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## Classical Model of Strategic Behavior of Iranian Sports Managers

Rasool Nazari<sup>1</sup>, Fariba Rafeei Dehkordi<sup>2</sup>

1. Faculty of Sports Sciences, Iran Branch (Khorasgan), Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran  
r.nazari@khuif.ac.ir (Corresponding Author)
2. Faculty of Sports Sciences, Iran Branch (Khorasgan), Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran  
frdrafeei@gmail.com

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### Abstract

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The design of the strategic behavior model of sports managers is exploratory in nature and in need of being provided with a schematic model. Using a classic approach with grounded theory, data analysis was done in four overlapping processes of initial coding, focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding. Data collection and analysis was done consciously and simultaneously. Participants included 20 professors of physical education, educational sciences, psychology and political science, senior managers of physical education departments of universities and managers and experts of the sport and all people with experience in sports management who were purposefully selected. The average duration of interviews varied between 15 and 30 minutes. The findings of this study showed that the components of behavior including political, supportive, ethical, investment, entrepreneurial, innovative, mentoring, conservative and opportunistic behavior can be a suitable behavioral model for Iranian sports managers. Knowledge, strategic thinking and skills of managers complement this behavioral pattern. The findings also showed that in this pattern of behavior, which was ideal for participating managers, items such as organizational barriers and problems, managers' styles and individual differences are among the confounding factors in this model. In general, the results showed that Iranian sports managers can be inspired by the presented model to help their popularity, growth and excellence of the organization, increase profits, gain opportunities, support employees, appropriate distribution of resources and overcome the daily problems of the organization.

**Keywords:**

Behavior, Classic Approach, Grounded Theory, Sports Managers, Strategic.

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## Introduction

Advances in understanding the true behavior of managers over the years and developments in various behavioral models have increased the ability to make decisions in times of crisis on various issues (Vecchiato., 2019). The type of behavior that managers adopt regarding increasing self-esteem and motivation of employees will increase subordinates' trust in the manager and their support of the first person of the organization, and these behaviors will open the way to achieve the goals of the organization (Albulescu., 2020). It is one of the features that can help manage and lead sports organizations. Management plays an important role in strategy formation and its effective implementation. Also, the leadership styles of decision makers have helped them, which ultimately puts the organization's focus on the success of managers in achieving the goal and employee participation (F. Wang, Wang, & Zhang., 2017). A variety of forms of management have been proposed as a mechanism for developing managers' skills in response to changing work environments (Nazari., 2018). Management methods, especially the supportive behaviors of managers, are helpful in creating a suitable environment for training employees and increasing their motivation (Nasiri et al., 2020).

Senior managers of many sports organizations spend significant time, energy and financial and human resources to formulate strategies and determine the basic strategies of their organizations to achieve their goals (Nazari., 2016), but their employees' awareness and understanding of this vision and mission is very low and their alignment and empathy to achieve the goals derived from this vision and mission is too little (Nasiri, Nasiri, & Norrollahi., 2020); Therefore, senior managers are always looking for a solution to achieve the implementation of their strategies so that they can make the best decisions for the organization (Razavi, Ghare, Hosseini, & Talaie., 2018). Management model is a relatively stable behavioral pattern that is one of the characteristics of a leader. New management approaches can have positive effects on the attitudes and behaviors of followers and can increase employee commitment and satisfaction ( Nazari, Dickson, & Rafeei., 2022).

Effective employee management has been an endless skill since the beginning of management science. The skill of coordinating people with others is another key skill for managers. Establishing the right and logical coordination between individuals, units and the right relationship with stakeholders and environmental developments is an important part of this skill (Naghshbandi & Mirani., 2019). The existential cause and basic responsibility of managers is executing leadership roles, decision making, management style and beliefs and especially their behavior at all management levels (Vecchiato., 2019). In sports organizations, it is very important to pay attention to manpower. In fact, it is with the efforts of sports organizations that the health of the active and efficient workforce of other organizations is ensured and creating satisfaction in the workforce within these organizations leads to satisfaction in society, which facilitates the achievement the organizational goal (Guenzi, Georges, & Pardo., 2009).

The leadership styles of decision makers have helped them in the field of management, which ultimately focuses on the success of managers in achieving the goal and participation of employees. The existential cause and basic responsibility of managers is executing leadership roles, decision making, management style and beliefs and especially their behavior at all management levels (Nazarii, Rafeei Dehkordi, & Ramezani Nejad., 2020). While most researchers have focused on the effect of managerial beliefs on strategy and showed that managers' behaviors are not constant and strategic decision making can profoundly affect their development (Nazari, Anvari, & Aboodarda., 2018). It may be possible to identify some specific behaviors of managers that lead to employee satisfaction and prevention of capital wastage, goal orientation, discovering new areas of business, maturity and survival of the organization, no risk-taking, improving the situation with political behavior and policy as a source of organizational capital (Roeth, Spieth, & Lange., 2019).

The change in nature of work in organizations with flat organizational structures and designing interaction-based work have created new approaches to managerial development (Mir Ameri, Abbasi, & Jamshidi., 2019). A variety of forms of management have been proposed as a mechanism for developing managers' skills in response to changing work environments (Samavatyan, Khani, Nouri, & Shariat., 2011). Some behaviors in managers cause employees to have a comprehensive view of the manager and managers are perceived as competent individuals by employees, which requires new ideas and thoughts in managers (Shao., 2019).

In the meantime, it seems that one of the effective tools in creating and accompanying employees to control the organizational breakthrough currents is the integration of warm behaviors of managers (Kalar, Primc, Erker, Dominko, & Ogorevc., 2021). Managers with professional behavior can coordinate and prepare the employees for confronting these currents, because behavior of manager not only is a subject of their personal interests, but also represents the level of respect for others' values and beliefs and this

influences the employees (Eidi, Loghmani, & Ssraroudi, 2014). The existential cause and basic responsibility of managers is executing leadership roles, decision making, management style and beliefs and especially their behavior at all management levels (Khan, Abbas, Gul, & Raja, 2015). It has been shown that managerial beliefs are not fixed and the behavior and type of decision making can profoundly affect evolution of the organization (Nazari, Ehsani, Gangoei, & Ghasemi., 2012). Leadership styles of managers have an important role in the field of management. Sometimes people have to behave beyond their own interests for others so that their relationships are continued and reinforced (Sarлак & Nouriani, 2020).

Support of managers and supervisors for employees by making them involved in making decisions and providing appropriate occupational feedback and respectful behaviors are considered as support for employees because employees tend to have the representatives of the organization as their supporters (Wakefield & Giacobbe, 2008). Management methods, especially supportive behaviors of managers, are complementary to creating a suitable environment for training employees and increasing their motivation (Wang, Schaefer, Dandekar, & Greenberg, 2015). The increasing pressure of the business in a competitive space has made such a condition that makes the organizational dynamics and survival dependent on the managers' equipped with strategic thinking capability because managers equipped with strategic thinking can motivate and encourage other employees to find creative solutions for the organizational success (Jackman, Dargue, Johnston, & Hawkins, 2021).

Understanding political behavior will help and contribute to organizational trust and social motivation (Noroozi, Malekinejad, & Rahimi-Movaghar., 2018). Paying attention to employees and human resources in any organization, identifying and strengthening appropriate and useful behaviors, and paying attention to negative behaviors distancing the organizational goals and helping to eliminate them cause organizational growth and excellence (Elbanna., 2018). The ever-increasing complexity of today's societies has led organizations to provide appropriate feedback for analysis of issues related to basic decision making and strategic planning by manager. Examining the behaviors of managers and subsequently their effectiveness in organizations was of this type of feedback. Organizations make up today's communities, rapid change in today's world has brought about different challenges for these small and large communities (Guenzi et al., 2009).

The researcher also seeks to find the effect of managers' leadership skills, beliefs and styles on their behaviors. The current research can help find the proper path for creativity of sport managers. The success of the organization and its relationship with the strategic thinking of its top management encourage them to strengthen this type of thinking in themselves so that more success is achieved for the organization, resulting in reinforcement and progress. In management processes, there are some internal and external obstacles and limitations. Through presenting a model of managers' behavior, the present study deals with designing a conceptual model composed of different managerial behaviors and their integration in the form of strategic behavior.

Due to different leadership styles and different personality types and considering the presence of strategic thinking knowledge in Iranian sports managers, it is expected to solve problems inside and outside the organization and unique decisions by managers according to their strategic behavior. Finally, it can be acknowledged that the importance of recognizing the different dimensions of behavior, the outcome of managers' decision making without strategic thinking, adopting an appropriate behavioral strategy for employee behavior, knowing the positive and negative aspects of political behavior in the fate of management, knowing the role of management skills in achieving the organizational goals, awareness of managers about their behavior and approach toward obstacles in the organization, and knowing the role of strategic thinking in managers' behavior are the most important reasons for the importance and necessity of the present study. Doing this research can fill the gap caused by strategic thinking, new skills of managers and applied knowledge for managers of sports organizations in order to make strategic decisions and satisfy employees and align them in the direction of organizational ideals, so what are the components of this model and the constructive factors of strategic behavior in sports managers?

## Research Methods

The present study has been conducted with an exploratory method, and with the aim of expanding the existing knowledge and understanding about human capabilities in the field of sports. The purpose of exploratory research is to clarify concepts, gather definitions, gain insight, correct problems and ideas. In this research, the grounded theory strategy was used. In order to present a schematic model of the findings derived from the codes, an attempt has been made to use a classic approach in the grounded theory. The 2 overlapping processes in classic analysis of grounded theory are: initial coding and theoretical coding. In the present study, because we seek to discover new concepts, it is exploratory-fundamental in terms of its nature,

it is inductive in terms of approach, and it uses interpretive-constructive paradigm. While it uses grounded theory with a classic approach as the research strategy, it is a field and library research in terms of data collection, and finally, it is a model presentation research in terms of purpose.

**Table 1. Research participants**

Type	Component
Exploratory-fundamental	Nature of research
Mixed approach	Research method
Interpretive / positivism (pragmatism)	Research paradigm
Inductive	Research approach
Grounded theory/survey	Research strategy
Focus groups / Existing theoretical studies / Questionnaire / Interview	Data collection
Conceptualization and categorization based on a classic approach	Data analysis

According Table (1), In-depth interviews and theoretical studies were used for data collection. Grounded theory underpins strategies of qualitative method, which focuses on information emergence from data to be able to create a theory with a model. In this study, after studying and reviewing the mentioned challenge in order to present a systematic and schematic model of the findings arising from the coded data, an attempt was made to use the classic approach in the grounded theory. The note-taking process in the classic approach of grounded theory is shown in the figure below. Subjectivity: creative, meaningful and interpretive mind of researcher

Objectivity: events, expressions, interpretations, and interests of people, data and evidence Note-taking process, the theory is evolutionary developed in this way.

The criterion for the participation of the participants was that they should have sufficient knowledge and experience in the field of sports and the administration of sports organizations. Participants in the study included professors of physical education and sports sciences (all majors), educational sciences, psychology and political science, senior managers of physical education departments of universities and managers and experts of the General Directorate of Physical Education and all people with experience in sports management. According to the characteristics and indicators specified in the inclusion criteria, in order to perform in-depth interviews, purposive sampling method and snowball sampling technique were used. Data collection stopped after 20 interviews due to data saturation. Following studying and reviewing the theoretical foundations, raw data were obtained inductively from in-depth interviews with experts and specialists. Simultaneously with the interviews, data were analyzed based on grounded theory with a classic approach.

Four strategies were used to audit the present study; initially, for reliability, the researcher coded one of the interviews after one month again, and the results were compared with the Scott coefficient. It should be noted that for reliability and transferability, the method of analysis of research members was used. In this method, the researcher's report was studied in terms of accuracy and completeness. In this regard, dependability in the meaning that whether if someone else encodes the same findings were made was examined. For verification, three experts reviewed the codes, findings and model, and all the steps were presented in detail so that the experts could give their opinion about the model.

**Findings**

In initial coding, pieces of data such as lines, words, segments, and events are examined. In particular, we consider them from an analytical perspective. In fact, the initial codes are placed in concepts and categories based on the content of each of them. The purpose of initial coding is to break down the collected data set into the smallest possible conceptual components. At this stage of the research, out of about 290 transcribed sentences from the interviews, after removing duplicate and unrelated items, about 230 initial codes were identified and marked by the researcher in the first stage.

In the next step, the initial codes obtained in the previous step were converted into 65 primary concepts and 18 categories. At this stage, 18 categories were identified. At this stage of the research, 4 focused codes were presented.

**Table 2. Concepts and focused codes**

Major concepts	Categories
Plotting future behavior; Creating ideas in resource allocation and forecasting	Futuristic thinking
Decision making; Decision making strategies	Decision making strategies
Intrinsic desire to develop in a short time; resources and equipment	Developmental thinking

Major concepts	Categories
High efficiency; Lack of interaction in some cases; Participatory leadership	Leadership Styles
Extraversion; Compatibility; Accountability	Individual differences
Human barriers; Organizational barriers	Obstacles and problems
Personal knowledge; Strategic knowledge; Improving efficiency by promoting knowledge, sharing knowledge capacities	knowledge and awareness
Political skills; Perceptual skills; New management skills; Communication skills	Managers' skills
Long-term look; Transformational; Distribution of resources in proportionate to objectives; Systematic and intelligent thinking; High organizational motivation; Interpretation of events	Strategic thinking
Positive and negative aspects of political behavior; Individual and personality factors; Environmental and internal conditions of the organization; Creativity of managers and knowledge of managers	Political behavior
Support of managers; Benefits of support; Supportive aspects	Supportive behavior
Learning ethics; Ethical standards; Immorality as a poison for popularity	Ethical behavior
The importance of ethics; Orientation to goals	
Reducing economic problems	Entrepreneurial behavior
Promoting organization and developing culture	
Discovering new areas of business	
Factors affecting managers' innovation	Innovative behavior
Innovation in managers' thoughts and interactions	
Innovative behavior as the factor of survival and growth of the organization	
Development through exploration and innovation	
Investment and profit with risk-taking	Investment behavior
Underlying behavior of managers	
The positive and negative dimensions of opportunism	Opportunistic behavior
Improving the situation with opportunistic tools	
No risk-taking	Conservative behavior
Qualitative characteristics in conditions of uncertainty	
Effective on the ability of the manager in the maturity or decline of the organization	
Effective behavior; Role-playing behavior	Mentor behavior
Self-directed behavior; Perfectionist behavior; Consonant	

In table (2) the minor and major categories of the strategic behavior model of Iranian sports managers.

**Table 3. Major categories of the strategic behavior model of Iranian sports managers**

Minor concepts	Major concepts
Futuristic Thinking - Decision Making Strategies - Developmental Thinking	Ambiguity of strategic behavior
Leadership styles - individual differences - obstacles and problems	Confounders
Knowledge and awareness - Managers skills - Strategic thinking	Supplements
Political Behavior - Supportive Behavior - Ethical Behavior - Entrepreneurial Behavior - Innovative Behavior - Investment Behavior - Opportunistic Behavior - Conservative Behavior - Mentor Behavior	Behavior components

According to Table (3), theoretical coding is a complex level of the coding process. In theoretical coding, the codes created in the focused coding step are followed. These codes help the researcher to construct and describe his analytical story. Thus, these codes not only conceptualize the relationships between the codes, but also move the analytical story towards the theoretical domain.

After analyzing the categories related to the strategic behavior model of managers of sports organizations, the final model is that different behaviors, based on the confounding factors and supplements shown in the model, make the strategic behavior of managers. The following figure shows the model of strategic behavior of Iranian sports managers. The results showed that using interviews, literature and related documents and clips, after removing duplicate and unrelated items, about 290 key points were obtained from the data categorized in the form of 230 primary codes, 65 concepts and 18 categories for the 4 main factors. The main factors included a) ambiguity of strategic behavior b) supplements c) confounders and d) components of behavior. From the dimensions of the main factors of the model, the following were obtained: a) Ambiguity of strategic behavior (futuristic thinking, decision-making strategies, developmental



thinking); B) Components of behavior (political behavior, supportive behavior, moral behavior, investment behavior, entrepreneurial behavior, innovative behavior, conservative behavior, opportunistic behavior, leadership behavior); C) confounders (leadership styles, individual differences, obstacles and problems); D) Supplements (knowledge and awareness, managers' skills, strategic thinking).

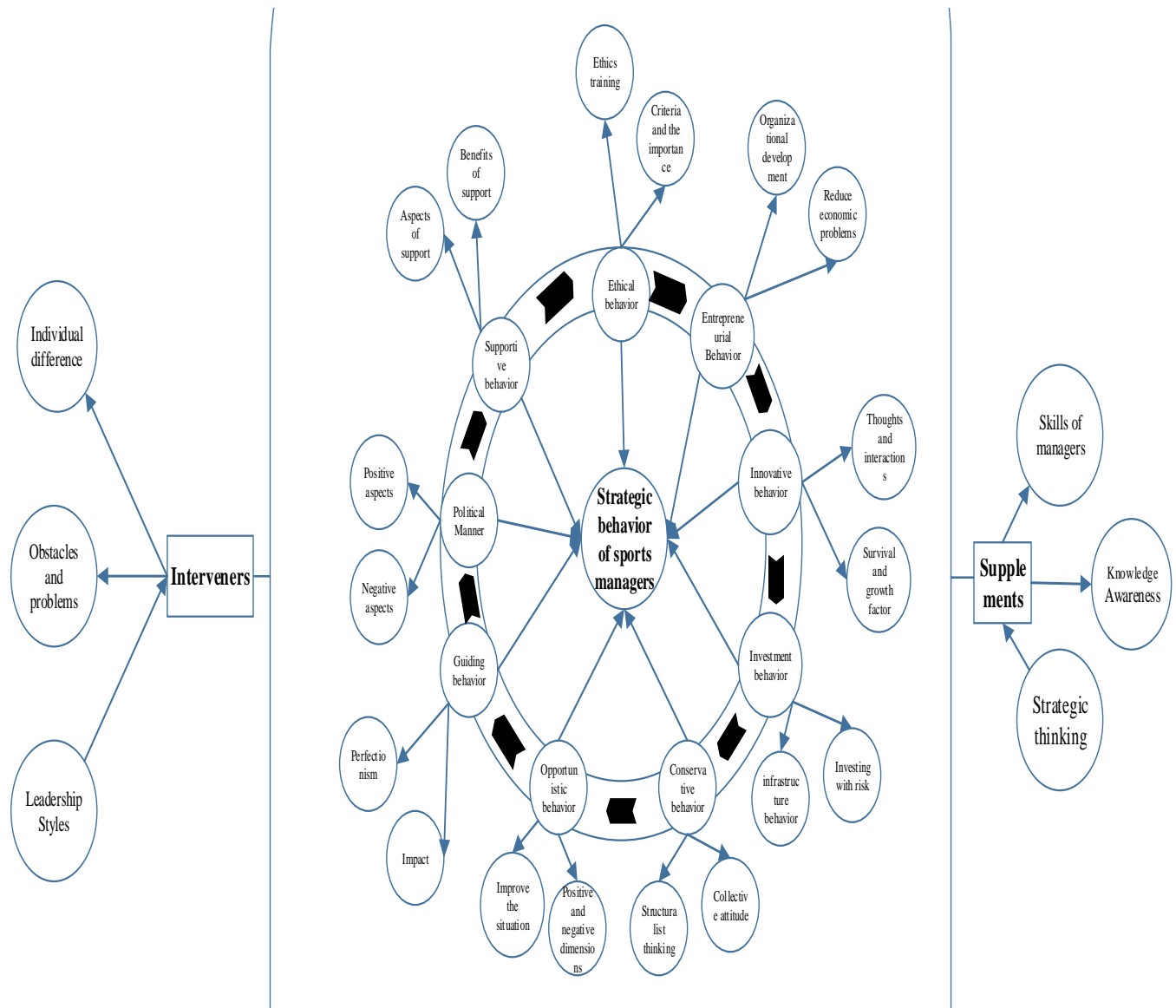


Figure 1. The proposed model of strategic behaviors of sports managers

### Discussion

The results of this study include achieving goals in the shortest time with the lowest cost, employee participation in decision making and creating a sense of satisfaction in them, maintaining the lifetime of the organization, creating a bright future and achieving the desired conditions and productivity in the organization's programs. These are the codes obtained about the positive dimensions and aspects of political behavior, and the distortion and manipulation of information, deviation from the goals of the organization and change in the view of managers are the codes obtained about the negative dimensions and aspects of political behavior. In this study, the interviewees pointed to the positive and negative aspects of political behavior and claimed that it has a great impact on meeting the needs of the organization and also considered it as one of the main pillars of managers' behavior. Regarding political behavior, Interviewees, referred to internal conditions and its environmental conditions, as well as organizational factors. Most people tend to view political behavior as oppressive and persistent. In his research on the positive aspects of political behavior on decision-making, Elbanna states that political behavior is often one of the main driving forces in organizations and decision-makers are often willing to use appropriate political tactics to advance their organizational goals, and considers it as one of the constructive aspects of political behavior that covers part of alignment (Elbanna., 2018). He examines the mediating effect of organizational trust on the effect of

perceived political behavior on social motivation that produces positive and negative outcomes. He claims that trust and perception are the basis of social relationships between employees and managers. Kocak stated that the negative impact of employees' perceptions of political behavior on their motivations can be reduced through organizational trust (Kocak., 2020).

According to the results of this study, ethics gives the direction to the path that managers take to achieve goals. Also, the root of many economic problems was identified as lack of ethics in behavior, and the increase in division of labor and repetitive tasks have been identified due to lack of ethics in behavior. Codes derived from ethical behavior show the importance of ethics of sports managers and emphasis on acquiring ethics by managers. Ethical behavior of employees on their job satisfaction and showed that there is a positive relationship between ethical behavior and job satisfaction in employees (Eidi et al., 2014). In fact, it can be said that from the point of view of managers, forcing employees to moral behavior can be effective in their job satisfaction. On the other hand, some researchers have stated that one of the important factors in the development of ethics in organizations is the ethical behavior of the managers and supervisors and positive reinforcement for ethical behavior. On the other hand, immoral actions by managers cause immoral treatment of subordinates. Therefore, if there is work ethic in the workplace, we will see working with job satisfaction and self-fulfillment and individual innovation on the one hand, and the satisfaction of people and the progress of work on the other. Furthermore, job satisfaction can be the result of ethical behavior in the workplace that increases productivity in the organization.

In developing societies, the lack of credit due to economic hardships requires the entrepreneurial behavior of managers. In order to solve economic problems, it is necessary to implement entrepreneurship programs for the organization. Creating jobs in the working field of sports managers, reducing economic problems, and discovering new areas of business are among the results obtained, which emphasize the need for such behavior for managers. Optimal use of resources at the disposal of managers is one of the entrepreneurial behaviors for managers. Entrepreneurship along with strategic thinking creates wealth. The results of this study showed that the coordination of ideas and behaviors with innovation can be profitable for organizations and strategic thinking is mostly observed in creative and innovative managers. The results of this study consider the need for innovation for managers even in social interactions. Among the main results of this research, we can mention the creativity of sports managers in presenting decisions under specific circumstances. Strategy in customer behavior can have an important effect on its absorption and retention (F. Wang et al., 2017). Knowing how to deal with the customer, or in other words, with the employees, can guarantee the stability of the system and make managers more productive. In a study on entrepreneurial behavior and its relationship with people's perception, it has been shown that people's perceptions have an impact on entrepreneurial behavior and it seems that by changing attitudes and orienting people's abilities and interests, behavior in the organization can be changed. The achievements of this part of the research are consistent with the results Nazari, & et al(2022) that they acknowledged new management approaches can have positive effects on the attitudes and behaviors of followers and can increase employee commitment and satisfaction.

The results showed that innovation behavior at the senior management level can be highly influential, and managers involved in exploratory innovation pursue new knowledge and develop their organization. The results also showed that the tendency of managers to take risks is a factor in creating innovation in the organization, and successful organizations direct innovation and marketing activities simultaneously on the path to achieving superior performance. Innovative behavior is a factor in the growth and survival of sports organizations. The results showed that opportunism is a tool in the hands of sports managers to maintain management, and managers adopt opportunistic behavior to maintain their interests. Managers believe that opportunism, with professional ethics, is an optimistic aspect of the dimensions of opportunism.

The results of this study showed that managers with investment behavior are very risk taking, and successful investors have higher risk power. The results also showed that investment behavior is more common in competitive managers, and in organizations where there is an investment opportunity, having investment behavior is one of the basic behaviors of managers. The results showed that conservatism is one of the limiting principles in financial and accounting issues, and if the risk is in a position of opportunity, the conservative manager will not benefit from it. Besides, the results indicated that conservatism in behavior is one of the qualitative characteristics of managers and is a cautious reaction in conditions of uncertainty. Conservatism reduces the ability of managers to use their personal and confidential information to maximize profits, and determines the maturity and decline of an organization. Conservatism is a precautionary response in a situation of uncertainty that seeks to ensure that the inherent risk and uncertainty in the company situation are sufficiently addressed. According to the results, having a conservative behavior for the manager

prevents him from accepting the risk and if the risk is in a position of opportunity, the conservative manager will not benefit from it.

According to the results of coding interviews and documents and articles, the obstacles and problems identified in organizations, including sports organizations, are as follows, which play an important role in presenting the behavior and performance of managers: human barriers, including inefficient manpower, poor management team, lack of commitment of decision makers, lack of support from senior managers, lack of employee alignment, lack of understanding of employees and managers about the concept of strategy, poor and inappropriate communication and inadequate interaction and ineffective communication between employees of the organization. Organizational barriers include lack of instructions with a model to guide the implementation of the strategy, lack of attention to the description of programs and not justifying employees, existence of organizational structure inconsistent with the strategic decision, mismatch of various dimensions of the organization with the respective strategy, lack of attention to division of duties and responsibilities, resource constraints (money, materials, and manpower), weakness and inadequacy of information systems and inadequate allocation of resources in the organization. The most important point in management science is that managers often need to know management skills to provide a suitable environment for their efficiency. The most popular theories about management efficiency point out that an effective manager should be capable in technical skills, human skills, perceptual skills, communication skills and political skills. The results showed that managerial skills give the manager the power to design the best solution to problems.

### Conclusion

Competent managers with strategic thinking ensure the health of the organization, and the macro view toward the phenomenon of sports is the result of knowledge of strategic thinking techniques. Managers' behaviors complement their thinking, and in the absence of strategic thinking and lack of a strategic plan, the manager just thinks about today. With strategic thinking, the manager can achieve the goals of the organization without wasting material, human, and financial resources. The failure or success of any organization largely depends on the quality of management and the behavior of its managers, so that if an organization is in crisis, the manager must be accountable first, and for this, it is necessary to master strategic thinking, because the starting point is to create the vision of the organization. Providing this model regarding the strategic behavior of Iranian sports managers can be a way to solve the problems of sports organizations that sometimes arise from the incorrect application of strategic decisions or managers' behaviors or leadership styles. Also, by using this model, we can hope for a dramatic change in the strategic behavior of Iranian sports managers. Therefore, it is time for the officials of the organizations in charge of sports to take a more serious look at the concept of strategic thinking and new managerial skills.

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