

Self-Leadership, Innovative Work Behaviour, and Public Sector Performance in Kenyan County Governments: A Conceptual Framework

Pamela Namulanda Situma

School of Leadership, Business, and Technology, Pan Africa Christian University, Nairobi, Kenya
Email: situmapam@gmail.com

How to cite this paper: Situma, P. N. (2026). Self-Leadership, Innovative Work Behaviour, and Public Sector Performance in Kenyan County Governments: A Conceptual Framework. *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 14, 261-269. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojbm.2026.141016>

Received: November 11, 2025

Accepted: January 4, 2026

Published: January 7, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Objective: Operational inefficiencies and service delivery deficits persist in Kenyan County Governments despite the devolution mandate. This study aims to address these behavioural gaps by proposing a conceptual framework linking Self-Leadership Strategies (SLS) to Organisational Performance through Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB). **Theoretical Framework:** The paper integrates Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to argue that SLS enhances self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation. These psychological states are posited as necessary antecedents for the multi-stage process of IWB (Idea Generation, Promotion, and Realisation). **Conceptual Model:** The framework proposes a partial mediation model where IWB mediates the relationship between SLS and the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) performance perspectives (Internal Processes, Customer, Financial). It explicitly incorporates “Relatedness” in the idea promotion stage and identifies organisational moderators (Bureaucracy, Political Interference) specific to the Kenyan context. **Policy Implications:** The study suggests that to improve public sector performance, policy must move beyond structural reforms to foster individual behavioural agency. Practical recommendations include establishing “innovation circles” to satisfy social needs and reducing bureaucratic red tape to allow self-led innovations to flourish.

Keywords

Self-Leadership, Innovative Work Behaviour, Conceptual Framework, Public Sector Performance, Balanced Scorecard, Kenya, Devolution

1. Introduction and Contextual Background

The devolution of governance in Kenya, formalized by the 2010 Constitution, was intended to decentralize service delivery, enhance public participation, and improve resource management at the County Government (CG) level (Mbui & Minja, 2023). However, operational challenges persist, with CGs frequently facing scrutiny over inadequate financial management, sustained performance deficits, and entrenched issues of corruption (Kimani, Oluoch & Ncabira, 2021; Nzomo, 2023). Reports consistently highlight low internal revenue collection and inefficient expenditure, pointing to systemic weaknesses in administrative processes (Lagat et al., 2016; Ochuodho & Ngaba, 2020). In the public sector globally, achieving high performance is inherently complex due to multiple stakeholders demands and political factors, necessitating effective performance management systems (Mohangi & Nyika, 2023). Given the documented deficiencies in CG functionality, purely structural or technical solutions are insufficient. The core challenge in translating decentralized mandates into effective outcomes in Kenya lies in the behavioral agency of individual public servants. High-performing public systems rely on employees who voluntarily and proactively self-regulate their behavior to achieve organizational goals (Maden-Eyiusta & Alparslan, 2022; Enyina, Okurebia, & Uwa, 2023). This conceptual paper addresses this critical behavioral gap by proposing a novel, theory-driven framework. We argue that Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB) is the essential behavioral mechanism for performance improvement in CGs, and that Self-Leadership Strategies (SLS), rooted in robust psychological theories of motivation, are the necessary antecedents that enable IWB (Kör, 2016). The objective of this manuscript is to articulate a precise theoretical cascade: Self-Leadership Strategies (SLS) → Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB) → Balanced Scorecard (BSC) Performance. By anchoring this framework in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), we provide a model that is both psychologically robust and strategically measurable for the Kenyan public sector context.

African Regional and Kenyan Context

The African regional context is characterized by unique institutional voids and challenges, particularly within the Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) and public sectors. These contexts often require a high degree of adaptability and proactive behavior from individual actors to overcome structural and bureaucratic inertia.

Within the Kenyan county governments, operational performance is often measured through basic financial inputs/outputs. However, the complexity of public service necessitates a more holistic performance evaluation that accounts for service quality and internal process efficacy, which are foundational to achieving financial stability. Prior research has highlighted that innovation is crucial for county government performance (Njeri, Elegwa, & Anthony, 2018), yet the individual-level drivers of this innovation—specifically Self-Leadership—remain sig-

nificantly under-examined in this specific governance system. This framework aims to provide the theoretical structure to fill that gap.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Self-Leadership and Innovation

Self-Leadership (SLS), primarily developed by Charles C. Manz in 1986 (Manz, 1986), is defined as a process through which individuals influence themselves to achieve the self-direction and self-motivation needed to perform. This concept moves beyond mere self-management by incorporating motivational and cognitive elements. SLS is typically categorized into three overarching strategies (Neck, Manz, & Houghton, 2020):

- Behaviour-Focused Strategies: Actions aimed at self-regulating behavior (e.g., self-goal setting, self-observation).
- Natural Reward Strategies: Efforts to create environments that are intrinsically motivating (e.g., focusing on enjoyable aspects of a task).
- Constructive Thought Strategies: Strategies aimed at restructuring unproductive thinking patterns (e.g., visualizing successful performance or challenging irrational beliefs).

To explicate the link between individual agency and organizational performance in Kenyan County Governments, the suggested framework is anchored in two complementary psychological theories: Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Rather than operating in isolation, these theories provide the distinct cognitive and motivational scaffolding required for the specific dimensions of Self-Leadership Strategies (SLS) to activate Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB).

2.1. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Constructive Thought Strategies

Social Cognitive Theory, developed by Bandura (1986), provides the theoretical anchor for the Constructive Thought dimension of SLS. SCT posits that human functioning is a product of the interplay between personal behaviors, environmental influences, and cognitive processes—the most critical being *Self-Efficacy*. Constructive Thought Strategies, such as visualizing successful performance and challenging irrational beliefs, function as cognitive mechanisms that directly build this self-efficacy. By mentally rehearsing successful service delivery or reframing bureaucratic hurdles as solvable challenges, public officers enhance their belief in their capability to execute tasks. Consequently, SCT specifically supports the Idea Generation stage of IWB. High self-efficacy is a prerequisite for ideation; employees must believe they possess the cognitive capacity to solve problems before they attempt to generate novel solutions (Maysaroh, Qodriah, & Risdianto, 2025).

2.2. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Natural Reward Strategies

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) serves as the theoretical founda-

tion for the Natural Reward dimension of SLS. SDT suggests that optimal functioning depends on the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: *Autonomy*, *Competence*, and *Relatedness*. Natural Reward Strategies, which involve focusing on the enjoyable aspects of a task, operate through intrinsic motivation. When employees restructure their work to align with their natural interests, they satisfy the needs for Autonomy (volition) and Competence (mastery) (Odinga, Matata, & Monari, 2023). This theoretical lens specifically supports the Idea Promotion stage of IWB. Promoting an idea in a rigid public sector environment is socially risky, and Natural Reward strategies sustain the intrinsic motivation required to persist against resistance. Furthermore, SDT explicitly introduces the need for *Relatedness*, explaining why innovators seek social buy-in from colleagues, thereby transforming a solitary idea into a shared organizational goal.

2.3. Integrating SCT and SDT: The Role of Behaviour-Focused Strategies

The Behaviour-Focused dimension of SLS—comprising tactics like self-goal setting and self-observation—represents the integration of both theories. This dimension utilizes the self-regulatory tools described in SCT to achieve the autonomous goals described in SDT. This integration is critical for supporting the Idea Realization stage of IWB. The implementation phase requires the discipline of SCT to track progress and self-correct, combined with the volition of SDT to endure administrative fatigue and push projects to completion (Green & Van Zyl, 2023).

2.4. Synthesis: The Cognitive-Motivational Engine

The synthesis of these theories suggests that SLS leads to IWB through a dual-process mechanism rather than a single pathway. SCT provides “Can Do” (Capability), where Constructive Thought allows employees to develop self-efficacy to believe they *can* innovate. Simultaneously, SDT provides the “Want To” (Volition), where Natural Rewards cultivate the intrinsic motivation to *want* to innovate. Therefore, High Performance in County Governments is not merely a result of technical skills, but of a psychological state where employees feel both capable and autonomously driven to engage in the idea generation, promotion, and realization required for service delivery improvement (Harunavamwe, Pillay, & Nel, 2020).

3. Conceptual Framework: Self-Leadership → IWB → Performance

3.1. The Mediating Mechanism: SLS → IWB

To measure CG performance, this paper adopts the Balanced Scorecard Model (Kaplan & Norton, 1992) as a currently customised tool in the Kenyan public service. Syahdan, Munawaroh and Akbar (2018) recognise that while the BSC Model has been used in public sector organizations there are still difficulties associated

with implementation in this sector. We posit that IWB mediates the relationship between SLS and CG performance. However, acknowledging the complexity of organizational behavior, we propose partial mediation rather than full mediation.

While the primary pathway is that SLS triggers the intrinsic motivation (Autonomy/Competence) required for high-risk IWB, SLS may also have a direct effect on the Learning & Growth perspective of the Balanced Scorecard. An employee high in self-leadership may report higher job satisfaction and skill acquisition (Learning & Growth outcomes) even if they are not currently engaged in active innovation.

Proposition 1: Self-Leadership Strategies are positively related to employee satisfaction of the Basic Psychological Needs for Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness).

Proposition 2: The synergistic effect of Self-Efficacy (SCT) and Need Satisfaction (SDT) is positively related to Innovative Work Behaviour.

Proposition 3: Innovative Work Behaviour mediates the relationship between Self-Leadership Strategies and Organizational Performance though direct effects on Learning & Growth may persist (Partial Mediation).

3.2. Contextual Relevance: Organizational Moderators in Kenya

To enhance practical relevance, the proposed framework must account for the specific institutional friction inherent in the Kenyan public sector. The theoretical trajectory moving from Self-Leadership Strategies (SLS) to Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) and subsequently to Organizational Performance does not exist in a vacuum; rather, the strength of these relationships is likely contingent on specific organizational moderators that dictate the success or failure of the model (Gkontelos, Vaiopoulou, & Stamovlasis, 2023).

The first significant moderator is the prevalence of a rigid bureaucratic culture. Highly formalized structures, common in established public entities, may dampen the catalytic effect of self-leadership on innovation. Even when an individual possesses autonomy and motivation associated with high levels of SLS, the presence of rigid red tape and procedural bottlenecks can arrest the process at the implementation stage, preventing Idea Realization. Consequently, the potential for self-led initiative is stifled by the inability to navigate complex administrative hierarchies.

Furthermore, the framework must address the reality of political interference, particularly within County Governments where political patronage can frequently override meritocratic systems. High levels of political interference act as a potent negative moderator, weakening the link between an employee's innovation efforts and actual organizational performance. When decision-making is driven by political allegiance rather than operational efficiency, the value of IWB is diminished, and the expected performance outcomes fail to materialize regardless of the employee's effort.

Conversely, Leadership Support can buffer the inherent reputational and career

risks associated with challenging the status quo through IWB (Akhtar & Ali, 2023). Leaders who actively encourage self-regulation and autonomy strengthen the link between SLS and the early stages of innovation, specifically Idea Promotion. By creating a psychological safety net, supportive leaders ensure that self-leadership translates effectively into observable innovative behaviors.

3.3. Performance Measurement: The Balanced Scorecard (BSC)

The four BSC perspectives map the cascade effect:

- 1) **Learning & Growth (L&G):** Employee competence, motivation, and system capacity. Directly impacted by SLS (enhanced motivation/competence) and the “Partial Mediation” pathway.
- 2) **Internal Processes (IP):** Efficiency, quality, and cycle time of operations (e.g., revenue collection, permit processing). This is the primary outcome of IWB.
- 3) **Customer/Citizen (CUS):** The distal outcomes resulting from improved processes—stakeholder satisfaction, service quality, and responsiveness.
- 4) **Financial (FIN):** The distal outcomes resulting from improved processes - revenue generation, cost control, and budget utilization.

A conceptual model is provided in **Figure 1** to illustrate the relationships explained.

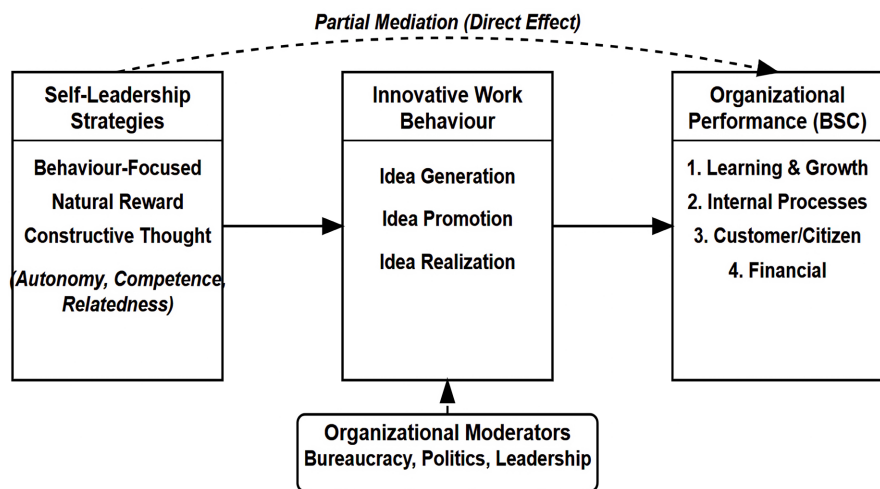


Figure 1. Conceptual model: self-leadership strategies, innovative work behavior, and public sector performance (Balanced Scorecard). Source: (Author, 2025).

The Conceptual Model flows from SLS (antecedent) → IWB (mediator) → Performance (outcome), moderated by Organizational Context (Bureaucracy/Politics).

4. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

4.1. Conclusion

This paper integrates SDT and SCT to demonstrate how Self-Leadership drives public sector performance. By mapping specific SLS dimensions to IWB stages—

such as linking *Constructive Thought* to *Idea Generation* and *Natural Rewards* to the social demands of *Idea Promotion*—we provide a granular view of innovation. Furthermore, by acknowledging Relatedness and the potential for Partial Mediation, the framework respects the complexity of human behavior. Crucially, the inclusion of moderators like political interference grounds the model in the reality of the Kenyan public sector. This model constitutes critical theoretical advancement, guiding future empirical research toward actionable interventions focused on behavioral change in devolved governance systems.

4.2. Policy and Management Recommendations

The theoretical cascade proposed by the SLS → IWB → BSC framework yields specific, testable policy and managerial recommendations for CG management.

First, to maximize the efficacy of idea generation, policy interventions should extend beyond the encouragement of individual autonomy to the structural formation of “innovation circles” or cross-functional teams. By institutionalizing these collaborative units, the organization can satisfy the psychological need for Relatedness while simultaneously leveraging Natural Reward strategies. This social scaffolding is particularly vital during the arduous “Idea Promotion” stage, ensuring that individual innovations are socially supported and refined rather than isolated.

Furthermore, management must acknowledge that investment in SLS training is insufficient if it occurs within a stifling bureaucratic culture. To bridge the gap between employee potential and organizational execution, County Governments must actively dismantle excessive red tape. Reducing these structural barriers is essential to ensure that the high self-efficacy generated by SLS is not wasted but is instead allowed to translate directly into tangible Idea Realization. Without addressing these moderators, the momentum built by self-leadership is lost to administrative friction.

Finally, the appraisal mechanisms within the organization require recalibration to reflect the nuances of the partial mediation dynamic (Papulová, Gažová, Šlenker, & Papula, 2021). Performance evaluations must account for the foundational Learning & Growth gains derived directly from SLS—such as self-development and psychological ownership—rather than focusing exclusively on final financial outputs. A balanced appraisal system validates the internal processes of self-leadership, reinforcing the behavior even before it yields quantitative financial returns.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Akhtar, M. S., & Ali, H. (2023). Innovative Work Behavior: An Association of Leadership Styles, Job Autonomy, and Employee Proactive Behavior. *Journal of Social Sciences Review*, 3, 190-211.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*.

- Prentice-Hall. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1985-98423-000>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*. Plenum. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-1-4899-2271-7>
- Enyina, I. G., Okurebia, S., & Uwa, K. (2023). Employee's Work Behaviour: Absenteeism, Embezzlement, & Organizational Performance. *International Journal of Business and Management Review*, *11*, 85-99. <https://doi.org/10.37745/ijbmr.2013/vol11n68599>
- Gkontelos, A., Vaiopoulou, J., & Stamovlasis, D. (2023). Teachers' Innovative Work Behavior as a Function of Self-Efficacy, Burnout, and Irrational Beliefs: A Structural Equation Model. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, *13*, 403-418. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe13020030>
- Green, K., & Van Zyl, E. (2023). The Effect of Psychological Capital and Self-Leadership on Work Engagement among Agricultural Extension Advisors. *South African Journal of Agricultural Extension (SAJAE)*, *51*, 169-189. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2413-3221/2023/v51n4a15600>
- Harunavamwe, M., Pillay, D., & Nel, P. (2020). The Influence of Psychological Capital and Self-Leadership Strategies on Job Embeddedness in the Banking Industry. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, *18*, a1294. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v18i0.1294>
- Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (1992). The Balanced Scorecard—Measures That Drive Performance. *Harvard Business Review*, *70*, 71-79.
- Kimani, J., Oluoch, J., & Ncabira, K. (2021). Financial Management Practices and Performance of County Governments in Kenya. *International Journal of Finance and Accounting*, *6*, 22-35. <https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Kimani+Oluoch+Ncabira+2021>
- Kör, B. (2016). The Mediating Effects of Self-Leadership on Perceived Entrepreneurial Orientation and Innovative Work Behavior in the Banking Sector. *SpringerPlus*, *5*, Article No. 1829. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40064-016-3556-8>
- Lagat, C. K., Ayuma, C. O., Okelo, C. A., & Tere, E. (2016). Effect of Internal Control Systems on Financial Management in Baringo County Government, Kenya. *Journal of Economics, Finance and Accounting*, *3*, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.17261/pressacademia.2016116531>
- Maden-Eyiusta, C., & Alparslan, A. M. (2022). Proactive Personality and Innovative Work Behavior: The Role of Self-Leadership. *Innovation: Organization & Management*. <https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Maden-Eyiusta+Alparslan+2022>
- Manz, C. C. (1986). Self-Leadership: Toward an Expanded Theory of Self-Influence Processes in Organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, *11*, 585-600.
- Maysaroh, I., Qodriah, S. L., & Risdianto, R. (2025). Self-Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior: The Mediating Effect of Creative Self-Efficacy Among Government Employees in Kesambiirroh. *Jurnal Maneksi (Management Ekonomi dan Akuntansi)*, *14*, 1982-1992.
- Mbui, C., & Minja, D. (2023). Influence of Governance Practices on Performance of County Governments in Kenya: A Case of Embu County. *International Academic Journal of Law and Society*, *1*, 111-128. https://iajournals.org/articles/iajls_v1_i3_111_128.pdf
- Mohangi, P., & Nyika, F. (2023). Performance Management Implementation in Local Government: Lessons from Recent International Literature. *Jurnal Administrasi Publik Public Administration Journal*, *13*, 75-86. <https://doi.org/10.31289/jap.v13i1.9520>
- Neck, C. P., Manz, C. C., & Houghton, J. D. (2020). *Self-Leadership: The Definitive Guide to Personal Excellence* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Njeri, M., Elegwa, M., & Anthony, W. (2018). Innovation Strategies and Performance of County Governments in Kenya. *European Journal of Business and Strategic Management*,

3. <https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Njeri+Elegwa+Anthony+2018>

- Nzomo, E. M. (2023). Effect of Selected Factors on Revenue Collection in Machakos. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 11, b1-b8. <http://www.ijcrt.org/>
- Ochuodho, H. A., & Ngaba, D. (2020). Revenue Administration Strategies and Financial Performance of County Government of Kisumu, Kenya. *International Journal of Economics, Business and Management Research*, 4, 230-251. <http://www.ijebmr.com>
- Odinga, B., Matata, K., & Monari, D. (2023). Influence of Employee Empowerment on Job Satisfaction of Commercial State Corporations in Kenya. *Journal of Human Resource & Leadership*, 7, 79-97. <https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t6052>
- Papulová, Z., Gažová, A., Šlenker, M., & Papula, J. (2021). Performance Measurement System: Implementation Process in SMEs. *Sustainability*, 13, Article 4794. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13094794>
- Syahdan, S., Munawaroh, R., & Akbar, M. (2023). Balance Scorecard Implementation in Public Sector Organization, A Problem? *International Journal of Accounting, Finance, and Economics*, 1, 1-6. <https://journal.stkipsingkawang.ac.id/index.php/IJAFE/article/view/557/599>