Developing a Self-Management Model for Employees in Iraqi Sports Organizations

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to develop a self-management model for employees in Iraqi sports organizations. Self-management refers to an individual's ability to plan, direct, and monitor their behavior and activities independently. This skill helps individuals achieve their goals and perform better. This research is applied in terms of its aim, descriptive-survey in terms of data collection, and qualitative in terms of typology. Data analysis utilized a thematic analysis strategy. The statistical population of this research comprised experts from Iraq's Ministry of Youth and Sports, heads of some sports federations, and several academic faculty members in Iraq. A purposive sampling method was employed, selecting 16 individuals through a snowball sampling technique. The results of the interviews' analysis revealed that the extracted codes from the 16 interviews amounted to 315 meaningful sentences, from which 90 initial codes and 43 sub-codes were derived. Ultimately, the extracted themes were categorized into seven final themes: self-concept, self-expression, self-care, self-control, self-development, self-confidence, and self-motivation. This model can serve as an effective strategy for enhancing organizational resilience, improving team performance, and achieving long-term goals. Attention to these components and their development in employees paves the way for sustainability and success in sports organizations.

Keywords: self-management, sports organization, Iraq, thematic analysis.

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1. Introduction

The dawn of the new century and the increasing complexity of interpersonal, organizational, and environmental relationships compel modern organizations to adopt novel perspectives on management and leadership. These organizations must implement new approaches to their human resources, predominantly composed of knowledge workers with diverse skill sets [1]. Historically, management scholars and researchers emphasized leadership styles characterized by top-down approaches, where subordinates were led and controlled by a single individual [2]. However, the transformation of employees from workers relying on physical labor to knowledge workers utilizing ideas, knowledge, and skills to achieve maximum material and social welfare renders traditional management styles ineffective, necessitating fundamental changes in leadership and management approaches [3].

The new paradigm of management and leadership suggests that these activities can be distributed among individuals, groups, or organizations [4]. Proponents of this perspective argue that, given the advanced competencies and capabilities of modern employees in various management domains, they possess significant decision-making and management capabilities regarding their tasks and responsibilities [5]. Recent studies in organizational behavior indicate that organizations fostering environments where employees take responsibility for executing their tasks, exercise self-control, and monitor processes independently experience heightened self-motivation among employees, resulting in significantly improved productivity [6, 7]. Consequently, organizations adopting bottom-up leadership approaches and leveraging self-management strategies not only witness higher employee productivity but also foster more capable, committed, and enthusiastic workers in their daily tasks.

Self-management is a critical skill encompassing a set of deliberate actions influencing employees' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to achieve optimal personal and professional outcomes. This strategy serves as a strong driver for individual autonomy, effective decision-making, and creativity in complex and challenging situations. In recent years, self-management, employee participation in decision-making, and granting autonomy in organizational processes have gained unprecedented attention. Implementing this strategy in management and leadership can lead to notable outcomes, such as job satisfaction, self-efficacy, creativity, and innovation among employees [8].

Self-management is considered a psychological and motivational attribute of employees related to their job roles. Individual self-management correlates more strongly with an individual's perception of their abilities than with their actual skill levels. Higher levels of self-management in an individual are associated with greater persistence in job-related behaviors. On the other hand, collective self-management relates to group activities, shared efforts, and the collective progress of group members [9]. Empowered employees with self-awareness and self-management skills demonstrate innovation and creativity in ambiguous and complex situations. They can identify threats and opportunities in their environment effectively, offering strategies to capitalize on opportunities and transform threats into advantages, thereby achieving personal and organizational goals [4].

Adopting this management and leadership style fosters an organizational atmosphere where employees utilize their skills and competencies effectively, receive feedback on their work, and find growth opportunities. This approach ultimately enhances individual and organizational productivity, facilitating goal attainment. Conversely, the absence of self-management strategies and reliance on traditional leadership styles in today's complex organizations, composed of multi-skilled knowledge workers, exacerbates organizational challenges and undermines goal achievement. Hence, it is imperative to identify and implement the internal components of employee self-management as part of a new organizational approach [1, 6, 7, 10, 11].

Self-management, sometimes referred to as "self-leadership" or "self-regulation," has gained prominence for leaders, especially those overseeing remote and hybrid workforces. With limited direct interaction with employees, managers strive to ensure productivity, growth, and job satisfaction. In the workplace, self-management skills enable employees to regulate their thoughts and behaviors to achieve critical work objectives, such as functional expertise, effective collaboration, and delivering business results. Employees with self-management skills can assess their actions, identify successful practices, and make necessary adjustments to resolve issues. As such, effective self-management strategies are vital for success in today's work environment [12].

The concept of self-management has emerged as a modern administrative principle encompassing skills that transform management from a centralized function into a holistic movement, aiming to achieve targeted goals. In

Iraq's sports organizations, self-management is viewed as a collaborative process between employees and community stakeholders. This approach is one of the most critical modern strategies for achieving decentralization [10, 11]. Self-management involves granting employees the authority to participate in decision-making, fostering a developmental and participatory educational process within the organization [10].

In summary, employees are assigned tasks and plan to accomplish them within organizations. Self-management entails empowering employees to take control of their tasks and align them with organizational goals, fostering intrinsic motivation. Employees perform optimally and build meaningful relationships when they have control over their circumstances [13].

In today's knowledge-based economy, skilled employees are considered a crucial organizational asset, and losing such talent is untenable. Attracting and retaining skilled employees is challenging because they often have alternative job opportunities. However, possessing skilled employees alone is insufficient for organizational success; managing them effectively to ensure active engagement and optimal performance is essential. Scholars view self-management as a strategy to resolve organizational conflicts and optimize goal achievement. Organizations leveraging individual development in their management strategies actively encourage employees to take greater responsibility for their progress [6, 10].

Given these findings, it can be asserted that Iraqi organizations, including sports organizations, predominantly follow traditional management approaches, resulting in communication delays and diminished effectiveness. The agile and flexible processes required by sports organizations, due to their nature and objectives, underscore the importance of knowledge and performance management. Addressing the challenges facing Iraqi sports organizations, such as slow administrative processes and insufficient empowerment, necessitates adopting a novel management and leadership approach. Developing a model of internal self-management components for employees in Iraqi sports organizations, a relatively unexplored topic in previous research, appears to be a viable solution.

This study aims to address the question: What is the self-management model for employees in Iraqi sports organizations?

2.   Methodology

This study is applied in terms of its objective, descriptive-survey in terms of data collection method, and qualitative in terms of typology. The thematic analysis strategy was employed for data analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for analyzing qualitative data, often used for transcribed sets of interviews or group discussions. The researcher closely examines the data to identify recurring themes, topics, ideas, and semantic patterns.

The statistical population of this research consisted of experts from Iraq's Ministry of Youth and Sports, heads of certain sports federations, and academic faculty members from Iraqi universities. A purposive sampling method was used, with 16 participants selected through the snowball sampling technique. The sample size was determined using the principle of theoretical saturation, such that no new factors emerged after the interviews with the 14th and 15th participants, concluding the interview process with the 16th participant. Each interview lasted an average of 40 minutes. Following the interviews, the content was transcribed verbatim.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews. This method organizes data and describes it in detail while identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is one of the most suitable methods for studies employing semi-structured interviews. The stages of thematic analysis in this study included familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba were employed. For accuracy and robustness, participants were asked to reinterpret the meaning of their interview words to reach consensus. Member checking, reading interview transcripts, revising initial codes, categories, and concepts, and obtaining feedback were utilized to ensure data validity. The acceptability of the data was confirmed through supervisor reviews, with interview texts, codes, and extracted categories revised and verified.

From the 16 interviews conducted, interviews numbered 5, 9, and 15 were randomly selected to assess reliability using the test-retest reliability coefficient (stability index) and two coders (repeatability index). Coefficients above 0.8 indicate high reliability of the interviews. In this study, the test-retest reliability coefficient was 0.913, and the inter-coder reliability coefficient was 0.915, indicating high reliability of the interviews.

3. Findings and Results

Stage 1: Familiarization with Data

In this study, the researcher reviewed all the data obtained from the interviews before conducting the coding analysis.

Stage 2: Generating Initial Codes

In the current study, the coding process was conducted manually. The researcher systematically reviewed the collected data to align the initial codes. The information gathered from the interviews was carefully studied, reviewed, and analyzed. Similar data were assigned appropriate meanings. Instead of presenting all the written pages from the interviews and focus groups, only the key points annotated from the interview texts were identified and presented. Each key point was assigned an initial code, resulting in the extraction of 90 initial codes.

Stage 3: Searching for Themes

This stage involved grouping various codes into potential themes and organizing all summarized, coded data under identified themes. The researcher began by reporting the codes and analyzing how different codes could be combined to form overarching themes. Some initial codes formed primary themes, others constituted sub-themes, and some were excluded. Occasionally, a group of codes that did not clearly belong to any category was assigned to a "miscellaneous" theme. At this stage, efforts were made to create accurate categorization for the initial themes, with adjustments made progressively over time. Table 1 below summarizes the primary and sub-themes extracted by the researcher for developing a self-management model for employees in Iraqi sports organizations.

Table 1. Initial Themes for Designing a Self-Management Model for Employees in Iraqi Sports Organizations

Primary Theme	Initial Code	Primary Theme	Initial Code
Professional Identity	Understanding employees' roles and responsibilities within the organization	Focus and Attention	The ability to stay focused on tasks and goals despite distractions.
	Alignment of personal identity with job role		Avoiding procrastination and delaying tasks.
Self-Awareness	Recognizing personal strengths, weaknesses, values, and beliefs	Innovation and Creativity	Enhancing the ability to propose new ideas and find creative solutions to challenges.
	Assessing the impact of one's behavior and performance on others and the organization		Using imagination to discover new paths for self-improvement.
Cognitive Flexibility	Adapting perspectives and attitudes in response to changes or new situations	Learning from Failures	Revisiting mistakes and failures to identify ways to improve.
	Accepting feedback and using it for growth and development		Embracing failures as a natural part of the growth process.
Meaning in Work	Understanding how one's work contributes to organizational and societal goals	Character Development	Strengthening qualities like honesty, responsibility, and respect for others.
	Linking personal values to organizational missions		Striving to align personal values with behaviors.
Goal Orientation	The ability to set clear personal and professional goals	Perseverance and Resilience	The ability to endure challenges and hardships while continuing on the path of growth.
	Motivation to pursue goals using available resources		Utilizing difficult experiences as opportunities for learning.
Transparency in Expression	Communicating ideas and emotions clearly and understandably	Critical Thinking	Analyzing and logically evaluating information and situations to make better decisions.
	Avoiding ambiguity and delivering messages precisely and directly		Applying creative and innovative approaches to problem-solving.
Assertiveness	Expressing opinions, needs, and concerns respectfully and confidently	Networking	Establishing effective connections with others to exchange knowledge and experience.
	Balancing self-advocacy with respect for others		Leveraging connections to create opportunities for learning and growth.
Communication Skills	Using body language to convey messages	Self-Awareness	Understanding personal strengths and weaknesses.
	Employing tone of voice effectively		Awareness of unique skills, talents, and capabilities.

	Choosing the right words to convey messages		Accepting limitations without diminishing self-esteem.
	Adapting communication styles to different audiences	Confidence in Abilities	Belief in one's ability to successfully complete tasks and challenges.
Constructive Criticism	Providing feedback to improve performance		Drawing on previous experiences and skills to solve new problems.
	Offering criticism to address issues	Managing Fear and Doubt	Overcoming inner fears and doubts.
	Maintaining politeness and respect while criticizing others		Using such emotions as a stimulus for growth and learning.
Creative Expression	Proposing ideas and opinions in innovative and attractive ways	Small Achievements	Attaining small goals to boost confidence and a sense of success.
	Employing imagination and creativity to provide new solutions		Recognizing and celebrating small successes as positive steps forward.
Physical Well-being	Taking care of basic bodily needs, including healthy nutrition, sufficient sleep, and regular exercise	Managing Failures	Viewing failures as opportunities for learning and growth, not as signs of inability.
	Attending to preventive care and treatment		Rebounding from failures and maintaining self-confidence.
	Seeking medical attention when necessary	Positive Self-Talk	Replacing negative thoughts and statements with positive, motivational phrases.
Mental Well-being	Managing stress through techniques like meditation, mindfulness, and deep breathing		Practicing affirmations such as "I can" or "I am capable."
	Identifying and reducing stressors in work and personal life	Positive Impact	Creating a positive influence on the work environment and others.
Work-Life Balance	Establishing clear boundaries between work and personal time		Belief that individual efforts and ideas can yield positive outcomes.
	Ensuring work does not negatively impact other aspects of life	Autonomy	Trusting oneself to complete tasks without dependence on others.
Social Support	Building effective connections with colleagues, friends, and family to receive emotional and social support		Feeling responsible and capable of independent decision-making.
	Creating positive relationships while avoiding toxic ones	Energy and Enthusiasm	Maintaining enthusiasm and energy for tasks even in challenging situations.
Learning and Growth	Developing skills and knowledge to enhance personal capacity in facing challenges		Focusing on the positive and appealing aspects of work.
	Learning new self-care techniques to improve quality of life	Intrinsic Rewards	Enjoying work for its process rather than just the outcomes or external rewards.
Emotional Regulation	Recognizing, understanding, and managing emotions like anger, anxiety, and stress		Valuing personal learning and progress.
	Maintaining composure and psychological stability in stressful situations	Self-Confidence	Belief in one's ability to perform tasks and achieve goals.
Self-Discipline	Following plans and rules		Building trust in individual abilities to face challenges.
	Developing positive habits while eliminating unproductive behaviors	Optimism	Maintaining a positive attitude toward challenges and problems.
Behavior Control	Regulating and managing behaviors in alignment with organizational goals		Reinforcing the mindset of "I can" for work advancement.
	Avoiding impulsive actions and irrational responses	Self-Encouragement	Motivating oneself by acknowledging both small and large achievements.
Rational Decision-Making	Making logical decisions after considering all aspects and avoiding emotional reactions		Creating motivation by identifying past successes.
	Analyzing the long-term consequences of decisions	Focus on Personal Growth	Prioritizing self-development as a source of motivation.
Problem-Solving	Examining issues logically to find solutions rather than focusing on the problems		Setting learning objectives for continuous improvement.
	Controlling emotional reactions for better decision-making	Stress and Fatigue Management	Identifying and addressing factors that reduce motivation.

Adherence to Values and Principles	Upholding behaviors aligned with personal and organizational values, even under challenging conditions		Resting and recharging to maintain energy and motivation.
	Maintaining ethical principles despite temptations or external pressures		

Stage 4: Reviewing Themes

This stage comprises two steps: reviewing and refining the themes. In the first step, the codes are reviewed, and in the second step, their validity is considered. If the thematic framework aligns well with the data, the next phase proceeds; otherwise, the research must return to the coding process and continue until a suitable thematic framework is achieved. In this study, upon reviewing the codes, some were eliminated or replaced, while others remained unchanged.

Stage 5: Defining and Naming Themes

The fifth stage began once a satisfactory thematic framework was established. At this point, the researcher defined and revisited the themes used for analysis, followed by an in-depth examination of the data within them. Through the definition and examination of the themes, the final research model was designed based on the identified themes. Researchers categorized the extracted themes into seven overarching concepts and 43 subcategories. These overarching concepts were named: self-concept, self-expression, self-care, self-control, self-development, self-belief, and self-motivation.

Table 2. Primary Themes of the Self-Management Model for Employees in Iraqi Sports Organizations

Sub-Themes	Main Themes	Row
Professional Identity	Self-Concept	1
Self-Awareness		
Cognitive Flexibility		
Sense of Meaning in Work		
Goal Orientation		
Transparency in Expression	Self-Expression	2
Assertiveness		
Communication Skills		
Constructive Criticism		
Creative Expression		
Physical Well-Being	Self-Care	3
Mental Well-Being		
Work-Life Balance		
Social Support		
Learning and Growth		
Emotional Regulation	Self-Control	4
Self-Discipline		
Behavior Regulation		
Rational Decision-Making		
Problem-Solving		
Adherence to Values and Principles		
Focus and Attention		
Innovation and Creativity	Self-Development	5
Learning from Failures		
Character Development		
Perseverance and Resilience		
Critical Thinking		
Networking		
Self-Awareness	Self-Belief	6
Confidence in Abilities		
Managing Fear and Doubt		
Small Experiences and Successes		
Managing Failures		
Positive Self-Talk		
Positive Influence		
Independence	Self-Motivation	7
Energy and Enthusiasm		

Intrinsic Rewards
Confidence
Optimism
Self-Encouragement
Focus on Personal Progress
Managing Stress and Fatigue

Stage 6: Developing the Final Model

The sixth stage is initiated when the researcher has a refined set of themes. This phase involves the final analysis and drafting the report. During this stage, the researchers reviewed and structured the developed model, as depicted in the figure below.
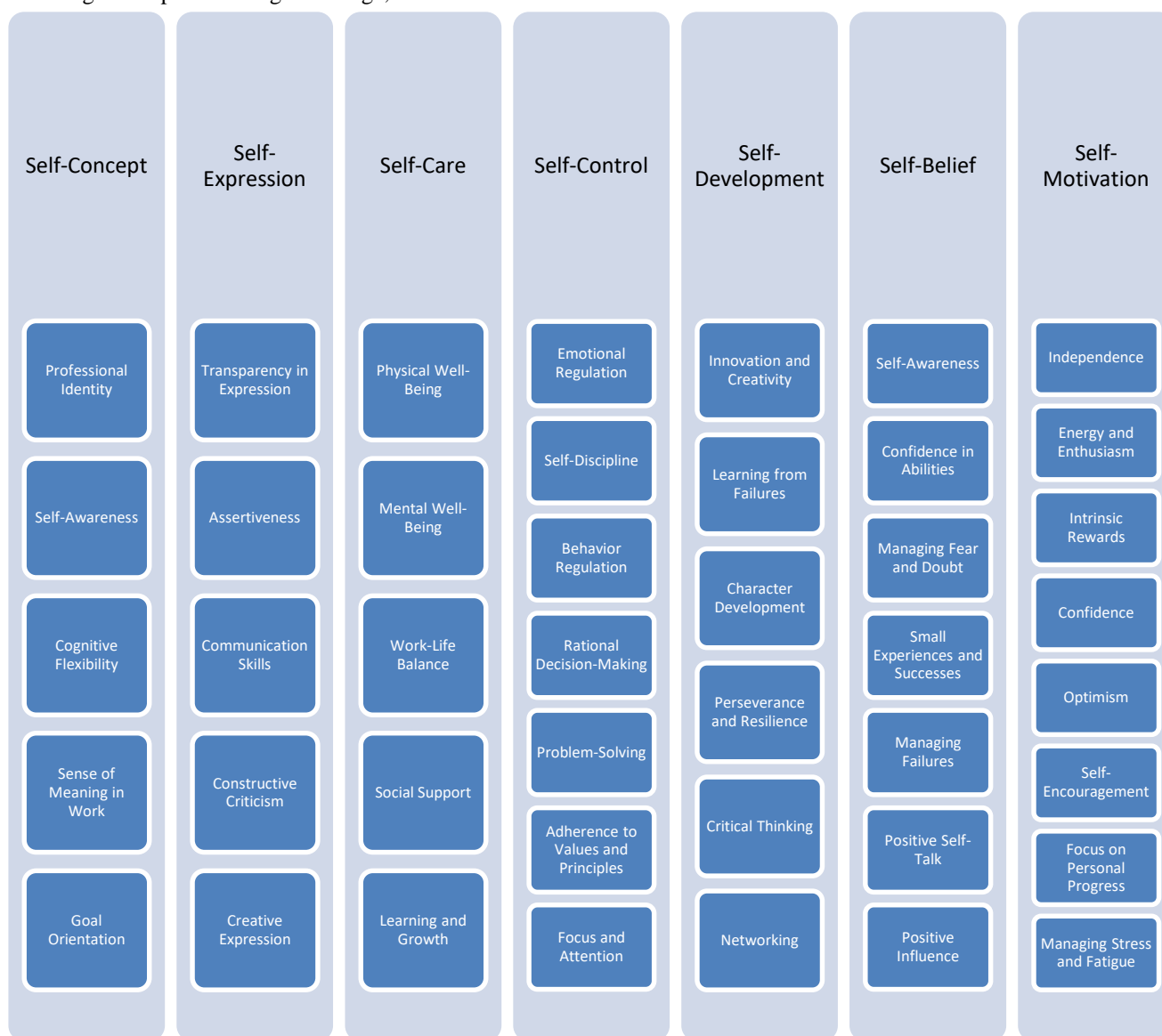

Figure 1. The Self-Management Model for Employees in Iraqi Sports Organizations

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This research aimed to develop a self-management model for employees of Iraqi sports organizations. Self-management refers to a set of skills and abilities that enable individuals to control and regulate their behaviors, emotions, and thoughts toward achieving specific goals. In organizational settings, it typically denotes employees' ability to manage their tasks, time, and energy without direct managerial supervision. When designing a self-management model for Iraqi sports organizations, it is essential to

consider the country's unique social, cultural, and economic conditions. Below, the main components and subcomponents of self-management identified through qualitative interviews with participants are discussed.

Self-concept, or the image an individual holds of themselves, is a fundamental component of the self-management model as it plays a pivotal role in shaping behaviors, motivations, and interactions. In this model, a positive self-concept is defined as a clear understanding of one's abilities, values, and organizational role, which fosters confidence, self-control, and a sense of responsibility. This aligns with prior findings [4, 8]. In sports organizations, where employees face high expectations and dynamic environments, a positive self-concept helps them navigate challenges proactively and constructively rather than reactively. This is particularly crucial for Iraqi sports organizations, which often contend with resource shortages and managerial instability. A positive self-concept among employees can enhance communication, increase the sense of belonging, and strengthen intrinsic motivation, all essential components of an effective self-management system. Cultivating this attribute requires focused training, a supportive organizational culture, and constructive feedback. Such efforts not only improve individual performance but also lead to more independent and efficient work teams. Consequently, self-concept serves as a cornerstone of this model, playing a key role in enhancing management quality and driving Iraqi sports organizations toward sustainability and success.

Self-expression, another key component, refers to an individual's ability to effectively and respectfully communicate their thoughts, emotions, and needs. In sports organizations, especially in Iraq where traditional hierarchical structures may prevail, strengthening self-expression skills can lead to clearer communication, conflict resolution, and increased empathy among team members. Self-expression allows employees to voice their concerns and perspectives without fear of judgment or criticism, thereby boosting job satisfaction and improving decision-making processes. This concept has also been highlighted by prior studies [14-16]. In the self-management model, self-expression closely connects to self-awareness and self-control; individuals with greater self-awareness are better able to recognize and articulate their thoughts and needs. For Iraqi sports organizations, emphasizing this component empowers employees, reducing their reliance on direct managerial oversight, while fostering a cooperative and participatory environment. Training and practice in self-

expression should be integral to the model's strategies, as they enhance both individual and team performance, contributing to the organization's success.

Self-care, which refers to the ability to maintain one's physical, mental, and emotional well-being, is another critical element of the self-management model. It is particularly vital for ensuring sustainable performance in high-pressure environments. Sports organization employees often face occupational stress and burnout due to constant interaction with athletes, managers, and stakeholders. Self-care involves planning for rest, proper nutrition, regular physical activity, and stress management to maintain optimal energy and motivation levels. In Iraq's sports organizations, which frequently grapple with resource shortages, unstable working conditions, and social stressors, self-care takes on even greater importance. Prior studies, including those by Eldredge et al. (2015) and Burke and Cooper (2012), have emphasized self-care as a key self-management criterion for employees [14, 17]. Within the self-management model, self-care is a prerequisite for achieving self-control, self-awareness, and sustained performance. Developing this skill requires targeted training, a supportive organizational culture, and adequate resources to promote physical and mental health. Self-care is not merely a tool for preventing job-related harm but a fundamental pillar for fostering motivation, performance resilience, and organizational productivity.

Self-control refers to an individual's ability to regulate their behaviors, emotions, and reactions when faced with challenges and work pressures. In organizational environments, particularly sports organizations that are characterized by intense competition, resource constraints, and complex interactions, self-control allows employees to make rational, purposeful decisions rather than impulsive or emotional reactions. For Iraqi sports organizations, where social and economic conditions are volatile, self-control is essential for helping employees handle daily stressors and conflicts professionally. Self-development, defined as the ongoing pursuit of personal and professional growth, is a crucial component of the self-management model. It encourages employees to identify their strengths and weaknesses and actively work on enhancing their skills, knowledge, and capabilities. In sports organizations, where dynamism, creativity, and adaptability are highly valued, self-development equips employees to respond more effectively to job demands and interact better with colleagues, managers, and athletes. For Iraqi sports organizations, which may face challenges such as limited

educational resources and learning opportunities, self-development becomes a decisive factor in individual and organizational success. Researchers such as Cowen and William (2015) have highlighted self-development as a critical dimension of self-management [18]. In the model, self-development acts as a driving force for other components, as employees committed to growth often possess higher self-awareness and motivation. This component can be strengthened through training programs, experiential learning opportunities, and fostering a culture of innovation and creativity. By emphasizing self-development, Iraqi sports organizations can nurture a culture where continuous improvement is valued, resulting in empowered employees, enhanced organizational productivity, and better adaptability to environmental challenges.

Self-belief, a cornerstone of the self-management model, involves employees' confidence in their abilities, skills, and decisions. This belief enables them to handle their job responsibilities with assurance. Burke et al. (2012) also emphasized the importance of self-belief in their research [17]. In sports organizations, where employees encounter competitive environments, group conflicts, and high work pressures, self-belief significantly influences their performance quality. For Iraqi sports organizations, fostering self-belief can help address challenges such as resource constraints, environmental instability, and managerial changes. In the self-management model, self-belief fosters a sense of responsibility and motivates employees to embrace difficult roles and perform effectively under challenging conditions. Through skill training, managerial support, and a feedback-oriented organizational culture, self-belief can be strengthened, ultimately enhancing both individual and organizational outcomes.

Self-motivation, defined as an individual's ability to generate and sustain intrinsic motivation to achieve goals and advance in their roles, is a vital component of the self-management model. It plays a critical role in maintaining employee and organizational performance, particularly in sports organizations that demand high energy, dynamism, and constant interaction. Studies by Sarac and Yildiz (2024) and Santoso et al. (2020) also emphasized self-motivation as a critical self-management component [7, 11]. In the specific context of Iraqi sports organizations, where resource constraints and economic and environmental challenges persist, self-motivation helps maintain productivity and resilience. Employees with high self-motivation are less likely to become discouraged by obstacles and are more

likely to seek innovative solutions. Developing self-motivation involves creating an environment where employees understand their work's value, have growth opportunities, and receive the necessary support. As part of the self-management model, self-motivation not only improves individual performance but also positions organizations for long-term success.

The self-management model for employees is based on seven key components: self-concept, self-expression, self-care, self-control, self-development, self-belief, and self-motivation. Each plays a crucial role in empowering employees and improving individual and group performance. These components function as an integrated system designed to cultivate independent, responsible, and effective employees capable of sustainable performance in dynamic organizational settings, including challenging environments like Iraq. By combining these seven components, the model offers a comprehensive and efficient framework for self-management that enhances individual performance and fosters a dynamic, creative, and independent organizational culture. In Iraqi sports organizations, this model can serve as a strategic tool to boost organizational resilience, enhance team performance, and achieve long-term goals. Focusing on and developing these components among employees paves the way for sustainability and success in sports organizations.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

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

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