



# Innovation Capacity as a Governance Mechanism in Advancing Inclusive and Adaptive Public Service Systems

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	A B S T R A C T
<p>Received: February 16, 2025            Revised: April 10, 2026            Accepted: April 20, 2026            Available online: April 23, 2026</p>	<p>This study examines the role of innovation capacity within inclusive public service governance by developing an integrative analytical framework. Existing literature on public sector innovation, collaborative governance, and digital transformation remains conceptually fragmented, with limited attention to how innovation capacity connects these domains. To address this gap, the study adopts a qualitative analytical approach supported by bibliometric mapping using VOSviewer, to explore thematic structures and relationships within the literature. The findings indicate that innovation capacity occupies a central yet under-theorized position in governance discourse. It operates across institutional, relational, and systemic levels, enabling the integration of multi-actor collaboration, digital infrastructures, and adaptive service design. Rather than functioning solely as an organizational capability, innovation capacity emerges as a governance mechanism that transforms fragmented processes into coherent and outcome-oriented public service systems. This study contributes by reframing innovation capacity as a multi-level governance mechanism that bridges collaboration, digitalization, and inclusivity. The findings highlight the importance of systemic capacity building, emphasizing institutional coordination, digital integration, and stakeholder engagement. While limited by its reliance on bibliometric analysis, the study provides a foundation for future empirical research on innovation capacity in diverse governance contexts.</p>
KEYWORDS	
<p>Innovation Capacity; Public Governance; Collaborative Governance; Digital Governance; Inclusive Service</p>	
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## INTRODUCTION

The increasing complexity of public service delivery has shifted governance paradigms from hierarchical administration toward more collaborative, inclusive, and adaptive systems. In this evolving landscape, innovation capacity has emerged as a critical factor in enabling public institutions to respond effectively to diverse societal needs. Rather than being confined to organizational performance, innovation capacity is increasingly conceptualized as a system-level capability that facilitates coordination, resource integration, and responsiveness across multiple stakeholders (Bekkers et al., 2011; Sørensen & Torfing, 2018). This shift is particularly relevant in the context of inclusive public service governance, where policy effectiveness depends not only on institutional design but also on the ability to mobilize innovation across actors and sectors.

Existing studies have examined innovation and governance from multiple perspectives. Research on public sector innovation highlights that innovation capacity shapes how institutions design, adopt, and implement new solutions in response to complex policy challenges (De Vries et al., 2016). Similarly, collaborative governance literature emphasizes the importance of multi-actor interaction, shared decision-making, and cross-sector coordination in improving public service outcomes (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). In the domain of digital governance, recent studies demonstrate how digital technologies enable co-production, enhance service delivery, and facilitate data-driven decision-making, while also introducing challenges related to institutional readiness and integration (Mergel et al., 2019; Meijer & Bolivar, 2016). Furthermore, bibliometric research shows that governance-related scholarship

tends to be fragmented into thematic clusters, such as collaboration, sustainability, and policy innovation, often lacking integrative theoretical frameworks (Donthu et al., 2021). Other studies indicate that innovation, collaboration, and digitalization are increasingly interdependent, jointly influencing public value creation and governance performance (Osborne et al., 2021).

Innovation capacity in public administration has evolved from being understood as an organizational attribute into a broader system-level capability that shapes governance processes and outcomes. Early studies conceptualize innovation capacity as the ability of public institutions to generate, adopt, and implement new ideas, policies, and services (De Vries et al., 2016). However, recent governance scholarship emphasizes that innovation capacity is embedded within institutional interactions and policy networks, enabling coordination across actors and adaptation to complex societal challenges (Sørensen & Torfing, 2018). In this sense, innovation capacity functions not merely as a technical resource but as a relational and structural mechanism that supports the transformation of public service systems.

The significance of innovation capacity becomes more pronounced within the framework of collaborative governance, where policy outcomes are increasingly shaped by multi-actor engagement and co-production processes. Collaborative governance highlights the role of shared decision-making, trust-building, and cross-sector interaction in addressing complex public problems (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). However, the effectiveness of such collaboration depends heavily on the presence of sufficient capacity to integrate diverse forms of knowledge, align stakeholder interests, and sustain

collective action. Innovation capacity, therefore, plays a mediating role, translating collaborative processes into concrete policy innovations and enabling governance systems to move beyond fragmented interactions toward coordinated and outcome-oriented solutions.

In parallel, the rise of digital governance has introduced new dimensions to innovation capacity by expanding the technological and informational infrastructure of public administration. Digital technologies facilitate data integration, real-time communication, and service delivery innovation, thereby enhancing the potential for more responsive and efficient governance (Mergel et al., 2019; Meijer & Bolivar, 2016). At the same time, digital transformation presents challenges related to interoperability, institutional readiness, and unequal access, which can hinder the realization of its full potential. These dynamics suggest that innovation capacity is crucial not only for adopting digital tools but also for integrating them into governance systems in a coherent and effective manner.

The concept of inclusive public service governance further extends the relevance of innovation capacity by emphasizing the need for equity, accessibility, and responsiveness in public service delivery. Inclusive governance requires institutions to engage diverse stakeholders, particularly marginalized groups, and to design services that reflect varying social needs (Osborne et al., 2021). However, achieving such inclusivity is often constrained by rigid administrative structures and limited adaptive capabilities. Innovation capacity enables public institutions to overcome these constraints by fostering user-centered approaches, participatory mechanisms, and context-sensitive policy solutions, thereby linking governance processes with inclusive outcomes.

Despite the growing body of literature on innovation, collaboration, and inclusivity, these domains remain conceptually fragmented, with limited integration into a unified analytical framework. Innovation capacity is often treated as a managerial or technological issue, while collaborative governance and inclusivity are examined from normative or procedural perspectives. This fragmentation limits the understanding of how these elements interact within public service systems. Therefore, this study advances a conceptual perspective that positions innovation capacity as a multi-level governance mechanism that integrates collaborative processes, digital transformation, and inclusive service delivery, providing a more comprehensive framework for analyzing contemporary public administration challenges.

Despite these advances, the literature remains conceptually fragmented. Innovation capacity is often treated as a technical or managerial issue, while inclusive governance is approached from a normative or participatory perspective. Consequently, limited attention has been given to how innovation capacity operates as a bridging governance mechanism that connects collaboration, digital transformation, and inclusivity within public service systems. In addition, although bibliometric studies provide useful mapping of research trends, they tend to remain descriptive and do not sufficiently engage in theoretical interpretation and conceptual integration. This reveals a clear research gap: the absence of analytical studies that position innovation capacity within the broader architecture of inclusive public service governance.

Addressing this gap, this study advances an analytical perspective that conceptualizes innovation capacity as a governance mechanism embedded within collaborative and

digital systems, rather than as an isolated organizational attribute. By employing bibliometric mapping as a supporting analytical tool, this study seeks to uncover the underlying knowledge structure of the field and reinterpret it through a governance lens. Based on this background, this study is guided by two main research questions: (1) how innovation capacity is conceptualized and positioned within the literature on inclusive public service governance, and (2) how innovation capacity functions as a governance mechanism linking collaboration, digital transformation, and inclusivity in public service systems.

## METHOD

This study employs a systematic literature review to examine the transformation of e-government and its impact on transparency in public services, guided by the need to map research trends, challenges, and opportunities. A systematic literature review was chosen as it ensures an organized, comprehensive, and unbiased analysis of existing studies, facilitating the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of relevant literature (Amjad et al., 2023). This method is particularly effective in providing insights into the evolving themes and gaps in e-government research.

This study adopts a qualitative analytical approach supported by bibliometric mapping to examine how innovation capacity is conceptualized and positioned within the literature on inclusive public service governance. In line with the theoretical framework, which positions innovation capacity as a multi-level governance mechanism embedded within collaborative, digital, and inclusive systems, the methodological design emphasizes interpretive analysis rather than exhaustive systematic review. Qualitative approaches are particularly suitable for exploring complex conceptual relationships and developing theoretical insights within social research (Creswell, 2014).

The data for this study consist of academic publications related to innovation capacity, collaborative governance, digital governance, and inclusive public service. Articles were identified using keyword combinations such as “innovation capacity,” “public sector innovation,” “collaborative governance,” “digital governance,” and “inclusive public service.” The selection process prioritizes conceptual relevance and theoretical contribution, aiming to capture the intellectual structure of the field rather than its total population. This approach aligns with qualitative research strategies that emphasize purposeful selection of information-rich sources to support in-depth analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To support the analytical process, the study employs bibliometric mapping using VOSviewer, focusing on keyword co-occurrence and thematic clustering. Bibliometric analysis is widely used to identify patterns, relationships, and emerging trends within scientific literature, providing a structured overview of knowledge development (Donthu et al., 2021; van Eck & Waltman, 2010). In this study, bibliometric mapping functions as an exploratory analytical tool, enabling the identification of conceptual clusters related to innovation capacity and its linkage with governance dimensions such as collaboration, digital transformation, and inclusivity.

The analytical strategy follows an interpretive framework, where bibliometric findings are examined through the lens of governance theory. This approach reflects an interpretive tradition in qualitative research, where empirical patterns are not treated as final results but as inputs for theoretical explanation

and conceptual development (Creswell, 2014). Through this process, identified clusters and keyword networks are interpreted to explain how innovation capacity operates at multiple levels—institutional, relational, and systemic—and how it mediates the interaction between collaborative processes, digital infrastructures, and inclusive outcomes. This methodological design does not aim to produce a fully systematic literature review. Instead, it adopts a hybrid analytical approach that combines bibliometric mapping with conceptual interpretation, allowing for a deeper understanding of governance dynamics. By integrating empirical mapping with theoretical reasoning, the study contributes to the development of a more coherent and analytically grounded framework for understanding innovation capacity within inclusive public service governance.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Mapping Innovation Capacity in Inclusive Public Service Governance: Trends, Clusters, and Knowledge Structure

The bibliometric mapping reveals that the literature on innovation capacity in public service governance is structured around several interconnected thematic clusters, indicating a fragmented yet evolving knowledge domain. The analysis of keyword co-occurrence identifies dominant clusters related to collaborative governance, digital transformation, public service innovation, and social inclusion, suggesting that innovation capacity is not treated as an isolated concept but is embedded within broader governance discourses.

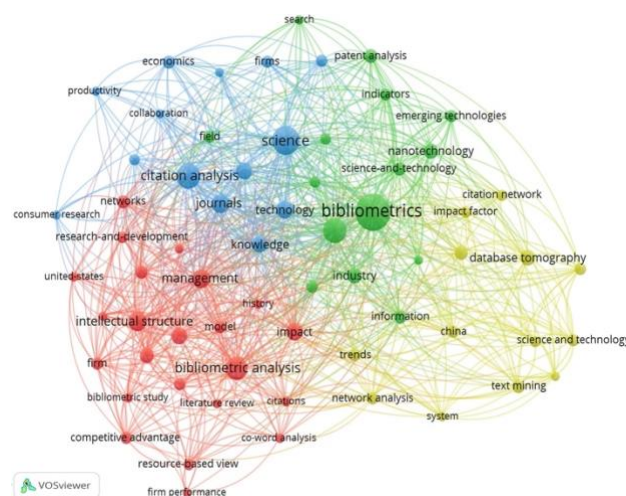
**Table 1.** Main Thematic Clusters and Analytical Interpretation

Cluster	Core Keywords	Core Keywords
Analytical Meaning	Collaborative Governance	collaboration, co-production, participation
Innovation as relational and network-based	Digital Governance	e-government, data, digital transformation
Innovation as technological enabler	Public Service Innovation	performance, reform, service delivery
Innovation as institutional capability	Social Inclusion	equity, access, participation

Source.

Table 1 presents the main thematic clusters identified in the literature and provides an analytical interpretation of how innovation capacity is positioned across different governance dimensions. The collaborative governance cluster, characterized by keywords such as collaboration, co-production, and participation, highlights that innovation emerges through relational dynamics and network-based interactions among multiple actors. The digital governance cluster, reflected in terms like e-government, data, and digital transformation, indicates that innovation functions as a technological enabler that supports system integration and enhances service efficiency. Meanwhile, the public service innovation cluster, including performance, reform, and service delivery, emphasizes innovation

as an institutional capability that drives organizational improvement and policy outcomes. Finally, the social inclusion cluster, represented by equity, access, and participation, underscores that innovation is essential for achieving inclusive and equitable public services.



The co-occurrence network figure illustrates that the knowledge structure underlying this study is organized into several interconnected clusters, which substantively reflect the relationship between innovation capacity and governance in public service systems. The cluster centered on bibliometrics and science indicates that research on innovation is grounded in analytical and mapping approaches, serving as a foundation for understanding knowledge development patterns. The cluster associated with management, firm performance, and resource-based view suggests that innovation capacity is widely examined as a strategic organizational capability, particularly in enhancing performance and competitive advantage. Meanwhile, the cluster involving technology, emerging technologies, and information highlights the critical role of digital transformation as an enabler of innovation within governance systems. In addition, the presence of concepts such as collaboration, networks, and knowledge indicates that innovation is not an isolated process but is shaped through multi-actor interaction and collaborative dynamics. Overall, the interconnected structure of these clusters demonstrates that innovation capacity does not operate independently, but functions as an integrative governance mechanism linking institutional capacity, collaborative processes, and digital transformation in advancing more adaptive and inclusive public service delivery.

From an analytical perspective, the emergence of these clusters reflects the multi-dimensional nature of innovation capacity, which operates across institutional, relational, and systemic levels. At the institutional level, innovation capacity is associated with organizational performance, leadership, and policy design. At the relational level, it is linked to collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and co-production processes. At the systemic level, it is connected to digital infrastructures, data integration, and governance transformation. This layered structure confirms that innovation capacity functions as a bridging construct, linking different dimensions of governance into a coherent analytical framework.

The mapping further indicates that collaborative governance constitutes one of the most central clusters, reinforcing the argument that innovation in public services is increasingly driven by multi-actor interaction and cross-sector coordination. Keywords related to participation, co-creation, and stakeholder engagement frequently co-occur with innovation-related terms, suggesting that innovation capacity is closely tied to the ability of institutions to facilitate collaborative processes. However, the clustering pattern also reveals that collaboration and innovation are often discussed in parallel rather than in an integrated manner, indicating a gap in the literature regarding their functional interdependence.

In addition, the digital governance cluster highlights the growing importance of technological transformation in shaping innovation capacity. The presence of keywords such as digital government, e-governance, and data integration suggests that digitalization plays a critical role in enabling innovation by providing the infrastructure for coordination and information exchange. Nevertheless, the mapping also reveals a degree of conceptual separation between digital governance and inclusivity, implying that technological advancements are not always directly linked to equitable service outcomes. This separation points to a limitation in existing research, where digital innovation is often examined without sufficient consideration of its implications for inclusivity.

Overall, the bibliometric findings indicate that the literature is characterized by conceptual fragmentation, with innovation capacity, collaboration, digital transformation, and inclusivity often treated as distinct domains. However, the co-occurrence patterns also suggest latent connections among these domains, providing a basis for developing a more integrated theoretical understanding. Thus, rather than viewing these clusters as separate areas of study, this analysis interprets them as components of a broader governance system in which innovation capacity serves as a central integrative mechanism.

**Innovation Capacity as a Governance Mechanism: Linking Collaboration, Digital Transformation, and Inclusivity**

Building on the mapping results, this study advances the argument that innovation capacity should be understood as a governance mechanism that mediates the interaction between collaboration, digital transformation, and inclusive public service delivery. The analysis demonstrates that innovation capacity is not merely a supporting factor but a structural enabler that determines how effectively governance systems can integrate diverse actors, technologies, and policy objectives.

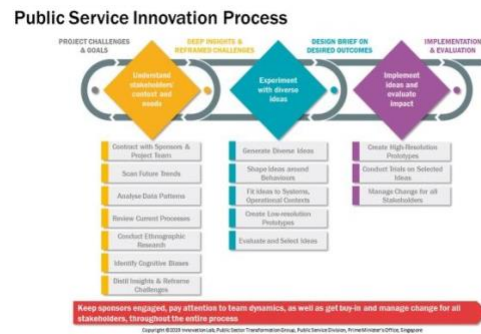
Table 2. Role of Innovation Capacity Across Governance Dimensions

Governance Dimension	Role of Innovation Capacity	Outcome
Collaborative Governance	Inclusive Governance	Effective co-production
Digital Governance	Integrates actors and knowledge	Effective co-production

Inclusive Governance	Supports adaptive service design	Equitable access and participation
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Source.

The table demonstrates that innovation capacity functions as a central governance mechanism across key dimensions of public service systems. Within collaborative governance, innovation capacity enables the integration of diverse actors and knowledge, transforming fragmented interactions into effective co-production processes. In the context of digital governance, it facilitates system integration by aligning technological infrastructure with institutional processes, resulting in more efficient and scalable public services. Meanwhile, in inclusive governance, innovation capacity supports adaptive and user-centered service design, ensuring that public services are accessible, responsive, and equitable for diverse populations. Overall, the table highlights that innovation capacity is not merely an organizational capability, but a multi-dimensional enabler that connects collaboration, digital transformation, and inclusivity to produce more effective and sustainable governance outcomes.



Source.

The figure illustrates the public service innovation process as a cyclical and adaptive system, beginning with understanding stakeholders' context and needs, followed by experimenting with diverse ideas, and culminating in implementation and evaluation. Each stage highlights that innovation is not merely about generating ideas, but involves a continuous process of contextual understanding, multi-actor collaboration, iterative testing, and impact assessment. In relation to this study, the model reinforces the argument that innovation capacity functions as a central governance mechanism that enables the integration of key dimensions of public service governance. In the initial stage, innovation capacity supports inclusive problem identification, aligning with the principles of inclusive governance. During the experimentation phase, it facilitates collaboration and co-creation among diverse actors, reflecting collaborative governance. In the implementation and evaluation stage, innovation capacity is closely linked to the ability to integrate systems and leverage digital tools effectively, which corresponds to digital governance.

From a collaborative governance perspective, innovation capacity plays a critical role in transforming multi-actor interaction into coherent and outcome-oriented processes. While collaboration provides the platform for stakeholder engagement, it is innovation capacity that enables the integration of knowledge, alignment of interests, and translation of ideas into actionable policies. Without sufficient innovation capacity,

collaborative processes risk becoming fragmented and ineffective. This finding supports the view that collaboration alone is insufficient; it must be complemented by the capacity to manage complexity and sustain collective action.

In the context of digital governance, innovation capacity functions as a system integrator, enabling the effective use of technological infrastructures to enhance public service delivery. The analysis suggests that digital tools, while essential, do not automatically lead to improved governance outcomes. Instead, their effectiveness depends on the ability of institutions to integrate digital systems into existing governance structures and processes. This highlights the importance of innovation capacity in bridging the gap between technological potential and practical implementation, ensuring that digital transformation contributes to both efficiency and inclusivity.

Moreover, the relationship between innovation capacity and inclusivity emerges as a critical dimension of governance. The findings indicate that inclusive public service delivery requires more than normative commitments to equity and participation; it depends on the ability of institutions to design adaptive, user-centered, and context-sensitive solutions. Innovation capacity enables this process by fostering flexibility, encouraging experimentation, and supporting the incorporation of diverse perspectives into policy design. In this sense, innovation capacity acts as a linking mechanism that translates governance principles into tangible outcomes.

Importantly, the analysis reveals that the interaction between collaboration, digitalization, and inclusivity is not linear but mutually reinforcing. Collaboration generates diverse inputs and perspectives, digital technologies facilitate coordination and scalability, and inclusivity ensures that outcomes are equitable and responsive. Innovation capacity operates at the intersection of these dimensions, enabling their integration into a coherent governance system. This integrative function represents the core theoretical contribution of the study, positioning innovation capacity as a multi-level governance mechanism rather than a discrete organizational capability.

The implications of this conceptualization are significant for both theory and practice. Theoretically, it challenges fragmented approaches to studying innovation and governance by proposing an integrated framework that captures the interdependencies among key dimensions of public service systems. Practically, it highlights the need for policymakers to move beyond isolated reforms and adopt a systemic approach to capacity building, focusing on strengthening the connections between institutions, technologies, and communities. Without such integration, efforts to promote innovation, collaboration, or inclusivity are likely to remain partial and ineffective.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that innovation capacity should be understood not merely as an organizational capability, but as a multi-level governance mechanism that enables the integration of collaboration, digital transformation, and inclusivity within public service systems. The findings reveal that, although the existing literature on innovation, governance, and public service is extensive, it remains conceptually fragmented, with limited analytical integration across these domains. Through bibliometric mapping and interpretive analysis, this study identifies that innovation capacity occupies a central yet under-theorized position within the knowledge structure, acting as a

connecting element between otherwise disconnected governance dimensions.

The analysis further shows that innovation capacity operates simultaneously at institutional, relational, and systemic levels. At the institutional level, it shapes organizational adaptability and policy design; at the relational level, it enables collaboration and knowledge integration among diverse actors; and at the systemic level, it supports digital integration and governance transformation. This multi-level functionality highlights that innovation capacity is not simply an input into governance processes, but a structural enabler that determines how effectively governance systems operate and evolve. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by reframing innovation capacity as a governance mechanism, thereby bridging three traditionally separate strands of research: collaborative governance, digital governance, and inclusive public service. By positioning innovation capacity as the integrative link among these domains, the study advances a more coherent and holistic understanding of contemporary public administration. This perspective challenges conventional approaches that treat innovation as a technical or managerial issue, instead emphasizing its role in shaping governance architecture and public value creation.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that efforts to improve public service performance should move beyond isolated reforms and focus on systemic capacity building, particularly in strengthening institutional coordination, digital integration, and stakeholder engagement. Without such integration, initiatives aimed at promoting collaboration, digitalization, or inclusivity are likely to remain fragmented and limited in impact. This study, however, is not without limitations. The reliance on bibliometric mapping as a supporting analytical tool means that the findings are based on a representative rather than exhaustive dataset, which may not capture all nuances of the literature. In addition, the study focuses primarily on conceptual and theoretical analysis, with limited empirical validation. Future research is therefore encouraged to explore empirical applications of innovation capacity in different governance contexts, employ mixed-method approaches, and further examine the role of contextual factors such as institutional settings and socio-political environments.

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