

The Model of Human Resource Management Strategies for Iranian Project-based Construction Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, human resources are vital in any organization and are considered as a driving force of strategic plans of organizations, such that correct utilization of human resources leads to growth and development of organizations. This study presents the desirable human resource strategies' model of a project-based construction organization in Iran through evaluation of internal and external environment and creating SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) and QSPM (Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix) matrices. In the next step, the best strategy was selected for the human resources of an organization. The most important influential internal and external factors were identified based on the experts' opinions, AHP and the strategies identification techniques. Subsequently, the initial strategies of human resources were compiled by using SWOT matrix. Finally, the position of the organization in the four-fold internal/external matrix was determined in terms of specific human resources and with QSPM technique for strategies relevant to human resource system of organization based on the results. The results show that defensive strategies are a desirable choice for the human resource system of the organization. According to the results, increasing organizational capitals for use in the motivation and punishment system, as well as revising the payment system and the educational system have the most significant effects on organizational success.

KEYWORDS: Strategic human resource management, Construction, Project-based organizations, SWOT, AHP, QSPM.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, information and knowledge have interacted with human lives, so that this era is named as the information era. In this circumstance, human resources as the owner of such knowledge and information in organizations have a considerable role in organizations' success or failure. On the other hand, all organizations are influenced by challenges, such as increased number of requests, change in customer expectations, quality improvement, increasing competition and widespread economic, social, cultural, political and technological transformations. Organizations must choose strategies to survive in today's competitive era. For this purpose, any organization needs strategic planning. Systematic

process of the prediction of desirable future, transforming this perspective into macro- and micro-goals and consecutive steps for their achievement are called strategic planning. In other words, the art of compilation for execution and valuation of multi-duty decisions is essential to enable an organization to achieve its goals (David and David, 2014). The reasons for conducting this research can be summarized as follows:

- Lack of a clear strategy regarding human resource management in many construction organizations in Iran.
- Mitigating the impacts of economic sanctions with improving the efficiency level and effectiveness of human resources.
- Proper use of human resources for the growth and development of construction organizations regarding the low rate of projects' success in the country.

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- Lack of knowledge and attention to the strategic human resource management in Iranian construction companies.
- Lack of correct and strategic attitudes in the country to the design and development of human resources as one of the most important and influential capitals of organizations.

Human resource management system can assist organizations in gaining competitive advantages. Also, organizations can utilize opportunities and positions optimally in the framework of strategic management of human resources. Strategic management of human resources enables the necessary coordination between diverse activities of an organization, creation of proper opportunities and prevention of possible threats. Upon increase in the number of manufacturing and service companies that consider human resources as a strategic viewpoint, the undeniable significance of human resources is revealed more for organizations in the country (Boon et al., 2017; Iqbal, 2019; McClean and Collins, 2019; Knezović et al., 2020; Sowa, 2020; Collins, 2021). Factors that led to such strategic viewpoint towards human resources in Iranian organizations are, for example, increased complexity, as well as increased size of Iranian companies which resulted from the increase in development plans of the government. In today's world, organizations pertain in a permanent competition and the intensity of the competition increases every year. Lack of a strategic, long-term viewpoint towards management of human resources on organizations leads to negative effects on correct planning in terms of staff recruitment, maintaining and turn-over, efficiency and realization of mission of the organizations. Meanwhile, the goals and strategies defined in recent years and the economic sanctions against Iran led to the establishment of restrictions in human resources. Hence, human resource management analysis and study and identifying its dimensions in sanction conditions as human capital are considered effective steps in the achievement of national goals. Investment in development of human resources under deficit circumstances has numerous advantages for the organization at the micro-level and for the country at the macro-level. Some of the advantages can be mentioned as follows: 1. Better usage of all human resources and active, creative and participatory behaviors by managers and staff. 2. Promotion of staff's

commitment through organizational values. 3. Reduced deficits caused by sanctions, as well as increased staff efficiency. 4. Better understanding of staff of the goals of the organization and the significance of organizational performance (Balaceanu, 2012).

Despite paying attention to lean construction and cost reduction (Wong and Ahmed, 2018), project-based organizations paid less attention to strategic human resource development (Sukamani and Wang, 2020). Likewise, Iranian project-based construction organizations paid less attention to this subject due to some reasons, such as the novelty of this subject, deficit in Persian references and lack of attention to successful foreign models and patterns. With a careful look at the concept of human resource strategic management, one can realize the necessity of its usage in all organizations, particularly in construction organizations. To the authors' knowledge, there has been no study on this subject in project-based construction organizations. However, numerous studies have been conducted on developing human resource management strategies in different manufacturing and service organizations. Meanwhile, certain analyses were conducted with regard to factors affecting the success of human resource strategic planning, the relationship between human resource strategic planning and human resource efficiency in different organizations and the role of human resource management in construction projects. Much more studies have been conducted on the strategy development with the Balanced Score Card (BSC) model in financial organizations and less in non-financial organizations (Yuksel and Coşkun, 2013).

Abang Ekhsan analyzed human resource management strategies and listed its barriers and obstacles as follows: poor human resource management, lack of senior managers' support, poor knowledge of human resources, lack of coordination among human resources, resistance of managers and lack of their coordination in management (Abang Ekhsan, 2009). Durai (2010) examined the obstacles of human resource management strategies. He found out the most critical barriers, such as lack of long-term attitude, lack of strategic logic and reasoning, insufficient support by high-level managers, resistance of workers' unions, fear of failure, flexibility of human resource tasks and duties and lack of measurement techniques (Durai, 2010). Haroon et al. (2010) stated that the upcoming issues in

this field could be organizational structure, culture, human resource strategies and merits of human resources. Sánchez et al. (2015) found that knowledge management strategies have a positive effect on company performance, e.g. hiring competent manpower, useful training, cooperation, effective performance evaluation and pay-off system.

The current research reviews and adopts human resource strategies and uses AHP and SWOT analysis techniques in a case study (Sport Venues Development Company). The output of this study can be used as a model for evaluating other project-based construction organizations. The main goals of this research are as follows: developing human resource management strategies for an organization in the construction industry, determining the importance of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the organization, prioritizing strategies and selecting the most effective strategy for the organization and analyzing the internal and external environments of the construction organization with the SWOT technique. The research questions can be mentioned as follows: In the field of human resources, what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the organization under study? What are the appropriate strategies for the human resource system of the organization? What is the best strategy based on the QSPM method?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The human resources section executes basically administrative work in many organizations, plays a servicing role and does not deal with strategic issues at all. Lack of strategic and long-term viewpoint towards human resource management causes negative effects on correct planning for staff hiring, maintaining and turnover in an organization and will lead to decreased efficiency and lack of realization of the mission of the organization. Meanwhile, human resource strategy is recognized as the fundamental principle for improvement of an organization and a necessary matter for increasing effectiveness, efficiency of management activities and development of human resources of organization. The studied organization with many technical capabilities and power is subject to economic sanctions and their consequences, lack of specific and

comprehensive strategies for human resources and involvement with routine jobs. If no specific strategy is defined for this large potential in line with macro-policies and sub-systems of resources, such as pay-off, training and evaluation of performance, it may face certain crises, such as loss of incentives in the long term or even in the short term. The authors consider this weakness as a problem for organizational development and intend to present strategies for improvement of the situation, because without sufficient knowledge of manpower condition and without necessary strategies for human resource planning, one cannot expect changes in the administrative structure of an organization in harmony with development plans and the perspective of the country. Therefore, this study presents a model and proposes proper strategies for human resource management of a project-based construction organization in Iran, such that this organization can achieve its macro-goals by the adoption of proper strategies.

An organization located in Tehran was considered as a case study in the construction industry. This company has been operating in the field of construction and development of sport facilities throughout the country since 2003. The organization is implementing more than 300 projects, such as 15,000-seat stadiums, 5,000-seat stadiums, cycling tracks, 6,000-seat halls and multi-purpose halls. The organization has 315 full-time employees, 109 of whom are experts and managers of the organization and are considered as the statistical population of this study. The well-known Cochran's formula was used as the sampling method. As a result, 85 managers and experts were chosen for the statistical sampling with 95% confidence level.

This survey research is descriptive. Also, the research data was gathered by using two types of questionnaire; conducting interviews with managers and experts of the given organization. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used for testing the reliability of the questionnaire. If this coefficient is more than 0.7, it shows a proper reliability and for the questionnaires of this research, the values 0.741, 0.771, 0.889 and 0.786 are related to environmental factors of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, respectively. This shows that the research instrument has proper reliability. This research is an applied research in terms of its goals, because it seeks to develop applying

knowledge in human resource management and the results can be used in organizational planning and decision-making. After the identification of effective environmental factors, a confirmed 5-scale Likert questionnaire was distributed for scoring the environmental factors. Also, a questionnaire (with standard validity and reliability) was distributed for determining the coefficients of significance of the internal and external factors of the organization. Subsequently, IFE and EFE matrices were formed using variables' analysis and surveying the statistical population of the research and experts. Action was taken toward determining proper strategies based on SWOT matrix. Multi-criterion decision-making and AHP methods were used for determining the weights of the criteria. Finally, the QSPM technique was used for prioritizing the appropriate strategies and selecting the best strategy.

For preparing internal factor evaluation (IFE) matrices, the list of strengths and weaknesses was first specified and a weight coefficient between zero (insignificant) and one (very important) was assigned to each factor (David, 1999). Under such circumstances,

the total assigned weight coefficient must equal one. This weight was calculated by using AHP. After specifying the final weight or significance coefficient of each internal factor, rates from 1 to 4 were given to any of these factors using the collected information and based on the available status of the organization. 1 expresses fundamental weakness, 2 low weakness, 3 strength and 4 very high strength (Zhikang, 2017). For determining the final evaluation rate of the internal factors of any factor, the significance coefficient of any factor was multiplied by its score and the total final rates of any factor were calculated. If their mean is less than 2.5, the subject of research is weak in terms of internal factors, while if the mean grade is more than 2.5, the subject of research is strong. Likewise, EFE matrix was formed (Sarfaraz et al., 2013). In this research, multi-criterion decision-making and AHP methods were used for determining the weights of the criteria. SWOT analysis technique was used for developing strategies and QSPM technique was used for prioritizing the strategies. The research flowchart is presented in Figure 1.

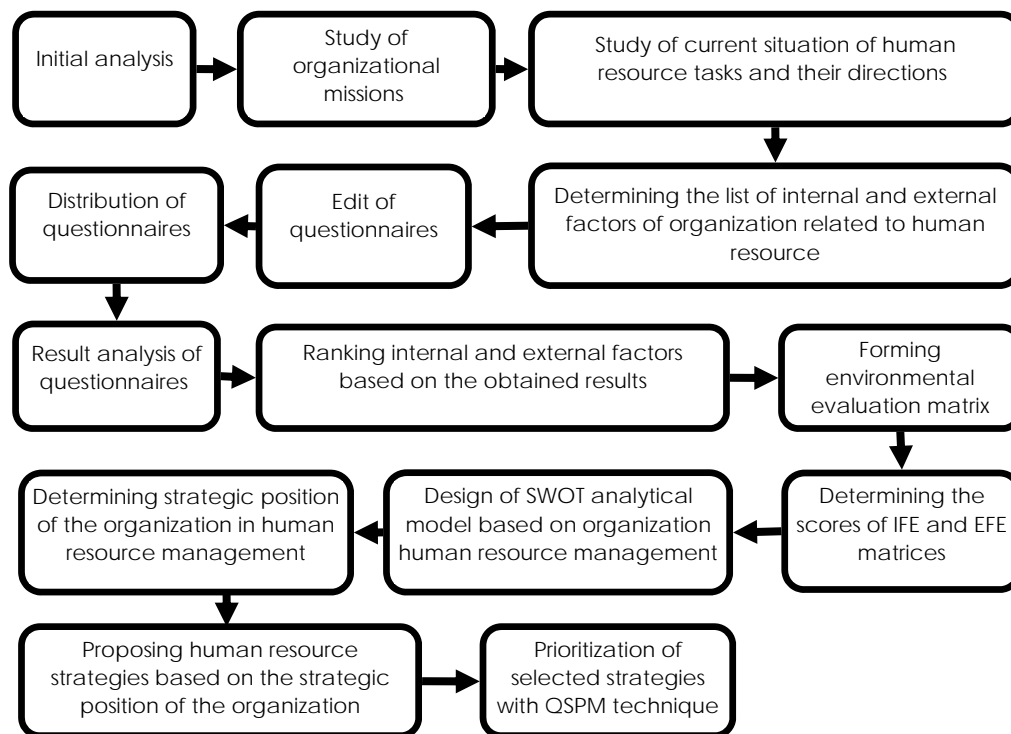


Figure (1): Research flowchart

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Evaluation of Internal and External Factors with IFE and EFE Matrices

After identification and selection of factors as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, environmental factors are identified by the judgments of 9 experts obtained by the questionnaires and pairwise comparisons aggregated by the geometric average method. Meanwhile, the incompatibility rates were calculated by Expert Choice software. Incompatibility rates of the questionnaires were all below 0.1. Therefore,

comparisons were reliable (Bartusková and Kresta, 2015). In this survey, 34 questions based on 5-scale Likert scale were used and distributed to the statistical population of the research including 92 individuals from the experts and senior managers of the studied organization. Then, the internal and external organizational factors of human resource management were scored.

Results obtained by the evaluation of internal and external factors, average rank, significance coefficient and grade assigned by respondents to each of the factors are displayed in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively.

Table 1. The evaluation of internal human resource factors' matrix

Row	Title	Score	Significance Coefficient	Final Grade
s1	Committed manpower in the organization	3.36	0.17	0.58
s2	Proper place and educational facilities	2.96	0.04	0.105
s3	Staff's attention to organizational learning and welcoming effective changes in the organization	3.36	0.05	0.158
s4	Timely payment of salaries and allowances	3.68	0.045	0.164
s5	Offering welfare facilities and loan to staff	2.64	0.018	0.048
s6	Proper reflectivity and participation spirit in staff	3.12	0.086	0.268
s7	Young and educated manpower	3.44	0.045	0.115
s8	The position and importance of the organization	3.49	0.032	0.110
s9	Relationship with universities & educational centers	2.8	0.02	0.056
w1	Numerous changes in top and middle managers	1.01	0.067	0.068
w2	Deficit in experienced, efficient and qualified staff in departments	1.68	0.09	0.15
w3	Lack of a systematic motivation and punishment system based on performance in the organization	0.76	0.052	0.039
w4	Lack of proper solutions and efficient criteria for hiring and selecting required employees	1.17	0.051	0.059
w5	Lack of sufficient experience and knowledge in modern knowledge areas	1.01	0.026	0.026
w6	Lack of attention to required educational plans for the development of the organization and employees' performance	1.01	0.05	0.054
w7	Financial debit in the organization	0.95	0.07	0.067
w8	Deficient execution of staff's assessment process	1.01	0.055	0.06
w9	Staff's negative attitude towards performance of certain managers in fair payment of benefits	0.096	0.035	0.034
Total sum			$\Sigma=1$	2.21

Table 2. The evaluation of external human resource factors' matrix

Row	Title	Score	Significance Coefficient	Final Grade
01	Unemployed graduated and specialist force in the society and the possibility to use them in the organization	3.24	0.11	0.37
02	Young work force	3.52	0.03	0.11
03	High unemployment rate in society and work-seekers' inclination to employment in organizations	3.6	0.04	0.14
04	Emphasis of the state 20-year perspective plan on building human resource capacities	3.1	0.12	0.38
05	Cooperation of the organization with consultants and numerous experienced companies	3.52	0.04	0.13
06	Increase in level of studies in society	3.5	0.046	0.16
07	Government's inclination to development and welfare of the country	3.2	0.051	0.16
08	Educability of society and welcoming education	3.03	0.06	0.18
T1	Laws and regulations in government employment system and the low amount of accessibility level of required specialist forces	1.2	0.061	0.073
T2	Imbalance in scientific quality level of graduates	0.8	0.039	0.0310
T3	Lack of necessary experience and low amount of quality level of scientific degrees of most graduates	1.04	0.039	0.04
T4	Presentation & compilation of organizational chart by respective authorities considering insufficient knowledge of the organization	1.44	0.015	0.021
T5	Variability of state economic conditions and increase in inflation rate and economic recession	0.32	0.233	0.074
T6	Possibility of attracting specialized and efficient forces of the organization by other companies considering low salaries and wages of the organization	1.6	0.041	0.065
T7	Decrease in approved credibility of construction plans	0.8	0.057	0.046
T8	Implementation of pressure and order from outside the organization based on attraction of inefficient human resources or those irrelevant to the organization's needs	1.2	0.018	0.022
Total sum			$\Sigma=1$	2.03

SWOT Model Design

Internal and external matrices were used for concurrent analysis of internal and external factors. These matrices are used for determining the position of the organization (Pickton et al., 1998). Then, in order to form the SWOT matrix, the scores of IFE and EFE matrices were determined after listing all of the internal and external factors that were identified and prioritized in the previous stages. Then, the scores obtained by the internal factors' evaluation matrix are placed in the

vertical dimension and the scores obtained by the external factors' evaluation matrix are placed in the horizontal dimension, so that the junction of each row and column determines the organization position and the related proper strategies. Therefore, this matrix will always lead to 4 classes of SO, WO, WT and ST strategies.

Strategies placed in (SO) are invasive strategies that are yielded from the junction of a number of opportunities (O) and strengths (S) of the organization.

Accordingly, competitive strategies are in ST. They are yielded from the junction of a number of threats (T) and strengths (S) of the organization. Strategies in WO are conservative strategies that are yielded from the junction of a number of opportunities (O) and weaknesses (W) of the organization. Finally, defensive strategies are placed in WT. They are yielded from the junction of certain threats (T) and weaknesses (W) of the organization (Purahmad et al., 2013). In Figure 2, the status of the human resource system of the respective organization is displayed in a four-fold matrix of internal/external factors based on the ranks and coefficients given by a group of managers and experts.

Proposed Strategies for Organization Human Resource Process

As can be seen in the environmental evaluation matrix, the scores of the studied organization with regard to its performance against internal and external environmental factors are respectively 2.21 and 2.03, while the scores of the EFE and IFE matrices which are

related to the organization’s performance against internal and external environmental factors intersect in WT. On the other hand, we know that defensive strategies are used for WT. Strategists in this state are obliged to use defensive strategy for longer survival of the company and creation of efficiency of human resource system. Therefore, the strategies of human resource management must be extracted by using the experts’ opinions and defensive strategies should be proposed as desirable strategies which require small changes in the current trend of the organizational human resource system and will lead to the efficiency of the organizational human resource system without any fundamental changes. Accordingly, after analysis of environmental factors of human resources and the experts’ opinions, considering the policies of the organization in this area, the strategies of human resource management are formed in a SWOT matrix. The determined WT strategies (weaknesses and threats) are displayed in Table 3.

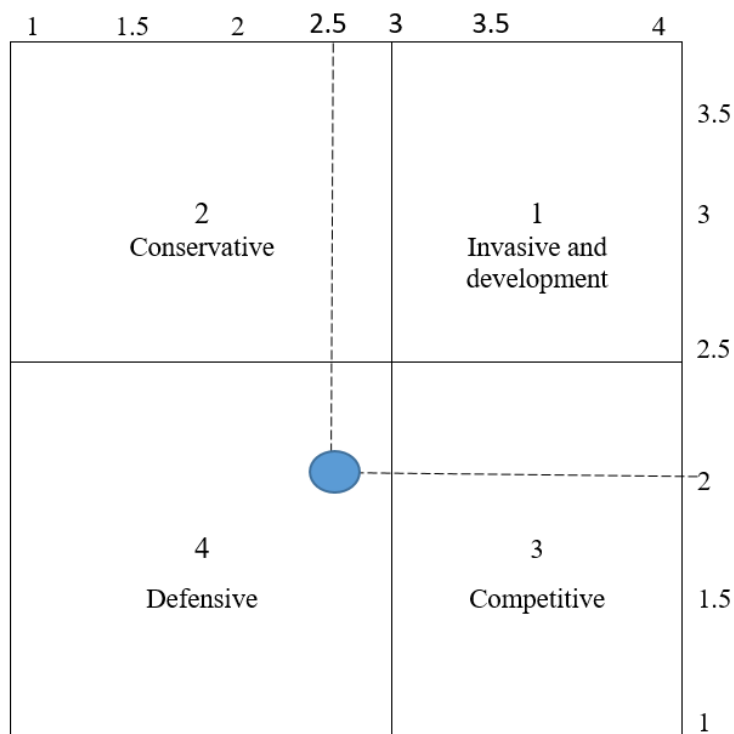


Figure (2): Four-fold human resource internal and external factors’ matrix

Table 3. Final WT strategies

Row	Strategy Description	Threats & Affiliated Points of Weakness
WT1	Proper and fair pay-off system and organizational justice in distribution of rewards for improvement of efficiency	W3-W9 T1-T6
WT2	Design of an educational planning and knowledge development process for improving performance, efficiency, skill of staff and adapting educational system to goals and needs of the organization	W1-W2-W5-W6-W7 T2-T3-T7
WT3	Revision and modification of terms of staff selection and recruitment processes with the goal of maintaining and attracting human resources with high quality	W2-W4 T1-T4-T6-T8
WT4	Concentration on financial saving, optimization of costs in line with achievement of goals of the organization and necessary measures for management of expenses, identification and deletion of non-emergency costs	W7-W9 T5-T6-T7
WT5	Design and execution of a comprehensive competition, assessment and promotion system based on merit and performance of staff with the goal of incentive increase	W2-W8-W9 T1-T3-T6
WT6	Development of culture of cooperation in the organization and improvement of proper relationships with universities, scientific and educational centers and other organizations for constant exchange of information, technology, experiences and scientific and advanced ideas	W2-W4-W5-W8 T1-T3
WT7	Improvement of financial foundation of the organization by increasing assignment of credit, financing planning and technical income	W2-W3-W5-W7 T5-T6-T7
WT8	Systematization of manpower transfer and displacement process and proper design of occupations in terms of type, independence, possibility of growth and work space and creation of a specific occupational path	W2-W4-W9 T2-T4-T6

Prioritization of the Proposed Strategies with QSPM Analysis

This technique is an analytical method which is used for the identification of the best strategy based on the internal and external status of the organization. In other words, QSMP matrix is used in the stage of strategic decision-making and is based on previous analyses. Analytical results of the internal factors' matrix as well as the external factors' matrix obtained by the SWOT technique are considered as the input of quantitative strategic planning analysis.

The following steps are done for forming the above-mentioned matrix (David, 2009).

1. First, based on the previous analyses and the analysis of the SWOT matrix, the internal and external factors which include points of weaknesses and threats together with the weighted scores are transferred to the strategic planning table. Then, all proposed and acceptable defensive strategies are listed in the top row of the planning matrix.
2. Then, the attractiveness score (AS) of each strategy is

determined based on its significance and effect on environmental factors.

3. The scale for attractiveness is described as follows. This score will be finally multiplied by the coefficient related to each factor, so that the total attractiveness score related to each strategy is obtained for each factor.
 1. Without attractiveness, 2. Attractive to some extent, 3. With reasonable attractiveness, 4. Very attractive.
4. Finally, the total attractiveness score related to each strategy is calculated.

Considering the specified position, the studied organization faces major environmental threats and on the other hand, the internal weaknesses of the organization act as major barriers for the organization. In order to develop strategies and prioritize them, after analysis of internal and external factors of human resource duties and the viewpoints of experts in the area of organizational human resource environmental factors considering the position and direction of policies

identified in this area, human resource strategies that include defensive strategies were defined. Also, their attractiveness scores were determined by means of experts' judgments and the strategic planning table (QSPM). Their attractiveness score ranged from 1.58 to 2.6. The more the score, the more the effectiveness. Even though the future cannot be accurately predicted, organizations can prepare themselves and this readiness will lead to competitive advantage. The more uncertainties intensify, the more the competitive advantages of organizations that have sustainable and resistant strategies. Selection of the most important strategy that is valuable for resource assignment is always the main challenge of managers. Therefore, organizations are obliged to prioritize the selected strategies. Table 4 shows the ranks and effects of final strategies, respectively.

The results of this research showed that the organization had different points of weakness and strength and was exposed to threats and opportunities from outside the organization. This organization was not

in a proper status in the human resource process in terms of internal and external factors and was lower than the average level. The total score of internal factors (points of weakness and strength) was 2.21 and the final score of external factors (opportunities and threats) was 2.03, both of which were less than 2.5. Therefore, the results showed that defensive strategies (WT) were a desirable choice for the human resource system. Improvement of the financial situation of the organization by financial planning and increasing income are better technical alternatives and have the most significant effect on organizational success. As it was mentioned before, the organization must apply the determined strategies for achieving its goals and realizing success. The execution of some of these strategies, such as the revision of motivation, punishment and payment systems and the modification of the staff educational system, has associated costs for the organization. Also, the results of this research showed that attempts of efficient planning must take place to improve the financial situation of the organization.

Table 4. Final prioritized strategies

Row	WT Strategies	Total Score in QSPM	Rank
WT7	Improvement of financial foundation of the organization by increasing assignment of credit, financing planning and technical income	2.6	1
WT4	Concentration on financial saving, optimization of costs in line with achievement of goals of the organization and necessary measures for management of expenses, identification and deletion of non-emergency costs	2.33	2
WT2	Design of an educational planning and knowledge development process for improving performance, efficiency, skill of staff and adapting educational system to goals and needs of the organization	1.96	3
WT5	Design and execution of a comprehensive competition, assessment and promotion system based on merit and performance of staff with the goal of incentive increase	1.9	4
WT1	Proper and fair pay-off system and organizational justice in distribution of rewards for improvement of efficiency	1.80	5
WT6	Development of culture of cooperation in the organization and improvement of proper relationships with universities, scientific and educational centers and other organizations for constant exchange of information, technology, experiences and scientific and advanced ideas	1.7	6
WT3	Revision and modification of terms of staff selection and recruitment processes with the goal of maintaining and attracting human resources with high quality	1.68	7
WT8	Systematization of manpower transfer and displacement process and proper design of occupations in terms of type, independence, possibility of growth and work space and creation of a specific occupational path	1.58	8

CONCLUSION

In this study, the desirable human resource management strategies of a project-based construction organization in Iran were obtained by the evaluation of internal and external environmental factors. Consequently, the best strategy for the human resource system of the organization was found by creating SWOT and QSPM matrices. Hence, the most important influential internal and external factors that relate to the area of human resources of the organization were identified with the assistance of strategy selection techniques and viewpoints of experts. Then, significance coefficients and rates were assigned to each

of them by using AHP technique and the experts' and managers' opinions. Based on the results of the IFE and EFE matrices, the position of the organization was specified in a SWOT matrix and the initial strategies of organizational human resources were determined. Finally, the most important and key strategies were defined together with their prioritization for the organizational human resource system. It is suggested that managers should revise their approach to their financial strategies and increase the credit in order to achieve the organization's goals and try to create changes in favor of the organization in terms of the facilities and capabilities of the organization.

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