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FOSTERING ORGANIZATIONAL INNOVATION AND GOAL ACHIEVEMENT IN THAI LOCAL ADMINISTRATION: A MIXED-METHODS ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study systematically investigates the critical determinants driving organizational innovation and goal achievement within Local Administrative Organizations (LAOs) in Thailand's upper northeastern provinces. Addressing the growing demand for public-sector adaptability in an era of digital transformation, the research uses a robust mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys of 381 local personnel with in-depth qualitative interviews with eight municipal executives. The empirical findings reveal a remarkably high overall readiness for innovation among these rural and semi-rural administrations. Multiple linear regression analysis shows that effective use of digital technology, flexible governance structures, strategic resource allocation, and collaborative networking significantly drive organizational innovation. Notably, collaborative networking emerged as the most influential statistical predictor of innovative capacity. Furthermore, while quantitative results suggest that innovative leadership and organizational culture are not direct statistical drivers, qualitative insights clearly show their vital role as foundational enablers that sustain structural reforms. Ultimately, this research underscores that fostering authentic public-sector innovation requires the systemic integration of digital transformation, inter-organizational partnerships, and adaptive governance, providing actionable strategies to enhance local administrative efficiency and citizen-centered public service delivery fundamentally.

Keywords: Organizational Innovation, Local Administrative Organizations, Collaborative Networking, Digital Governance, Public Sector Innovation

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Introduction

Local administrative organizations (LAOs) are very important to Thailand's decentralization framework. They are the main government units closest to the people and are responsible for providing key public services, building local infrastructure, providing welfare, and developing communities. Still, central control, uneven institutional capacity, and limited local autonomy remain problems for Thai local administration. These things make it harder for LAOs to meet local needs and change their policies (Haque, 2010; Unger & Mahakanjana, 2016). These problems have worsened in recent years as the population ages, the economy becomes unstable, new technologies emerge, and people want government to be more open, responsive, and better at providing services. In many cases, innovation is no longer just a way to run things more smoothly; it has become a strategic necessity. In the public sector, innovation includes adopting new technologies and developing new governance frameworks, administrative procedures, service delivery models, and collaborative strategies that enhance public value and institutional effectiveness (de Vries et al., 2016; Scupola & Zanfei, 2016).

Previous studies indicate that a blend of organizational and relational characteristics, such as leadership, governance structures, resource allocation, digital proficiency, and inter-organizational collaboration, influences public-sector innovation. Networked and co-creative governance models have proven effective in improving problem-solving and increasing the adaptability of public services, particularly in resource-constrained contexts (Scupola & Zanfei, 2016; Torfing et al., 2019). Recent evidence from Thailand shows that digital transformation can greatly enhance workflow efficiency, responsiveness, and citizen-centered service delivery in Local Administrative Organizations (LAOs) when digital tools are incorporated into organizational routines rather than merely added to traditional procedures (Prachumrasee et al., 2024). Transformational leadership has been shown to boost innovation and openness in Thai local government organizations, which in turn improves overall organizational performance (Zumitzavan et al., 2025). In Thailand, citizen participation is a key determinant of public-sector efficacy, as higher social capital and civic involvement correlate with improved public performance. Nonetheless, technology-driven reforms may perpetuate or widen participation gaps if they do not adequately address inclusivity and citizen capacity (Sontiwanich et al., 2022; Suebvises, 2018).

Even with these advancements, major gaps remain in the research. Much of the research on public sector innovation focuses on ideas, nationwide changes, or changes within a single city. Less research has focused on rural and semi-rural municipal administrations, where administrative skills, digital readiness, and resources differ significantly from those in cities. This limitation is particularly relevant in Thailand's upper northeastern region, where local governments face challenges such as dispersed populations, limited financial resources, and rising expectations for better services and digital governance. Recent research has begun documenting the effects of digital innovation and leadership within Thai Local Administrative Organizations (LAOs). The interaction among principal factors of innovation—namely, innovative leadership, a culture conducive to innovation, citizen engagement, the application of digital technology, adaptable and transparent governance, strategic resource distribution, and collaborative networking—has not been sufficiently examined within a singular analytical framework, especially through mixed-method evidence that combines survey data with executive insights (Prachumrasee et al., 2024; Zumitzavan et al., 2025).

This study empirically examines the organizational factors that shape the emergence of LAOs as innovative entities in Thailand's upper northeastern regions. The study focuses on Sakon Nakhon, Mukdahan, and Nakhon Phanom, integrating key elements from the public-sector innovation literature into a cohesive framework. It examines how these elements affect organizational innovation and goal achievement. The study aims to offer a more contextually refined understanding of how Thai local government promotes innovation by integrating

quantitative analysis with qualitative insights from local executives, while also producing actionable recommendations to enhance innovation capacity in non-urban Local Administrative Organizations (LAOs).

By combining quantitative surveys and qualitative executive interviews, this study explains how innovation emerges and operates within these administrative bodies. Consequently, grounded in both statistical outcomes and qualitative insights, the research explicitly aims to evaluate the current state of factors influencing LAO innovation in the upper northeastern provinces, structurally identify the pivotal factors that significantly drive the transformation of LAOs into innovative organizations, and ultimately propose actionable innovation strategies to assist these entities in achieving their strategic objectives. Beyond providing crucial empirical support for public-sector innovation research in Thai and broader Asian contexts, these findings are expected to inform and educate both regional practitioners and national policymakers.

Literature Review

Innovation in Public Organizations

Governments aspire to do better, address complex social problems, and deliver public goods in an ever-changing environment. That is why innovation has become an important idea in public administration. Innovation in the public sector goes beyond just new technologies. It also involves new ways of delivering services, running organizations, doing business, and working together that make organizations more efficient and improve outcomes for society (de Vries et al., 2016). The research emphasizes that innovation in governmental enterprises is profoundly influenced by institutional context, including leadership, administrative traditions, and accountability frameworks. In decentralized yet institutionally constrained environments such as Thailand, the interaction between formal restrictions and managerial discretion can affect how far innovation is implemented and sustained within public enterprises (Haque, 2010; Unger & Mahakanjana, 2016).

Innovation in Local Governments and LAOs

Innovation is important for local governments because they provide essential public services and meet community needs directly. People are closest to their local administrations. They affect how quickly services are delivered, how satisfied people are with the government, and how much they trust it. Studies show that local governments need to gradually adopt adaptive, collaborative, and citizen-centered governance practices to meet society's changing needs (Torfing et al., 2019). Local Administrative Organizations (LAOs) in Thailand operate within a decentralization framework characterized by substantial central monitoring, which may limit local autonomy and inhibit innovation (Haque, 2010; Unger & Mahakanjana, 2016). Recent studies show that when Thai Local Administrative Organizations (LAOs) use digital systems, digital workflow reforms and leadership-driven initiatives can make them more open, efficient, and innovative (Prachumrasee et al., 2024; Zumitzavan et al., 2025).

Determinants of Public Sector Innovation

The research identifies numerous organizational and relational elements that influence public-sector innovation, including leadership, organizational culture, governance frameworks, digital proficiency, resource allocation, and collaborative networks. Transformational leadership can encourage experimentation and motivate employees to embrace change. On the other hand, supportive organizational cultures that value learning and information sharing can improve the organization's long-term ability to innovate (de Vries et al., 2016; Zumitzavan et al., 2025). Flexible governance arrangements can help overcome bureaucratic problems and make processes more open and accountable, creating a climate that supports innovation (Torfing et al., 2019). Digital skills and the capacity to plan strategic resource use are also vital for making data-driven decisions and improving service delivery. Inter-organizational collaboration and information exchange give local governments access to external specialists and resources

essential to sustaining innovation projects (Gil-García & Sayogo, 2016; Prachumrasee et al., 2024). Another essential factor is citizen involvement. Studies indicate that social capital and civic participation can enhance public-sector performance and yield stronger innovation outcomes in local government (Suebvises, 2018).

Innovation, Digital Governance, and Sustainability in Asia

Digital governance, decentralization, and sustainable development are increasingly intertwined with public-sector innovation in Asia. Governments in the region use digital technologies to improve services, make them more accessible, and make them work better. However, research indicates that the benefits of digital governance are unevenly distributed, particularly between urban and rural areas where infrastructure, digital literacy, and administrative skills differ significantly (Prachumrasee et al., 2024). These differences show how important it is to look at innovation in specific local settings. In Thailand's upper northeastern regions, LAOs often operate with limited resources, dispersed populations, and increasing expectations for improved services and digital governance, making innovation both necessary and challenging (Haque, 2010; Unger & Mahakanjana, 2016).

Research Gap and Conceptual Implications

The existing literature emphasizes the importance of leadership, governance, digitalization, engagement, and collaboration in fostering public-sector innovation; yet, significant gaps remain. Many studies focus on single determinants rather than exploring how multiple organizational factors shape innovation outcomes. Additionally, empirical research on rural and semi-rural municipal governments is limited, as the current literature primarily focuses on metropolitan or national contexts. Furthermore, mixed-methods studies that integrate quantitative data with qualitative insights from local executives to clarify how innovation capability evolves within local administrative organizations remain scarce (de Vries et al., 2016; Torfing et al., 2019). This study integrates critical factors influencing innovation, including innovative leadership, a culture that fosters innovation, citizen and stakeholder engagement, the utilization of digital technology, adaptive governance, strategic resource allocation, and collaborative networks, into a cohesive analytical framework. This framework will be used to examine how these characteristics affect innovation outcomes in LAOs across Thailand's upper northeastern provinces (Prachumrasee et al., 2024; Zumitzavan et al., 2025).

Conceptual Framework

This study offers a conceptual framework to clarify how Local Administrative Organizations (LAOs) in Thailand's upper northeastern provinces evolve into innovative public organizations. The concept is based on the idea that public-sector innovation comes from the interaction of organizational and relational elements. As a result, inventive leadership, an organizational culture that supports innovation, citizen and stakeholder participation, the use of digital technology, flexible and open governance, strategic resource allocation, and network collaboration are all seen as independent variables. These characteristics are expected to influence the dependent variables, namely administrative efficiency, organizational learning capacity, and budgetary innovation. The framework asserts that LAO innovation is enhanced when leadership supports change, governance promotes adaptability and transparency, digital systems are utilized efficiently, resources are managed strategically, and collaborative networks enable knowledge exchange and problem resolution (de Vries et al., 2016; Gasco-Hernandez et al., 2022; Torfing et al., 2019; Zumitzavan et al., 2025).

Consequently, the conceptual framework identifies several independent variables—specifically, innovative leadership, an organizational culture conducive to innovation, robust citizen and stakeholder participation, effective use of digital technology, flexible and transparent governance structures, strategic resource allocation, and collaborative network engagement—as critical determinants. These multifaceted characteristics are hypothesized to directly influence the dependent variables, which encapsulate the core indicators of innovative

LAOs: enhanced administrative efficiency, the cultivation of a learning organization, and the successful implementation of budgetary innovation.

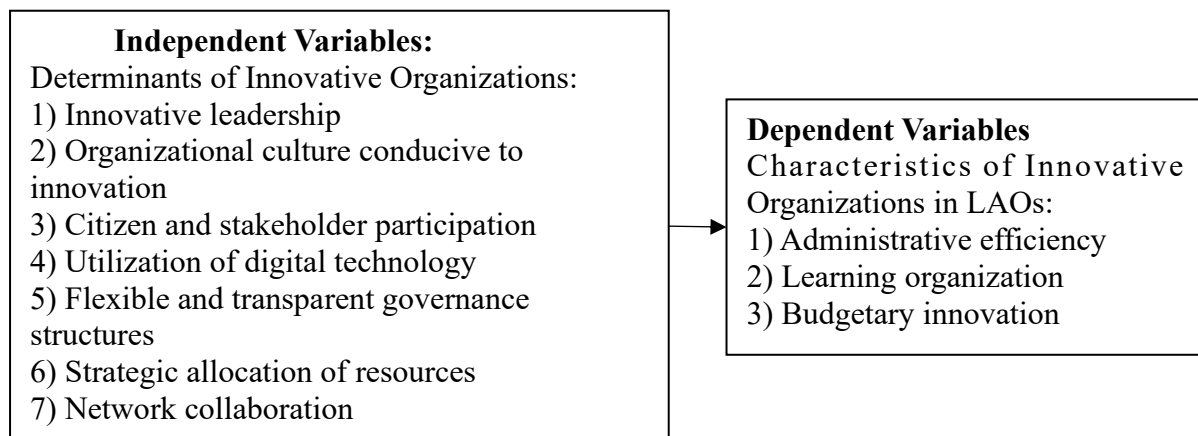


Figure 1 Research Conceptual Framework

Research Methods

Research Population and Sample

The research population consists of 8,316 employees from 300 Local Administrative Organizations (LAOs) in the upper northeastern provinces. The study selected a sample of 381 respondents from these LAOs using simple random sampling; Yamane's (1973) formula was used to calculate the sample size. However, to collect qualitative data, the study conducted in-depth interviews with eight LAO executives from the three provinces in the upper northeast. Because of their direct decision-making responsibilities and background in managing and promoting organizational innovation, these informants were selected to offer deeper insights into how LAOs become innovative organizations.

Data Collection and Analytical Procedures

Conducted over a comprehensive one-year period from October 2024 to October 2025, this research seamlessly integrated the systematic development of instruments, empirical data collection, and robust analytical synthesis. After formal ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Nakhon Phanom University (Certificate No. HE 13368), the data collection process used two rigorously developed instruments: a structured questionnaire and an in-depth interview guide. The questionnaire was strategically divided to capture respondent demographics, assess the seven determinants of organizational innovation using a standardized five-point Likert scale (Srisa-ard, 2011), evaluate three core indicators of innovative organizations, and solicit strategic suggestions through open-ended inquiries. Concurrently, the structured interview guide, administered directly to municipal executives, explored perceived enablers and constraints of innovation, probing their practical experiences with digital technologies, strategic resource allocations, and network collaborations.

Data collection officially commenced following formal administrative coordination with the sampled Local Administrative Organizations (LAOs) across the targeted upper northeastern provinces. A total of 381 questionnaires were systematically distributed and successfully retrieved, ensuring a complete and highly reliable response rate. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted iteratively based on the availability of executive informants. Subsequently, the quantitative data were rigorously analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential methods—specifically Pearson's correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA)—to identify significant predictors of organizational innovation at the .05 significance level. Concurrently, the qualitative interview transcripts were evaluated using systematic

content analysis, where data were meticulously organized and coded to extract major thematic drivers and operational constraints. Ultimately, methodological triangulation integrated the quantitative and qualitative findings, ensuring a comprehensive, reliable, and robust understanding of innovation dynamics within the studied local administrative bodies.

Research Results

The demographic analysis of 381 respondents reveals the following: Most respondents were female (56.7%). The largest age group was 41-50 years (36.5%). Most respondents had more than 16 years of work experience (32.1%). The predominant educational qualification was a Bachelor's degree (74.8%). In terms of job position, the majority were government officers (65.1%). Regarding income, the largest group earned 25,001 THB or above per month (28.3%). These findings suggest that most LAO personnel in the study area are experienced, well-educated government officers with relatively stable incomes. This demographic composition may positively influence the organizational capacity to adopt and sustain innovation, aligning with prior studies highlighting the importance of human resources in innovation-driven organizations (Senge, 1990).

Table 1 Analysis of the current conditions of factors influencing LAOs in becoming innovative organizations (n = 381)

No.	Factors Influencing Innovative Organizations	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
1	Innovative leadership	4.31	0.61	High
2	Organizational culture conducive to innovation	4.14	0.75	High
3	Citizen and stakeholder participation	4.24	0.66	High
4	Utilization of digital technology	4.27	0.64	High
5	Flexible and transparent governance structures	4.32	0.62	High
6	Strategic allocation of resources	4.24	0.61	High
7	Network collaboration	4.17	0.66	High
Overall		4.24	0.58	High

The analysis of factors influencing LAOs in becoming innovative organizations in the upper northeastern provinces revealed that, overall, the factors were rated at a high level ($\bar{x} = 4.24$, S.D. = 0.58). When considering each dimension individually, all factors were also found at a high level. Ranked in order from highest to lowest mean scores, the results were as follows: Flexible and transparent governance structures ($\bar{x} = 4.32$, S.D. = 0.62), Innovative leadership ($\bar{x} = 4.31$, S.D. = 0.61), Utilization of digital technology ($\bar{x} = 4.27$, S.D. = 0.64), Strategic allocation of resources and Citizen and stakeholder participation ($\bar{x} = 4.24$, S.D. = 0.61 and 0.66, respectively), Network collaboration ($\bar{x} = 4.17$, S.D. = 0.66), Organizational culture conducive to innovation ($\bar{x} = 4.14$, S.D. = 0.75). These findings suggest that governance structures, leadership, and digital technology are the most critical determinants for fostering innovation within LAOs. At the same time, organizational culture—although still rated high—appears to be comparatively less emphasized. This aligns with previous studies showing that governance, leadership, and technological adaptation play central roles in enabling public organizations to become innovative (Lukkhasorn & Lowatcharin, 2019; Namburi, 2019). The analysis of innovative organizational factors among LAOs in Sakon Nakhon, Mukdahan, and Nakhon Phanom provinces indicated that, overall, these factors were rated highly ($\bar{x} = 4.23$, S.D. = 0.65). When examined individually, each factor also received a high-level assessment. Ranked by mean scores, the results are as follows: Learning organization ($\bar{x} = 4.32$, S.D. = 0.83), Budgetary innovation ($\bar{x} = 4.22$, S.D. = 0.70), Administrative efficiency ($\bar{x} = 4.14$, S.D. = 0.69). These findings highlight that the learning organization dimension was considered the most significant indicator of innovative organizations, reflecting the importance

of continuous knowledge development and adaptability within LAOs. This aligns with Wannasri (2020), who emphasized that fostering a learning-oriented organizational culture is central to achieving innovation. Meanwhile, budgetary innovation and administrative efficiency also play vital roles by ensuring resources are strategically managed to support innovative practices (Expressway Authority of Thailand, 2023; Namburi, 2019).

Table 2 Analysis of factors characterizing innovative organizations in local administrative organizations (LAOs) in the upper northeastern provinces (n = 381)

No.	Factors of Innovative Organizations	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
1	Administrative efficiency	4.14	0.69	High
2	Learning organization	4.32	0.83	High
3	Budgetary innovation	4.22	0.70	High
Overall		4.23	0.65	High

Table 3 Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis (MRA) on the Research Hypotheses

Factors Influencing the Development of Innovative Organizations	B	S.E.	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant (a)	.056	.133	-	.422	.673
X1: Innovative leadership	.000	.043	.000	.009	.990
X2: Organizational culture conducive to innovation	.093	.048	.106	1.961	.051
X3: Citizen and stakeholder participation	-.062	.053	-.063	-1.177	.240
X4: Utilization of digital technology	.289	.051	.282	5.686	.000*
X5: Flexible and transparent governance structures	.160	.047	.153	3.425	.000*
X6: Strategic allocation of resources	.209	.056	.196	3.740	.000*
X7: Network collaboration	.296	.052	.297	5.734	.000*
R = .789, R ² = .709, Adjusted R ² = 0.698, F = 134, S.E. = .050					

*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level

Table 3 presents the statistical findings from multiple linear regression tests measuring the extent to which the seven determinants influence the development of innovative organizations among the study LAOs. The linear regression model was statistically significant overall, $F(7, 373) = 134.00$, $p < .001$. As shown in the table, the regression model had an R of .789 and an R² of .709 with an adjusted R² of .698. The model with the seven determinants showed that about 70.9% of the variance in innovative organizations' development among LAOs could be explained by the seven determinants that were entered into the model, and the standard error of the estimate was .050.

Before interpreting the unstandardized and standardized coefficients, we conducted rigorous multicollinearity diagnostics. The variance inflation factor (VIF) for each variable remained strictly below the recommended threshold ($VIF < 5$), confirming that multicollinearity did not exist within the dataset and assuring that the regression estimates were highly stable.

Subsequently, the linear regression analysis demonstrated that four critical determinants—namely, the utilization of digital technology ($\beta = .282$, $p < .001$), flexible and transparent governance structures ($\beta = .153$, $p < .001$), strategic resource allocation ($\beta = .196$, $p < .001$), and network collaboration ($\beta = .297$, $p < .001$)—exhibit statistically significant positive relationships with the development of innovative organizations. Consequently, these specific factors are positively associated with driving innovation among the 380 participating LAOs. Notably, the standardized coefficient for network collaboration was the largest among all determinants in the model. This indicates that inter-organizational linkages, collaborative efforts, and strategic networking are the most influential and statistically significant predictors of innovation development in the sampled rural and semi-rural provinces. Therefore, compared

directly with innovative leadership, organizational culture, digital technology adoption, resource allocation, or citizen participation, close cooperation with external counterparts is fundamentally essential and significantly more influential in sustaining innovative practices and elevating overall municipal performance.

Qualitative insights gathered from municipal executives were systematically synthesized into core thematic groupings that clearly explain the practical innovation approaches implemented by LAOs. Foremost, adapting to rapid global transformations, profound digital shifts, and economic volatility was consistently emphasized as an absolute necessity rather than a mere option, compelling LAOs to pivot aggressively from traditional administrative management toward proactive, resilient strategies. To navigate these shifts effectively, innovative leadership was deemed utterly critical in championing a clear, forward-looking organizational vision. Leaders must cultivate a culture of openness, risk tolerance, and widespread experimentation, where transparent, flexible governance structures empower officials and citizens to co-create solutions. In this adaptive environment, executives strongly emphasized the need for digital transformation, advocating the integration of unified digital platforms, Big Data analytics, and smart citizen service applications to improve operational efficiency and enable real-time, data-driven decision-making.

Furthermore, informants explicitly identified strategic resource allocation and targeted budgetary innovation as essential structural enablers. Executives recommended immediately establishing dedicated innovation funds alongside systematically reducing administrative redundancies to free up vital financial resources. This structural support must be matched with comprehensive capacity-building initiatives and ongoing knowledge-exchange platforms to strengthen staff competencies across all municipal agencies significantly. Emphasizing a truly inclusive developmental approach, the panel recognized active citizen participation and collaborative co-creation as indispensable to ensure that newly implemented services authentically address local needs while building enduring public trust. Finally, to firmly institutionalize these innovative practices, executives stressed the absolute necessity of embedding rigorous monitoring systems and evaluation frameworks, explicitly endorsing the adoption of recognized international quality standards—such as ISO certifications or the Thailand Quality Award (TQA)—to transparently measure and sustain strategic success in both service delivery efficiency and holistic citizen satisfaction.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study's results provide crucial information on how Local Administrative Organizations (LAOs) in Thailand's upper northeastern provinces can generate new ideas and achieve their goals. Overall, the results suggest that LAOs are relatively open to new ideas in many areas, such as leadership, organizational culture, citizen engagement, use of digital technology, governance flexibility, resource sharing, and collaboration with other groups. These findings suggest that many critical prerequisites for public-sector innovation are already in place within these institutions. This aligns with previous studies indicating that the ability to innovate in public organizations is closely linked to organizational readiness, institutional support, and the capacity to integrate new technologies and governance frameworks into administrative processes (de Vries et al., 2016; Mergel et al., 2019).

Readiness for Organizational Innovation

The high mean ratings in most areas suggest that the institutional climate in LAOs is generally open to new ideas, especially regarding digital transformation, innovative leadership, and flexible governance. These findings support earlier research showing that digital technology and flexible governance frameworks drive innovation in modern public administration (Mergel et al., 2019; Scupola & Zanfei, 2016). When used in routine administrative duties, digital tools can improve information flow, help consumers make better choices, and make services more

responsive. Governance frameworks that promote transparency and flexibility can reduce bureaucratic impediments and encourage innovation inside public organizations (Bekkers & Tummers, 2018; Torfing et al., 2019).

Still, consistently high scores across all variables could mean respondents agree on something, rather than that all LAOs are doing well on innovation. Previous research shows that innovation outcomes in public organizations are often shaped by the institutional setting, administrative capacity, and local governance frameworks (de Vries et al., 2016). In Thailand, centralized administrative restrictions may occasionally limit local autonomy, constraining disruptive innovation and promoting incremental changes within established bureaucratic structures (Unger & Mahakanjana, 2016). So, even when overall readiness for innovation seems strong, implementation may vary depending on the institution's needs and its ability to manage it.

Key Determinants of Innovative Organizations

The regression analysis demonstrates that several factors significantly influence the emergence of innovative organizations within LAOs. These include working together in networks, using digital technology, planning how to use resources wisely, and having flexible governing structures. Collaborating in networks was the most reliable indicator of innovative outcomes among these characteristics. This research highlights the importance of external alliances and inter-organizational collaboration in augmenting innovative capacity inside resource-constrained municipal governments. Collaborative governance and co-creation methods enable public organizations to access external knowledge, mobilize resources, and jointly develop solutions to complex public challenges (Torfing et al., 2019; Voorberg et al., 2015).

Digital technology is becoming increasingly vital, which is why digital transformation matters for public sector innovation. Digital platforms, data systems, and online service channels can help operations run more smoothly, support data-driven decision-making, and make it easier for government agencies and individuals to communicate (Mergel et al., 2019; Gil-García & Sayogo, 2016). It is also crucial to allocate resources strategically to promote innovative projects, especially in local governments with limited budgets. When organizations manage resources well, they can focus on innovation projects, invest in digital infrastructure, and build capacity for change (Scupola & Zanfei, 2016).

Open, adaptable governance systems also strongly influence innovation. Organizations can learn and try new things when governance structures make bureaucratic processes less rigid while still holding people accountable. These governance settings encourage stakeholders to work together and help public organizations address new problems (Bekkers & Tummers, 2018; Torfing et al., 2019).

Non-significant Determinants and Integration with Qualitative Findings

Interestingly, the regression model did not identify inventive leadership, organizational culture, or citizen and stakeholder participation as statistically significant direct determinants of innovation results. Although this result may seem inconsistent with previous theoretical expectations, it does not necessarily mean these elements are inconsequential. The findings suggest that leadership, culture, and participation may exert effects indirectly, through alternative organizational processes such as governance frameworks, resource allocation, and collaborative networks. Previous research supports this interpretation, showing that leadership and organizational culture often impact innovation indirectly by shaping learning processes, employee empowerment, and knowledge-sharing practices within organizations (de Vries et al., 2016; Torfing et al., 2019).

The qualitative interview results further support this view. Interviews with LAO executives regularly highlighted digital transformation, collaborative networks, adaptive governance, and smart resource allocation as practical drivers of innovation. The interview data also suggested that a clear company goal and a positive culture remain crucial for these structural mechanisms to work effectively. Leaders are especially important for getting people to work together, try

new things, and ensure new ideas align with the organization's goals. An organizational culture that encourages transparency, learning, and information sharing can also help innovation projects continue longer.

The quantitative and qualitative data collectively suggest that innovation in LAOs does not emerge from a single determinant; instead, it arises from the interplay of multiple organizational elements. Structural factors such as governance flexibility, digital capability, and collaborative networks appear to affect how well innovation works directly. Meanwhile, leadership and culture enable these systems to function. This comprehensive perspective reinforces the claim that public-sector innovation is a systemic process involving institutional frameworks, organizational capacities, and collaborative governance structures (de Vries et al., 2016; Mergel et al., 2019; Torfing et al., 2019).

Implications

The results suggest that systemic and structural factors may influence innovation outcomes in Thai LAOs more than individual-level factors alone. Practical initiatives to foster innovation should prioritize strengthening networks, investing in digital systems, enhancing governance flexibility and openness, and allocating resources effectively. To maximize impact, leadership and culture initiatives should be coordinated with these broader structural changes.

New Knowledge and Strategic Recommendations

Synthesizing these multidimensional findings, the research constructs a comprehensive model of organizational innovation tailored to local administrative bodies, as conceptually illustrated in Figure 2. The new knowledge shows that flexible, transparent governance accelerates administrative adaptation while significantly reducing bureaucratic inertia, especially when leaders actively support creativity and tolerate safe experimentation. At the same time, strategic, data-driven resource allocation ensures financial and technological investments prioritize rapidly evolving public needs. This vital internal capability is amplified through robust network collaborations—spanning government, the private sector, academia, and local communities—that enable essential knowledge sharing and the dynamic co-creation of sophisticated public solutions. Furthermore, integrating these systemic pathways with comprehensive digital transformation initiatives empowers municipalities to embed innovation into their core strategic frameworks, using advanced metrics and recognized quality criteria to drive continuous improvement and strong public accountability.

Based on this empirical model, several critical, actionable recommendations emerge for LAOs seeking to strengthen their innovative capacity. First, municipal bodies in the upper northeastern provinces must strategically pivot toward providing modern, citizen-centered services, placing a definitive premium on transparent, proactive, and accessible information dissemination. To achieve this structural shift, administrations should rapidly adopt and tightly integrate advanced digital technologies, including smart data systems and artificial intelligence, to meticulously optimize real-time monitoring, strategic evaluation, and evidence-based decision-making. Additionally, LAOs must actively build broad, multi-sector participatory networks, engaging diverse stakeholders across all development initiatives to achieve sustainable, equitable improvements in local quality of life. Ultimately, future policy and infrastructure initiatives should prioritize expanding robust digital systems, ensuring local administrative platforms have the technological agility to consistently deliver responsive, inclusive, and genuinely innovative public services.

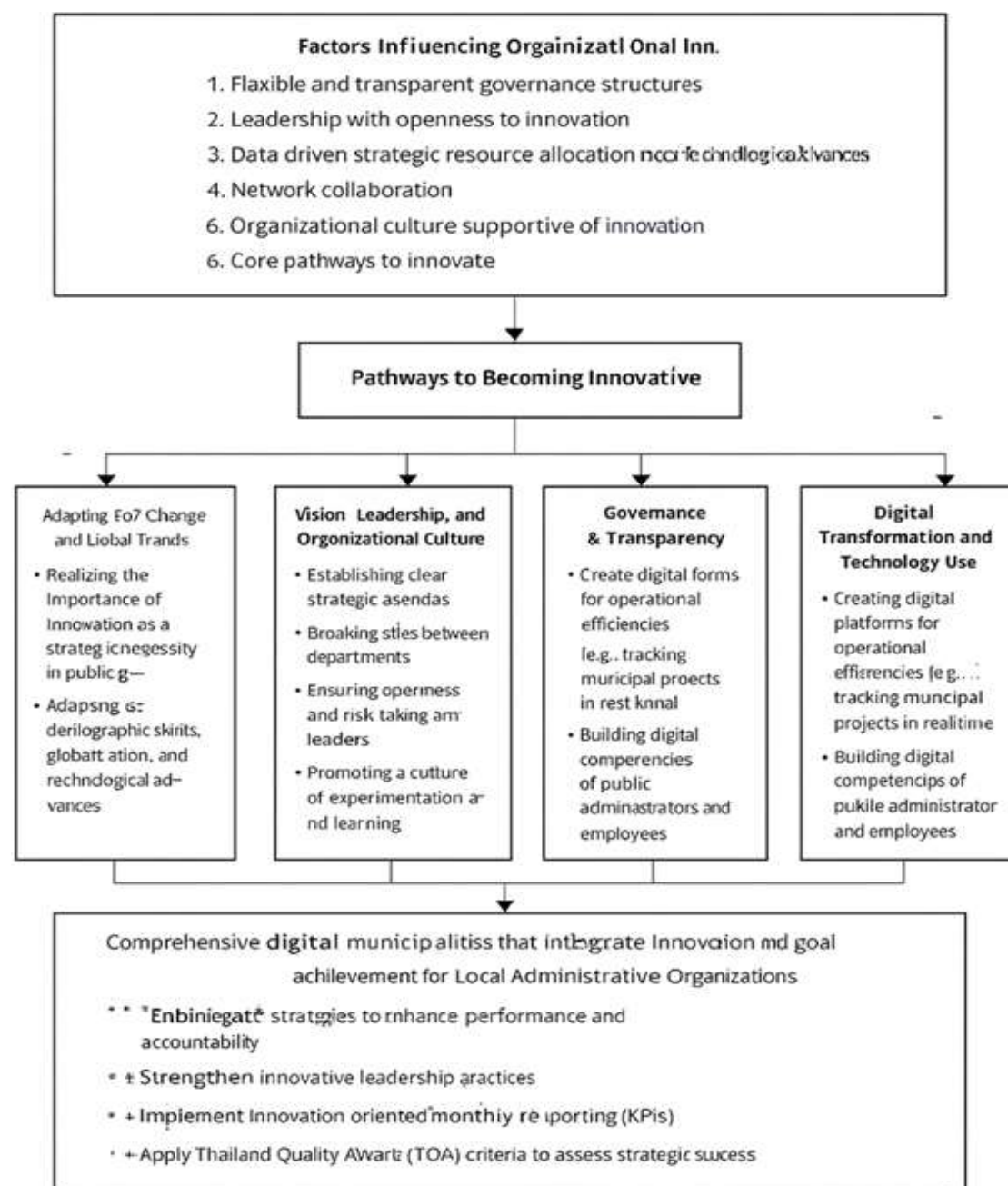


Figure 2 Organizational Innovation and Achievement of Goals of Local Administrative Organizations

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