

ORIGINAL ARTICLE**Designing an Organizational Innovation Model Based on Learning Agility in the Departments of Sports and Youth****Nahid Ghavipankeh^{1*}, Saeid Roomiany², Halime Piri³**

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Receive Date: 09/Nov/2024

Accept Date: 10/Dec/2024

Published Online: 23/Sep/2025

How to cite

Ghavipankeh, N., Roomiany, S., & Piri, H. (2025). Designing an Organizational Innovation Model Based on Learning Agility in the Departments of Sports and Youth. *Applied Research of Sport Management*, 14(2), 57-74.

EXTENDED A B S T R A C T**Introduction**

In today's competitive environment, organizations require continuous learning and innovation in order to succeed and survive. Organizational innovation, which contributes to improved performance and the creation of competitive advantage, encompasses novel ideas and activities that differ from existing practices. This innovation is generally categorized into two main types: exploratory and exploitative. Exploratory innovation focuses on fundamental changes in processes and products, typically addressing emerging customer needs and market dynamics. In contrast, exploitative innovation emphasizes incremental improvements to existing products and processes, thereby reinforcing the organization's current structures and capabilities. Beyond its positive impact on organizational performance, innovation also enhances employees' motivation and job satisfaction by providing opportunities for skill development and the expression of creative ideas. For long-term success, organizations must maintain a balance between both types of innovation—a notion introduced as ambidexterity, which stresses that concentrating solely on one type diminishes the likelihood of long-term success. One of the emerging and influential concepts in the field of innovation is learning agility, which refers to the ability of organizations and employees to learn quickly and effectively when facing complex challenges.

This concept has been defined as the capacity to acquire new skills under difficult and unfamiliar conditions, and later described as a characteristic that facilitates the attainment of innovative outcomes. Learning agility is associated with flexibility and readiness to embrace new challenges and ongoing change. It is composed of four dimensions: people agility, which relates to openness to new ideas and responsiveness to feedback from the environment; mental agility, which involves analyzing and integrating information; change agility, which concerns active participation in innovation and change processes; and results agility, which refers to effective performance under varying conditions. Research has demonstrated that agile learners, with their enthusiasm for learning, rapid information processing, and adaptability in addressing problems, play a pivotal role in fostering sustainable innovation. Moreover, continuous learning within dynamic environments enhances creative processes and improves organizational effectiveness.

Particularly in competitive contexts, learning agility enables organizations to remain more adaptable and better prepared to respond to environmental changes, thereby generating impactful innovations.

Methodology

The present applied study was conducted using a qualitative approach, with data collected and analyzed through semi-structured interviews. The employed method is grounded theory with Charmaz's constructivist approach, which provides systematic yet flexible guidelines for collecting

and analyzing qualitative data and developing theory. The choice of Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory in this research is justified by its ability to explore and explain phenomena based on data derived from real-world contexts. This approach enables researchers to generate theories grounded in empirical data rather than relying on pre-existing theoretical frameworks, thereby contributing to the creation of new knowledge in the fields of organizational innovation and learning agility within the Departments of Sport and Youth.

Furthermore, its emphasis on social interactions and relationships allows for the analysis of factors influencing learning agility and organizational innovation. This feature is particularly significant in the context of sport and youth departments, where patterns of innovation and learning may evolve rapidly. Accordingly, the adoption of this method empowers researchers to achieve a deeper understanding of organizational processes and the factors that influence them, and to produce meaningful findings that may enhance the performance of these departments. The statistical population of this study comprised managers and experts in the field of organizational behavior within sport and youth departments across the country. To ensure the quality and validity of the collected data, specific inclusion criteria were established. First, participants were required to possess sufficient experience in the field of sport management, enabling them to provide professional insights and a deeper understanding of the issues under investigation. In addition, familiarity with human resource development was deemed essential due to the direct relevance of organizational innovation and learning agility to HRM.

Prior research or executive experience within sport organizations and youth departments was also considered a key criterion, as such experience enhances comprehension of relevant issues.

The ability to interpret and analyze matters related to career development and innovation in sport organizations was particularly emphasized for individuals actively engaged in educational processes or human resource management. Adherence to these criteria ensured that participants possessed the expertise and perspectives necessary to contribute meaningful insights to the study. In this research, purposive and convenience sampling methods were employed to select participants.

These techniques allowed the researchers to identify and recruit individuals with knowledge and experience directly relevant to the research topic, thereby securing reliable and meaningful data. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached, meaning that data collection persisted until no new or significant information emerged in response to the research questions. In general, theoretical saturation is typically achieved with approximately 12 to 21 participants. In this study, 13 interviews were conducted to ensure comprehensive coverage of the subject matter and to guarantee that the data were sufficiently rich and analytically robust. To strengthen the credibility of the research, considerable effort was made to carefully identify participants in accordance with the specified inclusion criteria.

Findings

Data analysis involved initial and focused coding, note-taking, and concept review, conducted simultaneously with data collection. For validating the results, member checks, peer reviews, and structured processes were used to ensure reliability. According to the study's findings, the indicators influencing organizational innovation based on learning agility in sports and youth departments include an innovative culture, supportive leadership, organizational needs analysis, idea generation processes, enhanced efficiency and effectiveness, employee empowerment, and sustainable development.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the significance of an innovative culture as a key determinant of organizational innovation based on learning agility in the Departments of Sport and Youth. According to the results, both training and organizational culture play a crucial role in shaping organizational innovation. Encouraging risk-taking through multiple practices enhances innovation. Such practices include creating an environment where mistakes are perceived as opportunities for learning, rewarding and motivating employees to engage in agile learning, organizing workshops and idea-sharing sessions on innovation, and cultivating positive attitudes toward embracing failure. In addition, providing access to consultants and experts on risk-taking, along with training employees in risk management strategies, can further strengthen innovation within organizations. Offering extended learning opportunities to risk-taking employees also contributes to fostering this culture. Collaboration and participation are other vital elements of this culture, achieved through the establishment of cross-disciplinary teams for learning and developing innovative projects. Such collaboration enhances interdepartmental communication and knowledge sharing. Leveraging online platforms to facilitate idea exchange and learning, organizing joint sessions for sharing experiences and insights, and creating direct communication channels for knowledge and idea exchange all serve to strengthen collaboration. Finally, implementing systems for gathering employees' feedback to improve cooperation and foster positive relationships among team members can further consolidate an innovative culture and enhance learning agility in the Departments of Sport and Youth.

These results suggest that an innovative culture grounded in risk-taking and collaboration can significantly improve the performance and innovation of sport organizations. Supportive and consultative leadership also plays an essential role in fostering learning agility and organizational innovation in these departments. Consultative leadership contributes to innovation by holding advisory sessions aimed at identifying and addressing employees' learning challenges, supporting creative decision-making, and promoting a philosophy of servant leadership that emphasizes employee growth.

Additionally, utilizing feedback on employees' learning improves leadership performance and alignment with organizational needs. Promoting innovative values through training programs focused on innovative performance and continuous learning, organizing sessions to define and review innovation-related values, and showcasing innovative successes as inspiring models all reinforce this orientation. Encouraging innovative thinking in everyday decision-making and creating spaces for knowledge sharing among employees further increase interactions and the exchange of innovative ideas. Collectively, these approaches can significantly enhance learning agility and innovative performance in sport and youth departments.

Organizational needs assessment emerges as a vital process for improving performance and strengthening learning agility in these departments. This process entails two primary steps: identifying and prioritizing needs. Surveys are employed to gather direct data from employees to uncover their actual needs and daily challenges. Moreover, analyzing existing data such as performance records and previous outcomes helps identify weaknesses and gaps. Group discussions between employees and managers also facilitate the identification of critical challenges, while reviewing past experiences provides lessons learned that can inform future improvements. Once needs are identified, the organization must prioritize them using clear criteria. Analytical models can be applied to assess the importance and urgency of each need. Decision-making meetings involving both managers and employees help establish the organization's main priorities. Incorporating employees' input into the prioritization process ensures that decisions are more precise and grounded in organizational realities. This structured approach to needs assessment enables organizations to address problems more effectively and align their planning with employees' actual and immediate needs. Finally, ideation processes represent a central component in enhancing innovation and ensuring continuous development in sport and youth organizations.

These processes begin with the creation of environments that stimulate creative thinking and idea generation. Designing creative workspaces can foster innovative thinking among employees and encourage the presentation of new and diverse ideas. Regular brainstorming sessions, as a powerful group tool, further facilitate idea exchange and analysis within an interactive space. The presence of innovation within organizations ultimately leads to improved employee performance, higher motivation, and greater job satisfaction.

KEY WORDS

Innovative Culture, Idea Generation, Sustainable Development.

