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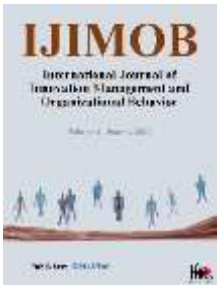

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Formulation of a Model for Employee Empowerment and Job Embeddedness with the Mediating Role of Social Capital in National Sports Federations

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A B S T R A C T

Objective: The objective of this study is to develop a model for employee empowerment and job embeddedness in sports federations, emphasizing the mediating role of social capital.

Methodology: This research is applied in nature and employs a descriptive-correlational methodology. Data were collected through standardized questionnaires, including Sprietzer's Job Empowerment Questionnaire (1995), Putnam's Social Capital Questionnaire (2005), and Edwards and Kilpatrick's Job Embeddedness Questionnaire (1984), all using a 5-point Likert scale. The sample consisted of 269 randomly selected employees from the total population of 901 employees in national sports federations. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through SPSS and LISREL software to test the hypothesized relationships between empowerment, job embeddedness, and social capital.

Findings: The results indicate that the relationship between employee empowerment and job embeddedness is significantly mediated by social capital. The path coefficient for the impact of empowerment on job embeddedness was 0.59, and the mediating role of social capital had a path coefficient of 0.67. The model fit indices, including RMSEA (0.080), GFI (0.91), AGFI (0.97), and NFI (0.91), demonstrate an acceptable fit for the proposed model. The analysis also showed that increasing social capital strengthens the relationship between empowerment and job embeddedness, while decreasing social capital weakens this relationship.

Conclusion: This study concludes that employee empowerment and job embeddedness are closely linked through the mediating influence of social capital. Enhancing social capital in sports federations can significantly improve employee retention and productivity.

Keywords: *Empowerment, Job Embeddedness, Human Resources, Social Capital, Sports Federations*

1 Introduction

In the third millennium, sports organizations need to leverage various factors and tools to enhance their competitive edge and facilitate the achievement of predetermined goals and results. Furthermore, political, economic, geographical, and technological changes have had profound impacts on organizations. The rapid pace of these changes, coupled with increasing global competition, has compelled organizations to rethink their operational methods and reorganize their activities (Jiang et al., 2012). Among these organizations are sports federations, which play a significant role in developed countries and in the domain of professional sports. Sports federations operate in a dynamic and competitive environment where internal and external variables are constantly changing, making it difficult to predict these changes. On the other hand, sports organizations invest substantial time and resources in strategy formulation and execution to achieve long-term goals and vision, and to raise their nation's flag in international events, thus enhancing national pride (Nazari et al., 2017).

Today's world is continuously evolving, leading to instability in plans, programs, structures, and organizations. The only framework of thought that can be effective in designing and advancing an organization's goals is strategic thinking. Every organization that defines its long-term goals based on visions and aspirations is a multifaceted phenomenon involving complex natural, human, and social dimensions (Rezaei et al., 2021). Sports organizations and federations are no exception and often face more dynamic and turbulent environments, encountering greater challenges in decision-making. In the third millennium, sports organizations, as the key managers of sports in every country, must evolve into strategy-oriented organizations, like institutions in other social and economic sectors, to survive and succeed in national and international competitions. The development of the sports industry in any country is a critical factor in economic, social, and cultural development, and strategic development programs provide the foundation for achieving these objectives. Strategic planning encompasses theoretical foundations, methods, activities, and actions aimed at development through environmental analysis, preparation, implementation, and evaluation of plans based on the current situation and the desired future state (Nazari et al., 2017).

Organizations must consider how to ensure employee loyalty and engagement, as employee participation is crucial to business success. Therefore, organizations must thoroughly understand their employees, as they are the most important agents of change and can create competitive advantage and innovation for the organization (Ruck et al., 2017).

According to Mitchell et al. (2001), "job embeddedness" represents the broad accumulation of influences on employee retention and comprises a combination of forces that prevent an individual from leaving their job (Mitchell et al., 2001; Yao et al., 2004). Job embeddedness reflects both contextual and perceptual forces, such as marital status, community involvement, and job status (Crossley et al., 2007), which tie individuals to their workplace, people, and tasks. Job embeddedness is also understood as the extent to which employees become enmeshed in a larger social system, influenced by numerous external (or contextual) forces, including links, fit, and sacrifice, within the organization and the community (Lee et al., 2014). Job embeddedness emphasizes the role of non-emotional, non-attitudinal, and external factors in understanding employees' connection to their organizations. In simpler terms, research on job embeddedness suggests that both on-the-job and off-the-job forces can bind individuals to their work (Crossley et al., 2007).

Mitchell et al. (2001) argue that job embeddedness represents the broad accumulation of influences on employee retention. Two related theories that aid in understanding job embeddedness are the sticky objects theory and field theory. Sticky objects theory posits that employees become embedded in their context, making separation difficult (Mitchell et al., 2001). They become part of their surrounding environment. Field theory also supports the idea that individuals perceive a life space where various aspects of their lives are interconnected. These connections can be few or many, distant or close. Metaphorically, job embeddedness is like a net in which an individual becomes trapped (Mitchell et al., 2001). Mitchell et al. (2001) identify three critical aspects of job embeddedness: the extent to which people are connected to other people or activities; the extent to which jobs and communities align with other aspects of life; and how easily connections can be broken, i.e., what one loses when leaving the organization, especially if physically relocating to another city or home (Mitchell et al., 2001).

In today's competitive world, human capital is a key tool for organizational transformation and survival, as well as achieving the desired goals and missions. Empowering employees is one of the effective techniques for increasing

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productivity and optimizing the use of individual and group capabilities in line with organizational objectives. Human resources are now considered even more important than new technology, financial resources, and material resources (Yang, 2017).

Human resource empowerment is one of the subfields of human resource management. Strategic human resource empowerment should be explored within the literature on strategic human resource management. Therefore, before addressing strategic human resource empowerment, the concepts of strategic management and strategic human resource management will be discussed (Hartline et al., 2018).

Almasi (2019) demonstrated in his research that the analysis of social capital impacts job engagement, and improving social capital, in turn, creates the conditions for enhancing employee job engagement (Almasi, 2019). Social capital, like other forms of capital, provides a suitable foundation for access to organizational opportunities and goals, and is considered one of the critical resources for organizational and social success. In the modern era, managers rely more on social capital than on physical capital for development. Social capital encompasses the sum of potential and actual resources embedded in the network of relationships between individuals (Berggren, 2009).

One of the benefits of social capital is that it fosters increased interaction, trust, intimacy, and cooperation among individuals. If this is applied at the organizational level, it becomes clear that increased trust, interaction, and intimacy in the organization lead to greater employee willingness to participate in organizational tasks (Rezaei et al., 2021; Taslimi et al., 2006). Additionally, the results of Davoodi et al. (2022) on the impact of social capital on employee empowerment showed that considering social capital leads to the development of empowerment in the organization (Davoodi et al., 2022).

Currently, increasing productivity and the efficient use of available resources in sports federations is no longer an option but a necessity. Sports federation managers, regardless of their mission, objectives, or vision, must ultimately operate in a national or international arena, and they are accountable to athletes, stakeholders, clients, and the public. Consequently, assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of their performance is a crucial strategic process and a determining factor in achieving sports development plans. To this end, it is necessary to consider various environmental and organizational factors that the country's sports federations are engaged with, and to provide mechanisms for enhancing employee empowerment and job embeddedness. Accordingly, the first step is to identify the indicators and components among the employees, examine the current status of these components, and ultimately propose a model for employee empowerment and job embeddedness in the country's sports federations, with an emphasis on the role of social capital. This leads to the fundamental question: What model can be proposed for employee empowerment and job embeddedness in the country's sports federations, with an emphasis on the role of social capital? Throughout his career, the researcher has been concerned with whether it is possible to educate employees in sports federations about developing employee empowerment and job embeddedness, and whether they possess sufficient information on the levels of employee empowerment and job embeddedness. To find answers to these questions, the researcher seeks deeper insights into the dimensions, components, and indicators of employee empowerment and job embeddedness in the country's sports federations, with an emphasis on the role of social capital.

2 Methods and Materials

This research is applied in terms of its objective and descriptive-correlational in terms of its methodology. The goal is to formulate a model for employee empowerment and job embeddedness with the mediating role of social capital in the country's sports federations. Thus, in terms of data collection, the research method employed was a survey. The statistical population of this study includes all employees of the country's sports federations, totaling 901 individuals after a thorough evaluation. The sampling method was stratified random sampling, resulting in a sample size of 269. For data collection, standardized questionnaires were used, including Sprietzer's (1995) Job Empowerment Questionnaire with 12 questions (Davoodi et al., 2022), Putnam's (2005) Social Capital Questionnaire with 28 questions using a 5-point Likert scale (Kiani & Nazari, 2021), and Edwards and Kilpatrick's (1984) Job Embeddedness Questionnaire with 20 questions (Yao et al., 2004). Data analysis was performed using SPSS and LISREL software, with structural equation modeling tests.

3 Findings and Results

Based on the collected data, 55.8% of respondents were male, while 44.2% were female. Additionally, 4.5% of respondents were in the age group of 41 to 50 years (the least frequent group), and 50.9% were in the age group of 21 to

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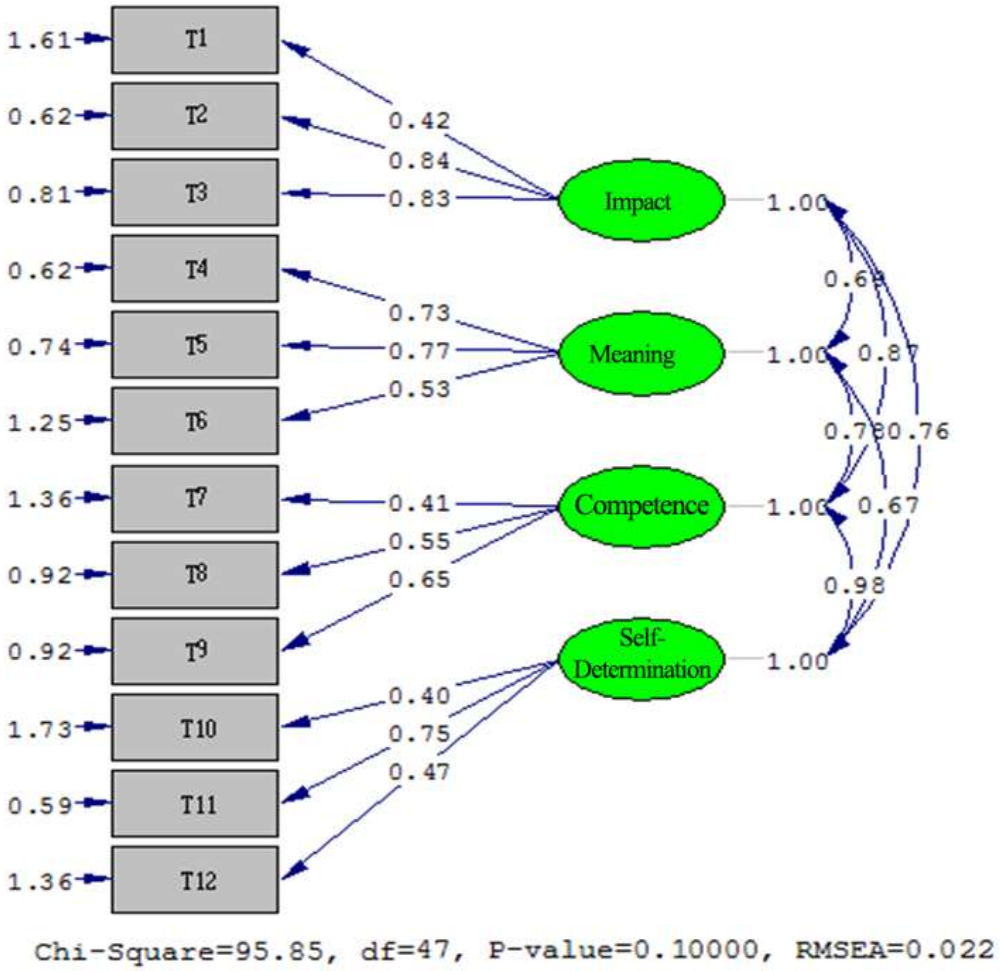
30 years (the most frequent group). Furthermore, 5.9% of respondents had a doctoral degree (the least frequent), while 66.5% held a bachelor's degree (the most frequent). Regarding work experience, 22.3% of respondents had less than 10 years of experience, while 43.5% had 10 to 20 years of experience.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is a comprehensive approach to testing hypotheses about the relationships between observed and latent variables. It is sometimes referred to as covariance structure analysis, causal modeling, or LISREL, but the dominant term today is Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). SEM is one of the most powerful and appropriate methods for analysis in behavioral and social sciences research, as these topics often involve multiple variables that cannot be solved using bivariate methods (where one independent variable is considered with one dependent variable at a time).

Figure 1

Measurement Model of the Empowerment Variable



First model includes all dimensions of the empowerment variable. The numbers on the arrows indicate the factor loadings of the variables and indicators, reflecting the contribution of each. The model fit indices, as shown in Figure 1, suggest that the measurement model for the dimensions of the empowerment variable is appropriate, with an RMSEA value of 0.022, which is below the threshold of 0.09, indicating an acceptable average squared error. Additionally, the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio is less than 3. The values for the GFI, AGFI, and NFI indices are 0.91, 0.95, and 0.99, respectively, all indicating a good fit.

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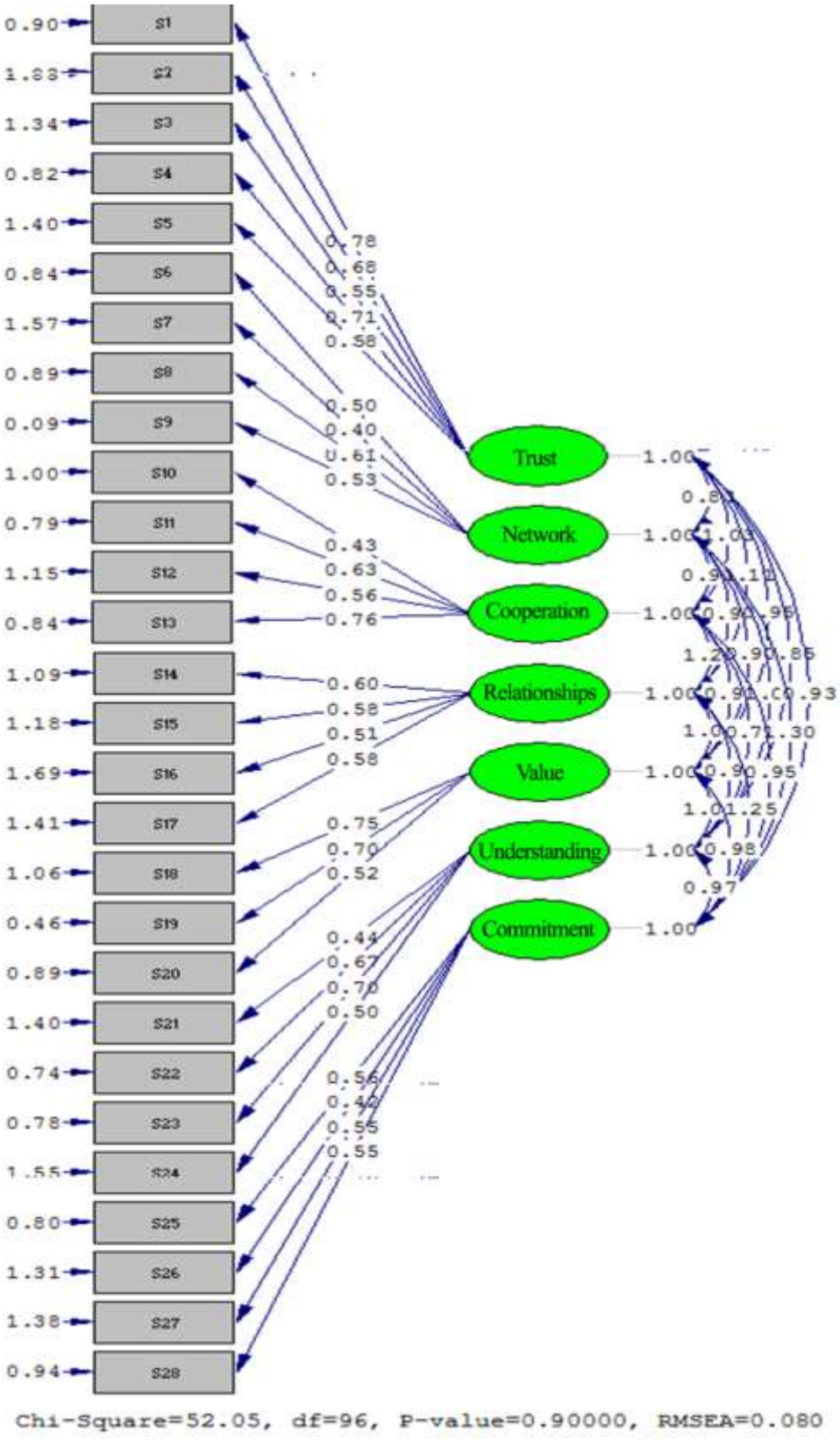
Figure 2

Measurement Model of the Social Capital Variable



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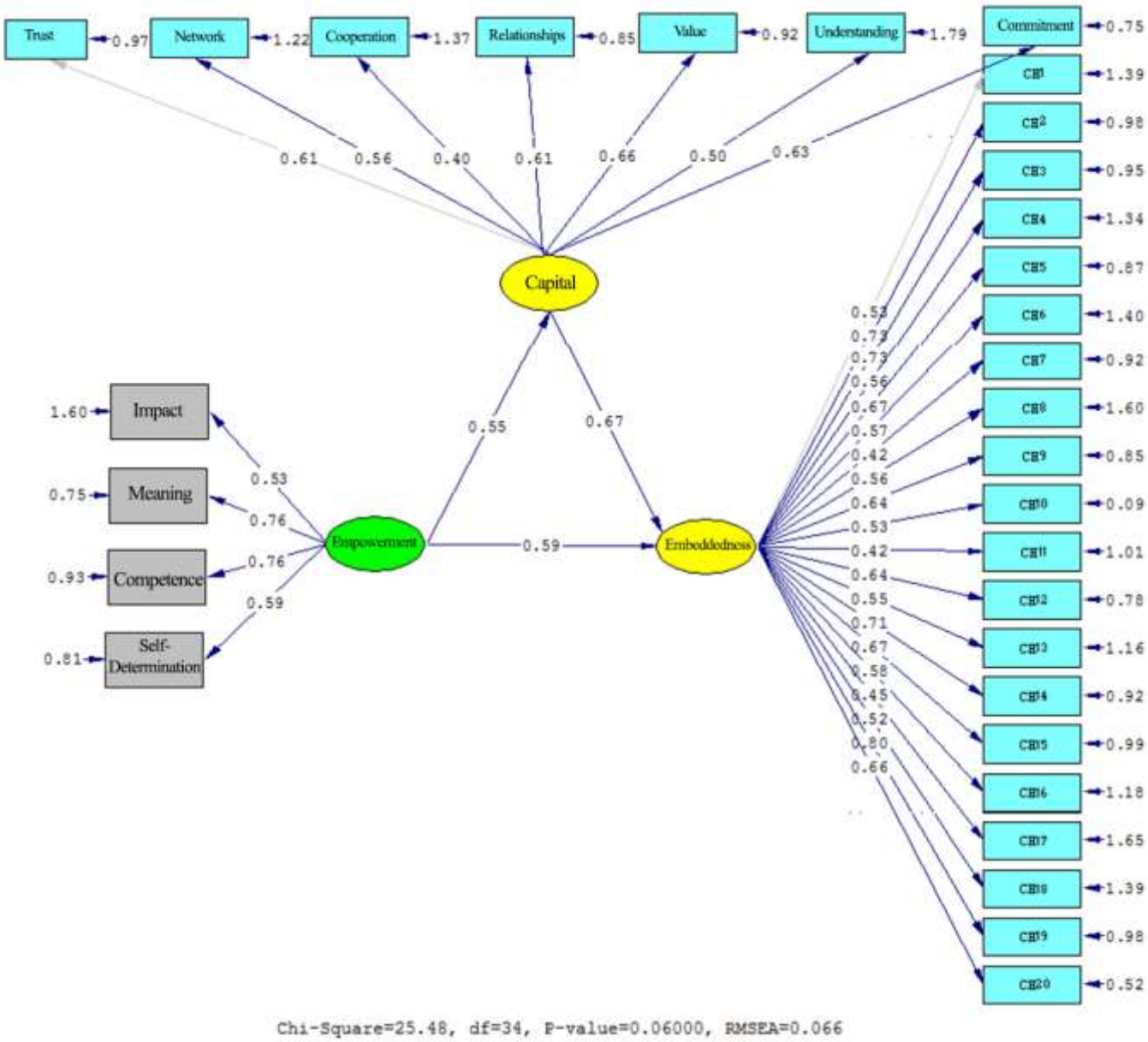
Next model includes all dimensions of the social capital variable. The numbers on the arrows indicate the factor loadings of the variables and indicators, reflecting the contribution of each. The model fit indices, as shown in Figure 2, indicate that the measurement model for the dimensions of the social capital variable is appropriate, with an RMSEA value of 0.080, which is below the threshold of 0.09, indicating an acceptable average squared error. Additionally, the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio is less than 3. The values for the GFI, AGFI, and NFI indices are 0.91, 0.97, and 0.91, respectively, all indicating a good fit.

Figure 3

Final Structural Model



As shown in Figure 3, the path coefficient for the effect of the empowerment variable on job embeddedness in human resources is calculated at 59%. The t-value for this parameter is estimated at 8.23. Additionally, the path coefficient for the mediating effect of social capital on job embeddedness in human resources is calculated at 67%, with a t-value of 10.26. Based on the path analysis of this research, it can be concluded that for the job embeddedness variable in human resources, empowerment and social capital account for 0.40% of the variance in this variable, with standardized beta coefficients of 0.59 and 0.67, respectively. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected with

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99% confidence, and given the significance and positive direction of this coefficient, it can be concluded that empowerment has a significant effect on job embeddedness in human resources in the country's sports federations, emphasizing the role of social capital. This finding indicates that the relationship between the two variables—empowerment and job embeddedness in human resources—is mediated by social capital. If social capital increases, this effect becomes stronger, and if social capital weakens, this relationship naturally diminishes. This conclusion is based on the significance and directionality of the effect of social capital.

As shown in Figure 3, the research results indicate that all relationships between the research constructs are valid. Additionally, the fit indices in Table 1 show that the model has a good fit.

Table 1

Results of the Fit for the Main Research Question

Index	Obtained Values	Acceptable Range	Result
Chi-square to degrees of freedom (X^2/df)	0.74	Less than 3	Good fit
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0.06	Less than 1	Good fit
Root mean square residual (RMR)	0.005	Close to zero	Good fit
Normed fit index (NFI)	0.90	Above 0.9	Good fit
Non-normed fit index (NNFI)	0.94	Above 0.9	Good fit
Comparative fit index (CFI)	0.93	Above 0.9	Good fit
Incremental fit index (IFI)	0.93	Above 0.9	Good fit
Relative fit index (RFI)	0.91	Above 0.9	Good fit
Goodness of fit index (GFI)	0.92	Above 0.9	Good fit
Adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI)	0.91	Above 0.9	Good fit

Considering the results, the fit indices in the measurement models of the confirmatory factor analysis tools suggest that the chi-square values in all measurement models are significant at the 5% error level. Additionally, the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio in all measurement models, based on the set criteria, indicates a good fit for the conceptual models. The RMSEA values in all measurement models fall within the acceptable range, indicating acceptable error levels in the measurement models. The values for the CFI, GFI, AGFI, NFI, and NNFI indices in all measurement models also meet the criteria, demonstrating a good fit for the measurement models. Therefore, based on the results of the measurement models, it can be concluded that all the research tools have an appropriate and acceptable fit.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

Empowerment is one of the most promising concepts in the world of work, which has been relatively neglected but is now gaining attention. Despite extensive discussions about the benefits of empowerment and the factors influencing it, there remains a scarcity of research on the subject. Empowerment allows managers to leverage the knowledge, skills, and experience of all members of the organization, but unfortunately, there are few managers and groups that understand how to foster an empowerment culture (Davoodi et al., 2022; Freez & Barney, 2017; Kanher & Kango, 2018). An effective organization is one that can manage ambiguities, be flexible, customer-focused, value-oriented, and foster a learning structure while recognizing the primary scope of work and high levels of employee empowerment. Experts define organizational effectiveness as the degree and extent of goal attainment (Taslimi et al., 2006). Understanding an organization's goals is one of the first steps in assessing organizational effectiveness. It is essential that the effectiveness of sports federations is measured based on goal achievement, so that the results can be used for future planning, ensuring that programs are structured to better meet specified objectives. The approach used in this research is the "goal achievement approach" (Davoodi et al., 2022).

Employees, even when alternative jobs are available, will stay with their organization if they are satisfied with their job and committed to the organization; otherwise, they will leave (Mitchell et al., 2001). The concept developed to answer the question, "Why do employees stay?" is called "job embeddedness." According to Mitchell and colleagues (2001), job embeddedness represents the broad accumulation of influences on an employee's decision to stay and consists of forces that prevent a person from leaving their job (Mitchell et al., 2001; Yao et al., 2004). Job embeddedness encompasses contextual and perceptual

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factors, such as marital status, community involvement, and job status (Crossley, Bennett, Jex, & Burnfield, 2007), which tie individuals to the workplace, people, and tasks. Furthermore, job embeddedness represents the extent to which employees become trapped within a larger social system, influenced by numerous external forces (referred to as links, fit, and sacrifice) in the organization and community (Lee et al., 2014). Job embeddedness emphasizes the role of non-emotional and non-attitudinal factors, as well as external job-related forces, in understanding employees' connection to their organizations (Davoodi et al., 2022). In simpler terms, research on job embeddedness shows that both job-related and external forces can bind individuals to their jobs.

One way to assess productivity is by examining the indicators and components associated with the organization. In this study, to calculate the productivity of sports federations, the statutes and specified indicators in the championship dimension were considered, alongside organizational resources, including financial, material, and human resources, to evaluate the productivity of Iran's Olympic federations in the championship dimension. The quality and empowerment of human resources are the most important factors in an organization's survival and growth. Empowered human resources create empowered organizations. Therefore, having capable and efficient human resources, considered the foundation of national wealth and vital assets of an organization, brings numerous benefits to organizations, companies, and businesses. The greater the amount of social capital in a society, the higher the cooperation and coordination among individuals and groups, the better the flow of information, the lower the transaction costs, the more effectively economic resources are utilized, and the faster the society advances and develops. Many development programs in countries may not achieve their desired outcomes without considering social capital. Therefore, special attention should be paid to social capital in the formulation and implementation of development programs.

The findings of this study showed that the relationship between the two variables of empowerment and job embeddedness in human resources is explained by the variable of social capital. If social capital increases, this effect becomes stronger, and if social capital weakens, the relationship naturally becomes weaker. This is inferred from the significance and positive directionality of the effect of social capital. The results of this research align with the prior findings (Almeida et al., 2020; Dargahi et al., 2022; Davoodi et al., 2022; de Jong et al., 2018; Freez & Barney, 2017; Kiani & Nazari, 2021; Rezaei et al., 2021).

Conducting research that evaluates the performance of sports federations provides a favorable basis for strategic planning in sports management, as gathering information on the productivity of sports federations creates experiential insights into the short-term and long-term activities of these federations. Based on the results obtained, it is recommended to utilize the human resources within the organization to identify and document existing processes for improvement. Additional financial resources should be allocated to the championship dimension and the empowerment of the staff in the country's sports federations, and federations should increase their collaboration with employees. Furthermore, coaches and specialized experts in talent identification should receive training, and technical specialists should be employed within the federations.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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