

## INNOVATIVE CAPABILITY AS A MEDIATOR OF SOCIAL TIES AND SERVICE DELIVERY: EVIDENCE FROM SELECTED COUNTY GOVERNMENTS IN KENYA

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose of the study:** The study assessed the mediating effect of innovative capability on relationship between social ties capability and service delivery in selected County Governments in Kenya.

**Methodology:** The research was underpinned by the SERVQUAL model, the Resource-Based View Theory and the Diffusion of Innovation theory, providing a robust theoretical foundation. Adopting a pragmatic philosophical stance, the study utilized both descriptive and explanatory research designs. The target population comprised 263 senior officials across the County Governments of Garissa, Mandera and Wajir. A census approach was employed and data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire administered through the drop-and-pick method. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency distribution tables, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis and presented in narrative form. To evaluate the relationships among social ties capability, innovative capability and service delivery, regression analyses were employed.

**Findings:** The study findings indicated that social ties capability had a significant positive effect on service delivery in the selected County Governments in Kenya, accounting for 25.02% of change in service delivery. There was a significant partial mediating effect of innovative capability on the relationship between social ties capability and service delivery in the selected County Governments in Kenya.

**Conclusion:** The study concluded that County Governments demonstrated effective networking with public members, suppliers and stakeholders, fostering resource acquisition, collaborative problem-solving and internal knowledge-sharing. The partial mediating effect of innovative capability emphasized that Counties must strategically integrate social networking capabilities with innovation-fostering environments to maximize service delivery improvements.

**Recommendations:** The study recommends that County Governments in Kenya should prioritize the development of innovative capability by fostering a culture that encourages creativity and new ideas, in addition to cultivating stronger social ties. Counties should establish structured programs for engaging with stakeholders while creating supportive environments for innovation by providing necessary tools, systems and time for employees to explore new solutions. This research would assist County Governments in formalizing the mechanisms used to incorporate the outcomes of social ties capability activities into specific management programs and help policymakers develop future plans for enhancing their effectiveness through the application of social ties capability.

**Keywords:** *County Governments, Innovative Capability, Service Delivery, Social Ties Capability*

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## INTRODUCTION

The transformation of global economic systems following the 1929 economic crisis marked a pivotal shift from industrial labor toward service-oriented employment, fundamentally altering how organizations conceptualize and deliver services (Rafi, 2024; Terao, 2023). This paradigm shift gained momentum through Japan's "zero defects" philosophy, which redirected organizational focus toward meeting customer expectations and addressing the "quality gap" between expected and perceived service quality (Syaiful et al., 2019; Belrzaeg, 2025; Dihardjo, 2021; Alam, 2022). The recognition of this quality discrepancy spurred innovations in service delivery, culminating in the development of the SERVQUAL model by

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (2019) as a structured framework for identifying and addressing service gaps (Ndebele & Enaifoghe, 2023).

Service delivery encompasses the effective and equitable provision of public goods and services designed to meet citizen needs, playing a central role in public policy at grassroots and county levels (Anshari et al., 2025; Thusi & Selepe, 2023). High-quality service delivery serves as a crucial foundation for building public trust and satisfaction, functioning as a key performance indicator amid rising public expectations (Hassan, 2019). The present study conceptualizes service delivery through six critical dimensions: access, assurance, reliability, responsiveness, tangibility, and empathy, employing the SERVQUAL model as a guiding framework for examining public sector excellence (Lin, Mamun, Yang & Masukujjaman, 2023; Ebrahimi et al., 2023). These dimensions collectively address service accessibility, consistent delivery, physical aspects, staff competence, promptness, and personalized attention during service interactions (Parasuraman et al., 2019; Vu, 2021; Hafez, Elakkad & Gamil, 2021; Arun & Uma Maheswari, 2023).

Despite governmental mandates to provide equitable public services, persistent challenges including infrastructural inadequacies, inefficiencies, and limited accessibility continue affecting service delivery globally, as evidenced in contexts such as India and Nepal (Cingolani & Salazar-Morales, 2024; Kagwanja, 2023; Pokhrel, 2022). Across Africa, public dissatisfaction with service provision endures despite ongoing reform efforts, largely due to systemic constraints in institutional capacity and performance (Franco & Njogu, 2020; Abdulrazak & Madu, 2023). In Kenya's devolved governance system, county governments continue grappling with inefficiencies, unresponsiveness, and inadequate performance, intensifying public demand for improved governance and service outcomes (Mbaabu, Musau & Muturi, 2022; Muwonge et al., 2022).

Social ties capability represents the connections and relationships existing between individuals or groups within specific organizations or communities, influencing how members interact, share information, and collaborate through both formal and semi-formal structures (Hunter, Bentzen & Taug, 2020). Semi-formal interactions, characterized by structured yet flexible exchanges that fall between highly regulated formal meetings and casual conversations, facilitate interpersonal communication, mutual assistance, and efficient problem-solving (Hällström, Bosch-Sijtsema & Poblete, 2024; Hunter et al., 2020). Knowledge sharing emerges as a key function of social ties, enabling the dissemination of

knowledge, abilities, insights, and experiences across network members to enhance learning, collaboration, and innovation (Yeboah, 2023; Saied, Wahba, Abdel-Bary Ghanem, 2021).

Innovative capability represents an organization's proficiency in leveraging creativity to adapt knowledge, expertise, and resources for generating novel ideas while enhancing service delivery quality (Zhao & Wu, 2021; López-Fernández & Perea-Medina, 2023; Bula, 2019). This capability includes generating new ideas consistently in response to evolving environments and successfully replacing outdated systems through gradual or radical transformation processes affecting services, processes, governance structures, and organizational frameworks (Mendoza-Silva, 2021; Saunila, 2020). Governmental creativity encompasses innovative initiatives, policies, processes, and services that substantially elevate public sector effectiveness and productivity, with even limited-scope innovations potentially catalyzing broader state transformation (Hutagalung & Hermawan, 2018; Kosec & Wantchekon, 2020; Danielle & Masilela, 2021).

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that innovative capability serves as a key mediator in relationships between critical variables and superior service delivery, with research confirming that innovation capability significantly mediates connections between financial resources, dynamic capabilities, information exchange, and service delivery outcomes (Boateng & Cai, 2022; Mostafiz, Sambasivan, Goh & Shaki, 2021; Pranowo, Dachi, Nasution, Ende & Hendayana, 2021). Studies reveal that innovative organizations consistently outperform non-innovative counterparts in service delivery, establishing innovation capacity as a fundamental determinant of service quality and a critical competency for county governments (Smith & Heriyati, 2023; Corona-Treviño, 2023; Petković, Rastoka & Radicic, 2023; Momen & Ferdous, 2023). The present research examines county governments' capacity to develop and manage innovative capability as a mediating variable in enhancing service delivery through social ties capability, measuring innovation through competence base, creativity, organizational intelligence, and idea management dimensions (Henneman & Lee, 2022; Huang & Shih, 2022).

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The Counties in North Eastern Kenya continue to face significant challenges in public service delivery, with multifaceted problems encompassing limited access to essential services, low service reliability, lack of assurance in service provision, inadequate empathy, poor

responsiveness and the absence of tangible service attributes (Moses et al., 2020). In Garissa County, the health department struggles to consistently deliver quality healthcare services while nutritional services are constrained by excessive workloads placed on nutritionists (Ministry of Health Garissa County, 2018). Mandera County experiences a perceived lack of empathy within health facilities that has discouraged community members from seeking medical assistance, contributing to concerning mortality rate increases, with limited transportation infrastructure further restricting household access to healthcare. Similarly, Wajir County residents endure acute water shortages, exacerbated by a decline in skilled personnel within the public sector (County Government of Wajir, 2023). These enduring deficiencies have had severe consequences for the well-being of local populations (Oribu, 2020; Cannon & Ali, 2018).

Amid these challenges, social ties capability has emerged as a significant area of interest in empirical research, recognized for its potential to enhance service delivery through improved community engagement, trust-building and collaborative governance (Gordon et al., 2020). The growing scholarly focus on social ties is driven by its ability to provide critical insights into addressing systemic service delivery gaps (Singh, Dhir, Das, & Sharma, 2020). In this context, the present study investigated the influence of social ties capability on service delivery within selected County Governments in Kenya, while examining the mediating role of innovative capability in shaping the relationship between social ties and service delivery outcomes. This research addresses the critical need to understand how County Governments can leverage social connections and innovation to overcome persistent service delivery challenges and improve outcomes for vulnerable populations in North Eastern Kenya.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the study was to assess the mediating effect of Innovative capability on relationship between social ties capability and service delivery in selected County Governments in Kenya.

## **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

The associated hypotheses were;

H<sub>01</sub>: Social ties capability does not have a significant effect on service delivery in selected County Governments in Kenya

H<sub>02</sub>: Innovative capability does not have a significant mediating effect on relationship between social ties capability and service delivery in selected County Governments in Kenya

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

The study was grounded in three complementary theoretical frameworks that provided a comprehensive foundation for understanding the relationships between social ties capability, innovative capability, and service delivery in County Governments. The SERVQUAL Model served as the primary framework for conceptualizing and measuring service delivery quality across six dimensions: access, assurance, reliability, responsiveness, tangibility, and empathy. This model, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, offers a structured approach to identifying service gaps and evaluating the alignment between citizen expectations and perceived service performance, making it particularly relevant for assessing public sector service delivery effectiveness in the Kenyan county context.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory informed the study's understanding of how County Governments can leverage their unique internal capabilities, particularly social ties capability, as strategic resources for competitive advantage in service delivery. RBV theory emphasizes that organizations possessing rare, valuable, and difficult-to-imitate resources can achieve superior performance outcomes, which aligns with the study's focus on social ties as distinctive organizational capabilities that influence service delivery effectiveness. The diffusion of innovation theory provided the theoretical foundation for understanding how innovative capability mediates the relationship between social ties and service delivery, explaining how new ideas, practices, and technologies spread through organizational networks and influence adoption rates and implementation success in public sector contexts. Together, these three theories created a robust theoretical framework that guided the study's examination of the complex interactions between social connections, innovation processes, and service delivery outcomes in Kenya's devolved governance system.

## **EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

The empirical literature on social ties capability and service delivery reveals mixed findings across different organizational contexts. Aliyu and Sahabi (2022) examined knowledge exchange at Ahmadu Bello University Library using descriptive statistics and found that information-sharing enhanced service quality, though their study was limited to a single institutional context. Similarly, Imam and Ebiefung (2022) identified a strong correlation

between knowledge sharing and information service quality among library staff in southwest Nigeria, while Tseole and Ngulube (2022) found that knowledge sharing at Thomas Mofolo Library in Lesotho enhanced service delivery, though both studies lacked causal insights. Nguyen and Malik (2021) applied Structural Equation Modelling to assess knowledge sharing's impact on customer satisfaction and staff performance in Vietnamese hotels, confirming positive influences but lacking comprehensive service delivery metrics. Alderwick *et al.* (2021) explored cross-sector collaboration in health services but found limited evidence of direct service improvements, while Chiwarawara and Masiya (2018) highlighted social networks' role in community mobilization for public service provision, though their focus on protest-driven engagement presented contextual mismatches for organizational settings.

Studies examining innovation capability as a mediator demonstrate consistent positive relationships across various contexts. Idrees *et al.* (2023) investigated innovation's mediating role between knowledge management capabilities and organizational performance in Pakistani construction firms using Partial Least Square SEM on 277 employees, finding significant positive effects with innovation capability serving as a key mediator, though industry-specific focus limited generalizability. Wijaya and Rahmayanti (2023) explored entrepreneurial orientation and COVID-19 risk perception's influence on business performance in Bali's MSMEs, with PLS-SEM analysis of 90 managers revealing that entrepreneurial orientation bolstered innovation and performance while risk perception impeded both. AlTaweel and Sulieman (2021) examined innovation capability's mediating role between strategic agility and organizational performance in Jordanian industries through SEM analysis of 224 managers, showing that innovation capability significantly enhanced the agility-performance link, though national focus restricted broader applicability.

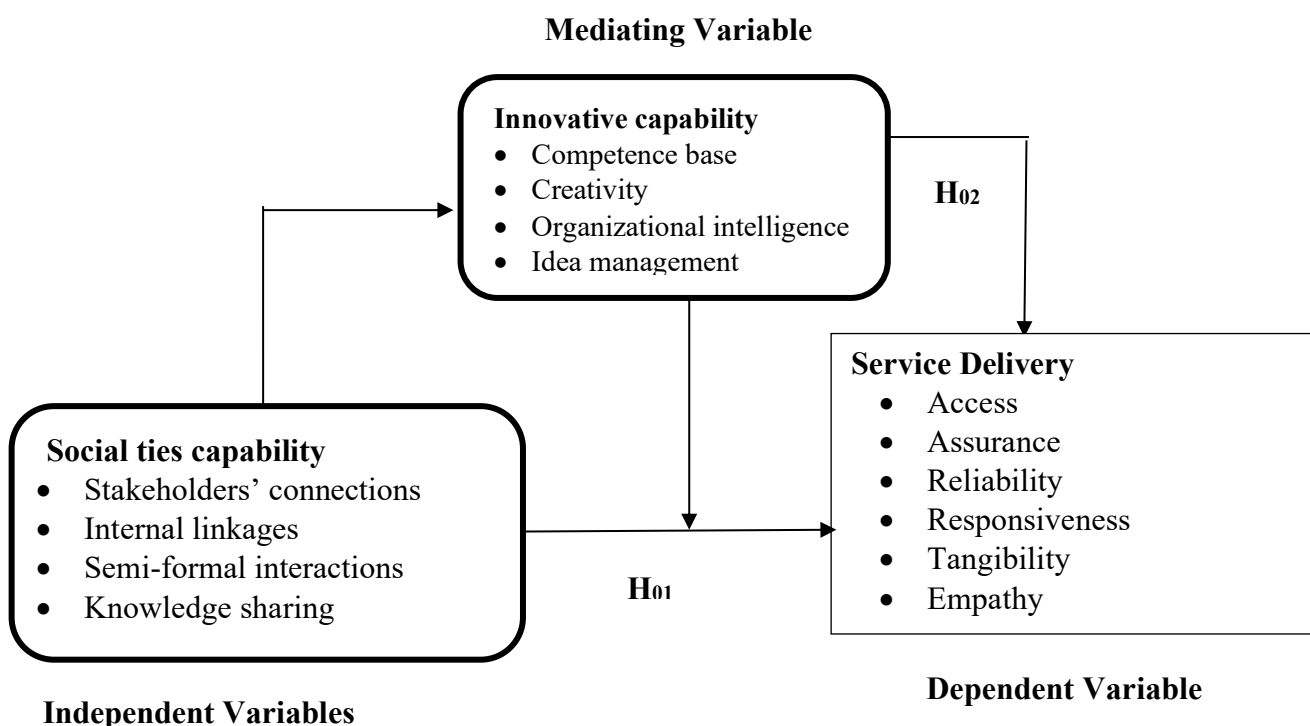
Additional research reinforces innovation's critical role in enhancing organizational performance and service delivery. Sasono and Novitasari (2020) analyzed relationships between service standards, employee productivity, and innovation capability using SEM, confirming that innovation enhances both productivity and service quality, though lacking detailed innovation metrics. Waribu (2021) assessed innovation's role in County Governments' development strategies in Kenya using descriptive and inferential statistics, confirming innovation's impact on development plans while acknowledging purposive sampling bias risks. These studies collectively demonstrate that while social ties capability



and innovation capability individually contribute to improved outcomes, gaps remain in understanding their combined mediating effects on service delivery, particularly in public sector contexts where comprehensive frameworks integrating both capabilities are needed to address complex service delivery challenges.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

Source: Researcher (2024)

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was underpinned by a pragmatic research philosophy, selected for its integrative stance that transcends the traditional dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative methodologies, supporting both deductive and inductive reasoning while offering a flexible yet rigorous framework suited to complex research contexts (Maxcy, 2023). The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both explanatory and descriptive research designs and targeted a population of 263 senior officers from Garissa, Mandera, and Wajir Counties, employing a census sampling technique to enhance the accuracy, reliability, and precision of the findings. Data were collected using an unstructured questionnaire comprising both open- and closed-ended items, with quantitative data analyzed using descriptive statistics facilitated



by SPSS Version 24.0, while qualitative data, derived primarily from open-ended responses, were examined through narrative analysis within the context of a focused case study. To ensure analytical robustness, findings from both quantitative and qualitative strands were triangulated, enabling validation and enrichment of the results, with final outcomes presented through a cohesive and detailed narrative that integrated statistical insights with thematic interpretations. The relationship between the dependent and independent variables was thoroughly examined using regression analysis, with each research variable obtaining a composite index derived from its indicators to lay the groundwork for conducting empirical tests of direct and mediated interactions (Field, 2022; Hayes, 2023; Preacher & Hayes, 2022).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Descriptive Statistics for Service Delivery in Selected Counties in Kenya

The study precisely evaluated the service delivery within the selected County Governments in Kenya, focusing on various aspects of their service delivery and presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Service Delivery in Selected County Governments**

Service Delivery	n	Mean	Std. Dev.
The service locations readily accessible by everyone	223	3.108	0.986
There are sufficient employees in each location	218	3.212	0.964
Services are delivered promptly	223	3.084	0.993
Every service is delivered as planned	221	3.061	0.970
Services are delivered by competent staff	222	3.262	0.963
The staff maintain a neat physical environment at work	218	3.408	0.929
Employees give customers individual attention	222	3.236	0.925
The County ensures that services are available	218	3.220	0.888
The staff possess appropriate expertise and proficiency	221	3.384	0.902
Always responsive to the demands of the public	221	3.225	0.915
Staff are polite with customers	223	3.366	0.864
The public feels safe with service staff	219	3.305	0.925
Delivering adequate services	223	3.089	1.039
<b>Aggregate measures</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>3.228</b>	<b>0.943</b>

Source: Field data (2024)

The results exhibited significant uncertainty regarding the accessibility of service locations, as reflected by a mean of 3.108 with a standard deviation of 0.986. This indicates concerns about

the ease with which public service points can be accessed, suggesting the presence of potential infrastructural deficiencies that hinder effective citizen engagement with public services. Further analysis revealed that respondents expressed apprehension regarding staffing levels, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.212 and standard deviation of 0.964. This indicates considerable doubt regarding the adequacy of personnel to meet public demand, implying that a substantial workforce gap may exist, which is likely to strain service capacity, lead to increased wait times and undermine the overall quality of service delivery.

Timeliness of service delivery emerged as another critical issue. With a mean score of 3.084 and standard deviation of 0.993, it indicated a pervasive lack of confidence in the promptness of service execution, suggesting that delays and inefficiencies are a common feature of the service delivery process. Furthermore, there was considerable doubt about the consistency of service delivery, as evidenced by a mean of 3.061 and standard deviation of 0.970. These results point to a recurring pattern of unpredictability that erodes public trust in the reliability of services provided. While it was recognized some level of staff competence with mean of 3.262 and standard deviation of 0.963, concerns about inconsistent performance persisted. These findings suggest that, despite perceiving staff as competent, respondents remained uncertain about the ability of staff to consistently deliver high-quality services.

The physical environment in which services were delivered was generally regarded positively, with a mean of 3.408 and standard deviation of 0.929, indicating that staff maintained clean and organized workplaces. However, there were notable concerns regarding the personalization of service. A mean of 3.236 and standard deviation of 0.925 revealed that respondents felt interactions with staff lacked individual attention, suggesting that while the physical environment may have been conducive to service delivery, the quality of personalized customer engagement was not always aligned with public expectations. Results also expressed doubts about the effectiveness of County Governments in ensuring consistent service availability, as reflected by a mean of 3.220 and standard deviation of 0.888. Similarly, there were concerns about the knowledge and problem-solving abilities of staff, with a mean of 3.384 and standard deviation of 0.902, signaling potential deficiencies in training and institutional support.

While some level of responsiveness to public demands was acknowledged with a mean of 3.225 and standard deviation of 0.915) it remained uncertain about the politeness of staff interactions with a mean of 3.366 and standard deviation of 0.864 and the sense of safety experienced during public engagements with a mean of 3.305 and standard deviation of 0.925. These concerns

suggest significant weaknesses in the service culture and frontline engagement protocols that may affect the overall experience of citizens interacting with public service personnel. Ultimately, results expressed significant uncertainty regarding whether County Governments consistently deliver adequate services, with a mean of 3.089 and standard deviation of 1.039. The relatively low mean, combined with the high standard deviation, underscores a widespread perception of systemic performance issues that require immediate attention and rectification.

Overall, the service delivery was rated as moderate with a mean of 3.228 and standard deviation of 0.94), indicating a mixed evaluation. While services were generally perceived as somewhat adequate, there was significant uncertainty about their effectiveness, accessibility and responsiveness. These results align with findings from previous research, including studies by Moses *et al.* (2020), which documented similar challenges in Garissa, Mandera and Wajir Counties, such as restricted access to services, inconsistent service reliability, insufficient staff empathy and irresponsiveness. Additionally, Hassan *et al.* (2021) highlighted that the moderate level of service delivery in these Counties has contributed to increased workloads and staff burnout, leading to a rising incidence of staff attrition.

### Descriptive Statistics for Social Ties Capability

The study assessed social ties capability among service delivery in selected County Governments in Kenya to obtain Table 2.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Social Ties Capability and Service Delivery**

Social ties capability	N	Mean	Std Dev.
Formed networks to help get required resources	222	3.504	0.948
Used stakeholders' connections to access new ideas and suggestions	217	3.678	0.837
Efficiency is enhanced by means of building internal networks	222	3.651	0.756
Internal linkages create a better overall work experience and culture	218	3.755	0.787
Employees encouraged to forge connections with stakeholders	221	3.542	0.851
Use Semi-formal interactions to get vital information	219	3.581	0.807
Sharing activities and knowledge helps staff work efficiently	219	3.850	0.725
Sharing experience helps staff skills and expertise	219	3.757	0.723
Social ties capability has direct effect on service delivery	222	3.773	0.726
<b>Aggregate measures</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>3.677</b>	<b>0.796</b>

Source: Field Data (2024)

The results unequivocally confirm that the selected County Governments in Kenya have effectively developed extensive networks involving public members, suppliers and various external stakeholders, thereby facilitating access to vital resources as evidenced by a mean of 3.504, demonstrating the critical role these networks play in resource acquisition. The standard deviation of 0.948, however, suggests some variability, reflecting differing perceptions regarding the networks' overall effectiveness in resource provision. Additionally, the findings highlight the vital contribution of these networks to fostering innovation with a mean score of 3.678, strongly endorsing the significant role of stakeholder networks in generating new ideas and solutions. The standard deviation of 0.837 indicates moderate variability, implying that while many respondents acknowledged the networks' impact, others perceived it as less pronounced.

Furthermore, the establishment of internal networks was unanimously recognized as a key factor in improving operational efficiency within County Governments. A mean score of 3.651 clearly affirms the positive influence of internal linkages on organizational performance. The low standard deviation of 0.756 underscores the high consensus regarding the contribution of internal networks to enhanced service delivery. These networks also played a crucial role in cultivating a positive workplace culture. A mean of 3.755 strongly indicates agreement that internal networking contributed significantly to fostering a collaborative and supportive work environment, with a standard deviation of 0.787 showing moderate variability in responses. Nevertheless, the overall sentiment strongly affirms the positive impact of internal networks on workplace dynamics.

The results also reveal that County Governments actively encouraged employees to build connections with various stakeholders when addressing specific issues, reinforcing a commitment to collaborative problem-solving. A mean score of 3.542 reflects general agreement with this initiative. However, the high standard deviation of 0.851 suggests variability in perceptions regarding the extent to which these efforts were actively promoted, with some respondents seeing them as less emphasized than others. Moreover, County Governments frequently leveraged semi-formal interactions to acquire critical information not accessible through formal channels. A mean score of 3.581 suggests moderate agreement on the indispensable role of informal networks in supplementing formal structures, with a standard deviation of 0.807 indicating variability in respondents' assessments.

Regarding service delivery, the practice of knowledge sharing among staff was strongly linked

to improved outcomes. With a mean score of 3.850, respondents overwhelmingly agreed on the positive effects of knowledge sharing. The low standard deviation of 0.725 further reinforces the strong consensus on the contribution of collaborative knowledge exchange to enhanced service delivery. The practice of learning from experienced peers was similarly acknowledged as vital for staff development. A mean score of 3.757 confirms strong agreement that peer-to-peer learning was essential for skill enhancement, with a standard deviation of 0.723 suggesting minimal variation in responses. The results also confirm that the social ties capability within County Governments significantly contributed to improving service delivery. A mean score of 3.773 reflects broad consensus on the pivotal role of social connections in enhancing service outcomes. The standard deviation of 0.726 indicates moderate variability, suggesting that while most respondents recognized the positive impact of social ties capability, there were differences in the perceived strength of this influence. Nonetheless, the findings consistently emphasize the crucial importance of social connections in enabling County Governments to access resources, promote collaboration and respond effectively to emerging challenges.

The results confirm that the selected County Governments in Kenya have demonstrated strong social ties capability, as reflected by a mean score of 3.677. This suggests that these Governments have largely succeeded in establishing and maintaining effective social networks. The standard deviation of 0.796 shows moderate variability, indicating that while most respondents acknowledged the effectiveness of social ties capability, there were some differences in perception. Empirical research further supports these findings, emphasizing that the strategic use of social ties capability for knowledge sharing, innovation and problem-solving is essential for driving efficient public service outcomes (Harrison *et al.*, 2022). As Dougherty, Williams and Jensen (2021) assert, the development and reinforcement of these networks are not merely advantageous, they are indispensable for the sustained improvement and adaptability of public service systems. By fostering robust relationships within communities and with external stakeholders, these networks enhance communication, build trust and ensure that services are more effectively aligned with public needs. Both Dougherty *et al.* (2021) and Harrison *et al.* (2022) emphasize that social ties capability are crucial for driving service responsiveness and agility, enabling public systems to remain flexible in the face of evolving demands, ultimately resulting in more efficient and equitable outcomes.

### Descriptive Statistics for Innovative Capability

In advance of assessing the mediating effect of innovative capability on relationship between social ties and service delivery in selected County Governments in Kenya, the study assessed the innovative capability to come up with Table 3.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Innovative Capability and Mediating Effect on Social ties capability and Service Delivery**

Innovative capability	n	Mean	Std Dev.
Innovation processes are supported by sufficient tools and systems	224	3.387	0.935
Employees have the capacity to create new approaches at work	222	3.438	0.901
Employees are allowed time to think of creative solutions to problems	224	3.279	1.016
Ability to create new methods on services provided to the public	219	3.387	0.924
There is ability to make sense of complex situations	218	3.491	0.835
Ability act effectively interprets signals about the environment	219	3.455	0.848
The management shows great enthusiasm for innovation	224	3.195	1.030
There is a culture of prioritizing feedback	219	3.155	0.986
Culture of creativity is essential for ensuring service delivery	223	3.636	0.862
Innovative capability mediates the relationship between social ties capability and service delivery	216	3.594	0.812
<b>Aggregate measures</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>3.402</b>	<b>0.915</b>

Source: Field Data (2024)

The analysis indicated a neutral-to-positive assessment regarding the availability of tools and systems necessary to support innovation within the selected County Governments in Kenya. A mean score of 3.387, coupled with a relatively high standard deviation of 0.935, suggested significant variation in the operational capacity for innovation. This variation implies that while some Counties had established mechanisms conducive to innovation, others lacked the foundational infrastructure required to support such processes effectively. The results further revealed a general consensus that employees within the County Governments possessed the capacity to develop innovative approaches to their work. With a mean of 3.438 and a standard deviation of 0.901, there was a moderately strong agreement on the potential of human capital to drive innovation. However, the observed variability in responses indicated inconsistencies in how this potential was being recognized or supported across different Counties, likely

reflecting disparities in training, organizational culture, or leadership priorities.

A key area of concern was the adequacy of time allocated to employees for developing creative solutions. The mean of 3.279, combined with a high standard deviation of 1.016, indicated a lack of consensus on this matter. These results suggest that in some contexts, organizational structures may permit reflective and innovative thinking, whereas in others, operational demands and time pressures could be limiting innovation efforts. Regarding the ability of employees to generate new methods for public service delivery, the results were similarly neutral. A mean of 3.387 and a standard deviation of 0.924 indicated uncertainty and a lack of consistent experiences across the Counties. This ambiguity may reflect limitations in institutional encouragement of service innovation or inconsistent implementation of best practices.

On a more positive note, the selected County Governments appeared to possess a sound capacity for navigating complex challenges. The mean of 3.491 and a relatively low standard deviation of 0.835 demonstrated a high level of agreement on the Counties' ability to effectively manage complexity. This indicates that despite other limitations, the institutional structures were, in general, well-equipped to handle operational challenges. In terms of environmental adaptability, the selected County Governments showed a moderate level of responsiveness. The mean of 3.455, with a standard deviation of 0.848, indicated that most entities demonstrated a capacity to interpret and respond to external changes. However, variability in the standard deviation suggests that this adaptability was not uniformly developed across all Counties.

Conversely, the enthusiasm of management for innovation was a notable area of weakness. The mean score of 3.195, along with a high standard deviation of 1.030, pointed to significant uncertainty and inconsistency in managerial support for innovation. This variation implies that while some Counties may demonstrate proactive leadership in fostering innovation, others may lack strategic vision or commitment in this area. Likewise, the presence of a culture that actively prioritizes feedback was uncertain. With a mean of 3.155 and a standard deviation of 0.986, the findings suggested a fragmented approach to feedback culture. While some organizations had established feedback mechanisms, others showed a clear need for improvement. This lack of a consistent feedback culture can undermine iterative learning and continuous improvement processes critical for innovation.



There was strong agreement on the importance of fostering a creative work environment for effective service delivery. The mean of 3.646 and standard deviation of 0.862 indicated widespread recognition of the value of creativity in enhancing service outcomes. Despite some variation in interpretation, the general trend reinforced the notion that creativity must be embedded in the culture of public service organizations to achieve long-term impact. The findings also suggested that innovative capability played a mediating role between social ties capability and service delivery. A mean score of 3.594 with a standard deviation of 0.812 reflected the belief that innovation directly contributed to improved service delivery. This supports previous research, such as Taleb et al. (2023), which has shown that institutions with strong innovation capacity are better positioned to respond proactively to shifting service demands.

The selected County Governments demonstrated a moderate to high level of innovative capability. The mean score of 3.402 suggests a generally conducive environment for innovation. However, the high standard deviation of 0.915 highlights notable differences in how innovation was valued or practiced across Counties. These differences underscore the need for targeted interventions to harmonize innovation efforts and close capability gaps across regions. The results highlight several areas requiring attention. Strengthening innovation capability demands strategic investment in tools and infrastructure, more active managerial support and structural adjustments to allow staff sufficient time for innovation. As emphasized by ALTaweel and Sulieman (2021), fostering an innovation-friendly culture is essential for public sector transformation. Furthermore, addressing disparities in feedback systems and promoting leadership commitment to innovation are crucial for creating an enabling environment. These findings also reinforce the view that innovation capability enhances the reliability and responsiveness of public services. Institutions that embed innovation into their operational frameworks benefit from improved efficiency, enhanced staff morale and greater adaptability to evolving community needs. As observed in earlier studies, including Waribu (2021), a proactive approach to innovation is instrumental in ensuring that public services are not only sustained but continuously improved to meet future demands.

### **Hypotheses Testing**

The current study used regressions to model the hypothesized relationships, which were captured in Table 4.

**Table 4: Analysis by Social ties capability and Service Delivery**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.000	0.004		0.001	0.999
Social ties capability	0.501	0.058	0.500	8.608	0.000
ANOVA	0.000				
R Square	0.2502				
<i>a. Dependent Variable: service delivery</i>					
(Constant)	0.000	0.003		-0.076	0.939
Social ties capability	0.677	0.050	0.675	13.642	0.000
ANOVA	0.000				
R Square	0.4560				
<i>a. Dependent Variable: Innovative capability</i>					
(Constant)	0.000	0.004		0.034	0.973
Innovative capability	0.563	0.055	0.563	10.152	0.000
ANOVA	0.000				
R Square	0.3170				
<i>a. Dependent Variable: service delivery</i>					
(Constant)	0.000	0.004		0.030	0.976
Social ties capability	0.221	0.074	0.221	2.986	0.003
Innovative capability	0.414	0.074	0.414	5.603	0.000
ANOVA	0.000				
R Square	0.3435				
<i>a. Dependent Variable: service delivery</i>					

The hypothesis testing revealed that  $H_{01}$ : Social ties capability does not have a significant effect on service delivery in selected County Governments in Kenya was rejected, indicating that social ties capability had a significant effect on service delivery in selected County Governments in Kenya, accounting for 25.02% of change in service delivery ( $r^2=0.2502$ ). The analysis demonstrated that a unit change in social ties capability led to a 0.501 rate of increase

in service delivery, establishing a substantial positive relationship between these variables. This significant direct effect provides empirical evidence that County Governments' ability to build and maintain social connections with stakeholders, engage in knowledge sharing, and foster collaborative networks directly contributes to improved service delivery outcomes. The magnitude of this relationship underscores the importance of social ties capability as a fundamental driver of public service effectiveness in the selected counties.

The significant effect of social ties on service delivery capability suggested the presence of a relationship suitable for mediation analysis. The results for the relationship between social ties capability and innovative capability ( $p < 0.01$ ) showed that the p-value was less than 0.05, confirming the significance of the relationship between social ties capability and innovative capability. Additionally, there was significance in the relationship between innovative capability and service delivery in selected Kenyan county governments, as indicated by the results ( $p < 0.01$ ) which was less than 0.05. This finding implied that service delivery in the selected Kenyan county governments would be impacted by innovative capability, establishing the necessary conditions for mediation analysis by demonstrating that both the predictor-mediator and mediator-outcome relationships were statistically significant.

The ANOVA results ( $p < 0.01$ ) showed that there was a significant mediating effect of innovative capability on the relationship between social ties and service delivery in selected County Governments in Kenya because the p-value was less than 0.05. However, the p-value for the beta of innovative capability ( $p < 0.01$ ) was not exceeding 0.05, indicating that there was a partial mediating effect of innovative capability on the relationship between social ties capability and service delivery in selected County Governments in Kenya. This partial mediation suggests that while innovative capability plays a significant role in explaining how social ties capability influences service delivery, the direct relationship between social ties and service delivery remains significant even when the mediator is included in the model. The partial mediation indicates that social ties capability affects service delivery both directly and indirectly through innovative capability, highlighting the complex interplay between relationship building, innovation, and service outcomes.

The results of this study align with the findings of Idrees et al. (2023), which highlight the positive and significant mediating role of innovation in the relationship between knowledge acquisition and organizational success. Further supporting this perspective, AlTaweel and Sulieman (2021) discovered that innovation capability serves as a critical mediator in the

relationship between strategic agility and organizational performance, suggesting that organizations demonstrating strategic agility can enhance their performance outcomes through effective innovative capability, thereby underscoring the importance of fostering an innovative culture. Moreover, Rahmayanti (2023) provided evidence that the capacity to innovate has a positive and significant impact on corporate performance, while Sasono and Novitasari (2020) emphasized the connection between employee creativity and productivity, revealing a significant positive influence on service delivery.

Additionally, Waribu (2021) demonstrated that innovation significantly impacts the implementation of County Integrated Development Plans, suggesting that innovative practices are crucial for effective governance and the successful execution of developmental strategies. These research efforts provide a comprehensive framework showing how innovation plays a crucial mediating role in various service delivery contexts, with the collective evidence supporting that county governments must prioritize and develop innovative competence to improve their operational efficiency and service delivery, thereby highlighting the significance of developing innovative capacity within the selected County Governments to leverage social ties capability for improved service delivery.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that social ties capability significantly affects service delivery in selected County Governments in Kenya, with the Counties demonstrating effective networking with public members, suppliers and stakeholders. These connections foster resource acquisition, collaborative problem-solving and internal knowledge-sharing, which boosts efficiency, skill development and a positive workplace culture. The empirical findings reveal that County Governments have successfully established comprehensive social networks that facilitate access to vital resources, enable stakeholder engagement for generating new ideas and solutions, and create internal linkages that enhance overall work experience and operational effectiveness. The significant positive relationship between social ties capability and service delivery, accounting for 25.02% of the variance in service delivery outcomes, underscores the critical importance of relationship-building and collaborative governance in improving public service provision in Kenya's devolved system.

The study highlights the partial mediating effect of innovative capability on the relationship between social ties capability and service delivery, indicating that Counties need to foster an

atmosphere that encourages innovation by providing staff members with the time, resources and tools necessary to develop original ideas, which will enhance public services and organizational flexibility. The partial mediation suggests that while social ties capability directly influences service delivery, this relationship is further strengthened when County Governments cultivate their innovative capacity through competence development, creativity enhancement, organizational intelligence, and effective idea management.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends that selected Kenyan Counties should establish structured programs for engaging with the public, suppliers and stakeholders while encouraging staff participation in networking events to enhance social ties capability in service delivery. Counties should implement internal platforms for knowledge-sharing and leverage communication tools to enhance stakeholder engagement, as the research highlights the critical importance of social ties capability in improving service outcomes. The selected Counties should strengthen integration capabilities by promoting a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration, which would enhance responsiveness and service effectiveness through better resource utilization and coordinated efforts across departments. Additionally, Counties should prioritize innovation by fostering a culture that encourages creativity and the exploration of new ideas, with clear communication of work practices across the organization and strategic investment in innovative solutions contributing to improved service delivery.

From a practical perspective, County Governments should focus on improving service accessibility for all citizens, especially in rural or underserved areas, while addressing staffing shortages through effective recruitment and training strategies to improve responsiveness. Counties should create systems to ensure consistent service delivery and personalized attention for citizens, which would enhance public trust and satisfaction based on the study's findings regarding moderate service delivery levels. The research suggests that Counties should strengthen internal and external networks by encouraging staff engagement in networking events and facilitating knowledge-sharing platforms, while promoting informal interactions and partnerships with stakeholders to improve collaboration and problem-solving. Furthermore, Counties should create a supportive environment for innovation by providing necessary tools, systems and time for employees to explore new solutions, fostering a culture that prioritizes creativity, feedback and continuous improvement to ensure better public service delivery and responsiveness to changing needs.

The theoretical implications suggest that Counties should leverage their ability to scan and utilize external information to inform decision-making, supporting the Resource Based View Theory by emphasizing unique internal capabilities as sources of competitive advantage in public administration. Counties should develop their capacity to gather data, conduct trend analysis and anticipate demographic changes as strategic resources that enhance service delivery effectiveness. The study indicates that Counties should foster environments that encourage innovation and creative problem-solving, aligning with Diffusion of Innovation Theory in public administration, where innovation capability should serve as a bridge between long-term social ties capability and operational service delivery improvements. These theoretical contributions underscore that Counties should strategically integrate social networking capabilities with innovation-fostering environments to maximize service delivery outcomes.

The study's contribution to strategic management knowledge suggests that practitioners and policymakers should recognize service delivery as multi-dimensional, requiring continuous evaluation and adjustment of operational practices across diverse factors to improve public services. County Governments should leverage both formal and informal ties for knowledge sharing, problem-solving and operational efficiency, reinforcing that managing relationships should be crucial to public sector effectiveness. The significant mediating effect of innovative capability indicates that public organizations should leverage innovation for improved outcomes by fostering innovative cultures to address complex public sector challenges. Counties should equip employees with necessary tools, time and support to innovate effectively, while leadership should nurture environments where innovation is encouraged as essential for enhancing service delivery. Given the moderate service delivery levels characterized by uncertainty, further research should focus on developing targeted initiatives to enhance service delivery within these Counties, addressing existing gaps and optimizing overall service delivery performance.

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