Future of Work and Digital Management Journal

Article type:
Original Research

Article history:
Received 10 June 2025
Revised 17 September 2025
Accepted 23 September 2025
Published online 26 October 2025

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How to cite this article:
Nourinejad Largani, K., Kia Kojouri, D., Hajiaghajani, A., & Rahmaty, M. (2025). Proposing a Model of Organizational Inertia Management in Iranian Public Organizations. *Future of Work and Digital Management Journal, 3*(4), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.61838/fwdmj.124

Proposing a Model of Organizational Inertia Management in Iranian Public Organizations

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted with the aim of designing a model for managing organizational inertia in Iranian public organizations using a meta-synthesis and Delphi approach. In the meta-synthesis stage, domestic and international studies related to organizational inertia and its management were extracted from reputable databases and analyzed through a meta-synthesis method. After screening the extracted articles, 49 international and 17 domestic studies were selected for coding. In the second stage, the results were refined through the Delphi technique, in which the sample consisted of 10 academic and organizational experts who were familiar with organizational inertia management, had authored publications in the field, possessed more than 20 years of professional experience, and held managerial positions. Model collection and representation were conducted using MAXQDA software. After integrating and finalizing the findings from the meta-synthesis and Delphi analyses, the results identified five overarching criteria (strong and transformational leadership, transparent communication and active employee participation, fostering an adaptive and learning-oriented organizational culture, strategic redesign of organizational structures and resources, and development of preventive support systems) and 16 components (transformational leadership, paradoxical leadership, empowering leadership, transparent communication, active employee participation, fostering acceptance of change and flexibility, promoting continuous learning and knowledge sharing, fostering innovation and creativity, building psychological safety and trust, developing flexible and resilient environments, alignment of leadership, values and identity, redesigning organizational structure, reallocation and reconstruction of resources, adaptation of human resource practices and roles, training programs and skill development, and incentive and reward systems). The proposed model, by integrating the findings of meta-synthesis and the Delphi technique, provided a comprehensive framework that emphasizes the necessity of identifying the indicators of organizational inertia management in Iranian public organizations.

Keywords: organizational inertia, inertia management, organizational change, resistance to change, meta-synthesis, Delphi technique.

Introduction

Organizational inertia—persistent tendencies that slow or distort an organization's response to internal and external change—has long been recognized as a core barrier to innovation, service quality, and strategic renewal, especially in the public sector where formal rules, political accountability, and legacy processes compound rigidity [1, 2]. In government agencies, inertia manifests structurally (e.g., layered hierarchies), cognitively (e.g., dominant logics), culturally (e.g., risk aversion), and resource-wise (e.g., sunk costs), undermining timely policy implementation and citizen-centric value creation [3, 4]. Recent scholarship has expanded this lens by linking inertia to digital transformation, dynamic capabilities, and leadership, suggesting that the same frictions that stabilize public organizations also blunt their ability to absorb technologies, reconfigure processes, and orchestrate multi-stakeholder ecosystems [5-8].

Digitalization raises the stakes. While data platforms, automation, and AI promise efficiency and transparency, they also collide with entrenched routines and knowledge silos that sustain the status quo [9-11]. In manufacturing and service settings, identifying inertia "hotspots" has been shown to predict the pace and direction of transformation, but in the public sector these diagnostics must be reframed for bureaucratic missions and legal mandates [2, 9]. Moreover, organizational energy—the collective affective and cognitive activation needed to mobilize change—appears pivotal for translating digital strategies into operational shifts, moving human resources from stasis to flexibility [12]. A dynamic behavioral perspective similarly argues that inertia is not static resistance but an evolving pattern of sense-making and intergroup coordination that can be redirected with appropriate levers [13].

Leadership, therefore, becomes the critical fulcrum. Evidence indicates that transformational, paradoxical, and empowering leadership styles can unlock voice behavior, rebuild trust, and lower uncertainty—key preconditions for change acceptance among civil servants [14-16]. Project managers function as boundary spanners who translate strategic intent into implementable work packages, while navigating paradoxes between administrative control and adaptive autonomy [16, 17]. Complementary perspectives highlight green leadership and sustainability frames as morally resonant narratives that legitimize transitions in resource-constrained, legitimacy-sensitive settings typical of public agencies [18]. During shocks—such as pandemics—work-mode plasticity and remediation strategies illustrate how affordances and inertia co-evolve, reinforcing the need for leadership capable of orchestrating both stabilization and adaptation under pressure [19].

Public organizations also confront policy-driven and ecosystemic transformations. Business process automation (BPA) can serve as a strategic enabler for entrepreneurial public initiatives, but its value depends on redesigning workflows, clarifying decision rights, and reskilling administrative staff [11]. AI implementation amplifies these tensions by demanding data governance, algorithmic accountability, and cross-unit collaboration; inertia here emerges as both a socio-technical and behavioral barrier [10]. Relationship-centric views further suggest that public agencies, like platform organizations, pass through recognizable relational life-cycle stages in which expectations and commitments must be renegotiated to avoid institutional lock-in [20]. Sectoral cases—from hospitality to healthcare—demonstrate how unmanaged inertia depresses employee innovative behavior and service performance, whereas targeted managerial interventions can restore alignment between operations and citizen expectations [12, 21, 22].

At the micro-foundational level, the antecedents and consequences of inertia are increasingly mapped through integrative models that connect individual cognition, social norms, and formal routines [23]. In knowledge-intensive public units, "knowledge inertia" moderates the pathway from learning capability to innovation outcomes; without explicit mechanisms to refresh cognitive frames, additional training alone may not translate into novel practices [24, 25]. Meta-reviews in Iranian contexts confirm similar patterns: inertia is multiply determined—by leadership, incentives, HR practices, and policy regimes—and it accrues over time through small frictions that collectively produce large delays [26, 27]. Studies of career stagnation further reveal how inert structures suppress progression, reinforcing learned helplessness and diminishing organizational citizenship behaviors vital for reform initiatives [28]. Conversely, "quantum" managerial skills—framing, perspective taking, and integrative learning—appear to reduce inertia indirectly by building intellectual capital and institutionalizing organizational learning loops [29].

Innovation policy agendas compound the picture. Government adoption of frontier technologies—from accessibility platforms in universities to blockchain acceptance in public banking—hinges on resolving institutional contradictions,

regulatory ambiguities, and legacy performance metrics [30, 31]. Empirical investigations in Iranian municipalities, education-oriented organizations, and cooperative structures show that values, waqf/charity logics, and successor-training regimes shape how change is framed and enacted—making "cultural-legal fit" a non-negotiable design parameter for any inertia-management model [32-34]. Broader governance debates similarly argue that AI's promise for "transcendent governance" will be realized only when strategic management integrates ethical constraints, public value creation, and citizen trust into technology roadmaps [35]. On the administrative side, internal political behavior interacts with change strategies; mapping these causal hierarchies via ISM clarifies which levers (e.g., transparency mechanisms, incentive redesign) have the highest downstream effects on reducing inertia [36].

Change-management scholarship provides actionable scaffolding. Process models from the digital transformation literature offer phased approaches—diagnose, mobilize, redesign, institutionalize—explicitly oriented to inertia detection and mitigation, helping public leaders decide when to standardize versus localize practices [5, 8]. Qualitative syntheses of resistance in telecom and broader digital-era transitions emphasize the interplay among leadership behaviors, technological affordances, and employee adaptability, recommending coherent communication, psychological safety, and capability building as preconditions for adoption [37, 38]. Cross-national analyses of bureaucratic inertia confirm that learning mechanisms—experimentation, feedback loops, and knowledge sharing—are central to overcoming rule-bound rigidity in developing-country administrations [2, 4]. Within Iran, systematic reviews and applied studies call for models that balance doctrinal values with managerial pragmatism, recognizing that legitimacy and performance are mutually reinforcing in public reforms [26, 27, 39].

Parallel literatures provide corroborating evidence. Reviews and case studies on organizational inertia consistently associate high inertia with reduced employee innovative behavior; conversely, leadership and HR architectures that reward initiative and voice buffer the negative effects on performance [21, 40]. Public-sector evidence likewise indicates that agility moderates the inertia–performance link, suggesting that structural ambidexterity (balancing exploration and exploitation) is a viable design response for agencies facing volatile policy environments [22, 41]. At the same time, the diffusion of digital capabilities and dynamic capabilities into business-model innovation is systematically hampered when inertia remains unaddressed—pointing to the need for synchronized interventions across strategy, structure, and skills [6]. Organizational learning programs, when paired with strategic framing and stakeholder communication, can overcome bureaucratic drag by reframing change as opportunity rather than threat [4, 42]. From a behavioral vantage, paradoxical leadership—holding competing goals such as stability and change in constructive tension—has been shown to reopen channels of voice behavior previously blocked by perceived hypocrisy or fear, a pattern especially salient in compliance-heavy agencies [15, 43].

Operational enablers complete the toolkit. BPA reduces handoffs and cycle times, but it must be embedded in redesigned governance to avoid "automating the old bureaucracy" [11]. Programmatic change portfolios benefit from project-manager orchestration and phased communication to sustain momentum and prevent relapse into legacy routines [16, 44]. Studies of work-mode plasticity during crises show that hybrid arrangements can either entrench silos or catalyze collaboration depending on how managers structure autonomy, accountability, and shared norms [19]. In parallel, paradox-aware strategy processes help organizations navigate the triad of tensions—mission continuity, stakeholder diversity, and technological discontinuity—that commonly spark public transformation "stalls" [17]. Finally, cooperative and value-driven contexts (e.g.,

endowment and charity logics) require tailored designs for ethics codes and capability building, ensuring that change infrastructures respect foundational norms while enabling experimentation [32, 34].

Despite this progress, two gaps persist. First, many models remain sector-agnostic and under-specify how administrative law, political oversight, and cultural expectations in Iran shape inertia's antecedents and remedies [26, 27]. Second, extant frameworks often treat technologies (AI, blockchain, accessibility platforms) as plug-ins rather than catalysts that reconfigure decision rights, identity, and inter-organizational relationships [10, 20, 30, 31]. Addressing these gaps requires an integrated, context-sensitive model that (a) diagnoses inertia across structural, cognitive, cultural, and resource dimensions; (b) specifies leadership micro-behaviors (transformational, paradoxical, empowering) that rebuild trust and psychological safety; (c) embeds learning architectures that reduce knowledge inertia; and (d) sequences digital levers (automation, datafication, platforms) with complementary HR, incentive, and governance redesign [5, 8, 9, 24, 25].

Taken together, the literature provides convergent theoretical and practical cues for designing a public-sector–specific inertia-management model that is culturally aligned with Iranian administrative values yet operationally robust for digital-era mandates [33, 35, 39]. Therefore, the aim of this study is to develop a comprehensive, context-adapted model for managing organizational inertia in Iranian public organizations—integrating leadership, learning, HR, and digital transformation mechanisms to enhance innovation and performance while preserving public value

Methodology

This study is qualitative, exploratory in nature, and conducted using the grounded theory method. The data collection tool in this research was the semi-structured interview, and the sampling method was purposive. The target population of this study consisted of experts in urban entrepreneurship, and the participants were selected from municipal officials with entrepreneurial experience in different districts of the city, as well as influential entrepreneurs in Tehran. After 15 interviews, the researcher reached theoretical saturation, and based on the data-driven theory, open, axial, and selective coding were applied for data analysis. The data obtained were validated using the CVR table by 5 additional experts, and the findings were extracted.

Findings and Results

To present the model of organizational inertia management in Iranian public organizations, the meta-synthesis method was first employed. This technique analyzes and examines the content of existing studies and, with the aim of extracting indicators and key themes related to organizational inertia management, compares relevant articles. In this regard, 126 articles related to organizational inertia were initially identified from domestic scientific databases (SID, Magiran, Noormags) and international databases (ScienceDirect, Emerald, Scopus). Out of this number, 12 articles were eliminated after in-depth review, as they did not have a direct connection with inertia management in public organizations. Subsequently, 42 articles were excluded after abstract review, since they lacked sufficient focus on the public sector or appropriate conceptual relevance. Finally, six additional articles were excluded after full-text review due to noncompliance with qualitative criteria. As a result, 66 articles (49 international and 17 domestic) were selected as the final sources for analysis in this study.

Table 1

Description of International Sources

Code	Source
CL1	[45]
CL2	[15]
CL3	[16]
CL4	[21]
CL5	[11]
CL6	[10]
CL7	[30]
CL8	[19]
CL9	[17]
CL10	[20]
CL11	[44]
CL12	[13]
CL13	[40]
CL14	[38]
CL15	[37]
CL16	[8]
CL17	[43]
CL18	[9]
CL19	[26]
CL20	[22]
CL21	[25]
CL22	[7]
CL23	[42]
CL24	[4]
CL25	[46]
CL26	[5]
CL27	[47]
CL28	[48]
CL29	[29]
CL30	[1]
CL31	[14]
CL32	[41]
CL33	[3]
CL34	[2]
CL35	[49]
CL36	[50]
CL37	[51]
CL38	[52]
CL39	[53]
CL40	[54]
CL41	[55]
CL42	[56]
CL43	[57]
CL44	[58]
CL45	[59]
CL46	[60]
CL47	[61]
CL48	[62]
CL49	[63]

The codes for Persian sources are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Description of Persian Sources

Code	Source
CP1	[27]
CP2	[64]
CP3	[65]

CP4	[28]
CP5	[66]
CP6	[67]
CP7	[68]
CP8	[24]
CP9	[23]
CP10	[69]
CP11	[70]
CP12	[71]
CP13	[72]
CP14	[73]
CP15	[74]
CP16	[75]
CP17	[76]

The examination of the most important indicators of organizational inertia management in Iranian public organizations as a source of these indicators is derived through content analysis of documents and records, including upstream policy documents, articles, and dissertations. In fact, the identification of the main components of organizational inertia management in Iranian public organizations is conducted through the analysis of existing guidelines, articles, manuals, related books, and other relevant materials.

The identification of the main components of organizational inertia management in Iranian public organizations, based on the findings of the qualitative analysis of the above-mentioned sources, is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Identification of Organizational Inertia Management in Iranian Public Organizations Extracted from Meta-Synthesis Analysis

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Indicator	Source code
Strong and transformational leadership	Transformational leadership	Inspiration, motivation, and encouragement of change acceptance	CL12, CL14, CL15, CL16, CL18, CL22, CL32, CL40, CL42, CP8, CP14
		Providing emotional support during transition	CL14, CL15, CL18, CP14
		Fostering trust, respect, and commitment	CL14, CL15, CL41, CP14
		Increasing self-confidence and reducing uncertainty	CL14, CL15, CP14, CL33, CL34
		Creating an empowering and value-affirming environment	CL1, CL2, CL14, CL15, CL18, CL36, CL37, CL43, CP14
		Clear communication and presentation of the logic of change	CL11, CL14, CL15, CL32, CP6, CP7, CP14
		Demonstrating empathy and active listening	CL14, CL15, CL49, CP13, CP14
	Paradoxical leadership	Integrating and simultaneously accommodating conflicting demands	CL14, CL15, CP14, CP15
		Maintaining employee satisfaction without violating rules	CL14, CL15, CL18, CP14
		Using flexible behaviors	CL1, CL14, CL15, CL41, CP14
		Fostering team-building and performance improvement	CL14, CL15, CP14, CL17
		Faith in and support for subordinates	CL14, CL15, CP14
		Role modeling in paradoxical situations	CL14, CL15, CP14
		Encouraging expression of ideas while respecting viewpoints	CL14, CL15, CP14, CP15, CL10
		Balancing control and autonomy	CL14, CL15, CP14
	Empowering leadership	Cultivating a safe and empowering culture	CL14, CL15, CL43, CP14, CL11
		Eliminating cynicism and creating a supportive environment	CL14, CL15, CP14, CL12
		Increasing trust in the organization and senior management	CL14, CL15, CL33, CL34, CP14
		Helping to find purpose, security, creativity, and reducing defensive behavior	CL1, CL9, CL14, CL15, CP14, CL32
		Supporting the development of technical and managerial skills	CL13, CL14, CL15, CL18, CP14

		Improving the work environment and increasing individual motivation	CL14, CL15, CP14, CL16
		Emphasizing power sharing	CL14, CL15, CP14, CL49
		Providing motivational support	CL14, CL15, CP14, CL18
Employee participation motivation	Transparent communication	Clarity and understanding of the logic and impact of change	CL1, CL12, CL14, CL15, CL16, CL18, CL20, CL25, CL44
		Open dialogue and two-way communication	CL1, CL3, CL13, CL14, CL17, CL25, CL42, CP1
		Timeliness and regularity of information	CL1, CL3, CL8, CL9, CL15, CL26, CL42, CP8
		Honesty and transparency about challenges and risks	CL2, CL3, CL6, CL14, CL32, CP4
		Personal communication and impact	CL1, CL4, CL9, CL10, CL14
		Reinforcing the organizational vision and values	CL1, CL2, CL3, CL5, CL9, CL15
	Active employee participation	Participatory decision-making	CL1, CL3, CL4, CL13, CL14, CL15, CL42, CP3
		Gathering and valuing input and feedback	CL1, CL3, CL4, CL13, CL14, CL15, CL20, CL25, CL45, CP13
		Empowerment and autonomy	CL1, CL4, CL7, CL15, CL16, CL23, CL43, CP9
		Fostering a sense of ownership and inclusion	CL1, CL15, CL18, CL19, CL37, CP5
		Motivation and initiative	CL1, CL4, CL11, CL15, CL21, CL40, CP7
		Leadership role modeling and building support	CL4, CL16, CL17, CL24, CL25, CL42, CL44, CL46, CP10
Cultivating an adaptive and learning organizational culture	Fostering acceptance of change and flexibility	Emphasizing the values of flexibility and curiosity	CL1, CL14, CL15, CL17, CL26, CL36, CL41
		Framing change as an opportunity	CL15, CL18, CL26, CL28, CL42
		Encouraging risk-taking and learning from failures	CL26, CL42, CP8, CP14
		Promoting a flexible and open organizational climate	CL1, CL15, CL16, CL17, CL41
		Challenging assumptions	CL13, CL25, CL28
		Cultivating adaptive mindsets	CL16, CP3, CP8
	Promoting continuous learning and knowledge sharing	Investing in learning and flexibility	CL8, CL15, CL25, CL41, CP3, CP8, CP14
		Enhancing learning and innovation capabilities	CL15, CL25, CL26, CP8, CP14, CP15
		Updating cognitive frameworks	CL1, CL6, CL18
		Implementing trial-and-error mechanisms	CL6, CP3, CP14
		Knowledge-sharing activities	CL8, CP8, CP14
		Developing workforce competencies	CL46, CP6, CP15
	Fostering innovation and creativity	Mandating creativity as a job requirement	CL14, CL28, CP8
		Supporting innovative approaches	CL13, CP15
		Providing novel solutions	CL17, CL18, CP14
		Leveraging employees' ideas	CL8, CL13, CP6, CP8
	Building psychological safety and trust	Cultivating psychological safety	CL2, CL13, CL16, CP3
		Fostering trust and commitment	CL1, CL16, CP8
		Promoting transparency and empathy	CL15, CL16, CP14
		Encouraging open dialogue	CP8, CP15
	Developing a flexible and resilient environment	Balancing competing demands	CL4, CL9, CL17, CP2
		Managing exploitation and exploration	CL7, CL22, CP6
		Establishing separate structures	CL3, CL9, CL26, CP13
		Increasing resilience and adaptability	CL1, CL2, CL5, CL31, CP15
	Aligning leadership, values, and identity	Aligning leadership with organizational values	CL8, CL15, CL21, CP1
		Strengthening organizational values	CL1, CL2, CL19, CP4
		Building shared identities	CL9, CL16, CP3
		Fostering a sense of belonging and purpose	CL12, CL15, CL40, CP8
		Using strategic framing	CL42, CL45, CP14
Strategic redesign of organizational structures and resources	Redesigning organizational structure	Simplifying decision-making processes	CL48, CL18, CP11
		Adopting agile management approaches	CL23, CL41, CL46, CP9
		Structural reconfigurability	CL10, CL27, CP16
		Promoting structural flexibility through network changes	CL13, CL28, CL41, CP12
		Creating a comprehensive change management program	CL45, CL1, CP17

	Reallocation and reconstruction of resources	Changing resource investment patterns	CL11, CL36, CP5
		Creating dedicated resources and inter-organizational alliances for AI deployment	CL27, CL34, CP7
		Providing comprehensive resources for change	CL35, CL37, CP10
		Prioritizing strategic investments	CL20, CL30, CP13
		Platformization	CL10, CL25, CP14
		Datafication	CL32, CL33, CP15
		Refocusing information technology resources	CL26, CL38, CL41, CP16
		Implementing business process automation	CL24, CL29, CP17
	Adapting HR practices and roles	Developing preventive talents	CL1, CL15, CL39, CL47, CP1
		Training and skills development	CL4, CL5, CL6, CL15, CP4, CP5
		Redefining roles and responsibilities	CL2, CL3, CL9, CL10, CP6, CP7
		Incentive and reward systems	CL8, CL9, CL11, CL15, CP9, CP10
		Leveraging HR analytics	CL9, CL26, CL27, CP11, CP12
Development and preventive support systems	Training programs and skill development	Equipping for new technologies	CL1, CL3, CL5, CL15, CL25, CL26, CL41, CL45, CP13
		Increasing self-confidence and competence	CL1, CL3, CL4, CL5, CL6, CL7, CL15, CL18, CP1, CP2
		Reducing anxiety and uncertainty	CL1, CL3, CL16, CL17, CL19, CP3, CP4
		Addressing skill gaps	CL4, CL5, CL12, CL13, CP5, CP6
		Updating cognitive frameworks	CL20, CL21, CL32, CP7, CP8
		Increasing adaptability and resilience	CL6, CL14, CL15, CL45, CP9, CP10
		Deploying new technologies and processes	CL1, CL15, CL24, CL25, CL41, CL46, CP11
		Soft skills and strategic thinking	CL1, CL4, CL5, CL15, CL22, CL23, CL28, CP4, CP12, CP13
		Crisis management and recovery	CL1, CL4, CL45, CL46, CL47, CP14, CP15
		Appropriate timing	CL13, CL14, CL15
	Incentive and reward systems	Encouraging accelerated change adoption	CL1, CL3, CL8, CL13, CL17, CL25
		Stimulating intrinsic motivation	CL1, CL3, CL8, CL10, CL11, CL15, CL25
		Maintaining positive attitudes	CL1, CL9, CL12, CL13
		Rewarding preventive participation	CL9
		Encouraging innovation	CL1, CL18, CL23, CP8
		Performance-based recognition	CL25
		Career advancement opportunities	CL19
		Utilizing personalized incentives	CL13
		Utilizing comprehensive reward systems	CL25
		Overcoming risk avoidance	CL13, CL21, CL22
		Alignment with strategy	CL9
		Balancing factors	CL25

According to the data extracted from the reviewed articles and the attainment of saturation as displayed in the previous tables, the categories and classes—and ultimately the analysis of the collected information—were carried out using MAXQDA statistical software. After deriving the initial model, Cohen's Kappa index was calculated as 0.821, indicating the adequacy of the study's findings and demonstrating high reliability, which strengthened the methodological rigor of the research. Based on the codes extracted from the meta-synthesis section, the Delphi questionnaire was developed, and the open-ended responses of the experts were used to refine the indicators. In the experts' view, the indicators presented in Table 4 represent the components of organizational inertia management in Iranian public organizations. These components were obtained by synthesizing the Delphi technique results.

Table 4

Screening of Organizational Inertia Management Components Using the Delphi Technique

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Indicator	Mean (Round 1)	Mean (Round 2)	Difference (R2–R1)	Mean (Round 3)	Difference (R3–R2)
Strong and transformational leadership	Transformational leadership	Inspiration, motivation, and encouragement of change acceptance	4.27	4.60	0.33	4.67	0.07
		Providing emotional support during transition	3.80	4.33	0.53	4.47	0.13
		Fostering trust, respect, and commitment	4.13	4.40	0.27	4.47	0.07
		Increasing self-confidence and reducing uncertainty	3.33	4.20	0.87	4.33	0.13
		Creating an empowering and value-affirming environment	4.20	4.53	0.33	4.67	0.13
		Clear communication and presentation of the logic of change	4.33	4.60	0.27	4.60	0.00
		Demonstrating empathy and active listening	4.13	4.40	0.27	4.40	0.00
	Paradoxical leadership	Integrating and simultaneously accommodating conflicting demands	3.80	4.33	0.53	4.40	0.07
		Maintaining employee satisfaction without violating rules	4.33	4.67	0.33	4.67	0.00
		Using flexible behaviors	4.27	4.80	0.53	4.87	0.07
		Fostering team-building and performance improvement	4.00	4.53	0.53	4.60	0.07
		Faith in and support for subordinates	4.20	4.60	0.40	4.60	0.00
		Role modeling in paradoxical situations	2.40	2.33	−0.07	—	—
		Encouraging expression of ideas while respecting viewpoints	3.87	4.33	0.47	4.47	0.13
		Balancing control and autonomy	3.87	4.40	0.53	4.47	0.07
	Empowering leadership	Cultivating a safe and empowering culture	3.40	4.00	0.60	4.07	0.07
		Eliminating cynicism and creating a supportive environment	3.80	4.60	0.80	4.60	0.00
		Increasing trust in the organization and senior management	4.13	4.60	0.47	4.60	0.00
		Helping to find purpose, security, creativity, and reducing defensive behavior	4.20	4.73	0.53	4.80	0.07
		Supporting the development of technical and managerial skills	4.00	4.53	0.53	4.67	0.13
		Improving the work environment and increasing individual motivation	3.93	4.33	0.40	4.33	0.00
		Emphasizing power sharing	4.27	4.60	0.33	4.60	0.00
		Providing motivational support	4.13	4.40	0.27	4.40	0.00
Employee participation motivation	Transparent communication	Clarity and understanding of the logic and impact of change	4.00	4.40	0.40	4.40	0.00
		Open dialogue and two-way communication	4.27	4.53	0.27	4.53	0.00
		Timeliness and regularity of information	4.00	4.33	0.33	4.33	0.00
		Honesty and transparency about challenges and risks	3.87	4.40	0.53	4.40	0.00
		Personal communication and impact	4.27	4.80	0.53	4.80	0.00
		Reinforcing organizational vision and values	3.87	4.20	0.33	4.20	0.00
	Active employee participation	Participatory decision-making	4.27	4.47	0.20	4.53	0.07
		Gathering and valuing input and feedback	3.87	4.40	0.53	4.53	0.13

		Empowerment and autonomy	4.47	4.80	0.33	4.87	0.07
		Fostering a sense of ownership and inclusion	3.93	4.60	0.67	4.67	0.07
		Motivation and initiative	4.53	4.93	0.40	5.00	0.07
		Leadership role modeling and building support	4.13	4.53	0.40	4.67	0.13
	Cultivating an adaptive and learning organizational culture	Fostering acceptance of change and flexibility	Emphasizing the values of flexibility and curiosity	4.27	4.60	0.33	4.67
		Framing change as an opportunity	4.07	4.40	0.33	4.40	0.00
		Encouraging risk-taking and learning from failures	3.87	4.20	0.33	4.27	0.07
		Promoting a flexible and open organizational climate	4.20	4.53	0.33	4.53	0.00
		Challenging assumptions	3.87	4.33	0.47	4.33	0.00
		Cultivating adaptive mindsets	4.00	4.33	0.33	4.33	0.00
		Knowledge management and organizational learning	—	4.40	—	4.40	0.00
	Promoting continuous learning and knowledge sharing	Investing in learning and flexibility	3.93	4.33	0.40	4.40	0.07
		Enhancing learning and innovation capabilities	4.20	4.60	0.40	4.60	0.00
		Updating cognitive frameworks	4.07	4.33	0.27	4.47	0.13
		Implementing trial-and-error mechanisms	4.13	4.00	−0.13	4.00	0.00
		Knowledge-sharing activities	4.07	4.40	0.33	4.47	0.07
		Developing workforce competencies	3.87	4.27	0.40	4.40	0.13
	Fostering innovation and creativity	Mandating creativity as a job requirement	4.13	4.40	0.27	4.40	0.00
		Supporting innovative approaches	4.07	4.40	0.33	4.47	0.07
		Providing novel solutions	4.07	4.27	0.20	4.40	0.13
		Leveraging employees' ideas	4.07	4.13	0.07	4.13	0.00
	Building psychological safety and trust	Cultivating psychological safety	4.27	4.33	0.07	4.27	−0.07
		Fostering trust and commitment	4.07	4.73	0.67	4.73	0.00
		Promoting transparency and empathy	4.00	4.40	0.40	4.47	0.07
		Encouraging open dialogue	3.87	4.73	0.87	4.73	0.00
	Developing a flexible and resilient environment	Balancing competing demands	4.07	4.33	0.27	4.47	0.13
		Managing exploitation and exploration	4.27	4.53	0.27	4.53	0.00
		Establishing separate structures	3.80	4.47	0.67	4.47	0.00
		Increasing resilience and adaptability	3.67	4.20	0.53	4.20	0.00
	Aligning leadership, values, and identity	Aligning leadership with organizational values (alignment with the organization's Islamic-Iranian values)	3.80	4.33	0.53	4.40	0.07
		Strengthening organizational values	4.07	4.40	0.33	4.53	0.13
		Building shared identities	4.13	4.47	0.33	4.53	0.07
		Fostering a sense of belonging and purpose	3.73	4.33	0.60	4.33	0.00
		Using strategic framing	3.93	4.47	0.53	4.47	0.00
Strategic redesign of organizational structures and resources	Redesigning organizational structure	Simplifying decision-making processes	3.73	4.33	0.60	4.40	0.07
		Adopting agile management approaches	4.33	4.73	0.40	4.73	0.00
		Structural reconfigurability	4.27	4.33	0.07	4.40	0.07
		Promoting structural flexibility through network changes	4.40	4.73	0.33	4.73	0.00
		Creating a comprehensive change management program	4.27	4.67	0.40	4.73	0.07

	Reallocation and reconstruction of resources	Changing resource investment patterns	3.93	4.47	0.53	4.53	0.07
		Creating dedicated resources and inter-organizational alliances for AI deployment	2.73	2.67	−0.07	—	—
		Providing comprehensive resources for change	4.47	4.27	−0.20	4.27	0.00
		Prioritizing strategic investments	4.47	4.33	−0.13	4.33	0.00
		Platformization	4.47	4.73	0.27	4.73	0.00
		Datafication	3.67	4.40	0.73	4.47	0.07
		Refocusing information technology resources	4.13	4.67	0.53	4.67	0.00
		Implementing business process automation	4.00	4.67	0.67	4.67	0.00
	Adapting HR practices and roles	Developing preventive talents	4.33	4.60	0.27	4.60	0.00
		Training and skills development	4.00	4.53	0.53	4.53	0.00
		Redefining roles and responsibilities	4.27	4.53	0.27	4.53	0.00
		Incentive and reward systems	3.87	4.40	0.53	4.47	0.07
		Leveraging HR analytics	4.00	4.67	0.67	4.80	0.13
Development and preventive support systems	Training programs and skill development	Equipping for new technologies	3.67	4.00	0.33	4.00	0.00
		Increasing self-confidence and competence	3.93	4.67	0.73	4.67	0.00
		Reducing anxiety and uncertainty	4.00	4.40	0.40	4.47	0.07
		Addressing skill gaps	3.93	4.73	0.80	4.73	0.00
		Updating cognitive frameworks	3.53	4.33	0.80	4.40	0.07
		Increasing adaptability and resilience	3.87	4.13	0.27	4.20	0.07
		Deploying new technologies and processes	3.93	4.60	0.67	4.60	0.00
		Soft skills and strategic thinking	4.13	4.47	0.33	4.53	0.07
		Crisis management and recovery	4.07	4.47	0.40	4.47	0.00
		Appropriate timing	4.00	4.60	0.60	4.60	0.00
		Training to counter social loafing and bureaucracy	—	4.53	—	4.67	0.13
	Incentive and reward systems	Encouraging accelerated change adoption	3.93	4.67	0.73	4.67	0.00
		Stimulating intrinsic motivation	3.67	4.53	0.87	4.60	0.07
		Maintaining positive attitudes	4.07	4.60	0.53	4.67	0.07
		Rewarding preventive participation	4.13	4.53	0.40	4.60	0.07
		Encouraging innovation (knowledge-management-based innovation encouragement)	4.00	4.40	0.40	4.40	0.00
		Performance-based recognition	4.07	4.53	0.47	4.53	0.00
		Career advancement opportunities	4.20	4.53	0.33	4.53	0.00
		Utilizing personalized incentives	4.07	4.67	0.60	4.67	0.00
		Utilizing comprehensive reward systems	4.33	4.47	0.13	4.47	0.00
		Overcoming risk avoidance	4.33	4.60	0.27	4.67	0.07
		Alignment with strategy	4.53	4.80	0.27	4.80	0.00
		Balancing factors	4.13	4.53	0.40	4.60	0.07

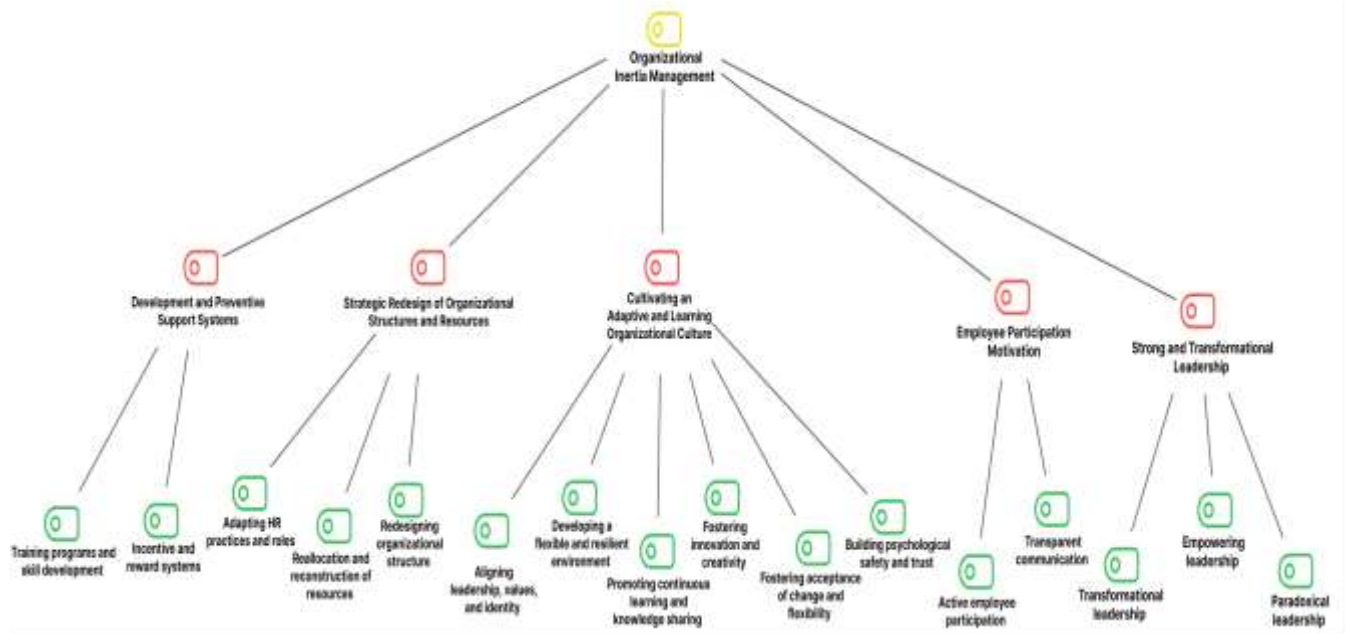
Considering the need to localize indicators within the Delphi process, indicators such as “creating dedicated resources and inter-organizational alliances for AI deployment” were removed, as the primary focus is on local innovation compatible with Iran’s bureaucratic structures. Likewise, “role modeling in paradoxical situations” was eliminated due to its complexity and misalignment with public-sector hierarchies. In contrast, the indicator “knowledge management and organizational learning” was added to the “cultivating an adaptive organizational culture” criterion to target the knowledge inertia prevalent in Iranian organizations, and the indicator “training to counter social loafing and bureaucracy” was added to “development and

preventive support systems" to address common structural and behavioral issues in the public sector. Moreover, "alignment with organizational values" was revised to "alignment with the organization's Islamic-Iranian values" to better fit Iran's cultural and legal context, and "encouraging innovation" was refined to "knowledge-management-based innovation encouragement" to align with the study's emphasis on learning and reducing inertia. These changes help simplify the model and enhance its effectiveness within Iranian public organizations.

Based on the study's findings, the final model was categorized into 5 criteria and 16 sub-criteria, and, in total, 104 indicators were identified as the indicators of the components of organizational inertia in Iranian public organizations, as shown in Figure 1. This model is the output of MAXQDA software.

Figure 1

Model of Criteria, Sub-criteria, and Indicators of Management (MAXQDA Output)



Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study offer a multidimensional perspective on how organizational inertia can be systematically identified, categorized, and managed within Iranian public organizations. The integration of meta-synthesis and Delphi techniques led to the extraction of 104 refined indicators grouped under five broad criteria and sixteen sub-criteria. These results underscore the complexity of inertia as both a stabilizing force and a constraint on adaptation, echoing the notion that inertia is not a static condition but a dynamic pattern influenced by leadership, structure, culture, and external shocks [1, 13].

One of the most salient results was the critical role of strong and transformational leadership in reducing organizational inertia. Transformational, paradoxical, and empowering leadership styles emerged as essential for fostering motivation, voice behavior, and adaptability among employees. This aligns with studies highlighting how paradoxical leadership can simultaneously balance control and freedom, generating psychological safety and encouraging innovation despite entrenched routines [14-16]. Similarly, evidence from organizational change management research emphasizes that supportive leadership behaviors—such as transparent communication, emotional support, and modeling adaptability—

directly counteract resistance and stabilize transitions [8, 37]. In contexts like Iranian public agencies, where bureaucratic hierarchies and compliance norms amplify rigidity, leadership becomes the linchpin for legitimizing change and reinforcing cultural acceptance [2, 7].

Equally significant was the identification of employee participation motivation as a mitigating factor against inertia. Transparent communication and participatory decision-making emerged as mechanisms that not only reduce uncertainty but also enhance ownership of change initiatives. These results resonate with prior findings that stress the importance of open dialogue and structured feedback loops for overcoming bureaucratic inertia [3, 4]. In public organizations where top-down control is dominant, involving employees in decision processes helps redistribute psychological ownership and facilitates smoother adaptation to new technologies and practices [39, 42]. Moreover, studies in both hospitality and service industries indicate that when employees feel heard and valued, their innovative behavior increases despite systemic inertia [21, 40].

The development of an adaptive and learning organizational culture also emerged as a key theme. Indicators such as continuous learning, psychological safety, and knowledge sharing were prioritized in the Delphi validation. This is consistent with empirical research suggesting that knowledge inertia—defined as the inability to update cognitive frames—significantly hampers the translation of training into innovation outcomes [24, 25]. Likewise, management innovation and organizational learning have been identified as mediators that weaken inertia's negative impact on performance in both private and public sectors [6, 41]. In the Iranian context, where knowledge-sharing mechanisms are often underdeveloped, fostering organizational learning becomes a necessary countermeasure against inertia's entrenched effects [26, 27].

Another critical finding was the role of strategic redesign of structures and resources. Simplification of decision-making processes, adoption of agile management approaches, and reallocation of resources toward strategic priorities were identified as structural enablers for reducing inertia. These results support earlier work suggesting that bureaucratic complexity intensifies inertia and that structural ambidexterity—balancing exploration with exploitation—helps organizations remain adaptive in turbulent environments [2, 22]. Likewise, the literature on digital transformation highlights the importance of business process automation and platform-based restructuring as effective levers against organizational stagnation [5, 11]. Particularly relevant is the finding that automating outdated bureaucratic processes without redesigning governance frameworks risks perpetuating inertia rather than overcoming it [9].

The last dimension validated in this study was the importance of development and preventive support systems, including training, skill-building, and incentive mechanisms. The Delphi results highlighted that confidence-building, addressing skill gaps, and aligning incentives with change initiatives are critical steps. This is supported by evidence showing that capability building and structured reward systems enhance employee readiness for change and mitigate the demotivating effects of career stagnation [28, 77]. Furthermore, crisis management training and resilience-building initiatives were emphasized, which aligns with studies demonstrating that organizational energy and resilience are critical for transitioning from inertia to flexibility, especially in sectors like healthcare and education [12, 64].

Taken together, these findings highlight the multi-layered nature of inertia in Iranian public organizations and reinforce the argument that overcoming inertia requires simultaneous interventions across leadership, culture, structure, and human capital. Aligning with prior systematic reviews, this study confirms that inertia is not merely resistance to change but an accumulation of cultural, cognitive, and structural rigidities that must be addressed holistically [1, 67].

Despite its contributions, the present study faces several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, although the meta-synthesis drew from both domestic and international databases, the inclusion criteria may have excluded potentially relevant studies published in less accessible outlets or in non-English languages, limiting the breadth of the evidence base. Second, the Delphi technique, while robust for reaching expert consensus, relied on a relatively small panel of experts (n=10), which may constrain the generalizability of the findings to broader public-sector contexts. Third, the study focused on Iranian governmental organizations, which operate under distinct cultural, legal, and bureaucratic systems. This specificity enhances contextual relevance but restricts the external validity of the findings to other national or institutional settings. Finally, although methodological triangulation was applied, the reliance on qualitative coding and expert judgment introduces the possibility of researcher bias, even with measures such as Cohen's Kappa to ensure inter-coder reliability.

Future research could expand on this study in several important ways. First, quantitative testing of the validated indicators across larger samples of public organizations could enhance generalizability and allow for hypothesis-driven analysis of causal relationships between inertia and organizational outcomes. Second, cross-national comparative studies are recommended to examine how different governance structures, legal frameworks, and cultural orientations influence inertia and its management. Third, longitudinal designs would help capture how inertia evolves over time, particularly during prolonged reform programs or digital transformation initiatives. Fourth, integrating employee-level surveys with organizational-level performance data could shed light on the micro–macro linkages that drive inertia. Finally, exploring sector-specific manifestations of inertia—for instance, in healthcare, education, or municipal services—would provide more tailored models and strategies for addressing inertia in diverse public-sector settings.

For practitioners, several implications arise from this study. First, policymakers and senior managers in Iranian public organizations should prioritize leadership development programs that emphasize transformational and paradoxical leadership skills, ensuring that leaders can balance continuity with innovation. Second, managers should institutionalize participatory decision-making and transparent communication mechanisms to build employee ownership and reduce uncertainty during reforms. Third, investing in continuous learning and knowledge-sharing infrastructures will help counteract knowledge inertia and foster adaptability across organizational levels. Fourth, simplifying bureaucratic processes and adopting agile management approaches are essential to reducing structural rigidity. Finally, aligning incentive systems with change objectives and providing crisis management and resilience training can strengthen employees' readiness to embrace and sustain organizational transformations.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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