Future of Work and Digital Management Journal

Article type:
Original Research

Article history:
Received 10 July 2025
Revised 20 August 2025
Accepted 09 October 2025
Published online 01 January 2025

Hosein. Heidari Ardi[1], Reza. Verij Kazemi[1*], Davood. Kia Kojouri[1]

1 Department of Management, Cha.C., Islamic Azad University, Chalus, Iran.

Corresponding author email address:
rezakazemi@iau.ac.ir

How to cite this article:
Heidari Ardi, H. , Verij Kazemi, R. & Kia Kojouri, D. (2026). Proposing a Conceptual Model of the Drivers and Inhibitors of Conspiracy Beliefs in Iranian Public Organizations. *Future of Work and Digital Management Journal,* 4(1), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.61838/fwdmj.147

Proposing a Conceptual Model of the Drivers and Inhibitors of Conspiracy Beliefs in Iranian Public Organizations

ABSTRACT

Conspiracy belief in public organizations refers to the perception that others are secretly and malevolently acting against one's interests. This phenomenon can lead to reduced collaboration, organizational isolation, lack of transparency, and inefficiency in responding to societal needs. The purpose of this study was to propose a conceptual model of the drivers and inhibitors of conspiracy belief in Iranian public organizations. A qualitative research design based on thematic analysis was employed. Data were collected through 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews with experts in management, human resources, social sciences, sociology, and psychology. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach and resulted in 157 initial codes, 18 components, and six main dimensions. To ensure validity, member checking and meticulous documentation of the research process were conducted. Reliability was assessed using the inter-coder agreement method, yielding 82.4%. Findings revealed that individual psychological factors (need for control, anxiety level, confirmation bias), socio-cultural factors (cultural norms, group belonging, social polarization), political-institutional factors (centralization of power, perceived corruption), informational-media factors (organizational rumors, information restrictions), economic factors (resource scarcity, economic inequality), and organizational-managerial factors (authoritarian leadership, work pressure) act as key drivers of conspiracy belief. Conversely, inhibitors such as tolerance of ambiguity, social trust, organizational transparency, critical thinking, job security, and participative leadership can reduce this phenomenon. The proposed model provides a comprehensive framework for managing conspiracy beliefs and improving the performance of public organizations.

Keywords: conspiracy belief, public organizations, political behavior, thematic analysis, conceptual model

Introduction

Conspiracy beliefs have moved from being marginal phenomena to occupying a visible and impactful position in contemporary organizations. Defined as the perception that covert and malevolent forces are acting against individuals or groups [1, 2], conspiratorial thinking affects interpersonal trust, decision-making, and organizational performance [3, 4]. Within public organizations, where hierarchical structures and information asymmetries are common [5, 6], conspiracy beliefs can undermine collaboration, decrease employee engagement, and erode citizens' confidence in governance [7, 8]. Understanding the drivers and inhibitors of conspiracy belief has thus become essential for effective public sector management and policy design.

Although conspiracy theories have been extensively examined in social psychology and political science [9-11], their specific organizational antecedents and consequences remain less systematically explored, particularly in the public sector [3, 12]. Recent work has shown that organizations are not immune to the same psychological and cultural forces that drive

conspiratorial thinking at the societal level [13, 14]. However, the complexity of public administration — with its political dependencies, bureaucratic rules, and exposure to media narratives — creates unique conditions for conspiracy beliefs to emerge and spread [15-17].

At the individual level, personal psychological needs play a central role. Research consistently shows that individuals who feel a lack of control are more prone to perceive hidden malevolent patterns [18, 19]. Anxiety and uncertainty intensify the search for simple explanatory narratives, including conspiracies [11, 20, 21]. Conversely, higher emotional intelligence, tolerance of ambiguity, and self-efficacy buffer employees against suspicious interpretations of workplace dynamics [20, 22]. These individual factors, although studied broadly, remain underexplored in the governance context of Iranian public organizations [23, 24].

Social and cultural conditions amplify or suppress conspiracy beliefs. A culture of distrust in authority [8, 13] and polarized "us versus them" narratives [14, 25] can legitimize suspicion inside organizations. In collectivist settings, strong ingroup loyalty may foster perceptions of external groups as plotting or threatening [9, 13]. Conversely, organizational environments marked by openness, fairness, and social support can weaken the appeal of conspiratorial frames [4, 26]. Yet in many public institutions, legacy cultural norms and informal power structures can sustain suspicion and hinder trust [27, 28].

Political–institutional dynamics represent another important layer. Public organizations often operate under concentrated decision-making and politicized structures [5, 6]. When power is highly centralized and accountability mechanisms are weak, employees may interpret decisions as opaque or self-serving [29, 30]. Perceived corruption strongly correlates with conspiratorial thinking [2, 31], while transparent communication and participatory governance reduce the sense of manipulation [15, 17]. Yet transparency efforts may remain superficial unless embedded into deeper cultural change [32, 33].

Information and media play a dual role. On one hand, accurate and diverse information sources counteract rumors and false narratives [9, 22]. On the other, limited information access and organizational rumor networks create fertile ground for conspiracy beliefs [3, 34]. The rise of social media intensifies these dynamics: algorithms amplify sensational content and can create echo chambers reinforcing suspicious interpretations [1, 35]. Media literacy and critical thinking among employees, therefore, become protective factors against mis- and disinformation [21, 36].

Economic stressors within organizations also shape conspiracy perceptions. Job insecurity, resource scarcity, and perceptions of distributive injustice increase employees' vulnerability to hidden-agenda explanations [4, 37]. Conversely, fair compensation, career development opportunities, and economic stability support organizational commitment and reduce suspicion [26, 38]. In public organizations facing fiscal constraints, competition for limited resources may fuel rivalries and conspiracy narratives [24, 29].

Leadership and managerial style are especially critical. Authoritarian leadership, characterized by unilateral decisions and poor communication, creates environments where rumors flourish and mistrust escalates [4, 31]. In contrast, participative and ethical leadership fosters transparency, inclusion, and psychological safety [30, 39]. Scholars emphasize that leadership behaviors signal whether the organization values openness and fairness or secrecy and manipulation [9, 40]. Evidence from Iranian contexts shows that leadership development and competency-based succession planning can strengthen trust and reduce politically motivated suspicion [32, 33].

Despite these insights, research in Iranian public organizations remains fragmented. Studies on political behavior in government agencies highlight the interplay of power, informal networks, and cultural norms [15-17], yet they seldom link

these to conspiracy beliefs explicitly. Emerging work on organizational deception [34] and epistemic malevolence [31] suggests the need to integrate ethics and information integrity into management frameworks. Moreover, local studies on organizational culture [30, 36], entrepreneurship barriers [37], and leadership behaviors [24, 28] indicate that structural and cultural inhibitors of transparency persist across public institutions.

A conceptual model is therefore needed to synthesize these diverse strands of knowledge and provide actionable guidance. Such a model should integrate psychological triggers (e.g., control and anxiety), social and cultural climates (e.g., trust and group polarization), political and institutional dynamics (e.g., centralization of power and corruption), informational and media ecosystems (e.g., rumor management and media literacy), economic conditions (e.g., fairness and security), and organizational leadership practices (e.g., participative versus authoritarian styles). Scholars argue that multi-level and contextually grounded frameworks are critical for managing conspiratorial perceptions in complex institutions [3, 9, 13].

This study responds to this gap by developing a comprehensive conceptual model of the drivers and inhibitors of conspiracy belief in Iranian public organizations.

Methodology

The present research was designed with a qualitative approach and employed thematic analysis to develop a conceptual model of the drivers and inhibitors of conspiracy belief in Iranian public organizations. This study is applied in nature and aimed to identify and extract the dimensions, components, and sub-indicators related to conspiracy belief in Iranian public organizations. The methodological design was structured to accurately reflect the perspectives of experts and practitioners while ensuring the validity, comprehensiveness, and practical applicability of the results.

The study population consisted of specialists and scholars in management, human resources, social sciences, sociology, and psychology with expertise in conspiracy belief, conspiratorial thinking, or organizational issues related to individuals inclined toward conspiracy theories in Iranian public organizations. In addition, senior managers and experts from public organizations who were familiar with the challenges and opportunities of working with individuals holding conspiracy beliefs in the workplace were included in the population. Sampling combined purposive (judgmental) and snowball techniques. In the first stage, five key experts were selected purposively based on the research team's knowledge of their academic and professional experience in managing public organizations and their familiarity with conspiracy belief and its impact on organizational performance. Subsequently, using the snowball method, ten additional participants were recruited through referrals by the initial experts. In total, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted until thematic saturation was reached; meaning that continued interviews did not yield new insights or add novel perspectives to the existing themes.

Inclusion criteria were having at least five years of executive or research experience in public sector management, human resources, or industrial/organizational psychology; familiarity with challenges and opportunities related to conspiracy beliefs in public workplaces; the ability to provide deep and analytical perspectives on the social and managerial aspects of conspiracy belief in organizations; and informed consent to participate and have the interviews recorded. To ensure data richness, diversity was considered in selecting experts in terms of work experience, academic specialization, and organizational type (research centers, universities, and government institutions).

Research data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were open-ended and aimed at exploring participants' experiences, insights, and analyses regarding the drivers and inhibitors of conspiracy belief

in Iranian public organizations. The initial questions were formulated based on a review of the theoretical literature on conspiracy belief, human resource management, organizational behavior, and organizational studies. The topics included communication and interactional challenges caused by conspiratorial thinking in public organizations, organizational culture, the role of leadership in managing and mitigating the negative effects of conspiracy belief, and managerial strategies to increase productivity and reduce destructive impacts of conspiracy-driven perceptions. At the end of each interview, an open question such as “Is there any topic or issue in this area that we have not addressed?” was asked to allow participants to add new and broader perspectives.

Each interview lasted between 40 and 100 minutes, with an average duration of approximately 60 minutes. For precise data capture, in addition to note-taking, audio recordings were made with participants’ prior oral or written consent to uphold ethical principles, including confidentiality and anonymity. The interview locations were chosen by mutual agreement and were mostly quiet and private environments such as offices or academic settings. To increase participants’ preparedness, an email containing details of the study, its main objectives, and key guiding questions was sent to them in advance.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase thematic analysis method. In the first phase (familiarization with data), the full transcriptions of the interviews were read and reviewed several times to achieve an in-depth understanding of the content. In the second phase (generating initial codes), key semantic units and important statements related to the research topic were extracted from each interview, resulting in the identification of 157 initial codes. In the third phase (searching for themes), the initial codes were grouped based on similarities, conceptual connections, and semantic overlaps. In the fourth phase (reviewing themes), the preliminary themes were refined to ensure internal coherence and distinctiveness from one another. In the fifth phase (defining and naming themes), each theme was clearly defined and labeled, and its relevance to the research objectives was clarified. Finally, in the sixth phase (producing the report), the findings were synthesized into a comprehensive conceptual model of the drivers and inhibitors of conspiracy belief in Iranian public organizations. MAXQDA 2020 software was used to organize and analyze the data.

To ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative study, criteria of credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability were considered. For credibility, existing literature was consulted, and the transcribed interviews and extracted codes were returned to some participants for feedback, refinement, and confirmation of the codes and themes. For transferability, rich contextual descriptions, including demographic details of the sample, their professional experience, and the research setting, were documented to facilitate the application of findings to similar contexts. For confirmability, all research stages were transparently documented to allow external audit and verification. For dependability, inter-coder reliability was calculated by comparing coding results between two independent coders.

As shown in Table 1, the agreement rate between the two coders was 82%, demonstrating high reliability and analytical rigor in the coding and thematic development process.

Table 1

Results of Inter-Coder Reliability Assessment

Interview No.	Total Codes	Agreements	Disagreements	Reliability (%)
2	23	19	4	82.60
5	20	17	3	85.00
11	25	20	5	80.00
Total	68	56	12	82.40

Findings and Results

The findings of this qualitative study, conducted using a thematic analysis approach, present a conceptual model of the drivers and inhibitors of conspiracy belief in Iranian public organizations. This model was derived from an in-depth analysis of interviews with 15 experts and specialists in management, human resources, social sciences, sociology, and psychology working in Iranian public organizations. The thematic analysis process led to the identification of six main dimensions: *individual psychological factors*, *socio-cultural factors*, *political-institutional factors*, *informational-media factors*, *economic factors*, and *organizational-managerial factors*. Each of these dimensions includes associated components and sub-indicators, which are explained in detail below. The demographic characteristics of the interviewees are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Information of Interview Participants

Interviewee Code	Number of Codes	Work Experience (years)	Area of Expertise	Organization Type	Gender	Age (years)
M1	13	More than 10	Public Administration	Government Agency	Male	45
M2	13	More than 10	Organizational Psychology	University	Female	38
M3	10	5–10	Human Resources	Research Center	Male	34
M4	12	More than 10	Sociology	Government Agency	Female	42
M5	9	5–10	Management	University	Male	36
M6	11	More than 10	Psychology	Research Center	Female	40
M7	10	5–10	Human Resources	Government Agency	Male	37
M8	12	More than 10	Public Administration	University	Male	48
M9	9	5–10	Sociology	Research Center	Female	33
M10	10	More than 10	Organizational Psychology	Government Agency	Male	44
M11	10	5–10	Management	University	Female	39
M12	9	5–10	Human Resources	Research Center	Male	35
M13	11	More than 10	Psychology	Government Agency	Male	46
M14	9	5–10	Sociology	University	Female	37
M15	9	5–10	Public Administration	Research Center	Male	41
Total	157	—	—	—	—	—

Step A — Open Coding and Extraction of Axial Codes

In the first step of thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, the process began with familiarization with the data and the generation of initial (open) codes. After accurately transcribing all 17 interviews conducted with experts, each transcript was carefully and repeatedly reviewed to achieve a deep and comprehensive understanding of the content. Subsequently, 157 meaningful statements and sentences related to the drivers and inhibitors of conspiracy belief in Iranian public organizations—including associated challenges, opportunities, dimensions, and components—were extracted and identified as initial open codes.

These open codes represented raw and unprocessed concepts directly derived from the data. The 157 semantic statements and 41 open codes were then grouped into 18 axial codes (components) based on semantic and conceptual similarities and their relationships to one another. The purpose of this stage was to condense and organize the extensive raw data into more general concepts, which would serve as the foundation for forming the main themes in the subsequent stages of analysis.

The following table illustrates an example of the open coding process, including the extraction of meaningful statements and axial codes (components) along with the corresponding interviewee codes.

Table 3

Semantic Statements and Open Codes

Codes	Frequency	Interviewee Code	Semantic Statements (Direct Quotes from Interviews)
Need for Control	4	M3	"When an employee feels they have no influence over organizational decisions, they start to think that things are happening behind the scenes that they don't know about."
		M7	"People who always want to control everything quickly conclude that the cause of problems is hidden schemes plotted against them."
		M12	"When the need for control is unmet, the mind starts searching for hidden reasons."
		M15	"Those who cannot take control of their work situation are more prone to believe in conspiracies."
Tolerance of Ambiguity	3	M2	"Employees who are comfortable with ambiguity are less likely to look for simplistic, conspiratorial explanations."
		M9	"When someone can tolerate uncertainty, they don't need a clear reason for everything."
		M14	"Patient people who can handle ambiguous situations are less likely to fall into conspiratorial thinking."
Anxiety Level	4	M1	"Stressed employees tend to think that something is being plotted against them."
		M5	"When anxiety rises, the mind starts connecting random dots and building conspiracy stories."
		M10	"High stress makes people see everything as suspicious."
		M13	"Worried employees always feel like some danger is approaching."
Political Self-Efficacy	4	M4	"When an employee believes they can influence decisions, they think less about conspiracies."
		M6	"A sense of efficacy in influencing outcomes prevents the formation of conspiracy thinking."
		M8	"Someone who sees themselves as capable of making changes doesn't need to resort to conspiracy theories."
		M11	"High self-efficacy means having the confidence to handle problems without relying on conspiracy explanations."
Confirmation Bias	3	M3	"Some employees only accept information that matches what they already believe."
		M7	"Once someone believes a conspiracy exists, they only look for evidence that supports that belief."
		M15	"Ignoring contradictory evidence and focusing only on confirming information is a sign of confirmation bias."
Emotional Intelligence	4	M2	"Employees who manage their emotions well are less influenced by rumors."
		M9	"High emotional intelligence means distinguishing emotions from reality."
		M12	"People with high emotional intelligence understand themselves and the situation before making judgments."
		M14	"Managing emotions prevents hasty decisions based on fear or shock."
Social Trust	4	M1	"When trust in colleagues and managers exists, there's less room for rumors to spread."
		M5	"Trust in institutions and people is the best vaccine against conspiratorial thinking."
		M10	"In a trusting environment, employees analyze problems naturally."
		M13	"Distrust paves the way for accepting any kind of conspiracy theory."
Social Support	3	M4	"When employees feel supported, they're less likely to think others are plotting against them."
		M6	"A strong support network creates security and reduces the need for conspiratorial explanations."
		M8	"Lack of social support leads to isolation and suspicious thinking."
Cultural Norms	4	M11	"In our culture, sometimes skepticism is seen as intelligence."
		M3	"Certain cultural values create a predisposition toward conspiracy acceptance."
		M7	"Our culture's distrust of authorities has historical roots."
		M15	"Social norms sometimes encourage suspicion."
Group Belonging	4	M2	"When someone identifies strongly with a group, it's easier to believe other groups are plotting against them."
		M9	"A strong sense of belonging can create an 'us vs. them' mentality."
		M12	"Intense group identity can lead to perceiving outsiders as enemies."
		M14	"Group bias fuels the acceptance of conspiracies about rival groups."
Social Polarization	3	M1	"A deeply polarized society provides fertile ground for conspiracy theories."
		M5	"Severe social divisions make people blame every problem on the opposing side."
		M10	"Polarized environments sacrifice truth."
Closed Organizational Culture	4	M4	"In organizations where everything is decided behind closed doors, rumor creation is natural."
		M6	"Withholding information is the best fertilizer for conspiracy theories."
		M8	"A secretive culture destroys trust."
		M13	"When there is no transparency, the mind fills the gap with guesses."
Open Organizational Culture	4	M11	"Transparency and honesty kill conspiracy theories."
		M3	"When everything is clear, there's no room for doubt."
		M7	"A participatory culture makes everyone feel ownership."
		M15	"In an open environment, mistakes are seen as learning opportunities, not conspiracies."
Organizational Transparency	4	M2	"When information is accessible to everyone, there's no need for guessing."
		M9	"Transparency means an employee knows why a decision was made."
		M12	"In a transparent environment, no decision seems mysterious."
		M14	"Free access to information is the best cure for suspicion."
Participation in Decision-Making	3	M1	"When employees are involved in decision-making, they see themselves as owners, not victims."

		M5	“Real participation means everyone’s voice is heard.”
		M10	“Employees involved in decisions view them as less suspicious.”
Distributive Justice	4	M4	“When everyone feels that resources are distributed fairly, there’s no motivation to think about conspiracies.”
		M6	“Unfair allocation of resources creates ground for conspiratorial thinking.”
		M8	“Justice means everyone is evaluated based on merit and effort.”
		M13	“Severe inequality breeds enemy perception.”
Accountability	3	M11	“A manager who is accountable builds trust.”
		M3	“Lack of accountability plants seeds of suspicion and worry.”
		M7	“When a manager is willing to explain decisions, the space for doubt disappears.”
Centralization of Power	4	M15	“When power is held by a few, the rest feel out of control.”
		M2	“Excessive concentration of power creates worry and suspicion.”
		M9	“Centralized power reduces transparency.”
		M12	“When all decisions come from the top, it’s natural that employees think something is being hidden.”
Political Change	3	M1	“Sudden political changes create anxiety and uncertainty.”
		M5	“In an unstable political environment, everyone looks for explanations.”
		M14	“Rapid, unpredictable changes foster conspiratorial thinking.”
Perceived Corruption	4	M4	“When employees think corruption exists, it’s easy for them to believe there’s also conspiracy.”
		M6	“Perceptions of corruption destroy trust.”
		M8	“If someone believes the system is corrupt, they attribute every negative event to corruption.”
		M10	“Perceived corruption is like a virus that contaminates everything.”
Information Accuracy	4	M13	“Accurate, reliable information is the best weapon against rumors.”
		M11	“When information is trustworthy, there’s no need to speculate.”
		M3	“High-quality information discourages wrong mental processing.”
		M7	“False information is the raw material of conspiracy theories.”
Information Diversity	4	M15	“When you get information from different sources, you’re less likely to fall into one-sided thinking.”
		M2	“Diverse sources give a more complete view of reality.”
		M9	“Relying on a single source increases the risk of bias.”
		M12	“Multiple credible sources complete the puzzle of reality.”
Media Literacy	3	M1	“Someone who can critically analyze media is less likely to be deceived by rumors.”
		M5	“Media literacy means distinguishing reliable from unreliable information.”
		M14	“Learning how to analyze news is an essential skill today.”
Critical Thinking	4	M4	“Critical thinking is the best protection against conspiracy theories.”
		M6	“Questioning and logical doubt are ways to find the truth.”
		M8	“Critical thinkers aren’t easily convinced.”
		M10	“Critical thinking means not accepting everything without evidence.”
Organizational Rumors	4	M13	“Rumors spread like fire and burn everything.”
		M11	“In a rumor-filled environment, truth gets drowned.”
		M3	“Baseless rumors create fertile ground for conspiracies.”
		M7	“A small rumor can grow into a big conspiracy theory.”
Information Restrictions	4	M15	“When information is limited, the mind starts filling the gaps.”
		M2	“Information control is the best fertilizer for suspicion.”
		M9	“Lack of access to information creates doubt and uncertainty.”
		M12	“Incomplete information paves the way for false interpretations.”
Social Media Misuse	4	M1	“Social networks sometimes become rumor factories.”
		M5	“Improper use of virtual space strengthens conspiratorial thinking.”
		M14	“In social media, everyone acts like an expert.”
		M4	“Social media algorithms reinforce false beliefs.”
Job Security	4	M6	“When employees aren’t worried about job loss, their minds don’t spiral into negative thinking.”
		M8	“Job security creates peace of mind and prevents obsessive thoughts.”
		M10	“Someone with a secure job is less likely to think of conspiracies against them.”
		M13	“Job instability fosters paranoid thinking.”
Financial Satisfaction	4	M11	“When employees are satisfied with their income, they have no motivation for suspicion.”
		M3	“Financial dissatisfaction creates enemy perception.”
		M7	“Enough money frees the mind from financial worry.”
		M15	“Poor financial conditions make people blame everyone else.”
Promotion Opportunities	4	M2	“Hope for advancement creates positive motivation.”
		M9	“When a clear career path exists, no one imagines hidden barriers.”
		M12	“Opportunities for growth create optimism.”
		M14	“Blocked advancement paths bring hopelessness and conspiracy thinking.”
Resource Scarcity	4	M1	“When resources are scarce, competition grows, and everyone becomes suspicious.”
		M5	“Lack of resources makes people feel deliberately deprived.”
		M4	“Limited resources encourage conspiratorial interpretations.”
		M6	“Budget shortages provide reasons to find scapegoats.”
Economic Instability	4	M8	“An unstable economy worries everyone about the future.”
		M10	“Inflation and economic fluctuations fuel anxiety and suspicion.”

		M13	"Bad economic conditions push people to look for someone to blame."
		M11	"Economic crisis creates fertile ground for conspiracy theories."
Economic Inequality	4	M3	"Large income gaps generate feelings of injustice."
		M7	"Seeing a colleague earn more than you creates doubt."
		M15	"Visible inequality fosters conspiratorial ideas."
		M2	"Pay discrimination destroys trust."
Authoritarian Leadership	4	M9	"A manager who makes all the decisions alone creates a suspicious atmosphere."
		M12	"Autocratic leadership makes employees feel controlled."
		M14	"Authoritarian managers destroy dialogue."
		M1	"When employees' voices aren't heard, they start imagining conspiracies."
Participative Leadership	4	M5	"A manager who consults with the team builds trust."
		M4	"Participative leadership means everyone feels their voice counts."
		M6	"When a leader is transparent, there's no space for suspicion."
		M8	"True participation is the best cure for distrust."
Effective Communication	4	M10	"Good communication solves half the problems."
		M13	"Healthy communication reduces misunderstandings."
		M11	"Open dialogue is the best way to prevent rumors."
		M3	"Two-way communication creates mutual trust."
Fair Evaluation System	4	M7	"Fair evaluation prevents feelings of discrimination."
		M15	"A transparent appraisal system builds trust in justice."
		M2	"Fairness in evaluation motivates employees positively."
		M9	"Unfair evaluation fosters dissatisfaction and suspicion."
Role Conflict	4	M12	"When employees don't know their exact responsibilities, they get confused."
		M14	"Unclear roles cause stress and worry."
		M1	"Role conflict makes employees feel lost."
		M5	"Lack of clarity in duties leads to misunderstanding and doubt."
Work Pressure	4	M4	"Excessive workload reduces employees' tolerance."
		M6	"High stress disrupts logical judgment."
		M8	"When everything is urgent, there's no time to think."
		M10	"Constant pressure makes the mind ready to accept simple explanations."
Training and Development	4	M13	"Continuous employee training keeps the mindset open and prevents closed thinking."
		M11	"Investing in employee education is the best way to prevent irrational beliefs."
		M3	"Workshops on critical thinking greatly improve organizational mental health."
		M7	"Employees exposed to diverse training gain broader perspectives."
Career Opportunities	5	M15	"When employees know advancement is possible, they have less motivation to engage in negative theories."
		M2	"Promotion opportunities keep employees focused on work rather than speculation."
		M9	"Job rotation and variety prevent monotony and negative thinking."
		M12	"Employees with a clear career future are less involved in rumors and conspiracies."
		M14	"A defined career path gives hope and direction, diverting thoughts away from suspicion."

Step B — Searching and Reviewing Themes (Selective Codes)

After extracting 18 axial codes during the open coding stage, this step focused on further organizing and summarizing these codes. The axial codes, each representing a set of open codes, were grouped into broader categories based on conceptual and logical relationships. This process led to the identification and formation of six main dimensions (selective themes), each representing a general domain within the conceptual model of the drivers and inhibitors of conspiracy belief in Iranian public organizations. These six dimensions are: *individual psychological factors*, *socio-cultural factors*, *political-institutional factors*, *informational-media factors*, *economic factors*, and *organizational-managerial factors*.

During the theme search, efforts were made to cluster axial codes with shared or related concepts under one main theme. For example, the axial codes *need for control*, *tolerance of ambiguity*, and *anxiety level*, which all relate to individual psychological characteristics in confronting conspiracy belief, were grouped under the dimension *individual psychological factors*. Likewise, axial codes such as *organizational transparency* and *participation in decision-making* were categorized within the *political-institutional factors* dimension due to their relationship with governance and managerial processes.

After forming these preliminary dimensions, the theme review phase began. Each of the six identified main dimensions (selective themes) was carefully examined to ensure internal consistency. The distinctiveness of each dimension and the absence of semantic overlap were also assessed. When necessary, certain axial codes were relocated between themes, and some theme names were refined to more accurately represent the underlying concepts. This iterative process helped refine and clarify the conceptual model, ensuring the final dimensions best represented the interview data and provided a coherent framework for understanding the drivers and inhibitors of conspiracy belief in Iranian public organizations. Ultimately, these six dimensions were established as the core structure of the conceptual model in this study.

Table 4

Main and Sub-Themes

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Axial Codes
Individual Psychological Factors	Personality Traits	Need for Control; Tolerance of Ambiguity; Anxiety Level
	Cognitive Capacities	Political Self-Efficacy; Confirmation Bias; Emotional Intelligence
Socio-Cultural Factors	Social Trust and Support	Social Trust; Social Support
	Cultural Patterns	Cultural Norms; Group Belonging; Social Polarization
	Organizational Cultural Climate	Closed Organizational Culture; Open Organizational Culture
Political-Institutional Factors	Transparency and Participation	Organizational Transparency; Participation in Decision-Making
	Organizational Justice	Distributive Justice; Accountability
	Power Structure	Centralization of Power; Political Change; Perceived Corruption
Informational-Media Factors	Information Quality	Information Accuracy; Information Diversity
	Information Literacy	Media Literacy; Critical Thinking
	Information Control	Organizational Rumors; Information Restrictions; Social Media Misuse
Economic Factors	Individual Economic Security	Job Security; Financial Satisfaction; Promotion Opportunities
	Economic Competition and Risk	Resource Scarcity; Economic Instability; Economic Inequality
Organizational-Managerial Factors	Leadership Style	Authoritarian Leadership; Participative Leadership
	Organizational Communication	Effective Communication; Fair Evaluation System
	Job Demands and Pressure	Role Conflict; Work Pressure
	Human Resource Development	Training and Development; Career Opportunities

Step C — Defining and Naming Themes and Developing Sub-Indicators

In this third step of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, after identifying the six main dimensions (selective themes) in Step B, the themes were defined and precisely named, and sub-indicators associated with each axial code were developed. The goal of this step was to provide clear and comprehensive definitions of each theme and show their direct relevance to the main research objective — developing a conceptual model of the drivers and inhibitors of conspiracy belief in Iranian public organizations.

Each of the 18 axial codes identified in the previous step was carefully examined to extract and define sub-indicators from the semantic statements. These sub-indicators represent more specific and measurable elements that clarify the meaning of each component and enable their practical operationalization within the conceptual model.

For example, for the component *organizational transparency*, sub-indicators such as "access to decision-making information," "transparency of organizational processes," and "publication of performance reports" were identified — each addressing different facets of transparency in public organizations. Similarly, for the component *social trust*, sub-indicators such as "level of cooperation among employees," "trust in managers," and "willingness to share information" were defined. These sub-indicators were primarily formulated as keywords or behavioral/organizational markers to ensure evaluability and applicability.

Finally, the results of this step were presented in Table 5, which shows the main dimensions, their related components (axial codes), and the corresponding sub-indicators for each component. This table provides a clear and structured representation of the final conceptual model derived from the qualitative data.

Table 5

Drivers and Inhibitors

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Component	Type of Factor
Individual Psychological Factors	Personality Traits	Need for Control	Driver
		Tolerance of Ambiguity	Inhibitor
		Anxiety Level	Driver
	Cognitive Capacities	Political Self-Efficacy	Inhibitor
		Confirmation Bias	Driver
		Emotional Intelligence	Inhibitor
Socio-Cultural Factors	Social Trust and Support	Social Trust	Inhibitor
		Social Support	Inhibitor
	Cultural Patterns	Cultural Norms	Driver
		Group Belonging	Driver
		Social Polarization	Driver
	Organizational Cultural Climate	Closed Organizational Culture	Driver
		Open Organizational Culture	Inhibitor
Political-Institutional Factors	Transparency and Participation	Organizational Transparency	Inhibitor
		Participation in Decision-Making	Inhibitor
	Organizational Justice	Distributive Justice	Inhibitor
		Accountability	Inhibitor
	Power Structure	Centralization of Power	Driver
		Political Change	Driver
		Perceived Corruption	Driver
Informational-Media Factors	Information Quality	Information Accuracy	Inhibitor
		Information Diversity	Inhibitor
	Information Literacy	Media Literacy	Inhibitor
		Critical Thinking	Inhibitor
	Information Control	Organizational Rumors	Driver
		Information Restrictions	Driver
		Social Media Misuse	Driver
Economic Factors	Individual Economic Security	Job Security	Inhibitor
		Financial Satisfaction	Inhibitor
		Promotion Opportunities	Inhibitor
	Economic Competition and Risk	Resource Scarcity	Driver
		Economic Instability	Driver
		Economic Inequality	Driver
Organizational-Managerial Factors	Leadership Style	Authoritarian Leadership	Driver
		Participative Leadership	Inhibitor
	Organizational Communication	Effective Communication	Inhibitor
		Fair Evaluation System	Inhibitor
	Job Demands and Pressure	Role Conflict	Driver
		Work Pressure	Driver
	Human Resource Development	Training and Development	Inhibitor
		Career Opportunities	Inhibitor

Step D — Comprehensive Description of Themes and Components (Content Analysis)

In this step, a detailed and rich description of each of the six main dimensions (selective themes) and their related components is provided. This description includes clarification of the concepts, relationships, and semantic connections among the components and the presentation of illustrative semantic statements taken from interviews to enhance the clarity and credibility of the findings.

1. **Individual Psychological Factors:** This dimension focuses on the psychological and cognitive characteristics of individuals that act either as drivers or inhibitors of conspiracy belief in public organizations. Components such as

need for control and *anxiety level* (drivers) and *tolerance of ambiguity* and *emotional intelligence* (inhibitors) belong to this category. For example, one participant (M3) stated: "When an employee feels they have no influence over organizational decisions, they start to think that things are happening behind the scenes that they don't know about." This illustrates the role of the need for control in fostering conspiratorial thinking. Conversely, tolerance of ambiguity and emotional intelligence help reduce suspicion and hasty judgments, as M2 noted: "Employees who are comfortable with ambiguity are less likely to look for simplistic, conspiratorial explanations."

2. **Socio-Cultural Factors:** This dimension refers to social relationships, cultural norms, and organizational climate that influence the formation or reduction of conspiracy belief. Components such as *social trust* and *open organizational culture* (inhibitors) and *cultural norms* and *group belonging* (drivers) are included here. For instance, M1 stated: "When trust in colleagues and managers exists, there's less room for rumors to spread," highlighting the key role of social trust in mitigating conspiracy beliefs. In contrast, cultural norms that encourage skepticism, as M11 said, "are sometimes defined as intelligence," can reinforce conspiracy belief.
3. **Political-Institutional Factors:** This dimension examines power structures and institutional processes that affect conspiratorial perceptions. Components such as *organizational transparency* and *participation in decision-making* (inhibitors) and *centralization of power* and *perceived corruption* (drivers) are included. For example, M9 explained: "Transparency means an employee knows why a decision was made," showing how openness reduces suspicion. In contrast, M15 indicated that "excessive concentration of power creates worry and suspicion," contributing to conspiracy thinking.
4. **Informational-Media Factors:** This dimension focuses on the quality, accessibility, and control of information. Components such as *information accuracy* and *critical thinking* (inhibitors) and *organizational rumors* and *information restrictions* (drivers) belong to this category. For example, M13 said: "Accurate and reliable information is the best weapon against rumors," underlining the importance of quality information. Conversely, M15 stated: "When information is limited, the mind starts filling the gaps," illustrating how restricted information fosters conspiracy beliefs.
5. **Economic Factors:** This dimension addresses individual and organizational economic conditions that affect susceptibility to conspiracy thinking. Components such as *job security* and *financial satisfaction* (inhibitors) and *resource scarcity* and *economic inequality* (drivers) are identified here. For example, M6 noted: "When employees aren't worried about job loss, their minds don't spiral into negative thinking," showing how job security reduces suspicion. In contrast, M5 said: "Lack of resources makes people feel deliberately deprived," showing how scarcity reinforces conspiratorial thought.
6. **Organizational-Managerial Factors:** This dimension covers leadership style, organizational processes, and human resource development. Components such as *participative leadership* and *effective communication* (inhibitors) and *authoritarian leadership* and *work pressure* (drivers) are identified. For instance, M5 stated: "A manager who consults with the team builds trust," highlighting participative leadership's positive effect. In contrast, M9 said: "A manager who makes all the decisions alone creates a suspicious atmosphere," showing how authoritarian leadership can increase conspiracy beliefs.

Step E — Final Reporting and Presentation of the Conceptual Model

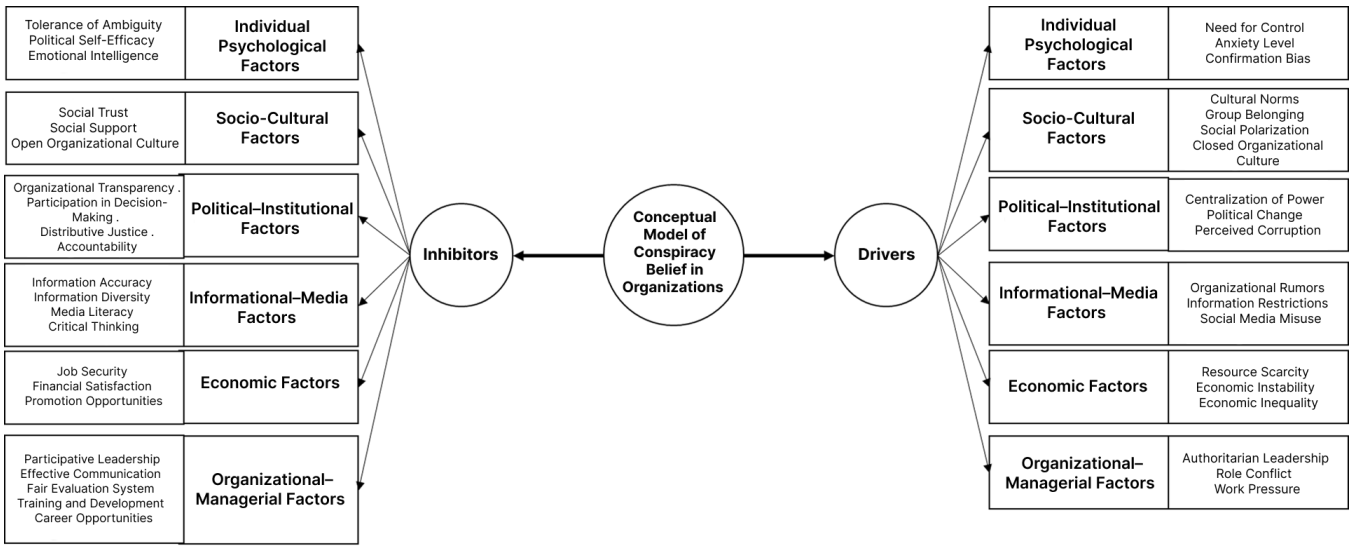
In this final step, the results obtained from all phases of thematic analysis (familiarization with the data, initial coding, searching and reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes and sub-indicators) are integrated into a single, coherent conceptual model for identifying the drivers and inhibitors of conspiracy belief in Iranian public organizations. This model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon and the factors influencing it.

The conceptual model proposed in this study, developed from the perspectives of subject-matter experts and using the qualitative methodology of thematic analysis, not only describes the current situation (dimensions, components, and sub-indicators) but also serves as a roadmap for policymakers and managers of Iranian public organizations. This model can serve as a foundation for designing targeted intervention programs, managerial policies to reduce conspiratorial beliefs, and creating work environments that are more transparent, participatory, and trust-oriented.

In this section, the interrelationships among the six identified dimensions (individual psychological factors, socio-cultural factors, political-institutional factors, informational-media factors, economic factors, and organizational-managerial factors) and the ways they interact to reduce conspiracy belief and strengthen organizational health are comprehensively explained. Focusing on these six dimensions enables the development of a multi-dimensional and sustainable approach for effectively managing conspiracy beliefs and enhancing trust, collaboration, and productivity in Iranian public organizations.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of the Drivers and Inhibitors of Conspiracy Belief in Iranian Public Organizations



As illustrated in the conceptual model presented in Figure 1, the model includes six main dimensions, each encompassing multiple components and sub-indicators. The full details of these dimensions, their components, and the related sub-indicators are provided separately in Table 5.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study developed and validated a comprehensive conceptual model of the drivers and inhibitors of conspiracy belief in Iranian public organizations. By employing thematic analysis and integrating perspectives from management, psychology, sociology, and organizational studies, six overarching dimensions emerged: individual psychological factors, socio-cultural

factors, political–institutional factors, informational–media factors, economic factors, and organizational–managerial factors. The findings demonstrate that conspiracy thinking within public sector contexts is not an isolated cognitive bias but a complex, multi-level phenomenon shaped by personal vulnerabilities, collective narratives, organizational culture, and the institutional environment.

The results confirmed that need for control, anxiety levels, and confirmation bias are key psychological triggers for conspiracy beliefs among employees. These findings echo long-standing evidence that a perceived lack of control fosters illusory pattern perception and suspicion [18, 19]. Anxiety amplifies cognitive shortcuts, leading individuals to seek simple and agentic explanations for ambiguous organizational events [20, 21]. At the same time, protective factors such as tolerance of ambiguity, political self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence emerged as important inhibitors. This aligns with research suggesting that self-efficacious and emotionally competent employees are less likely to resort to conspiratorial interpretations when faced with uncertainty [20, 22]. In the Iranian public sector, where job demands can be high and formal influence channels limited, psychological resilience and adaptive coping appear crucial for countering suspicious thinking [23, 24].

Social and cultural dynamics strongly shape the organizational climate for conspiracy beliefs. Our study shows that cultural norms encouraging distrust, strong group belonging, and social polarization act as accelerants. These findings parallel global literature showing that “us versus them” divisions foster belief in intergroup conspiracies [14, 25]. In Iranian organizational contexts, historical patterns of power distance and collective identity can make employees more receptive to narratives portraying other groups — management, rival units, or external authorities — as scheming or exclusionary [8, 13]. In contrast, social trust, peer support, and an open organizational culture were identified as key inhibitors. These findings support the argument that organizational climates emphasizing fairness, interpersonal support, and participative dialogue reduce susceptibility to misinformation [4, 26]. Local studies have likewise linked supportive climates and trust-building practices to lower political suspicion in Iranian agencies [27, 28].

The study confirmed that centralization of power, perceived corruption, and political instability feed conspiracy beliefs, whereas organizational transparency, accountability, and employee participation in decision-making suppress them. These findings mirror long-established organizational power theories, which hold that nontransparent, top-heavy structures cultivate cynicism and suspicion [5, 6]. Scholars have shown that perceptions of unfairness or elite collusion are strong predictors of conspiratorial thinking [2, 31]. Iranian evidence reinforces this, showing that opaque political maneuvering and weak communication about strategic change often provoke distrust [15, 17]. Conversely, visible accountability and employee voice can reduce the ambiguity that often triggers conspiratorial reasoning [29, 30].

Our findings highlight the crucial role of information flows. Rumors, restricted access to information, and social media misuse emerged as major drivers of conspiracy beliefs, while accuracy of information, diversity of sources, media literacy, and critical thinking served as protective mechanisms. These outcomes align with global organizational deception research, which shows that ambiguous or contradictory messaging can generate suspicion [1, 34]. In workplaces where official communication is inconsistent or absent, informal rumor networks thrive, feeding narratives of hidden agendas [3, 9]. Social media intensifies this dynamic by amplifying emotionally charged content and creating echo chambers [9, 35]. Training employees in critical evaluation of digital content and diversifying information channels thus appear essential to counteract conspiratorial spread [21, 36].

Economic pressure within organizations was also central to the model. Resource scarcity, economic instability, and perceived distributive injustice fuel suspicion and encourage zero-sum thinking among employees [4, 37]. When resources, promotions, or compensation seem arbitrary or limited, employees may interpret disadvantage as intentional manipulation [24, 29]. In contrast, job security, financial satisfaction, and clear advancement opportunities act as stabilizers that build trust and organizational commitment [26, 38]. These findings are especially salient in Iran's economically pressured public sector, where budget constraints and pay inequities have been reported to intensify workplace rivalry [17, 41].

Perhaps most actionable for managers, the study confirms the pivotal role of leadership style. Authoritarian leadership and high work pressure were repeatedly mentioned as direct triggers of suspicion, while participative leadership, effective communication, and fair performance evaluation emerged as inhibitors. These results are consistent with the argument that opaque, top-down leadership breeds fear and informal theorizing about hidden agendas [4, 31]. Conversely, inclusive decision-making and authentic communication strengthen psychological safety and reduce uncertainty [30, 39]. Ethical and competency-based leadership models, recently advocated in the Iranian management literature [32, 33], may offer practical pathways to reduce conspiratorial climates.

Collectively, these findings reinforce the multi-causal, layered nature of conspiracy beliefs in organizations. They corroborate motivational models emphasizing the interplay of epistemic (need for certainty), existential (control and security), and social (identity and belonging) motives [9, 13]. They also extend organizational behavior theory by embedding conspiracy thinking within frameworks of power, culture, and information asymmetry [5, 6]. Importantly, the study contributes context-specific nuance by demonstrating how these universal mechanisms interact with Iran's public governance characteristics — strong hierarchical traditions, politicization, and economic constraints [15, 17, 28].

Furthermore, the findings build on and integrate emerging Iranian research on political behavior and organizational suspicion [16, 29, 41]. While previous studies have described political maneuvering or mistrust, few have provided a coherent, empirically grounded model linking these factors to conspiracy belief formation. Our conceptual framework bridges this gap and introduces a diagnostic tool that public managers can use to identify risk factors and leverage protective elements.

Although this study provides a rich and contextually grounded conceptual model, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research relied exclusively on qualitative interviews, which, while appropriate for theory-building, limit generalizability. The sample of 15 experts captured diverse managerial and psychological insights but may not reflect the full heterogeneity of Iranian public organizations. Second, the analysis is interpretive and could be influenced by researcher subjectivity despite rigorous coding and inter-rater reliability checks. Third, the study focused on the Iranian context, where historical, cultural, and political features shape organizational life; this limits direct transferability to other national settings. Finally, given the sensitivity of discussing mistrust and corruption, some participants may have self-censored or framed their answers cautiously.

Future studies should employ mixed-method and quantitative designs to validate and refine the proposed model across larger and more diverse organizational samples. Longitudinal studies could examine how conspiracy beliefs evolve during organizational change, crises, or political transitions. Comparative cross-country research would also help identify universal versus culturally specific drivers and inhibitors. Additionally, exploring the role of digital transformation — including AI-based information systems and new media ecosystems — could shed light on how technology shapes organizational trust and

suspicion. Intervention-based research, such as testing leadership development programs or transparency initiatives, would be valuable to assess practical strategies for reducing conspiratorial climates.

Practitioners should consider multi-level interventions aligned with the model's six dimensions. At the individual level, investing in employee development programs that build emotional intelligence, resilience, and critical thinking can buffer against suspicion. At the cultural level, fostering open dialogue, fairness, and inclusive practices can break patterns of distrust and polarization. Institutional leaders should strengthen transparency and accountability systems, ensuring accessible, accurate, and timely communication about decisions and resources. Economically, ensuring fair compensation and clear career progression reduces zero-sum perceptions. Finally, leadership development is essential: equipping managers with participative, ethical, and trust-based skills can transform organizational climates and mitigate the risk of conspiracy beliefs undermining collaboration and performance.

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.

References

[1] C. Baden and T. Sharon, "Blinded by the lies? Toward an integrated definition of conspiracy theories," *Communication Theory*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 82-106, 2021, doi: 10.1093/ct/qtaa023.

[2] K. M. Douglas, R. M. Sutton, and A. Cichocka, "Belief in conspiracy theories: Looking beyond gullibility," in *The social psychology of gullibility*: Routledge, 2019, pp. 61-76.

[3] L. Tam, H. Lee, and J. N. Kim, "Conspiratorial thinking in the workplace: how it happens and why it matters," *Journal of Communication Management*, 2024, doi: 10.1108/JCOM-12-2023-0139.

[4] K. M. Douglas and A. C. Leite, "Suspicion in the workplace: Organizational conspiracy theories and work-related outcomes," *British Journal of Psychology*, vol. 108, no. 3, pp. 486-506, 2017, doi: 10.1111/bjop.12212.

[5] H. Mintzberg, *Power In and Around Organizations*. Prentice-Hall, 1983.

[6] J. Pfeffer, *Managing with power: Politics and influence in organizations*. Harvard Business Press, 1993.

[7] A. A. Johnson, "Conspiracy thinking," in *Handbook on Democracy and Security*: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023, pp. 289-308.

[8] J. E. Oliver and T. J. Wood, "Conspiracy theories and the paranoid style (s) of mass opinion," *American journal of political science*, vol. 58, no. 4, pp. 952-966, 2014, doi: 10.1111/ajps.12084.

[9] K. M. Douglas, A. Cichocka, and R. M. Sutton, "Motivations, emotions and belief in conspiracy theories," in *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories*: Routledge, 2020, pp. 181-191.

[10] D. Jolley, R. Meleady, and K. M. Douglas, "Exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories promotes prejudice which spreads across groups," *British Journal of Psychology*, vol. 111, no. 1, pp. 17-35, 2020, doi: 10.1111/bjop.12385.

[11] V. Swami, T. Chamorro-Premuzic, and A. Furnham, "Unanswered questions: A preliminary investigation of personality and individual difference predictors of 9/11 conspiracist beliefs," *Applied cognitive psychology*, vol. 24, no. 6, pp. 749-761, 2010, doi: 10.1002/acp.1583.

[12] S. Wich, "Delusion Is No Illusion," *Management Report for Nonunion Organizations*, vol. 45, no. 10, pp. 3-4, 2022.

[13] J. W. Van Prooijen and M. Song, "The cultural dimension of intergroup conspiracy theories," *British Journal of Psychology*, vol. 112, no. 2, pp. 455-473, 2021, doi: 10.1111/bjop.12471.

[14] A. Cichocka, M. Marchlewska, A. Golec de Zavala, and M. Olechowski, "'They will not control us': Ingroup positivity and belief in intergroup conspiracies," *British journal of psychology*, vol. 107, no. 3, pp. 556-576, 2016, doi: 10.1111/bjop.12158.

[15] M. H. Taheri and M. Ataei, "Designing a Model of Political Behavior in Iranian Governmental Organizations," *Scientific Journal of New Research Approaches in Management and Accounting*, vol. 5, no. 19, pp. 1142-1162, 2021.

[16] M. Sanaei, H. Ja'farian, and M. Samanian, "Political Behavior of Governmental Managers and Its Causes in the Organization," *Iranian Political Sociology Monthly*, vol. 5, no. 11, pp. 2894-2911, 2022.

[17] H. Damghanian, A. Saberi, and B. Fakhraei, "Identifying and Explaining Political Behaviors of Education Employees: A Mixed-Methods Study," *Scientific Journal of Organizational Culture Management*, 2024.

[18] J. A. Whitson and A. D. Galinsky, "Lacking control increases illusory pattern perception," *science*, vol. 322, no. 5898, pp. 115-117, 2008, doi: 10.1126/science.1159845.

[19] H. Kelley, "Attribution theory and research," *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 31, pp. 1-32, 1980, doi: 10.1146/annurev.ps.31.020180.002325.

[20] S. Sajadi, D. Kiakojouri, and G. Hatami, "The Relationship Between Anxiety and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation with General Health and Psychological Hardiness in Students of Islamic Azad University," *Indian Journal of Fundamental and Applied Life Sciences*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 117-125, 2012.

[21] K. M. Douglas and R. M. Sutton, "Does it take one to know one? Endorsement of conspiracy theories is influenced by personal willingness to conspire," *British Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 50, no. 3, pp. 544-552, 2011, doi: 10.1111/j.2044-8309.2010.02018.x.

[22] V. Pishchik, "Features of Conspiratorial Mentality and Critical Thinking of Managers," in *International Scientific Conference on Agricultural Machinery Industry "Interagromash"*, Cham, 2022: Springer International Publishing, pp. 876-883, doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-21432-5_92.

[23] M. Shiri, S. Baghersalimi, and B. Shafiee, "Ethical and Social Factors Influencing the Formation of Political Behaviors," *Ethics in Science and Technology*, vol. 19, pp. 134-143, 2024.

[24] F. Radpour, B. Farrokh Seresht, D. Kiakojori, and H. A. Taghipour, "Designing a Model of Effective Personality Dimensions on the Level of Managers' Communication Skills," *Sociology of Education*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 21-30, 2024, doi: 10.22034/ijes.2023.2006845.1435.

[25] M. Biddlestone, A. Cichocka, I. Žeželj, and M. Bilewicz, "Conspiracy theories and intergroup relations," in *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories*: Routledge, 2020, pp. 219-230.

[26] M. A. Hitt, C. C. Miller, A. Colella, and M. Triana, *Organizational behavior*. John Wiley & Sons, 2017.

[27] S. Ghanbari and S. Nourollahi, "Structural Equation Model of Political Behaviors on Organizational Citizenship Behavior Mediated by Job Engagement and Job Satisfaction in Companies Affiliated with the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB)," *Public Management Researches*, vol. 16, no. 61, pp. 241-266, 2023.

[28] M. Izadi, A. H. Nazaripour, R. Sepahvand, H. Vahdati, and M. Hakkak, "Designing and Explaining a Model of Managers' Political Behavior in Governmental Organizations," *Quarterly Journal of Management and Education Outlook*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 241-258, 2024.

[29] M. H. Taheri, J. Mehrabi, and N. Jazani, "Analyzing the Model of Political Behavior in Governmental Organizations with a Mixed-Methods Approach," *Scientific Quarterly of Iranian-Islamic Progress Model Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 63-86, 2024.

[30] D. Kiakojouri, "Identifying the Dimensions and Components of the Cooperative Structure in Iran with the Approach of Waqf and Charity Affairs Based on Mixed Research," *Journal of Endowment & Charity Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 185-202, 2024.

[31] M. Meyer and C. W. Choo, "Harming by deceit: Epistemic malevolence and organizational wrongdoing," *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 189, no. 3, pp. 439-452, 2024, doi: 10.1007/s10551-023-05370-8.

[32] D. Kiakojouri, "Analysis of the relationships among Organizational Culture Indicators Using the DEMATEL Method at the Islamic Azad University in the West of Mazandaran Province," *Journal of Dynamic Management Business Analysis*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 1-12, 2024, doi: 10.61838/dmbaj.2.4.1.

[33] M. khodaparast, D. Kiakojouri, S. J. mortazavi amiri, and S. A. Jafari Kalarijani, "Analyzing the dimensions and components of the developed model of competency-based successor training in education-oriented organizations with a meta-composite approach," *Management and Educational Perspective*, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 193-220, 2024, doi: 10.22034/jmep.2024.384659.1160.

[34] A. P. Hubbell, "Organizational deception: Lies at work," in *The Palgrave handbook of deceptive communication*, 2019, pp. 625-645.

[35] D. Jolley and A. Lantian, "Bullying and conspiracy theories," *Social Psychology*, 2022, doi: 10.1027/1864-9335/a000492.

[36] M. MirTaghian Rudsari and D. Kiakojouri, "Students' Attitudes to the Effectiveness of the Factors Affecting the Development of E-Learning (Case Study: Imam Khomeini Marine Science University in Nowshahr)," *JOURNAL OF TEACHING IN MARINE SCIENCE*, vol. 3, no. 5, pp. 51-66, 2016.

[37] S. Firouzyar and D. KiaKojouri, "Identification of Structural Restricting and Driving Factors of Development of Corporate Entrepreneurship (CE): A Case Study," *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 1-16, 2013.

[38] M. Pourpanahi Kol Tappeh, P. Nourbakhsh, M. Nourbakhsh, and H. Sepasi, "Presenting a Paradigmatic Model of Employees' Political Behavior in Iranian Sports Organizations," *Sport Management Journal*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 303-322, 2022.

[39] R. Rogers, M. Pan, S. E. Hartigan, Y. T. Chang, and J. E. Donson, "Workplace Deceptions During the Pandemic: Differences in Conspiracy Beliefs, Psychological Functioning, and Covid-19 Experiences," *Psychological Reports*, vol. 127, no. 4, pp. 1941-1968, 2024, doi: 10.1177/00332941221144606.

[40] M. Barkun, *A culture of conspiracy: Apocalyptic visions in contemporary America*. Univ of California Press, 2013.

[41] A. Ghafouri, A. Matoufi, M. Garkaz, and A. Khozain, "The role of illusion of conspiracy among auditors using Dematel method," *International Journal of Nonlinear Analysis and Applications*, vol. 15, no. 11, pp. 377-391, 2024.