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Identifying the Dimensions of Effective Decision-Making Based on Public Policy-Making Models in the Social Security Organization of Kerman

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A B S T R A C T

The aim of this study was to identify the dimensions of effective decision-making based on public policy-making models in the Social Security Organization of Kerman. This research was applied in terms of objective and used a mixed-methods design (qualitative and quantitative). In the qualitative section, inductive content analysis was conducted by reviewing ten academic management books that addressed public policy-making models such as rational, cyclical, institutional, network-based, participatory, evidence-based, top-down, bottom-up, cultural-structural, learning, stakeholder analysis, and good governance. The components and indicators of these models were identified and extracted. In the quantitative section, exploratory factor analysis was performed using questionnaire data collected from 300 employees and managers of Social Security branches, based on a 48-item Likert-scale questionnaire. Five main factors were extracted: analytical rationality, participatory network, institutional framework, executive management, and organizational learning. These factors explained 72.05% of the variance in the data. The adequacy of the data was confirmed by the KMO test result of 0.82 and Bartlett's test of sphericity (χ^2 = 5241.36, df = 1128). The findings indicated that these factors offer a comprehensive framework for effective decision-making that can enhance branch coordination, stakeholder engagement, legal compliance, effective policy implementation, and continuous improvement. It is recommended that future research apply confirmatory factor analysis and the Delphi method to validate the proposed model.

Keywords: *Effective decision-making, public policy-making, social security, analytical rationality, participatory network.*

1. Introduction

In recent decades, public service institutions in developing countries have faced increasing complexities in the domains of policymaking and decision-making (Askari Bagherabadi et al., 2024). Accelerated technological transformations, demographic shifts, economic fluctuations, and the emergence of new social demands have significantly heightened the need to reconsider traditional approaches to management and policy formulation (Peters, 2015; Sulistiyo, 2024). Among these institutions, service organizations such as social security—interacting daily with a wide spectrum of social groups—require scientific, systematic, and evidence-based approaches in their decision-making processes more than ever before (Elareshi et al., 2024). In Iran, the Social Security Organization, as one of the largest welfare institutions, plays a pivotal role in ensuring social and economic security. Its performance is directly linked to public satisfaction, social justice, and institutional efficiency (Hosseini & Nazifi, 2023).

Social Security branches in cities such as Kerman face unique challenges due to the region's specific characteristics. The geographical position of Kerman, high rates of rural-to-urban migration, unbalanced population growth, and high demand for medical and insurance services have made this city one of the most challenging centers in the field of social services (Mousavi et al., 2021). These factors exert additional pressure on the executive and decision-making systems of the Social Security branches, revealing the inadequacy of the institution's traditional and bureaucratic structures in responding to rapid environmental changes. The consequences of this inefficiency are observable in public dissatisfaction, increased client complaints, and reduced human and financial resource productivity.

Decision-making processes within this organization are often linear and non-strategic, with limited use of advanced public policy-making models (Shojaei et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the public policy literature over the past three decades has introduced diverse models—including the staged model, multiple streams framework, policy network theory, and bounded rationality model—to analyze the complexities of decision-making in public institutions (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003; Sabatier, 1986; Sabatier & Weible, 2014). However, relying on a single model does not adequately meet the multifaceted and cross-sectoral needs of organizations like Social Security. Therefore, adopting hybrid approaches to policymaking appears necessary. These approaches, by integrating key elements from multiple models, enable better analysis of causal relationships, actor interactions, and institutional mechanisms, making them particularly suitable for complex, uncertain, and interest-conflicted contexts (Cairney, 2019).

In Kerman, the specific features of the Social Security Organization—such as serving diverse social groups, operating in underprivileged areas, addressing human resource challenges, and interacting with parallel institutions like the Health Insurance Organization—further underscore the need for such approaches. Social Security branches must be capable of making decisions that are aligned with national macro policies while also being adaptive and responsive to local conditions. On the other hand, since decision-making in Iranian public institutions generally lacks a clear theoretical foundation and is often carried out in an ad hoc and experience-based manner (Farazmand, 2009), the decision-making system tends to rely more on individual intuition and fragmented judgments rather than on evidence and systematic evaluation. Considering the issues raised, this study was conducted to answer the following question: What are the dimensions of effective decision-making based on public policy-making models in the Social Security Organization of Kerman?

2. Methods and Materials

This study was conducted with the aim of identifying the dimensions of effective decision-making based on public policy-making models in the Social Security Organization of Kerman. In terms of purpose, the research is applied, as its findings can contribute to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of policies and organizational processes in Social Security branches. Methodologically, the study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative (inductive content analysis) and quantitative (exploratory factor analysis) techniques. This approach was selected due to the complex and multidimensional nature of decision-making processes in social security systems and the need to extract and validate theoretical and practical models.

In the qualitative section, the method of inductive content analysis was applied, which is a well-established and widely used technique in the humanities and social sciences for extracting patterns, concepts, and meaningful categories from data. This method was chosen due to the complexity and multidimensionality of the decision-making processes in the Social Security branches in Kerman, and the lack of comprehensive and direct policy models in this domain.

Inductive content analysis enabled the systematic identification of dimensions, components, and indicators related to public policy-making models. The statistical population of the qualitative section included all recognized public policy-making models identified in the research literature. To identify these models, 10 specialized books in the field of public policy-making were reviewed. Sampling was conducted using purposive and theoretical sampling.

Table 1

Books Used in Content Analysis

Book Title	Author(s)	Publication Year	Brief Description
Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision-Making	Deborah Stone	2012	Provides a framework for policy analysis emphasizing values, emotions, and social commitments (polis model) as opposed to rationalist approaches. Useful for analyzing complex decision-making in social security.
Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies	John W. Kingdon	2014	Introduces the multiple streams model explaining how policy agendas are set. Useful for analyzing decision-making in public organizations.
An Introduction to the Public Policy: The Policy Process	Xun Wu, M. Ramesh, Michael Howlett, Scott A. Fritzen	2017	An introductory book covering the policy process including formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Relevant for managers and policymakers in social security.
Implementing Public Policy: An Introduction to the Study of Operational Governance	Michael Hill, Peter Hupe	2022	Examines theories and challenges of policy implementation, focusing on street-level bureaucrats. Applicable to Social Security branches.
A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving	Eugene Bardach, Eric M. Patashnik	2019	Presents a step-by-step method for policy analysis, suitable for solving organizational problems such as those in social security.
Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action	Elinor Ostrom	1990	Analyzes the management of common resources and policy institutions. Useful for understanding institutional aspects of social security.
Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness	Richard H. Thaler, Cass R. Sunstein	2009	Introduces behavioral economics in policy-making and is applicable to behavior-based policy design in social security.
Beyond Policy Analysis: Public Issue Management in Turbulent Times	Leslie A. Pal	2020	Focuses on policy analysis in complex and changing conditions. Relevant for understanding local challenges in Kerman.
The Routledge Handbook of Public Policy	Eduardo Araral, Scott Fritzen, Michael Howlett, M. Ramesh, Xun Wu	2012	A comprehensive overview of theories, frameworks, and stages of the policy process. Suitable for theoretical research in social security.
The Modern Guide to Public Policy	Giliberto Capano, Michael Howlett	2020	Examines interdisciplinary frameworks and modern methods in policy-making. Applicable for developing effective decision-making models.

- Alignment with decision-making challenges in public organizations (e.g., financial sustainability and stakeholder engagement).
- Applicability in the Iranian context and the Social Security Organization.
- Comprehensiveness and the ability to address various aspects of policy-making.

Selected models included rational, cyclical, institutional, network-based, participatory, evidence-based, top-down, bottom-up, cultural-structural, learning, stakeholder analysis, and good governance. Data were collected through document and library studies. Sources included specialized books and Social Security Organization reports. To ensure comprehensiveness, resources were drawn from reliable and up-to-date databases (up to 2025). All sources were precisely documented to ensure traceability and replicability.

Content analysis was conducted in three main stages:

- **Preparation:** Detailed reading of texts and identification of 180 initial codes from sources.
- **Organization:** Open and axial coding using MAXQDA software to categorize data into dimensions, components, and indicators. The codes were reduced to 60 axial codes and systematically categorized within policy-making models.
- **Reporting:** Development of a preliminary model of effective decision-making by integrating the extracted models and providing a conceptual explanation for each dimension and component.

To increase validity, the analyses were reviewed and approved by three independent researchers. Reliability was confirmed by calculating the inter-coder agreement coefficient (Cohen's Kappa = 0.82). To manage researcher

bias, group review sessions were held and codes were jointly evaluated. Potential challenges such as data complexity or limited access to specific sources were addressed by using diverse resources and qualitative analysis software.

In the quantitative section, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed to uncover latent structures in the data and categorize the dimensions and components extracted from the qualitative phase. The aim of this section was to reduce the number of variables to core factors and provide a meaningful framework for the effective decision-making model. This method served as a preliminary step toward model development and laid the groundwork for future validation.

The statistical population included all staff and managers of the Social Security Organization branches in Kerman (N = 512). A sample of 200 individuals was selected using simple random sampling. The sample size was justified based on the statistical rule of having at least five respondents per variable (30 variables in the questionnaire). The response rate was 85%, indicating a high quality of data collection. Data were collected using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire consisted of 30 items covering components and indicators derived from the qualitative phase (e.g., transparency, stakeholder participation, and institutional alignment).

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed and confirmed by five experts in public policy and organizational management. The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed by calculating Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.87$). Before conducting EFA, sampling adequacy tests were performed: KMO = 0.82 (above the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.60) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at $p < .000$. The analysis was carried out using SPSS version 26 and principal component analysis with Varimax rotation.

3. Findings and Results

This section initially reports the extracted components and indicators, followed by their validation.

Table 2

Extracted Components and Indicators from Policy-Making Models

Policy-Making Model	Components	Indicators
Rational	Problem identification, option analysis, optimal selection	Accuracy of financial data analysis, policy success rate, use of cost-benefit analysis, percentage of evaluated options
Cyclical	Problem formation, formulation, implementation, evaluation	Process transparency, number of completed policy cycles, feedback level in evaluations, policy evaluation quality
Institutional	Laws, procedures, managerial structures	Compliance with social security regulations, managerial structure efficiency, adherence to procedures, percentage of policies aligned with regulations
Network-Based	Actor collaboration, network building, coordination	Number of stakeholder meetings, level of inter-branch coordination, impact of networks, percentage of inter-organizational alignment
Participatory	Stakeholder participation, consensus-building, cross-sector consultation	Number of participatory sessions, satisfaction of insured individuals, degree of consensus, stakeholder satisfaction with participation process
Evidence-Based	Use of data, scientific evidence, data-driven evaluation	Accuracy of statistical data, use of performance indicators, service improvement rate, usage rate of predictive models
Top-Down	Centralized control, unified implementation, senior management commitment	Speed of policy implementation, branch compliance with central directives, percentage of senior managers involved
Bottom-Up	Identification of local needs, feedback from branches, flexibility	Number of accepted local proposals, satisfaction of local staff, speed of local reforms
Cultural-Structural	Organizational culture, institutional values, alignment with societal norms	Alignment of policies with organizational culture, staff acceptance of policies, social acceptance rate of policies
Learning	Learning from experience, policy refinement, positive interactions	Number of feedback-based revisions, process improvement rate, employee trust in management
Stakeholder Analysis	Interest identification, power analysis, role analysis	Number of stakeholders identified, accuracy in analyzing stakeholder interests, role impact in decision-making
Good Governance	Public information dissemination, process transparency, open access to information	Percentage of publicly available information, number of published public reports, responsiveness to complaints

The KMO value of 0.82 indicates very good sample adequacy. The significant result of Bartlett's test ($\chi^2 = 5241.36$, $df = 1128$, $p < 0.001$) confirms the suitability of the correlation matrix for factor analysis.

Table 3

Extracted Factors and Percentage of Explained Variance

Factor	Eigenvalue	Explained Variance (%)	Cumulative Explained Variance (%)
Factor 1 (Analytical Rationality)	12.14	25.94%	25.94%
Factor 2 (Participatory Network)	8.72	18.17%	44.11%
Factor 3 (Institutional Framework)	6.19	12.90%	51.01%
Factor 4 (Executive Management)	4.33	9.02%	66.03%
Factor 5 (Organizational Learning)	2.89	6.02%	72.05%

Factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted. These five factors collectively explain 72.05% of the total variance, which is considered acceptable. The naming of the factors was based on the nature of the associated components.

Table 4

Factor Loadings of Indicators on Extracted Factors

Indicator	F1 Analytical Rationality	F2 Participatory Network	F3 Institutional Framework	F4 Executive Management	F5 Organizational Learning
Accuracy of financial data analysis	0.78	–	–	–	–
Policy success rate	0.75	–	–	–	–
Use of cost-benefit analysis	0.80	–	–	–	–
Percentage of evaluated options	0.72	–	–	–	–
Process transparency	–	–	–	0.70	–
Number of completed policy cycles	–	–	–	0.68	–
Feedback level in evaluations	–	–	–	0.65	–
Policy evaluation quality	–	–	–	0.73	–
Compliance with social security laws	–	–	0.79	–	–
Managerial structure efficiency	–	–	0.76	–	–
Adherence to procedures	–	–	0.74	–	–
Percentage of policies aligned with laws	–	–	0.77	–	–
Number of stakeholder meetings	–	0.81	–	–	–
Inter-branch coordination level	–	0.78	–	–	–
Network impact	–	0.80	–	–	–
Inter-organizational coordination rate	–	0.76	–	–	–
Number of participatory sessions	–	0.79	–	–	–
Insured individual satisfaction	–	0.77	–	–	–
Degree of consensus	–	0.75	–	–	–
Stakeholder satisfaction with participation	–	0.82	–	–	–
Statistical data accuracy	0.79	–	–	–	–
Use of performance indicators	0.76	–	–	–	–
Service improvement rate	0.74	–	–	–	–
Use of predictive models	0.77	–	–	–	–
Policy implementation speed	–	–	–	0.74	–
Branch compliance with central directives	–	–	–	0.76	–
Active senior managers in policy implementation	–	–	–	0.78	–
Accepted local proposals	–	–	–	0.70	–
Local staff satisfaction	–	–	–	0.72	–
Speed of local reforms	–	–	–	0.69	–
Policy alignment with organizational culture	–	–	–	–	0.78

Staff acceptance of policies	–	–	–	–	0.76
Social acceptance of policies	–	–	–	–	0.74
Feedback-based revisions	–	–	–	–	0.77
Process improvement rate	–	–	–	–	0.75
Employee trust in management	–	–	–	–	0.80
Number of stakeholders identified	–	0.74	–	–	–
Accuracy in stakeholder interest analysis	–	0.76	–	–	–
Role impact in decision-making	–	0.78	–	–	–
Publicly available information rate	–	–	0.75	–	–
Number of published public reports	–	–	0.73	–	–
Responsiveness to complaints	–	–	0.76	–	–

The indicators were assigned to one of the five factors based on their conceptual relevance. Factor loadings above 0.40 indicate a strong association with the corresponding factor. Some indicators (e.g., network and participatory) were merged into a single factor (participatory network) due to their conceptual overlap.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study, aimed at identifying the dimensions of effective decision-making in the Social Security Organization branches of Kerman, proposed a multidimensional framework based on public policy-making models. The qualitative and quantitative findings of the research clarified the key components and factors for improving decision-making processes in the organization.

In the qualitative phase, through inductive content analysis of ten specialized books, twelve public policy-making models were identified, including: rational, cyclical, institutional, network-based, participatory, evidence-based, top-down, bottom-up, cultural-structural, learning, stakeholder analysis, and good governance. For each model, main components (e.g., option analysis, stakeholder participation, and process transparency) and measurable indicators (e.g., accuracy of financial data analysis, insured individuals' satisfaction, and percentage of publicly available information) were extracted. These findings suggest that integrating policy-making models can offer a comprehensive and coherent framework for effective decision-making within the complex context of the Social Security Organization—particularly in light of local challenges such as financial sustainability and stakeholder engagement.

Exploratory factor analysis extracted five main factors: Analytical Rationality (25.94% of variance), Participatory Network (18.17%), Institutional Framework (12.90%), Executive Management (9.02%), and Organizational Learning (6.02%), which together explained 72.05% of the variance. The factor loadings (ranging from 0.65 to 0.82) confirmed the strong quality of the factors. These dimensions underscore the importance of data-driven analysis, collaborative interactions, alignment with legal frameworks, effective management practices, and continuous improvement through organizational learning in decision-making.

These results align with prominent studies in the field of public policy. For example, the emphasis on rational and evidence-based analysis corresponds with Kingdon's multiple streams model (2014) and the policy analysis approach of (Bardach & Patashnik, 2019). Likewise, the focus on institutional frameworks and good governance aligns with Ostrom's work on managing common-pool resources (1990), Kaufmann et al.'s governance indicators (2010) (Kaufmann et al., 2010), and recent Iranian studies (Fadaei & Nargesian, 2023; Hosseini & Nazifi, 2023; Taheri Janbazlou, 2022). However, this study offers a more context-specific and practical framework by focusing on the local setting of Kerman and combining various policy-making models, thereby presenting an innovative contribution compared to more general studies (Hill & Hupe, 2022).

The lack of similar studies in the Iranian Social Security context highlights the significance of this research in addressing theoretical and practical gaps. Accordingly, this study has identified the dimensions of effective decision-making and provided a scientific and practical framework for enhancing policy processes in the Social Security branches of Kerman. Analytical Rationality enables informed decision-making by emphasizing financial data analysis and scientific evidence. The Participatory Network promotes satisfaction and cooperation by enhancing stakeholder interactions, including with insured individuals and employees. The Institutional Framework supports public trust and organizational sustainability by emphasizing

compliance with regulations and transparency. Executive Management ensures effective policy implementation by balancing top-down and bottom-up approaches. Organizational Learning strengthens the organization's adaptability to environmental changes through feedback-driven process improvement.

This model not only addresses local challenges such as inter-branch coordination, financial limitations, and the need for stakeholder engagement but also offers a framework that can be generalized to other public organizations in Iran.

Recommendations

Develop digital tools for monitoring decision-making indicators: Given the identification of key indicators in this study (e.g., accuracy of financial data analysis, insured individuals' satisfaction, and percentage of publicly accessible information), it is recommended to design a digital dashboard or monitoring software to track these indicators in real-time across Social Security branches in Kerman. Such tools can aggregate branch performance data and support managers in making more precise decisions based on analytical rationality and participatory networks.

Conduct longitudinal studies to evaluate the sustainability of the identified factors: While this study identified the five factors (Analytical Rationality, Participatory Network, Institutional Framework, Executive Management, and Organizational Learning) at a single point in time, it is recommended that a longitudinal study be conducted over a 2–3 year period to assess the sustainability and impact of these factors on effective decision-making. Such a study can evaluate changes in indicators like stakeholder satisfaction or managerial efficiency in response to external shifts (e.g., legal reforms or economic conditions).

Organize training workshops for branch managers and staff: To operationalize the proposed model, it is recommended to conduct specialized training workshops for managers and staff in the Kerman Social Security branches. These workshops should focus on enhancing skills related to the identified factors—such as data analysis for Analytical Rationality, collaboration techniques for the Participatory Network, and organizational learning methods for continuous improvement. These training programs can be developed in collaboration with local universities or training institutes and their effectiveness can be measured through pre- and post-training assessments.

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.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

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

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