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Validation of the Human Resource Development Model in Non-Governmental Organizations

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Abstract

This study employed a descriptive-survey methodology and is applied in terms of its objective. The statistical population consisted of all employees in non-governmental organizations. Based on Cochran's formula and to ensure sufficient sample size and questionnaire return rate, 400 questionnaires were distributed among the selected sample units. A total of 384 completed and valid questionnaires were collected. For sampling, a cluster random sampling method was used. The research instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire developed based on qualitative findings, the validity and reliability of which were examined. To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha on 15 preliminary questionnaires, resulting in a coefficient of 0.89. For data analysis, the structural equation modeling (SEM) method was applied using Smart PLS software. The results indicated that the individual, organizational, and environmental dimensions, as well as the designed components of the human resource development model in non-governmental organizations, had a significant relationship ($P < 0.05$). Additionally, the overall model fit (GOF) was calculated to be 0.62, indicating a good and strong model fit. It can thus be concluded that the human resource development model in non-governmental organizations is valid and can be effectively employed to promote and support the development of such organizations.

Keywords: Validation, Human Resource Development, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

1. Introduction

The evolution and increasing influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the development ecosystem have positioned them as key actors in delivering essential services and advancing social equity, particularly in contexts where government capacity is limited or public trust is fragile. NGOs play a pivotal role in promoting community empowerment, addressing local needs, and enhancing sustainable development through diverse interventions across sectors such as education, healthcare, environment, and rural development (Abiddin et al., 2022; Ali, 2020; Robinson et al., 2024). Their ability to respond rapidly to grassroots demands, maintain operational flexibility, and leverage community trust has made them indispensable components of national and global development agendas (Evans & Wellstead, 2013; Murphy, 2012).

As NGOs expand their scope and responsibilities, the need for robust organizational infrastructure becomes more pronounced. One critical element of this infrastructure is the capacity to develop and manage human resources effectively. Human Resource Development (HRD), traditionally associated with corporate and governmental settings, is now recognized as a vital determinant of performance and sustainability in NGOs (Goswami, 2018; Jacobs, 2017; Swanson, 2022). HRD in



the NGO sector is not only concerned with staff training and capacity building but also with fostering a culture of learning, innovation, and ethical responsibility that aligns with the mission-driven nature of these organizations (Amiri & Collaborators, 2021; Gholami et al., 2023).

The concept of HRD encompasses a wide array of functions—such as recruitment, talent development, knowledge sharing, leadership training, and performance evaluation—all of which must be tailored to the unique structures and constraints of NGOs. Unlike their corporate counterparts, NGOs often face unpredictable funding streams, heavy reliance on volunteer labor, and fluid stakeholder dynamics, all of which demand context-specific HRD strategies (Lewis et al., 2020; Obedgiu, 2017). In this light, designing a validated HRD model specifically for NGOs is both a theoretical and practical imperative that contributes to their operational resilience and strategic alignment with development objectives.

Numerous studies have attempted to delineate the characteristics of effective HRD frameworks within public and private institutions, yet relatively few have addressed their applicability within the NGO sector (Niyireba et al., 2024; Rafati Alashti & Seyed Naqavi, 2022). This gap is particularly significant given the rise of NGOs as intermediaries between state mechanisms and civil society, and their increasing role in co-producing public goods in collaboration with governmental institutions (Cheng & Li, 2022; Gupta & Koontz, 2019). The institutional embeddedness of NGOs in community structures calls for HRD models that prioritize participatory approaches, value-based leadership, and decentralized decision-making (Ferreira et al., 2017; Yaqoubi et al., 2021).

From an operational standpoint, NGOs often struggle with employee retention, skill mismatches, lack of structured performance evaluations, and limited access to professional development programs. These challenges undermine their ability to maintain institutional memory, enhance service quality, and scale interventions effectively (Ebrahimi, 2022; Mazaei et al., 2023). By contrast, organizations that implement structured HRD systems—grounded in competency mapping, lifelong learning, and organizational development principles—report higher levels of adaptability, innovation, and mission coherence (Gholami et al., 2023; Gupta & Koontz, 2019).

One promising avenue for improving NGO performance lies in the formulation and validation of comprehensive HRD models that incorporate both internal and external environmental factors. Such models must integrate organizational variables (e.g., leadership style, resource allocation, policy frameworks), individual-level determinants (e.g., motivation, skills, values), and contextual drivers (e.g., legal support, cultural norms, market conditions) (Calo et al., 2023; Telyatnikova et al., 2020). A systemic approach to HRD in NGOs facilitates not only employee development but also institutional learning and strategic transformation (Jacobs, 2017; Swanson, 2022).

Another important consideration in model validation is the relevance of HRD indicators and performance metrics. These should go beyond traditional productivity measures and include qualitative dimensions such as empowerment, organizational citizenship behavior, and social accountability (Abiddin et al., 2022; Robinson et al., 2024). Furthermore, collaborative governance structures, which characterize many NGO operations, require HRD models that promote cross-functional learning, distributed leadership, and inter-organizational knowledge flows (Calo et al., 2023; Cheng & Li, 2022).

In Iran, where NGOs operate within complex regulatory and socio-political environments, efforts to establish standardized HRD models are both timely and challenging. Studies such as those by (Amiri & Collaborators, 2021) and (Yaqoubi et al., 2021) emphasize the importance of ethical capital, participatory governance, and strategic planning in enhancing NGO effectiveness. Nonetheless, there remains a pressing need for empirically validated frameworks that encapsulate these elements within a cohesive HRD model tailored to the Iranian NGO context (Ebrahimi, 2022; Mazaei et al., 2023).

Moreover, policy developments and strategic shifts in national development planning increasingly require NGOs to demonstrate professional competency, transparent HR practices, and measurable outcomes (Evans & Wellstead, 2013; Murphy, 2012). HRD is no longer a peripheral activity but a core strategic function that determines whether NGOs can meet performance expectations and retain legitimacy in the eyes of donors, regulators, and beneficiaries (Gupta & Koontz, 2019; Lewis et al., 2020). In this regard, the role of capacity-building interventions and structured human capital strategies cannot be overstated (Ferreira et al., 2017; Gholami et al., 2023).



The present study is motivated by the need to bridge this conceptual and practical gap by designing and validating a human resource development model specific to NGOs. Drawing on both international literature and indigenous insights, the model proposed in this research integrates structural, individual, and environmental dimensions, incorporating elements such as recruitment and retention systems, training and capacity development frameworks, performance evaluation standards, and motivational mechanisms

2. Methods and Materials

This study employed a descriptive-survey design and is applied in terms of its objective. The statistical population consisted of all employees in non-governmental organizations. Based on Cochran's formula and to ensure sufficient sample size and a reliable questionnaire return rate, 400 questionnaires were distributed among the sample units. A total of 384 completed and valid questionnaires were collected. The sampling technique used was cluster random sampling.

The research instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire developed based on qualitative findings, and its validity and reliability were examined. To assess the internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was applied to a pilot sample of 15 initial questionnaires, resulting in an alpha coefficient of 0.89.

For data analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed using Smart PLS software.

3. Findings and Results

In the research sample, 154 participants (40.1%) were female, and the rest were male. Regarding age, 150 participants (39.1%) were between 30 and 40 years old. Furthermore, 230 participants (59.9%) held a Master's degree or higher.

In terms of years of service, the group with 11 to 15 years of experience had the highest frequency, comprising approximately 45.3% of the sample.

By analyzing the interview data, the dimensions, components, and indicators for validating the Human Resource Development (HRD) model in non-governmental organizations were extracted, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Extracted Main Categories, Subcategories, and Final Indicators of the Study

Indicators	Components	Dimensions
Staffing method	Recruitment and employment system	Organizational Dimensions
Selection		
Employee mobility		
Retirement		
Succession planning	Training system	
Training needs assessment		
Training content		
Training continuity		
General and specialized training & rewards	Nurturing and development system	
Human resource empowerment		
Training standardization		
Leadership and management skill development		
Vision clarity	Performance appraisal system	
Altruistic spirit		
Team spirit and cooperation enhancement		
Evaluation results		
Performance evaluation criteria	Promotion system	
Employee performance improvement		
Innovation and creativity in problem-solving		
Feedback and continuous improvement		
Learning	Retirement payment system	
Promotion methods		
Educational level		
Leadership and management skills		
Employee benefits	Retirement payment system	
Salary system		
Insurance and retirement benefits		
Salary level		



Personal welfare	Organizational characteristics		
Social welfare			
Facilities			
Rewards and benefits			
Organizational goals			
Flexible organizational structure			
Job satisfaction			
Work environment	Individual Motivations	Individual Dimensions	
Organizational justice			
Organizational belongingness			
Achievement motivation			
Volunteer and autonomy opportunities			
Human resource competency development	Personal characteristics		
Knowledge and information sharing			
Commitment			
Personality type			
Individual temperament and traits			
Responsibility	Immediate Environment	Environmental Dimensions	
Flexibility			
Problem-solving ability			
Customers			
Suppliers			
Competitors	Remote Environment		
Government			
Political environment			
Social environment			
Technological environment			
Economic environment			
Cultural environment			
Legal support for the educational system			

In this study, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was employed to assess the normality of the data. If the data distribution is normal, it is possible to use parametric inferential statistical tests.

Table 2. Normality Test Results for Research Variables

Variables	N	K-S Statistic	Significance Level	Result
Individual Dimensions	384	0.286	0.000	Non-normal
Organizational Dimensions	384	0.200	0.000	Non-normal
Environmental Dimensions	384	0.197	0.000	Non-normal

Based on the results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, in all cases, the significance level was found to be less than the alpha threshold of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the distribution of the micro-scale data is not normal. Accordingly, hypothesis testing using PLS (Partial Least Squares) is fully justified and appropriate.

Initially, the outer model (measurement model) was examined through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using LISREL or AMOS software. This part of the model shows that the indicators considered for measuring each of the main factors possess sufficient validity. The strength of the relationship between indicators and their respective constructs is evaluated through factor loadings and their statistical significance using t-statistics. Figure 1 presents the standardized coefficients.



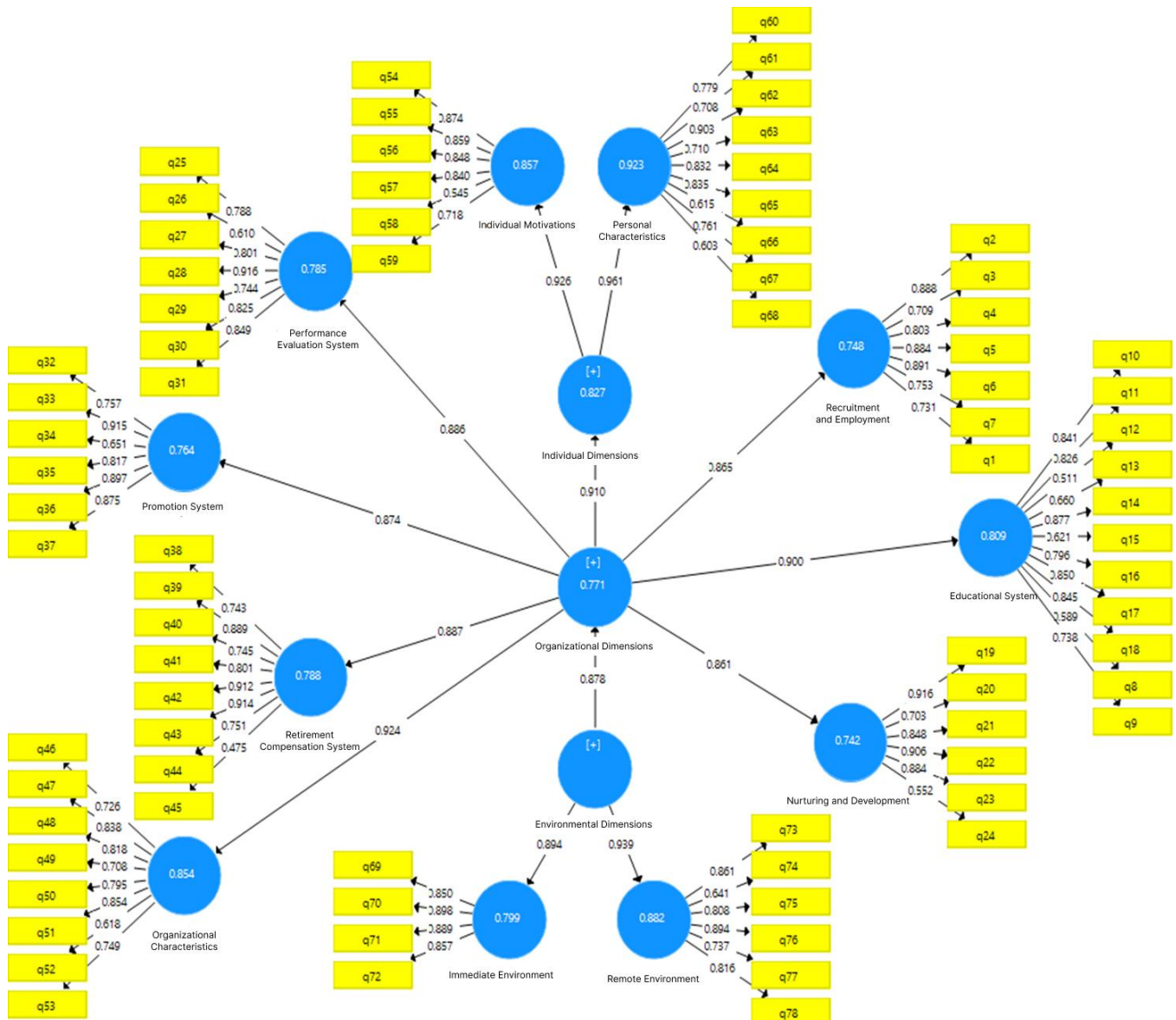


Figure 1. Standardized Coefficients of Variable Relationships Using Partial Least Squares (PLS)

All observed factor loadings exceeded 0.50, and the t-values were greater than 1.96. Therefore, the outer (measurement) model is confirmed.

The validity of the outer (measurement) model is shown in Table 3. For convergent validity and composite reliability (CR), the following conditions must be satisfied:

Condition 1:

$CR > 0.70$; $CR > AVE$; $AVE > 0.50$

Table 3. Outer Validity of the Research Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	rho A	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Organizational Dimensions	0.978	0.982	0.980	0.702
Individual Dimensions	0.934	0.942	0.943	0.529
Environmental Dimensions	0.917	0.926	0.931	0.579
Individual Motivations	0.873	0.896	0.907	0.623
Remote Environment	0.882	0.896	0.912	0.635
Immediate Environment	0.897	0.902	0.928	0.763
Educational System	0.919	0.936	0.933	0.564
Promotion System	0.903	0.919	0.926	0.678
Performance Evaluation	0.901	0.915	0.922	0.632
Nurturing and Development	0.890	0.919	0.919	0.660



Recruitment and Employment	0.914	0.927	0.931	0.659
Retirement Compensation	0.909	0.932	0.928	0.625
Organizational Traits	0.898	0.906	0.919	0.588
Personal Traits	0.903	0.915	0.922	0.571

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs are greater than 0.50, indicating convergent validity. In addition, Cronbach's alpha values for all variables are above 0.70, confirming internal consistency reliability. The Composite Reliability (CR) is also greater than the AVE and exceeds the threshold of 0.70 for all constructs. Thus, all three validity and reliability criteria are satisfied.

Next, the structural model illustrates the relationships among the main constructs of the research, as shown in Figure 2.

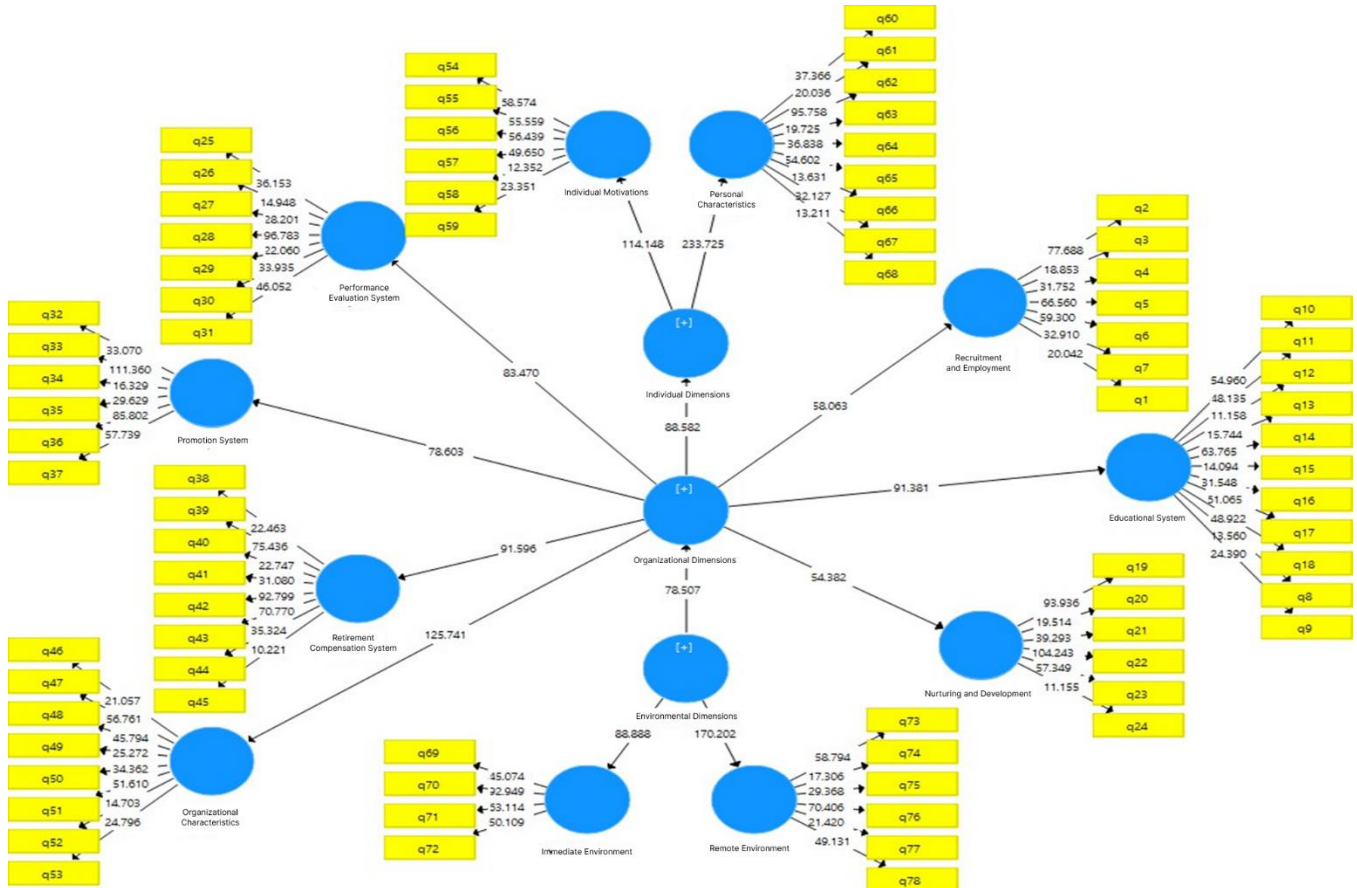


Figure 2. Structural Model in the T-Statistics Estimation Mode

Based on the observed path coefficients and the t-values (from bootstrapping), the relationships among variables can be interpreted as follows:

Table 4. Summary of Structural Model Results (Relationships Among Model Variables)

Path Relationship	Path Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Organizational Dimensions ← Individual Dimensions	0.910	0.010	88.582	0.000
Organizational Dimensions ← Educational System	0.900	0.010	91.381	0.000
Organizational Dimensions ← Promotion System	0.874	0.011	78.603	0.000
Organizational Dimensions ← Performance Evaluation	0.886	0.011	83.470	0.000
Organizational Dimensions ← Nurturing System	0.861	0.016	54.382	0.000
Organizational Dimensions ← Recruitment System	0.865	0.015	58.063	0.000
Organizational Dimensions ← Retirement System	0.887	0.010	91.596	0.000
Organizational Dimensions ← Organizational Traits	0.924	0.007	125.741	0.000
Individual Dimensions ← Individual Motivations	0.926	0.008	114.148	0.000
Individual Dimensions ← Personal Traits	0.961	0.004	233.725	0.000
Environmental Dimensions ← Organizational Dimensions	0.878	0.011	78.507	0.000
Environmental Dimensions ← Remote Environment	0.939	0.006	170.202	0.000
Environmental Dimensions ← Immediate Environment	0.894	0.010	88.888	0.000



The results of Table 4 indicate that all research hypotheses have significance levels less than 0.05. Therefore, these hypotheses are confirmed and accepted with 95% confidence.

Finally, the fit of the outer model was evaluated. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is a criterion indicating the extent to which changes in each of the dependent variables in the model are explained by the independent variables. The R^2 value is only reported for endogenous variables, and for exogenous constructs, it equals zero. The higher the R^2 value for endogenous constructs, the better the model fit, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary of Structural Model Fit Evaluation Results

Construct	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Organizational Dimensions	0.771	0.771
Individual Dimensions	0.827	0.827
Individual Motivations	0.857	0.856
Remote Environment	0.882	0.882
Immediate Environment	0.799	0.798
Educational System	0.809	0.809
Promotion System	0.764	0.763
Performance Evaluation System	0.785	0.785
Nurturing and Development	0.742	0.741
Recruitment and Employment	0.748	0.747
Retirement Compensation System	0.788	0.787
Organizational Characteristics	0.854	0.854
Personal Characteristics	0.923	0.923

The Stone-Geisser Q^2 index is used to assess the predictive relevance of the model. For the dependent variable, values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 respectively indicate weak, moderate, and strong predictive power of the independent variable in relation to the dependent variable, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Q^2 Predictive Relevance Index

Construct	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 (=1 - SSE/SSO)$
Organizational Dimensions	20,352.000	13,307.212	0.346
Individual Dimensions	5,760.000	3,418.339	0.407
Environmental Dimensions	3,840.000	3,840.000	—
Individual Motivations	2,304.000	1,154.724	0.499
Remote Environment	2,304.000	1,094.851	0.525
Immediate Environment	1,536.000	658.889	0.571
Educational System	4,224.000	2,447.895	0.420
Promotion System	2,304.000	1,211.449	0.474
Performance Evaluation System	2,688.000	1,467.766	0.454
Nurturing and Development	2,304.000	1,255.291	0.455
Recruitment and Employment	2,688.000	1,487.606	0.447
Retirement Compensation System	3,072.000	1,700.050	0.447
Organizational Characteristics	3,072.000	1,637.041	0.467
Personal Characteristics	3,456.000	1,757.715	0.491

The GOF (Goodness-of-Fit) index evaluates the overall model fit based on both the measurement model and structural model. This index is calculated as the square root of the product of the average R^2 values and the average communalities (AVE values).

The GOF value was calculated to be 0.626, indicating that the model enjoys a desirable and strong fit.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to validate a comprehensive Human Resource Development (HRD) model tailored for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Iran. The results of structural equation modeling demonstrated that all hypothesized relationships within the model were statistically significant, with high path coefficients and t-values exceeding the threshold of 1.96. Specifically, the constructs of individual, organizational, and environmental dimensions—each including relevant subcomponents such as motivation, training systems, performance appraisal, and external environments—showed strong



explanatory power, as evidenced by high R^2 values across endogenous variables. The Goodness-of-Fit (GOF) index of 0.626 further affirmed that the model fits the data well and provides a reliable structure for understanding HRD processes within NGOs.

The significance of the path from personal characteristics and individual motivations to individual dimensions reflects the importance of aligning personal values, ethical dispositions, and intrinsic motivations with organizational missions. This finding supports prior research that emphasizes the centrality of human agency and individual commitment in the nonprofit sector (Amiri & Collaborators, 2021; Obedgiu, 2017). It suggests that NGOs must not only focus on external capacity building but also foster internal drivers such as achievement motivation, sense of belonging, and ethical responsibility to maintain a cohesive and motivated workforce. These results align with the assertions of Lewis et al. (2020), who stress that NGO personnel are often driven by mission-oriented goals, which require tailored HRD strategies emphasizing personal growth and ethical engagement (Lewis et al., 2020).

Moreover, the study revealed strong linkages between the organizational dimension and systems of recruitment, training, promotion, and performance evaluation. These structural components were identified as foundational to building an agile and effective NGO workforce. The high path coefficients in this part of the model are consistent with the work of Gholami et al. (2023), who demonstrated that systematic HRD planning significantly contributes to the professionalization and performance of public and nonprofit organizations (Gholami et al., 2023). Similarly, Rafati Alashti and Seyed Naqavi (2022) emphasize that organizations with reliable HRD infrastructures—grounded in performance appraisal, knowledge transfer, and structured promotions—are better equipped to manage complexity and ensure accountability (Rafati Alashti & Seyed Naqavi, 2022).

Another critical insight of the study lies in the environmental dimension, which encompasses both proximate factors (customers, suppliers, competitors) and distal influences (political, economic, cultural, and legal environments). The structural model confirms that environmental variables have a substantial impact on HRD processes within NGOs, validating the contextual dependency of nonprofit workforce strategies. This observation corresponds with studies by Gupta and Koontz (2019) and Cheng and Li (2022), which show that government policies, funding mechanisms, and regulatory dynamics significantly influence how NGOs recruit, retain, and develop their personnel (Cheng & Li, 2022; Gupta & Koontz, 2019). Furthermore, this finding resonates with the notion that HRD in NGOs cannot be divorced from the broader ecosystem in which these organizations function, a point emphasized in studies of NGO-government collaboration and policy dialogue (Evans & Wellstead, 2013; Murphy, 2012).

The validated model also highlighted the mediating roles of training and educational systems in shaping organizational performance. Constructs such as leadership skill development, continuous learning, and ethical education emerged as critical to sustaining long-term human capital in mission-driven contexts. This aligns with Swanson's foundational framework of HRD, which integrates personal and organizational learning with strategic development objectives (Swanson, 2022). Moreover, the inclusion of moral and ethical development components in the HRD model aligns with Amiri et al. (2021), who argue that moral capital should be a core HRD objective in people's organizations, especially in contexts where trust, legitimacy, and community impact are central to organizational survival (Amiri & Collaborators, 2021).

Additionally, the predictive relevance of the model—as indicated by Q^2 values well above the 0.35 threshold for several key constructs—demonstrates that the HRD model is not only descriptive but also prescriptive, offering tangible pathways for intervention. The inclusion of volunteer management, succession planning, and psychological empowerment in the model indicates an advanced understanding of the multifaceted HR challenges NGOs face. These elements echo the work of Abiddin et al. (2022), who underscore the importance of sustainability planning and leadership development in community-based organizations (Abiddin et al., 2022).

The study also supports the argument that HRD within NGOs must extend beyond skill-building to encompass broader developmental and participatory goals. This holistic perspective reflects the educational and pedagogical orientation proposed by Ebrahimi (2022), who argues that work-life integration and self-directed learning are becoming key elements in contemporary people's organizations (Ebrahimi, 2022). Similarly, Robinson et al. (2024) emphasize that service provision outcomes in health and education sectors are significantly enhanced when NGOs invest in long-term human capital strategies and cultivate collaborative relationships with state institutions (Robinson et al., 2024).



In light of collaborative governance trends, the model's capacity to integrate inter-organizational learning and external stakeholder engagement is particularly relevant. As Calo et al. (2023) demonstrate, nonprofits are increasingly involved in co-governance mechanisms, requiring their staff to possess not only technical and managerial competencies but also political acumen and communication skills (Calo et al., 2023). The model's inclusion of environmental and organizational flexibility indicators allows it to serve as a framework for preparing NGO personnel for these multi-actor governance arrangements.

Finally, the model reaffirms the necessity of evidence-based HRD planning in the nonprofit sector. Studies by Jacobs (2017) and Telyatnikova et al. (2020) support the idea that NGOs need systematic platforms for knowledge work, leadership pipeline development, and innovation management (Jacobs, 2017; Telyatnikova et al., 2020). The present model's validation contributes to these discourses by offering a data-driven structure that links HR practices with organizational outcomes in civil society organizations.

Despite the robust design and comprehensive scope of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research is contextually bound to Iranian NGOs, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or regulatory environments. Second, although the sample size was sufficient for structural equation modeling, a larger and more diverse sample across various types of NGOs (e.g., advocacy, service-delivery, religious-based) could enhance external validity. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the data collection restricts the ability to infer causality. Longitudinal studies would be necessary to observe how HRD interventions influence organizational outcomes over time.

Future studies could explore comparative analyses between NGO sectors in different geopolitical contexts to assess the adaptability of the proposed HRD model. Furthermore, researchers might investigate the impact of digital transformation on HRD practices in NGOs, particularly with regard to remote training, digital literacy, and virtual collaboration. Qualitative studies focusing on the lived experiences of NGO employees regarding performance evaluation, motivation, and ethical training could also yield nuanced insights that enrich the quantitative model. Finally, experimental or action-research designs may help assess the effectiveness of specific HRD interventions derived from the model.

NGO leaders and HR managers should use the validated HRD model as a diagnostic and developmental tool to evaluate and enhance their current human resource practices. Investing in continuous training, structured promotion pathways, and succession planning can significantly improve staff retention and organizational learning. Moreover, developing staff capacities for policy engagement and inter-sectoral collaboration will equip NGOs to function effectively in complex governance environments. Emphasizing ethical leadership and participatory decision-making can further cultivate trust and accountability within the organization and among external stakeholders.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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