

Article type:
Original Research

Article history:
Received 02 November 2024
Revised 02 February 2025
Accepted 12 February 2025
Published online 30 March 2025

Hossein. Argiv¹, Mehraban. Hadi Peykani^{2*}, Alborz. Gheitani², Sahar. Faeghi³

1 Department of Human Resources Management, Isf.C., Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

2 Department of Public Administration and Media, Isf.C., Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

3 Department of Cultural Sociology, Isf.C., Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

Corresponding author email address:
m.paykani@khuisf.ac.ir

How to cite this article:
Argiv, H., Gheitani, A., Hadi Peykani, M., & Faeghi, S. (2025). Designing and Explaining the Employability Model with Emphasis on Urban Management: A Qualitative Study in Public Organizations. *Future of Work and Digital Management Journal*, 3(1), 1-13.
<https://doi.org/10.61838/fwdmj.3.1.80>



© 2025 the authors. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

Designing and Explaining the Employability Model with Emphasis on Urban Management: A Qualitative Study in Public Organizations

ABSTRACT

Employability, as one of the key components of human capital, plays a significant role in enhancing the efficiency and accountability of public organizations, particularly in the field of urban management. Accordingly, the aim of the present study is to design an employability model in public organizations with an emphasis on urban management. This research, employing a multiple grounded theory approach and drawing on existing literature and theories as well as semi-structured interviews with experts and specialists in human resources, urban planning, and public management, has developed a coherent model of employability. A purposive sampling method was used, and interviews continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Data obtained through coding and analysis led to the extraction of 457 initial codes, 112 secondary codes, 38 concepts, and 6 categories. The employability model in public organizations is shaped by a set of individual, organizational, and environmental causal factors, contextual conditions (individual characteristics and structural-organizational features), intervening conditions (potential, facilitating, and weakening factors), and organizational strategies (such as training, empowerment, and human capital development). Finally, individual and psychological, organizational and operational, economic and developmental, as well as cultural and social outcomes were identified in the model. This model can serve as a basis for revising human resources policies in public organizations.

Keywords: Employability, Human Capital, Urban Management, Public Organizations

Introduction

In the evolving landscape of public administration, the concept of employability has emerged as a central determinant of organizational sustainability, workforce adaptability, and public value creation. While the public sector has traditionally been characterized by stable career paths and structured bureaucracies, globalization, rapid technological change, and shifting societal expectations have fundamentally altered the nature of work and the skills required for long-term professional success [1, 2]. As public organizations navigate increasingly complex socio-political, economic, and technological environments, ensuring that their human capital remains employable—capable of maintaining and enhancing their value in dynamic labor markets—has become a strategic imperative [3].

Employability in the public sector extends beyond the possession of technical expertise. It encompasses a combination of adaptive capabilities, continuous learning orientation, and alignment with organizational missions and public service values

[4, 5]. Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability have been identified as equally vital for success, influencing not only individual career trajectories but also organizational effectiveness and public trust [6-8]. In fact, as public sector organizations respond to citizen demands for transparency, equity, and innovation, the integration of both technical competencies and soft skills becomes essential to meet performance expectations [9, 10].

The globalization of labor markets has redefined the competitive landscape, with public organizations now competing not only with private firms but also with transnational institutions for talent [1, 11]. This intensifies the need for strategic human resource management approaches that foster employability through targeted learning and development interventions, performance appraisal systems, and adaptive organizational cultures [12-14]. Indeed, research shows that access to continuous training and development significantly enhances work engagement and job performance in the public sector [13, 15], while a lack of such opportunities can undermine motivation and retention [16, 17].

In addition, the rise of digital transformation and “smart governance” has introduced new demands on public sector employees. The integration of urban innovation platforms, interoperability between government systems, and data-driven decision-making have necessitated new skill sets that blend technological literacy with public service acumen [18, 19]. Public organizations are increasingly expected to operate with agility, leveraging digital tools not only to enhance service delivery but also to support remote work models and decentralized collaboration [14, 20]. These shifts challenge traditional HR models, requiring more dynamic approaches to recruitment, career development, and succession planning [21, 22].

Motivation remains a critical component of employability, as individuals’ willingness to adapt, learn, and innovate is strongly tied to both intrinsic and extrinsic drivers [10, 16]. Public service motivation, in particular, has been linked to higher levels of performance and job satisfaction, making it a key lever for sustaining employability in mission-driven organizations [10, 23]. At the same time, organizational culture and leadership styles play a pivotal role in shaping the climate for learning and adaptability [3, 24]. Transformational leadership has been shown to foster stronger organizational commitment, employee engagement, and the proactive acquisition of new skills [15, 25].

The literature also highlights the importance of managing both formal and informal organizational networks in promoting employability. While structured training programs and competency frameworks form the backbone of skill development, informal knowledge exchange and collaborative networks are equally important for innovation and organizational learning [3, 26]. These networks facilitate the rapid transfer of tacit knowledge, enable cross-departmental collaboration, and support the development of problem-solving capabilities in complex governance environments [2, 11].

In the context of urban management, employability takes on added significance due to the multifaceted and cross-sectoral nature of municipal governance. Urban managers must respond to diverse challenges such as infrastructure development, environmental sustainability, social equity, and economic competitiveness, all while engaging multiple stakeholders [18, 19]. The alignment of individual capabilities with organizational missions is particularly critical in this domain, as the quality of urban governance directly impacts citizens’ quality of life and trust in public institutions [6, 9].

From a strategic perspective, talent management in public organizations must reconcile long-term workforce planning with the need for agility in the face of external shocks, such as economic downturns, pandemics, and political transitions [21, 22]. This requires robust systems for identifying future skill requirements, creating career pathways, and integrating continuous feedback into performance management [27, 28]. Furthermore, the development of employability should be seen

not merely as a function of HR departments but as a shared responsibility across leadership levels, line managers, and employees themselves [7, 12].

Another dimension of employability is its socio-economic impact. Well-designed employability strategies contribute to reducing structural unemployment, increasing social mobility, and fostering inclusive economic growth [1, 2]. In the public sector, these outcomes are aligned with broader policy objectives, including sustainable urban development, citizen empowerment, and equitable access to opportunities [18, 29]. Given these far-reaching implications, employability should be approached as both a micro-level HRM priority and a macro-level governance concern [10, 11].

Despite its growing importance, empirical studies on employability in the public sector—particularly in the context of urban management—remain limited [4, 5]. Much of the existing research has focused on private sector contexts or generalized workforce development, leaving a gap in understanding the specific conditions, strategies, and outcomes relevant to public sector organizations facing the unique pressures of political accountability, budgetary constraints, and public scrutiny [8, 17]. Moreover, the interdependencies between individual-level factors (such as soft skills and motivation), organizational-level enablers (such as culture and leadership), and environmental drivers (such as policy and technology) require more integrated models to guide practice [7, 22].

The present study addresses this gap by designing and explaining an employability model with a focus on urban management in public organizations.

Methods and Materials

The present study, in terms of its objective, is applied research, and in terms of its nature, is descriptive–exploratory, falling within the category of qualitative research. This study, using a grounded theory approach, seeks to discover and explain the phenomenon of *“employability in urban management”*—a phenomenon for which there is currently no comprehensive theoretical knowledge within the context of urban structures. In this research, for data collection, a total of 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with academic experts, human resource managers, and operational managers of municipalities. Participants were selected through theoretical and snowball sampling, and the interview process continued until theoretical saturation was reached—that is, the point at which no new information emerged from the interviews.

The coding and data analysis process followed Strauss and Corbin’s approach, carried out in three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the first stage, the raw data from the interviews and the initial concepts were extracted. These concepts were then grouped into categories with shared conceptual relationships to identify the main categories. Finally, in the selective coding stage, a core category was identified, and the conceptual framework of the research was explained by drawing a paradigmatic model consisting of causal conditions, the central phenomenon, contextual conditions, intervening factors, strategies, and consequences. In designing the interview questions, efforts were made to ensure that the main axes of grounded theory were covered. The questions revolved around topics such as individuals’ perceptions of the concept of employability in municipalities, the influencing factors, challenges, and solutions for its enhancement within the structure of urban management. To achieve a deeper understanding of the topic, follow-up questions were asked in accordance with the participants’ initial responses.

The results from the qualitative phase of the study formed the basis for designing a researcher-made questionnaire. This questionnaire consists of two sections: a general section and a specialized section. The general section covers respondents’

demographic information, including gender, marital status, education level, age, years of service, job position, and workplace location within the municipality structure. The specialized section of the questionnaire, designed to measure various dimensions of the phenomenon of “*employability in urban management*”, includes questions aimed at identifying the causal conditions affecting the employability of municipal employees, examining the dimensions of the central phenomenon and participants’ understanding of the concept and importance of employability in urban environments, analyzing contextual conditions such as organizational structure, human resource policies, and the prevailing culture in municipalities, assessing intervening conditions such as economic factors, technology, or macro-policies influencing employability, extracting strategies used by employees or managers to enhance employability, and finally, evaluating the individual, organizational, and social consequences resulting from the development or weakness of human resource employability in urban management.

This questionnaire is intended to be used in the subsequent stage of the study to validate the qualitative findings and to test the theory generated.

For assessing the content validity of the questionnaire, the designed instrument was submitted to 10 experts in the field of human resource management and urban management. Using the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) and based on Lawshe’s table, it was determined that the CVR value for all items was higher than 0.62; therefore, the content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed. To measure the reliability of the instrument, the inter-coder reliability method was used. In this regard, a doctoral graduate in human resource management, specializing in public sector employability, independently re-coded the data.

Table 1:

Results of Data Reliability Assessment

Interview Code	Total Codes	Agreements	Disagreements	Reliability Percentage
I3	36	16	5	88%
I5	28	10	6	71%
I7	27	11	5	81%
Total	91	37	16	81%

Findings and Results

In this section, the demographic characteristics of the interviewees are first presented, followed by the final categories derived from the data coding process. In accordance with the theoretical purposive sampling procedure, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 managers, senior experts, and supervisors working in the municipality of one of Iran’s metropolitan cities. The selection of these individuals aimed to obtain perspectives from different organizational levels and ensure sufficient experience in dealing with the issue of employability within the structure of urban management. Of the total participants, 11 were male (73%) and 4 were female (27%). In terms of educational level, 7 individuals (47%) held doctoral degrees, and 8 individuals (53%) held master’s degrees. Regarding the field of specialization, 8 participants were in the areas of human resource management, urban management, and organizational development; 5 participants specialized in technical and urban engineering disciplines; and 2 participants had expertise in the fields of social sciences, urban sociology, and planning. In terms of work experience, 11 participants (73%) had between 10 and 20 years of experience, and 4 participants (27%) had more than 20 years of experience in institutions related to municipalities.

During the interview process, participants were asked to express their views, based on their experiences, regarding the dimensions, barriers, enhancers, and consequences of employability within the municipal structure. Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, supplementary questions were also posed to deepen concepts and clarify perspectives. Due to the diversity of tasks, bureaucratic structure, and the cultural and economic characteristics of metropolitan areas, analyzing the data from the viewpoint of employees in various municipal departments (such as human resources, planning, training, information technology, urban services, and finance) was essential for enriching the study.

In the open coding stage, 455 initial codes were extracted, which were then reduced to 75 codes during the axial and selective coding process by combining similar concepts. Subsequently, through a content validity review of the codes by experts, a final set of 38 codes was established and classified into six main categories related to employability in urban management. These categories are explained below.

Causal Factors

Causal factors, or antecedent factors, are those variables and events that lead to the formation and development of employability in urban management. Based on the interviews and data analysis, these factors were categorized into four main dimensions: individual, organizational, environmental, and social status. These four dimensions and their associated axial codes provide a suitable foundation for understanding the causal conditions in the field of employability in urban management, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2.

Categories Related to Causal Factors

Selective Code	Axial Codes	Open Codes
Individual	Individual self-empowerment	Development of soft skills (such as effective communication, critical thinking, teamwork) – Enhancement of self-leadership and self-awareness – Continuous learning and skills updating – Adaptability to environmental conditions and changes – Strengthening intrinsic motivation for career growth and success
Organizational	Organizational empowerment	Development of human resources through targeted and effective training – Transformational leadership style encouraging learning – Designing reward and incentive systems for skill enhancement – Internal policymaking to support employability development – Creating a learning- and development-oriented organizational culture
	Alignment of employability with organizational mission	Linking individual competencies with organizational strategic goals – Utilizing job analysis to determine employment needs – Focusing on competency-based recruitment – Continuous monitoring and evaluation of human resource performance – Alignment between individual capabilities and organizational positions
Environmental	Environmental imperatives for employability	High unemployment rates at national and local levels – Economic pressures and livelihood concerns – Changes in labor market structure and reduction of stable jobs – Gap between market needs and workforce capabilities – Inefficiency of the formal education system in preparing qualified workers
	Adaptation to macro transformations	Impact of globalization on the labor market – Digitalization of organizational and managerial processes – Technological transformations in urban management – Macro employment and human resource development policies – Changes in macro-level labor market demand patterns
Social Status	Social status through employability	The role of employment in enhancing an individual’s social status and identity – Positive public image of governmental and public organizations – Job justice and equal access to promotion opportunities – The impact of employment in public institutions on individual self-esteem – Increased organizational commitment and intrinsic motivation

Core Phenomenon

The core phenomenon in this study is employability, defined as the continuous ability of individuals to maintain and enhance their position in the changing labor market of urban management. This concept, while encompassing a set of skills, knowledge, and personal attributes, represents a dynamic and ongoing process of learning, adaptation, and alignment with organizational and environmental conditions. Within this framework, employability is recognized as the key element for professional survival and the achievement of sustainable development in the field of urban management.

Contextual Conditions

Contextual conditions, or the prevailing background, refer to a set of specific factors and circumstances that provide the necessary foundation for the emergence and manifestation of the phenomenon under study—namely, employability in urban

management. To better understand these conditions, participants in the interviews were asked: *“What factors and conditions can create the groundwork for enhancing employability in municipalities?”* The responses indicated the influence of multiple individual, organizational, and environmental factors, which are categorized as follows.

Table 3:
Categories Related to Contextual Conditions

Selective Code	Axial Codes	Open Codes
Individual Characteristics	Individual talents, capabilities, and human motivations	Diversity of technical and specialized skills – Behavioral competencies and soft skills – Material motivations (salary, benefits) – Moral motivations (job satisfaction, organizational commitment) – Learning abilities and adaptability to environmental changes
Structural–Organizational Characteristics	Organizational systems and structures in human resource management Organizational resources, facilities, and tools Changes and transformations in organizational philosophy and structure	Policies and processes of recruitment and staffing – Promotion and career development systems – Training programs and skills development – Performance appraisal systems and continuous feedback – Reforms in administrative hierarchy and bureaucracy Financial resources and technical equipment – Access to modern technologies – Opportunities for organizational growth and development – Managerial and software tools Revision of the organization’s mission and vision – Updating strategies and policies – Acceptance of innovation and continuous change – Dynamic and learning-oriented organizational culture

Strategies for Achieving the Core Phenomenon (Employability in Urban Management)

Strategies are a set of actions, policies, and interactions that contribute to the realization and improvement of employability in urban management. In this study, to identify effective solutions for enhancing employability, interviewees were asked: *“In your opinion, how can employability be effectively increased in urban management organizations?”* The responses emphasized training and empowerment, structural and institutional reform, human capital development, strategic and technology-driven approaches. Based on the interview analysis, the following strategies were proposed:

Table 4:
Categories Related to Strategies for Implementing Employability in Urban Management

Selective Codes	Axial Codes	Open Codes
Educational and Empowerment-Oriented	Strengthening the training and knowledge-building system	Lack of attention to job-relevant training – Absence of clear programs for skill enhancement of employees
	Educational planning and talent development	Absence of a roadmap for nurturing talented staff – General training without alignment with individual characteristics
	Succession planning and experience transfer	Lack of formal mechanisms for transferring retirees’ experience – Implicit rather than structured knowledge transfer
	Reforming perspectives and attitudes	Managers’ resistance to modern HR approaches – Dominance of traditional views on career development
Structural and Institutional	Reforming organizational structures	Inefficient structure hindering employee participation and growth – Centralized and inflexible decision-making in the organization
	Reforming organizational duties and processes	Role overlap and lack of clear job descriptions – Slow and time-consuming processes in task execution
	Reforming hierarchy and enhancing responsibility and accountability	Middle managers not being accountable for performance outcomes – Lack of clear mechanisms for evaluating responsibility
Human Capital Development	Utilizing performance appraisal and evaluation systems	Overemphasis on quantitative evaluation while ignoring quality – Employees’ distrust in periodic evaluation results
	Reforming and strengthening a justice-oriented recruitment system	Recruitment based on relationships rather than merit – Weakness in standardizing hiring criteria
	Designing a precise career path and fair advancement	Absence of clear plans for vertical and horizontal advancement – Employees’ concerns over discrimination in promotion opportunities
Strategic and Technology-Oriented	Establishing a meritocracy system and focusing on ethical values	Undermining motivation of capable individuals due to ignoring their efforts – Prioritizing personal interests over professional competence
	Proper use of modern and advanced technologies	Outdated IT infrastructure – Weakness in training employees to use new technologies
Participatory and Communication-Oriented	Utilizing modern public management strategies to enhance employability	Neglecting modern models of human resource governance – Partial implementation of new strategies due to traditional perspectives on urban management
	Information exchange, communication, and social interactions toward enhancing employability	Holding regular dialogue sessions between organizational levels – Strengthening horizontal and vertical communication networks – Facilitating exchange of work experiences among employees
	Creating the necessary grounds for broad participation to grow employability	Encouraging employees to participate in organizational decision-making – Designing participatory processes in HR planning – Encouraging voluntary participation in development projects

Motivational and Psychological	Provision of facilities and requirements to foster motivation and enhance self-confidence	Providing the tools and infrastructure needed for career growth – Designing a reward system based on performance and learning – Providing a supportive environment for experiential learning and safe failure
--------------------------------	---	---

Intervening Conditions

Intervening, or mediating, conditions refer to those factors that can either facilitate or weaken the strategies adopted to achieve employability within a specific organizational or environmental context. These conditions influence the manner and intensity with which causal conditions affect the core phenomenon, playing a key role in guiding or constraining the effectiveness of strategies. In this study, to identify intervening factors, participants were asked: *“What external or internal factors can influence the realization of employability in the field of urban management?”* Analysis of the interview data revealed that these factors could be classified into three main categories:

Table 5:

Categories Related to Intervening Conditions

Selective Codes	Axial Codes	Open Codes
Potential Factors	Global growth and rapid global transformations	Globalization of opportunities and competition – International economic dynamics – Rapid changes in global employment patterns
	Role of laws and regulations in employability	Facilitation or restriction by labor and employment laws – Obligation to comply with administrative regulations and standards – Legal fluctuations at national and local levels
	Role of culture and cultural institutions in recruitment	Social values regarding work and competence – Public attitudes toward employment in government organizations – Influence of cultural beliefs on recruitment processes
	Role of environmental and geographic factors in employability	Differences in access to opportunities across regions – Climatic and infrastructural conditions affecting career development – Geographic distribution of resources and job capacities
	Role of supervisory organizations in employability	Complexities of monitoring and controlling recruitment – Legal and administrative pressure on HR processes – Heavy supervisory bureaucracy or inefficiency in oversight
Facilitating Factors	Impact of information technology on employability	Expansion of digital and remote jobs – Need for digital skills and technological literacy – Modern recruitment and evaluation platforms
	Role of managerial and governance factors in recruitment	Quality of human resource decision-making and leadership – Governance style of public organizations – Centralization or decentralization of decision-making authority
	Role of communication and constructive interaction in recruitment	Effective communication between organizational units and levels – Networking and interaction with urban institutions – Strengthening organizational social capital
Weakening Factors	Impact of political factors on employability	Political instability in HR policymaking – Impact of macro-level decisions on the public labor market – Political influence in organizational recruitment
	Labor market challenges and their role in recruitment	Mismatch between labor market needs and university outputs – High unemployment rates and intense competition – Instability of job opportunities

Consequences

In the final part of the interviews, to identify the effects and outcomes of employability, participants were asked: *“In your opinion, what consequences will enhancing employability have for employees, organizations, and society?”* Given the high level of understanding and practical experience of the participants, the responses were expressed with great clarity and accuracy, and the consequences of this phenomenon were categorized into three levels: individual, organizational, and macro. The results of the analyses show that improving employability can have multidimensional positive impacts on various levels of the human resource system and the administrative system. The table below presents these consequences according to their level of impact.

Table 6.

Categories Related to the Consequences of Employability

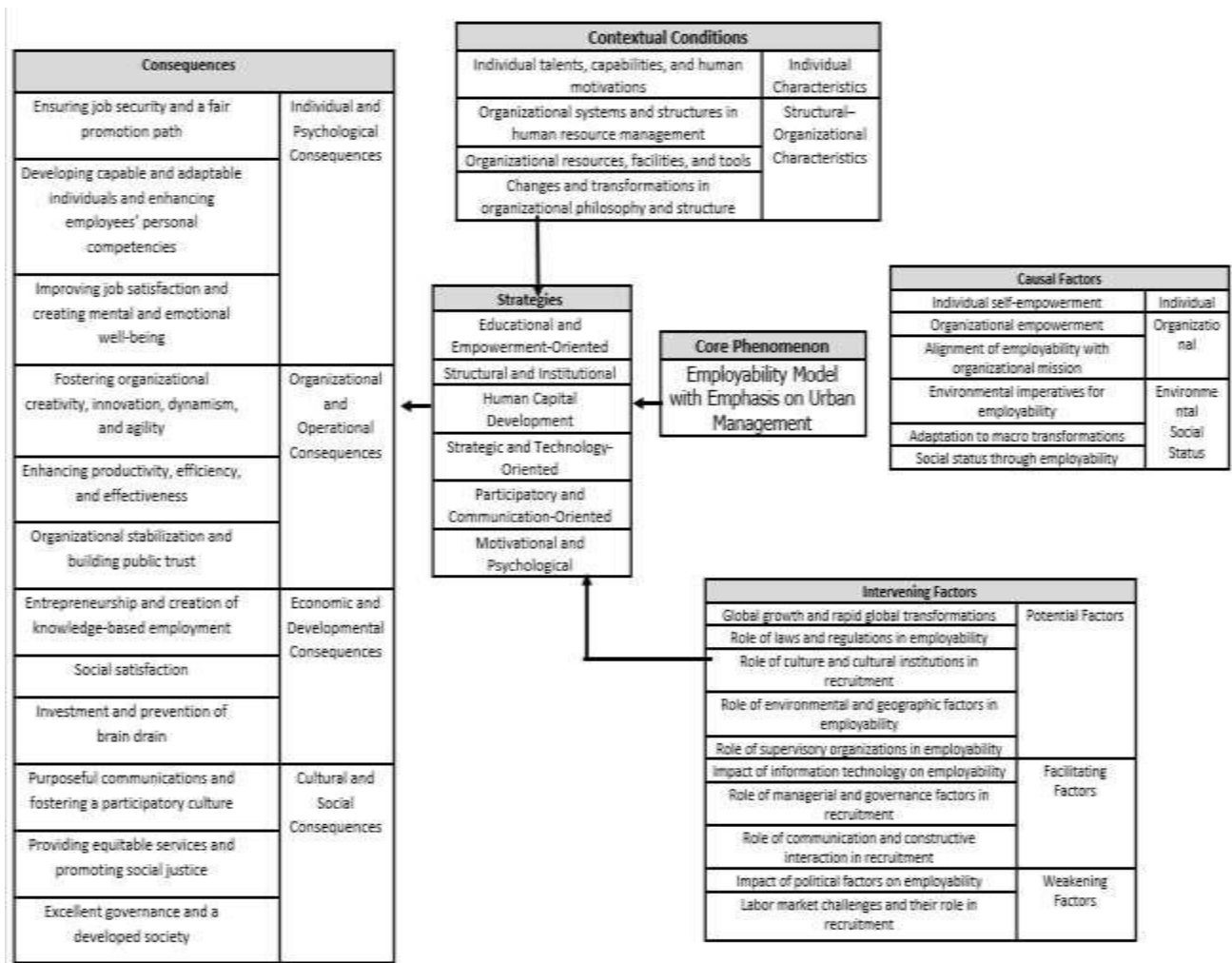
Selective Codes	Axial Codes	Open Codes
Individual and Psychological Consequences	Ensuring job security and a fair promotion path	Job stability in conditions of economic change – Equal opportunities in the promotion path
	Developing capable and adaptable individuals and enhancing employees’ personal competencies	Continuous development of individual skills – Increased adaptability to environmental changes

Organizational and Operational Consequences	Improving job satisfaction and creating mental and emotional well-being	Reducing stress and workload – Increasing motivation and job satisfaction
	Fostering organizational creativity, innovation, dynamism, and agility	Encouraging the presentation of new ideas – Flexibility in work processes
	Enhancing productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness	Improving service quality – Reducing execution time and operational costs
Economic and Developmental Consequences	Organizational stabilization and building public trust	Increasing employee commitment – Enhancing public trust in the organization
	Entrepreneurship and creation of knowledge-based employment	Supporting innovative ideas – Creating knowledge-based job opportunities
	Social satisfaction	Improving citizens’ quality of life – Increasing social participation
Cultural and Social Consequences	Investment and prevention of brain drain	Attracting and retaining talent – Creating suitable conditions for scientific growth
	Purposeful communications and fostering a participatory culture	Strengthening communication among employees – Creating a collaborative and participatory environment
	Providing equitable services and promoting social justice	Ensuring fairness in service distribution – Equal access to urban facilities
	Excellent governance and a developed society	Improving decision-making processes – Achieving sustainable urban development

Based on the results obtained, the overall employability model is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Final Model



Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study highlight that employability in the context of urban management within public organizations is a multifaceted construct shaped by the interplay of individual, organizational, environmental, and social factors. Through grounded theory analysis, the study identified a comprehensive model in which causal conditions—including personal competencies, organizational empowerment structures, environmental imperatives, and social status considerations—interact with contextual conditions, intervening variables, and targeted strategies to influence employability outcomes. The results underscore that employability is not a static attribute but rather a dynamic, ongoing process of skill acquisition, adaptability, and alignment with organizational missions and external demands [4, 5].

A key outcome of the study is the centrality of soft skills—such as communication, problem-solving, adaptability, and teamwork—in driving employability in the public sector. Participants emphasized that while technical expertise remains important, it is the ability to navigate complex interpersonal and organizational contexts that often determines success. This aligns with previous research which has shown that soft skills are critical for sustaining performance and public trust in service delivery [6-8]. In particular, soft skills serve as enabling capabilities that facilitate knowledge transfer, collaborative problem-solving, and responsiveness to citizen needs [9, 12]. These findings reinforce the notion that public sector HR strategies must prioritize the development of behavioral competencies alongside technical proficiencies to achieve holistic workforce capability [10].

Another significant finding is the strong influence of organizational culture and leadership style on employability outcomes. The study found that transformational leadership, supportive HR systems, and a learning-oriented culture fostered higher adaptability, engagement, and skills development among municipal employees. This observation is supported by literature demonstrating that transformational leaders inspire greater organizational commitment, enhance motivation, and promote continuous learning [15, 16, 23]. Furthermore, organizational cultures that encourage experimentation, support risk-taking, and provide structured opportunities for professional growth have been linked to enhanced employability and resilience in changing environments [3, 24]. In line with this, the model in the present study incorporates organizational empowerment as a causal factor that enables employees to align their competencies with strategic organizational goals, thereby increasing their value in the labor market.

The research also emphasizes the role of environmental and policy-related conditions in shaping employability. Participants pointed to high unemployment rates, economic pressures, and the evolving nature of labor markets as critical drivers for maintaining employability, particularly in urban settings. This resonates with the view that globalization, economic restructuring, and technological transformation create both opportunities and threats for workforce sustainability [1, 2]. Moreover, the study's identification of macro-level policy frameworks and legal regulations as influencing employability aligns with evidence from prior research on the regulatory determinants of recruitment and workforce development in the public sector [11, 19]. These external conditions can either facilitate or constrain the implementation of employability strategies, depending on the degree of policy coherence and institutional support.

The role of technology as both a driver and enabler of employability emerged as a notable dimension of the findings. Digitalization of processes, the introduction of smart city platforms, and the rise of remote work models require employees to possess advanced technological literacy and adaptability [14, 18, 20]. Participants stressed that insufficient training in digital tools can undermine the potential benefits of technology, suggesting that strategic integration of IT training into HR

development programs is essential for sustaining employability. This perspective is consistent with contemporary models of public sector capability building, where technological proficiency is viewed as a foundational competency for service innovation and operational efficiency [21, 22].

Motivation—both intrinsic and extrinsic—was found to be a crucial determinant of employability. The study's findings reveal that intrinsic motivation, such as commitment to public service and personal growth, significantly enhances adaptability and learning behaviors, while extrinsic motivators, such as fair promotion paths and job security, contribute to retention and engagement. This aligns with self-determination theory's multidimensional approach to work motivation, which recognizes the importance of balancing intrinsic and extrinsic drivers for optimal performance [10, 16]. Furthermore, previous research has shown that public service motivation correlates strongly with job satisfaction, creativity, and the willingness to embrace organizational change [9, 10]. These findings suggest that employability strategies should not only build technical and behavioral capabilities but also nurture the motivational foundations that sustain long-term performance.

An important contribution of this study is its identification of intervening conditions—factors that can either facilitate or weaken employability strategies. For example, global economic trends and digital job growth can open new opportunities for skill deployment, while political instability, market mismatches, and bureaucratic inefficiencies can undermine progress. This mirrors prior research on the dual nature of environmental factors, where the same global forces that create opportunities can also exacerbate inequality and job insecurity if not managed strategically [2, 25]. Additionally, the influence of informal networks in facilitating knowledge exchange and innovation echoes the work of Krackhardt [26], who demonstrated that organizational social capital plays a decisive role in the diffusion of ideas and problem-solving approaches.

The study also confirms that employability yields multi-level benefits, including individual, organizational, economic, and social outcomes. At the individual level, improved employability leads to greater job security, skill adaptability, and job satisfaction [6, 8]. Organizationally, it fosters creativity, efficiency, and trust, enhancing overall performance and public perception [7, 17]. Economically, employability contributes to entrepreneurship, knowledge-based job creation, and talent retention [1, 2]. Socially and culturally, it promotes equity in service delivery, participatory governance, and sustainable urban development [18, 29]. These findings validate the argument that employability in public organizations is not merely an HRM concern but a broader governance and societal priority [11, 21].

Overall, the study advances the understanding of employability in urban public organizations by presenting an integrated framework that connects micro-level individual factors with macro-level environmental and policy dynamics. By situating employability within the unique operational, cultural, and political contexts of urban management, the findings extend existing theoretical models and provide practical guidance for designing interventions that are both context-sensitive and future-oriented [3, 22, 24].

Despite the contributions of this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research employed a qualitative approach with data collected from a single metropolitan municipality, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other urban contexts or national public sector systems. Second, while the grounded theory method allowed for in-depth exploration, it inherently reflects the perspectives and interpretations of the selected participants, potentially omitting relevant viewpoints from other stakeholder groups, such as citizens or policymakers. Third, the study's focus on employability within urban management may not capture the full range of sectoral variations present in other branches of the public sector, such as healthcare, education, or national defense. Finally, given the rapid evolution of technology, labor

markets, and governance models, the framework developed here should be periodically reassessed to ensure its continued relevance and applicability.

Future studies could expand on this work by employing mixed-methods designs that integrate qualitative insights with quantitative validation, allowing for broader generalization and statistical testing of the proposed model. Comparative research across different municipalities, regions, or countries would provide valuable cross-cultural and cross-institutional perspectives, enriching the understanding of how contextual factors shape employability strategies and outcomes. Longitudinal research could also track the evolution of employability over time, particularly in response to technological disruptions, policy reforms, or economic crises. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of non-managerial employees, citizen stakeholders, and policymakers could yield a more holistic picture of employability's role in public sector effectiveness.

Public sector organizations should prioritize the integration of employability development into their strategic human resource management frameworks, ensuring alignment between individual capabilities and organizational goals. Investment in continuous learning, particularly in soft skills and digital literacy, should be institutionalized through structured training programs and mentorship initiatives. Organizational cultures should be cultivated to promote adaptability, innovation, and knowledge sharing, supported by transformational leadership and transparent performance management systems. Policymakers should ensure that legal and institutional frameworks facilitate, rather than hinder, employability-enhancing practices, and municipal leaders should leverage partnerships with educational institutions, private sector actors, and civil society to create comprehensive employability ecosystems.

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] K. Schwab, *The Global Competitiveness Report 2022*. World Economic Forum, 2022.
- [2] G. Standing, *The precariat: The new dangerous class*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.
- [3] P. L. Witt, R. P. Moser, and R. J. W. Cline, "The role of organizational learning in employee development: A meta-analytic review," *Human Resource Development Review*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 5-30, 2024, doi: 10.1177/1534484323123456.
- [4] F. Rahimi, A. Darzian Azizi, Y. Mehr Alizadeh, and A. Maleki, "Designing a Model of Graduate Employability," *New Educational Approaches*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 87-114, 2022.
- [5] W. Kim-Yang, "Employability in the public sector: The impact of individual and organizational characteristics," *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2024, doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1041618.
- [6] S. Pearson, J. L. Perry, and K. Cooney. "Why soft skills are essential for public sector success Accountability in public organizations: Uneasy at rest." <https://jhmilesandassociates.com/blog/why-soft-skills-are-essential-for-public-sector-success/> (accessed 79).
- [7] A. Rylatt, "Soft skills and public sector performance: A global perspective," *Public Administration Review*, 2024.
- [8] M. Abbas, C. Asghar, and A. Saqib, "Impact of soft skills on employee performance: A study of the public sector," *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 45-67, 2023.
- [9] J. A. H. Fabre, D. K. J. G. Liban-Benemerito, J. I. Alejandro, B. P. Malang, and J. D. S. Malang, "Exploring the impact of motivation on job performance: A study of government personnel in public sector organizations," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Applied Business and Education Research*, vol. 5, no. 11, pp. 4526-4545, 2024, doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.05.11.20.
- [10] A. Ritz, W. Vandenabeele, and D. Vogel, "Public service motivation and individual job performance," in *Managing for public service performance: How HRM and leadership can make a difference*: Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. 254-277.
- [11] W. J. M. Kickert, E. H. Klijn, and J. F. M. Koppenjan, "Managing complex networks: Strategies for the public sector," in *Managing Public Networks*: Routledge, 2022, pp. 45-60.
- [12] A. Chourasia, P. C. Bahuguna, and T. Bangar Raju, "Strategic human resource management: A road to organizational performance: Evidence from public sector organizations in the oil and gas sector," *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, vol. 12, no. First Special Issue, pp. 66-90, 2023, doi: 10.33844/ijol.2023.60365.
- [13] M. P. Hassett, "The effect of access to training and development opportunities on rates of work engagement within the U.S. federal workforce," *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, vol. 42, no. 3, pp. 358-379, 2022, doi: 10.1177/00910260221098189.
- [14] D. Host, *The future of training and development in the public sector*. Emerald Publishing, 2022.
- [15] J. Wang and Z. Wang, "The impact of transformational leadership on affective organizational commitment and job performance: The mediating role of employee engagement," *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 13, p. 831060, 2022, doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.831060.
- [16] A. Van den Broeck, J. L. Howard, Y. Van Vaerenbergh, H. Leroy, and M. Gagné, "Beyond intrinsic and extrinsic motivation: A meta-analysis on self-determination theory's multidimensional conceptualization of work motivation," *Organizational Psychology Review*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 240-273, 2021, doi: 10.1177/20413866211006173.
- [17] I. Marzec, A. Austen, A. Frączkiewicz-Wronka, and B. Zacny, "The impact of job content on employability and job performance in public organizations," *International Journal of Manpower*, vol. 42IS - 4, pp. 628-643, 2021, doi: 10.1108/IJM-11-2019-0502.
- [18] K. A. Paskaleva and I. Horváth, "Smart governance in smart cities: Interoperability assessment of urban innovation platforms," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, vol. 167, p. 120748, 2021, doi: 10.1016/j.techfore.2021.120748.
- [19] Oecd, *Methods for assessing competencies and motivation during recruitment*, 2022. OECD iLibrary OECDER -, 2022.
- [20] J. E. Bessen, "AI and jobs: The role of demand," 2021: NBER Working Paper No. 24235 National Bureau of Economic Research, doi: 10.3386/w24235.
- [21] D. Ulrich and J. H. Dulebohn, "Talent management: Past, present, and future," *Human Resource Planning*, vol. 43, no. 2, pp. 1-18, 2020, doi: 10.1108/HRP-02-2020-001.
- [22] O. Cornerstone. "The future of learning: Building agile and adaptable workforces." Cornerstone OnDemand (accessed).
- [23] A. Anand and J. Brix, "The learning organization and organizational learning in the public sector: A review and research agenda," *The Learning Organization*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 129EP - 156, 2022, doi: 10.1108/TLO-05-2021-0061.

- [24] M. E. Al-Azkiya, S. Sudarmo, and F. Ansoriyah, "Organizational culture and adaptability in public sector organizations: Bibliometric analysis and literature review," 2024, vol. 593, p. 08001, doi: 10.1051/e3sconf/202459308001.
- [25] M. Shoss, C. Kueny, and D. K. Jundt, "The benefits of individual proactive and adaptive performance: An organizational learning perspective," in *Handbook of Research on Stress and Well-Being in the Public Sector*, 2020, p. 200.
- [26] D. Krackhardt, "The impact of informal networks on knowledge transfer and innovation," *Organization Science*, vol. 31, no. 5, pp. 1234-1250, 2020, doi: 10.1287/orsc.2020.1367.
- [27] E. A. Jensen and P. A. Patel, "Performance appraisal systems and employee motivation: An empirical study," *International Journal of Business and Management Review*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 1-12, 2021.
- [28] R. A. Noe, J. R. Hollenbeck, B. Gerhart, and P. M. Wright, *Fundamentals of Human Resource Management*. McGraw-Hill Education, 2021.
- [29] Unesco, *Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education*. UNESCO Publishing, 2021.