

Public Organizations Management

Open Access

Vol. 13(4), (Series 51): 45-62/ 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30473/ipom.2025.72838.5072>

E-ISSN: 2538-600X

P-ISSN: 2322-522X

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Proposing a Model of Productivity Improvement Indices for Managers in Iranian Sports Organizations

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Receive Date: 20/Nov/2024

Revise Date: 08/Mar/2025

Accept Date: 16/Mar/2025

How to cite

Jafarzadeh Kuchaki, B., Javani, V., Aghajani, F. (2025). Proposing a Model of Productivity Improvement Indices for Managers in Iranian Sports Organizations. *Public Organization Management*, 13(4), 45-62.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction

In the era of globalization, human societies are rapidly moving toward organizational structures, with social life increasingly dependent on organizations and institutions. Organizations now serve as main centers of interaction, cooperation, and human progress, bridging individuals, groups, and communities (Miranda-Tapia & Lee Rivera, 2024). However, organizations face unprecedented challenges threatening their survival. Emerging media, advances in information technology, and international standards have fundamentally transformed the organizational environment (Cispe et al., 2024). Flexibility, continuous innovation, and adaptability have become vital for organizational survival and success (Ath & Jacobs, 2023). Organizational management plays a vital role in institutional success through complex processes aimed at achieving efficiency and effectiveness. Key management functions include precise planning, organizing resources, directing employees, and continuous performance control (Tyagur et al., 2023). Managerial personality traits, including extraversion, emotional stability, and conscientiousness, significantly impact organizational performance (Tomasian, 2022; Tallman & Coza, 2024). Large organizations' success depends on managerial competence. Sports organizations are no exception, as the sports industry has become one of the largest global industries pursuing economic, political, cultural, and health goals (Salimi et al., 2019; Ghaedi et al., 2016). Research shows sports managers' productivity is influenced by multiple factors. Effectiveness studies are crucial for diagnosing job competencies (Birkan & Jenkler, 2015), while support and motivation enhance managerial capabilities (Anwar & Boudi, 2018). Technical skills (Asadi et al., 2015; Kachmaz & Serinkan, 2014), personality traits (Demeti & Hoechman, 2022; Akinwal & Oluafami, 2022), and organizational behavior-which impacts productivity by 49.2% (Griffin et al., 2020; Mesgus Asaari et al., 2022)-are essential. Environmental support (Casal et al., 2018), scientific development (Bodowicz-Poyo, 2023), and lifelong learning (Sernito, 2022; Azandi et al., 2022) are also emphasized.

The country's sports sector faces a critical shortage of competent managers, causing extensive negative consequences including failure to secure international positions, violation of athletes' rights, and heavy fines (Nodi et al., 2017). Despite this importance, managerial appointments often remain arbitrary and lack scientific criteria. This research aims to provide a comprehensive model for improving sports organization managers' productivity, offering practical solutions to prevent resource waste and create conditions for sustainable sports development.

Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods (qualitative-quantitative) approach conducted in two phases. In the qualitative phase, thematic analysis was utilized using the Attride-Stirling thematic network approach. After deep and repeated study of texts, initial codes were extracted and classified into three levels: basic themes, organizing themes, and global themes. The data analysis process comprised six fundamental steps: familiarizing with data, initial manual coding, identifying themes, reviewing themes,

defining and naming themes, and preparing the final report.

The statistical population for the qualitative phase consisted of managers from the Ministry of Sports and National Olympic Committee, provincial directors of Sports and Youth, sports federation managers, provincial sports board presidents, and city-level sports and youth department managers. Although theoretical saturation was achieved at the eleventh interview, interviews continued until the thirteenth participant. To assess validity, approaches proposed by Guba and Lincoln were employed, and a research colleague coded three interview samples, calculating a reliability coefficient of 78%, indicating a satisfactory level of trustworthiness of the findings. In the quantitative phase, the statistical population comprised the same managerial groups from the qualitative section. Based on Hooman's (2005) suggestion requiring 5 to 15 observations per variable in structural equation modeling, the minimum required sample size was estimated at 320 participants (5×64). A researcher-made questionnaire extracted from qualitative findings was distributed among the sample, ultimately collecting 350 complete responses. For data analysis, structural equation modeling using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach was employed. The selection of PLS was due to its advantages over other covariance-based methods. This method, with its component-based approach, is suitable for non-normal data and enables working with latent variables and describing measurement errors. According to Kempo and Higgins (1995), this method is ideal for data facing issues of multicollinearity, small sample sizes, and non-normal distribution. Questionnaire validity was assessed through examining cross-loadings of items, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while reliability was evaluated using composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha criteria.

The PLS-SEM approach provided flexibility in handling complex models with multiple constructs and indicators, making it particularly appropriate for exploratory research aimed at theory development. The method's predictive orientation aligned well with the research objectives of developing a comprehensive productivity model for sports organization managers. Data analysis was conducted systematically, first assessing the measurement model to ensure reliability and validity of constructs, followed by evaluation of the structural model to test hypothesized relationships between variables. This rigorous two-phase methodology combining qualitative depth with quantitative validation ensured robust findings that could inform practical interventions for enhancing managerial productivity in sports organizations.

Findings

In the qualitative phase of the research, data analysis was conducted precisely and systematically using thematic analysis. After collecting interview data, verbal texts were carefully transcribed and converted into written text. During the coding stage, meaning units were systematically extracted from the text and transformed into initial codes. This process led to the identification of 34 basic themes, 15 organizing themes, and 5 global themes. From the thematic analysis of interviews, five main categories were extracted: development of personality traits, development of environmental support, development of organizational behavior, scientific-research development, and development of individual skills.

Development of Personality Traits encompassed four sub-themes: managerial personality characteristics, mental and intellectual characteristics, communicative and behavioral characteristics, and motivational and psychological characteristics. This category emphasizes the crucial role of managers' inherent and developed personal attributes in organizational effectiveness.

Development of Environmental Support included three sub-themes: motivation and encouragement of managers, job support and security, and development of skills and team spirit. This dimension highlights the importance of creating a supportive organizational environment that enables managers to perform optimally.

Development of Organizational Behavior comprised three sub-themes: organizational leadership characteristics, development and promotion of human resources, and employee health and welfare. This category underscores the significance of leadership qualities and attention to human capital in achieving organizational objectives.

Scientific-Research Development contained two sub-themes: educational development and academic knowledge, and enhancement of professional and communication skills. This dimension emphasizes the critical role of continuous learning and research in maintaining managerial competence.

Development of Individual Skills included three sub-themes: technical and specialized skills, communication and social skills, and managerial skills. This category highlights the diverse skill set required for effective sports management.

To verify the findings' validity, approaches proposed by Guba and Lincoln were employed. Subsequently, structural equation modeling based on the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach was utilized to assess validity and test relationships among identified variables. Statistical analyses demonstrated that the measurement instrument's reliability and validity were at satisfactory levels. Composite reliability above 0.7 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) greater than 0.5 were calculated for all variables, indicating appropriate composite validity. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha values for all latent variables exceeded the threshold of 0.7, confirming the questionnaire's satisfactory reliability.

The results revealed that five different factors have significant impacts on the productivity of sports organization managers. All relationships were significant at the 0.001 level, indicating that all independent variables have considerable effects on managers' productivity. Among the various factors,

development of organizational behavior with a path coefficient of 0.428 had the greatest impact on sports organization managers' productivity, underscoring the importance of organizational culture and behavior in enhancing managerial efficiency.

Scientific-research development ranked second with a path coefficient of 0.293, emphasizing the role of knowledge and research in improving managerial performance and highlighting the necessity of continuous learning. Development of environmental support, development of individual skills, and development of personality traits showed effects with path coefficients of 0.195, 0.114, and 0.115 respectively. Although these three factors exhibited smaller path coefficients, all factors were statistically significant, indicating that multiple dimensions contribute to improving sports organization managers' productivity.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research aimed to provide a comprehensive model for identifying indicators to improve sports organization managers' productivity in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Investigations revealed five key indicators: development of individual skills, organizational behavior development, scientific-research development, personality traits development, and environmental support.

Findings demonstrated that developing personality traits is a complex, multidimensional process transforming the entire organizational system. Successful managers possessing responsibility, decisiveness, creativity, high intelligence, and strong communication skills effectively manage sports environment complexities. Risk-taking spirit, humility, extraversion, and intrinsic motivation create innovations and constructive cooperation. These findings align with Demeti and Hoechman (2022) and Akinwal and Oluafami (2022), confirming personality traits' central roles in determining organizational behavior, ethical leadership, and interpersonal relationships. Environmental support development emerged as a strategic approach enhancing managers' productivity through three components: motivation, job support, and team skills development. Creating job security and social-political support reduces job stress and increases self-confidence, consistent with Casal, Vinand, and Robinson (2018). Organizational behavior development focuses on continuous improvement of organizational culture through three components: organizational leadership, human resource development, and employee health and welfare. Gully et al. (2020) identified organizational behavior as vital for management, while Asaari et al. (2020) reported a 49.2% positive impact on organizational productivity. Scientific-research development represents continuous enhancement of specialized knowledge through educational development and participation in specialized courses. This aligns with Bodowicz-Poyo (2023) and Sernito (2021), who emphasize lifelong learning and professional development in knowledge-based economies. Individual skills development focuses on enhancing technical, communication, and managerial capabilities. Azandi et al. (2022) confirmed that targeted training programs improve sports management capacity.

It is recommended that sports organizations design comprehensive empowerment programs focusing on these five axes, including specialized training courses, skill-building workshops, continuous performance evaluation, and motivational mechanisms. Managerial appointment mechanisms should shift from arbitrary approaches toward merit-based selection founded on scientific and practical competencies, investing in continuous development of specialized knowledge and managerial skills to enhance productivity and innovation in sports management.

KEY WORDS:

Iran, Managers' Productivity, Structural Equation Modeling, Sports Organizations, Thematic Analysis.

