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Identifying the Components of Artificial Intelligence–Based Organizational Behavior in Iranian Sports Federations from the Perspective of Psychological Capital

Saeedeh. Saki[1], Mohammad. Nikravan[1*], Zohreh. Rezaei[1], Reza. Saboonchi[1]

[1] Department of Physical Education, Bo.C., Islamic Azad University, Borujerd, Iran

*** Corresponding author email address**: m.nikravan@iau.ac.ir

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A B S T R A C T

Objective: This study aimed to identify and conceptualize the components of artificial intelligence–based organizational behavior in Iranian sports federations from the perspective of psychological capital.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative exploratory study was conducted among experts in sports management, organizational behavior, psychological capital, artificial intelligence, human resource management, and industrial and organizational psychology. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling, and data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved after 18 semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 45–75 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed using MAXQDA through open, axial, and selective coding. Trustworthiness was enhanced through peer review, participant checking, reflective note-taking, systematic documentation of the analytical process, and continuous comparison of emerging categories with the original interview data.

Findings: Analysis of the interviews generated 341 initial codes, which were reduced to 82 open codes after eliminating duplication and merging conceptually similar items. These codes were organized into 21 subcategories and six overarching dimensions: psychological capital capacities, AI readiness and intelligent work competencies, adaptive and innovative organizational behavior, intelligent leadership and human resource management, organizational and technological enabling conditions, and individual and organizational outcomes. The central category emerging from the analysis was the development of psychologically empowered intelligent organizational behavior through the integration of psychological capital and artificial intelligence. The findings indicated that self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and realistic optimism provide the psychological foundation for constructive engagement with AI, while AI literacy, continuous technological learning, data competence, supportive leadership, ethical governance, organizational culture, technological infrastructure, and structural flexibility

facilitate the translation of these capacities into adaptive, innovative, collaborative, and performance-enhancing organizational behavior.

Conclusion: Artificial intelligence–based organizational behavior in Iranian sports federations is a multidimensional, human-centered phenomenon in which psychological capital interacts with technological competencies, leadership practices, organizational conditions, and ethical governance to shape employee adaptation, innovation, engagement, decision quality, performance, and organizational agility.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Organizational Behavior, Psychological Capital, Sports Federations, Intelligent Leadership, Organizational Innovation*

1 Introduction

Rapid advances in artificial intelligence have transformed the nature of work, managerial decision-making, employee–technology interaction, and organizational adaptation across contemporary institutions. Artificial intelligence is increasingly embedded in data analysis, performance monitoring, human resource management, communication, forecasting, decision support, and knowledge-management systems, thereby altering not only how organizations perform tasks but also how employees interpret their roles and respond behaviorally to technological change. In algorithm-driven workplaces, artificial intelligence may function as a significant job resource when employees possess sufficient psychological resources to engage with it constructively, especially because psychological capital can strengthen innovative responses to technologically mediated work environments (Liu et al., 2026). At the same time, the increasing digitalization of organizations has generated new forms of uncertainty, job insecurity, cognitive burden, and technological strain, making the psychological capacities of employees increasingly important for organizational effectiveness and wellbeing (Bhukya, 2026; Lathabhavan & Bharadwaja, 2026). Consequently, understanding organizational behavior in the artificial intelligence era requires an integrated perspective in which technological transformation is examined together with human psychological resources, behavioral adaptation, leadership, organizational culture, and institutional context.

Organizational behavior refers broadly to the attitudes, perceptions, emotions, motivations, interactions, and behaviors through which individuals and groups function within organizational systems. Contemporary perspectives increasingly emphasize that organizational behavior cannot be explained solely through formal structures or job requirements because employee outcomes depend on combinations of individual psychological resources, social relationships, organizational values, leadership processes, and environmental demands. Theoretical developments in organizational analysis have therefore moved toward more integrative explanations capable of accounting for intangible resources and dynamic organizational conditions (Behl et al., 2022; Jahagirdar, 2022). Research has also demonstrated that constructs such as emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, work engagement, psychological wellbeing, organizational citizenship behavior, and positive emotions contribute meaningfully to how employees behave and perform in complex work environments (Alifuddin & Widodo, 2022; George et al., 2021; Moorthy et al., 2023; Prasad et al., 2024). Such evidence becomes particularly relevant in environments characterized by rapid technological disruption because artificial intelligence changes the informational and relational conditions under which organizational behavior occurs.

One of the most influential positive psychological constructs for explaining employee functioning under uncertainty is psychological capital. Psychological capital represents a developable positive psychological state commonly characterized by self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism. These four resources collectively enable individuals to approach demanding tasks confidently, persevere toward goals, identify alternative pathways when obstacles arise, recover from adversity, and maintain positive expectations regarding future outcomes. In contemporary organizational environments characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, psychological capital has been proposed as an important resource for maintaining employee functioning and psychological wellbeing (Luthans & Broad, 2022). Positive organizational psychology has further positioned psychological capital as a central mechanism linking human strengths with flourishing, leadership, employee wellbeing, and organizational performance (Galanakis, 2026). Similarly, broader models of occupational wellbeing have emphasized the importance of positive psychological resources in promoting both effective performance and sustainable employee functioning (Donaldson & Zyl, 2022).

Psychological capital is especially relevant when employees face organizational change. Technological transformation often requires employees to abandon familiar routines, acquire new competencies, reinterpret professional

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roles, and tolerate uncertainty about future responsibilities. Research suggests that psychological capital can reduce resistance to change and provide employees with the internal resources necessary to respond more constructively to organizational transitions (BozdoĞAn, 2023). The contribution of psychological capital to organizational behavior is also evident in studies showing its relationships with motivation, commitment, engagement, performance, and proactive behavior. Psychological capital has been associated with multidimensional job performance through mechanisms such as intrinsic motivation and goal commitment (Shaheen et al., 2023), while positive emotions and emotional intelligence can strengthen the relationship between psychological capital and work engagement (Shahid et al., 2023). Similarly, psychological capital has been identified as an important mechanism through which transformational leadership facilitates taking-charge behavior and thriving at work (Malik, 2022). These findings suggest that psychological capital may be particularly important for explaining how employees respond behaviorally when artificial intelligence becomes integrated into organizational work processes.

The importance of psychological capital also extends to employee wellbeing and work quality. Evidence from different occupational contexts indicates that stronger psychological resources are associated with better quality of work life, more adaptive emotional experiences, and improved wellbeing (Erden, 2025). Psychological capital may also interact with organizational values and institutional culture to promote employee wellbeing, demonstrating that individual psychological resources are most effective when supported by a compatible organizational context (Bandara et al., 2024). In remote and digitally mediated work environments, optimism, efficacy, resilience, and hope have likewise been identified as crucial resources for coping with uncertainty, maintaining motivation, and sustaining performance (Dholariya, 2025). Furthermore, psychological capital may operate alongside workplace spirituality and other meaning-oriented resources to influence positive employee functioning (Sarkar et al., 2022). Collectively, these studies indicate that psychological capital should not be regarded solely as an individual trait-like resource; rather, it functions through interaction with organizational conditions, leadership, job characteristics, and changing technological environments.

The emergence of artificial intelligence has intensified the need to understand these interactions. AI-supported workplaces can provide employees with greater access to information, faster analytical processes, automated routine tasks, and improved decision support, but they can simultaneously generate anxiety, overload, uncertainty, and concerns regarding occupational relevance. AI anxiety and digital overload have been linked with technostress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced psychological wellbeing, particularly when employees perceive rapid technological change as difficult to control (Bhukya, 2026). Conversely, digital organizational cultures that promote learning and adaptation may buffer the negative effects of employment uncertainty and strengthen positive psychological outcomes (Lathabhavan & Bharadwaja, 2026). Research concerning digital education has similarly shown that positive psychological capital can affect innovative engagement with digital technologies, while perceptions of effort and behavioral intention shape whether individuals actually adopt technology in practice (Sung & Lee, 2025). These findings imply that the behavioral consequences of AI cannot be predicted solely by technological availability; they depend substantially on employees' psychological readiness and their interpretations of technological change.

From this perspective, psychological capital may constitute a key human foundation of artificial intelligence–based organizational behavior. Self-efficacy can influence whether employees believe they are capable of learning and using new AI systems. Hope can help them maintain meaningful goals while identifying alternative ways of accomplishing tasks in redesigned work environments. Resilience can support recovery from technological errors, role disruption, implementation failures, and learning difficulties. Optimism can promote constructive expectations regarding the benefits of intelligent technologies without necessarily eliminating awareness of their limitations. Recent research directly supports this argument by showing that psychological capital can transform artificial intelligence into a job resource capable of promoting innovation in algorithm-driven workplaces (Liu et al., 2026). Broader reviews also indicate that psychological capital is increasingly being examined in relation to entrepreneurial and adaptive behaviors, illustrating its relevance for contexts that require initiative, uncertainty tolerance, and opportunity recognition (Chaibi et al., 2026).

The behavioral effects of psychological capital are also influenced by other individual resources. Emotional intelligence has repeatedly been associated with job performance, work engagement, and positive organizational functioning (Moorthy et al., 2023; Saeed et al., 2021).

Research examining the interaction between emotional intelligence, positive psychological capital, and flourishing suggests that emotionally competent employees may be better able to mobilize psychological resources in demanding work situations (Rodrigues & Silva, 2024). Bibliometric analysis of research on emotional intelligence and psychological capital further demonstrates the expanding scholarly interest in understanding how these resources jointly shape workplace outcomes (Tjimuku & Atiku, 2024). Cultural intelligence is also relevant, particularly in diverse organizations, because it affects how employees interpret social environments and adapt their behavior across cultural contexts (Alifuddin & Widodo, 2022). In service settings, cultural intelligence and psychological capital have jointly been linked to service quality, reinforcing the view that psychological capital interacts with broader adaptive competencies rather than functioning independently (Jiony et al., 2021).

Leadership constitutes another important contextual mechanism. Leadership practices can strengthen or weaken employees' psychological resources and thereby influence their behavior during periods of organizational change. Transformational leadership has been associated with psychological capital and reduced turnover intention, indicating that leaders can contribute to more sustainable employee responses to organizational demands (Gom et al., 2021). Servant leadership has likewise been linked with service excellence through psychological capital as a personal resource (Qamar & Soomro, 2023). In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Leadership 4.0, psychological capital, and high-performance human resource practices have been proposed as interconnected mechanisms for sustaining organizational performance and employee wellbeing (Adekanmbi & Ukpere, 2022). Psychological capital may also spread through leadership processes, although the effectiveness of such transmission can depend on organizational justice and characteristics of leaders (Gojny-Zbierowska, 2024). Therefore, an AI-based organizational environment requires not only technologically competent employees but also leaders who can maintain trust, psychological safety, learning opportunities, and appropriate human oversight.

Organizational citizenship behavior, innovation, and proactive contribution represent further behavioral outcomes relevant to AI-supported organizations. Psychological capital and social capital have been associated with job performance through organizational citizenship behavior, indicating that employees' positive psychological resources can support discretionary behaviors that benefit organizational functioning (Chen & Hu, 2025). Conceptual research has similarly linked intangible organizational assets to citizenship behavior (Jahagirdar, 2022). Innovative behavior is particularly significant because the strategic value of artificial intelligence depends on whether employees use technological capabilities to improve processes, generate ideas, and solve organizational problems. Research in health organizations has demonstrated that innovative employee behavior depends on favorable organizational and psychological conditions (Mutonyi et al., 2021). Workplace behavior during periods of severe disruption has likewise been shown to depend on psychological and contextual resources, emphasizing that adaptive behavior emerges from the interaction between individuals and their environments (Wuttaphan, 2022).

The relationship between psychological capital and performance has therefore become increasingly multidimensional. Psychological capital can influence job performance directly and indirectly through motivational, emotional, social, and behavioral pathways. Research has shown that psychological capital and emotional intelligence contribute to employee performance (Saeed et al., 2021), while mindfulness may improve work performance through emotional intelligence and psychological capital (Long et al., 2025). Machine-learning approaches have also begun to examine predictors of psychological capital, indicating growing methodological interest in understanding the complex factors that shape this resource (Perinelli et al., 2025). These developments suggest that future organizational research should move beyond simple direct relationships and examine the broader systems through which psychological capital interacts with technological environments, behavioral competencies, and institutional conditions.

Such an integrative perspective is especially important in sports organizations. Sports federations are distinctive organizational systems because they combine administrative functions, competitive performance objectives, stakeholder management, national and international governance requirements, media exposure, athlete-related operations, and often complex political and institutional pressures. Leadership, communication, and decision-making in international sports federations are influenced by cultural diversity and cross-cultural management challenges (Kang et al., 2025). Professional competence among federation presidents and senior sports administrators also plays an important role in determining organizational effectiveness

and the capacity to manage complex institutional responsibilities (Khorshidi Paji et al., 2026). Within Iranian sports federations specifically, managerial attitudes toward organizational change have been linked with leadership styles and ethical intelligence, demonstrating the importance of leadership and psychological-organizational factors in shaping responses to transformation (Soleimani et al., 2024). These characteristics make sports federations particularly suitable environments for investigating how artificial intelligence, psychological capital, and organizational behavior intersect.

The successful application of artificial intelligence in sports federations may depend on a broad range of human and organizational capabilities. Technical infrastructure and data availability are necessary, but employees and managers must also possess communication skills, learning orientation, critical thinking, adaptability, and collaborative competence. Research on employability and soft-skill competency frameworks emphasizes the continuing importance of interpersonal, cognitive, and adaptive skills despite increasing technological sophistication (Bisschoff & Massyn, 2024). Likewise, the ability to combine technological intelligence with human judgment is likely to become increasingly important as organizations use AI for performance analysis, administrative support, human resource processes, and strategic decision-making. Organizational effectiveness therefore depends not on replacing human behavior with intelligent systems but on redesigning work so that technological resources and human psychological capabilities reinforce one another.

This issue is especially important because AI implementation can produce both positive and negative behavioral consequences. When employees perceive AI as useful, fair, understandable, and supportive, it may strengthen innovation, decision quality, learning, and organizational agility. When it is experienced as threatening, opaque, excessively controlling, or cognitively demanding, it may increase anxiety, resistance, disengagement, or exhaustion. The direction of these outcomes is likely influenced by psychological capital, leadership, organizational values, digital culture, and perceived fairness. Research on organizational justice indicates that psychological resources operate differently depending on the fairness of the surrounding environment (Gojny-Zbierowska, 2024), while research on workplace wellbeing has similarly emphasized the interaction between personal and organizational resources (Donaldson & Zyl, 2022; Galanakis, 2026). Therefore, the development of AI-based organizational behavior should be conceptualized as a systemic process rather than as a purely technological intervention.

Despite the growing body of literature on psychological capital, employee wellbeing, leadership, innovation, organizational citizenship behavior, emotional intelligence, digital culture, and AI-related work experiences, several important gaps remain. Much of the existing research has examined psychological capital as a predictor, mediator, or moderator of outcomes such as performance, engagement, wellbeing, service quality, innovation, resistance to change, and turnover (Jiony et al., 2021; Qamar & Soomro, 2023; Shaheen et al., 2023; Shahid et al., 2023). Other studies have examined technology-related stress or digital transformation without fully integrating psychological capital into a broader model of organizational behavior (Bhukya, 2026; Sung & Lee, 2025). Moreover, there remains limited qualitative understanding of how experts conceptualize the specific components of organizational behavior emerging from the interaction between artificial intelligence and psychological capital, particularly within sports federations. The institutional characteristics of Iranian sports federations, including their governance structures, leadership patterns, technological readiness, cultural conditions, and human resource characteristics, further limit the direct transferability of models developed in other organizational or national contexts.

Accordingly, there is a need to identify the phenomenon from within the organizational context itself and to determine which psychological, behavioral, technological, managerial, and contextual components experts regard as essential. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for such a purpose because it allows the phenomenon to be explored without imposing a predetermined structure and enables relationships among emerging concepts to be developed from expert knowledge and organizational experience. Such an approach may clarify how psychological capital supports AI readiness, how psychological and technological resources are translated into adaptive and innovative behavior, how leadership and organizational conditions facilitate or inhibit this process, and what outcomes may arise when human and artificial intelligence capabilities are effectively integrated.

Therefore, the aim of the present study was to identify and conceptualize the components of artificial intelligence–based organizational behavior in Iranian sports federations from the perspective of psychological capital.

2 Methods and Materials

This study employed a qualitative exploratory design to identify and conceptualize the components of artificial intelligence–based organizational behavior in Iranian sports federations from the perspective of psychological capital. The qualitative approach was selected because the phenomenon under investigation involves organizational experiences, expert interpretations, behavioral processes, psychological resources, and emerging applications of artificial intelligence that require in-depth exploration within their specific organizational context. Rather than beginning with predetermined variables or fixed relationships, the study sought to derive the relevant components and their interconnections from the knowledge, professional experiences, and interpretations of individuals who possessed substantial expertise in organizational behavior, sports management, psychological capital, artificial intelligence, human resource management, and the administration of sports federations. Accordingly, the study followed an inductive logic in which empirical data obtained from expert interviews formed the principal basis for identifying concepts, developing categories, and constructing the conceptual framework of artificial intelligence–based organizational behavior in Iranian sports federations.

The research setting consisted of selected sports federations in Iran, particularly the Football Federation, Volleyball Federation, and Athletics Federation. These federations were considered suitable organizational contexts because they represent different structural and operational characteristics within Iranian sport, including team and individual sports, different levels of national and international activity, and relatively complex administrative structures. Inclusion of experts familiar with these different organizational settings was intended to provide sufficient diversity of professional perspectives and to enable the emerging conceptual structure to reflect the heterogeneous conditions under which sports federations operate. The study focused specifically on the organizational and managerial environment of sports federations and on the ways in which psychological capital may shape organizational behavior in contexts increasingly influenced by artificial intelligence technologies.

The study population consisted of university professors, researchers, specialists, and senior managers with relevant knowledge and practical experience in organizational behavior, sports management, psychological capital, artificial intelligence, industrial and organizational psychology, human resource management, and sports federation administration. Participants were selected using purposive sampling combined with the snowball technique. At the beginning of the sampling process, individuals with substantial academic or professional expertise in the focal domains were purposefully identified and invited to participate. After each interview, participants were also asked to recommend other experts who possessed relevant knowledge or extensive experience concerning the research topic. This procedure enabled the researcher to progressively identify information-rich participants whose perspectives could contribute to the conceptual development of the study. Eligibility was based on demonstrable academic expertise, professional involvement, managerial experience, or research activity related to at least one of the principal areas of the study, together with sufficient familiarity with organizational processes in sports organizations or the application of artificial intelligence in organizational environments.

Sampling continued concurrently with data collection and preliminary analysis until theoretical saturation was reached. Saturation was defined as the point at which additional interviews no longer produced substantively new concepts, categories, properties, or relationships relevant to the emerging analytical framework. In the present study, saturation was achieved after interviews with 18 experts. Participants represented different areas of specialization, including sports management, organizational behavior, artificial intelligence, industrial and organizational psychology, and human resource management, and possessed approximately 6 to 25 years of relevant academic, managerial, or professional experience. This disciplinary and experiential diversity was considered important because artificial intelligence–based organizational behavior is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be adequately understood solely from a technological, managerial, or psychological perspective. Integrating these perspectives allowed the study to explore how psychological resources such as self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism may interact with AI-related organizational processes, managerial practices, employee behaviors, organizational structures, and the distinctive institutional characteristics of Iranian sports federations.

Participation in the study was voluntary. Before each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the nature of their involvement, the expected interview procedure, the use of the collected information,

confidentiality arrangements, and their right to withdraw from the study or decline to answer any question. Informed consent was obtained before data collection and separate permission was obtained for audio recording. To preserve anonymity, identifying information was removed during transcription and each participant was assigned an identification code. Interview recordings, transcripts, analytical notes, and coding files were stored securely and were accessible only to the research team. Throughout the research process, particular attention was paid to respect for participants, protection of professional confidentiality, accurate representation of their perspectives, and avoidance of any distortion of the data.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with the selected experts. Semi-structured interviewing was considered appropriate because it provided sufficient consistency across interviews while preserving the flexibility required to investigate participants' interpretations, experiences, examples, and professional judgments in greater depth. An interview guide was developed on the basis of the conceptual focus of the study and a review of the relevant theoretical literature concerning organizational behavior, psychological capital, artificial intelligence, human resource management, and sports organization management. The guide was designed to facilitate broad exploration rather than impose predetermined categories on participants. Consequently, the interview questions were open-ended and were accompanied by probing questions whenever clarification, elaboration, examples, or further explanation was required.

The interviews explored participants' perceptions of the principal characteristics of organizational behavior within Iranian sports federations, the psychological resources that enable employees and managers to function effectively in technology-oriented environments, and the organizational implications of incorporating artificial intelligence into managerial and behavioral processes. Participants were encouraged to describe how psychological capital may influence acceptance of technological change, learning, adaptability, innovative behavior, organizational commitment, collaboration, decision-making, resilience in response to change, confidence in dealing with intelligent technologies, and constructive organizational responses to AI-assisted management. The interviews also examined participants' views regarding the opportunities, requirements, challenges, ethical concerns, organizational conditions, managerial mechanisms, and human factors associated with the use of artificial intelligence in sports federations. Particular attention was given to identifying indigenous organizational characteristics that may influence the applicability of AI-based organizational behavior within the institutional and cultural setting of Iranian sports federations.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 75 minutes. With participants' permission, interviews were digitally recorded to ensure that their statements could be captured accurately and analyzed in their original context. The recordings were transcribed verbatim shortly after each interview. Transcripts were reviewed against the audio recordings to minimize transcription errors and to preserve the intended meaning of the participants' statements. The researcher also prepared reflective and analytical notes throughout the interviewing process. These notes included emerging conceptual ideas, observations regarding recurring themes, potentially important relationships among concepts, and reflections concerning possible researcher assumptions. The interview guide remained flexible throughout data collection, and questions were refined when emerging findings indicated that particular issues required deeper investigation. In this manner, data collection and analysis proceeded interactively, allowing insights from earlier interviews to inform subsequent interviews while maintaining consistency with the central research purpose.

The trustworthiness of the qualitative findings was addressed using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement with the interview data, iterative comparison of emerging concepts across participants, peer review, and participant checking. During peer review, the coding structure, categories, and preliminary conceptual model were independently examined by two academic experts familiar with qualitative research and organizational behavior. Their feedback was used to refine the analytical structure, including the merging of three overlapping codes, revision of the labels assigned to two subcategories, and reconsideration of several relationships among categories. These procedures enhanced conceptual clarity and reduced the likelihood that the analytical framework merely reflected an individual interpretation by the researcher.

Participant checking was also undertaken to examine whether the emerging interpretations adequately represented the experiences and views expressed during the interviews. A summary of the extracted codes, subcategories, main categories, and preliminary conceptual structure was provided to five interview participants. They were asked to

evaluate the accuracy and appropriateness of the researcher's interpretations in relation to their own statements and professional understanding. The participants confirmed that the coding and interpretations adequately reflected the content of the interviews, and no substantive revisions to the categories were requested. This procedure provided additional support for the correspondence between the original interview data and the analytical interpretations.

Transferability was addressed through detailed description of the research context, participant characteristics, selection procedures, interview process, and analytical steps. The deliberate inclusion of experts from several professional domains and with different levels and types of occupational experience provided a broad range of perspectives from which the phenomenon could be interpreted. Such contextual and participant diversity allows readers to assess the potential applicability of the findings to other sports federations or comparable organizational environments. Dependability was supported through systematic documentation of the research process. The interview guide, sampling procedures, audio recordings, verbatim transcripts, coding decisions, analytical notes, category-development procedures, and successive versions of the conceptual framework were retained as an audit trail. MAXQDA software was used to organize the qualitative database and systematically document coding decisions and category development.

Confirmability was strengthened by maintaining a clear connection between the empirical material and the final interpretations. Reflective notes were recorded throughout data collection and analysis to identify assumptions and potential sources of researcher bias. The researcher repeatedly returned to the original transcripts when developing or revising codes and categories in order to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts. Peer review and participant checking provided additional safeguards against idiosyncratic interpretation. Furthermore, representative direct quotations from participants were retained during analysis and were used when reporting the findings to demonstrate the empirical basis of the identified concepts and categories. Together, these procedures were intended to establish a transparent analytical process in which the resulting model could be traced to the participants' accounts rather than to unsupported assumptions introduced by the researcher.

The interview data were analyzed qualitatively using an iterative thematic coding process supported by MAXQDA. Analysis began immediately after the first interviews and continued concurrently with data collection so that emerging concepts could inform subsequent interviews and sampling decisions. The analytical procedure moved progressively from detailed examination of individual statements to the development of broader conceptual categories and, ultimately, an integrated conceptual framework. This process involved repeated reading of interview transcripts, constant comparison among participants' accounts, comparison of newly identified concepts with previously coded material, development and refinement of categories, and examination of relationships among the categories. The analytical process was conducted in three interrelated stages consisting of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

During open coding, each verbatim transcript was examined line by line and meaningful units of text relating to organizational behavior, psychological capital, artificial intelligence, organizational structures, employee responses, managerial processes, enabling conditions, barriers, and anticipated organizational outcomes were identified. Descriptive and conceptual codes were assigned as closely as possible to the meaning conveyed by the participants. Particular attention was paid to statements concerning the role of psychological capacities in responding to intelligent technologies, the organizational conditions needed for AI adoption, employee and managerial behavioral patterns, technological readiness, resistance or adaptability to change, learning and innovation, organizational trust, leadership practices, and perceived consequences of integrating artificial intelligence into sports federation management. A total of 341 initial codes were generated from the 18 interviews. The initial coding set was subsequently reviewed through repeated comparison across transcripts. Duplicate codes were removed, conceptually overlapping codes were merged, and codes expressing substantially similar meanings were consolidated. This process resulted in 82 distinct open codes that represented the principal concepts identified in the interview data.

During axial coding, the 82 open codes were systematically compared and organized according to conceptual similarity, differences, interrelationships, and their explanatory relevance to the research phenomenon. Codes addressing related meanings were grouped into higher-order subcategories. The researcher repeatedly moved between the coded excerpts, emerging categories, reflective notes, and entire interview transcripts to ensure that the formation of categories remained grounded in the original evidence. Through this process, 21 subcategories

were identified. Analytical attention was also directed toward the relationships among these subcategories, including organizational conditions that facilitate or hinder AI-based organizational behavior, psychological capacities that enable constructive responses to technological transformation, managerial and behavioral mechanisms through which artificial intelligence may influence organizational functioning, contextual characteristics of Iranian sports federations, and individual and organizational consequences associated with the interaction between psychological capital and artificial intelligence.

Selective coding was subsequently used to integrate the identified subcategories into broader conceptual dimensions and to determine the central phenomenon capable of explaining the relationships among the categories. At this stage, the researcher examined how the main categories converged around the study's central concern: the emergence of organizational behavior shaped simultaneously by human psychological capacities and the increasing use of artificial intelligence in sports federation management. Relationships among the categories were continually checked against the interview evidence to ensure that the resulting conceptual structure was coherent, analytically defensible, and sufficiently comprehensive. The central category that emerged from this analytical process represented the development of intelligent organizational behavior through the integration of psychological capital and artificial intelligence within the organizational context of Iranian sports federations. The final analytical framework therefore reflected not merely a collection of independent themes, but an integrated representation of the psychological, behavioral, technological, managerial, and contextual components identified by the participating experts.

Throughout the analytical process, constant comparison was used to refine conceptual boundaries and identify similarities and differences across participants and professional backgrounds. New codes were compared with existing codes, each subcategory was compared with other subcategories, and the emerging conceptual framework was repeatedly examined against the complete interview dataset. Attention was also given to deviant or contrasting views so that the final framework would not reflect only the most frequently expressed perspectives. Coding continued until additional analysis produced no substantively new properties or conceptual relationships and theoretical saturation was established. MAXQDA was used to organize transcripts, retrieve coded segments, compare categories, document revisions, and maintain an auditable record of the analytical process. The combination of systematic coding, constant comparison, peer review, participant checking, reflective documentation, and repeated return to the original transcripts provided the methodological basis for identifying the components of artificial intelligence–based organizational behavior in Iranian sports federations from the perspective of psychological capital.

3 Findings and Results

The qualitative findings were derived from 18 semi-structured interviews conducted with experts possessing academic, managerial, and professional experience relevant to sports management, organizational behavior, psychological capital, artificial intelligence, human resource management, and industrial and organizational psychology. Examination of participants' demographic and professional characteristics indicated that the expert panel represented a heterogeneous combination of academic and executive perspectives. Of the 18 participants, 13 were male and 5 were female. Participants' ages ranged from 34 to 58 years, reflecting the deliberate inclusion of both mid-career and senior experts. Their relevant professional experience ranged from 6 to 25 years, with the majority having more than 10 years of experience in academic, managerial, technological, psychological, or sports-related organizational settings. In terms of professional specialization, 5 participants had their principal expertise in sports management, 4 in organizational behavior and human resource management, 3 in artificial intelligence and intelligent organizational systems, 3 in industrial and organizational psychology and psychological capital, and 3 were senior managers or experienced administrators with direct involvement in sports federations. Several participants possessed interdisciplinary experience that extended beyond their principal field of specialization. The participants also represented different organizational and institutional backgrounds, including universities, sports federations, executive sports organizations, and professional environments associated with organizational technology and human resource management. This diversity was particularly important because the phenomenon of artificial intelligence–based organizational behavior was viewed by the participants as an interdisciplinary phenomenon positioned at the intersection of human psychological capacities, organizational systems, technological transformation, managerial processes, and the institutional characteristics of sports federations.

The interviews generated a substantial body of qualitative data. Initial line-by-line analysis of the 18 interview transcripts resulted in 341 preliminary codes. Following continuous comparison, elimination of duplicate expressions, and consolidation of codes with conceptually similar meanings, 82 distinct open codes remained. These codes were subsequently organized into 21 subcategories and then integrated into six overarching dimensions. The six dimensions reflected the principal domains through which the experts conceptualized artificial intelligence–based organizational behavior from the perspective of psychological capital in Iranian sports federations: psychological capital capacities, AI readiness and intelligent work competencies, adaptive and innovative organizational behavior, intelligent leadership and human resource management, organizational and technological enabling conditions, and individual and organizational outcomes. The resulting structure demonstrated that AI-based organizational behavior was not understood merely as the use of intelligent technologies in administrative activities. Rather, it emerged as a multidimensional organizational phenomenon in which employees' psychological capacities, technological competencies, leadership practices, organizational culture, structural conditions, and AI-supported decision processes interacted to shape employee behavior and organizational performance.

Table 1

Main Dimensions and Subcategories of Artificial Intelligence–Based Organizational Behavior from the Perspective of Psychological Capital

Main dimension	Subcategories	Number of open codes	Analytical meaning
Psychological capital capacities	AI-related self-efficacy; future-oriented hope; resilience to technological change; realistic optimism toward AI	16	Psychological resources enabling employees to confidently, persistently, and constructively interact with technological change
AI readiness and intelligent work competencies	AI literacy and understanding; technological learning orientation; data-driven decision competence	13	Individual competencies required to understand, learn, evaluate, and effectively utilize intelligent technologies
Adaptive and innovative organizational behavior	adaptability and behavioral flexibility; innovative and proactive behavior; organizational learning and knowledge sharing; constructive collaboration	15	Behavioral responses through which employees convert psychological and technological resources into constructive workplace action
Intelligent leadership and human resource management	psychologically empowering leadership; AI-supported human resource practices; participative and transparent decision-making	14	Managerial mechanisms that integrate human psychological capabilities with AI-assisted organizational processes
Organizational and technological enabling conditions	supportive organizational culture; technological infrastructure and data quality; ethical governance and trust; structural flexibility	13	Contextual conditions required for safe, accepted, and sustainable development of AI-based organizational behavior
Individual and organizational outcomes	employee engagement and commitment; improved decision quality and performance; organizational agility and innovation	11	Behavioral and organizational consequences resulting from alignment among psychological capital, AI, leadership, and organizational context
Total	21 subcategories	82 open codes	Integrated qualitative structure of AI-based organizational behavior

As shown in Table 1, the analysis produced six main dimensions comprising 21 subcategories and 82 finalized open codes. The dimension of psychological capital capacities contained 16 open codes and constituted one of the most conceptually central parts of the emerging framework. Participants consistently emphasized that technological capability alone could not produce intelligent organizational behavior unless employees possessed adequate psychological resources for dealing with uncertainty, learning demands, changing occupational roles, and the perceived risks associated with artificial intelligence. AI-related self-efficacy referred to employees' confidence in their ability to learn, understand, and work effectively with AI-supported tools and processes. Future-oriented hope reflected the capacity to establish meaningful occupational goals while developing alternative pathways when technological changes disrupted existing work routines. Resilience to technological change represented the ability to recover from mistakes, uncertainty, unsuccessful technological implementation, or disruptions caused by organizational transformation. Realistic optimism toward AI referred to maintaining positive expectations regarding the potential benefits of artificial intelligence while simultaneously recognizing its limitations and risks.

Consequently, psychological capital emerged not as a peripheral employee characteristic but as an underlying human capacity that facilitated constructive engagement with intelligent organizational environments.

The second dimension, AI readiness and intelligent work competencies, consisted of 13 open codes distributed among AI literacy and understanding, technological learning orientation, and data-driven decision competence. Participants repeatedly distinguished psychological willingness to engage with AI from actual competence in using it. According to the interviews, employees may have positive attitudes toward AI but remain unable to translate those attitudes into effective organizational behavior if they lack sufficient knowledge of AI systems, understanding of data, or capacity to evaluate algorithmically generated information. AI literacy therefore included an elementary understanding of how intelligent systems operate, what they can and cannot accomplish, and how their outputs should be interpreted. Technological learning orientation referred to continuous willingness to acquire new competencies as AI systems and organizational technologies evolve. Data-driven decision competence represented the ability to integrate algorithmic information with professional expertise rather than accepting AI outputs uncritically.

Adaptive and innovative organizational behavior contained 15 open codes and reflected the observable behavioral manifestation of psychological capital and technological readiness. Participants described employees functioning effectively in AI-supported environments as individuals who were behaviorally flexible, willing to experiment, capable of modifying routines, inclined to learn from technological feedback, prepared to share knowledge, and willing to collaborate across functional boundaries. Innovation was frequently interpreted not only as developing completely new ideas but also as redesigning established work processes through more effective combinations of human judgment and AI capabilities. Participants also emphasized proactive behavior, arguing that intelligent organizational behavior requires employees who actively identify opportunities for using AI rather than merely responding to managerial instructions.

The fourth dimension, intelligent leadership and human resource management, contained 14 open codes. The findings indicated that AI-based organizational behavior was strongly dependent on leadership practices. Participants emphasized psychologically empowering leadership, AI-supported human resource practices, and participative and transparent decision-making as central mechanisms. Leaders were expected to strengthen employee confidence, reduce anxiety surrounding technological change, explain the rationale for AI implementation, encourage experimentation, and maintain clear human accountability. AI-supported human resource management included intelligent support for recruitment, training, performance monitoring, workforce planning, competency development, and employee development, although participants repeatedly emphasized that these applications should support rather than replace professional and managerial judgment.

Organizational and technological enabling conditions accounted for 13 open codes and emphasized that individual psychological capital and competence require an appropriate organizational context. A supportive culture, adequate technological infrastructure, reliable and accessible data, ethical governance, trust, and structural flexibility were repeatedly identified as prerequisites for sustainable AI-supported behavior. Finally, the individual and organizational outcomes dimension contained 11 open codes and represented the consequences expected when the preceding elements were aligned. These consequences included increased employee engagement, stronger commitment, better decision quality, improved efficiency, enhanced organizational agility, and greater capacity for organizational innovation. Overall, Table 1 demonstrates that the phenomenon identified in the interviews was systemic rather than technologically deterministic. Artificial intelligence became organizationally meaningful only when integrated with psychological capabilities, employee competencies, leadership processes, organizational structures, and ethical conditions.

Table 2

Qualitative Categories and Representative Open Codes Extracted from Expert Interviews

Main dimension	Subcategory	Representative open codes identified in the interviews
Psychological capital capacities	AI-related self-efficacy	confidence in learning AI tools; perceived capability to work with intelligent systems; confidence in interpreting AI outputs; willingness to undertake AI-assisted tasks
Psychological capital capacities	Future-oriented hope	maintaining professional goals during technological change; finding alternative pathways to achieve work objectives; goal persistence; perceiving AI as an opportunity for occupational development
Psychological capital capacities	Resilience to technological change	recovering from technological failure; tolerance of uncertainty; persistence after unsuccessful implementation; psychological adaptation to changes in occupational roles
Psychological capital capacities	Realistic optimism toward AI	positive expectations regarding AI benefits; constructive interpretation of technological change; balanced assessment of AI risks; expectation of organizational improvement
AI readiness and intelligent work competencies	AI literacy and understanding	knowledge of AI applications; understanding algorithmic limitations; awareness of AI capabilities; recognition of inappropriate reliance on automated outputs
AI readiness and intelligent work competencies	Technological learning orientation	willingness to acquire new digital skills; continuous learning; experimentation with emerging tools; openness to technological feedback
AI readiness and intelligent work competencies	Data-driven decision competence	interpreting data dashboards; integrating AI outputs with professional judgment; evaluating algorithmic recommendations; evidence-oriented decision-making
Adaptive and innovative organizational behavior	Adaptability and behavioral flexibility	adjustment of work routines; acceptance of redesigned roles; flexible response to technological change; willingness to modify established procedures
Adaptive and innovative organizational behavior	Innovative and proactive behavior	proposing AI-supported solutions; experimenting with improved workflows; identifying new applications of AI; proactive problem solving
Adaptive and innovative organizational behavior	Organizational learning and knowledge sharing	exchange of technological experiences; sharing successful practices; learning from errors; collective problem solving
Adaptive and innovative organizational behavior	Constructive collaboration	human-AI collaboration; interdisciplinary teamwork; cooperation between managers and technical specialists; cross-unit coordination
Intelligent leadership and human resource management	Psychologically empowering leadership	strengthening employee confidence; supporting experimentation; providing psychological safety; encouraging learning from mistakes
Intelligent leadership and human resource management	AI-supported human resource practices	intelligent competency assessment; personalized training; AI-assisted performance analysis; workforce planning support
Intelligent leadership and human resource management	Participative and transparent decision-making	explaining AI-supported decisions; involving employees in technological change; maintaining managerial accountability; communicating decision criteria
Organizational and technological enabling conditions	Supportive organizational culture	innovation-oriented culture; tolerance for experimentation; openness to learning; acceptance of technological transformation
Organizational and technological enabling conditions	Technological infrastructure and data quality	accessible digital infrastructure; integrated organizational data; reliable databases; technical support for AI systems
Organizational and technological enabling conditions	Ethical governance and trust	data privacy; algorithmic fairness; transparency; human oversight; accountability for AI-supported decisions
Organizational and technological enabling conditions	Structural flexibility	reduced bureaucracy; flexible procedures; rapid interdepartmental coordination; capacity for process redesign
Individual and organizational outcomes	Employee engagement and commitment	greater involvement in work; psychological ownership; commitment to organizational goals; reduced resistance to technological transformation
Individual and organizational outcomes	Improved decision quality and performance	faster information processing; evidence-based decisions; improved efficiency; reduction of repetitive administrative work
Individual and organizational outcomes	Organizational agility and innovation	rapid organizational response; improved adaptability; continuous innovation; enhanced capacity for intelligent transformation

Table 2 provides a more detailed representation of the analytical content underlying the six principal dimensions and illustrates how the 21 subcategories were grounded in the interview data. Within the psychological capital dimension, participants' accounts demonstrated that self-efficacy acquired a technology-specific meaning. The experts did not consider general confidence alone sufficient; rather, employees needed confidence in their capacity to learn AI applications, interpret intelligent-system outputs, and perform tasks in which technology played an increasingly influential role. Hope was similarly described as an active psychological mechanism rather than simple positive expectation. Participants associated hope with the ability to preserve meaningful professional goals while discovering alternative pathways when technological transformations changed established methods of achieving those goals. Resilience was closely associated with uncertainty tolerance and the capacity to recover after

unsuccessful digital initiatives, technological errors, or changes in occupational responsibilities. Optimism was regarded as beneficial when it remained realistic and informed. Excessive confidence in artificial intelligence was not interpreted as positive psychological capital; instead, experts emphasized constructive but critical optimism in which employees recognize both the potential and the limitations of intelligent systems.

The second group of codes indicated that psychological readiness required complementary technological competence. Participants frequently noted that anxiety toward AI could arise not only from resistance to change but also from insufficient understanding of how AI functions. AI literacy therefore emerged as a foundational competency through which employees could distinguish appropriate and inappropriate uses of artificial intelligence. Technological learning orientation extended this competency by emphasizing continuous development. The experts noted that because AI tools evolve rapidly, competence could not be understood as the completion of a single training course; instead, employees required an ongoing orientation toward experimentation, learning, and skills renewal. Data-driven decision competence was particularly important for managers because intelligent systems increasingly produce predictions, recommendations, rankings, and performance indicators. Participants emphasized that employees and managers should be capable of evaluating such outputs, integrating them with contextual knowledge, and questioning them when necessary.

The open codes related to adaptive and innovative organizational behavior demonstrated how internal psychological and technological resources were expressed in observable workplace conduct. Behavioral flexibility involved employees' willingness to change routines, revise familiar procedures, and adapt to redesigned responsibilities. Innovative behavior was characterized by active exploration of new ways to combine human expertise with intelligent systems. Importantly, participants did not perceive innovation as an activity restricted to technical specialists. Administrative staff, human resource professionals, operational managers, and sports executives were all considered capable of generating ideas about how AI might improve their functions. Organizational learning and knowledge sharing were likewise considered fundamental because AI adoption was described as a collective organizational learning process rather than an individual technological experience. Knowledge accumulated through trial and error needed to be disseminated so that successful practices could become organizational capabilities.

The leadership-related codes further revealed that managerial behavior was considered a decisive factor in determining whether employees perceived AI as a developmental resource or as a source of threat. Psychologically empowering leaders were described as those who created psychological safety, tolerated reasonable experimentation, provided learning opportunities, and avoided stigmatizing employees who initially experienced difficulty adapting to technological systems. Participants argued that fear-based implementation could undermine psychological capital, increase resistance, and produce superficial compliance. In contrast, participation and transparency could increase trust in technological change. The codes concerning AI-supported human resource practices indicated that experts saw significant opportunities for intelligent systems in competency mapping, personalized training, performance analysis, and workforce planning, although they consistently emphasized the need to preserve human oversight and contextual interpretation.

The organizational conditions identified in Table 2 also demonstrated that AI-based organizational behavior could not emerge through individual training alone. Participants repeatedly referred to organizational culture, technological infrastructure, data quality, ethics, trust, and structural flexibility. Poor data quality was considered particularly problematic because inaccurate or fragmented information could undermine the usefulness of AI systems regardless of their technical sophistication. Ethical governance was closely connected with employee trust. Participants emphasized privacy protection, transparent criteria, algorithmic fairness, and human accountability as conditions under which employees would be more willing to accept AI-supported organizational processes. Structural flexibility was also important because highly bureaucratic procedures could prevent organizations from translating AI-generated information into timely action.

The outcome-related codes showed that participants associated successful integration of psychological capital and artificial intelligence with stronger employee engagement, improved decision-making, enhanced efficiency, greater organizational agility, and increased innovation. However, these outcomes were described as conditional rather than automatic. Experts repeatedly emphasized that merely purchasing AI software or introducing automated tools would not necessarily improve organizational behavior. Positive outcomes were expected

when technological systems were aligned with employee capabilities, psychologically supportive leadership, ethical governance, appropriate infrastructure, and flexible organizational structures.

Table 3

Integrated Relationships Among the Identified Components of AI-Based Organizational Behavior

Analytical level	Identified component	Role in the emerging qualitative framework	Expected behavioral manifestation
Individual psychological foundation	Self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism	Provides the psychological resources required to engage constructively with AI-related organizational change	confidence, persistence, reduced resistance, constructive coping, goal-directed behavior
Individual technological capability	AI literacy, continuous technological learning, data competence	Enables employees to understand, evaluate, and use AI rather than merely accept or reject it	informed technology use, critical interpretation, continuous skills development
Behavioral mechanism	Adaptability, innovation, learning, knowledge sharing, collaboration	Converts psychological and technological resources into observable organizational behavior	flexible routines, experimentation, proactive behavior, collaboration, knowledge exchange
Managerial mechanism	Empowering leadership, participative decision-making, AI-supported HRM	Directs and reinforces desirable employee responses while maintaining human accountability	psychological safety, participation, trust, capability development, responsible AI use
Organizational context	Culture, infrastructure, data quality, ethical governance, structural flexibility	Provides enabling or constraining conditions for the institutionalization of intelligent behavior	acceptance of change, effective AI implementation, transparent processes, coordinated action
Organizational consequences	Engagement, commitment, decision quality, performance, agility, innovation	Represents the principal outcomes of alignment among human, technological, managerial, and contextual components	improved performance, stronger commitment, faster adaptation, intelligent organizational transformation

The integrated relationships presented in Table 3 indicate that the qualitative findings formed a sequential and mutually reinforcing structure rather than a collection of independent factors. At the foundational level, psychological capital was identified as the principal human resource that influences how employees interpret and respond to artificial intelligence. Employees with stronger self-efficacy were described as more willing to interact with unfamiliar systems and less likely to perceive technological complexity as an insurmountable barrier. Hope enabled employees to maintain goal-directed behavior while adjusting the pathways used to achieve occupational objectives. Resilience supported persistence during technological disruption and helped employees recover when implementation difficulties occurred. Optimism encouraged employees to recognize potential benefits of intelligent technologies while maintaining positive expectations about their capacity to adapt.

Nevertheless, the findings demonstrated that psychological capital alone was insufficient. Individual technological capability constituted a second layer that transformed positive psychological orientation into informed technological participation. An employee might be confident and optimistic yet still fail to work effectively in an AI-supported environment without sufficient AI literacy or data-related competence. Conversely, employees might possess high technical competence but refrain from using their capabilities constructively if they lack resilience, confidence, or positive expectations. The findings therefore suggest a complementary relationship between psychological capital and AI readiness. Psychological resources determine, to a considerable extent, whether employees are willing to engage with technological change, while technological competencies determine whether that engagement can be translated into effective performance.

The third analytical level consisted of adaptive and innovative behavioral mechanisms. These mechanisms represented the point at which psychological resources and technological capabilities became visible through organizational action. Adaptability enabled employees to modify work routines and occupational roles, whereas innovation encouraged them to search for new applications of AI. Organizational learning ensured that experience accumulated through technology use was retained and disseminated rather than remaining isolated within individuals or departments. Collaboration was particularly prominent because many AI-related organizational tasks were perceived as requiring interaction among managers, employees, technical specialists, data professionals, and subject-matter experts. Participants therefore portrayed intelligent organizational behavior as inherently collaborative rather than individually autonomous.

At the managerial level, leadership and human resource practices influenced whether these individual capabilities could develop into sustained organizational patterns. Empowering leadership was identified as a major facilitator

because it strengthened self-efficacy, maintained hope, supported resilience, and reduced defensive reactions to technological uncertainty. Participative decision-making contributed to trust by giving employees greater understanding of why AI systems were introduced and how algorithmic recommendations were incorporated into managerial decisions. AI-supported human resource management was regarded as an opportunity to improve competency assessment, training, workforce development, and performance management, but participants emphasized that these applications required continuous human oversight. In particular, experts rejected an organizational model in which algorithmic outputs were treated as unquestionable managerial decisions. Instead, artificial intelligence was viewed as a decision-support resource whose contribution should be interpreted within organizational, human, and ethical contexts.

The organizational context constituted another decisive analytical level. The same employee capabilities and leadership practices could produce different outcomes depending on the organizational environment in which they operated. A culture that encouraged learning, experimentation, and innovation provided employees with greater opportunity to translate psychological capital into adaptive behavior. In contrast, punitive responses to errors could suppress experimentation even among highly resilient and competent employees. Similarly, inadequate digital infrastructure or fragmented organizational data could prevent employees from using intelligent systems effectively. Ethical governance was especially important because uncertainty regarding surveillance, data privacy, biased algorithms, or unclear accountability could reduce trust and intensify resistance. Structural flexibility influenced whether insights produced by intelligent systems could actually lead to organizational action. Participants noted that organizations characterized by excessive administrative hierarchy and rigid procedures could obtain useful AI-generated information while still being incapable of responding to it effectively.

The final analytical level consisted of individual and organizational consequences. Employee engagement and commitment emerged as expected consequences when employees perceived artificial intelligence as a supportive resource rather than a mechanism for uncontrolled surveillance or occupational displacement. Improved decision quality and performance were associated with the ability of AI to process large volumes of information, identify patterns, and reduce repetitive administrative burdens. Organizational agility reflected the capacity of sports federations to detect changes rapidly, interpret information, and redesign responses in a timely manner. Innovation represented the broader developmental consequence of combining human creativity, psychological capacities, organizational learning, and intelligent technological support.

Taken together, the qualitative findings led to the identification of a central organizing concept that may be described as **the development of psychologically empowered intelligent organizational behavior through the integration of psychological capital and artificial intelligence**. This core category connected all six major dimensions and explained the relationships observed across the interviews. According to the emerging model, psychological capital constitutes the human foundation of intelligent organizational behavior; AI readiness provides the cognitive and technological capability required for effective interaction with intelligent systems; adaptive, innovative, learning-oriented, and collaborative behaviors translate these capacities into organizational action; leadership and human resource management direct and reinforce the process; organizational and technological conditions determine whether the process can be institutionalized; and improved engagement, decision quality, performance, agility, and innovation represent its principal consequences.

A particularly important finding was that the experts did not conceptualize artificial intelligence as a replacement for human organizational behavior. Instead, they viewed AI-based organizational behavior as an enhanced form of human organizational functioning in which intelligent technologies expand employees' access to information, analytical capabilities, and decision support while psychological capital enables employees to interact with those technologies confidently and constructively. Accordingly, the human and technological components were interpreted as complementary rather than competing elements. The experts emphasized that implementation strategies focusing exclusively on technological investment would be incomplete because technological systems cannot compensate for low employee trust, weak psychological resources, poor leadership, insufficient learning opportunities, or organizational rigidity.

Another recurrent pattern concerned the relationship between psychological capital and resistance to technological change. Participants suggested that resistance should not automatically be interpreted as an employee's

unwillingness to cooperate. In many instances, resistance may reflect low self-efficacy, uncertainty about future occupational roles, fear of losing professional value, inadequate technological knowledge, concerns regarding algorithmic monitoring, or distrust of managerial intentions. Consequently, the emerging findings suggest that strengthening psychological capital may be an important organizational strategy during AI transformation. Increasing confidence through training and successful experience, strengthening hope through clear career pathways, developing resilience through supportive learning environments, and fostering realistic optimism through transparent communication may improve employees' capacity to engage with intelligent organizational systems.

The findings also revealed a strong connection between trust and ethical AI governance. Participants consistently emphasized that employees' willingness to accept intelligent systems depended not only on technological usefulness but also on perceptions of fairness, transparency, privacy, and accountability. Where employees were uncertain about how their data were collected, how algorithmic assessments were produced, or who remained responsible for decisions, distrust could undermine otherwise technically effective systems. Human oversight therefore emerged as a fundamental characteristic of the proposed framework. AI was viewed as capable of assisting managers and employees by processing information, identifying patterns, generating recommendations, and supporting routine decisions, but ultimate organizational responsibility was expected to remain with human decision-makers.

Within the specific context of Iranian sports federations, participants also emphasized the importance of organizational readiness. Sports federations were described as organizations in which administrative structures, professional expertise, sporting priorities, stakeholder expectations, and external regulatory pressures intersect. The successful institutionalization of AI-based organizational behavior therefore requires more than general technological modernization. Federations need reliable data systems, integrated information infrastructures, managerial commitment, staff development, explicit ethical standards, interdisciplinary cooperation, and structures capable of translating analytical information into organizational action. The experts indicated that differences in organizational size, managerial stability, access to technological resources, international engagement, and workforce competencies could influence the speed and form of AI adoption across different federations.

Overall, analysis of the 18 interviews demonstrated that the identification of AI-based organizational behavior from the perspective of psychological capital resulted in a multidimensional and interconnected framework consisting of 82 open codes, 21 subcategories, and six major dimensions. The findings indicate that psychological capital serves as the principal human foundation of this framework, while AI literacy and technological readiness provide the competencies required for meaningful engagement with intelligent systems. Adaptive and innovative behaviors represent the behavioral expression of these capacities, and intelligent leadership and supportive human resource practices function as managerial mechanisms through which such behaviors can be strengthened. Organizational culture, technological infrastructure, data quality, structural flexibility, and ethical governance create the context within which the phenomenon can either develop or be constrained. When these elements are effectively aligned, the expected outcomes include greater employee engagement and commitment, improved decision quality and performance, stronger organizational agility, and increased capacity for innovation. Thus, the qualitative findings portray artificial intelligence–based organizational behavior in Iranian sports federations as a human-centered process of intelligent organizational transformation in which psychological capital and technological capability jointly shape the quality of organizational behavior.

4 Discussion

The present study sought to identify the components of artificial intelligence–based organizational behavior in Iranian sports federations from the perspective of psychological capital. Analysis of the 18 expert interviews resulted in 82 open codes, 21 subcategories, and six overarching dimensions: psychological capital capacities, AI readiness and intelligent work competencies, adaptive and innovative organizational behavior, intelligent leadership and human resource management, organizational and technological enabling conditions, and individual and organizational outcomes. Taken together, these findings indicate that AI-based organizational behavior should not be understood as a purely technological phenomenon. Rather, it emerges through the interaction of psychological resources, technological competencies, observable employee behaviors, leadership practices, organizational infrastructure, ethical governance, and institutional conditions. The central category identified in the study was

the development of psychologically empowered intelligent organizational behavior through the integration of psychological capital and artificial intelligence. This finding suggests that the effectiveness of AI in sports federations depends substantially on the extent to which employees and managers possess the psychological and behavioral capacities required to engage with intelligent systems constructively.

The first major dimension identified in the study was psychological capital capacities, comprising AI-related self-efficacy, future-oriented hope, resilience to technological change, and realistic optimism toward AI. This finding is consistent with the broader conceptualization of psychological capital as a positive psychological resource composed of efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism, each of which contributes to effective functioning in uncertain and demanding environments (Luthans & Broad, 2022). The present results extend this framework by showing that these dimensions acquire specific meanings in AI-mediated organizational contexts. Self-efficacy becomes confidence in learning and using intelligent systems, hope becomes the ability to preserve occupational goals while developing alternative pathways in changing work environments, resilience becomes the capacity to recover from technological disruption, and optimism becomes a constructive but realistic expectation regarding the benefits of AI. This interpretation is also compatible with recent evidence showing that psychological capital can transform artificial intelligence into a job resource and promote innovation in algorithm-driven workplaces (Liu et al., 2026). In other words, AI may produce positive organizational outcomes when employees possess sufficient psychological resources to interpret technological change as manageable and potentially beneficial rather than threatening.

The importance of resilience and optimism identified in the present study is also supported by research examining work under conditions of uncertainty and disruption. Psychological capital has been proposed as an important protective resource in volatile and ambiguous environments, particularly when employees encounter stressors that challenge their sense of control and occupational security (Luthans & Broad, 2022). Similarly, digital culture and psychological capital have been shown to play important roles in maintaining positive outcomes under conditions of job insecurity (Lathabhavan & Bharadwaja, 2026). The findings of the present study therefore suggest that AI implementation in sports federations should be regarded not only as a technical transition but also as a psychologically demanding organizational change process. Employees may have to cope with uncertainty regarding future roles, altered performance expectations, new forms of monitoring, and changes in decision-making authority. Psychological capital can help employees interpret and manage these changes more constructively.

The findings also showed that psychological capital was closely associated with reduced resistance to change. Participants emphasized that resistance to AI may stem from low confidence, uncertainty, insufficient technological knowledge, or concerns about future occupational relevance rather than simple unwillingness to cooperate. This interpretation aligns with evidence that psychological capital mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and resistance to change and can reduce defensive reactions to organizational transformation (BozdoĞAn, 2023). It is also compatible with studies showing that positive psychological resources contribute to work engagement, motivation, and commitment under changing organizational conditions (Shaheen et al., 2023; Shahid et al., 2023). Thus, the present findings suggest that resistance to AI should be interpreted as a potentially modifiable behavioral response influenced by psychological and organizational resources.

The second dimension, AI readiness and intelligent work competencies, included AI literacy, technological learning orientation, and data-driven decision competence. The experts consistently distinguished psychological willingness to use AI from the actual capability to use it effectively. This distinction is important because positive attitudes toward technology are unlikely to produce meaningful organizational benefits if employees cannot interpret algorithmic outputs, understand technological limitations, or integrate AI-generated information with professional judgment. The findings are consistent with evidence indicating that digital innovation depends not only on positive psychological capital but also on behavioral intention, effort expectancy, and technology-related competence (Sung & Lee, 2025). They also align with research emphasizing the continuing importance of soft skills and adaptive competencies in increasingly digitalized workplaces (Bisschoff & Massyn, 2024). Consequently, psychological capital and AI competence appear to function as complementary resources: psychological capital provides willingness and persistence, whereas technological competence provides the capability required for effective action.

The identified importance of continuous technological learning is especially relevant because AI systems change

rapidly. Participants described technological readiness as an ongoing orientation rather than a static skill set. This interpretation is consistent with broader research showing that adaptive and cognitive capabilities remain critical in contemporary organizational environments and that employee performance increasingly depends on continuous learning and adjustment (Alifuddin & Widodo, 2022; Jiony et al., 2021). The present findings therefore suggest that sports federations should avoid treating AI training as a one-time intervention. Instead, organizations require continuous learning systems that allow employees to update technological skills, discuss emerging applications, and develop the confidence necessary to work with evolving intelligent systems.

The third main dimension involved adaptive and innovative organizational behavior, including behavioral flexibility, proactive behavior, organizational learning, knowledge sharing, and collaboration. These findings indicate that psychological capital and AI readiness become organizationally valuable only when they are translated into observable behavior. Employees may possess confidence, resilience, and technological knowledge, but unless these resources result in adaptation, initiative, experimentation, and knowledge exchange, the organization will obtain limited benefit from AI. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that psychological capital supports proactive behavior, motivation, and performance (Malik, 2022; Shaheen et al., 2023). It also aligns with evidence that innovative employee behavior depends on supportive organizational and psychological conditions (Mutonyi et al., 2021). The present findings extend these studies by indicating that adaptive and innovative behavior may represent the behavioral bridge through which psychological and technological resources are converted into organizational outcomes.

The role of knowledge sharing and collaboration was particularly prominent. Experts emphasized that AI-based organizational behavior cannot be reduced to individual interaction with technology because effective implementation requires cooperation among managers, technical specialists, human resource professionals, and operational employees. This interpretation is consistent with research linking social capital and organizational citizenship behavior to employee performance (Chen & Hu, 2025). It is also compatible with conceptual work emphasizing the role of intangible organizational resources in citizenship behavior and cooperative organizational functioning (Jahagirdar, 2022). Thus, the present study suggests that collaborative behavior is central to intelligent organizational transformation because AI adoption often requires interdisciplinary interpretation, collective learning, and shared responsibility.

The fourth dimension, intelligent leadership and human resource management, included psychologically empowering leadership, AI-supported human resource practices, and participative and transparent decision-making. Participants emphasized that leaders play a decisive role in shaping whether AI is perceived as a developmental opportunity or as a source of threat. This finding is supported by research showing that transformational leadership contributes to psychological capital and reduces negative employee outcomes such as turnover intention (Gom et al., 2021). Individual-focused transformational leadership has also been shown to facilitate taking-charge behavior through psychological capital and thriving at work (Malik, 2022). Similarly, servant leadership has been linked to service excellence through psychological capital as a personal resource (Qamar & Soomro, 2023). These studies reinforce the present finding that leadership can strengthen psychological resources and thereby influence employees' reactions to organizational change.

The importance of leadership is also evident in the context of Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies. Leadership 4.0, psychological capital, and high-performance human resource practices have been identified as mutually reinforcing elements for sustaining organizational performance and employee wellbeing (Adekanmbi & Ukpere, 2022). The present study extends this reasoning to sports federations by suggesting that intelligent leadership requires both technological awareness and psychological sensitivity. Leaders should explain the rationale for AI implementation, encourage experimentation, maintain accountability, provide learning opportunities, and protect employees from unnecessary uncertainty. The finding regarding participative and transparent decision-making is particularly important because employees may resist AI-supported management if they do not understand how algorithmic recommendations are produced or how they influence managerial decisions.

The role of organizational justice and trust identified by participants is similarly supported by previous research. Psychological capital may exert different effects depending on the fairness of the organizational context, and organizational justice can shape how positive psychological resources are transmitted through leadership processes (Gojny-Zbierowska, 2024). This finding is directly relevant

to AI-supported management because algorithmic systems may generate concerns about fairness, surveillance, data privacy, and accountability. The present study therefore suggests that transparent governance and human oversight are necessary for employees to trust AI-based decisions.

The fifth dimension concerned organizational and technological enabling conditions, including supportive culture, technological infrastructure, data quality, ethical governance, and structural flexibility. The findings demonstrate that employee psychological capital and technological competence cannot compensate for poor organizational conditions. This interpretation aligns with research showing that psychological capital interacts with organizational values and institutional conditions in shaping wellbeing and performance (Bandara et al., 2024). It also corresponds with broader positive organizational psychology perspectives that emphasize the interaction between individual resources and organizational systems (Donaldson & Zyl, 2022; Galanakis, 2026). Thus, AI-based organizational behavior should be viewed as an organizational capability rather than merely an individual competency.

The emphasis on organizational culture is particularly relevant. A culture that encourages learning, experimentation, and innovation may enable employees to convert psychological resources into adaptive behavior, whereas rigid or punitive cultures can suppress initiative. Workplace spirituality and other meaning-related organizational resources have also been shown to relate to psychological capital (Sarkar et al., 2022). Similarly, research on cultural intelligence indicates that adaptive behavior is influenced by the social and cultural context in which employees operate (Alifuddin & Widodo, 2022). These findings support the present conclusion that AI adoption must be embedded in a supportive organizational culture rather than implemented as a detached technological project.

The experts also emphasized ethical governance, particularly privacy, transparency, algorithmic fairness, and human accountability. These findings are especially relevant because AI-related anxiety and digital overload can contribute to technostress and emotional exhaustion (Bhukya, 2026). A lack of transparency may intensify these negative responses because employees may interpret AI as a mechanism of surveillance or uncontrolled managerial power. Therefore, ethical governance can be understood as both a moral requirement and a psychological condition for successful implementation. When employees perceive AI systems as fair, understandable, and accountable, they may be more willing to engage with them constructively.

The sixth major dimension included individual and organizational outcomes such as employee engagement, commitment, improved decision quality, higher performance, organizational agility, and innovation. These findings are strongly supported by previous research linking psychological capital with performance and engagement. Psychological capital and emotional intelligence have been shown to contribute to job performance (Saeed et al., 2021), while positive emotions and emotional intelligence can strengthen the relationship between psychological capital and work engagement (Shahid et al., 2023). Similarly, psychological capital has been linked to multifaceted job performance through intrinsic motivation and goal commitment (Shaheen et al., 2023). The present findings therefore support the view that psychological capital can generate both attitudinal and performance-related outcomes when embedded in favorable organizational conditions.

The role of emotional intelligence also appears relevant to the findings. Participants emphasized that successful AI-based organizational behavior requires constructive responses to uncertainty, collaboration, and changing interpersonal dynamics. Research has shown that emotional intelligence is associated with work engagement and performance (George et al., 2021; Moorthy et al., 2023), and that psychological capital interacts with emotional intelligence in predicting flourishing and positive workplace outcomes (Rodrigues & Silva, 2024). Bibliometric evidence also indicates increasing scholarly attention to the intersection of psychological capital and emotional intelligence (Tjimuku & Atiku, 2024). These findings suggest that emotionally intelligent employees may be better able to mobilize psychological capital during AI-related change, although this relationship was not directly tested in the present qualitative study.

The finding that AI-based organizational behavior can improve innovation and agility is also consistent with recent evidence that psychological capital enhances innovative behavior in algorithm-driven workplaces (Liu et al., 2026). The ability to use AI effectively may accelerate information processing and support more evidence-based decision-making, but the present study indicates that these benefits depend on human interpretation and organizational readiness. This conclusion is also supported by studies showing that mindfulness and psychological capital can improve work performance through emotional and cognitive mechanisms (Long et al., 2025). Likewise, machine-learning

research on predictors of psychological capital demonstrates the growing recognition that psychological resources themselves can be understood within complex and dynamic systems (Perinelli et al., 2025).

The context of sports federations adds particular importance to these findings. Sports federations operate within complex governance structures and must coordinate administrative, competitive, regulatory, and international functions. Research on international sports federations has demonstrated that communication and decision-making are shaped by cross-cultural management challenges (Kang et al., 2025). Professional competency among federation presidents and senior executives is also essential for organizational effectiveness (Khorshidi Paji et al., 2026). In Iran, leadership styles and ethical intelligence have been associated with managers' attitudes toward organizational change in sports federations (Soleimani et al., 2024). These studies support the present conclusion that intelligent organizational behavior in sports federations must be understood as a context-sensitive phenomenon shaped by leadership, culture, competency, and institutional structure.

5 Conclusion

Overall, the findings suggest that AI-based organizational behavior in Iranian sports federations is best understood as a human-centered process of organizational transformation. Artificial intelligence does not automatically generate improved behavior, innovation, or performance. Its contribution depends on employees' psychological capital, their AI-related competencies, adaptive and collaborative behavior, supportive leadership, ethical governance, infrastructure, and organizational flexibility. This conclusion is consistent with the growing literature emphasizing that positive organizational outcomes emerge from the interaction of psychological, social, and organizational resources rather than from isolated technological investments (Donaldson & Zyl, 2022; Galanakis, 2026). The central contribution of the present study is therefore the integration of these elements into a qualitative framework specifically tailored to the context of Iranian sports federations.

The study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the qualitative sample consisted of 18 experts, and although theoretical saturation was reached, the findings reflect the perspectives of a limited group of participants with particular academic and professional backgrounds. Second, the study focused on selected Iranian sports federations, and institutional, cultural, and managerial characteristics may differ across other federations, sports organizations, or national contexts. Third, the findings were based on expert perceptions rather than direct observation of employees' behavior in AI-supported work settings. Fourth, the rapid development of artificial intelligence means that technological conditions, applications, and organizational practices may evolve faster than qualitative models can be updated. Finally, although multiple strategies were used to strengthen trustworthiness, qualitative interpretation inevitably involves some degree of researcher judgment.

Future studies should examine the proposed dimensions in a wider range of sports federations and organizational contexts and compare whether the identified structure remains stable across different sports, organizational sizes, and cultural environments. Longitudinal research would be useful for examining how psychological capital and AI-related organizational behavior change before, during, and after the implementation of intelligent systems. Future qualitative studies could also include frontline employees, coaches, technical staff, and athletes in addition to senior managers and experts in order to capture a broader range of experiences. Further work could develop and validate a measurement instrument based on the six dimensions identified in this study and test the relationships among psychological capital, AI readiness, adaptive behavior, leadership, organizational conditions, and organizational outcomes. Comparative studies could also investigate whether different forms of AI use, such as decision support, human resource analytics, performance monitoring, or knowledge management, produce different psychological and behavioral consequences.

In practice, sports federations should approach AI adoption as an organizational and human-development process rather than merely a technological investment. Managers should strengthen employees' self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and realistic optimism through training, supportive communication, participation, and opportunities for successful technological experience. Continuous AI literacy and data-interpretation programs should be established for both managers and employees. Leadership practices should emphasize psychological safety, transparency, participation, and clear human accountability for AI-supported decisions. Federations should also invest in reliable data infrastructure, ethical governance mechanisms, privacy protection, and explicit procedures for reviewing algorithmic recommendations. Finally, organizational

structures should be sufficiently flexible to encourage experimentation, knowledge sharing, interdisciplinary collaboration, and rapid translation of AI-generated insights into practical decisions.

Authors' Contributions

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

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

Transparency Statement

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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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