Interlocal Agreements as Overlapping Social Networks: Picket-fence regionalism in Metropolitan Kansas City

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Prepared for the 6th National Public Management Research Conference
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN
October 18-20, 2001
“The metro area has problems; the people have cities.”

~Frederickson’s Sage (1999, p. 25)~

Introduction
This is a story about multiple, overlapping social networks in the Kansas City Metropolitan Area (KCMA). It is the story of a picket fence of epistemic communities that is found throughout the KCMA, and in which the pickets tend to span vertically across cities, counties, school districts, and special districts, but seldom to the state or national government. It is the story of a newly relevant governance model that is actually a long-established mode of public administration: interlocal agreements (ILAs).

At this conference in 1999, Agranoff and McGuire (1999) presented a list of important research questions related to public network management research. They noted that few scholars conduct “empirical research with the expectation that it will lead to additional research, and too few provide empirical researchers with questions to consider and hypotheses to test. We accepted this challenge with respect to one of the oldest forms of public networks, ILAs in metropolitan areas. There is a paucity of empirical social network analyses specifically related to ILAs among local governments, although there are a few related studies (Agranoff and McGuire 1998, 1999b, Bardach and Lesser 1996, Landau 1991, Chisolm 1989, Kearns 1989, Knoke 1982, Tees and Stanford 1972, Wilkes 1975).

Interlocal agreements (ILAs) are long-established service delivery instruments for local governments. Although ILAs are an established feature of local government operations, there is surprisingly little empirical research on ILAs among local governments. Two rather old sources point to the longstanding importance of ILAs to American local governments. Tees and Stanford (1972) surveyed local governments in Texas following passage of state legislation that provided blanket authority for interlocal agreements on any activity that the local government was already authorized to conduct on its own. They found examples of agreements representing almost every area of local government responsibility. They found 53 percent of responding cities and 68 percent of responding counties involved in at least one ILA (1972, 1). In their view, “the most significant finding” was that nearly every public service provided independently by a Texas local government was also “provided jointly by two or more local governments on mutually beneficial terms somewhere in the state” (1972, 1-2). Five years later, Wilkes (1975) conducted a follow-up survey and affirmed that “where interlocal agreements are in use, the results have been richly rewarding according to reports by city and county officials who cooperate formally with neighboring jurisdictions”
These reports were framed as parts of local government handbooks to promote ILAs in Texas, and provided little analysis of ILA characteristics beyond type and numbers of participants. In fact, Wilkes complained that once an agreement is used, “there is little systematic follow-up study” to determine if satisfactory results have been achieved (1975, 8).

ILAs may deserve renewed attention for several reasons. First, modern governance is challenging traditional modes of public service delivery. Public policies addressing complex issues increasingly require transjurisdictional solutions. The borders and the sovereignty of jurisdictions are declining in importance, and “there is a corresponding decline in the capacity of jurisdictions” to manage some public policy issues (Frederickson 1999, 7). “Preferences for limited, liberal government in the context of widespread support for action,” O’Toole notes, “encourage complex, networked mechanisms for service delivery and management—extending the reach of government programs while loosening the immediate managerial grasp” (1997, 46). Cooperative, multiorganizational networks such as ILAs have become a common mechanism for delivering a variety of public services, yet we lack acceptable methodologies to evaluate their effectiveness (Provan and Milward 2001, O’Toole 1997). ILAs should be an important element of our growing concern about measuring public service delivery mechanisms.

Conventional wisdom suggests that the rationale for ILAs is most frequently cost savings for a local government that does not wish to provide the service itself. A related rationale for ILAs may be lowered transactions costs for a local government, perhaps in the belief that there is less monitoring necessary for an ILA than for a contract with a private sector provider. This requires a certain level of trust between the two (or more) governments in the ILA, and trust may be easier to find among local governments than between the public and private sectors. In such cases, trust may substitute for monitoring transactions, thereby lowering the costs of the ILA for the government receiving the service from the local government provider.

Is economizing really the most common reason for participating in an ILA? For example, are ILAs viewed as substitutes for contracting to the private sector or other forms of privatization? If so, is trust an important substitute for transaction monitoring? Then how is trust established and how does it endure? What are other rationales for ILAs and how common are they relative to economizing? What values underlie these other rationales?

ILAs are best understood as manifestations of social networks. Social networks are studied in a variety of ways, and the extensive literature analyzes many facets of social networks in the US and in international contexts.
Pertinent questions include the commonality (or commonalities) shared by the network organizations, the shared values or interests that serves as the “glue” holding the ILA organizations together, and the power relationships within the networks. Discussions about ILAs should be viewed as a subset of what is becoming the body of public management network scholarship. There is a large and growing literature on public management networks (including Agranoff and McGuire 1999, Jennings and Ewalt 1998, O’Toole 1997, Chisolm 1989, Mandell 1999). There is also a related social network literature debated largely among sociologists and social psychologists (Degenne and Forse 1999, Valente 1995, Knoke 1982, Granovetter 1982, Cook 1982, Lin 1982, Galaskiewicz 1979, Emerson 1972, to name but a few). While there are the beginnings of some crossover research (Agranoff and McGuire 1999b, Provan and Milward 2001, O’Toole 1997), there does not seem to be much overlap between the two groups of scholars. In part, they are concerned about different issues. But as Agranoff and McGuire delve into deeper questions about public networks, it may be valuable to revisit the network literature as it has developed elsewhere to help explain important issues.

This paper explores ILAs as social network phenomena, identifying rationales and underlying values for various ILAs, central and peripheral actors, brokering roles, and the relative powers of actors in network exchange relationships. Our treatment relies more heavily on social network theory as articulated in the sociology literature than on more recent public network literature. The primary reason for this tactic is our desire to return to the roots of network theory to try to understand the dynamics of the ILAs that we have studied. As Agranoff and McGuire note (1999a, 1), we need to find new models to explain organizational networks, and perhaps a look outside the field of public administration may be helpful. As O’Toole (1997, 48) suggests, sociologists have developed rich conceptualizations that need to be applied to public administration issues.

After describing the essential elements of social network theory, the paper reports the results from an exploratory field study of ILAs among local governments in the Kansas City Metropolitan Area (KCMA). We describe the field study methodology, and then analyze several important KCMA interlocal agreements in the framework of social network theory. We find that the economizing value is not always the rationale for ILA participation, and that the complexity of ILAs in the KCMA reveals a multitude of overlapping networks that often—but not always—percolate ILAs from informal ideas into formal, written agreements affirmed and accepted by city and county commissions. The study suggests that ILAs are a rich research area that requires much more study to gain an understanding of local government service delivery in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.
Explaining ILAs as social networks

Social Network Analysis

Our social network analysis of ILAs begins with some important concepts that underlie network structures. First, we view local governments as self-interested organizations pursuing goals of service delivery to their citizens. The goals reflect both efficiency and effectiveness concerns; that is, the goal is to provide effective services at the least cost to taxpayers. Inherent in providing services is allocating organizational resources. Actors allocate resources based on criteria, and criteria are based on information from the surrounding environment. Local government organizations are open systems with respect to their economic and political environments. They can be buffeted by poor economic conditions that lower tax revenues and threaten service delivery, and they can be shocked by changing political winds that alter the composition of elected officials and potentially alter the mix of services and revenues that comprise the local service delivery bundle to citizens.

Consequently, as do other organizations, local governments try to control and dominate their environments to reduce uncertainty. Controlling as many factors as possible reduces potential variation in conditions and improves the predictability of revenues and service delivery effectiveness. Stable goals from strategic planning, for example, provide multi-year direction to department directors and employees so that they can plan steps to implement service requirements. Controlling service production factors also frees decisionmakers to focus attention on changing environmental conditions, enhancing their ability to adapt to changing service delivery conditions.

An important strategy for reducing environmental uncertainty is gathering and sharing information with other organizations (Galaskiewicz 1979, 20-1). These transactions create interdependency among the organizations in the environment. They also require a degree of trust that the shared information is reliable and credible. When an organization is able to rely on other organizations for credible information about the environment, it can reduce its information search costs and devote scarce resources to more effective service delivery.

A local government can be involved in many dyadic relationships between it and other local governments. Each of the other local governments, in turn, can be involved in dyadic relationships with other local governments. Together, the set of dyadic relations forms a macrolevel social structure that comprises a set of actors in a social network. It is important to note here, as we will later, that the creation of these macrolevel social structures themselves can alter the environment in which the organizations function. For example, over time, the series of
network exchanges can foster a “tradition of cooperation” (Wilkes 1975, p 7) that induces further forms of cooperation. Still, we assume (for now) that network actors operate first in their own self-interest, responding to incentives that affect those interests directly and indirectly. Networks are sufficiently complex that their impact on jurisdictional or network performance is “somewhat unpredictable for all involved” (O’Toole 1997, 47).

These important features suggest that the context for ILA analysis is thinking about the underlying social networks as exchange networks. Many forms of social structure can be represented as networks of connected exchange relations; and actors can be identified as individuals or organizations. For the moment, the argument here focuses on jurisdictions as organizational actors, but it is not easy to separate individuals from their organizations when one analyzes the dynamics of ILAs. An exchange network is simply a set of two or more connected exchange relations, and exchange networks represent the structure of resource dependencies across various positions in a social network. Exchange categories are sets of actors that occupy the same exchange domain, and an important feature is that the actors are “substitutable” because they have the same resources to offer in exchanges. Actors can be alternative sources of the same resource, and access to alternative sources is an important determinant of power in an exchange network (Cook 1981, 177-183).

Exchange relations can be positively or negatively connected (Emerson 1972). Exchange relations are connected if exchange in one relation is contingent on exchange or nonexchange in the other relation. In such a case, “the magnitude or frequency of transactions in one relation is affected by the magnitude or frequency of transactions in another relation” (Cook 1981, 180). In positive connections, the exchange in one relation increases the likelihood of exchange in the other relation, whereas in negative connections, the exchange in one relation decreases the likelihood of exchange in the other relation (Cook, Molm, and Yamagishi 1993). Exchange theory is concerned (in part) with the strength of the contingencies affecting the actual flow of resources within the network. That is, the exchange in one dyadic must be contingent on the exchange in another dyadic to constitute an exchange network (Cook 1981, 181).1

Social network theory identifies central and peripheral actors based on the frequency and types of dyadic interactions. The network relationships are measured in several ways, including centrality and structural equivalence (Degenne and Forse 1999, 132-58). Central actors are identified as those who have interactions with

1 There are now several accessible sources for a background on exchange theory, resource dependency theory, and social network theory, including Degenne and Forse 1999; Cook, Molm and Yamagishi 1993 (especially Figure 1, page 298 for a timeline of theoretical developments); and Cook and Whitmeyer 1992.
the most actors in the network, or those actors who are physically located in the center of the network space. Two actors are considered to be structurally equivalent if they have identical relations with all positions in the network. Peripheral actors are those who are physically located at the perimeter of the network space, or those who have less frequent (or infrequent) interaction with other network actors. Network actors are inclined to enter into exchange relationships with other network actors when there is a benefit that meets or exceeds the cost of the exchange.

Social network theory identifies three types of power in a social structure: [1] different levels of control over valuable resources, [2] different proximity to actors who have control over valuable resources, [3] different levels of influence over other actors (Burt 1977). Network power and network position are related in complex ways. Centrally located actors tend to enjoy a position of privilege relative to peripheral actors because power is expected to concentrate in network hubs, or central positions (Degenne and Forse 1999, 132). Actors in central positions assume leadership roles because they have a “special interest” in resolving conflicts in order to maintain their own power in the community. And they control a special resource for conflict resolution—“the potential to draw other actors into a problem-solving coalition” (Galaskiewicz 1979, 30). However, centrality and power are not necessarily synonymous, and the issue requires more research.

As social networks develop, a broker role may emerge in which centrally located actors work on behalf of collective interests (Marsden 1981). Brokers are able to gain power in networks because they offer a unique resource to other actors: the ability to connect with many more actors in the network. The brokerage role assumed by intermediary actors facilitates transactions between other actors lacking access to, or trust in, one another. While it may be possible for an actor to connect with other actors in multiple dyadic relationships, the transaction costs are lower for the actor to use the broker as an intermediary, and the greater efficiency allows the broker to extract some “payment” from each actor (Marsden 1981, 206). Marsden argues that factors such as ideological similarity, limited trust, commitment to particular exchange relations and social homogeneity influences actors to exchange with only a limited set of actors in the social system. Each of these subsets (of transaction routes) constitutes an access network. This leads to some important features of exchange networks. Some access networks are larger than others, and the size of the access network affects the number of alternative sources of resources—and thus relative power—of the actors. This allows some actors to assume the brokerage role, engaging in purposive actions that facilitate exchanges between other actors who lack direct access (Marsden 1981, 204-6). This brokering behavior need not be
exploitive, especially with respect to positively connected networks, as in mutual aid pacts among local governments.

Brokers have a keen interest in providing effective intermediary services. If they are ineffective, the peripheral actors can reroute their interactions, potentially to another intermediary. The consequence for the broker is lost resource payments from previous network “customers.” The value-added service of the broker must therefore be greater than the cost to the peripheral actors of using the broker. However, there may not be a broker role in every network, and brokers are not necessarily centrally located actors.

Peripheral actors are still important to social networks, however. Although they tend to have weak links to core network actors, they are also most likely to serve the network as a bridging link to other networks, and are referred to as “weak ties” in the literature (Granovetter 1982, 1973). In a sense, the actors who function as weak ties may belong to multiple networks, depending upon how one draws the networks’ boundaries. Peripheral actors are also more likely to adopt “risky” innovative practices more quickly than central network actors (Valente 1995, 37). In this way, peripheral actors who function as weak ties may embolden the network to respond more radically to environmental changes affecting the network actors.

We believe the concepts of social network theory are promising instruments for understanding the creation and maintenance of interlocal agreements. We argue below, that ILAs tend to have central actors, peripheral actors, and brokers. The incentives for ILA participation are rooted in the self-interest of local governments, although this is not exclusively based on lower transaction costs. The underlying self-interest in ILA participation is, in fact, one of the curious issues that requires more study.

**Previous Research on ILAs**

Research on intergovernmental agreements suggests that such activity is extensive (Agranoff, 1989). One study of cities with fewer than 25,000 inhabitants revealed that 58% received services from other units, but most agreements involved only a single service or function. Henderson’s (1984) survey of cities and counties revealed that a majority of cities and counties had entered into intergovernmental service contracts or joint service agreements. A survey done by the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (1985) discovered that 52% of responding municipalities have either written or unwritten contracts with other units of government to provide certain local services.
The Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations study (1985) revealed that economies of scale were the most mentioned reason why governments enter into inter-local contracts. Sonenblum, Kirlin, and Ries (1977) reported that California officials tend to enter into inter-local contracts for scale economies when large capital start-up costs were involved or when back-up services were needed.

Morgan and Hirlinger (1991) tested a model on intergovernmental service contracting for 615 U.S. cities of 25,000 and over population in five service areas—public works, public safety, health and human services, parks and recreation, and support services. They found that the presence of a city manager facilitates greater intergovernmental contracting, although restrictive state laws limit such arrangements. Jurisdictions located in metropolitan areas were more likely to engage in more intergovernmental agreements. The authors speculate that economies of scale or standardization of services are the primary motivation for such contracts. Furthermore, Morgan and Hirlinger found that fiscal stress is not major reason for contracting with other jurisdictions. They found that both wealthy and poor jurisdictions find intergovernmental contracts appealing. Above all, when local officials fear loss of service control, less intergovernmental contracting occurs in all five functional service areas.

Bartle and Swayze (1997) studied thirteen Nebraska cities involved in different inter-local agreements. They concluded that inter-local agreements are more likely to occur in more populous jurisdictions and when there is leadership (particularly administrative), communication and professional networks in place. They found that cities in Nebraska enter into inter-local agreements to reduce costs and enhance the quality of service. Many respondents also mentioned fiscal pressure as a reason to cooperate with other jurisdictions. Political considerations were absent from the reasons for entering into inter-local agreements.

In other research related to patterns of intergovernmental relations, Frederickson (1999) stated that as a result of the disarticulated state, public administration is moving toward theories of cooperation and networking. Consistent with the theory of administrative conjunction, professional staff are more likely to be connected and engaged with their counterparts in other jurisdictions than are elected officials. Administrative conjunction is specifically designed to address the issues associated with high jurisdictional fragmentation. The cooperative arrangements derived from administrative conjunction result from a shared understanding of interdependence and need to reduce uncertainty.

Tees and Stanford (1972, 4) argue that ILAs benefit participants when

A. Enlarged scales of operations yield reduced unit costs, increasing operational efficiency.
B. Specialized services are made available to smaller municipalities, and larger municipalities can lower unit costs, increasing operational efficiency.

C. Duplications of service are reduced over a large service area.

D. Mutual aid pacts provide relatively inexpensive insurance relative to purchasing more equipment and staff to meet relatively uncommon but major events or crises.

E. Municipalities can enjoy these efficiencies while retaining the ability to preserve local self-determination (as an alternative to political consolidation).

We note that A through C above are direct economizing incentives for an ILA. Large and small governments stand to reduce unit service costs by ILA participation. Indeed, Wilkes (1975) found that lower operating costs was the most frequent reason given by TX local governments for ILA participation. Smaller cities, however, also frequently cited “meeting urgent problems” and avoiding “high capital costs” as “substantial inducements” for their ILA activities.

In addition, many of the municipalities in the Wilkes survey cited a “tradition of cooperation within their area” as an influential factor in their ILA participation (1975, 7). Many of the interlocal agreements in the Wilkes survey and in the Tees and Stanford survey were longstanding. In fact, network theory suggests that the longterm nature of the ILA relationships leads to “norms of reciprocity” that can be a stronger incentive for ILA participation than purely self-interested economizing. Mutual aid pacts (D) are only indirectly economizing measures. The marginal cost of providing additional units of protection against future and necessarily uncertain crisis events is rather high. Beyond a reasonable level of organizational slack or redundancy, how many reserve fire truck units should a city have—and how many can it afford—to fight the potential fire that would consume the central business district? How many emergency management staff should a city have in reserve to anticipate a devastating tornado or hurricane? What is the cost of the reserve capacity?

Landau (1991) and Chisolm (1989) suggest that social networks bound by norms of reciprocity provide regional slack to manage unknown, but not improbable, crisis events. Landau argues that networks are able to manage these events without recourse to centralized power structures or hierarchical administration. Mutual aid pacts, in effect, provide regional organizational slack that is taxed as regional events require. Thus, a massive fire in the warehouse district of Kansas City, Missouri was managed with the assistance of fire units from almost every surrounding jurisdiction—at no cost to Kansas City. When a small riot broke out at a local bar district in a Kansas
suburb, police responded from multiple jurisdictions directly to the riot and also to provide regular patrolling backup to the city police force while they managed the riot problem.

Another important factor in ILA activities is the broker role identified in network theory. As we shall see, the broker role may be best measured by centrality to network activity, not necessarily by actor size or political dominance. Consequently, counties may not always play the broker role, nor may the largest city in the metropolitan area. At first glance, the local Council of Governments (COG) or regional planning authority may appear as the network broker, but this too may be deceiving. The COG or planning organization may not be a member of every network in the metropolitan area. In addition, there may not be a broker role in every local network.

**Methodology: exploratory study**

The Kansas City metropolitan area provides a unique laboratory for the study of ILAs. With a growing population already exceeding 1.6 million people, the KCMA straddles two states, Kansas and Missouri, and includes more than 150 different units of local governments: 114 cities, 8 counties, over 30 school districts, and numerous special districts. A comprehensive study of metropolitan ILAs would need to survey a larger representative sample of these local governments, but that was not possible given our limited resources (both time and money).

We chose counties and cities for our exploratory field study that intuitively provided local governments with contrasting histories and demographic qualities to enhance variation in the sample. The sample was divided across the state line, with one county and two cities from each state. Jackson County, Missouri encompasses (but not exclusively) the cities of Kansas City and Independence, Missouri. Kansas City, Missouri actually spills across four counties, but about half is located in Jackson County. Johnson County, Kansas is a suburban county in the southwest section of the metropolitan area and is one of the fastest growing counties in the US. It includes the cities of Olathe (the county seat) and Overland Park. Olathe is a full-service city with a long history as a city independent of Kansas City, Missouri. Overland Park is a relatively new, suburban city (incorporated in 1960) that has grown rapidly in the last several decades. All of the cities and Johnson County have appointed professional chief administrative officers (CAOs). Jackson County has an elected CAO who also serves as the chief elected officer (CEO), the equivalent of a “strong mayor.” The Jackson County CEO/CAO, in turn, appoints three managers as assistants. A complete list of the six local governments and their populations is provided in Appendix A.
The initial research design required us to interview the chief administrative officer (CAO) and the chief financial officer (CFO) of each jurisdiction. In several localities, we also took the opportunities that were offered to interview key assistants who the CAO or CFO designated as key ILA actors for their jurisdiction. In addition, we also interviewed the executive director and a manager for government innovation at the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC), the regional planning organization for the Kansas City metropolitan area. A complete list of the interview subjects is also provided in Appendix A.

The interviews followed a combination of predetermined and extemporaneous open-ended questions. As such, the interviews resembled conversations that probed the answers generated by specific questions about ILAs and interpersonal relationships among metropolitan government actors. The interview objectives included:

- Mapping the interpersonal relationships of these key actors within and beyond the KCMA,
- Probing the nature of the ILAs in which the actor participated,
- Probing the nature of the ILAs in which the actor’s local government participated, and
- Probing the reasons why an actor might be a central or peripheral actor with respect to a given ILA.

Each interview lasted about 45-60 minutes and was taken in the official’s office. The interviews occurred over several weeks as schedules allowed. Although we tried to interview all of the key actors for a specific government on the same day, that was not always possible. Consequently, some discussion of the study among actors within a city or county might have occurred between interview dates, but that should not affect the results of this exploratory field study.

**Results**

The exploratory field study revealed several important and challenging facets of interlocal agreements in the Kansas City metropolitan area. First, there is an astounding level of ILA activity in the KCMA. Second, that there are multiple and overlapping social networks of actors in the metropolitan area, and that the overlapping character of the networks is linked both horizontally across organizations and vertically within certain cities and counties to create picket-fence regionalism for the management of certain government services. Third, that the regional planning organization is the leading broker role in the KCMA. Fourth, that the volume of interlocal agreements in KCMA can only partly be explained by direct economizing in exchange networks. In large part,

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2 A copy of the interview questionnaire is provided in Appendix B.
interlocal agreements are the products of positively connected exchange relationships facilitated by norms of reciprocity and a brokering role that successfully augments local resources into regional synergy that provides the regional slack necessary for the provision of effective government services in a metropolitan area. We next discuss each of these points in turn, then discuss the implications for understanding ILAs and intergovernmental relations in metropolitan areas.

Multiple ILAs permeate local government management in Kansas City Metro area.

Although both authors are very familiar with local government activities, we were surprised at the copious level of ILA activities in the KCMA. The important caveat is that the actual level of activity is a perception based on two factors. First, none of the CAOs and CFOs had an idea of how many ILAs included their city or county. They knew there were “a lot.” Yet there was no single repository of ILAs for any of the jurisdictions. The city or county clerk’s office was identified as the place where one could find all the formal ILAs that required commission approval. In theory, this would include all ILAs in the Missouri jurisdictions that involved an “exchange of value.” Under Missouri law, any contract involving a jurisdiction that required payment by taxpayers required a formal, written agreement approved by a vote of the local legislative body. Yet none of the Missouri officials we interviewed expected that all ILAs involving those jurisdictions were to be found as formal agreements. After informing the authors of this Missouri law, one CAO proceeded to cite an example of another ILA that required some expense but that was handled informally between the jurisdiction and another jurisdiction. He could not explain why it did not require an official agreement and vote, and it was unlikely that the example given would have required a formal agreement on the Kansas side of the line either. The number and variety of ILAs identified only by the few actors we interviewed are too numerous to mention here, but the scope and variety suggest ILAs pertaining to almost any public service (Wood and Thurmaier 2001).

In fact, the KCMA is an exciting laboratory for ILA research in part because the metropolitan area is divided almost equally on both sides of the Kansas-Missouri border. The actual border for much of the metropolitan area runs down the center of “State Line Road.” This street, itself, is the object of multiple interlocal agreements, including snow removal, regular maintenance, and rights of way (ROW) issues. These involve communities in both states, and multiple communities along the Kansas side of the street. There are numerous examples of road construction projects and maintenance of roads, where costs and resources are shared. For example, Olathe,
Overland park, and Lenexa share the plowing of roads that are contiguous; Olathe and Overland Park shared the widening of Plum Road; Overland Park put in lights in Pflum road but Olathe pays a portion of the electrical costs.

**Multiple networks of actors in the metro area.**

One of the important explanations for the lack of a central repository of ILAs in a jurisdiction is that each of the ILAs is a manifestation of a particular social network within the KCMA. These networks are structured around standard local government activities. Much as there are policy issue networks in the intergovernmental arena that structure “picket-fence federalism,” we find service oriented policy networks that produce interlocal agreements in the context of “picket-fence regionalism.”

The policy communities at the local level reflect the standard functions of local governments in the US: public safety, public works, public health, public budgeting and finance, information management, and so on. These are broad categories, and the policy communities in the KCMA tend to be more specialized than these broad functional areas would imply. In public safety, for example, we find police networks, fire networks, and emergency (ambulance) response networks. In public budgeting and finance, we find purchasing networks, tax administration networks, and financial management networks. Underlying each of the networks are regular (usually monthly) meetings of the principal actors from each jurisdiction in the KCMA to discuss issues and problems of common concern. There is a monthly meeting of the fire chiefs, of the police chiefs, and of the public works directors, for example.

MARC plays an instrumental role in gathering area CAOs each month to discuss issues. There are two important forums, and each meets in alternating months. One forum, the Kaufman Stadium lunch series, is a relatively informal luncheon followed by a program. The series audience also includes many of the assistant managers in the area cities and counties. In alternating months, MARC convenes the Manager’s Roundtable, a Friday morning meeting of managers that is largely, but not exclusively, attended by assistant managers. This series tends to focus on specific technical issues that the CAOs have agreed to cooperate toward a metropolitan-wide solution. More managers attend the stadium meetings, primarily to network; they often leave their assistants to attend the roundtable meetings, unless the specific subject is of particular interest or concern to them.

There is significant fluid participation in these meetings, and most of the managers did not distinguish between the two different series, often referring to the “monthly” MARC meetings, even if they only occasionally attend the roundtables. None of the managers reported religious attendance at the monthly meetings, although one
of the senior Missouri managers and one of the senior Kansas managers probably have the highest attendance at both meetings. Not coincidentally, they are viewed as mentors and central network actors by many of the managers in the area.

It is important to note that most of the department directors in these networks belong to multiple networks. For example, the Overland Park public works director belongs to the network of Johnson County public works directors, the Kansas highway priorities committee, the county storm water management advisory committee (SMAC), the county assisted road system (CARS) technical advisory committee, the bi-state traffic signal coordination program, “and numerous ad hoc groups including consultant selection committees for county funded storm water studies and county road construction.” In addition, he meets quarterly with the Kansas City, Missouri public works director! Similarly, the Johnson County manager belongs to the Northeast Kansas managers group, the MARC stadium luncheon network, and several other networks. Consequently, a thorough study of metropolitan networks would likely reveal a multitude of actors who bridge different social networks. Some will be weak ties to other networks, but some will be strong ties because we would anticipate that the centers of several social networks would likely overlap to a large degree. Boundary issues are complex but fascinating issues worth further study.

The individual networks of department directors may also be characterized as epistemic communities (Frederickson 1999, Haas 1964, Haas 1990). They are focused on the particular function of government for which they are responsible. The contribution of social network theory to our understanding of these epistemic communities is that they may be analyzed in terms of central and peripheral actors, power relationships, and the weak ties that connect them to other networks. Our discussions with KCMA officials leads us to a conception of these epistemic communities as networks of actors engaged largely in information exchange activities to reduce environmental uncertainty.

Yet they are also able to mobilize to action to respond to event opportunities that place decisions on the network decision agenda. Event opportunities are changes in the environment that alter the conditions under which the network actors, individually or collectively, are providing their service. Event opportunities can emerge on the network decision agenda when a longterm condition is reframed as a problem for which there are identifiable solutions, solutions that require a transjurisdictional agreement (Stone 1989). Routine network activities also can be disrupted when a crisis event reveals unforeseen problems in service delivery systems, problems that require a transjurisdictional solution. The latter case is not explicated in this essay, but the recent terrorist attack may be
impetus for public safety networks to re-evaluate current practices in light of the security failures identified by that tragedy.

Two case studies

Two examples of metropolitan ILA activities will illustrate some of the other important issues relating ILAs to social network theory. The first example is the quest to create a cooperative regional local government purchasing system. This is an example of an event opportunity in which a longterm condition is redefined as a problem-solution set in light of new technologies available in the local government purchasing and procurement environment. It also illustrates the important brokering role of MARC and the synergy available in a positively connected exchange network.

The story begins with Jackson County announcing to metropolitan managers that the county would be moving to an E-purchasing system and inviting area governments to investigate the possibilities of a collaborative venture. The county was particularly interested in collaboration with Kansas City, Missouri, as it is a large volume purchaser. Under the auspices of MARC, and specifically the government innovations manager, the managers roundtable group began a series of meetings to review options, investigate compatibility with existing accounting and procurement systems, and recommending a system for regional use. For example, MARC invited several E-purchasing vendors to make presentations to the managers and local procurement officials at one of the stadium luncheon meetings. While the county moved toward a system that would provide E-purchasing and replace the current county procurement accounting system, the other metropolitan governments opted for an alternative system that did not require a full interface with their financial accounting systems. At a recent meeting of the managers roundtable (September 2001), the meeting participants agreed to pursue management of the emerging local government E-purchasing system by the administration of the cooperative purchasing system used by area hospitals, itself a cooperative purchasing network. Meanwhile, an assistant county manager reiterated the invitation to area governments to join the county’s decision for the integrated system, without any takers. There was agreement all around, however, that all future contracts from area governments should include some sort of piggy-back clause to let neighbors take advantage of “good deals.”

The second illustration is an event opportunity in which a network externality coincides with the longterm condition of undesirable and harmful local construction practices and is reframed into a problem-solution set centered in Johnson County, Kansas. The building inspection officials from the communities in the county formed
the Johnson County Building Officials Association three years ago. They focused attention on what could be done to make construction easier for citizens and builders. The network externality was a radical change in the building code environment; three different codes were combined into one “international code” at the national level. This consolidation contrasted with 22 different building enforcement codes across the county’s municipalities. The county officials were also concerned about the longstanding problem of a few contractors who developed bad reputations in a specific city and then simply moved operations to another city in the county. Without a county level certification, there is little code enforcement officers can do to stop the general contractors from causing problems in other jurisdictions. Under Kansas law, general contractors are not required to have licensing. Kansas law only requires that the plumbers, electricians, and mechanical contractors need to be licensed; each municipality normally performs this function. General contractor licensing is a local government operation under home rule powers.

The code officers proposed a countywide licensing program as a solution to the problem. The goal of the program is to provide uniform certification and training of construction contractors who work on projects within the county. The county will train, test, and license contractors who wish to manage construction projects anywhere in the county. Each city will then demand evidence of, and honor, the contractor’s county license as part of the local permitting process. The Johnson County commission approved the ordinance at its September meeting, and authorized the county manager to develop a series of ILAs with participating local jurisdictions.

**Interlocal agreements and social network theory in practice**

These cases raise interesting questions about network boundaries, power relationships, the diffusion of management innovations, administrative conjunction, the motivations for interlocal agreements, and accountability issues for networks. These cases resemble the type of public management network problem that occupies much of the recent public administration literature and points to several relevant veins for further research. We hope to put such cases in a new analytical framework to explore ways we can better understand the dynamic character of public networks. We note one caveat, however; we are only able to lightly introduce social network theory concepts to issues of public management networks at this stage of our research. Our introductory work requires much more development in future research.

**Network Boundaries:** Network boundaries are not always clear. There were several clear examples where the boundaries of the network included the state line. Our initial investigation suggests that the primary reason for this boundary related to the legal structure governing Kansas versus Missouri municipalities. In several cases,
KCMA initiatives have bridged the state boundary only with the passage of enabling legislation in each state legislature. For example, the Bi-state Cultural District includes sales taxes and other issues to fund cultural activities in the metropolitan area.

Transactions theory says that net will emerge “when actors begin making transaction-specific investments of sufficient magnitude to commit themselves to relations” (Aldrich 1982, 287). The boundary is defined in rational rather than categorical terms. Such is the case here. The boundary of the root network is the set of metropolitan code officials, who meet regularly to discuss issues. The officials in Johnson County face perhaps the largest volume of contractor issues by virtue of the county being one of the fastest growing counties in the country, with an unceasing volume of construction. The county officials (that is, municipal and county) wanted to create a contractor-licensing program, but other officials in the region were not interested. The network boundary for this event opportunity then became the code officers within the county limits. Kearns (1989) found a similar “closed intracounty” boundary pattern in his study of municipality administrators, although the activity in his case study was adoption of computers by local governments in a regional area.

However, the network boundary was soon expanded to include many of the leading contractors to help craft the countywide program. “Networks eventually shape and transform the interests of actors, thus ultimately bringing about their own transformation. Networks affect interests because they give positions access to solutions that were not there before and also pose problems that were not recognized previously” (Aldrich 1982, 292). The leading contractors shared the mutual goal of policing bad contractors because their image suffered whenever bad contracting work was exposed in the press or in other venues. The transaction specific investments by network actors in this case were primarily time and energy to work collectively on a mutually agreeable program. It remains to be seen what effects the successful completion of this project will have on the code enforcement network, especially with respect to future activities and future network boundaries. Presumably, closer investigation of this case would reveal that the contractors participating in this particular event opportunity were not bound by county limits, as many worked throughout the KCMA. They would likely represent peripheral actors, and some of them would be “weak ties” to other code official networks, perhaps across the state line. Moreover, this case presents a research opportunity to study the diffusion of this innovation across the state line, which represents a different legal and regulatory environment. Our discussions with Missouri managers revealed that some of them were unaware of
the Johnson County program and were anxious to learn more about it. (The research contamination here is regrettable!)

The E-purchasing case also illustrates network boundary changes. The impetus for the program begins at the Jackson County management level through the auspices of MARC. A parallel network of metropolitan purchasing officers appears to have been largely uninvolved in the development of the idea until recently. (They had yet to see the programmatic details that were presented to the managers’ roundtable at the September meeting at MARC.) Then, the instigator of the cooperative idea appears to have separated from the rest of the metropolitan governments and is going it alone. Now, to implement the metropolitan purchasing program, the managers have agreed to explore linking with the metropolitan hospital’s purchasing cooperative, which includes all three levels of government. An in-depth mapping of the various and overlapping social networks underlying these developments would be helpful in understanding this course of events.

**Innovation Diffusion:** This E-purchasing initiative also points to the linkages between public network analysis and the diffusion of public management innovations. The case is an example of the managerial network responding to an event opportunity. The recent development of sophisticated online purchasing systems is a good example of a direct network externality (Valente 1995, 22) that affects the outcomes of buyer/seller exchanges in a particular service area. Knoke (1982) notes that the size of a jurisdiction is less important in innovation adoption and diffusion than nearness to innovators, neighborliness. Valente (1995, 52-4) shows that greater centrality (network concentration) promotes rapid diffusion of innovations. Yet Jackson County is both large and in the heart of the regional “neighborhood.” But is it seen as a neighbor? Our preliminary results suggest that it has traditionally been viewed as the recluse on the block, and it may take some time before recent efforts by the new CEO/CAO to engage the county in many more collaborative efforts produce visible results. We would expect more systematic probing would reveal that the “trust stock” of the county is not very high within the managerial networks. Social network theory suggests that repeated, active participation in ongoing network exchanges is needed to gain the trust necessary for partnership in network exchanges.

To what extent can the CEO/CAO opt out of the collective activity without significant negative consequences to the home jurisdiction? The same interdependence that creates the regional policies also constrains participant actors in policy behaviors once the collective decision is made. The county does not think it will be better off adopting the collective plan instead of their chosen option; the CEO/CAO and staff believe the financial
system needs to be modernized in any case, and the new system will accomplish that goal as well. Yet the consequences of “going alone” remain to be seen. The collective action aspects of public management networks are not well understood and network theory may provide some directions (Valente 1995). It is somewhat ironic that the county started the idea with its invitation to neighboring local governments for a collaborative E-purchasing network.

There are other aspects of innovation diffusion relevant to the contractor licensing case. The contractor-licensing program developed from a longstanding series of monthly meetings of area code enforcement officers who shared a common problem (poor contractor performance, enforcement evasion) and a changing network environment (the new national building code). We would expect a centrally clustered network if we were able to create a sociogram. For the code officers, the preferred solution necessarily spanned jurisdictional boundaries. They shared common professional values and norms, shared a high degree of trust in one another’s capacity to abide by the agreement, and happily vested the authority of the network in the county’s code enforcement office. There did not seem to be more or less powerful actors in this network, except for the chief county building officials who would administrator the new program. That is, the other code officers likely would have structural equivalence in this network. As such, the diffusion of this innovation should be rapid and complete across this network.

The primary code official for the county was a leader of the code officials’ social network that developed the ILA project. He thought aloud to us about the strategy options the group had discussed for assuring that all county jurisdictions participated in the ILA. They had a sense that the commissions of the two largest cities, Overland Park and Olathe, did not always cooperate. There was a “rumor that Overland Park was hesitating.” To be sure, the cities’ code officers wholly supported the county program, and fully participated in its development. Still, there was concern that the cities’ elected officials might hesitate to “give up” power to the county. So, should the code officers group get all the smaller jurisdictions “on board” and then “sign up” the largest cities? Or should the first get the largest cities to participate and then the rest would quickly fall in line? Network theory suggests that the key to adoption is getting a strong, centrally located actor (manager) to adopt and promote the innovation. Based on our admittedly small sample of network relations, we would note that the city manager of Lenexa wielded more influence than any other single manager in the metropolitan area. Without our consulting services, the association of building officials had opted to get a few of the most likely cities into the ILA, including Lenexa, before approaching

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3 Note that we did not conduct an in-depth study so this is speculation.
Olathe and Overland Park. In fact, several managers noted that Lenexa was viewed within the metropolitan area as one of the most innovative jurisdictions.

Administrative Conjunction: Without articulating it so plainly, the code officials were apparently concerned about the effect of the administrative conjunction phenomenon (Frederickson 1999). They were unsure that the elected officials would see the issue so clearly as a countywide phenomenon. Some see Olathe’s reputation for “going it alone” as part of a defensive posture against the increasing suburbanization of the county. Elected resistance to “homogenization” is partly seen as resistance to its historical identity as an independent, full-service city. Overland Park is the largest city in the county and is seen by some as “throwing its weight around” on occasion. Yet the cities’ officials were represented on the MARC board, and the Johnson County mayors also met regularly themselves, constituting a separate social network. There would seem to be a regional perspective evident in their attendance at such meetings. The MARC executive director suggests that there are many informal conversations of electeds across political boundaries, and these only surface publicly in obscure ways during commission debates. [In a separate conversation, the city managers of both cities did not anticipate any problems in getting their city councils to participate in the program. It had no fiscal impact, relieved city hall officials of administrative duties which were rarely covered by licensing fees, and potentially shifted the burden of contractor “problems” to the county courthouse from the city halls.]

The view about the behavior of these two cities did not pertain exclusively to the actions of the city council. The managers of the two cities, for example, have not been full participants in the regular roundtable meetings, and the Overland Park finance director rarely attends local or even national finance meetings where she can “network” with professional colleagues. The manager was relatively new to the job, but he had served as an assistant manager in the city before, and was a KU alumnus, which immediately conveys some standing among area managers (many of whom share this status). Perhaps because of his newness to the position, or perhaps because he did “not always get to those meetings,” he was not regularly mentioned by other manager colleagues as one of the three counterparts with whom they were most likely to discuss issues or seek advice. None of the area finance directors mentioned the Overland Park finance director in that context. In this case, the CAO and CFO could presumably provide important resources to their network counterparts in the KCMA. Exchange theory would suggest they would be powerful players. Locational theory suggests their geographic size and centrality would make them powerful network
players. Yet they do not seem to have this power in the context of the interlocal agreements mentioned in this brief survey. Further research may explain this situation.

This E-purchasing case also presents some very interesting and important questions about the role of chief elected officers (CEOs) who are also the chief administrative officers (CAO) of their jurisdictions. To what extent does the level of CEO/CAO participation influence the outcome of these regional policy decisions? To what extent did the Jackson County CEO/CAO lessen the power or influence of the county in the regional policy outcome by delegating participation in this venture to subordinates? Our sample is not large enough to create a reasonably accurate sociogram of the managers’ networks in KCMA. We suspect, however, that the Jackson County assistant managers do not have structural equivalence with the assistant managers of other metropolitan local governments who regularly attend the managers roundtable meetings. They are likely more peripheral actors, and if so, they wield less influence in network bargaining. More study is needed to test these expectations.

**Brokering Roles in ILAs:** These two examples raise important issues about the brokering role as it functions in ILAs. Our field study suggests MARC is an important broker in many of the social networks in the KCMA. It is especially important as a broker for the CAO networks. MARC’s broker role has evolved out of the simple regional transportation planning role (funded by federal transportation grants) into a highly visible and active intermediary involved in numerous regional issues. The primary brokering actors are the executive director, David Warm, and Dean Katerndahl, Manager of Government Innovations Forum. Warm is generally acknowledged to have repositioned MARC from an “only regional” actor into a service depot for individual local governments, especially as information brokers. Katerndahl’s position title belies his actual influence in the KCMA. He is widely regarded as “the most important thing MARC has done” in many years. In addition to actively participating in the CAO-level networks, he also actively participates in the multiple networks at the department director level. This multiplexity places him as both the broker for individual networks, and also as the bridging link between multiple networks.

Katerndahl’s agenda is set by the managers’ roundtable at MARC. His bio is interesting background and helps explain his success. Katerndahl has a Ph.D. in sociology on top of a BS in physics and an MS in nuclear engineering. His public service career began as a VISTA volunteer and he has worked in KCMA local governments for more than 25 years. He spent 23 years in Kansas City, Kansas as a planner working on urban renewal and community development, and as the public transportation coordinator, among other tasks. In 1997, the area
managers wanted MARC to create the position to coordinate regional activities and he took the job when it was offered to him. He is enthusiastic about the level of activities in the metropolitan area and is highly respected by all the actors we surveyed in this study.

Underlying the monthly managers meetings is an active, informal e-network of assistant managers who communicate daily through a discussion group mediated by Katerndahl. He acts as a broker and an information node to field information requests. They only meet physically at the monthly managers meetings. The frequent and active participation of assistant managers should not be taken as a signal that the meetings are unimportant to area managers, according to several of the managers and MARC staff. Instead, “mentoring assistants is part of the managers culture,” and reflects the high level of trust that professional managers place in their assistants.

MARC may also play in important brokering role across social networks within the KCMA, especially between the professional managers’ networks and the social networks of elected officials. We found that elected officials do not interact very much within the KCMA. Very few of the elected councils hold joint meetings with another council. Yet, the elected officials are not without their own social networks, although they are not particularly visible. The most visible network is the MARC governing board, composed of representatives from the various jurisdictions in the KCMA. MARC is one place where the elected officials meet on a regular basis; it is also at the vortex of the elected and administrative networks that permeate the region.

The executive director and staff of MARC are comfortable in both venues. This is particularly true of the executive director. Gabris, Golembiewski and Ihrke (2000) find that trust is a critical element in the ability of administrators to convince elected officials to accept recommendations. We expect that the wealth of trust enjoyed by the MARC director is an important factor in his brokering role between these two networks. Of course it follows that each of the jurisdictional managers must also a wealth of trust to convince their elected officials to approve of proposed interlocal agreements, even when the benefits of an ILA are vague and the costs uncertain. Alternatively, we can speculate that there will be a lower acceptance of ILAs with vague benefits and uncertain costs than ILAs with known or low costs and explicit benefits. However, we expect the trust stock enjoyed by the manager or the MARC broker to be a compounding factor in such an analysis.

Rationale and Motivation: It seems clear that the primary motivation for creating a cooperative purchasing system is economizing. The ILA generated for this system will reflect a desire to increase management efficiency. But that is not the sole rationale, according to several managers. Several of the largest jurisdictions view the system
as a way to help the smaller neighboring jurisdictions save costs by letting them piggyback on their large contracts. This speaks to a metropolitan culture of cooperation, evident in a norm of reciprocity, discussed below.

The motivation of the contractor licensing ILA had little, if anything to do with economizing. The issue was primarily increased regulatory effectiveness, with an expected outcome of greater public safety in buildings. The lack of cost savings should not be an impediment to adoption, according to one manager, because elected officials are focused on program effectiveness more than on saving costs. In fact, there was a near unanimity that cost was seldom the primary reason for an ILA, with some exceptions. One manager noted that the initial benefit-cost analysis was probably important at some level, but program effectiveness was probably more important. In fact, our original interest in ILAs was related to issues of ILAs as management efficiency instruments, but we found no jurisdiction monitoring either the cost or effectiveness of the ILAs to which they belonged (Wood and Thurmaier 2001).

Although there is surely a definable set of ILAs that developed from desires for direct economizing activities, the overwhelming lack of evidence that economizing is a continuing aspect of ILAs for the network actors suggests to us that there are one or more alternative values that better explain the existence and continued propagation of interlocal agreements in the KCMA. The foremost value that is explicitly stated by more than one actor we interviewed is a “norm of reciprocity” culture that pervades the metropolitan area.

This value can be explained in terms of the sociological concept of a belief system. “A belief system is an organized diversity of attitudes, or a number of opinions on multiple issues that can be summed up by a few underlying dimensions,” according to Erickson (1982, 159). Attitude agreement is related to structural position, because structure constrains and modifies interpersonal processes, especially the social comparison process that plays a major role in attitude formation and change (163). With respect to ILAs and their underlying social networks, we might then expect differences between elected officials, managers (including assistant managers), and department directors. We can also expect attitude differences between central and peripheral actors within various social networks. Erickson argues that it is important to distinguish between an attitude position—the extent to which people hold the same views, and an attitude structure—extent to which people organize their views in terms of a shared set of underlying dimensions (163). For example, people can share a liberal-conservative dimension and occupy different spots on it. Or they can agree on a set of specific positions yet think of these as points in different attitude spaces.
She contends “belief systems are most likely to emerge in social networks with a particular range of structures” (166). This is most likely in social structures that provide secure social bases for differing opinions and extensive connectedness of these bases. If representatives of the different opinion groups interact frequently, they will gradually develop generalizations of agreements and disagreements that are the basis for the dimensions of a shared attitude space. As people in one group see that those who believe X tend to believe Y, they begin to assume X and Y together, a natural pattern. “If a network includes fully connected but distinct subunits…an attitude space will emerge” (167-8). Thus, the belief system in a metropolitan “norm of reciprocity” may be held across all the networks, but may be held to stronger or lesser degrees, depending on the actor’s position in the regional social structure.

Elected officials may be focused on jurisdictional constituent relations more than on administrative matters, yet they may support the general concept of a regional norm of reciprocity. These concepts are compatible with Frederickson’s theory of administrative conjunction (1999). Erickson argues that dense relationships among those in a social network are likely to generate an ideology, especially with there is a clear mapping of persons into distinct social positions, when there is also connectedness between such positions. The number of weak ties likely increases with development of the communication system, bureaucratization, population density, and the spread of market mechanisms (Granovetter 1981, 113). This is precisely the brokering role that MARC appears to play in the KCMA. Some of the ways weak ties are fostered is through email discussion lists of the assistant city managers and the regular online publication of Management Matters (MARC 2001), which is more widely distributed and available to the general public. Management Matters briefs readers on a variety of activities and initiatives of governments throughout the KCMA and notifies readers of scheduled regional gatherings, such as the stadium luncheon series.

As Marsden notes, a critical instrument of the successful broker is the ability to frame and reframe the “mutual interest” of the collective groups. This may require altered frames for the elected officials and the managers. MARC seems to be successful at getting a range of regional actors to see the benefits of mutual cooperation. But are the MARC officials most appropriately viewed as network brokers (social network theory) or as public network managers (public administration theory)? We are not sure, but the issue deserves careful thought and empirical analysis.
**Accountability:** Although accountability is an enduring issue of network theorists in public management (Agranoff and McGuire 1999), we found a surprising lack of accountability concerns among those we interviewed. There is no central repository of ILA information in any of the jurisdictions we studied. Nor was there any understanding on the part of participating CAOs and CFOs about the fiscal consequences of the interlocal agreements in which their jurisdiction was participating. Agranoff and McGuire argue that there is a difference between accountability TO someone and accountability FOR something, suggesting that accountability for program effectiveness is more appropriate for network analysis than accountability to someone, since there are multiple accountabilities involved in networks.

Still, network participation involves resource exchanges, and that implies resource contributions. Microeconomic theory suggests that actors will not participate in the exchange unless they receive a benefit that is equal to or exceeds their contribution, and we made that one of our initial assumptions at the beginning of the study. Yet we found a surprising nonchalance attitude among all the actors we interviewed regarding fiscal accountability with respect to interlocal agreements. Why? We expect that part of the explanation is the nature of many ILAs. Mutual aid fire assistance ILAs, for example, pertain to public safety, and every manager noted that it was impossible to put a price on a life (i.e., public safety). There is also an informal ILA that pertains to a metro “crime squad.” Jurisdictions in the metropolitan area contribute specialist detectives on an ad hoc basis to the metro crime case squad to investigate major crimes throughout the metropolitan area. The squad is accountable to the metro police chiefs to some degree, but there is no systematic evaluation of the squad that any of our managers were aware of. If the ILA is primarily an efficiency instrument, accountability should be easier. No doubt that managers will be able to discern if the E-purchasing cooperative program is saving their jurisdiction money. Moreover, where contracting to the private sector is contemplated, but where there is no private competition and savings (and accountability) appear negligible, the jurisdiction may find a greater degree of accountability by virtue of using a public sector ILA. Where the goal is program effectiveness, the outcomes may be less clear, and the network’s “value-added” may be subject to all of the performance measurement problems common to other public services.

**Network power:** Network power is another important aspect of network theory that Agranoff and McGuire 1999 call us to better understand. There are multiple aspects of power that one can study. For sociologists who study network theory, centrality and resource exchange concepts are important, and suggest that larger entities with greater resources might be expected to be powerful network actors.
Perhaps an actor’s network influence is governed by how much organizational slack is available, and how much of that slack the organizational representative can commit to the network exchange relationships. For example, the Unified Government of Kansas City and Wyandotte County, Kansas (UG/KCK) is the second largest city in the metropolitan area, but is conspicuously absent from much of the CAO and CFO network activities we found in this field study. Although the city has a large budget, it is also fiscally stressed and has been for several years. The prolonged fiscal stress contributed to the recent consolidation of the city and county governments (Thurmaier and Leland 2000).

On the other hand, one might think that the city would seek to become a free rider to the extent that the metropolitan networks were willing to allow UG/KCK’s participation, even if it is unable to commit extensive resources. This is especially true given the dominant norm of reciprocity value revealed in our study. Moreover, many of the networks do not require extensive fiscal contributions to the network’s activities. The E-purchasing initiative, for example, would potentially allow UG/KCK to gain substantial economies of scale through piggyback contracts negotiated by other network actors. Yet the city is noticeably absent at the series of network meetings to create the E-purchasing consortium. It is also largely absent from the building officials network as well.

Perhaps an alternative explanation for the absence of UG/KCK is related less to fiscal stress and more to the demands on managers who are accountable to elected mayors. The mayor of the UG/KCK is elected at-large by the county citizens. Similar characteristics apply to the other major local government actor in the KCMA, Jackson County, Missouri. The Jackson County chief executive is also elected at-large by county citizens and she sees herself as “the mayor of Jackson County.” She is the CAO of Jackson County as well as its chief elected official. As such, her position resembles that of her strong mayor counterpart in the UG/KCK.

She rarely, if ever, attends the monthly manager meetings sponsored by MARC, although occasionally she has been represented by an assistant manager. Yet she is firmly committed to regional solutions to many KCMA problems, and believes Jackson County should be a central player in the process. Her professional background contributes to her perspective. Before becoming the elected CAO of Jackson County, she ran a congressional campaign for a district within KCMO, then served two terms on the KCMO city council. Before she ran for the Jackson County CAO position, she was well aware of the potential collaboration between the county and city, and was somewhat frustrated at the lack of cooperation between the staffs in two buildings across the street from each
other. In fact, she is actively creating new networks within the KCMA. The important point is that she is creating them among elected officials, not the CAOs.

We hypothesize that the elected character of the CAO is a critical, distinguishing characteristic of network participation for a local government. The appointed professional managers regularly meet together in multiple venues, and we expect that is related to a sense of shared professional values, shared educational backgrounds (e.g., MPA degrees), and common organizational structures. This is true of both city and county CAOs. (e.g., The Johnson County CAO is appointed by the county board.) By contrast, the elected CAOs participate in a smaller set of networks with other elected officials, and we expect that is related to a shared commitment to constituent responsiveness, and shared background of electoral experiences. She is more likely to talk with the mayor of UG/KCK than with the CAO of Johnson County. Similarly, the CAO of Johnson County is more likely to talk with the city manager of Independence, Missouri than Shields. Only one of the city managers we interviewed listed an elected official such as one of the three counterparts with whom he most frequently discussed issues and problems. That was the city manager of Kansas City, Missouri, who noted frequent conversations with the county CEO/CAO, a former member of the KCMO city council. They consider each other personal friends as well as professional colleagues.

We also found through our interviews that the central actors were professional managers that also were older and had longer tenure. These central actors did not come necessarily from larger or wealthier communities. Their pivotal role in the administrative conjuncture process seemed to have more to do with their experience, knowledge and reputation. It also appeared that the peripheral actors were new comers to the profession or the area. Generally, newcomers reached out to the central actors who could provide the advice and guidance that would help to insure their success.

More than one CAO of a large local government organization suggested that the reason they did not interact with many of the other metropolitan area managers was that their size (population) created different types of problems and issues that they did not share in common with smaller units of local government. They found advice outside of the metropolitan area in counterpart members of the National League of Cities (NLC) or the National Association of Counties (NACO).
Conclusion

This paper has attempted to introduce concepts of social network theory into the theoretical development of public administration’s perspective on public management networks. Our unit of analysis has been interlocal agreements, one of the oldest and most traditional forms of public management networks. We were able to apply some of the concepts of social network theory to ILAs within a bi-state metropolitan area. Laced throughout the discussion are several hypotheses about ILAs and metropolitan social networks that require further development. Although the exploratory field study lacks depth and precision, we believe it provides enough evidence to suggest that social network theory offers public administration theorists fruitful avenues for theoretical development of public network management.

References


MARC (Mid-America Regional Council), 2001. Management Matters is a monthly? Online publication distributed by Dean Katerndahl to inform members and other subscribers of regional activities, including those of MARC. See http://www.marc.org/gif/managementmatters.pdf for the September 7, 2001 issue.


Appendix A. Sample Cities and Officials and Related Data

Johnson County, Kansas: Population (451,000), Number of Cities (21)

  County Administrator                        Michael Press
  Budget Director                              Doug Robinson

Overland Park, Kansas: Population (150,000)

  City Manager                                  John Nachbar
  Finance Director                             Kristy Stallings

Olathe, Kansas: Population (100,000)

  City Manager                                  Michael Wilkes
  Finance Director                             Kevin Hammelke
  Finance Analyst                              Peggy Ingle

Jackson County, Missouri: Population (655,000), Number of Cities (12)

  Chief Executive Officer                       Katheryn Shields
  Manager of Administration                     Susan Duncan
  Finance Director                              Graham Morris

Independence, Missouri: Population (116,000)

  City Manager                                  Larry Blick
  Director of Finance                           James Harlow

Kansas City, Missouri: Population (443,400)

  City Manager                                  Robert Collins
  Assistant City Manager                       Richard Noll
  Assistant City Manager                       John Franklin
  Budget Director                              Larry Plaisted

Mid-America Regional Council (Board of 30 elected officials represents the region’s 8 counties and 114 cities)

  Executive Director                           David Warm
  Manager, Government Innovations Forum        Dean Katerndahl
Appendix B. Interview Questionnaire Design

Part I: Formal/Informal Communication
Please describe the frequency, nature, length and effectiveness of regular ongoing meetings held jointly by your governing body with other governing bodies in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Please describe the frequency, nature, length and effectiveness of regular ongoing meetings or discussions held by you and your counterparts in other governmental jurisdictions in the Kansas City Metropolitan area.

Please describe the frequency, nature, length, and effectiveness of regular ongoing meetings or discussions held between department directors in this city or county with department directors in other cities and counties in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Part II: Formal/Informal Coordination
Please describe any formal or informal agreements where your city or county has participated in a joint project, service, or program with other units of government in the following areas: public works (roads and bridges), public works (facilities), planning, law enforcement, fire services, recreation, support services, public health, bond issues, other. How effective are these joint efforts in terms of meeting organizational goals or reducing costs? How do you measure their effectiveness?

Part III: Formal/Informal Collaboration
Please describe any formal or informal agreements where a service or program has been consolidated with another jurisdiction, or your city or county has contracted with another jurisdiction to perform a service or function in any of the following areas: public works (roads and bridges), public works (facilities), planning, law enforcement, fire services, recreation, support services, public health, bond issues, other. How effective has functional collaboration been in each agreement in terms of meeting organizational goals or reducing costs? How do you measure effectiveness?

Part IV: Interpersonal Network Relationships
Please name three people you most frequently talk to in other government organizations (including cities, counties, MARC, etc.)

Please name three counterpart professionals who you most frequently ask for advice.

Please name three counterpart professionals who you consider as friends.

Please name three counterpart professionals who most frequently ask YOU for advice in other metropolitan government organizations (including cities, counties, MARC, etc.).

How important is trust to you when you evaluate whether to enter an ILA? Or do you prefer to rely on enforceable contracts?

If given a choice between an informal or a formal ILA, which would you prefer, and why?

How often do you attend metro area finance and budget meetings?

How often do you attend metro area general managers meetings?

How often do you attend regional, state, or national finance and budget meetings?

What professional journals or magazines do you read regularly?

What newspaper or newspapers do you read regularly?

What is your most important source of information about changes and innovations in your professional field?