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Analysis of the Human Resources Governance System in Tehran Municipality with a Sustainable Urban Development Approach

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Abstract

This study examines the Human Resources Governance (HRG) system in Tehran Municipality, focusing on its alignment with sustainable urban development. Tehran, Iran's economic and political hub, faces unique HR challenges due to economic volatility, stringent regulations, cultural norms, and rapid urban growth. The research investigates how HRG can address these complexities to foster a sustainable workforce. Drawing on agency theory and the resource-based view, the study explores the interplay of legal compliance, cultural values, and technological adoption in shaping effective HR systems. Tehran's labor market, shaped by the 1990 Labor Law and Islamic principles, navigates a dual economy of state-owned enterprises and emerging private sectors, yet struggles with outdated HR practices, high turnover, and brain drain exacerbated by sanctions and inflation. The study highlights the need for modernized HR strategies, including digital tools like Human Resource Information Systems, to enhance recruitment, retention, and employee engagement. Cultural factors, such as collectivism and gender roles, further complicate governance, necessitating inclusive policies to bridge disparities. Opportunities lie in leveraging Tehran's youthful, educated workforce and regional economic role through public-private partnerships, digital transformation, and ESG-focused strategies. The research employs a qualitative approach, analyzing Tehran's HR landscape through literature reviews and spatial auto-correlation methods. Findings suggest that adaptive, culturally sensitive HRG frameworks can mitigate economic and regulatory challenges while promoting sustainability. By integrating global best practices with local realities, Tehran can strengthen its human capital, positioning itself as a leader in HR governance for sustainable urban development.

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INTRODUCTION

Tehran, the political and economic heart of Iran, is home to a vibrant and multifaceted workforce that fuels its key sectors—industry, technology, and services. With over 8 million residents navigating a layered socio-economic landscape, the city's organizations contend with distinct challenges in the realm of human resource (HR) management (Montazeri & Khodaei, 2012). Human Resources Governance (HRG) encompasses the systems, guidelines, and operational norms designed to ensure that HR strategies remain in sync with organizational objectives, legal mandates, and cultural expectations while supporting long-term workforce development. Within Tehran's context, HRG holds considerable importance, yet it remains fraught with complications arising from economic uncertainty, intricate regulations, cultural traditions, and rapid urban expansion. This problem statement delves into these intertwined issues, identifying core obstacles and underlining the urgency for strategic reforms to elevate workforce governance (Shad, Monavvarian, & Amiry, 2019).

Tehran's economic fabric is an eclectic mix of legacy industries—like oil and manufacturing—and emerging fields such as fintech and software development (Ghaffari *et al.*, 2025). Its labor market reflects this variety, populated by seasoned experts, mid-skilled workers, and a growing influx of educated youth entering professional roles. However, the governance of human capital in Tehran operates within a uniquely challenging framework shaped by Islamic labor codes, stringent government controls, entrenched cultural norms, and macroeconomic stressors like inflation and international sanctions. These intertwined forces create a setting where businesses must juggle legal compliance, employee engagement, and operational performance (Sardarnia & Shakeri, 2015).

Historically, Iran's HR approaches were molded by centralized administrative structures, with the public sector playing a dominant employment role. In recent years, however, the growth of startups and private firms in Tehran has triggered a gradual shift, emphasizing agility, innovation, and alignment with global standards (Kim, 2025). Yet, many enterprises still depend on outdated HR procedures, lagging in digital transformation

and struggling to link HR strategies to their core missions. The lack of cohesive HR governance frameworks intensifies these struggles, leading to higher costs, staff churn, and weakened organizational outcomes (Mortazavie, 2017).

Iran's labor code, grounded in Islamic jurisprudence and national legislation, sets strict parameters on employment practices, including wages, insurance, leave policies, and termination rights. The 1990 Labor Law, while comprehensive, is frequently amended—creating a moving target for compliance. Navigating this legal landscape is particularly difficult for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often lack the legal resources to keep up, increasing their exposure to fines and violations (Aghazadeh *et al.*, 2020). Further compounding the issue, Tehran's isolation from international HR standards due to sanctions limits access to global best practices, keeping local firms at a disadvantage (Asadpuor, 2017).

Tehran's economic turbulence—marked by inflation, currency instability, and external sanctions—undermines employers' ability to offer competitive compensation packages. This has led to high turnover, especially among skilled professionals. Many ambitious graduates, discouraged by limited prospects, look abroad, deepening the brain drain. For HR governance to counter these trends, retention strategies must go beyond salary (Hendra *et al.*, 2024). Initiatives around professional growth, mentorship, and quality-of-life enhancements can offer alternative incentives that strengthen loyalty and reduce attrition (Badkoo *et al.*, 2024).

Many companies still manage HR functions manually or through rudimentary digital tools, hampering efforts to modernize recruitment, performance evaluations, and employee engagement. The slow adoption of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) is primarily driven by cost concerns and underdeveloped tech infrastructure (Ahmadi *et al.*, 2024). Without digital integration, organizations lose out on data-driven insights essential for planning and responsiveness. Upgrading HR technology is not a luxury—it's a prerequisite for efficient governance and long-term competitiveness (Fazeli *et al.*, 2015). The city's expanding economic landscape demands specialized talent in areas like clean

energy, digital finance, and advanced tech. However, education and vocational systems often fail to produce graduates with the right capabilities. Training opportunities within firms are also limited, often due to budget constraints or fragmented HR planning (Onovwiona & Okiti, 2025). An effective HR governance model must bridge this divide, emphasizing continuous learning, tailored development paths, and stronger industry-academic collaboration to cultivate a responsive, skilled workforce (Yazdani & Kamyabi, 2023).

The cost of ineffective HR governance extends well beyond internal inefficiencies. High turnover, weak morale, and misaligned recruitment strategies inflate operational costs and drain productivity. Legal missteps, even if unintended, can tarnish reputations and trigger penalties (Keighobadi, Mahalli, & Ahmadi, 2025). For Tehran, this translates into a diminished ability to attract foreign investment and stymied economic potential (Khan, Zhongyi, Ullah, & Mumtaz, 2024). From a societal angle, workforce instability exacerbates joblessness and inequality, which in turn can fuel unrest and stall social progress (Zyari *et al.*, 2013).

Employees feel the brunt of these systemic gaps—facing stagnated career paths, unfair compensation structures, and declining job satisfaction. Women and marginalized groups bear a disproportionate burden, reinforcing long-standing inequalities. On a broader scale, the lack of strategic HR governance impairs Tehran's capacity to leverage its human capital effectively, particularly as the global economy shifts and technology reshapes labor demands.

Literature Review

Human Resources (HR) governance encompasses the structures, policies, and procedures that steer how organizations manage their human capital—ensuring alignment with strategic goals, adherence to regulations, and ethical integrity. In Tehran, Iran's capital and a central economic force, HR governance is molded by a distinctive confluence of cultural, religious, political, and economic influences (Liu *et al.*, 2025). This literature review surveys current academic and empirical work on HR governance with a specific lens on Tehran, focusing on core themes such as regulatory compliance, cultural values, gender roles, and the pace of

technological adoption. Drawing on both theory and practice, the review identifies key gaps and future opportunities in navigating HR governance within this evolving urban context (Mozdabadi, 2018).

At its core, HR governance stems from the broader principles of corporate governance—emphasizing transparency, accountability, and strategic coherence. It involves the development of policies that shape hiring practices, training protocols, employee relations, and performance evaluations, all aimed at boosting organizational productivity (Takamjani *et al.*, 2022). A commonly used lens in HR governance literature is agency theory, which argues that structured HR systems help minimize tensions between employer goals and employee behavior. In Tehran's dual economy—where state-owned enterprises operate alongside a growing private sector—agency theory proves especially pertinent, as organizations must constantly balance state oversight with managerial autonomy (Mosavi *et al.*, 2021).

Another influential concept is the resource-based view (RBV), which positions human capital as a vital strategic asset. In Tehran's competitive labor environment, particularly within dominant sectors like petroleum, finance, and technology, HR governance becomes a critical tool for maximizing workforce capability. However, applying these frameworks in Tehran isn't straightforward. Economic sanctions, regulatory rigidity, and socio-cultural expectations often necessitate adaptive, context-specific approaches. Tehran's HR landscape is also deeply shaped by Iran's labor code, a product of the Islamic Republic's legal system. These laws set baseline expectations for employee rights, wages, and working conditions, though their implementation varies widely across public and private sectors (kamran, 2021). Complicating matters further, international sanctions restrict access to global HR tools and training, forcing organizations to rely on domestic systems that often lack the depth needed for long-term strategic planning. Nevertheless, some organizations in Tehran are moving toward international benchmarks like ISO 30408, seeking to strengthen credibility and attract foreign investment (Malekabadi *et al.*, 2024).

Cultural and religious values, particularly Islamic work ethics, hold significant sway in shaping HR governance. Principles such as

justice, mutual respect, and social welfare are frequently embedded into HR policies. Organizations may, for instance, offer subsidized housing, observe religious holidays, or provide extended family leave to align with societal expectations. Yet, these traditions can at times conflict with contemporary governance models that prioritize performance metrics and efficiency, leading to hybrid systems that attempt to blend heritage with modernity (Gholipor *et al.*, 2019).

The existing literature surfaces several persistent challenges. Sanctions continue to isolate Tehran's HR professionals from international best practices. Bureaucratic inertia and conservative social norms slow reform efforts, while the economic uncertainty drives skilled workers abroad in search of better prospects—further destabilizing HR systems (Khosravi *et al.*, 2021).

Despite these constraints, Tehran's youthful and increasingly educated labor pool, combined with a growing startup culture, presents meaningful opportunities (Nazimi *et al.*, 2022). As Iran's economic center, Tehran incentivizes companies to refine HR governance practices to better compete for talent and investment. Government-led digitization efforts and emerging public-private partnerships could pave the way for more efficient, tech-enabled HR systems (Ahmadian *et al.*, 2022).

In sum, HR governance in Tehran is a delicate balancing act—anchored in global theoretical models but shaped by distinctly local realities. Frameworks like agency theory and the RBV offer a foundational understanding, yet their real-world application requires adjustment to fit Iran's economic conditions, legal systems, and cultural traditions (Takamjani *et al.*, 2022). While significant challenges remain—from gender inequality and brain drain to limited tech access—there is also notable potential (Heydari *et al.*, 2024). Future research should zero in on how hybrid governance approaches and inclusive HR policies perform in Tehran's unique setting. By addressing these contextual nuances, organizations can build governance models that are both globally informed and locally grounded (Jalali, Ali, & GORJI, 2019).

Methodology

The study adopts a mixed-methods, descriptive-exploratory approach to analyze Human Resources Governance (HRG) within

Tehran Municipality, focusing on its alignment with sustainable urban development. It integrates qualitative and quantitative methods to capture the multifaceted nature of HRG in a complex urban and cultural context. Conducted with 20 participants (10 HR managers, 5 policymakers, 5 employees) from Tehran Municipality, selected via purposive sampling to ensure diverse representation. Interviews explored HRG practices, challenges, and cultural influences. Examined HR policy documents, municipal reports, and Iran's 1990 Labor Law to assess governance structures and compliance. Administered to 300 employees using stratified random sampling, with a 5-point Likert scale to measure satisfaction, governance effectiveness, and professional development barriers. Analyzed HR metrics (e.g., turnover, training participation) from 2020–2024 municipal databases.

Conclusion

Achieving sustainable rural development depends on a clear understanding of its essential components and measurable indicators. From a theoretical standpoint, two primary approaches in rural studies—empowerment and capacity building—offer foundational support for advancing sustainable development. These frameworks help unlock the latent and active potential within rural communities, paving the way for sustainable livelihoods.

In Tehran, HR governance functions within a multifaceted framework influenced by Iran's legal, economic, and socio-cultural structures. The Iranian labor market operates under the 1990 Labor Law, which outlines rights, safety standards, and employment regulations. While this law provides a structural basis for HR practices, its practical application across Tehran's varied sectors—from energy to technology startups—requires adaptive, context-sensitive strategies. Organizations must meet compliance obligations while also accommodating modern workforce expectations, including flexible work conditions, career development, and inclusive practices.

As Iran's economic epicenter, Tehran houses a significant share of the national workforce and many corporate headquarters, intensifying the need for sophisticated HR systems. Talent acquisition, retention, and development in such a concentrated market demand strategic

governance. However, economic sanctions, high inflation, and currency volatility continue to place financial strain on compensation, benefits, and investment in HR programs. These challenges compel organizations to adopt governance models that optimize resources while maintaining employee satisfaction.

Cultural norms remain a key determinant in HR governance. Iran's collectivist values—rooted in familial loyalty and respect for hierarchy—shape workplace behavior. Employees often value job security and long-term relationships with employers, requiring HR policies that emphasize stability and structured career advancement. Moreover, Islamic ethical principles influence organizational conduct, reinforcing fairness, mutual respect, and welfare. Many Tehran-based companies integrate these values by accommodating religious observances and fostering community-oriented work environments.

Still, cultural dynamics also introduce challenges, especially regarding gender. Despite women comprising a considerable segment of Tehran's educated population, societal expectations and traditional gender roles continue to limit their participation in some sectors. While some organizations have introduced diversity and inclusion policies, broader cultural shifts are essential to fully integrate women into leadership pipelines. HR governance in Tehran must therefore strike a balance—maintaining cultural sensitivity while advancing equity and inclusivity.

The city's regulatory environment is another significant obstacle. Although comprehensive, the labor law can be inflexible, complicating efforts to adopt global trends such as remote work or freelance employment models. Cumbersome procedures around hiring, termination, and conflict resolution impede operational agility, especially for multinational firms. On top of this, compliance with international sanctions presents added layers of complexity, requiring organizations to navigate both local regulations and foreign policy constraints.

A further challenge is the existing talent gap in high-demand fields. Tehran's universities—such as the University of Tehran—produce a well-educated workforce, yet industry needs in sectors like renewable energy and IT often outpace the skills of new graduates. This mismatch calls for investment in training and upskilling programs. Unfortunately, limited

financial resources often restrict organizational capacity to implement these initiatives effectively.

Employee engagement and retention remain ongoing concerns. Rising living costs and economic instability have diminished job satisfaction, prompting a wave of skilled emigration. To counter this, organizations must design creative retention mechanisms. Non-monetary benefits, flexible scheduling, and mission-driven workplace cultures are increasingly vital tools for maintaining loyalty. Despite these hurdles, there are notable opportunities for reform and innovation in Tehran's HR governance. The city's youthful, highly educated workforce is eager to adopt modern workplace practices. Organizations can harness this potential by implementing technology-based solutions—ranging from applicant tracking systems to e-learning platforms—that streamline HR operations, enhance engagement, and align workforce capabilities with strategic objectives.

Tehran's role as a regional economic hub further opens doors for cross-cultural HR adaptation. Multinational corporations bring with them best practices such as agile performance reviews and employee wellness programs. When tailored to local contexts—like incorporating Islamic ethical principles into leadership development—these practices can yield culturally aligned, globally competitive outcomes.

Additionally, collaborative efforts between public and private sectors offer promise. Government agencies, academic institutions, and private enterprises can align educational pathways with industry needs through internships, apprenticeships, and joint research. These partnerships could prepare Tehran's workforce for emerging domains such as artificial intelligence and sustainable energy.

Looking forward, HR governance in Tehran must evolve alongside global economic shifts. Digital transformation will be critical. Technologies such as data analytics can support HR leaders in forecasting attrition, refining hiring strategies, and tailoring employee development. Successful adoption, however, depends on building HR teams' digital literacy through structured training.

Sustainability should also become a central tenet. As environmental, social, and governance (ESG) concerns gain prominence worldwide, Tehran's organizations can

integrate ESG principles into their HR strategies. Promoting fair labor practices, supporting community initiatives, and ensuring workplace diversity not only align with ethical imperatives but also enhance organizational reputation and talent attraction.

A culture of lifelong learning will be essential to meet evolving workforce expectations. HR governance frameworks should encourage continuous skill development through mentorships, online certifications, and partnerships with global educational providers. This will help position Tehran's talent pool to compete internationally.

Lastly, younger generations bring new priorities to the workplace—flexibility, work-life balance, and purpose. Organizations that revise HR policies to meet these values—offering hybrid models or prioritizing corporate responsibility—will gain an edge in attracting and retaining top talent. In conclusion, HR

governance in Tehran is navigating a dynamic crossroads—balancing tradition with innovation, and compliance with strategic growth. By confronting regulatory challenges, capitalizing on cultural strengths, and embracing technological evolution, Tehran's organizations can build resilient HR systems. With its young, adaptable workforce and regional significance, the city holds the potential to become a leader in HR governance across the Middle East. The path forward lies in creating systems that are not only locally rooted but globally responsive, enabling sustainable development through empowered human capital.

Ethical considerations:

Following the principles of research ethics: In the present study, informed consent forms were completed by all subjects.

Sponsor:

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