 2008). Researchers keep reflective notebooks to keep track of their ideas, reflections, and reactions as they conduct their research. These journals help researchers reflect on themselves and become more conscious of the biases, presumptions, and feelings that may affect their study (Penner & McClement, 2008). They can use it to track how their ideas and insights change as they interact with the data. Reflective journaling can also help preserve the integrity and openness of the research by serving as a record of the researcher's decision-making procedures and the justifications for methodological decisions (Penner & McClement, 2008).

Member Checking

Member checking is essential in ensuring the accuracy and validity of qualitative research findings (Candela, 2019). It involves sharing research findings, such as interview transcripts or summaries, with the participants involved in the study and seeking their feedback and verification. Member checking allows participants to confirm whether the researcher accurately captured their experiences, perspectives, and sentiments (Candela, 2019).

In this research, the researcher employs member checking, which allows participants to review transcripts for accuracy before proceeding to the coding and data analysis phase. This approach will enable participants to provide additional context, clarify aspects, or rectify any misinterpretations within the data. The research incorporated member checking, strengthening the credibility and reliability of its

findings, as it underscores dedication to honoring participant perspectives and guaranteeing an accurate portrayal of their views in the research results. Member checking is significant in studies where participants' insights are central to shaping the research's ultimate conclusions.

Confidentiality

The researcher is committed to maintaining the participant's confidentiality. Participants' names are the most personal information shared with the researcher during the study. The researcher uses a unique identifier in place of the participant's names. Other personal identifying information collected through communication is kept on an external hard drive located at the participant's home office in a locked file cabinet. However, the names of the participants do not appear in the study and are accessible to the research team exclusively. Furthermore, any uncomfortable participant can withdraw from the study at any time without reason. All documents, recordings, and information emailed and printed are kept on the external hard drive or in a file folder titled "King's Study" in a locked cabinet researcher's home office. This information would include recording of interviews, transcripts, coding board, reflective journaling, and any other information or documents of the study.

Data Analysis

The overall goal of the study design was to develop themes founded on the data collected. The researcher coordinated an inductive approach to the analysis to reflect frequently reported patterns used in this qualitative data analysis (Thomas, 2003). The inductive approach serves the purpose of distilling extensive and diverse textual data into a concise summary (Thomas, 2003). It aims to establish coherent connections between

this data, the research objectives of the study, and the insights derived from the raw data (Thomas, 2003). Ultimately, this approach leads to the development of models and theories that illuminate the underlying structure within the data (Thomas, 2003). The inductive approach reflects the qualitative research data analysis (Thomas, 2003). Phenomenological studies do not theorize the data from the participants (Creswell, 2013). The participants' data describe what they have in common as they experience a phenomenon such as embarrassment, anger, and fear of not knowing (Creswell, 2013; Turner, 2010). The research design isolates the participants' experiences into a universal essence that can articulate and determine a cause and effect (Creswell et al., 2007). The participants' knowledge is coded and grouped based on excerpts from transcripts (Appendix I) from the interviews (Moustakas, 1994).

To transform the real-life experiences of individuals or a group into a phenomenon, Dworkin (2012) recommends that a sample size ranging from 5 to 50 individuals is sufficient (Dworkin, 2012). In alignment with this guidance, the sample size for this method falls within the range of 5 to 50 participants, as the objective is to gain a comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon (Dworkin, 2012). Furthermore, the researcher conducted interviews with 4 City Clerks for triangulation. The research questions serve as a framework for constructing a textual and structural description (Creswell et al., 2007). The researcher formulated an original interview questionnaire to facilitate data collection.

In the qualitative data analysis plan, the goal is to examine the symbolic and meaningful content of the data (Moustakas, 1994). This means interpreting the qualitative data using processes and procedures to build insight from dynamic decisions (Moustakas,

1994). In this analysis, the researcher takes the descriptive data collected from the participant's opinions, values, and behaviors in a social context. These data come from the recordings and transcripts of the interviews. The researcher used excerpts from the transcripts to assist in coding the data (Appendix J). The researcher organizes the data, interprets the data, identifies patterns within the data, formalizes conclusions, and then ties the research objectives with the data (Moustakas, 1994).

The use of the interpretive phenomenological analysis is to exude the core of the phenomenon leading this study. The content analysis is founded on the principles of pragmatism (Legg & Hookway, 2021). As a result of this analysis, the researcher applies pragmatic reasoning, identifies realistic conclusions, and obtains meaning from the data (Moustakas, 1994). The recommended stages for content analysis are decontextualization, recontextualization, categorization, and compilation to obtain the proper structure for coding for the in-depth data (Legg & Hookway, 2021).

After the researcher developed the content analysis, the researcher used the matrix coding board and created a theme matrix. The was further analyzed and grouped into themes. The research develops narratives to make diverse but equally substantial and meaningful complete interpretations and conclusions.

Table 3 *Data Analysis Plan*

RO	Data Collected	Data Category	Data Analysis

Table 3 (continued).

RO1	Gender	Nominal	Descriptive
	Age	Ratio	Statistics
	Race	Nominal	
	Years of work experience	Ratio	
	Years of work experience *in municipal government*	Ratio	
	Years of work experience *in accrual accounting*	Ratio	
	Years of work experience *in budgeting*	Ratio	
RO2	Factors influencing municipal performance	Text	Content Analysis Recurring Themes
RO3	Expectations of Capacity needed for role	Text	Content Analysis Recurring Themes
RO4	Municipal Preparation Strategies for local elected officials	Text	Content Analysis Recurring Themes

Trustworthiness

A word often used about the reliability and validity of a study in qualitative research is trustworthiness (Roberts, 2010). Trustworthiness aids the reader's confidence level in the credibility of the overall analysis. This study uses trustworthiness to account for validity. As an initial step, the researcher conducted the interviews using a direct script after IRB approval. Interviews were recorded using a virtual setting for the participants' convenience, where they carry out city business or feel most comfortable. If the individual subjects prefer, the discussions may be conducted in city hall, the home office, or in an informal setting. Nevertheless, the interview recorded the site in the notes before the interview began. This format allowed the participants to select a convenient time and date for the discussion.

The researcher used Zoom Communication's robot transcription services to convert the audio data into text. This software is used during the interview process and

actively transcribes the interview using voice recognition technology while recording the interview. This software is commonly used for virtual learning, research, and other educational purposes. Since COVID-19, it has become one of the most popular virtual communication software tools available. This software gives the research another step toward confirming the study's validity.

In addition, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with City Clerks in Mississippi, separate from the participants. Introducing this process requires the researcher to validate the findings using an isolated method during the data collection. Researchers can consider this procedure to add validity to their research if it combines multiple data sources and participant viewpoints (Creswell, 2013). The information obtained from the interviews with the City Clerks was used to triangulate the data. Triangulation enhances the quality and credibility of this qualitative research by using interviews (Patton, 1999). Therefore, triangulation and reflective journaling are used along with member methods to check validity. It is recommended that multiple strategies are employed to determine the trustworthiness of the results (Creswell, 2013). Data triangulation in qualitative research refers to using numerous methods or data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena and a strategy for testing validity (Patton, 1999).

The researchers' credibility is not solely dependent upon one thing but many, such as training, experience, track record, status, and presentation of self (Patton, 1999). The researcher use reflective journaling as a final step to clarify any research bias. It is also essential that the researcher demonstrates a philosophical belief in the value of qualitative

inquiry, which is to say, a fundamental respect for naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis, and purposeful sampling. (Patton, 1999).

The qualitative inquiry credibility issue depends on three distinct, relatable elements: rigorous techniques and methods for gathering high-quality data that are carefully analyzed, with attention to validity, reliability, and triangulation (Patton, 1999). This research has accounted for all listed elements. While many rigorous techniques influence data quality, qualitative research allows the researcher to be creative (Patton, 1999). Qualitative data esteem from astute pattern recognition and technical analysis is analytically rigorous (Creswell et al., 2007).

Summary

Chapter three is the methodology that constructs the study about the lived experiences of local elected officials serving in Mississippi. This study identified the study population and outlined the format of the survey. In addition, the validity and reliability of the study are outlined. Chapter III also includes detailed information about the target population and the sampling procedure for obtaining participants. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of the data analysis and the process taken to guarantee the trustworthiness of the research.

CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

This research explores local elected officials' capacity to govern in Mississippi, specifically how their educational background, life experiences, and employment history influence their ability to accomplish their elected roles effectively. The most influential internal factor affecting municipal performance is the capacity of the manager(s), also known as the local elected officials, as highlighted by (Avellaneda, 2008). However, the literature and results of this study identify other factors that could influence capacity. Moreover, the study explores how formal, nonformal, and informal education experiences impact the capacity of local elected officials (Smith, 2002). The results of this study provided a qualitative interpretive phenomenological research design, which uses one-on-one interviews to give knowledge of the participants' lived experiences. The research objectives serve as a guide for the data collection, which includes participants' demographic information, factors influencing municipal performance, participants' expectations regarding their capacity as it relates to their responsibilities, and strategies used by municipal organizations to prepare local elected officials for their roles. The data was collected and analyzed as outlined in Chapter III.

This chapter presents the research findings derived from various data sources, including semi-structured interviews, reflective journaling, and the coding of interview transcripts. To begin, the researcher introduces the data analysis process as previously outlined in Chapter III and discusses the study's validity concerning its methodology. Furthermore, the study defines the characteristics of the study participants and elucidates the use of triangulation in this research. Throughout this chapter, the researcher draws upon information obtained from semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and the

coding of interview transcripts. The study commences with an overview of the data

analysis procedure, followed by a discussion on the study's validity. The study concludes

with a detailed examination of the participants' characteristics and the implementation of

triangulation as a data source.

<center>Data Analysis</center>

Understanding how individuals interpret their life experiences necessitates

exploring their cognitive processes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This research employs

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative research approach that

centers on how individuals construct meaning from their lived experiences. This research

involved nine participants, five local elected officials, and four city clerks, who engaged

in semi-structured open-ended interviews. It's important to note that this study's city

clerk's data is exclusively used for triangulation purposes. The researcher employed

Zoom software to facilitate these interviews, conducting them through video

conferencing sessions. Simultaneously, the interviews used Zoom transcription service to

transcribe the audio and video recorded interviews. Subsequently, all transcripts were

expeditiously shared with the participants for member checking and completed within 48

hours of the interview date (Appendix K). This procedure is an integral component of the

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) process, which involves several general

phases for data analysis. These phases include the initial step of thoroughly reading the

transcripts multiple times, making notations of observations, embarking on the initial

coding process, transforming these notes into derived themes, clustering these themes,

repeating the process for all transcripts, and ultimately identifying commonalities across

interviews (Pietkiewiez, 2014). Table 4 is a depiction of the Data Analysis Plan.

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Table 4 *Data Analysis Plan*

RO	Data Collected	Data Category	Data Analysis
RO1	Gender	Nominal	Descriptive
	Age	Ratio	Statistics
	Race	Nominal	
	Years of work experience	Ratio	
	Years of work experience *in municipal government*	Ratio	
	Years of work experience *in accrual accounting*	Ratio	
	Years of work experience *in budgeting*	Ratio	
RO2	Factors influencing municipal performance	Text	Content Analysis Recurring Themes
RO3	Expectations of Capacity needed for role	Text	Content Analysis Recurring Themes
RO4	Municipal Preparation Strategies for local elected officials	Text	Content Analysis Recurring Themes

The data from the study is organized into three categories. The analysis derived seven themes: two for factors influencing municipal performance, three for participants' expectations, and two for strategies used by municipal organizations for preparation.

Triangulation

In the data collection process, the researcher uses city clerks to confirm or deny data collected from the study. According to Creswell (2013), "In triangulation, researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence" (pg. 251). This process typically entails combining data from several sources to clarify, confirm, or show no correlation of data related to the theme or viewpoint (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative researchers triangulate information and add validity when they find evidence supporting a code or theme in various data sources. Therefore, the researcher interviewed City Clerks to triangulate the

data collected for the study. A position historically elected but in the past decade is appointed by the local elected officials (Davis & Camp, 2021). The duties of a city clerk include keeping and maintaining historical and public records, scheduling meetings, arranging paperwork, and giving residents who require information customer service (Farrell, 2022). Semi-structured interviews ensure that all pertinent information is covered. These methods excel in yielding reliable and comparable qualitative data from a diverse pool of participants, even when multiple interviewers are involved (Williams, 2015). The depth of dialogue in interviews can often unveil fresh perspectives and offer valuable insights into the subject matter (Creswell, 2013).

Triangulation is a research technique that enhances the credibility and validity of study findings by incorporating multiple sources, methods, or perspectives (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). Researchers employ triangulation to mitigate bias, errors, or the limitations inherent in any single approach. Triangulation helps researchers gain a more comprehensive understanding of the subject under investigation by combining data from various sources or employing different research methods (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012).

In this research, the investigator invited and interviewed four City Clerks from the same geographic region as the study participants (Appendix L). The choice of City Clerks as interviewees was constructed on their job roles and historical appointment, with some Mississippi cities even electing them as part of the municipal employment process. City Clerks hold a unique position, closely resembling and often directly relevant to the roles of local elected officials in Mississippi, making them a fitting choice for this study. Researchers can obtain a more robust and nuanced view of the program's impact by comparing and contrasting findings from these diverse sources. Triangulation is used in

this study as a support tool to further confirm, support, and assist the reader in data analysis. Another way that researchers use triangulation is through data saturation.

Saturation

Saturation was achieved following three interviews with local elected officials. The reason for reaching saturation was the recurring nature of responses from the local elected officials, who shared overlapping insights when discussing their personal and professional life experiences. Additionally, the City Clerks' responses confirmed similarities as they predominantly revolved around their work experiences, which were highly consistent due to the standardized job description mandated by the state. Although the study reached saturation early on, the researcher continued to interview two additional participants for local elected officials, totaling five one-on-one open-ended interviews. The table below depicts the participant's demographics. However, each participant was assigned unique identifiers (UI) post-verification of informed consent during the interview protocol.

Participant Demographic

In the context of participant demographics, the researcher has employed research objective one as a means to elucidate the demographic characteristics of the study's participants. Furthermore, research objective one has been instrumental in identifying intrinsic factors that contribute to capacity. It is worth noting that research objective one entailed the utilization of both ratio and nominal data for reporting purposes.

RO1 – Describe the demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, work experience in municipal government, work experience in accrual budgeting,

education background, age, years of experience in their current or previous elected role, and race.

This study includes local elected officials who served after the year 2017. The population and sample size come from the Southern Region of the United States, specifically focused on Mississippi's local elected officials. Legislation is often changed and amended; the impact of current events, natural disasters, and economic opportunity are critical factors in understanding municipal performance. Therefore, the researcher isolated the population to cover only a 5-year gap, i.e., 2017 – 2023. The qualifying criteria for participants in this study follow:

- Must have served in municipal government as defined by Mississippi Code Annotated.

- Must have served after January 1, 2017.

- Must have served for a minimum of 1 year.

In addition, the researcher interviewed four City Clerks in Mississippi who are currently or have served in the position between 2017-2023. The five local elected officials interviewed served in various areas around the state, including but not limited to the southern, central, and most northern parts of Mississippi. The City Clerks interviewed also served in Mississippi's southern, central, and northern regions.

Table 5 *Participants Demographics*

UI	Position	Years In Position	Education
Local Elected Officials		Years	

Table 5 (continued).

LEO12023	(Current) Mayor	14	Bachelor's Degree
LEO22023	(Former) Selectman	4	Associates Degree
LEO32023	(Former) Mayor	12	Master's Degree
LEO42023	(Former) Mayor	4	Bachelor's Degree
LEO52023	(Former) Mayor	4	Bachelor's Degree

City Clerks		Years	
C012023	(Current) City Clerk	8	Bachelor's Degree
C022023	(Current) City	16	Master's Degree
C032023	(Current) City Clerk Clerk/Human Resources	19	High School Diploma/2 Years Undergraduate
C042023	(Former) Chief Financial Officer	5.5	High School Diploma

In this research, four City Clerks from four geographic region in Mississippi were used for the study's triangulation. It's important to note that the City Clerks were exclusively interviewed for triangulation; the selection of City Clerks as interviewees was deliberate, based on their job responsibilities and historical appointments. In the past, in some cities in Mississippi, City Clerks were elected as part of the municipal democratic process. Given their unique position, which closely mirrors and is often directly relevant to the roles of local elected officials in Mississippi, they emerged as an apparent choice for this study. By drawing insights from these diverse sources, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the local elected officials' capacity's impact through comparisons and contrasts.

Participants

Every participant in the study satisfied the eligibility criteria for participation. Moreover, each participant submitted an informed consent form before the interview.

Additionally, during the interview, after reviewing the script describing the study, each participant provided verbal consent. The City Clerk, used for triangulation purposes, also adhered to the participation guidelines, and offered verbal consent before the interview.

Participant LEO12023 currently holds the position of Mayor and has more than 25-year career in government, including roles as a state legislator and municipal elected official. In the current governance structure, this participant is housed in the municipal legislative branch and has had the title of Mayor for the past 14 years. Notably, they hold a bachelor's degree in engineering.

Participant LEO22023 previously served as a selectman in their municipality, related to a council member or alderman in Mississippi. They possess an associate's degree in business and oversee a national cleaning firm. Their municipal government service spanned a single four-year term.

Participant LEO32023 has a noteworthy history in government, with service from 2001 to 2009 and a return from 2017 to 2021, both times as Mayor. In these capacities, they led council meetings under the legislative body. The participants have a master's degree with six years of formal education in business and related fields. Currently, this participant serves as an Assistant City Manager.

Participant LEO42023 previously served as Mayor for five years in a city governed by a unique charter, exercising executive and legislative authority. Interestingly, this participant reports no formal education or MML certification and operates an entrepreneurial venture.

Participant LEO52023 served a single four-year term as Mayor and lacked previous political experience. They work from home without professional political ties,

holding a bachelor's degree. Participant also has worked with state legislators on policy issues impacting municipal government before taking the office of the Mayor.

Tables 2 and 3 provide detailed information about the City Clerks utilized for triangulating pertinent demographic data. While their specific roles and responsibilities may vary, the foundation for triangulating the data collected from local elected officials is rooted in their statutory duties. It's important to note that all the data about city clerks originates from their positions as City Clerks in Mississippi. It remains consistent irrespective of the municipality they serve, as mandated by the state legislature.

Participant C012023 is presently employed as a City Clerk and boasts an extensive 22-year career in municipal government, spanning multiple municipal organizations. Her exclusive role is that of a City Clerk, and she does not undertake any other responsibilities within the municipality. Furthermore, her journey into this role began after coming across a job posting following her high school graduation.

Participant C022023 currently serves as a City Clerk and holds state certification. This participant fulfills the duties of a City Clerk while also taking on various roles in municipal government. Her municipal government experience spans 17 years.

Participant C032023 possesses the most extensive municipal government experience among the four triangulation participants, totaling 23 years. This participant boasts a profound understanding of municipal practices, encompassing legal and procedural aspects. Additionally, this individual has worked across multiple departments, cities, and various forms of government.

Participant C042023, our final participant, has the least experience and presently holds the position of Chief Financial Officer for the municipal organization. Before this

role, the participant worked as a City Clerk. It's worth noting that this participant meets the basic requirements for a City Clerk in Mississippi and currently holds certification as a municipal clerk in the state.

The participants' ages ranged from 27 to 70 years old. Table 6 provides an overview of the mean demographic statistics pertinent to the study, encompassing the City Clerks. This dataset enabled the research to delve deeper into various internal and external factors that might influence municipal performance.

Table 6 *Demographics by Average*

Position	Demographics Categories	Mean
Local Elected Officials	Years Elected	m = 7.5
Local Elected Officials	Average Age	m = 44.8
Local Elected Officials	Average Years of Formal Education	m = 7.6
City Clerks	Years of Government Service	m = 17
City Clerks	Years as City Clerk	m = 12.1
City Clerks	Average Years of Formal Education	m = 3

Themes

This study's goal was to create themes based on the answers from the participants about their lived experiences as local elected officials. This study uses one-on-one interviews to explore local elected officials' capacity to govern. The analysis of the data and its subsequent theme development produced seven themes related to the research objectives. The following are the themes identified in Chapter III from the data collection process. The themes are depicted in Table 7 below.

Table 7 *Themes Connected to Research Objectives*

Research Objectives	Themes
RO2	Theme 1. What is my job
	Theme 2. I am smart

Table 7 (continued).

RO3	Theme 3. I can do this
	Theme 4. I am their voice
	Theme 5. It's a calling
RO4	Theme 6. Let's Go to MML
	Theme 7. More training, please

Factors Influencing Municipal Performance

Research Objective 2 pertains to the examination of factors impacting municipal performance. This objective is specifically focused on exploring these influencing factors and the subsequent derivation of thematic insights. Notably, this constitutes the primary objective for extracting themes from the responses provided by the study participants.

RO2 – Explore factors influencing municipal performance.

The participants pinpointed factors that played a role in shaping municipal performance. Table 8 illustrates these factors as identified by the participants, encompassing aspects such as education, continuing education, government-specific experience, financial expertise, respect for others' opinions, leading by example, trustworthiness, attentive listening, continuous learning, government experience, accounting proficiency, faith, integrity, budgetary acumen, interpersonal skills, work ethic, clarity on roles, comprehension of state policies, familiarity with local policies, and awareness of limitations. Local elected officials mentioned many of the factors, and City Clerks confirmed, supported, or denied many of those factors.

Table 8 *Factors Influencing Municipal Performance*

Participants	Factors	N LEO/CC

Table 8 (continued).

Local Elected Officials	Formal education	3/3
City Clerks	Continuing education	4/4
	Government-specific experience	4/4
	Financial Expertise	2/2
	Respect for others' opinions	3/3
	Leading by example	5/4
	Trustworthiness	5/4
	Attentive listening	5/4
	Accounting proficiency	2/4
	Faith, integrity	4/4
	Budgetary acumen	2/4
	Interpersonal skills	5/4
	Work ethic	5/4
	Clarity on roles	4/4
	Comprehension of state policies	2/4
	Familiarity with local policies	2/4
	Awareness of limitations	0/4

Research objective 2 sought to uncover the factors impacting municipal performance. The interviews yielded three prominent themes: Understanding my role and Education vs. Capacity. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the internal and external factors influencing municipal performance, research participants responded to a range of semi-structured, open-ended questions. Figure 1 illustrates these themes concerning the research objective—excerpts from the interviews and reflecting journaling support the theme development.

```
┌────────────────────────────────┐
│ Theme 1                         │
│ What is my role                 │
└────────────────────────────────┘
   ┌────────────────────────────────┐
   │ Theme 2                         │
   │ I am smart, I think             │
   └────────────────────────────────┘
      ┌────────────────────────────────┐
      │ Muncipal Performance            │
      │                                 │
      └────────────────────────────────┘
```
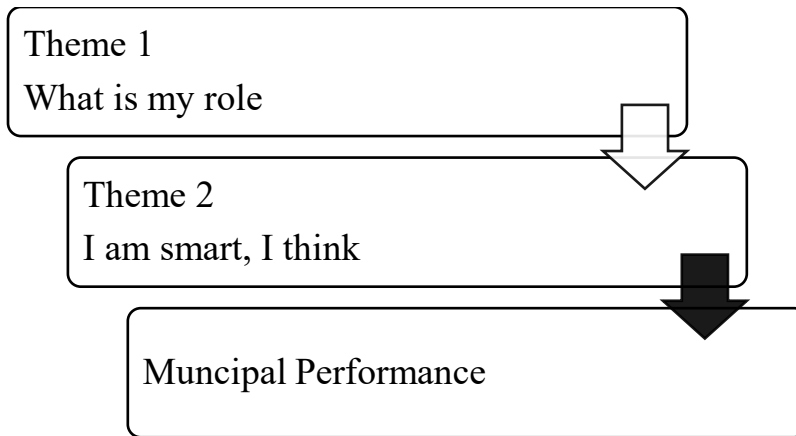
Figure 3. RO2 Theme Chart

While numerous responses were notable within the context of the research objective, the following specific excerpts played a pivotal role in shaping the themes that emerged. These excerpts are drawn from the transcript and formed the basis for the coding process that ultimately derived into the themes for RO2. Many local elected officials were confused by the qualifications to run for office. LEO32023 stated, "You are a legal resident of that municipality, I think, at least 2 or 3 years." When asked about qualifications for running for office. Some of the more profound excerpts that led to this theme are as follows.

- For me, it wasn't so hard because of my educational background. But I think for those who are, I will say, just a common layperson. It could be very challenging. (LEO32023)

- Local elected officials are not prepared when they take office (C022023)

- Yes. I mean that just to me. That goes without saying. The more education that you have, it easier (C032023)

- You have to have a vision and set goals. (LEO32023)

- I think. Just the part on all my business classes and things that help me understand audits and how to make a budget.(LEO22023)

- If you're an elected official, I think. For example, regarding budgeting, education, or having a college degree, is essential when it comes to budgeting, especially when you're up in the big numbers. Because if you don't have a college degree, some people don't know how to budget. But I do. I think having a college degree does make a difference. (C012023)

Numerous participants candidly shared their experiences of feeling unprepared and uncertain when assuming their respective roles in office. The overwhelming consensus among the majority, with only one notable exception, was a profound lack of comprehension regarding the nature of their responsibilities. This recurring theme emerged as a significant focal point during the data coding process, underscoring a common thread of unanticipated challenges and an absence of clear understanding among these individuals upon taking office. Multiple participants spoke specifically about municipal performance and how their work impacted it.

- Take classes with, you know, with probably Mississippi State, or something like that, to give them kind of background before they take office (C022023)

- To give you the understanding, especially the sociology or the sociology aspect of my educational attainment. Help give you more insight into how to affect the quality of people in those components that you'll need to pool to bring about positive change. (LEO32023)

- To run for a position and then later. Say, now, what's my job? You need to know what your job is before you decide. (LEO32023)

- I was very effective because even in my last administration, where I had this, hmm. This board that was, they were not willing to work together. So, having an in-depth knowledge of State law, having been influenced by our PDs, and having a reputation that local planning and development district planning and development district people knew what I stood for. So, my character outweighed. (LEO32023)

- The duties of the mayor are not specific according to by-laws or handbook. (LEO42023)

- Local elected officials affect your day-to-day performance. (C032023)

The majority of elected leaders engaged in discussions regarding the management of day-to-day operations within their jurisdictions. It's important to note that, except for LEO52023, these discussions were held under the context of their respective forms of government. Even in special charters cases, neither elected official had the authority to intervene or actively participate in the daily operations. This point underscores the limitations placed on their roles, regardless of their specialized circumstances.

Furthermore, a recurring sentiment among several participants was a perceived need for more formal education in their roles. Many expressed a desire to enhance their understanding and capabilities. Notably, LEO22023 took this sentiment further by advocating for mandatory education and training for local elected officials immediately upon taking office. This proposition highlights the importance of equipping elected

officials with the knowledge and skills to fulfill their duties and responsibilities effectively.

- But don't talk about it. Be about it (LEO42023)

- They're kind of different for each mayor but for myself. My duties were, of course, the day-to-day operation. You know, managing every organization within the city. You know. Making sure that the budget is on Point. (LEO42023)

- I speak to people fluently and with a charismatic nature. And so, I've picked up that skill from some of those classes in my education courses that helped me be the Mayor and my duty as a man of God, to preach and teach the Word of God each Sunday.(LEO42023)

Research objective 3 revolves around local elected officials' firsthand comprehension of the competencies required to fulfill their roles and duties. This research objective has yielded three distinct themes, all of which have emerged from the participants' responses, as outlined below.

<center>Participants' Expectations of Capacity Required</center>

Research Objective 3 involved the extraction of thematic patterns from the participant data. This objective specifically delved into the expectations held by local elected officials concerning the requisite capacity for fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. Although there is a resemblance to Research Objective 2, Research Objective 3 intentionally aimed to investigate the participants' perspectives on the capacity required for the effective execution of an elected official's duties.

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RO3 – Explore the participants' expectations regarding their capacity required to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the elected post.

Participants were inquired about the job requirements, but they were also questioned about their expectations of their roles. A significant number of participants mentioned feeling unprepared when assuming office. Nonetheless, all participants shared a common learning experience and regretted not being more prepared when taking office as they served in their elected positions. Table 5 visualizes the concepts and prospects related to participants' expectations regarding the execution of their roles and duties.

Table 9 *Participants' Expectations of Capacity Required*

Participants	Top Capacity Categories	N LEO/CC
Local Elected Officials	Formal education	3/3
City Clerks	Continuing education	4/4
	Financial Expertise	2/2
	Attentive listening	4/4
	Government experience	2/4
	Accounting proficiency	2/4
	Budgetary acumen	2/4
	Interpersonal skills	5/4
	Comprehension of state policies	2/4
	Familiarity with local policies	2/4
	Awareness of limitations	0/4
	Consensus building	5/4
	Mission, vision, objectives	1/3

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ I can do this                                │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
   ┌──────────────────────────────────────────┐
   │ I am their voice                          │
   └──────────────────────────────────────────┘
      ┌───────────────────────────────────────┐
      │ It's a Calling                         │
      └───────────────────────────────────────┘
         ┌────────────────────────────────────┐
         │ Participants Expectiation of       │
         │ Capacity Required                  │
         └────────────────────────────────────┘
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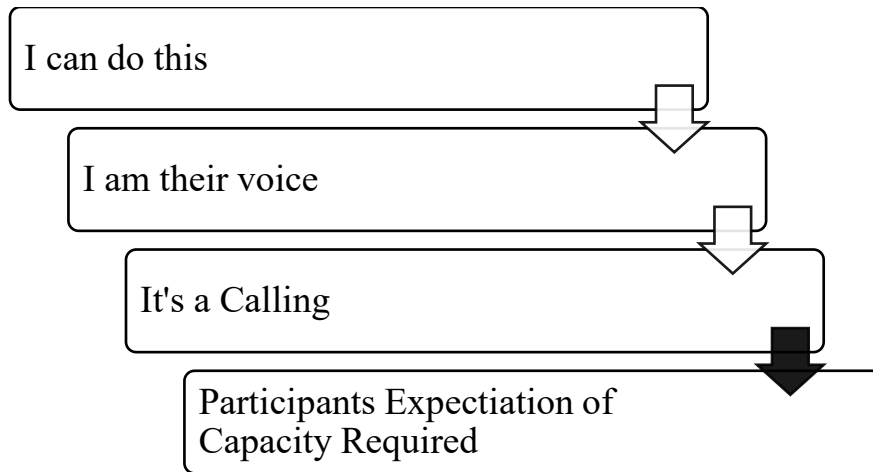
Figure 4. RO3 Theme Chart

Many elected officials openly discussed their faith and its influence on their role as leaders. Furthermore, many emphasized their commitment to advocacy and serving as the community's voice. Lastly, while expressing confidence, many acknowledged recognizing gaps in their expertise.

- There's a number value to everything. I think it's even Biblical. If you have a relationship with God, you should have your number in your head that allows you to feel confident.(LEO12023)

- Local elected officials think they have this overreaching power, and they don't realize how well, depending on what government you have. If you're an elected official, and you have a mayor in charge of day-to-day, they can't interfere. You come to the board meetings. You make decisions, and it's the mayor's job to implement them. But during day to day, if they go out and talk to contractors or try to instruct employees what to do. Then that's not covered in their state statute, and they don't realize that they can just do and say and tell people what to do. (C032023)

- So, I think, coming in, you come in with a whole bunch of ideas, and then, once you get elected. you're met with different laws and different statutes. And you think that you go in, and you can really make a difference. And then you find out that municipal government moves slowly. So, a big adjustment from the private sector to the government exists.(LEO22023)

- Thank God how close I am to a God that I serve, and they don't see my meditation every morning before I come to work, and as reading about a prayer book for me and my King Grace, quote. (LEO12023)

Local elected officials consistently expressed a deep sense of divine calling as the driving force behind their positions. For many of them, this calling was akin to a higher purpose that led them to their roles. It wasn't merely a career choice but a spiritual vocation that imbued them with a strong sense of confidence, if not always an immediate sense of competence. This divine connection was crucial in helping them navigate unfamiliar territory and grapple with issues they didn't fully comprehend.

Moreover, their passionate commitment to being the "voice for the voiceless" shone through in their discussions. They saw themselves as advocates for the people they served, representing their constituents' best interests through their voices and votes on the board. Their perception was that they were aligning their actions with the people's will, faithfully executing their duty to fulfill the desires of their constituents. However, it's noteworthy that not all City Clerks shared this perspective.

In contrast, two City Clerks highlighted the need for greater involvement of local elected officials in listening to and paying closer attention to the voices of the people they

serve. This dissenting viewpoint underscored the importance of an open dialogue and active engagement with the community to reflect the wishes and needs of the public.

- Sure, as I previously stated, you know, having a background in public administration through the University of Mississippi. Coming from a family who are politically active, who work politically active. My cousin was the first African American mayor of St. Louis. Michael was the first African Americans Supervisor; this was great for Chickasaw County, and I became Okolona's first African American mayor. (LEO32023)

- To step out and lead the constituents whom you're serving. (LEO22023)

- It's just, you know. You grow up. And I was nurtured in that kind of environment because from second grade. Throughout my current position, I have been active. Politically, I have been active civically with the community of Oklahoma, and to be a Shaker or the constructionist to bring about positive change. (LEO32023)

- I would say that. No, I'm not a career politician because my mantra has always been. I'm a man on a mission that, like God, has ordained. I don't play politics. I'm not that guy. I don't scratch my head when it's not itching, and I'm sure not a cheese either because I am lactose intolerant. So, I'm like Flip Wilson. I grew up here; what you see is what you get. (LEO32023)

- From being in front of a class of 200 people, I had to get up and speak the essay. That helped me along the way, learning to interact with different ethnicities, cultures, and people from different backgrounds. And so, I'm the type of person that comes from the street. So, I know how to relate to the people on the street.

And I also know how to relate to the white collar or the CEO, that is, sitting

behind the desk of a 4 to 500 company, and I learned that in mine. (LEO42023)

- I believe in the unbelievable, which comes with my faith and enables me to speak

  things like they were. (LEO42023)

- Because God anointed me.(LEO42023)

- I think it would be important always to be open to new ideas and listen to their

  citizens.(LEO22023)

- Local elected officials should just try to make the most informed decision

  possible. We send them outboard packages. Some read, some don't, and it's

  evident when you get to board meetings. Who does? Who has read and who

  hasn't?

Research objective 4 marks the culmination of the study, focusing on the

strategies municipal organizations employ to prepare local elected officials. Although the

themes may appear similar at first glance, their meanings are distinct and arise from the

individual responses provided by the participants. Consequently, three themes have been

extracted from the interviews, each rooted in the unique insights offered by the

participants.

<p align="center">Strategies to Prepare Local Elected Officials</p>

Research Objective Four delves into the strategies that local elected officials

engaged with through municipal organizations. This objective facilitated the

accumulation of pertinent data, enriching our comprehension of the existing support

mechanisms available to local elected officials. Additionally, this research objective

yielded valuable insights that can serve as a foundation for recommending educational

services tailored to the needs of local elected officials.

RO4 – Explore strategies municipal organizations use to prepare local elected officials

for their role.

Municipal organizations each employ distinct strategies aimed at securing the

success of their municipal leaders. Nevertheless, the primary objective of this study was

to gain insight into the strategies used to equip local elected officials for their roles

specifically. Table 6 provides an overview of the shared elements of customized

preparation that municipalities have implemented to ensure the overall success of their

organization.

Let's go on annual state leage
vacation

More Training Please

Stratigies Municipalities Use to
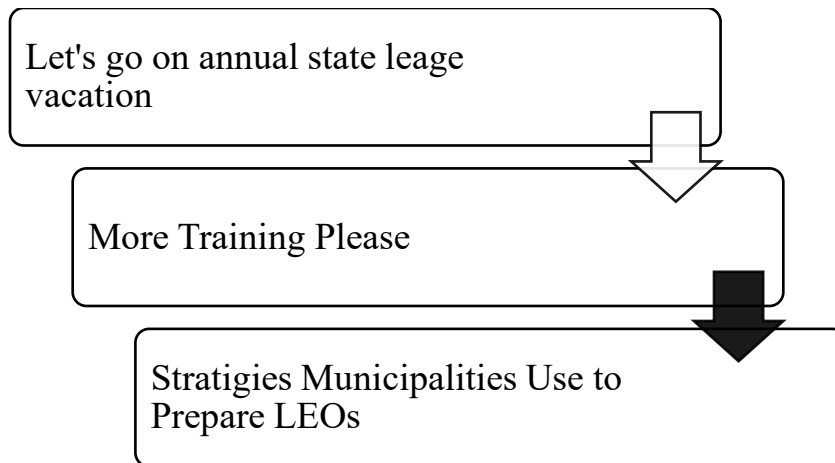Prepare LEOs

Figure 5. RO4 Theme Chart

Among the local elected officials, only one had a combination of formal and non-

formal education before assuming office. This observation paved the way for selecting

the three themes mentioned earlier. When gathering data about the training and education

of individuals, it became evident that the following themes emerged. Furthermore, the

insights provided by the City Clerks were instrumental in shaping these themes, as the

responses informed their experiences of the local elected officials.

Table 10 *Strategies to Prepare Local Elected Officials*

Participants	Strategies	N LEO/CC
Local Elected Officials	Mississippi Municipal League (MML0	3/2
City Clerks	Mississippi State Stennis Institute	2/2
	Staff Assistance	1/2
	Municipal Orientation	0/1
	State Laws and Policies	1/4
	Attorney Generals Opinions (AGO)	1/3

- Organizations such as MML Stennis Institute provide an opportunity for training

  and education. (LEO32023)

- sending them to most of our municipal classes. Get them some training. They

  usually do. I believe it's about 80 or 90 HI believe, per year(C042023)

- Mississippi Conference of Black Mayors and the National Eagle Cities, those

  enterprises have been some of the best tools and resources I have used in their

  classes. The educational aspect of it is priceless. (LEO32023)

- I didn't have those already in that position to leave me to help me show me the

  ropes. So, everything was learned on the fly. I was, you know, learning on the job.

  and so, I had to learn fast when I got into the office. There were already several

  opportunities at the table that I had to pick up from the previous mayor and run

  with.(LEO42023)

The Mississippi Municipal League (MML) is a vital organization offering

seminars and optional training opportunities to various essential roles, including City

Clerks, City Attorneys, and Local Elected Officials. The unanimous consensus among the

local elected officials was that MML represents the primary avenue for training in their respective positions. They rely on MML's offerings to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to fulfill their roles effectively.

On the other hand, all City Clerks have undergone the Mississippi State certification process, and they commonly perceive MML's training as optional. Some City Clerks argue that this optional nature of the program can render it less effective, as not all individuals may choose to participate. Despite this, it's important to note that all participants share a common desire for more training and education regardless of their roles. They are aware of how crucial professional growth and lifelong learning are for effectively serving their communities and performing at the top of their jobs. This collective interest underscores the need for accessible and comprehensive training opportunities tailored to their unique roles and responsibilities.

- It should become law and mandate that every elected official attend the Municipal League training and become certified in those courses.(LEO22023)
- Well, the most we have right now in my city is a brief orientation. (C032023)
- Local elected officials ask general questions during orientation, and then they go home, and they read, and then, but for the most part, if they have a question about anything, they don't look through the binders; they call the clerk or the attorney (C032023)

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Chapter IV provides a comprehensive account of the data analysis process for generating the codes, themes, and study outcomes. This chapter also dedicates sections to elucidate the measures taken to ensure the reliability and credibility of the results. A table

containing the participants' demographic information and concise descriptions acquaints the reader with each administrator and their respective roles in the educational context.

Chapter IV effectively addresses the study objectives by incorporating excerpts from the interview transcripts. The amalgamation of responses from participant interviews and reflective journal entries yielded eight overarching themes subdivided into emergent themes. Additionally, Table 7, the product of meticulous data analysis, illustrates the correlation between the research objectives and the identified themes. Chapter V delves into the study's conclusions and interpretations and offers recommendations for future research endeavors.

CHAPTER V – CONCLUSION

This study centers on the lived experiences of local elected officials in their capacity to govern. Chapters I to IV laid the foundation by elucidating the study's objectives, the relevant literature supporting its significance, the methodology employed, and the data collection outcomes. Chapter V encompasses the presentation of findings, the drawing of conclusions, and the formulation of recommendations. Furthermore, the researcher discusses the study's limitations and suggests future research.

Summary of Study

The primary aim of this study was to extract meaningful themes from the participants' experiences. These identified themes collectively narrate the tale of the capacity of local elected officials to govern proficiently. As illustrated in Figure 6, the framework is a product of the participants' lived experiences. Based on the data furnished, this graphical representation effectively addresses the overarching phenomenon of the study.
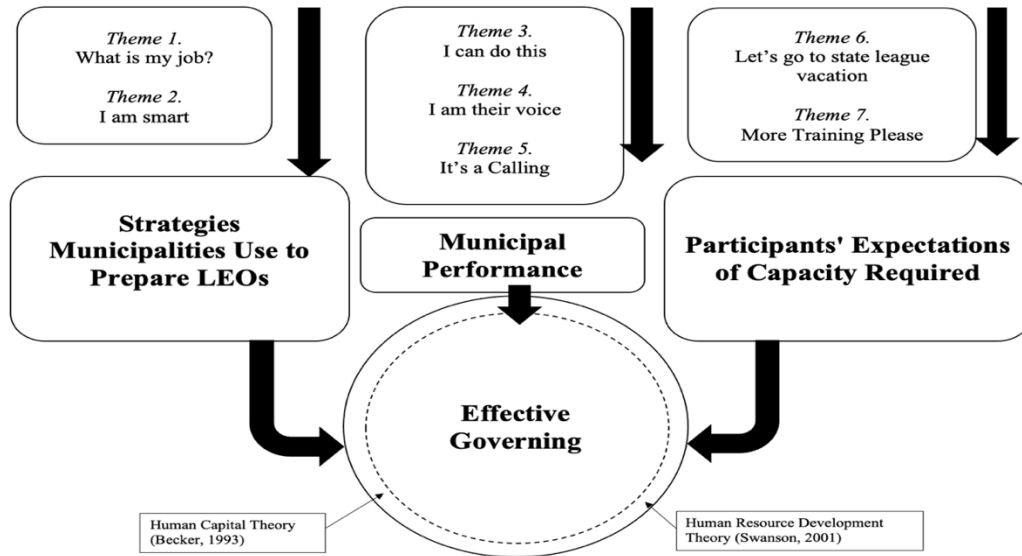
Figure 6. Theme Framework

The subjects explored in this study align with the research objectives and chosen methodology, designed to investigate how local elected officials impact municipal performance through their governance capacity. In an ideal scenario, local elected officials should excel in delivering efficient government services, prudently managing taxpayers' finances, elevating the quality of life, and nurturing an environment conducive to development and well-being. Regrettably, municipalities have not yet attained this utopian state due to capacity deficiencies stemming from many factors. Among these factors, the local elected officials are the primary internal contributors. The following research objectives have been articulated to guide this study.

> RO1 – Describe the demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, work experience in municipal government, work experience in accrual budgeting, education background, age, years of experience in their current or previous elected role, and race.

RO2 – Explore factors influencing municipal performance.

RO3 – Explore the participants' expectations regarding their capacity required to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the elected post.

RO4 – Explore strategies municipal organizations use to prepare local elected officials for their role.

The researcher employed a deliberate and targeted sampling approach to select participants in this study. The one-on-one interviews involved a total of nine local elected officials and four city clerks, with the inclusion of City Clerks serving a specific triangulation purpose.

The collected data underwent interpretation using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method. Participants' Demographic information was gathered through the interview protocol form and the interviews themselves. As a result of the IPA process, seven distinct themes emerged, which were categorized as follows: Understanding My Role, Education Builds Capacity, Confidence vs. Competence, Voice for the Voiceless, It's a Calling, Let's Go to MML and More Training, Please.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the internal factors that exert an influence on municipal performance. Additionally, the research endeavors to delve into the expectations of local elected officials regarding their roles and responsibilities and how these align with their capacity. The study seeks to establish a connection between the capacity of local elected officials and municipal performance, drawing on the insights derived from exploring internal factors.

Summary of Results

Demographic information pertaining to the participants was meticulously acquired, a step that successfully fulfilled the requirements of RO1. Moving forward, a comprehensive analysis of the interview and focus group transcripts uncovered more than 20 emergent themes. Specific themes exhibited resemblances and were subsequently synthesized into seven overarching thematic categories. Remarkably, these seven themes collectively supported the objectives encompassed in RO2 through RO4.

To further enrich the contextual understanding of these themes, carefully selected excerpts were extracted directly from the interview transcripts. These verbatim excerpts were strategically utilized to underpin and illustrate the salient points within each theme. This approach substantiated the themes and imparted a more profound insight by directly drawing from the participants' own words and perspectives.

Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The findings of this study encompassed the perspectives of local elected officials regarding the capacity required to govern effectively and achieve positive municipal performance. These findings were consistent with existing literature and were derived from one-on-one interviews with the participants, delving into their lived experiences. The participants' responses unveiled several factors influencing their capacity and aptitude to fulfill their elected roles and responsibilities. These factors encompassed their expectations, educational background, prior experiences, and how these elements related to their capacity. Additionally, the study shed light on various life experiences that could impede or enhance their ability to contribute to municipal performance.

Finding 1. Education is a multifaceted process, yet formal education should constitute a mandatory component of the learning journey for local elected officials before assuming office.

The participants emphasized the significance of a multifaceted approach to education, encompassing nonformal, informal, and formal practices, as a prerequisite before assuming office. Among the noteworthy insights gleaned from the participants, which align with existing literature, was their unanimous admission of feeling ill-prepared for the roles and responsibilities entailed by their offices. This perceived lack of readiness stemmed from a fundamental deficiency in their grasp of the intricacies associated with their functions, their duties, and the complex web of laws and policies that shape the framework they govern. For some participants, this concern manifested as a clear apprehension regarding the insufficiency of pre-office preparation.

Conclusion 1. The foundational concept of Human Capital Theory (HCT) posits that an individual's capacity for learning is on par with other valuable resources involved in producing goods and services (Becker, 1993; Lucas, 1988; Nafukho et al., 2004). Several local elected officials astutely observed a noticeable absence of learning capacity upon assuming their positions among their fellow elected officials. This deficiency posed significant obstacles to consensus-building and collaborative efforts, reducing funding allocation and decreasing the provision of essential goods and services.

In pursuit of effective public management, contemporary administrative techniques such as management by objectives have proven to be pragmatic solutions for achieving efficient governance (Avellaneda, 2008; Becker, 1993). This concept was resoundingly affirmed by City Clerks and local elected officials, who underscored the

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need for local elected officials to acquire proficient management skills. While many officials conveyed confidence in their roles, they also candidly acknowledged a shortfall in their overall competence regarding governing effectively.

Recommendation 1. Municipal organizations must take proactive steps to enhance the preparedness and effectiveness of local elected officials. To achieve this, the recommendation is to implement local and private legislation mandating specialized training programs aligned with the unique requirements of each municipal charter. These programs should equip elected officials with the requisite knowledge and skills necessary for their roles.

Furthermore, these training programs should be completed within a specified timeframe, ideally within the first 30 days following an official's election. This time-bound approach ensures that local elected officials assume office with a solid foundation of knowledge and readiness to perform their duties effectively.

By adopting such legislation and training initiatives, municipalities can foster a more informed and capable cadre of public servants, ultimately leading to improved governance and enhanced service delivery to the communities they represent. This proactive approach aligns to ensure that local elected officials are well-prepared to address the multifaceted challenges of their roles.

Finding 2. While local elected officials are motivated by passion and faith, their capacity often falls short of possessing the essential skills required to fulfill the duties of their elected office.

Furthermore, the study's findings align with existing literature, revealing that local elected officials are driven by passion and believe in their contributions as the voice for

the voiceless, representing the interests of the people they serve. Additionally, some officials draw upon their faith as a guiding principle for their service and its manner. This often led to confidence over competence.

Conclusion 2. In conclusion, the capacity of local elected officials to govern effectively hinges on their ability to implement fundamental principles of good governance (Savara, 2003). Local elected officials should prioritize transparency in decision-making processes and be accountable for their actions, which entails conducting open meetings, fostering clear communication, and upholding ethical conduct (Avellaneda, 2009; Juon & Bakke, 2023; Rumbach, 2016). They must engage in evidence-based policymaking, considering constituents' needs and concerns through thorough research and expert consultation when required (Avellaneda, 2009). Additionally, elected officials should maintain accessibility to their members, actively listening to their concerns and addressing them through legislative and policy actions. Responsible management of public finances is paramount, involving the creation of efficient budgets while minimizing waste and corruption (Juon & Bakke, 2023). Collaboration and consensus-building across party lines can lead to more effective governance by seeking common ground among colleagues to benefit the public. Clear and open communication with constituents, regular updates, and public engagement events are essential. Upholding high ethical standards, avoiding conflicts of interest, and promptly reporting violations are crucial. Promoting diversity and inclusion in decision-making ensures that all citizens' needs and perspectives are considered. Long-term planning, ongoing education, civic engagement, adaptability, conflict resolution skills, continuous evaluation of policy impacts, and environmental and social responsibility

initiatives are vital aspects of effective governance (Avellaneda, 2009; Juon & Bakke, 2023; Miron, 2017; Rumbach, 2016). Embracing these practices enables elected officials to enhance their governance capacity and contribute to the improvement of their communities and constituents.

Recommendations 2. Local elected officials must adhere to elevated standards during their elected positions. To ensure effective governance, these officials must operate under a well-defined set of metrics that align with their budgetary responsibilities and are specific and measurable. The correlation between accountability and success is undeniable; these metrics serve as vital tools for evaluating and enhancing their performance.

It's crucial to acknowledge that, while valuable, confidence in one's role can only go so far without the corresponding competence. To bridge this gap, all local elected officials are strongly recommended to participate in ongoing education and training programs, with an annual mandate for such endeavors. These programs would augment their knowledge and skillset, empowering them to govern more efficiently and effectively.

Furthermore, elected officials should be mandated to establish a structured process for promptly addressing constituents' inquiries and providing them with necessary information. Ensuring transparent communication and responsiveness fosters trust and accountability, strengthening the bond between officials and the communities they serve. By upholding these higher standards, local elected officials can strive for improved governance, improved service delivery, and a deeper connection with the

constituents they represent, ultimately promoting the well-being and progress of their municipalities.

Finding 3. Municipal organizations' success and overall performance hinges significantly on training and development initiatives.

Participants in the study strongly voiced the imperative to engage in diverse educational and training programs. Their sentiments extended beyond a singular desire for initial training, emphasizing the continuous need for ongoing education. This persistent need for learning and development stems from the dynamic and swiftly evolving government landscape. Staying abreast of new policies, technologies, and best practices is paramount in today's ever-changing governmental environment. The participants' recognition of these rapid changes underscores the importance of continuous learning as an essential component of effective governance. These insights illuminate a resounding call for a commitment to lifelong learning among government officials, reflecting the necessity of staying adaptable and well-informed to navigate modern governance's complexities successfully.

Conclusion 3. Effective municipal governance demands specific skills, specialized knowledge, and leadership training, particularly in the democratic political system (Blair, 1999). While it's noteworthy that local, state, and federal governments do not mandate ongoing education and skill development for local elected officials (Cohen, 1995), the absence of such mandates may inadvertently discourage officials from proactively seeking opportunities to enhance their governing capabilities. This, in turn, can impede their ability to grapple with the multifaceted challenges and complexities that

plague towns and municipalities, ultimately affecting their performance (Avellaneda, 2008; Svara, 2003; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999).

Research findings underscore a substantial gap between government practices and business principles, with government entities often lagging behind their corporate counterparts due to education and training gaps in the workforce (Yared, 2018). Scholars argue that embracing formal, nonformal, informal, and continuing education is imperative and contributes significantly to overall success, mirroring principles essential for thriving in the business realm (Arnaboldi et al., 2015). These principles are equally crucial for maintaining efficient and effective government operations. In essence, the municipal government, in theory, operates much like a business, functioning on behalf of the people through their elected leaders, all with the primary goal of advancing the common good (Smith, 1895). Recognizing this connection emphasizes the vital importance of equipping elected officials with the knowledge, skills, and training they need to successfully navigate the complexities of governance.

Recommendation 3. Municipalities must proactively allocate resources and make them readily accessible to local elected officials. Beyond simply offering these resources, it is imperative to mandate attendance at relevant training sessions to ensure the municipal organization's success. This proactive approach invests in the competence and preparedness of local elected officials, which, in turn, translates to more effective governance and improved performance for the entire municipality.

Additionally, municipalities should enforce a requirement for all local elected officials to participate in comprehensive orientation programs. These orientation sessions should delve deeply into policies, procedures, and current best practices, equipping

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officials with a robust understanding of the operational framework within which they will operate. This knowledge is vital, as it fosters a foundation upon which local elected officials can build, strengthening effective and efficient practices through consensus-building and meaningful engagement with the public.

Furthermore, local elected officials must clearly comprehend their roles and responsibilities within the legislative or executive branches of government. This understanding is pivotal in ensuring the seamless functioning of government and preventing any potential disruptions or conflicts between branches. In summary, by actively investing in resources, mandating training attendance, providing comprehensive orientations, and promoting a solid understanding of roles and responsibilities, municipalities can empower their local elected officials to govern effectively, uphold efficient practices, and collaborate harmoniously with their constituents and fellow branches of government. This holistic approach contributes to the overall success of municipal organizations and enhances the well-being of the communities they serve.

Discussion

Local elected officials and City Clerks discussed their roles and responsibilities within the municipalities they currently or previously served. The City Clerks served only to triangulate data collected from the participants. City Clerks confirmed and denied the data provided by local elected officials. The solicitation of participants yielded responses from current and former elected local officials. To ensure diversity and inclusion, the researcher employed a purposeful sampling technique to meet the required number of participants and maximum variation. The study only required one round of solicitation, as stipulated by its design.

Overall, participants expressed their engagement and appreciation for their roles as elected officials. However, some participants noted that while it was a valuable experience, it might not be a suitable long-term career path for them. Participants candidly shared personal and professional challenges and achievements associated with their positions, along with their aspirations for the future of their offices. However, achieving without awareness of limitations can be in vain when discussing municipal performance.

One of the prevalent recurring themes is the awareness of limitations. Notably, local elected officials conspicuously refrained from addressing or acknowledging their limitations. Conversely, they demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of their boundaries and competencies, evident in their knowledge assimilation. In stark contrast, all four City Clerks explicitly emphasized that local elected officials exhibited minimal awareness of their limitations. This particular facet underscored a significant gap in their training, indicating that it represents an area where educational resources are notably lacking.

This study is rooted in examining governance, which serves as the cornerstone of its inquiry. While governance is integral, the study's focus extends to the intricacies of achieving favorable outcomes in municipal performance, measured by the quality of goods and services provided. Furthermore, the research endeavors to gain insight into the individual capacities of elected officials to govern effectively. As the thematic analysis unfolded, a clearer understanding emerged regarding the reasons underlying most municipalities' often less-than-optimal performance and efficiency.

Notably, four out of the five Local Elected Officials (LEOs) interviewed expressed the importance of continuing education. However, it is equally notable that none of them have obtained the Municipal Leader Certification from the Municipal Management League (MML), despite each having served in their elected roles for four years or more, with the certification process spanning two years. Intriguingly, only one LEO mentioned factors such as knowledge of Attorney General Opinions, staff assistance, and familiarity with state laws and policies when discussing leadership. This observation was validated by City Clerks who confirmed a prevailing lack of knowledge among LEOs regarding Attorney General Opinions, staff support, and the legal and policy framework governing municipal operations.

The themes extracted from this investigation serve as repositories of information elucidating the inner workings of municipalities. Additionally, it is noteworthy that none of the elected officials made mention of the mission, vision, or objectives for their respective municipal organizations. This conspicuous absence was reinforced by all but one City Clerk, emphasizing a significant dearth of awareness regarding the fundamental principles that should guide the operation of municipalities.

It is essential to underscore that attaining effective municipal governance within a nation necessitates a deliberate and purposeful alignment of laws and policies with the overarching goal of human capital development. This alignment underscores the significance of viewing education and training as non-negotiable imperatives for the leaders of a democratic society. Furthermore, this perspective calls for establishing clear and non-discretionary requirements, which must be intrinsically linked to corresponding incentives and penalties. These measures are indispensable in holding elected officials

accountable for acquiring the requisite capacity essential for executing their roles and responsibilities effectively. In essence, it constitutes a fundamental paradigm shift in the approach to governance, with a focus on knowledge, skills, and competencies as integral components of public leadership.

A common theme that emerged, expressed in various ways, was the need for education and orientation both before and during their tenure in office. Additionally, participants highlighted the necessity for interventions to foster consensus on municipal legislative authority. Lastly, they emphasized the importance of enhanced collaboration involving all three branches of government.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations refer to potential factors that could impact the validity of the study's findings (Creswell, 2007). Validity, as defined by Shadish, Cook, and Campbell (2002), pertains to the accuracy of a study's findings. This study faces three distinct limitations that warrant consideration.

The first limitation pertains to generalizability in this study. The study's population consisted solely of local elected officials in Mississippi, and a purposive sampling technique was employed, wherein participants were selected based on specific criteria (Berg, 2007; Patton, 2015). While the researcher received inquiries from local elected officials in line with the study's criteria and willing to share their experiences, data saturation was reached after conducting three interviews. This limited pool of research participants hinders the generalization of the results, meaning that the findings may not accurately represent the perspectives of larger groups in different states.

Expanding the study to include local elected officials outside Mississippi could have provided a more diverse regional or national outlook.

The second limitation concerns the potential for researcher bias to influence the study's results (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher followed Creswell's (2009) recommendation to engage in self-reflection to mitigate this bias. It's worth noting that the researcher has a background as a former elected official and possesses multiple degrees related to business and organizational leadership. Through self-reflection, the researcher aimed to prevent the introduction of leading questions or any attempts to steer responses towards desired outcomes. This process also enabled the researcher to interpret reactions as they were given, limiting the time spent discussing responses with participants (Creswell, 2014).

The third limitation relates to the researcher's familiarity with conducting interviews. Throughout the study, the interviewer refined their interview techniques and improved the clarity of interview questions. Additionally, the researcher learned not to interrupt participants during their responses, allowing them adequate time for reflection and providing additional information. Lastly, the researcher acquired the skill of simply asking questions and using prompts for clarification.

<div align="center">Recommendation for Future Research</div>

There are several opportunities to extend this research. While the study delved into the lived experiences of local elected officials' capacity to govern, it was limited to participants in Mississippi. Expanding the analysis to encompass local elected officials from all states or different regions across the United States could yield more broadly applicable and comparable data, enhancing its relevance to the existing literature.

In this study, an interesting and significant finding emerged, highlighting the City Clerks as the individuals possessing the most comprehensive knowledge within the realm of municipal government. The utilization of City Clerks as a source of triangulation in this research validated the insights gleaned from both the participants and the existing literature and underscored their pivotal role in shedding light on the intricate web of internal factors that influence municipal governance.

This insight raises a compelling argument for the necessity of delving deeper into the role of City Clerks as primary sources of qualitative data in future studies. Such an exploration could yield invaluable insights into the intricate mechanisms and dynamics underpinning municipal government operations. This avenue of inquiry holds promise in unraveling the nuances of municipal governance, paving the way for a more comprehensive understanding of this complex administrative landscape. Furthermore, such an approach could contribute to more informed decision-making and governance practices at the local level, thus enhancing municipal government's overall effectiveness and efficiency.

Furthermore, an opportunity exists to include county elected officials in the study, as they also serve as local elected leaders with similar functions and roles to municipal leaders. County elected officials oversee unincorporated areas within specific geographic regions of the state not covered by municipal limits. Expanding the research scope to encompass all local elected officials, cities, and counties presents a valuable opportunity.

Furthermore, a mixed-methods study could provide a comprehensive understanding of the financial success of municipalities, which is closely linked to governance. Municipal organizations operate within their budgets, and a mixed-methods

study could involve a statistical analysis of municipal performance, including budgetary findings related to overspending thresholds, budget amendments, revenue, and expenditures. Combining quantitative methodology with a qualitative phenomenological design involving interviews with city administrators and local elected officials, could significantly enhance the depth and breadth of research on this topic.

In the United States, it is imperative to consider a fundamental restructuring of the mechanisms governing municipal government. We must delineate the distinction between active participation in a democratic society and the arduous responsibility of upholding, implementing, and cultivating democracy. To this end, it is both a recommendation and a call for an in-depth investigation to instigate legislative changes and regulatory frameworks that set forth essential prerequisites for holding elected office. These prerequisites should be intricately tailored to the office's specific demands and statutory responsibilities.

Through the establishment or revision of their charters, municipalities possess a unique opportunity to anchor their local governance on a foundation that mandates prerequisites for candidacy tied to the individual's demonstrable capacity. This approach would herald a paradigm shift, introducing a merit-based criterion for pursuing local office, ensuring that those in leadership roles possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and qualifications.

Furthermore, it is incumbent upon state governments to assume a leadership role by formulating and enforcing regulations that compel local authorities to demand a minimum level of education and competence before an individual can assume an elected position. By instituting such requirements, we move toward a system where our elected

officials are equipped with the proficiency necessary to navigate municipal governance's complex and nuanced landscape. This shift holds the potential to usher in a new era of effectiveness and efficiency in the operation of local government, ultimately bolstering the democratic principles on which the nation is built.

Summary

Chapter V contains a comprehensive study summary, research findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The primary objective of this research is to delve into the internal factors that significantly impact municipal performance. To achieve this, the researcher conducted individual interviews, transcribed them, and meticulously reviewed the transcripts to identify recurring codes, employing interpretative phenomenological analysis. Through this rigorous analysis, distinct themes and subthemes emerged, shedding light on obstacles and catalysts influencing persistence in municipal performance.

The researcher meticulously organized the identified themes based on participant responses, shedding light on the factors that influence the capacity of local elected officials capacity to govern effectively and contribute to positive municipal performance. These factors encompassed various aspects, such as formal education, continuous learning, government-specific expertise, financial acumen, respect for differing opinions, exemplary leadership, trustworthiness, active listening, accounting proficiency, faith, integrity, budgetary proficiency, interpersonal skills, strong work ethic, role clarity, and a comprehensive grasp of state policies.

Remarkably, participants demonstrated remarkable determination and commitment to achieving successful municipal performance, even in the face of

challenges and despite not having all the requisite resources. They regarded their tenacity

and dedication as fundamental components of personal success. Personal success serves

as a potent motivator and acts as an indicator of momentum toward positive outcomes

(Svara, 2003). Nevertheless, to enhance the capacity of local elected officials to govern

effectively and yield favorable outcomes, it is imperative to direct attention toward the

factors discerned in the results of this study and substantiated by existing literature.

A thorough assessment of the study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations

will prove indispensable to bolster municipal performance in Mississippi. These insights

hold the potential to provide valuable guidance for future initiatives aimed at enhancing

local governance and its positive impact on communities.

From: Kate Piersanti <kate@headlandpro.com>
Date: Monday, October 10, 2022 at 6:41 PM
To: Berrett-Koehler <bkpub@bkpub.com>
Subject: Re: FW: Mario King (Request to use HRD Stool in Dissertation)

Hi Mario,
You have permission to use the model requested. Please cite the material as follows:

    Reprinted with permission of the publisher. From (title of book),
    copyright© (year) by (author), Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.,
    San Francisco, CA. All rights reserved. www.bkconnection.com

Best to you with your work.
Go well,
Kate

On Mon, Oct 10, 2022 at 3:06 PM Berrett-Koehler <bkpub@bkpub.com> wrote:

From: Mario King <Mario.King@usm.edu>
Date: Monday, October 10, 2022 at 12:40 AM
To: Berrett-Koehler <bkpub@bkpub.com>, Katie Sheehan <ksheehan@bkpub.com>
Subject: Mario King (Request to use HRD Stool in Dissertation)

. . .

Interview Questionnaire

IRB #: 23-0227

1. What is municipal performance?

(Prompt: The objective of performance measurement, as a municipal government, is to provide a procedure for figuring out how a program carries out its mission through providing goods, services, or processes.

(Simplify: Successful Parks and Recreation Program = baseball program with 200 registered and paid, yielding a margin that allows you to reinvest the money to improve the program next year. (low crime, affordable housing, affordable taxes)

2. What are/were the duties of your elected position?

(Prompt: One of the duties of an elected official is to attend board meetings. More complex would be to make an informed vote on the budget. [ensure you understand the budget and how it relates to performance outcomes].

3. What are the qualifications for this role?

4. How can a local elected official assert their capacity to lead?

(Prompt: Read the capacity definition used for the study.)

5. How does your previous work experience impact your capacity to perform in this role?

(Prompt: In your previous role, you created budgets, wrote grants, maintenance supervisor, accountant, or ran a successful multimillion-dollar business.)

6. Do you feel you were prepared for this role as an elected leader?

(Prompt: After taking on this elected position, do you feel confident that you had the skills necessary to perform at the minimum capacity required to carry out the duties of

this role?)

7. How would you measure municipal performance? (Prompt: Bad performance would lead to adverse outcomes such as overspending on the budget. A good performance measurement would lead to positive outcomes such as a decrease in crime due to approving the budget to hire additional police officers.)

8. Please provide some background about your education. How did it help you as a local elected official?

(Prompt: For example, have you completed a high school diploma, GED, college, or certification? What are some of the courses, skills, or knowledge that assisted you as a local elected official?)

9. How would you measure your capacity related to this role 1-year post-election?

(Prompt: Read the capacity definition used for the study.)

(Simplify: I would be more successful if I had training in _____, for example, budget, policy, etc.)

10. What are some opportunities to improve the knowledge of local elected officials?

11. There are three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial. What branch of government do you fall under? _____ How could the communication between the three be improved to support positive municipal outcomes?

(Prompt: You could have workshops to discuss policies, procedures, and consequences. You could communicate more about successes and failures.)

12. Political parties, Republican, Democrat, or Independent, are all a part of the political process. Are you associated with any political party (yes or no), and do you feel it influences your choices as a local elected official.

(Prompt: If so, why? If not, why?)

13. What are some of the barriers you have faced as a local elected official?

14. What do you think of the term career politician? Do you feel that you are a career politician?

(Prompt: How does that impact your ability to make decisions?)

15. How does capacity impact your expectations as a local elected official?

16. How does your capacity impact municipal performance?

17. Does race play a role in municipal performance?

18. What does your organization have in place to assist newly elected officials in building capacity surrounding organizational performance?

Notes for the researcher for amendments to the questionnaire during the data collection process.

This study has been approved by the University of Southern Mississippi IRB @23-0227.

APPENDIX C – Interview Protocol

This study has been approved by the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional

Review Board. IRB #: 23-0227

A secure video conferencing technology will be used for all interviews. Each

participant will be made aware of the potential length of the interview. The participant

will also be made aware that they can end the interview at any point in the process.

Participants will be informed that the interview is being recorded at that point by the

researcher. After receiving verbal approval, the researcher will use the form below to

proceed. The interviewer will verify that the participant has a signed consent form, and

the interview will begin. Exploring the Capacity of Exploring the Capacity of Local

Elected Officials to Govern

(a) Pre-interview Check List:
1. This interview is being recorded from this point on. At any point you feel uncomfortable, you may stop the interview without penalty. Would you like to continue with the interview?
2. Test all equipment and ask the participant to repeat the study's title back to you.
3. Check to ensure all materials are present. pen, paper, journal, timer, recording enabled, and transcription enabled.
4. Review the Personal Information form for pre-interview aloud with the participant to ensure all information is recorded and accurate.
5. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview.

(b) Personal Information			
Name of Participant:	Date:		Interviewer:
Age:	Race:		YOE:
Occupation:	Years of Experience:		Location
Gender:	Highest Level of Education:		Participant ID:
Date		Location	
Time		Participation #	
Position Title		Current local elected official or. Past local elected official	
Start Time		End Time	

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(c) Interview Guide

1. You will be provided a transcript of this interview within 48 hours of completion. You will have 48 hours to make any changes, or I will proceed with the wording as is.
2. My name is Mario King, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at The University of Southern Mississippi, and I am the principal investigator for this research.
3. The purpose of this study is to explore and identify factors that contribute to the capacity of local elected officials' ability to govern.
4. The questions are about your lived experiences. I want you to be open and honest; as a reminder, your participation is confidential.
5. If you do not understand a question or need more information, please do not hesitate to stop me.

(d) Begin the interview:

a. Ask interview questions.
b. If the participant is unclear of a question or information explain further.
c. No session should last longer than 60 minutes, if so, interviewer should stop the session and end recording.
d. You will be provided a transcript of this interview within 48 hours of completion. You will have 48 hours to make any changes, or I will proceed with the wording as is.
e. Thank you again for your time!

This interview will last 60 minutes or less. Are you ready to begin?

Please excuse my journaling, as I am also taking notes to properly capture this experience and its entirety. As a reminder this interview is confidential, and your name will not be used or associated with this study in any way. This interview will be identified using a unique number.

FOR THE INTERVIEWER ONLY:
Demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, work experience in municipal government, work experience in accrual budgeting, education background, age, years of experience in their current or previous elected role, and race.

> Gender: • Male • Female
> How long have you been a local elected official?
> How many years of budgeting experience do you have?
> How many years of accrual budgeting experience do you have?
> What is your highest level of education completed?

This study has been approved by the University of Southern Mississippi IRB #23-022

APPENDIX D – IRB Approval

Office *of*
Research Integrity

THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN
MISSISSIPPI.

118 COLLEGE DRIVE #5116 • HATTIESBURG, MS | 601.266.6756 | WWW.USM.EDU/ORI

NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI using the Incident form available in InfoEd.
- The period of approval is twelve months. If a project will exceed twelve months, a request should be submitted to ORI using the Renewal form available in InfoEd prior to the expiration date.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 23-0227
PROJECT TITLE: Exploring Local Elected Officials' Capacity to Govern
SCHOOL/PROGRAM   Interdisciplinary Studies
RESEARCHERS: PI: Mario King
                     Investigators: King, Mario~Brown, Harnett Q~
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved
CATEGORY: Expedited Category
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 31-Jul-2023 to 30-Jul-2024

Lisa Wright

Lisa Wright, Ph.D., MPH
Senior Institutional Review Board Analyst

ORI | Office *of* Research Integrity

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
STANDARD (SIGNED) INFORMED CONSENT

STANDARD (SIGNED) INFORMED CONSENT PROCEDURES

- **Use of this template is <u>optional</u>.** However, by federal regulations (45 **CFR** 46.116), all consent documentation must address each of the required elements listed below (purpose, procedures, duration, benefits, risks, alternative procedures, confidentiality, whom to contact in case of injury, and a statement that participation is voluntary).
- Signed copies of the consent form should be provided to all participants.
- This form was adapted with permission from Cornell University's Research & Innovation Office (https://researchservices.cornell.edu/forms/irb-consent-form-templates).

Last Updated 06/30/2023

Today's date:		
Project Information		
Project Title: Exploring Local Elected Officials' Capacity to Govern		
Protocol Number: 23-0227		
Principal Investigator: Mario King	Phone: 469-659-9503	Email: mario.king@usm.edu
College: Business and Economics	School and Program: School of Leadership	

I am asking you to participate in a research study titled *Exploring Local Elected Officials Capacity to Govern. I* will describe this study to you and answer any of your questions. This study is being led by *Mario King, from School of Leadership at The University of Southern Mississippi.* The Faculty Advisor for this study is *Dr. H. Q. Brown, School of Leadership at The University of Southern Mississippi.* This study has been approved by USM's Institutional Review Board *(IRB protocol #23-0227).*

1. Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to explore local elected officials' capacity to govern and identify some key internal factors that influence municipal performance.

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2. Description of Study:

This study is an exploration of your lived experiences as a local elected official in Mississippi. I am requesting your participation in a recorded virtual interview that will last approximately one hour. You will be provided a transcript to verify the accuracy post the interview. The goal of your interview is for me to document your experiences.

3. Benefits:

This study will educate readers on the internal variables affecting local government performance. This study also offers some immediate advantages to you, such as self-reflection that enables you to discover more about yourself and create changes in your community that might lead to the provision of additional services and goods to your constituency. Your knowledge-sharing efforts may have a substantial impact on people's lives, address pressing societal issues, or point the way toward future change.

I hope to learn more about local elected officials and how their work changes society.

4. Incentives for Participation:

There are no incentives.

5. Risks and Discomforts:

There are no known or expected risks associated with your participation in the study.

6. Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security:

Your identity and responses will be confidential. You will receive a unique identifier of numbers and letters for the duration of the study post your this informed consent is signed. The research team and I will be the only individuals with access to the raw data.

- You will be identified with a unique identifier.
- You will receive a copy of your transcript to review for accuracy after your interview.
- The signed informed consent will be kept separate from the rest of the research. It will be in a separate folder electronically and on a separate thumb drive physically in the researcher's home office.
- All data will be accessed through a password-protected fold on the researcher's computer.
- Only the researcher will have access to the data. The research team can request access and be provided access upon request.
- We will use audio and video recording to ensure the accuracy of our transcripts to properly code data, as our interview is the main source of the data.
- All data will be destroyed after three years of the study's publication date. The data and research will be stored on an external hard drive and kept at the participant's home office for those three years.

We will do our best to keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent permitted by law; however, it is possible that other people may need to review the research

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records and may find out about your participation in this study. For example, the following people/groups may check and copy records about this research:

- The Office for Human Research Protections in the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services
- The University of Southern Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) and the Office for Research Integrity

Please note that email communication is neither private nor secure. Though Mario King is taking precautions to protect your privacy, you should be aware that information sent through e-mail could be read by a third party.

Your confidentiality will be kept to the degree permitted by the technology being used. We cannot guarantee against interception of data sent via the internet by third parties.

Please type your name and date below if you are willing to have this interview *that will be audio and video* recorded for research purposes.

(Type Name as signature)Signed: _____

Date: _____

De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance science and health. We will remove or code any personal information that could identify you before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you from the information we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee the anonymity of your personal data.

7. Alternative Procedures:
No alternative procedures are available. If you decide to withdraw or end participation after we begin, you may do so without penalty, consequence, or without providing a reason.

8. Taking part is voluntary:
Your involvement is voluntary; you may refuse to participate before the study begins, discontinue at any time, or skip any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable, with no penalty and no effect on you.

9. Participant's Assurance:

The main researcher conducting this study is *Mario King*, a *Dr. H. Q. Brown, School of Leadership* at The University of Southern Mississippi. Please ask any questions you have now. If

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you have questions later, you may contact *Mario King* at *mario.king@usm.edu* or at *469-659-9503*.

This project and this consent form have been approved by The University of Southern Mississippi's Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 601-266-5997 or:

Chair of the Institutional Review Board
The University of Southern Mississippi
118 College Dr. #5116
Hattiesburg, MS 39406

Once you email me this form, you may keep a copy for your record.

Statement of Consent
I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature_____ Date_____

Your Name (printed)_____

Signature of person obtaining consent_____ Date_____
Type or sign your name electronically
Printed name of person obtaining consent_____
Type name here

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APPENDIX F – Invitation Email

Invitation Email for Local Elected Officials My name is Mario King, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Southern Mississippi. I request your participation in a critical research study titled "Exploring Local Elected Officials' Capacity to Govern." As a respected local elected official, your insights and experiences are valuable in contributing to this study's success. The primary objective of our research is to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities local elected officials face in effectively governing their communities. By gathering information directly from those who serve on the front lines of local governance, we aim to gain a critical understanding of municipalities' decision-making processes and performance.

Your participation in this study would involve a recorded interview conducted via a video conferencing platform at a time convenient for you. The interview will be structured and should not take more than 60 minutes. All information shared during the interview will be kept confidential and anonymized to ensure your privacy and protect your identity. To confirm your participation time, please select a date and time below and read the attached informed consent, type in your name on the last page, and email it back to me.

Thank you for considering our request to participate. I believe that your involvement will make a significant difference in the success of our research and, ultimately, contribute to the betterment of local governance practices. Please call or email me if you have any additional questions regarding the study.

This study was approved by the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board. IRB#: 23-0227

Mario King
C: 469-659-9503
EMAIL: mario.king@usm.edu
Doctoral Candidate University of Southern Mississippi

APPENDIX G – Second Invitation Email

2nd Invitation Email for Local Elected Officials

My name is Mario King, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am following up on my previous invitation to participate in our research study, "Exploring Local Elected Officials' Capacity to Govern." As the deadline for data collection approaches, we are eager to include your valuable insights in our research.

As a respected local elected official, your insights and experiences are valuable in contributing to this study's success. The primary objective of our research is to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities local elected officials face in effectively governing their communities. By gathering information directly from those who serve on the front lines of local governance, we aim to gain a critical understanding of municipalities' decision-making processes and performance.

Your participation in this study would involve a recorded interview conducted via a video conferencing platform at a time convenient for you. The interview will be structured and should not take more than 60 minutes. All information shared during the interview will be kept confidential and anonymized to ensure your privacy and protect your identity. To confirm your participation time, please select a date and time below, read the attached informed consent, type in your name on the last page, and email it back to me.

Thank you for considering our request to participate. I believe that your involvement will make a significant difference in the success of our research and, ultimately, contribute to the betterment of local governance practices. Please call or email me with any additional questions regarding the study.

This study was approved by the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board. IRB#: 23-0227

Mario King
C: 469-659-9503
EMAIL: mario.king@usm.edu
Doctoral Candidate University of Southern Mississippi

APPENDIX H – Reminder Phone Call

Interview Reminder Call

Hello (Participant's Name), it is Mario King; I am calling to remind you about your interview, so I will not hold you long.

I am looking forward to our interview this week. Thank you again for agreeing to participate in the study "Exploring Local Elected Officials' Capacity to Govern." Here are the details:
• Interview date:
• Interview time
• You don't need anything but your knowledge
• Remember to have your computer or cellular device charged to last up to 60 minutes

This study was approved by the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board. IRB#: 23-0227
Mario King
C: 469-659-9503
EMAIL: mario.king@usm.edu
Doctoral Candidate University of Southern Mississippi

RO2 Explore internal factors influencing municipal performance as perceived by local elected officials.								
	Participants					City Clerks		
	12023	22023	32023	42023	52023	012023	022023	032023	042023
Emerging Themes									
Formal Education		X	X	X		X	X	X	
Continuing Education		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Government-specific experience		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Financial expertise			X				X	X	
Respect for others	X		X	X	X		X	X	X
Leading by example	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Trustworthiness	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Attenuative listening		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Accounting proficiency		X	X			X	X	X	X
Faith, integrity	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Budget acumen			X			X	X	X	X
Interpersonal skills	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Work ethic			X			X	X	X	X
Clarity on roles		X	X			X	X	X	X
Comprehension of State Policies	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Awareness of limitations						X	X	X	X

RO3 Explore the expectations regarding the capacity required to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the elected position as perceived by local elected officials.	
Participants	City Clerks

	12023	22023	32023	42023	52023	012023	022023	032023	042023
Emerging Themes									
Formal Education	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
Continuing Education	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Government-experience			X		X	X	X	X	X
Financial expertise	X		X				X	X	
Attenuative listening	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Accounting proficiency		X	X			X	X	X	X
Budget acumen			X			X	X	X	X
Interpersonal skills	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Familiarity with local policies		X	X			X	X	X	X
Comprehension of State Policies	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Awareness of limitations						X	X	X	X
Consensus Building	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mission vision, objectives	X					X	X	X	

RO4 Explore strategies municipalities implement to strengthen the capacity of the local elected officials as perceived by local elected officials.									
	Participants						City Clerks		
	12023	22023	32023	42023	52023	012023	022023	032023	042023
Emerging Themes									
MML	X		X		X			X	X
MS STATE STENNIS			X		X			X	X

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Staff Assistance	X						X	X	
Municipal Orientation							X	X	
State Laws and Policies				X		X	X	X	X
AGO			X			X	X	X	

29
00:03:20.840 --> 00:03:23.119
what is municipal performance?

30
00:03:23.170 --> 00:03:35.770
Mario King: And just to prompt the objective of performance is to measure, performance measurement as a municipal government is to provide a procedure for figuring out how program carries out its mission through providing business services or processes.

31
00:03:37.030 --> 00:03:39.470
Mario King: So what is municipal performance.

32
00:03:39.520 --> 00:03:42.180
LEO52023: I guess, just in my own words. Yes.

33
00:03:42.800 --> 00:03:53.169
LEO52023: municipal or performance would be the ability of the municipality to perform its duties. You know, in

34
00:03:53.370 --> 00:04:02.229
LEO52023: of of every department, whatever that department may have, whether it be trash collection. You know public works

35
00:04:02.420 --> 00:04:13.670
LEO52023: police fire. You know, I would just think, is this their their general ability to perform the task at hand? Would be kind of my short answer

36
00:04:14.450 --> 00:04:15.630
Mario King: that's good.

37
00:04:16.000 --> 00:04:27.459
LEO52023: And just to remind you, there's no wrong or right answer is just. These are just simple questions. I got, what are were the duties of your elected position.

38
00:04:28.260 --> 00:04:37.929

APPENDIX K – Member Checking

Participant's Name, I am contacting you as a part of the member-checking process for our ongoing research study, "Exploring Local Elected Officials' Capacity to Govern." Your involvement in this study has been immensely valuable, and we are committed to ensuring the accuracy and validity of our findings through member checking.

I extend our gratitude for your active participation and valuable insights during the interview. Your firsthand experiences and perspectives have been crucial in shaping our understanding of the challenges and opportunities local elected officials face in effectively governing our community.

In the attached document, you will find the transcript of our interview in a PDF format. We kindly request that you take some time to review the content thoroughly. We would greatly appreciate your feedback if you encountered any discrepancies or have additional insights to share. I will then correct and make the changes and send them back for your final review. You will have 48 hours to correct, or the transcript will be presented and coded as is.

This study was approved by the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board. IRB#: 23-0227

Mario King
C: 469-659-9503
EMAIL: mario.king@usm.edu
Doctoral Candidate University of Southern Mississippi

APPENDIX L – Thank You Email

Participant's Name,

I extend my sincerest gratitude for your invaluable participation in my study, "Exploring Local Elected Officials' Capacity to Govern." Your willingness to share your insights and experiences has been instrumental in enriching our research. Your commitment to public service is commendable. Thank you once again for your time and dedication to this critical endeavor.

This study was approved by the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board. IRB#: 23-0227

Mario King
C: 469-659-9503
EMAIL: mario.king@usm.edu
Doctoral Candidate University of Southern Mississippi

APPENDIX M – City Clerk Invite

My name is Mario King, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Southern Mississippi. I request your participation in a critical research study titled "Exploring Local Elected Officials' Capacity to Govern." As a respected City Clerk, your insights and experiences are valuable in contributing to this study's success. The primary objective of our research is to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities local elected officials face in effectively governing their communities. By gathering information directly from those who serve on the front lines of local governance, we aim to gain a critical understanding of municipalities' decision-making processes and performance.

Your participation in this study would involve a recorded interview conducted via a video conferencing platform at a time convenient for you. The interview will be structured and should not take more than 60 minutes. All information shared during the interview will be kept confidential and anonymized to ensure your privacy and protect your identity. To confirm your participation time, please select a date and time below, read the attached informed consent, type in your name on the last page, and email it back to me.

Thank you for considering our request to participate. I believe that your involvement will make a significant difference in the success of our research and, ultimately, contribute to the betterment of local governance practices. Please call or email me if you have any additional questions regarding the study.
This study was approved by the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board. IRB#: 23-0227

Mario King
C: 469-659-9503
EMAIL: mario.king@usm.edu
Doctoral Candidate University of Southern Mississippi

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