



An Investigation into the Networking Capability of Sports Boards: A Business Approach

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the networking capability of sports boards, which can be considered a launching pad for promoting sports federations. Networking can lead to a series of positive, innovative outcomes. If networking is performed well on sports boards, financial circulation will improve. Networking in sports organizations can drastically increase the organization's income and business prosperity in all respects.

Methodology: The present study was applied in terms of purpose and descriptive methods. Sports boards' staff in Iran's north-western provinces were considered statistical populations. The overall statistical population of the study consisted of 1832 subjects, from which a sample of 318 subjects were randomly selected according to the Morgan and Krejcie table. Data were collected through the researcher-made Business Networking Questionnaire. Cranach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire. A one-sample t-test and SPSS 26 software were used to test the hypotheses.

Findings: According to the findings, the networking capability of sports boards in the north-western provinces of the country was significantly higher than the average (mean 3 with 95% confidence) in all respects. The results demonstrated that thanks to the small size of the sports boards, they cannot trust their ability alone. Therefore, they should set up standardizing processes and use new information systems to facilitate the networking processes in their structure.

Originality: This study is innovative and is a milestone in reaching a wise government in society. If the networks are established in the sports organizations well, the federations can do their duty quickly and with the most productivity. Networks play a significant role in saving time, energy, and money for sports federations and society.

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1. Introduction

Inter-organizational communication has received considerable attention in both theory and practice (Agostini & Nosella, 2019) over the last two decades. Research in inter-organizational relations has proposed a new communication-induced organizational solution known as a cooperative network. Cooperative networks are operational solutions that develop cooperative relationships based on trust (Cho et al., 2011). In a cooperative network, all cooperating organizations are viewed as a whole, in which each member's capacities, competencies, and intellectual strengths are leveraged to gain a competitive advantage and maximize the entire network's performance. They emphasize that organizations should be placed next to each other and in cooperative positions (Sacchetti & Tortia, 2016). Based on this approach, organizational processes become widespread, and public and private organizations come together to solve mutual problems by applying collaborative solutions. Small and medium-sized companies with limited resources collaborate to overcome any limitations. This is called networking.

The philosophy of networking is based on establishing cooperative relationships (Hardwick et al., 2013). While initially referring to a strategy for job seekers to find opportunities, networking, as a concept, has grown to include collaboration strategies that more effectively establish the brand of an organization, whether personal, corporate, or for a product or service (Rachmad, 2020). Still, this strategy gradually became widespread and is now considered one of the most important pillars of business growth and success (Rachmad, 2020). Networking is essential for the success of businesses. Active and effective communication with colleagues, customers, and experts provides a basic infrastructure for sustainable business growth and development (Govindan et al., 2020). These connections bring new opportunities, market information, and experiences to companies, which can lead to improved performance and increased efficiency (Govindan et al., 2020). Through networking, businesses can easily benefit from diverse resources, use the opinions and experiences of others, and even establish strategic collaborations (Rachmad, 2020). In addition to creating new business opportunities, these connections develop sustainable relationships and credibility in the market.

Networking as a strategic tool plays a vital role in developing sports businesses and can contribute to their success and progress (Agbim, 2018). Mitrega et al. (2017) consider the networking capabilities of a company to create, develop, and combine relationships with various partners, including customers, suppliers, competitors, and research organizations. This capability includes pre-activity in creating organizational communications, communicative capability, and the ability to develop coordination in a set of organizational links. Pre-activity is the power of a company to discover and seize new and promising cooperative opportunities. Communicative capability is the ability of an organization to establish relationships with other organizations based on mutual trust and commitment. Finally, coordination capability refers to the firm's ability to integrate, coordinate, and flow information between partners. These three capabilities are considered as the networking capabilities of the companies (Hasanpour et al., 2023).

Along with network capabilities, network strategies should also be considered to use the networks best (Child et al., 2019). We distinguish two broad strategies for

conceptualizing networks –the entrepreneur’s business network strategy and the social network strategy (Engel et al., 2017). The business network perspective focuses on the potentially beneficial effects of formal relationships with suppliers, customers, trade associations, and other professional connections. The content of the links influences value and performance. In contrast, the social network perspective has its roots in sociology. Its central idea is that position in a social structure influences the attitudes and behaviors of entrepreneurs and, thus, their performance. The two perspectives jointly point to the underlying mechanisms that explain how specific network dimensions translate into social capital with positive and/or negative effects on performance, how entrepreneurs can actively shape their networks, and the benefits that come from them (Engel et al., 2017).

Networking in companies is increasing rapidly. An extensive network can be established by fostering relationships between individuals and organizations, as well as between customers and producers. Establishing networks with people who are active in different fields can lead to job offers, business opportunities, strategic collaborations, and staying up to date with various changes and trends in the world (Rachmad, 2020). Networking in organizations can be performed through professional platforms such as LinkedIn, which provides job opportunities, training, and collaborations between people (Ruparel et al., 2020).

One of the most critical organizations in every country is sports organizations (Green, 2016). Many sports organizations have adopted social networking as a means of communication, as it enables them to efficiently target their audiences, share content, and engage via links to videos, blogs, and other social networking platforms. Hambrick et al. (2019) state that using networks as a communication tool has several advantages and disadvantages for sports organizations. They state that one of the primary advantages of using networks is that it reduces cost whilst enhancing target audience reach. Santos et al. (2019) argue that networking offers sports organizations more direct interaction with fans and other stakeholders, assists them in gaining a deeper understanding of the key issues faced by their audience and stakeholder base, and helps tailor messages to support more substantial relationships. Furthermore, Jasim (2021) notes that despite networking being a critical communication tool, it also has its own set of disadvantages.

According to Temel & Durst (2021), practical networking tools require in-depth knowledge of information technology. They can risk an organization’s image and reputation due to a lack of control and dedicated time. Too, Heidemann et al. (2012) state that utilizing networks is very time-consuming as it may require organizations to stay active to keep in contact with their frequent online audiences or users. The organization then does not always control or regulate every message, comment, and feedback posted via network tools (Iansiti & Lakhani, 2017). Negative comments and feedback, as well as controversial opinions received from audiences or clients, can have a detrimental effect on an organization's image and reputation, as numerous online users can view and disseminate this information globally (Temel & Durst, 2021). Additionally, information posted on the networks can be misused or abused by competitors or exploited for fraudulent purposes by hackers. Companies must be cautious and closely monitor all networking processes to prevent potential problems (Iansiti & Lakhani, 2017).

Among the most essential components of sports organizations are sports boards. The sports board is a sector within the sports organization that provides a favorable environment for the expansion of the relevant sport, tries to attract people to sporting competitions, and invests in skill development following the organization's principles (Hums et al., 2023). These boards represent a relevant sports federation in the province. Their job is to implement and supervise activities at the provincial level in coordination with the general department of physical education in a manner that is compliant with the relevant laws and regulations (Hums et al., 2023).

With significant changes in organizational environments from the early 1980s onwards, sports organizations were also affected, and their survival was challenged; therefore, the continuation of current approaches in sports organizations, especially sports boards, seemed impossible. To overcome these challenges, the need for transformation and fundamental changes in these boards' decision-making structure and policy became necessary (Sage, 2015). Accordingly, sports organizations should look for alternative decision-making methods instead of the traditional ones (hierarchy method and market strategies) in formulating and designing their general policy, at least in some parts of their policies (Kikulis, 2000). Recently, networking models have been proposed to strengthen the infrastructure of civil society and play a constructive, positive, and influential role in the participation of all sectors in designing public policies. Networking is an advertising and communication tool and a comprehensive strategy to achieve business success (Ruparel et al., 2020). This process enables companies to communicate with diverse audiences, generate new business opportunities, and enhance brand recognition. Networking in all its forms can help organizations achieve their business goals (Ruparel et al., 2020). One of the most common forms of network governance is related to providing desirable social services and considering the public interest through the participation of various governmental, private, and non-profit sectors in decision-making processes (Klijn et al., 2015). The primary goal of this type of participation is to strengthen the relations between different parts of sports organizations and societies and improve performance in other areas of policy-making through synergy resulting from these relations (Klijn et al., 2015). Therefore, it seems logical to abandon the traditional policy and decision-making methods because they are not effective anymore (Putnam, 2015).

On the other hand, technological and scientific advancements are occurring at a rapid pace, and many scientists believe the speed of innovation in products produced has surpassed the rate of human learning (Makridakis, 2017). Therefore, sports organizations and boards may struggle to keep pace with the learning speed, even if they allocate resources to diverse strategies to offset this (Makridakis, 2017). Researchers believe that networking plays a vital role in enhancing the performance of sports organizations and boards, thereby creating growth and a competitive advantage for them (Gloor, 2006; Hernández-Carrión et al., 2017).

This research aims to investigate the factors affecting the networking capabilities of sports boards in the northwestern provinces of Iran.

2. Theoretical background

Networking in terms of services and products

Networking improves the sense of creativity and innovation in sports organizations. It also enables sports organizations to utilize all their internal and external capacities to achieve the best results from their products and services and to provide new services (Williams & Chinn, 2010). Pedersen et al. (2007) stated that networking helps to deliver high-quality services to sports organizations. By networking, sports organizations can present their services in all aspects, such as ticketing, organizing events, selling sportswear, and branding in the best way possible (Williams & Chinn, 2010). Considering the lack of research related to the role of networking in providing new products and services to sports boards, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: The sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran possess networking capabilities to deliver exceptional services and products.

Networking capabilities in terms of processes

The dynamic features in networks, including buying, selling, and distributing goods and services, are necessary to achieve organizational goals and play a vital role in highlighting the managerial functions of a sports organization (Slack & Parent, 2005). These dynamic structures and their relationship to the development of networks warrant serious consideration, as it can be instrumental in deriving benefits and advantages (Capó-Vicedo et al., 2011). Nicholson et al. (2015) stated that networking improves the performance of sports boards, especially in the commercial segment of the industry; however, no research has been conducted on the networking processes of sports boards. With this in mind, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: The sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran possess networking capabilities in the processes they use to fulfill their duties.

Networking capabilities of the employees

The networking capabilities of the employees play a significant role in advancing organizational goals (Rohe & Chlebna, 2022). Direct communication between employees and customers through social networking and other means of communication enables an organization to communicate with target customers posthaste (Govindan et al., 2020). Such communications allow the sending of marketing messages to attract customers and improve customer retention rates, enhancing their experience and resolving immediate problems. That is to say, turning regular customers into loyal ones (Agbim, 2018). For example, organizations can quickly respond to customer feedback and adjust their marketing strategies to meet needs and preferences. In this way, networking is crucial for increasing sales and achieving organizational goals (Boso et al., 2013).

Research has shown that the overall ability of sports organizations to set networking standards depends on their employees (Harris et al., 2021). As a result, employees need to be equipped with effective networking capabilities. This allows them to connect the

organization with other organizations (Kramer, 2010). These connections can lead to a better selection of employees in more specialized departments and improve the interaction between different departments (Rohe & Chlebna, 2022). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: The employees of the sports boards in the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities.

Networking capabilities of the managers

Managers need to establish a network of people within and outside the organization. By doing so, a manager can effectively leverage the power of networks to manage relationships related to strategy development and employee leadership. In examining the development of networks in the Scottish healthcare system, Kapucu & Hu (2020) identified management and governance as key issues affecting this network. Managing a network involves facilitation and activation processes rather than command and control, which can hinder progress and reduce trust among members. Managers need to be able to influence and maintain motivation to keep the network functioning properly (Kapucu & Garayev, 2013). Networking also enables the exchange of information between the employees of different organizations, and managers can look for potential permanent work partners by using this tool (Riva et al., 2015). In this way, managers of organizations identify and create work opportunities effectively or plan their organizational strategies based on those opportunities (Kabeyi, 2019).

Effective management in a sports organization involves collective actions, securing resources, and fostering shared values and commitments among members (Knoke, 1990). As a result, managers play a crucial role in the networking management of sports organizations. It is from this that the following hypothesis is presented:

H4: The managers of sports boards in the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities.

Networking capabilities in terms of informational systems

Networking is a crucial market information source and vital to business success. Communication with colleagues, customers, and even competitors enables the sharing of essential information about trends, market changes, customer needs, and preferences (Roberts & Grover, 2012). This information can be a strategic tool for macro decisions and marketing strategies (Roberts & Grover, 2012). It allows companies to adjust to market changes and customer needs and remain adaptive to improve their products and services continually (Hardwick et al., 2013). Additionally, this information is highly valuable for analyzing competitors, predicting market trends, and developing new solutions to achieve significant success. As a result, networking allows companies to make the most optimal use of market information and achieve successful strategies (Rainer & Prince, 2021). All that is described above is an informational system.

Informational systems are interdependent components that support decision-making and control in organizations. Such systems collect, process, store, and distribute information data, help managers and employees analyze or simulate organizational issues,

in addition to helping coordinate operations (Joseph & Gaba, 2020). Informational systems perform three main functions: input, processing, and output. The data is entered into the information system [i.e., input], the processing is executed to turn it into some specific form of information [i.e., processing], and data is sent to the consumers [i.e., output] (Rainer et al., 2020). Lastly, in any system, there should be a feedback mechanism for consumers to use to improve the system.

Although the structure of information systems, as described above, is very similar to that of a computer, the nature of an information system extends beyond the capabilities of a computer or software. Computers or software are tools that encapsulate components that constitute an informational system. However, a computer or software cannot yield the information the organization needs (Murthy & Schafer, 2011). With all this in mind, networking of information systems in sports organizations has been mentioned as an essential step in setting up networking (Wäsche et al., 2017). The following hypothesis is presented:

H5: The information systems among the sports boards in the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities.

Networking capabilities in terms of organizational structures

In the past, most sports organizations functioned relatively autonomously and were not directly or indirectly related to other organizations unless some functions were closely related. However, today, the interrelationships between organizations have increased rapidly, and there are relationships with diverse types of organizations, including public and private sectors. This led to the adoption of the term "inter-organizational networking," where competitors do not act disconnectedly but are related to each other closely, leading to more cooperation between them where information flows freely among the competitors and organizations (Wäsche, 2015). On the other hand, communication and interaction within the organization are different aspects of organizational structure. Meetings, internal discussions, and communication between teams and organization members are crucial (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). These communications can improve cohesion and coordination in the organization, and by increasing communication between members, ideas and criticisms can be exchanged in the best way possible (Rainer & Prince, 2021). Also, networking strengthens motivation and solidarity within the organization and, as a result, helps the organization succeed and improve its overall performance (Boso et al., 2013). Therefore, by creating effective internal communication, companies can use their internal potential and talent in the best way (Agbim, 2018). Russell & Smorodinskaya (2018) define inter-organizational networking as follows: "any relatively stable pattern of relationships or links between organizations or between organizations and individuals, where these relationships express a recognizable type of accountability (however weak and yet often limited), whether formal or informal, weak or strong, loose or firm, limited or boundless. This makes an advantageous synergy in inter-organizational networks that leverage information sharing and encourage the employees in the sports organization, leading to a more straightforward decision-making process due to the ability to exchange information more quickly than non-network

competitors (Nave & Ferreira, 2022). Intra-organizational network structures are characterized by an internal configuration that uses a lateral direction of intra-organizational communications rather than a vertical one and exploits advising processes rather than commanding ones. Authority is distributed throughout the networks, and information is available from many diverse sources at critical moments in decision-making processes (Kato et al., 2011). Accordingly, the researcher poses the following hypothesis:

H6: The organizational structures of the sports boards in the north-western provinces of Iran have networking capabilities.

Organizational culture

Organizational culture is a key issue in organizational behavior and management. All members of organizations agree that an invisible hand guides their behavior (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016). That invisible hand is the culture. By better understanding the organizational culture, we can explain the behavior of members and culture as a springboard for organizational development (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016). By organizational culture, we mean a system in which members share a common understanding of the organization, including its norms and values, as well as their experiences within it, which then distinguishes it from other organizations. Wells & McLean (2020) view organizational culture as a living system, a pattern of behavior shown by the members and how they think, feel, and treat each other. Sharing these experiences can foster a cooperative environment, enabling employees to benefit from one another's experiences and improve their performance, ultimately enhancing the organization's overall knowledge (Anwar & Ali Shah, 2020). This, in turn, allows companies to respond quickly to challenges and develop new solutions by leveraging their past experiences and those of others (Agostini & Nosella, 2019). Findings Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock (2012) have demonstrated that establishing networks through organizational cultures is essential in developing sports organizations. As such, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Organizational cultures are essential in developing networking capabilities in the sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran.

It can be said that all sports organizations and boards, regardless of their context, are confronted with the fact that they cannot reach their goals in today's competitive environment unless they participate in global markets and networks (Chelladurai, 2014). Because of this, sports boards and organizations have concluded that they cannot reach their desired position in the market without taking advantage of the networks (Ferrand & McCarthy, 2008). Accordingly, this research is trying to investigate the possibility of networking in sports boards and proposes the following hypothesis:

H8: The sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities.

3. Methodology

The research methodology was applied for the purpose of this project, as employees of sports boards in the northwestern provinces of Iran between 2020-2023 were sampled. The population of the sports board staff in the northwestern provinces was 1,832. From this sample, 318 subjects were randomly selected according to the Morgan and Krejcie table. Table 1 provides information about the target statistical population.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of the statistical sample of the subjects.

Province	Number
Sports board staffs of Ardabil province	63
Sports board staffs of west Azarbaijan province	82
Sports board staffs of east Azarbaijan province	73
Sports board staffs of Zanjan province	53
Sports board staffs of Ghazvin province	47

Data was collected through a Business Networking Questionnaire developed by the researchers. The questionnaire was composed of 32 questions and seven dimensions including 1 - Networking ability of the services and products [4 questions], 2 - Networking ability of processes [4 questions], 3 - Networking ability of employees [5 questions], 4 - Networking ability of managers [6 questions], 5 - Networking ability of information system [4 questions], 6 - Networking ability of organizational structure [5 questions] and 7 - Networking ability of organizational culture [4 questions]. The importance of each question in this questionnaire was rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Completely Agree" (1) to "Disagree" (5). Sport management professors confirmed the content and validity of the questionnaire, while Cronbach's alpha method, as implemented in SPSS 26 software, was used to determine its reliability.

Table 2. Results of reliability analysis of research variables.

Variable	Reliability coefficient
Networking ability of a product	0.71
Networking ability of processes	0.81
Networking ability of employees	0.82
Networking ability of managers	0.80
Networking ability of information system	0.87
Networking ability of organizational structure	0.72
Networking ability of organizational culture	0.86

Descriptive statistics were used to classify raw scores, design tables, create frequency distributions, and calculate dispersion indices, including the mean and standard deviation of networking features and average responses. The normality of the data distribution was determined using skewness and kurtosis parameters, and a one-sample t-test was used to assess the significance of the results. Table 3 shows that all variables' skewness and kurtosis parameters fall within the range of -2 to +2. As such, the distribution of the variables in the research groups is expected. SPSS 26 software was used for the statistical analysis of data.

Table 3. Normality of the distribution of the research variables.

Networking parameters	The parameters of descriptive statistics		
	Sd±Average	skewness	kurtosis
Networking ability of a product	3.72±2.13	0.498	0.441
Networking ability of processes	86.37±1.36	-0.435	0.410
Networking ability of employees	10.32±3.25	0.680	0.818
Networking ability of managers	77.32±4.25	-0/926	0.038
Networking ability of information system	05.07±5.31	0.334	-0/575
Networking ability of organizational structure	28.52±5.24	0.099	0.492
Networking ability of organizational culture	03/97±5.30	-0/233	0.155

4. Results

Results for demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age, education) in the sample are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Demographic profile of the sample.

Gender	F.	P.	Age	F.	P.	Education	F.	P.
Female	242	75.8	20<	26	8.1	Diploma	41	12.6
Male	76	24.2	20-25	47	14.6	Bachelor	195	61.5
			25-30	100	31.5	Masters	75	23.6
			>30	145	45.6	PhD	7	2.3

Testing the hypotheses:

H1: The sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran possess networking capabilities to deliver exceptional services and products.

Table 5. Comparing the average of the networking capability in terms of the products.

Average	Standard deviation	Number	Degrees Of Freedom (DF)	T-test	Significant level
13.72	2.03	318	317	71.42	0.000

According to Table 5, a one-sample t-test was used to investigate this hypothesis, and the results showed that the average overall score of networking capability in terms of the products (services) was 13.72. According to the significance level obtained ($p = 0.000$), it can be concluded that the sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran possess networking capabilities in terms of products and services.

H2: The sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran possess networking capabilities in the processes they use to fulfill their duties.

Table 6. Comparing the average of the networking capability in terms of the processes.

Average	Standard deviation	Number	Degrees of Freedom (DF)	T-test	Significant level
11.66	1.86	318	317	63.17	0.000

According to Table 6, a one-sample t-test was used to investigate this hypothesis, and the results showed that the average overall score of the networking capability of the sport boards in terms of the process was 11.66. According to the significance level obtained ($p = 0.000$), it can be concluded that the sports boards of the north-western provinces of Iran have networking capabilities in terms of the processes.

H3: The employees of the sports boards in the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities.

Table 7. Comparing the average of the networking capability of the employees.

Average	Standard deviation	Number	Degrees of Freedom (DF)	T-test	Significant level
25.03	3.10	318	317	96.10	0.000

According to [Table 7](#), a one-sample t-test was used to investigate this hypothesis. The results showed that the employees' average overall score of the networking capability was 25.03. According to the significance level obtained ($p = 0.000$), it can be concluded that the employees in the sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities.

H4: The managers of sports boards in the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities.

Table 8. Comparing the average of the networking capability of the managers.

Average	Standard deviation	Number	Degrees of Freedom (DF)	T-test	Significant level
25.03	4.77	318	317	63.47	0.000

According to [Table 8](#), a one-sample t-test was used to investigate this hypothesis. The results showed that the average overall score of the networking capability of the managers was 25.03. According to the significance level obtained ($p = 0.000$), it can be concluded that the managers of the sports boards in the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities.

H5: The information systems among the sports boards in the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities.

Table 9. Comparing the average of the networking capability of the information systems.

Average	Standard deviation	Number	Degrees of Freedom (DF)	T-test	Significant level
31.07	5.05	318	317	75/36	0.000

According to [Table 9](#), a one-sample t-test was used to investigate this hypothesis. The results showed that the average overall score of the networking capability of the sports boards in terms of information systems was 31.07. According to the significance level obtained ($p = 0.000$), it can be concluded that the sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities regarding information systems.

H6: The organizational structures of the sports boards in the north-western provinces of Iran have networking capabilities.

Table 10. Comparing the average of the networking capability in terms of organizational structures.

Average	Standard deviation	Number	Degrees of Freedom (DF)	T-test	Significant level
13.72	5.28	318	317	55.21	0.000

According to [Table 10](#), a one-sample t-test was used to investigate this hypothesis, and the results showed that the average overall score for the networking capability of sports boards in terms of organizational structures was 13.72. According to the significance level

obtained ($p = 0.000$), it can be concluded that the sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities in terms of organizational structures.

H7: Organizational cultures are essential in developing networking capabilities in the sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran.

Table 11. Comparing the average of the networking capability in terms of organizational culture.

Average	Standard deviation	Number	Degrees of Freedom (DF)	T-test	Significant level
30.92	5.03	318	317	75.11	0.000

According to [Table 11](#), a one-sample t-test was used to investigate this hypothesis, and the results showed that the average overall score for the effect of organizational cultures on the development of networking capabilities in the country's northwestern provinces was 30.92. According to the significance level obtained ($p = 0.000$), it can be concluded that organizational culture was significantly effective in developing networking capabilities in the sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran.

H8: The sports boards of the country's northwestern provinces have networking capabilities.

Table 12. Comparing the average of the networking capability of sports boards in the northwestern provinces of the country.

Average	Standard deviation	Number	Degrees of Freedom (DF)	T-test	Significant level
162.41	16.41	318	317	131.37	0.000

According to [Table 12](#), a one-sample t-test was used to investigate this hypothesis. The results showed that the average overall score of the networking capability of sports boards in the northwestern provinces of Iran was 162.41. According to the significance level obtained ($p = 0.000$), it can be concluded that the sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities.

5. Discussion and conclusion

According to the significance level obtained in H1, it can be concluded that sports boards in the northwestern provinces of Iran possess networking capabilities, particularly in delivering exceptional services and products. Regarding the provision of new products and services through networking in sports organizations and boards, it is worth noting that one of the essential applications of networking in these organizations emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was when sports managers networked on platforms such as Eita, Rubika, and WhatsApp, paving the way for new services, products, and virtual job opportunities and promoting their businesses ([Luo, 2021](#)). These companies can improve their performance by coordinating their activities within the networks and leveraging the knowledge and information of other companies as well. This point is supported by [Solano Acosta et al. \(2018\)](#), who demonstrated that components of network operations have a positive and statistically significant effect on company performance.

According to the significance level obtained in H2, it can be concluded that the sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran possess networking capabilities in the

processes they undertake to fulfill their duties. For example, organizing sports events can be expensive for a small sports board; however, effective networking can significantly reduce costs (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). Further, utilizing these networks on computers and media platforms to inform and execute all necessary procedures can help boards optimize the management of events. In this way, networking activities can reduce production expenses by sharing resources while satisfying product distribution channels. This, in turn, can accelerate the production process while generating revenue and reducing costs.

According to the significance level obtained in H3, it can be concluded that the employees of the sports boards in the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities. This finding is consistent with that of Barbu et al. (2018), who noted an increase in the sharing of human resources alongside improved performance. In other words, boards perform better by utilizing network resources, such as technical expertise and network management, creating standardized features with other companies, integrating and deploying valuable information, and sharing knowledge. This finding is also consistent with the results of Garousi Mokhtarzadeh et al. (2020), who reported that networks positively impact performance. This issue highlights another prerequisite for networking within the organization: training. Organizations and sports boards should allocate a portion of their expenses to training employees on networking basics. In other words, if sports organizations devote part of their income to training, they can see significant financial benefits in the long run (Ezuma & Ismail, 2017).

According to the significance level obtained in H4, it can be concluded that the managers of the sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities. While examining network development in the Scottish healthcare system, Silvers et al. (2019) managers were identified as the most effective and efficient network members. Good management secures collective action, obtains resources, and creates shared belonging and commitment among members until needed in the network (Flanagin et al., 2006). Network managers must be influential and motivated to keep the network functioning properly (Rodan & Galunic, 2004). Network management involves facilitation and "activation" rather than a command and control approach (Silvers et al., 2019). Managing networks, then should not be taken for granted (Flanagin et al., 2006).

According to the significance level obtained in H5, it can be concluded that the informational systems of the sports boards in the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities. The informational systems used on the board provide a basis for new activities and clubs to provide integrated services through intelligent systems with greater coordination. This contradicts those who argued that technological innovations are not observed in small companies such as sports boards. Nevertheless, expanding business networks alleviate issues raised by Freel (2005) enabling sports clubs to standardize their activities and implement a new information system to innovate. This enhances entrepreneurial performance and can be viewed as a new source of revenue for provincial boards within the context of establishing a robust business network (Wicker & Breuer, 2013).

According to the significance level obtained in H6, it can be concluded that the sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities in terms of

organizational structure. As a result, networks describe a set of people and their structural connections. This conceptual field enables us to examine how initiating these interpersonal interactions benefits the organization and its individuals. Therefore, network analysis can be applied to different organizations as a conceptual research topic. This is due to the inherent characteristics of communication and the relationships built, which can ultimately be utilized in any organization or management structure to achieve organizational goals.

According to the significance level obtained in H7, it can be concluded that the organizational culture affects the sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran in terms of networking capabilities. Organizational culture is shaped by a lifetime of managerial activities. [Zapata Cantu & Mondragon \(2016\)](#) reported that understanding and receiving organizational norms, values, and goals, with the help of networks, is an essential component of communication among members of an organization. This also exists in sports boards, which can be used to create and develop an organizational culture.

According to the significance level obtained in H8, it can be concluded that the sports boards of the northwestern provinces of Iran have networking capabilities. The sports board is an organization that provides a favorable environment for expanding the relevant sports field and creates motivation in society regarding the pertinent sports. It also attracts people to sports, discovers talents, and raises sports skills based on the principles and foundations outlined in the organization's goals. This board serves as the representative of the relevant sports federation in the province, implementing and supervising related activities at the provincial level in coordination with the province's general department of physical education and in compliance with relevant laws and regulations.

In all, the networking capability of the sports boards in the northwestern provinces of Iran can help link and connect boards in the field of business and sports, as well as attract people to sports, discover talent, and raise the level of sports skill development in a manner congruent with the principles of the organization and, by extension, federation. To conclude, sports boards in the northwestern provinces of Iran can capitalize on the opportunity to network in the sport and develop sports in all its aspects.

Managerial implications

Networking is essential for managing organizations. Every manager, regardless of their position, needs tools, including networks, to succeed. By building a coherent network, they can then lead the organization to its desired goals.

The results of this research have practical implications for managers of sports boards and organizations. In particular, it suggests that managers need to adopt effective management networking strategies. According to the results of this research, networking plays a significant role in the effective management of sports organizations. For this reason, sports managers should not only define their goals but also account for various elements of their organization, including their products, stakeholders, consumers, employees, and managerial processes, which can translate into effective networking. In addition, sports managers should focus on creating a network among all the organization's

stakeholders, including supporters, employees, and consumers, to pave the way for better handling the organization through its challenges.

Limitations and future research

As a limitation of this study, Lazar et al. (2020) noted that external variables influence networking. External variables include system qualities, instructions provided, teaching methods, the level of user involvement, and the approach to implementing networking (Lazar et al., 2020). Therefore, future research can focus on these factors. Secondly, examining demographic variables such as gender, age, education, and income can provide more comprehensive results to the relevant literature. Thirdly, Wellman et al. (2000) state that networking is a professional activity that is more than anything based on social and psychological processes. Examining social and psychological variables could offer a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of networking.

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بررسی قابلیت شبکه‌سازی در هیات‌های ورزشی: با رویکرد کسب و کار

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چکیده

هدف: هدف اصلی این پژوهش بررسی قابلیت شبکه‌سازی هیات‌های ورزشی است که می‌تواند سکوی پرتابی برای بهبود کسب و کار و نوآوری در فدراسیون‌های ورزشی باشد و گردش مالی در اتحادیه‌های ورزشی بهبود می‌یابد.

روش: پژوهش حاضر از نظر هدف کاربردی و از نظر روش توصیفی است. جامعه آماری کارکنان هیات‌های ورزشی استان‌های واقع در شمال غرب کشور ایران در نظر گرفته شد. جامعه آماری پژوهش شامل ۱۸۲۲ نفر بود که از بین آنها ۳۱۸ نفر با توجه به جدول مورگان و کرجسی به طور تصادفی انتخاب شدند. داده‌ها از طریق پرسشنامه محقق‌ساخته شبکه‌های تجاری جمع‌آوری گردید. برای سنجش پایایی پرسشنامه از آلفای کرنباخ استفاده شد. برای آزمون فرضیه‌ها از آزمون t تک نمونه‌ای و نرم افزار SPSS 26 استفاده شد.

یافته‌ها: بر اساس یافته‌ها، توان شبکه‌سازی هیات‌های ورزشی در استان‌های شمال غربی از هر نظر به‌طور معنی‌داری بالاتر از میانگین (میانگین = ۳ با اطمینان ۹۵ درصد) بود. نتایج نشان داد که با توجه به اندازه کوچک هیات‌های ورزشی، آنها نمی‌توانند به تنهایی به توانایی خود اعتماد کنند. بنابراین، آنها باید جهت تسهیل فرآیندهای شبکه‌سازی در ساختار خود به دنبال استانداردهای فرآیندها و استفاده از سیستم‌های اطلاعاتی جدید باشند.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: این مطالعه نقطه عطفی جهت رسیدن به دولت هوشمند در جامعه می‌باشد و در این زمینه نقشی نوآورانه ایفا می‌کند. اگر فرایند شبکه‌سازی به خوبی در سازمان‌های ورزشی مستقر گردد، فدراسیون‌ها می‌توانند در کوتاه‌ترین زمان ممکن و با بیشترین بهره‌وری به وظایف خود عمل کنند و این می‌تواند الگویی برای سایر سازمان‌های ورزشی در جامعه باشد.

کلیدواژه

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کسب و کار
گردش مالی
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