KMAN PUBLISHING INSTITUTE

Article history:
Received 08 July 2026
Revised 25 August 2026
Accepted 29 August 2026
Published online 01 September 2026

Journal of Resource Management and Decision Engineering

Volume 5, Issue 5, pp 1-15



Identifying Human Resource Recruitment Themes Based on a Meritocracy Approach

Mojtaba. Tohidimanesh[1], Mehrdad. Bayat[2*], Alireza. Nobari[1], Maryam. Majidi[1]

[1] Department of Management, Sav.C., Islamic Azad University, Saveh, Iran
[2] Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran

*** Corresponding author email address**: bayatmehrdad60@pnu.ac.ir

A r t i c l e I n f o

Article type:
Original Research

How to cite this article:
Tohidimanesh, M., Bayat, M., Nobari, A., & Majidi, M. (2026). Identifying Human Resource Recruitment Themes Based on a Meritocracy Approach. *Journal of Resource Management and Decision Engineering*, 5(5), 1-15.
https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.jrmde.457

© 2026 the authors. Published by KMAN Publication Inc. (KMANPUB). This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

A B S T R A C T

The present study aimed to design a human resource recruitment model based on a meritocracy approach in Qom Municipality. Given the strategic role of human resources as the most vital asset of organizations and the direct effect of workforce quality on the performance and effectiveness of urban services, establishing a merit-based recruitment system has emerged as a fundamental requirement in urban management. In terms of purpose, this study was applied, and in terms of data collection method, it employed a qualitative approach. Using thematic analysis and semi-structured interviews with experts and managers of Qom Municipality, the themes and components affecting merit-based recruitment were identified. The study population comprised 15 experts and specialists in the fields of human resource management and organizational management, as well as managers with professional experience in Qom Municipality. Data analysis resulted in the identification of seven overarching themes: "Design and Implementation of a Competency-Based Recruitment System," "Development and Empowerment of Competent Human Capital," "Performance Management and Retention of Competent Human Capital," "Leadership, Organizational Culture, and Meritocratic Governance," "Smart Governance and Institutional Infrastructures for Merit-Based Recruitment," "Justice, Inclusion, and Equal Opportunities in Human Resource Recruitment," and "Structural Barriers and Pathology of the Recruitment Process." In addition, 15 organizing themes and 64 basic themes were identified as components of the proposed model. By emphasizing the identification of key competencies, employer branding, scientific selection, continuous human capital development, transparent performance management, ethical leadership, reform of legal structures, and monitoring of employment equity, the model provides an operational framework for enhancing recruitment quality and, consequently, improving urban services. Furthermore, identifying barriers such as ceremonial bureaucracy, relationship-based favoritism, and weaknesses in monitoring systems can provide a foundation for structural reforms within the organization. By contextualizing competency indicators within the municipal setting and providing practical instruments, this study represents an effective step toward realizing meritocracy in the national administrative system and improving the quality of urban management.

Keywords: *human resource recruitment, meritocracy, Qom Municipality, human resource management, indigenous model, thematic analysis.*

1. Introduction

Human resources constitute one of the most consequential strategic assets of contemporary organizations because the quality of organizational outcomes is closely tied to the competencies, capabilities, ethical orientation, adaptability, and performance of the people who enter and remain within the organization. In public organizations, this issue assumes even greater importance because human resource decisions directly affect administrative effectiveness, service quality, public trust, accountability, and the efficient use of public resources. Recruitment, therefore, cannot be regarded merely as an administrative procedure for filling vacant positions; rather, it is a strategic mechanism through which organizations acquire the human capital required to achieve present objectives and respond to future challenges. Recent studies on competency development emphasize that organizations operating under conditions of technological change, digital transformation, and Industry 4.0 must continuously align human resource competencies with evolving organizational requirements and environmental demands {Sri Ndaru, 2026 #549520}. Similarly, competency-based human resource planning has been identified as an important foundation for improving workforce deployment and optimizing organizational performance {Kania, 2026 #549511}. These developments have strengthened the case for designing recruitment systems that prioritize demonstrated merit and competencies rather than formalistic, relationship-based, or purely credential-oriented approaches.

The meritocracy approach is rooted in the principle that access to organizational positions, opportunities for advancement, and allocation of responsibilities should primarily depend on relevant competence, ability, performance, and professional qualifications. In the context of public governance, meritocracy is not only a human resource management principle but also a governance requirement because it can contribute to institutional effectiveness, impartiality, administrative legitimacy, and public confidence. Evidence suggests that merit-based administrative arrangements can strengthen effective governance by aligning organizational roles with the qualifications and capabilities of personnel {Wante, 2025 #549524}. Within public organizations, however, establishing meritocracy requires more than selecting qualified applicants at the point of entry. It requires the integration of recruitment, assessment, training, performance appraisal, promotion, succession planning, compensation, organizational culture, and accountability mechanisms into a coherent competency-based architecture. In other words, meritocracy becomes sustainable only when it is institutionalized throughout the employee life cycle and supported by transparent and enforceable organizational procedures.

A competency-based perspective provides an appropriate foundation for such institutionalization. Competencies typically encompass the knowledge, skills, abilities, behavioral attributes, professional values, and personal characteristics that enable individuals to perform effectively in specific roles. Competency-based human resource management seeks to align these attributes with job requirements and organizational strategy, thereby creating a clearer connection between recruitment decisions and subsequent performance {Anggara, 2023 #549501}. Research on competency-based human resource development also indicates that systematic identification of competency requirements is essential for designing appropriate development strategies and strengthening organizational capacity {Bahri, 2025 #549505}. In public-sector settings, the need for context-sensitive competency models is particularly important because generic private-sector models may fail to capture legal accountability, public service values, institutional complexity, and stakeholder expectations. Recent work on Iranian public-sector employees has therefore emphasized the importance of developing general competency models that reflect the characteristics of governmental organizations and the administrative environment in which employees operate {Dehghanpour Farashah, 2026 #549489}.

The design of competency models is closely related to the broader objective of identifying efficient and high-performing human resources. Studies have shown that efficient human resources can be understood through a combination of professional, behavioral, managerial, and organizational indicators rather than through educational credentials or tenure alone {Dazeh, 2023 #549506}. Likewise, competency-based models developed for managers in public and semi-public organizations have demonstrated the value of systematically identifying the behavioral and managerial attributes required for successful performance {Keykha, 2020 #549496}. In municipal settings, competency assessment is particularly significant because managers and employees operate in complex environments characterized by public accountability, service diversity, community expectations, interdepartmental coordination, and legal constraints. Research conducted in

Tehran Municipality has highlighted the importance of identifying and prioritizing managerial competency dimensions as a basis for more valid assessment and managerial development {Sadri Ayoubi, 2020 #549493}. These findings suggest that municipalities need localized competency frameworks that reflect the specific realities of urban governance rather than relying exclusively on broad or imported competency lists.

Recruitment based on competency is also closely connected with organizational performance. Empirical research has shown that recruitment and career development influence employee performance partly through their effects on competence, indicating that the quality of initial recruitment decisions can have long-term performance consequences {Arifin, 2020 #549503}. Competence should therefore be considered a central criterion not only in selection but also in subsequent career progression. Competency models have been applied to employee promotion decisions, demonstrating how structured decision-making methods can improve the alignment between employee capabilities and organizational positions {Hsien Yu, 2020 #549509}. Similarly, managerial competency and learning orientation have been associated with stronger job performance, underscoring the importance of recruiting and developing personnel who can learn, adapt, and apply their capabilities in changing organizational environments {Niazi, 2020 #549516}. In this sense, competency-based recruitment can be understood as the first stage of a broader strategic system linking entry, development, evaluation, promotion, and retention.

Recruitment systems also need to account for talent attraction in increasingly competitive labor markets. Organizations no longer compete only for applicants who are actively seeking employment; they also seek high-potential individuals, specialized professionals, and talented candidates who may not be immediately available through conventional recruitment channels. Research on systematic talent attraction has emphasized the importance of structured mechanisms for identifying and employing top talent, particularly in organizations where specialized capabilities are strategically important {Farhi, 2022 #549494}. Employer branding, professional networks, university partnerships, targeted communication, and transparent job information can therefore play an important role in enlarging the pool of qualified applicants and improving person–organization fit. However, talent attraction must be integrated with objective assessment; otherwise, the recruitment process may increase applicant volume without improving the quality of selection.

Scientific selection requires reliable and transparent methods for evaluating relevant competencies. Traditional recruitment systems that rely heavily on résumés, unstructured interviews, or subjective managerial judgment may be vulnerable to bias, inconsistency, and favoritism. By contrast, competency-oriented selection can incorporate structured interviews, simulations, assessment centers, behavioral measures, scenario-based exercises, and other standardized tools. Research on assessment and development centers has demonstrated their usefulness for identifying employee competency-development indicators and supporting systematic human resource decisions {Sarlak, 2021 #549491}. Similarly, conceptual models of managerial competency assessment and development centers indicate that structured competency assessment can contribute to improved organizational performance by connecting evaluation results with targeted development interventions {Yarahmadi Khorasani, 2021 #549499}. These approaches are especially relevant to public organizations, where recruitment decisions should be defensible, transparent, and consistent with principles of fairness and equal opportunity.

The establishment of meritocracy also depends on performance management after recruitment. A merit-based system cannot be sustained if recruitment is competency-based but subsequent appraisal, promotion, and reward practices are disconnected from competence and performance. Performance evaluation has been identified as an important mechanism for realizing meritocracy because it provides a basis for distinguishing employees according to actual contribution and capability rather than informal influence or seniority alone {Kamali, 2021 #549510}. Performance management should therefore include clear criteria, continuous feedback, competency assessment, and mechanisms for detecting evaluative bias. It should also be linked to fair career paths and promotion decisions so that employees perceive consistency between recruitment principles and later organizational treatment. Where this alignment is absent, even well-designed recruitment systems may lose legitimacy and fail to reinforce merit-based behavior.

Human resource development is another essential dimension of merit-based systems. Recruitment identifies individuals with suitable current competencies, but organizational requirements evolve, and employees must continuously develop new capabilities. Research on

professional competency development has shown that systematic development processes are necessary for improving the quality of human resources and sustaining professional performance {Annisa, 2020 #549502}. Contemporary human capital approaches similarly emphasize that organizations should invest strategically in training, learning, adaptability, and future-oriented capability development {Purwanto, 2025 #549519}. In addition, competency development can be strengthened through knowledge management, mentoring, coaching, and succession planning. Leader competencies have been found to influence knowledge sharing and job performance, highlighting the role of leadership capabilities in converting individual expertise into organizational value {Swanson, 2020 #549521}. Consequently, meritocracy should not be viewed as a static mechanism for ranking employees but as a developmental system that continuously enhances organizational capability.

The increasing role of technology has also transformed the management of competencies and recruitment. Digital tools, data analytics, artificial intelligence, and advanced technologies are reshaping how organizations identify candidates, assess capabilities, predict performance, and manage human resources {Vrontis, 2022 #549523}. Information technology, when combined with human resource competency and employee engagement, can contribute to improved employee performance and more integrated management processes {Heslina, 2021 #549508}. However, technology does not automatically guarantee fairness. Algorithmic systems and data-driven recruitment may reproduce or amplify existing biases if the underlying data, criteria, or governance mechanisms are flawed. For this reason, data-based recruitment should be accompanied by institutional oversight, transparency, periodic auditing, and mechanisms for evaluating unintended discriminatory effects. Smart governance in human resource management therefore requires the simultaneous development of technological infrastructure and ethical, legal, and accountability safeguards.

The importance of adaptable human resource systems became especially visible during major organizational disruptions. The COVID-19 crisis demonstrated that organizations must respond rapidly to changes in work arrangements, employee expectations, occupational risks, and strategic priorities, thereby increasing the importance of workforce flexibility and resilient human resource management {Hamouche, 2021 #549507}. Such disruptions reinforce the value of recruiting employees with learning agility, adaptability, problem-solving ability, and psychological readiness for change. They also suggest that competency models should not be static documents; instead, they should be periodically updated in response to environmental, technological, and institutional developments. This dynamic view of competency is particularly relevant for municipalities, which must manage diverse service responsibilities while responding to demographic changes, urban growth, technological innovation, and evolving citizen expectations.

Ethics and transparency are equally important components of merit-based recruitment. Sustainable human resource management increasingly emphasizes responsibilities that extend beyond efficiency and organizational performance to include fairness, stakeholder interests, dignity, and the common good {Aust, 2020 #549504}. Business ethics training can strengthen ethical awareness and decision-making within human resource development systems, supporting more responsible management practices {Kreismann, 2021 #549514}. Moreover, transparency and demonstrated HR competence can strengthen employee trust and organizational commitment by signaling procedural reliability and institutional integrity {Klimchak, 2020 #549513}. In recruitment, these considerations imply that criteria should be publicly understandable, selection procedures should be consistently applied, and applicants should be protected from discriminatory or arbitrary decision-making.

The legal and institutional context is particularly important in public-sector recruitment. In Iran, public recruitment is shaped by administrative law, statutory regulations, formal procedures, and institutional requirements that distinguish it from private-sector employment. Comparative analysis of public recruitment models in Iranian administrative law has emphasized the need for coherent legal structures that reconcile administrative efficiency with fairness and lawful access to public employment {Rezaei, 2021 #549490}. At the same time, competency models for human resource managers in government organizations indicate that globalization and changing administrative environments require new forms of managerial capability within public institutions {Vaezi, 2020 #549498}. These requirements create a need for recruitment models that are both legally compliant and sufficiently flexible to identify contemporary competencies.

Despite the normative appeal of meritocracy, its implementation frequently encounters organizational and cultural barriers. Research on barriers to merit-based

recruitment has identified problems such as non-transparent procedures, informal relationships, structural constraints, and weaknesses in the practical application of merit principles {Mousavi Rad, 2021 #549497}. In many public organizations, relationship-based appointments, patronage, excessive bureaucracy, weak monitoring, and inconsistencies between formal regulations and actual practice can undermine merit-based selection. These barriers are not merely technical deficiencies; they can produce perceptions of injustice, reduce organizational trust, discourage capable applicants, and weaken employee commitment. Therefore, any model of merit-based recruitment should incorporate not only positive components of an ideal system but also a diagnostic understanding of the structural and behavioral obstacles that prevent those components from functioning effectively.

Organizational culture and leadership can either reinforce or weaken these systems. Meritocracy requires leaders who support transparent decision-making, resist informal pressures, and consistently apply competency criteria. Competency-based human resource management is more likely to become institutionalized when senior managers treat competency standards as genuine decision criteria rather than symbolic documentation {Ghasem Ahangari, 2024 #549495}. Human resource systems also benefit from development approaches that connect competence with organizational values and commitment. For example, research on green human resource behavior has shown that training, competence, and affective commitment can interact to shape desired employee behaviors {Nugroho, 2023 #549517}. Although the substantive context differs, the underlying implication is relevant: competencies become organizationally meaningful when they are reinforced through culture, learning, and commitment mechanisms rather than treated as isolated assessment scores.

A further concern is the need for inclusion and equal opportunity. Meritocracy should not be interpreted narrowly as competition among applicants without attention to whether all qualified individuals have a fair opportunity to compete. Equal access to information, objective criteria, transparent procedures, and mechanisms for monitoring demographic patterns are essential for preventing discrimination and ensuring that competency-based selection does not become a rhetorical justification for exclusion. Fair recruitment should therefore integrate merit-based differentiation with institutional safeguards for equality and non-discrimination. Such safeguards are especially important in public organizations, where employment decisions have broader implications for public legitimacy and perceptions of government fairness.

The municipality represents a particularly appropriate context for examining these issues because municipal organizations combine bureaucratic structures with highly visible service responsibilities. Employees and managers are involved in urban planning, infrastructure, citizen services, cultural affairs, finance, administrative operations, regulatory functions, and numerous other areas requiring different combinations of technical, behavioral, ethical, and managerial competence. Consequently, a municipal recruitment model should incorporate both organization-wide core competencies and job-specific competencies. It should also link recruitment with employer branding, structured selection, training, knowledge management, performance evaluation, career advancement, leadership development, organizational justice, digital monitoring, and institutional accountability. Qualitative research approaches are well suited to identifying such multidimensional requirements because they allow researchers to capture the contextual meanings, experiences, and institutional realities that may not be adequately represented through predetermined quantitative indicators. Theoretical-domain-based qualitative inquiry has demonstrated the usefulness of systematic qualitative exploration for identifying behavioral and organizational factors within complex professional settings {Agomo, 2020 #549500}.

Existing scholarship therefore provides substantial evidence regarding competency models, performance, development, technology, ethics, talent management, assessment, and public recruitment, but these dimensions are often examined separately rather than integrated into a comprehensive framework tailored to a specific municipal context. In particular, there remains a need to identify how recruitment-related competencies, development mechanisms, performance systems, governance structures, fairness considerations, technological infrastructure, and structural barriers interact within a single merit-based human resource recruitment model. Addressing this gap requires an empirically grounded framework that reflects both normative principles of meritocracy and the actual organizational conditions under which recruitment occurs. Such a framework can support more consistent recruitment decisions, strengthen institutional transparency, improve the alignment between employee capabilities and municipal responsibilities, and provide a basis for subsequent reform of human resource policies and practices.

Accordingly, the aim of this study was to identify and develop a model of human resource recruitment based on a meritocracy approach in Qom Municipality.

2. Methods and Materials

Thematic analysis was employed as the research method in this study. Before beginning the data analysis stage, the unit of analysis was first determined. Units of analysis may include words, themes, individuals, events, or documents that can be coded and organized into categories. Accordingly, the "theme" was selected as the unit of analysis for the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis is a method for analyzing qualitative data and involves searching across a dataset to identify, analyze, and report recurring patterns or themes. Themes represent the most significant meanings and underlying responses associated with the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis process involves a continuous iterative movement between the dataset and the generated codes. Themes may be identified inductively, that is, derived from the data, or deductively, that is, based on theory. Identifying themes through an inductive approach is somewhat similar to grounded theory, in which the processes of analysis and coding are conducted entirely on the basis of the data. In the present study, Braun and Clarke's (2006) model was employed for thematic analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection instrument. The study population consisted of 15 experts and specialists in human resource management and organizational management, as well as managers with experience in Qom Municipality. Member checking with interviewees and external auditors was used to establish the credibility of the findings.

3. Findings and Results

In the first phase, the extracted data were derived from the summarized and segmented interview texts. An example of the coding extraction process is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Example of Summarized and Segmented Text

Summarized and Segmented Text	Basic Theme
The first and most important step in designing any merit-based recruitment system is to determine what type of people the organization needs. A general competency model cannot simply be copied from another source and generalized to all organizations. The organization's mission, vision, and strategies must first be carefully examined. Qom Municipality, given its distinctive religious, cultural, and service-oriented characteristics, requires competencies that may not be relevant at all in an industrial or private-sector organization. Core competencies required of all employees should be distinguished from specialized competencies specific to each functional area. This process requires rigorous analysis and the participation of senior managers and organizational experts.	Identification of the organization's key competencies

The extracted basic concepts were classified at three levels based on the analytical model: overarching themes, organizing themes, and basic themes. Table 2 presents the components identified within this classification.

Table 2

Overarching, Organizing, and Basic Themes of Merit-Based Human Resource Recruitment

Basic Themes	Organizing Theme	Overarching Theme
Identification of the organization's key competencies	Designing an indigenous competency model	Design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system
Designing a multidimensional competency model (managerial, behavioral, ethical, knowledge-based, and practical)	Designing an indigenous competency model	Design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system
Competency gap analysis and needs assessment	Designing an indigenous competency model	Design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system
Job classification based on competencies	Designing an indigenous competency model	Design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system
Continuous updating of the competency model	Designing an indigenous competency model	Design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system
Presenting the organization as a merit-oriented employer	Employer branding and talent attraction	Design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system
Recruitment through professional and academic networks	Employer branding and talent attraction	Design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system

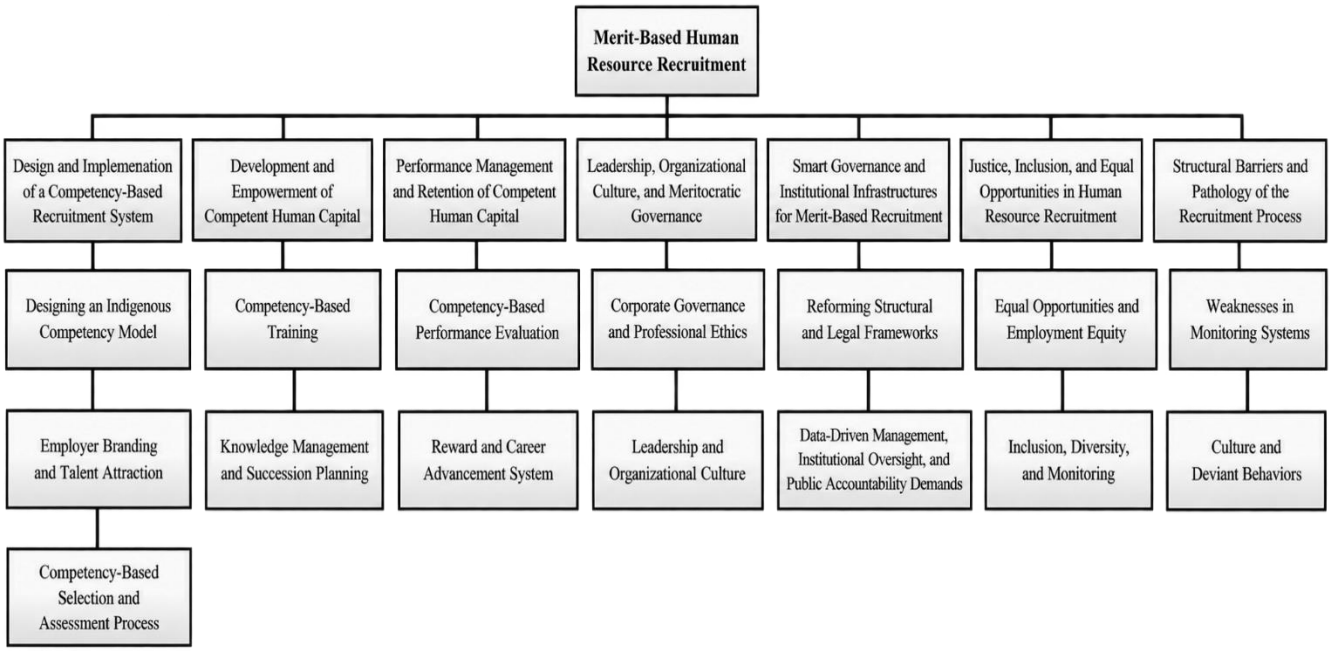
Storytelling and transparency in job advertisements	Employer branding and talent attraction	Design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system
Targeting passive talent	Employer branding and talent attraction	Design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system
Designing valid and transparent assessment instruments	Competency-based selection and assessment process	Design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system
Using simulations and complex scenarios	Competency-based selection and assessment process	Design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system
Assessment of behavioral competencies, character, and learning agility	Competency-based selection and assessment process	Design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system
Participation of specialized and diverse assessors	Competency-based selection and assessment process	Design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system
Analysis of recruitment data to reduce bias	Competency-based selection and assessment process	Design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system
Designing targeted and responsive training programs	Competency-based training	Development and empowerment of competent human capital
Initial empowerment and organizational socialization	Competency-based training	Development and empowerment of competent human capital
Targeted mentoring and coaching	Competency-based training	Development and empowerment of competent human capital
Development of soft skills, character, and capacity to manage complexity	Competency-based training	Development and empowerment of competent human capital
Technical, specialized, and future-oriented training	Competency-based training	Development and empowerment of competent human capital
Documentation and transfer of organizational knowledge	Knowledge management and succession planning	Development and empowerment of competent human capital
Identification and development of leadership talent	Knowledge management and succession planning	Development and empowerment of competent human capital
Leadership development and succession-planning programs	Knowledge management and succession planning	Development and empowerment of competent human capital
Establishment of a knowledge base and organizational learning system	Knowledge management and succession planning	Development and empowerment of competent human capital
Designing a transparent and fair evaluation system	Competency-based performance evaluation	Performance management and retention of competent human capital
Continuous and systematic feedback	Competency-based performance evaluation	Performance management and retention of competent human capital
Use of 360-degree evaluation and competency assessment	Competency-based performance evaluation	Performance management and retention of competent human capital
Analysis of performance data to identify bias	Competency-based performance evaluation	Performance management and retention of competent human capital
Continuous monitoring and alignment with strategic objectives	Competency-based performance evaluation	Performance management and retention of competent human capital
Designing competency-based career paths	Reward and career advancement system	Performance management and retention of competent human capital
Merit-based selection in appointments and promotions	Reward and career advancement system	Performance management and retention of competent human capital
Fair and performance-based compensation system	Reward and career advancement system	Performance management and retention of competent human capital
Enhancement of satisfaction, organizational belonging, and loyalty	Reward and career advancement system	Performance management and retention of competent human capital
Continuous monitoring of fairness in the reward system	Reward and career advancement system	Performance management and retention of competent human capital
Institutionalization of a culture of meritocracy and justice orientation	Leadership and organizational culture	Leadership, organizational culture, and meritocratic governance
Transparency in recruitment and promotion processes	Leadership and organizational culture	Leadership, organizational culture, and meritocratic governance
Managerial accountability and responsibility	Leadership and organizational culture	Leadership, organizational culture, and meritocratic governance
Character- and ethics-based leadership	Corporate governance and professional ethics	Leadership, organizational culture, and meritocratic governance
Participatory leadership and consensus-based decision-making	Corporate governance and professional ethics	Leadership, organizational culture, and meritocratic governance
Respect for stakeholder rights, justice, and fairness	Corporate governance and professional ethics	Leadership, organizational culture, and meritocratic governance

Establishment of an internal control system and effective oversight	Corporate governance and professional ethics	Leadership, organizational culture, and meritocratic governance
Information transparency and reporting	Corporate governance and professional ethics	Leadership, organizational culture, and meritocratic governance
Monitoring organizational justice and eliminating discrimination	Corporate governance and professional ethics	Leadership, organizational culture, and meritocratic governance
Reducing bureaucracy and facilitating authorizations	Reforming structural and legal frameworks	Smart governance and institutional infrastructures for merit-based recruitment
Reforming employment laws and guidelines	Reforming structural and legal frameworks	Smart governance and institutional infrastructures for merit-based recruitment
Enhancing administrative integrity and transparency	Reforming structural and legal frameworks	Smart governance and institutional infrastructures for merit-based recruitment
Developing physical and technological infrastructures	Reforming structural and legal frameworks	Smart governance and institutional infrastructures for merit-based recruitment
Defining and measuring competency and justice indicators	Data-driven management, institutional oversight, and public accountability demands	Smart governance and institutional infrastructures for merit-based recruitment
Analyzing recruitment-process data and identifying bias	Data-driven management, institutional oversight, and public accountability demands	Smart governance and institutional infrastructures for merit-based recruitment
Establishing an institutional oversight system and targeted intervention	Data-driven management, institutional oversight, and public accountability demands	Smart governance and institutional infrastructures for merit-based recruitment
Citizen demand for accountability and transparency of performance	Data-driven management, institutional oversight, and public accountability demands	Smart governance and institutional infrastructures for merit-based recruitment
Continuous monitoring of reform effectiveness and accountability	Data-driven management, institutional oversight, and public accountability demands	Smart governance and institutional infrastructures for merit-based recruitment
Ensuring equal opportunities and non-discrimination	Equal opportunities and employment equity	Justice, inclusion, and equal opportunities in human resource recruitment
Transparency in recruitment and promotion processes	Equal opportunities and employment equity	Justice, inclusion, and equal opportunities in human resource recruitment
Prioritizing competency and merit-based selection	Equal opportunities and employment equity	Justice, inclusion, and equal opportunities in human resource recruitment
Monitoring and correcting unconscious biases	Equal opportunities and employment equity	Justice, inclusion, and equal opportunities in human resource recruitment
Promoting diversity in recruitment and employment	Inclusion, diversity, and monitoring	Justice, inclusion, and equal opportunities in human resource recruitment
Analysis of demographic recruitment data	Inclusion, diversity, and monitoring	Justice, inclusion, and equal opportunities in human resource recruitment
Monitoring employment equity and accountability	Inclusion, diversity, and monitoring	Justice, inclusion, and equal opportunities in human resource recruitment
Monopoly and discrimination	Culture and deviant behaviors	Structural barriers and pathology of the recruitment process
Ceremonial bureaucracy	Culture and deviant behaviors	Structural barriers and pathology of the recruitment process
Relationship-based favoritism and nepotism	Culture and deviant behaviors	Structural barriers and pathology of the recruitment process
Lack of transparency and accountability	Weaknesses in monitoring systems	Structural barriers and pathology of the recruitment process
Weak internal controls	Weaknesses in monitoring systems	Structural barriers and pathology of the recruitment process
Non-compliance with laws and regulations	Weaknesses in monitoring systems	Structural barriers and pathology of the recruitment process

Based on the components classified in Table 2, the thematic network was schematically developed to illustrate the relationships among the components and dimensions at the levels of overarching, organizing, and basic themes, as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Thematic Network of Merit-Based Human Resource Recruitment



A total of 64 basic themes and 15 organizing themes were extracted from the summarized and segmented texts, ultimately leading to the development of Table 2. Table 3 presents the frequency of each theme based on the organizing-theme codes.

Table 3

Frequency of Organizing Themes

No.	Organizing Theme	Frequency
1	Designing an indigenous competency model	5
2	Employer branding and talent attraction	4
3	Competency-based selection and assessment process	5
4	Competency-based training	5
5	Knowledge management and succession planning	4
6	Competency-based performance evaluation	5
7	Reward and career advancement system	5
8	Leadership and organizational culture	3
9	Corporate governance and professional ethics	6
10	Reforming structural and legal frameworks	4
11	Data-driven management, institutional oversight, and public accountability demands	5
12	Equal opportunities and employment equity	4
13	Inclusion, diversity, and monitoring	3
14	Culture and deviant behaviors	3
15	Weaknesses in monitoring systems	3
Total		63

Subsequently, in the next phase, a thematic matrix was developed based on the themes extracted from the preceding table. This matrix represents the frequency of each theme in relation to the other themes. Table 4 presents the frequency of the organizing themes according to their interrelationships in matrix form.

Table 4

Thematic Network Matrix

Organizing Theme	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
	*														
	9	*													
	10	9	*												
	10	9	10	*											
	9	8	9	9	*										
	10	9	10	10	9	*									
	10	9	10	10	9	10	*								
	8	7	8	8	7	8	8	*							
	11	10	11	11	10	11	11	9	*						
	9	8	9	9	8	9	9	7	10	*					
	10	9	10	10	9	10	10	8	11	9	*				
	9	8	9	9	8	9	9	7	10	8	9	*			
	8	7	8	8	7	8	8	6	9	7	8	7	*		
	8	7	8	8	7	8	8	6	9	7	8	7	6	*	
	8	7	8	8	7	8									

1. Indigenous Competency Model; 2. Employer Branding and Talent Attraction; 3. Competency-Based Selection and Assessment; 4. Competency-Based Training; 5. Knowledge Management and Succession Planning; 6. Competency-Based Performance Evaluation; 7. Reward and Career Advancement; 8. Leadership and Organizational Culture; 9. Corporate Governance and Professional Ethics; 10. Structural and Legal Reform; 11. Data-Driven Management, Institutional Oversight, and Public Accountability Demands; 12. Equal Opportunities and Employment Equity; 13. Inclusion, Diversity, and Monitoring; 14. Culture and Deviant Behaviors; 15. Weaknesses in Monitoring Systems

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to identify and organize the principal themes underlying merit-based human resource recruitment in Qom Municipality. The thematic analysis yielded seven overarching themes: design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system; development and empowerment of competent human capital; performance management and retention of competent human capital; leadership, organizational culture, and meritocratic governance; smart governance and institutional infrastructures for merit-based recruitment; justice, inclusion, and equal opportunities in human resource recruitment; and structural barriers and pathology of the recruitment process. These overarching themes were further articulated through 15 organizing themes covering competency modeling, employer branding and talent attraction, competency-based selection and assessment, training, knowledge management and succession planning, performance evaluation, reward and career advancement, leadership and organizational culture, corporate governance and professional ethics, structural and legal reform, data-driven management and institutional oversight, employment equity, inclusion and diversity, deviant organizational behaviors, and weaknesses in monitoring systems. Taken together, the findings indicate that merit-based recruitment should not be interpreted as a discrete hiring procedure confined to identifying qualified applicants. Rather, it constitutes an integrated human resource governance system extending from competency identification and attraction to assessment, development, appraisal, promotion, retention, accountability, and institutional oversight.

The first overarching theme, design and implementation of a competency-based recruitment system, demonstrated that merit-based recruitment begins with the identification of context-specific competencies and the establishment of an indigenous competency model. The participants emphasized the need to distinguish core organizational competencies from job-specific competencies and to integrate managerial, behavioral, ethical, knowledge-based, and practical dimensions. This finding is consistent with research emphasizing competency as a foundation for effective human resource planning and performance optimization {Kania, 2026 #549511}. It also corresponds with evidence that public organizations need competency frameworks specifically adapted to their administrative, institutional, and cultural contexts rather than relying solely on generic models {Dehghanpour Farashah, 2026 #549489}. The importance assigned to multidimensional competency is similarly supported by studies identifying competency-based human resource management as a mechanism for aligning

individual characteristics with organizational requirements {Anggara, 2023 #549501}. Research in Iranian public and governmental organizations has also demonstrated that managerial and human resource competencies need to reflect contextual requirements, globalization, organizational responsibilities, and public-sector characteristics {Vaezi, 2020 #549498;Keykha, 2020 #549496}. Therefore, the present finding extends previous research by showing that competency specification in a municipality must be simultaneously strategic, occupational, behavioral, and ethical.

Within the same overarching theme, employer branding, talent attraction, and competency-based selection emerged as indispensable components. The findings suggested that a municipality seeking competent personnel must actively present itself as a merit-oriented employer, establish relationships with professional and academic networks, communicate employment opportunities transparently, and reach passive as well as active candidates. This result is aligned with research showing that systematic mechanisms are required to identify, attract, and employ high-level talent, particularly in organizations where specialized capabilities are strategically important {Farhi, 2022 #549494}. The findings also highlighted the importance of valid assessment instruments, simulations, behavioral assessment, learning agility, diverse assessors, and recruitment data analysis. These results support the broader competency-management literature, in which assessment and development centers have been identified as useful mechanisms for evaluating employee capabilities and strengthening the validity of human resource decisions {Sarlak, 2021 #549491;Yarahmadi Khorasani, 2021 #549499}. Furthermore, structured approaches to managerial competency assessment have been shown to facilitate better promotion and placement decisions {Hsien Yu, 2020 #549509}. The current findings therefore reinforce the argument that merit-based recruitment requires a transition from subjective selection toward systematic, evidence-based, and competency-oriented assessment.

The second overarching theme, development and empowerment of competent human capital, indicates that meritocracy does not end once an employee is recruited. Participants identified targeted training, organizational socialization, mentoring, coaching, soft-skill development, technical and future-oriented learning, knowledge transfer, leadership-talent identification, and succession planning as necessary mechanisms for sustaining merit over time. This result is consistent with competency-based human resource development research emphasizing that organizational performance depends not only on recruiting qualified individuals but also on continuously developing their capabilities {Bahri, 2025 #549505}. The growing complexity of organizational environments and Industry 4.0 has similarly increased the need for continuous competency development and adaptive human capital strategies {Sri Ndaru, 2026 #549520}. Studies of professional development have shown that systematic enhancement of employee competencies can strengthen the overall quality of human resources {Annisa, 2020 #549502}, while contemporary human capital approaches emphasize investment in knowledge, skills, adaptability, and future-oriented capability development {Purwanto, 2025 #549519}. Thus, the findings suggest that a meritocratic municipality requires a developmental rather than merely selective interpretation of merit.

The identification of knowledge management and succession planning within this theme further demonstrates that meritocracy has an intergenerational and organizational-learning dimension. The participants stressed the importance of documenting organizational knowledge, building learning systems, identifying leadership talent, and preparing qualified successors. This finding is supported by evidence that leadership competencies contribute to knowledge sharing and improved job performance, thereby converting individual capability into organizational capital {Swanson, 2020 #549521}. Moreover, managerial competency and learning orientation have been associated with stronger job performance, suggesting that the ability to learn and transfer knowledge is itself a central element of organizational competence {Niazi, 2020 #549516}. In the municipal context, where considerable operational knowledge may be accumulated through experience, institutionalizing knowledge transfer can reduce dependence on individuals and prevent expertise from being lost through turnover or retirement.

The third overarching theme, performance management and retention of competent human capital, consisted of competency-based performance evaluation and a merit-oriented reward and career progression system. Participants emphasized transparent evaluation criteria, continuous feedback, 360-degree assessment, performance-data analysis, strategic alignment, competency-based career paths, merit-based appointments, fair compensation, and monitoring of reward fairness. This finding is consistent with research identifying performance evaluation as one of the central institutional mechanisms for realizing

meritocracy in organizations {Kamali, 2021 #549510}. It also supports evidence that recruitment, competence, career development, and performance are interrelated rather than independent human resource functions {Arifin, 2020 #549503}. If individuals are selected according to merit but later promoted or rewarded according to informal relationships, the internal coherence of the merit system is lost. Therefore, the present findings indicate that recruitment and performance management should operate as components of one integrated competency architecture.

The fourth overarching theme, leadership, organizational culture, and meritocratic governance, highlights the institutional and normative foundations required for a merit-based system to function. The participants stressed institutionalization of a meritocracy-oriented culture, transparency in recruitment and promotion, managerial accountability, ethical and character-based leadership, participatory decision-making, respect for stakeholder rights, internal controls, and organizational justice. This finding is consistent with studies suggesting that competency-based HRM becomes effective when embedded within organizational structures and managerial practices rather than treated as a technical human resource instrument {Ghasem Ahangari, 2024 #549495}. It is also supported by research demonstrating that transparency and perceived HR competence can strengthen employee trust and commitment {Klimchak, 2020 #549513}. From a broader sustainable HRM perspective, organizational effectiveness should also be balanced with fairness, stakeholder interests, dignity, and the common good {Aust, 2020 #549504}. Therefore, the results of the present study suggest that meritocracy is simultaneously an administrative and ethical system.

Ethical leadership and professional integrity were particularly prominent within this theme. The emphasis placed on character, ethics, justice, and stakeholder rights suggests that competence should not be restricted to technical proficiency. An individual may be professionally capable while still exhibiting behaviors inconsistent with public responsibility. The finding is compatible with the literature on ethics training in human resource development, which emphasizes the need to strengthen ethical judgment alongside professional capability {Kreismann, 2021 #549514}. It also resonates with competency research showing that effective human resources incorporate behavioral, professional, and organizational attributes rather than technical ability alone {Dazeh, 2023 #549506}. For municipalities, this expanded understanding of competence is particularly important because employees exercise authority, interact directly with citizens, and operate within a public accountability framework.

The fifth overarching theme, smart governance and institutional infrastructures for merit-based recruitment, showed that competency-oriented recruitment requires supportive legal, structural, technological, and monitoring systems. Participants identified reduction of unnecessary bureaucracy, reform of employment regulations, enhancement of administrative integrity, development of technological infrastructure, definition of measurable competency and justice indicators, recruitment-data analysis, institutional oversight, citizen accountability demands, and continuous monitoring of reform effectiveness. This result is aligned with the growing influence of digital technologies, data analytics, and artificial intelligence on human resource management {Vrontis, 2022 #549523}. Information technology and human resource competence have also been associated with stronger organizational performance, particularly when combined with employee engagement {Heslina, 2021 #549508}. Nevertheless, the present findings show that technology should be understood as an enabling infrastructure rather than an independent solution. Data-driven recruitment must be accompanied by explicit standards, oversight, and accountability to ensure that efficiency does not come at the expense of fairness.

The structural and legal dimension of this finding is especially significant in public organizations. Recruitment within Iranian public institutions is subject to administrative law and formal regulatory arrangements; therefore, a merit-based model cannot be institutionalized independently of the legal framework. Previous research on public recruitment in Iranian administrative law has similarly emphasized the importance of establishing coherent recruitment arrangements that reconcile legal compliance, equality, and administrative effectiveness {Rezaei, 2021 #549490}. The need to update institutional arrangements is reinforced by evidence that contemporary government organizations operate under globalization, technological change, and increasingly complex competency requirements {Vaezi, 2020 #549498}. In addition, major disruptions such as the COVID-19 crisis demonstrated the need for more adaptive human resource systems capable of responding quickly to changing organizational conditions {Hamouche, 2021 #549507}. Thus, legal stability must be combined with sufficient organizational flexibility to respond to emerging competency needs.

The sixth overarching theme, justice, inclusion, and equal opportunities in human resource recruitment, demonstrates that meritocracy and organizational justice are mutually reinforcing rather than competing principles. Participants emphasized equal opportunity, non-discrimination, transparent recruitment and promotion, priority for competency, monitoring of unconscious bias, diversity, demographic analysis, and employment-equity accountability. These findings indicate that a genuinely meritocratic system requires all eligible candidates to have an equitable opportunity to demonstrate competence. This interpretation is consistent with the broader sustainable HRM perspective, which places justice, stakeholder welfare, and social responsibility alongside organizational performance {Aust, 2020 #549504}. It is also consistent with evidence that transparency is an important signal of organizational competence and fairness and can influence trust and commitment {Klimchak, 2020 #549513}. Therefore, merit cannot be meaningfully assessed where access to opportunities, assessment processes, or promotion pathways is distorted by hidden preferences or unequal treatment.

The seventh overarching theme, **structural barriers and pathology of the recruitment process**, identified monopoly and discrimination, ceremonial bureaucracy, relationship-based favoritism and nepotism, lack of transparency, weak internal control, weak monitoring systems, and non-compliance with laws as critical threats to merit-based recruitment. This is one of the most consequential findings because it demonstrates that the existence of formal regulations or competency models alone does not guarantee meritocratic practice. The finding directly corresponds with previous research identifying structural, administrative, and behavioral barriers to merit-based recruitment {Mousavi Rad, 2021 #549497}. Such barriers can create a gap between formal institutional claims and actual organizational behavior. In this regard, the present findings also explain why accountability, internal controls, transparency, and data-based monitoring emerged elsewhere in the model as essential dimensions: they are not peripheral administrative tools but mechanisms for preventing the subversion of meritocratic principles.

The interconnectedness of the organizing themes in the thematic matrix further indicates that no individual element can independently establish meritocracy. Corporate governance and professional ethics, data-driven oversight, competency modeling, assessment, performance management, and structural reform exhibited strong conceptual interrelationships within the thematic network. This systemic pattern is consistent with previous research demonstrating that competence contributes to outcomes through multiple mechanisms, including learning, engagement, career development, and organizational commitment {Arifin, 2020 #549503;Nugroho, 2023 #549517}. Moreover, competency-based systems increasingly operate at the intersection of human judgment, organizational processes, and technological infrastructure {Vrontis, 2022 #549523}. The model developed in the present study therefore conceptualizes merit-based recruitment as an organizational ecosystem rather than a sequence of isolated HR practices.

Overall, the results contribute to the literature by integrating recruitment, development, performance, governance, equity, technology, and organizational pathology into a single context-sensitive framework for municipal human resource management. Previous studies have often focused individually on competency development, managerial assessment, talent attraction, performance, or legal recruitment arrangements {Sadri Ayoubi, 2020 #549493;Farhi, 2022 #549494;Sarlak, 2021 #549491}. The present findings show that these dimensions become substantially more meaningful when considered together. In practical terms, the model suggests that Qom Municipality can strengthen meritocracy only through simultaneous interventions at individual, organizational, and institutional levels. This interpretation is consistent with qualitative research emphasizing the usefulness of examining multiple behavioral and organizational determinants when seeking to understand complex professional practices {Agomo, 2020 #549500}. Accordingly, the central implication of the study is that merit-based recruitment should be institutionalized as a continuous governance process beginning before recruitment and continuing through development, evaluation, advancement, and organizational accountability.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the research was conducted within Qom Municipality and relied on the perspectives of 15 experts, specialists, and experienced municipal managers; therefore, although the purposive selection of knowledgeable participants provided rich contextual information, the findings cannot automatically be generalized to all municipalities, ministries, public agencies, or private organizations. Second, because the study employed a qualitative thematic-analysis design, the identified relationships among the themes represent

analytically derived conceptual relationships rather than statistically tested causal associations. Third, participant accounts may have been influenced by professional experiences, organizational positions, and perceptions of existing recruitment practices, and socially desirable responses cannot be entirely excluded in a study addressing issues such as justice, favoritism, transparency, and accountability. Fourth, the study focused primarily on managerial and expert perspectives and did not directly incorporate the views of job applicants, newly recruited employees, ordinary citizens, or external regulatory bodies. Finally, the identified model reflects the institutional and administrative context prevailing during the study period, whereas recruitment technologies, employment regulations, labor-market conditions, and municipal governance practices may evolve over time.

Future studies should quantitatively validate the proposed model using larger and more heterogeneous samples drawn from different municipalities and public organizations and should examine the reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and structural relationships among the identified dimensions. Comparative research across municipalities with different sizes, governance structures, socioeconomic environments, and levels of digital maturity would help determine which components are universal and which are context dependent. Longitudinal studies could investigate whether the implementation of competency-based recruitment produces sustained improvements in employee performance, organizational commitment, service quality, turnover, citizen satisfaction, and perceptions of organizational justice. Future research could also incorporate the perspectives of job applicants, recently hired employees, frontline personnel, citizens, and regulatory authorities to develop a multi-stakeholder understanding of meritocracy. Experimental and quasi-experimental studies may examine the effectiveness of structured interviews, assessment centers, competency simulations, blind screening, and algorithm-assisted recruitment in reducing bias and improving selection validity. Further studies should also examine mediating and moderating mechanisms, such as organizational culture, ethical leadership, digital maturity, perceived justice, and institutional trust, in the relationship between merit-based recruitment and organizational outcomes.

For practical implementation, Qom Municipality should first develop and formally approve an indigenous competency framework covering both organization-wide core competencies and job-specific technical, managerial, behavioral, and ethical competencies. Job descriptions and recruitment announcements should then be revised to reflect these competencies explicitly, while structured interviews, assessment centers, simulations, standardized scoring protocols, and trained multidisciplinary assessors should be introduced to reduce subjectivity. Recruitment data should be systematically recorded and analyzed to detect disparities, recurring bottlenecks, and potential biases, and clear indicators should be established for monitoring employment equity and compliance with merit-based procedures. The municipality should strengthen employer branding and partnerships with universities and professional networks to attract qualified talent while establishing transparent career pathways, competency-based performance evaluation, fair compensation, and succession-planning mechanisms to retain high-performing personnel. Ethics, accountability, internal control, and managerial responsibility should be incorporated into both leadership development and performance appraisal. Finally, legal and administrative procedures that create unnecessary bureaucracy should be reviewed, while independent oversight, transparent reporting, accessible complaint mechanisms, and periodic audits should be strengthened to minimize favoritism, informal influence, non-compliance with regulations, and symbolic rather than substantive implementation of meritocracy.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethics Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were considered.

References

Asghari Saraskanroud, S., Esfandiari Darabad, F., Faal Naziri, M., & Zeinali, B. (2024). Estimating and assessing land subsidence hazards within the urban fringes of Savojbolagh, Nazarabad, Chaharbagh, Karaj, and Fardis counties. *Hydrogeomorphology*, *11*(41), 135-161. https://doi.org/10.22034/hyd.2024.62570.1751

Azimi, A. (2021). Understanding and analyzing the transformation of industrial spatial structure and the system of influential flows in the Southern Alborz region, with emphasis on freight truck movements. *Urban Structure and Function Studies*, *8*(28), 7-31.

Ebrahimi, A. (2020). Examining construction supervision and control from the municipality's perspective. *Applied Research in Technology and Engineering*(20), 29-40.

Faraji, A. (2019). *An introduction to analyzing regional spatial structure and organization*. University of Tehran Press.

Fedchyshyn, D., Ігнатенко, I. B., & Leiba, L. (2020). Land-Use Rights for Agricultural Land in Ukraine. *Ius Humani Revista De Derecho*, *9*(1), 159-178. https://doi.org/10.31207/ih.v9i1.215

Hosseini, S. A., Miri, G., & Kiani, A. (2022). Evaluating changes in the sustainability of agricultural land uses in urban peripheral fringes. *Eghtesad-e Fotouh va Tose'e-ye Roustaei*, *11*(4), 79-98.

Kazemi, S. M. (2024). Land within urban fringes and the law on preserving agricultural and orchard land uses: Examining court judgments in the Basti Hills case. *Critique and Analysis of Judicial Decisions*, *3*(1), 179-203. https://doi.org/10.22034/analysis.2024.2026026.1086

Khalaji, S. (2021). Effects of land-use changes on land-use planning. *Space and Place Research in the City*, *5*(19), 5-18.

Lambin, E. F., & Geist, H. J. (2006). *Land-use and land-cover change: Local processes and global impacts*. Springer Science & Business Media. https://doi.org/10.1007/3-540-32202-7

Loh, C. G. (2011). Assessing and Interpreting Non-Conformance in Land-Use Planning Implementation. *Planning Practice & Research*, *26*(3), 271-287.

Meshkini, A., Parhizkar, A., & Heydari, M. (2023). Requirements of integrated spatial governance for achieving sustainable development in metropolitan fringes. *Environmental Spatial Planning*, *16*(61), 105-128.

Mirza Abutaleb, H., Ebrahimi Janmani, L., Haghzad, A., & Ramazanipour, M. (2023). Analyzing urban land-use changes with emphasis on public rights: The case of Chaharbagh County, Karaj. *Environment and Development*, *15*(27), 169-182. https://doi.org/10.22034/eiat.2024.428466.1071

Mohsenzadeh, A., Taleshi, M., Soleimani, A., & Mousa Kazemi, S. M. (2025). Explaining physical and spatial transformations of villages in the peri-urban region of Ardabil. *Peri-Urban Space Development*, *7*(1), 111-148. https://doi.org/10.22034/jpusd.2024.463680.1311

Obeyat, M., Maleki, S., Obeyat, M., & Obeyat, M. (2023). Assessing the effects of land-use changes on spatiotemporal patterns of land surface temperature and heat islands in Ahvaz using satellite imagery. *Human Geography Research*, *55*(2), 39-61. https://doi.org/10.22059/JHGR.2022.326267.1008331

Parsa, M., Vatani, A., & Karimi, A. (2020). Examining legal policies on agricultural land-use changes with emphasis on preserving urban fringes and developing agriculture: The case of Shemiranat County. *Regional Planning*, *10*(38), 161-178. https://sid.ir/paper/999808/fa

Pourahmad, A., Ziari, K., & Sadeghi, A. (2021). Measuring and evaluating compact city indicators in the regeneration of urban fabrics. *Human Geography Research*, *53*(2), 515-532.

Pourmohammadi, M., Khavari, A., & Rostami, F. (2022). Evaluating the physical and functional consequences of land-use changes in metropolitan fringes. *Human Geography Research*, *54*(3), 875-892.

Pourmohammadi, M., Rasouli, A., & Nouri, A. (2021). Analyzing the effectiveness of urban growth boundaries in controlling horizontal development and urban sprawl. *Geography and Urban Planning*, *31*(75), 105-122.

Raeis Ghanavati, K., Shamsoddini, A., & Heydari, A. (2023). Developing sustainable urban development scenarios based on scenario planning: The case of the port city of Mahshahr. *Geographical Studies of Coastal Areas*, *4*(1), 75-89. https://sid.ir/paper/1055038/fa

Rezvani, M., Shekari, A., & Ahmadi, H. (2021). Reconsidering the role of tourism in the sustainable development of metropolitan fringe functions. *Tourism Planning and Development*, *10*(37), 113-134.

Sajadzadeh, H., Sharifi, A., & Hamidi, R. (2022). Analyzing infill development capacities in the regeneration of dysfunctional and deteriorated urban fabrics. *Urban Studies*, *11*(42), 45-60.

Sarrafi, M., & Abdollahi, M. (2020). Explaining a framework for assessing ecological resilience in urban fringes. *Environmental Studies*, *46*(2), 215-232.

Sarrafi, M., Abdollahi, M., & Tavakoli, M. (2021). *Structural planning and new frameworks for sustainable urban development*. Shahid Beheshti University Press.

Sarrafi, M., & Mohammadi, A. (2022). Explaining the political economy of space approach in analyzing urban regeneration and gentrification. *Urban Studies*, *12*(45), 49-64.

Sharifi, A., & Rezaei, M. (2022). Explaining sustainability and social justice indicators in third-generation smart cities. *Urban Studies*, *12*(46), 15-28.

Taghvaei, M., Safarabadi, E., & Hosseini, S. A. (2021). An analysis of the functional and spatial organization of peripheral fringes in urban systems. *Geography and Environmental Planning*, *32*(1), 45-62.

Verburg, P. H., Overmars, K. P., & Witte, N. (2004). Accessibility and land-use patterns at the rural-urban fringe. *Journal of Environmental Management*, *72*(1-2), 9-18. https://research.wur.nl/en/publications/accessibility-and-land-use-patterns-at-the-forest-fringe-in-the-n

Ziari, K., Hosseini, S. A., & Mohammadi, A. (2020). Evaluating new urbanism indicators in improving quality of life and neighborhood development. *Human Geography Research*, *52*(3), 845-863.

Ziari, K., Hosseini, S. H., & Mohammadi, A. (2019). A critical assessment of residential and service development in metropolitan peripheral fringes. *Urban Studies*, *9*(31), 15-28.