

Human capital development for smart city objectives: An HR perspective on Oman vision 2040

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the integration of human resource practices with the strategic objectives of Oman Vision 2040. It focuses on aligning human resource strategies with the technological and sustainability priorities associated with smart city development. Fifteen literatures were analyzed in line with the research problem, which supported the investigation. This research found several gaps, which could be addressed in detail to cover the objectives. A conceptual framework is also proposed, which outlines the key dimensions of smart cities relevant to Oman Vision 2040. A structured questionnaire was utilized to collect data from the public and private organizations in Barka. An interview was also undertaken with key participants to gather further insights. Descriptive and analytical research will be applied to this research. Quantitative data were analyzed in Microsoft Excel and SPSS using descriptive statistics, and correlation analysis, while qualitative responses were investigated using theme coding. The findings show that, while organizations in Oman recognize the need to align HR practices with smart city aspirations, implementation gaps persist—particularly in skills development and technology-driven HR procedures. HR practices that emphasize continuous training, an innovation-oriented culture, and strategic workforce planning geared toward smart city competencies significantly improve alignment. However, challenges remain in areas such as limited digital HR preparedness, insufficient specialized expertise, and inconsistent integration of performance management tools. The study provides valuable local insights into human capital readiness for Oman Vision 2040, highlighting the importance of targeted skill-development programs, enhanced HR-technology integration, and more proactive talent initiatives. Future research should examine the compatibility of sector-specific human resources with smart city projects, conduct longitudinal assessments of workforce readiness, and develop frameworks to support the digital transformation of HR practices within the Omani context.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of smart cities is positioned as a strategic priority in Oman Vision 2040, aiming to achieve sustainable economic diversification and enhance the quality of life through innovation and technology. However, aligning human resource practices with national smart city objectives remains crucial to the successful realization of these urban transformation goals. Although it is widely acknowledged that human capital is essential for creating effective, sustainable, and livable urban environments, many Omani organizations lack the HR frameworks necessary to attract, nurture, and retain talent prepared for the digital economy. This leads to underutilized workforce potential and misallocated resources that impede the advancement of smart cities. Therefore, this study examines the relationship between HR practices and Oman Vision 2040, with a specific focus on how inclusive HR policies, strategic workforce planning, upskilling and reskilling programs can be reorganized to support smart and sustainable city objectives. The research also aims to examine the role of HR practices in supporting smart sustainable city initiatives in Oman and analyze the purpose of HR policies in promoting an inclusive environment within Oman's smart city development. This will ultimately help create a workforce that can meet the changing demands of Oman's smart urban transformation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To foster sustainable and equitable urban development, Oman Vision 2040's transition to smart cities calls for more than just technology advancement — it also calls for the strategic integration of human resource (HR) practices. Because organizational culture, leadership, and workforce competencies have a direct impact on innovation and service quality, scholars are emphasizing that human capital is a key factor in the development of smart cities (Sharma & Sharma, 2024; Sallam & Abdelghain, 2023). Aligning HRM strategies with national development goals, according to scholars, improves institutional readiness and promotes long-term

socioeconomic transformation in the Omani context (Al Balushi & Ateeq, 2024).

2.1 Workforce Development and Strategic HRM for Smart Cities

Oman-based empirical research shows how important strategic HRM strategies are to supporting smart city projects. (Aro-Gordon and AlRaeesi, 2021) show that organizational performance in critical areas assisting the development of smart cities is strongly correlated with HR strategies, specifically hiring, training, and employee motivation. Similarly, the integration of electronic HRM systems enhances strategic decision-making and labor efficiency (Al Balushi and Ateeq, 2024). According to these results, HR departments need to change from being administrative to strategic partners in creating a workforce that is flexible and technologically savvy in line with Oman Vision 2040.

2.2 Smart Learning Ecosystems, Education, and HR Practices

Education and intelligent learning environments are frequently cited in literature as being essential to the development of human capital in smart cities building on (Huang's ,2017) research. (Al-Kindi and Al-Khanjari, 2020) emphasize how adaptive technology in smart learning environments can improve student engagement and academic achievement. Their research emphasizes how crucial it is for universities and the tech industry to work together to develop talent that is prepared for the future. According to Oman Vision 2040, these learning ecosystems facilitate ongoing professional development and reskilling from an HR standpoint, guaranteeing that the workforce can successfully participate in smart city operations and innovation.

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2.3 Sustainable HRM, Leadership, and Governance in Smart Cities

Capabilities for leadership and governance are frequently mentioned as being essential to the implementation of smart cities. According to Al Harthy et al. (2021) and Alsharif and Alharthy (2020), ICT proficiency, strategic planning, and human capital investment are critical components of effective leadership in Omani smart city initiatives. Furthermore, (Sharma and Sharma, 2024) support a people-centric governance model that puts employee and citizen participation ahead of technology-centric strategies. Together, these studies show how ethical leadership development, institutional capacity building, and collaborative governance structures—all crucial for the sustainability of smart cities—are facilitated by sustainable HRM practices.

2.4 Cultural Context, Nationalization, and HR Alignment with Vision 2040

Nationalization policies and local cultural values have a particular influence on the development of HRM in Oman. Omanization is crucial for workforce planning, according to Al Balushi and Ateeq (2024), necessitating HR systems that strike a compromise between local talent development and global competitiveness. Additionally, Dharmasiri et al. (2024) stress how crucial it is to include ancient values into contemporary governance and management systems, such as environmental stewardship and majlis (consultation). In addition to ensuring that smart city development stays in line with the economic, social, and environmental pillars of Oman Vision 2040, this culturally entrenched HR approach enhances societal sustainability.

2.5 Conceptual framework – key smart city aspects relevant to HR

The conceptual framework is grounded in Smart City Theory, which emphasizes six core dimensions: smart people, smart living, smart environment, smart economy, smart mobility and smart government. These dimensions collectively influence sustainable development outcomes, including workforce sustainability (Giffinger et al., 2007). It highlights Smart People by promoting learning, innovation, equity, and civic engagement. In smart living, livable communities, infrastructure, safety, and overall quality of life are all given top priority. The Smart Environment component promotes environmental health, clean energy, and green building practices. The objectives of a smart economy include affordability and a strong, shared economy. While Smart Mobility prioritizes accessibility and the integration of multiple modes of transportation, Smart Government encourages cooperation between the public and private sectors as well as participatory government to guarantee that a range of stakeholders contribute to effective urban planning. When these elements are combined, a rational strategy for creating inclusive, environmentally friendly, and technologically advanced cities is produced.

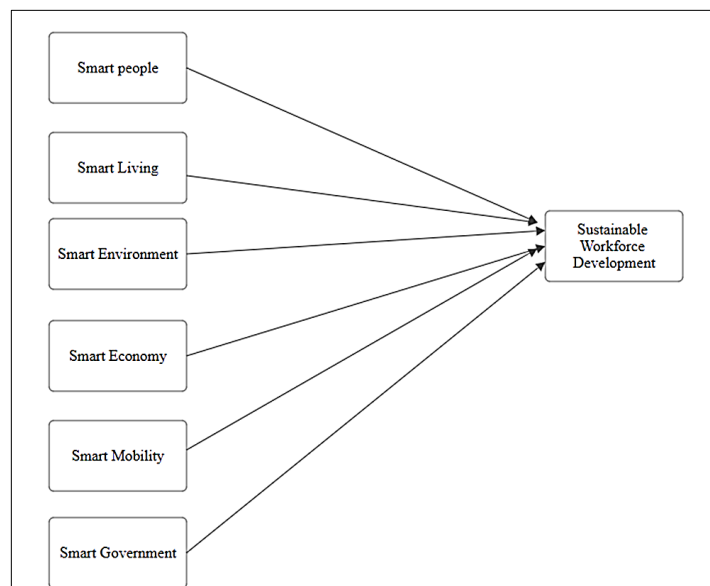


Fig. 1. Research framework

Research on the potential integration of HR practices and smart city goals under Oman's Vision 2040 framework is lacking, particularly empirical

studies that focus on this intersection. Current research usually ignores Oman's unique cultural and socioeconomic traits in favor of Western environments. Additionally, there aren't enough sector-specific evaluations that examine how HR practices could be adjusted for application in various businesses to support smart city initiatives. Stakeholder perspectives on this integration are also still unclear, and there are no recognized frameworks for assessing how successfully HR initiatives achieve the objectives of smart cities. Longitudinal studies that track how HR practices evolve and impact the development of smart cities over time are also essential. Closing these gaps could provide valuable insights into how HR practices can best align with Oman's 2040 vision aims.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed-methods approach and a descriptive and analytical research methodology to investigate how HR practices match with smart city features and how they affect sustainable workforce development within the framework of Oman Vision 2040. To gain a thorough understanding of the study problem, both quantitative and qualitative approaches are applied. Structured survey questionnaires are used to collect quantitative data, and semi-structured interviews are used to acquire qualitative data to capture detailed viewpoints and experiences. The respondents are drawn from Barka in South Al-Batinah using a cluster sample technique, and Madinat Sultan Haitham is chosen as a representative example of an intelligent and sustainable metropolis. To enhance the qualitative analysis, the study sample consists of 10–15 interview participants in addition to 100 survey respondents, who comprise HR managers, organizational leaders, and workers in the smart city and sustainability-related industries. Strict ethical principles are followed when collecting data, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respondents' rights to skip or withdraw questions. While survey surveys and interview responses are primary data sources, academic journals, research articles, and reports on smart city efforts are secondary data sources that may be accessed through databases like Google Scholar, JSTOR, Web of Science, and Scopus. While qualitative data are studied through thematic coding, quantitative data are analyzed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel, utilizing correlation analysis and descriptive statistics. The integration of quantitative results and qualitative themes allows for triangulation of findings and supports comprehensive conclusions about the role of HR practices in accomplishing smart city goals under Oman Vision 2040.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the statistical analysis of the data collected, beginning with descriptive statistics to summarize respondents' perceptions of the study variables, followed by correlational analysis to examine the relationships between them. Descriptive measures provide an overview of the central tendencies and variability within the data, while the correlational analysis identifies the strength and direction of the associations between human resource practices and smart city dimensions. Together these analyses offer an initial understanding of how HR related factors interact in supporting the objectives of Oman vision and establish the basis for subsequent interpretation and discussion.

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Dimensions of smart city (KD1 – KD6)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
KD1	100	2.00	5.00	4.0200	.75183
KD2	100	1.00	5.00	4.0800	.73416
KD3	100	1.00	5.00	4.1000	.84686
KD4	100	1.00	5.00	3.9700	.88140
KD5	100	2.00	5.00	4.0600	.73608
KD6	100	2.00	5.00	4.1600	.81303
Valid N (listwise)	100				

The findings indicate considerable agreement among respondents, with high mean scores ranging from 3.97 to 4.16 across all six smart city aspects (N = 100). KD4 had the lowest mean (3.97), although it was still at a high level, while KD6 had the highest mean (4.16). The moderate diversity indicated by standard deviations (0.73–0.88) indicates responses that are typically consistent.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics – R1 and R2 (Role of HR in Oman's Smart Cities)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
R1	100	.00	5.00	3.7700	1.38429
R2	99	1.00	5.00	3.8485	.77412
Valid N (listwise)	99				

The mean scores for R1 and R2 were 3.85 (SD = 0.77, N = 99) and 3.77 (SD = 1.38, N = 100), respectively. R1 has higher variability, but R2 exhibits slightly higher agreement and more regular answers. Both variables show moderate to favorable perceptions overall.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics – WUR1 & WUR2 (Workforce Upskilling & Reskilling in Smart City Transformation)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
WUR1	100	1.00	5.00	3.9800	.72446
WUR2	100	1.00	5.00	3.9100	.85393
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Based on 100 respondents, the results indicate high mean scores for both WUR1 (M = 3.98, SD = 0.72) and WUR2 (M = 3.91, SD = 0.85). This suggests that both variables are viewed favorably. The standard deviations indicate somewhat higher variability in WUR2 and generally consistent responses.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics-HRP(HR Policies for Inclusive Smart Cities)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
HRP	100	1.00	5.00	3.9100	.84202
Valid N (listwise)	100				

The HRP variable had a mean score of 3.91 (SD = 0.84, N = 100), indicating that respondents viewed it favorably overall. The responses' adequate consistency is indicated by the moderate standard deviation.

4.2 Correlation and Regression Analysis

Table 5: Correlation - Smart city Key dimensions and HR role

		AVG_KD	AVG_R
AVG_KD	Pearson Correlation	1	.514**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
AVG_R	Pearson Correlation	.514**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation study looks at the relationship between HR's role (AVG_R) and key dimensions (AVG_KD). The two variables have a moderately positive association, as indicated by the Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.514. This implies that the HR position tends to improve in proportion to the efficacy of key HR aspects. So, the H_{01} is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis H_{11} is accepted.

Table 6: Correlation - Smart city Key dimensions and WUR (Work-force Upskilling and Reskilling)

		AVG_KD	AVG_WUR
AVG_KD	Pearson Correlation	1	.325**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	100	100
AVG_WUR	Pearson Correlation	.325**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	100	100

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Key dimensions (AVG_KD) and WUR (AVG_WUR) have a somewhat favorable association, according to the correlation study, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.325. This implies that improvements in important HR characteristics are linked to improved relationships and understanding at work (WUR). So, the H_{02} is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis H_{12} is accepted.

Table 7: – Smart city Key dimensions and HRP (HR policies)

		AVG_KD	HRP
AVG_KD	Pearson Correlation	1	.378**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
HRP	Pearson Correlation	.378**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation study between key dimensions (AVG_KD) and HR practices (HRP) reveals a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.378, signifying a moderate positive association between the two variables. So, the H_{03} is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis H_{13} is accepted.

4.3 Qualitative Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis as the primary method for examining qualitative data. It's a systematic approach to identify, analyse, and report patterns within the textual data. The data were collected through

semi-structured interviews based on open ended questions allowing participants to share detailed insights and experiences. Through systematic coding and theme development, recurring patterns were identified to provide a deeper understanding of the strategic role of HR in achieving national transformation objectives. The identified themes derived from thematic analysis are presented in the tables below:

Table 8:- How HR practices align with goals of Oman 2040?

Themes	Frequency	Rank
Theme 1: Skills Development and Training	18	1
Theme 2: Culture of Innovation and Collaboration	15	2
Theme 3: Talent Attraction and Retention	14	3
Theme 4: Strategic Workforce Planning	10	4
Theme 5: Technology Integration and Performance Management	9	5

According to the results, participants placed the greatest emphasis on skills development and training, emphasizing the necessity of ongoing upskilling in technical fields like artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), cybersecurity, renewable energy, and data analytics, as well as critical soft skills like creativity and problem-solving. To improve national competencies, cooperation with academic and technical institutions was also suggested. To meet the goals of Vision 2040, the theme of Culture of Innovation and Collaboration emphasized the significance of creating an atmosphere at work that promotes innovation, interdepartmental collaboration, and knowledge sharing. To create a workforce prepared for the future, Talent Attraction and Retention also concentrated on providing competitive incentives, professional development possibilities, and a balance between Omanization and global competence. Through organized planning, performance alignment, and governance, Strategic Workforce Planning emphasized how HR initiatives are in line with smart city objectives. Finally, Oman Vision 2040's Technology Integration and Performance Management focused on using data analytics, automating systems, and digitizing HR procedures to improve decision-making and make sure that performance indicators complement the country's sustainability and innovation objectives.

Table 9: How do you think HR policies can create a more innovative and inclusive environment to achieve smart city goals in Oman?

Themes	Frequency	Rank
Theme 1: Diversity and Inclusion	20	1
Theme 2: Continuous Learning and Development	17	2
Theme 3: Innovation and creativity	15	3
Theme 4: Flexible Work Practices	12	4
Theme 5: Collaboration and Reward Systems	10	5

The results show that diversity and inclusion are top HR priorities. Participants emphasized equitable opportunities, diversified recruiting practices, and increased involvement of women and young people to boost innovation and organizational efficacy. Additionally, a heavy emphasis was placed on continuous learning and development, highlighting the necessity of continual training in digital skills, artificial intelligence, and sustainable urban planning to guarantee that staff members are prepared to support smart city activities. Additionally, Innovation and Creativity concentrated on developing an organizational culture that promotes experimentation, problem-solving, and employee-driven idea platforms to produce clever solutions. Flexible work practices were shown to be crucial for luring tech-savvy people, facilitating remote collaboration, and accommodating a variety of work styles. To improve engagement and forward the objectives of smart city development, Collaboration and Reward Systems emphasized the significance of praising creative contributions, encouraging interdepartmental cooperation, and setting up ongoing feedback mechanisms.

5. KEY FINDINGS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study looked at how Oman Vision 2040's smart city objectives and HR practices interact. With high agreement on smart living (86%), digital readiness (87%), smart transportation (82%), e-government efficiency (84%), and environmental sustainability (85%), the results show popular support for smart city programs has been robust. Nonetheless, a lower level of agreement (75%) about digital innovation and entrepreneurship indicates that more attention must be paid to this topic. The findings also support a favorable view of HR's contribution to the creation of smart, sustainable cities. While 79% of respondents thought HR

policies encouraged innovation, most respondents (88%), felt that HR practices effectively provide training and capacity building. Initiatives for workforce development were seen favorably; 78% of respondents said there were enough training possibilities, and 80% supported attempts to reskill and upskill. Furthermore, 78% of respondents concurred that HR policies support diversity and inclusion, even though it is advised to develop inclusive practices even further. Overall, the study concludes that to successfully support Oman's 2040 smart city goal, HR practices must be in line with training and skills development, innovation culture, talent management, strategic workforce planning, technology integration, and inclusive policies.

5.1 Findings Aligned with Research Objectives and Framework

The findings show that the public is strongly in favor of smart city projects, with an 86% agreement on the advantages of smart living, an 87% agreement on citizen competence, an 85% agreement on environmental sustainability, and an 88% agreement on labor readiness. The high association between improved smart city key aspects and successful HR practices is confirmed by a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.514$). H_{01} is thus denied, proving that HR procedures are essential to the advancement of Oman's smart, sustainable city development. Training and ongoing development enhance smart city performance, as evidenced by the positive and significant association ($r = 0.325$) between workforce upskilling/reskilling and smart city dimensions. H_{02} is thus denied, demonstrating that worker development programs successfully aid in Oman's transition to a smart city. HR policies and smart city dimensions have a positive and significant association ($r = 0.378$), underscoring the significance of organized, welcoming, and helpful HR frameworks. As a result, H_{03} is denied, demonstrating that HR practices greatly improve Oman's smart city results. Interview responses ranked workforce planning and technology integration as the top HR strategies, followed by talent recruitment, innovation culture, and skills development. Building an innovative and inclusive workplace that is in line with Vision 2040 was further highlighted by themes including diversity and inclusion, innovation, flexible work arrangements, reward systems, and ongoing learning.

5.2 Recommendations

Culture of Innovation: Encourage employees to submit creative ideas that are pertinent to the development of smart cities by strengthening HR policies that encourage risk-taking and innovation. **Targeted Training Programs:** To prepare the workforce for future expectations, start offering thorough training on smart city technologies like IoT and sustainable practices. **Diversity and Inclusion as a Priority:** To ensure greater community representation in smart city initiatives, implement HR policies that give priority to diverse recruiting and inclusive practices. **Flexible Work Policies:** Implement flexible work schedules to improve productivity and job satisfaction while creating an atmosphere that encourages creative thinking. **Align HR Strategies with 2040 Vision:** Make sure that all HR procedures complement Oman's 2040 Vision's objectives, which centre on the expansion of human capital and sustainable urban development.

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Conflict of Interest

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Author Contributions

All authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and manuscript preparation. All authors critically reviewed the manuscript, approved the final version, and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in this study prior to data collection.

Use of Generative AI

The authors confirm that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely for minor language editing and grammatical refinement. These tools did not contribute to the study design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, or the intellectual content and conclusions of the manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the work.

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