

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Identifying the Factors that Determine the Alignment of Information Technology with Organizational Strategies in Iranian Sports Federations

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction

The alignment of information technology with organizational strategies shows the extent to which information technology and the organization's activities and processes are in harmony with each other (Chen, 2010). In the past decade, one of the biggest challenges facing Iranian organizations was the strategic alignment of information technology with the organization's leaders (Mahmoudi et al., 2009), and this challenge is currently also of concern to managers (Jalilvand et al., 2010). Given the nature of sports federations, working conditions and tasks in them change rapidly, so information technology strategies and organizational goals must complement and support each other based on the environment and nature of the work. The necessity of having a correct strategy for information technology in the organization to achieve the goals of any organization in the age of communications is undeniable, and different organizations, based on their nature and goals, must seek help from this tool in a way that they can achieve their goals as quickly as possible. Given the necessity of advancing strategic goals and improving the management and performance indicators of Iranian sports federations, the present study was designed and implemented to identify the determining factors of information technology alignment with organizational strategies in Iranian sports federations.

Methodology

The type of research is applied based on the purpose and is exploratory and cross-sectional in terms of time based on the method of data collection. The statistical population of the research was composed of experts and scholars (authors of books and articles on sports communications, IT officials of the Ministry of Sports and Youth Headquarters and sports federations, university professors in the field of sports management and IT management) in this field. In the process of implementing this research, theoretical and technical saturation was achieved after interviewing 12 experts. The interview was between the two extremes of structured and unstructured. The interview protocol included predetermined questions and of course the researcher also raised new questions during the study. In this case, the researcher was responsible for coding the answers and classifying them. The interviews in the present study were conducted orally and individually.

The interview was based on the variables of "communication, participation, competence/value, scope and architecture, level of exercise of authority and skills", which are derived from the Luftman model (2000) and the questionnaire of Manian et al. (2009) for assessing the alignment of the IT strategy. The information obtained from the interview led to the development of the Luftman model and its customization for sports federations. This information was analyzed using Max Quda software and content analysis to identify appropriate and specific indicators for sports

federations. The identified indicators were confirmed by the Delphi method.

The Delphi method was followed and implemented in this study in four phases. In the first phase, the problem was formulated and the scope of discussion around the topics was determined. In the second phase, the opinions and opinions of experts were collected and the opposing and agreeing opinions were identified. In the third phase, the indicators related to the agreeing and disagreeing opinions were categorized and the reasons for the agreeing and disagreeing opinions were examined. Finally, in the fourth phase, indicators that received favorable opinions were selected and indicators that received opposing opinions were eliminated.

Findings

After data collection, thematic analysis showed that a total of 439 concepts were obtained from 12 interviews and a number of common issues were raised in each interview. Finally, only 66 independent concepts were identified and were further examined in the Delphi stages.

A total of 66 concepts were obtained and 6 categories were evaluated by experts in the first Delphi round. The fuzzy Delphi method was used to select concepts or eliminate concepts. Thus, the fuzzy number calculated from the values assigned by the experts determines the consensus or lack of consensus for each concept. In the first Delphi stage, 14 concepts were not agreed upon by the experts and were eliminated from the concept category. In the second Delphi round, 3 concepts were not agreed upon and in the third Delphi round, all 52 remaining concepts were agreed upon and agreed upon. Therefore, in this study, the Delphi method was implemented in three rounds to reach a final consensus and identify the determining factors of information technology alignment in Iranian sports federations.

After implementing the Delphi method, 52 concepts were obtained in six categories. Therefore, it has been determined that these 52 concepts obtained can be classified into six categories: communication, competence/value, management/authority, participation, scope/architecture, and human resources/skills. This classification is consistent with Luftman's IT strategic alignment assessment model.

Discussion and Conclusion

Studies have shown that the alignment of information technology and its measurement dates back to the past two decades, and this field of study is still being tested, researched, and studied until it reaches maturity and stability. Since sports federations are among the organizations that use information technology hardware and software, but like many other organizations, the nature of their work is far from the nature of information technology construction and engineering (Lopez et al., 2021), there is a need to examine the productivity and success of strategic information technology projects in such organizations to prevent waste of cost, time, and numerous funds. The results of the present study showed that the main indicators of "communication, competence/value, management/authority, participation, scope/architecture, and human resources/skills" determine the strategic alignment of information technology in Iranian sports federations.

Participation and mutual understanding in the organization include issues such as social and antisocial behaviors, aggression, superiority, high self-confidence, and communication with colleagues, which are of a social nature and necessarily require a suitable environment for appropriate and positive expression or development (Robbins et al., 2009). Managers, relying on their leadership ability, will ultimately lead to greater employee participation by creating opportunities for collective and individual participation and influence on the organization's work processes (Farahani et al., 2017). Experts believe that when the leadership style of managers is more relationship-oriented and less task-oriented, a participatory leadership style is created (Lee et al., 2015). According to the results of the present study, it was observed that the communication and participation of work areas with the IT unit in sports federations can lead to the growth of strategic alignment of IT in the organization. Managers who provide opportunities for employee empowerment have been called transformational leaders. Because a transformational leader is someone who empowers followers and motivates them to perform beyond their expectations and encourages them to follow collective goals rather than interests (Kantz, 2006).

Management and authority and its related factors are positively related to the functions of information and communication technology in sports organizations. Strategic management benefits from linking human resource management with short-term and long-term strategic goals

to improve organizational performance and create an organizational culture that can strengthen flexibility and creativity. Strategic management is a comprehensive, innovative and organized transformational foresight in providing the organization's human resources, nurturing and improving them, providing quality of work life for them, and finally, the appropriate and effective use of this strategic resource by recognizing and applying the aspects of the impact and influence of the internal and external organizational environment in order to explain strategies, in order to achieve the organization's mission and goals (Mirsepasi, 2019). The role of organizational architecture in the strategic alignment of information technology and its success in sports organizations was seen in the present study. When organizational architecture improves organizational performance, the organization has provided its employees with the necessary training to improve their knowledge, ability and skills, and thereby creates a sense of job self-efficacy resulting from acquiring the necessary expertise in employees. While training and acquiring job knowledge and skills, employees gain the opportunity to experience new work challenges and realize the importance and value of their professional duties, which comes from realizing the positive consequences of performing job duties using up-to-date expertise, skills, and technology, and feel empowered. On the other hand, improving the empowerment of the organization's employees causes a change in the practical behavior of the workforce (Abdi et al., 2018).

In order for organizations to make their employees' performance more efficient and effective in terms of educational and specialized levels, they must encourage and motivate their employees to use technology in line with the speed of technological changes and raise their level of awareness and technological literacy. The issue of information literacy and how to achieve it in the context of society is one of the important points that enables the intelligent presence of society in this era (Mohammadi et al., 2016). While it has been observed that not only in Iranian sports federations but also in all Iranian sports organizations, the role of information technology in facilitating and succeeding the organization's functions is very important and fundamental (Mohammadi et al., 2016).

Information technology and business alignment refers to the use of information technology in a competent manner and in balance with the organization's strategies, goals and business needs (Loftman, 2000). In this regard, hardware and software infrastructures and technical tools and methods determine alignment. In this study, it was observed that the most important technical indicators effective in strategic alignment of information technology among the obtained indicators are, respectively: 1- Integrated strategic planning of the organization 2- Appropriate prioritization of information technology projects 3- Leadership ability of information technology managers 4- Acceptance of risks, rewards and shared values 5- Existence of appropriate hardware 6- Participation of organization managers in strategic technology planning.

Considering the results obtained and their alignment with models and results of past research, it is recommended that managers pay attention to the determining factors identified in this study in order to establish better alignment and achieve high levels of strategic alignment of information technology in Iranian sports federations.

KEYWORDS

Strategic Alignment, Information Technology, Organization Strategies, Sports Federations.

