



Political Intelligence and Change Management Capability: A Case Study in Women's Sports

A. Saberi^{1,*}, A. Aminazad²

¹ Assistant Professor of Sports Management, Faculty of Management and Accounting, Farabi Campus, University of Tehran, Iran

² Deputy of Championship Sports Development, Department of Sports and Youth Affairs, Isfahan Province, Iran

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History: Received 8 August 2019 Received in revised form 15 October 2019 Accepted 20 December 2019 Available online 22 December 2019</p>	<p>The world is constantly undergoing transformation, and the pace of change in our era surpasses that of any previous period in human history. Factors such as population growth, technological inventions and discoveries, advances in communication systems, and the increasing number of educated individuals with greater dynamism and adaptability toward their goals have collectively reshaped the environment. Consequently, transformation and change have become the most significant challenges faced by contemporary organizations. As the well-known saying goes, “nothing is constant except change.” Change within organizations is inevitable, and leaders who can anticipate and swiftly respond to these changes are more likely to succeed. Accordingly, the present study aimed to examine political intelligence and change management capability: a case study in women's sports. This research is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive–survey in nature, employing a correlational analysis approach. The statistical population consisted of managers responsible for women's sports in the Ministry of Sports and various sports federations. Data analysis was performed on 116 valid questionnaires. The research instrument was a questionnaire whose validity and reliability were confirmed. Data were analyzed at both descriptive and inferential levels. The findings indicated that political intelligence has a significant effect on the change management capability of female sports managers.</p>
<p>Keywords: Change Management, Political Intelligence, Women Sports Managers</p>	

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic world of sports, political intelligence defined as the ability to perceive, manage, and leverage power relations, influence, and organizational dynamics to achieve strategic goals plays a pivotal role in the success of sports managers and organizations [1]. This concept, rooted in leadership and organizational behavior theories, encompasses skills such as identifying stakeholder interests, effective negotiation, and managing conflicts in complex environments. In the field of women's sports characterized by structural, cultural, and gender-related challenges its importance becomes even more pronounced [2].

* Corresponding Author: ali_saberi1364@ut.ac.ir

Assistant Professor of Sports Management, Faculty of Management and Accounting, Farabi Campus, University of Tehran, Iran



Change management, as an organizational capability for planning, implementing, and institutionalizing transformation, has also become essential in women's sports due to historical barriers such as limited resources, gender discrimination, and cultural resistance [3].

Case studies have shown that political intelligence can serve as a driving force for change management; for instance, sports leaders with high political intelligence can build coalitions, gain stakeholder support, and reduce resistance to structural reforms [4]. In women's sports, these abilities are particularly evident in initiatives such as infrastructure development, enhancing women's participation in leadership roles, and reforming gender-related policies leading to improved organizational performance and gender equity [5].

However, a lack of comprehensive empirical studies in this field, especially regarding women's sports, has created a notable knowledge gap [6]. Therefore, this study, by presenting a case study in women's sports, seeks to examine the relationship between political intelligence and change management capability, providing practical insights for policymakers and sports managers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on political intelligence (or political skill) within organizations has expanded rapidly over the past two decades. The concept of political skill, systematically defined by Ferris and colleagues, refers to the ability to accurately perceive the behaviors and motives of others in the workplace and to use that understanding to influence others effectively and achieve both individual and organizational goals. Extensive research has identified four core dimensions of this construct: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity and confirmed its positive association with leadership effectiveness and job performance [7].

Meta-analytic reviews further reveal that political skill is a significant predictor of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall work performance, serving as a crucial resource for navigating organizational politics [8]. This line of inquiry underscores that understanding and exercising political intelligence enables managers and leaders to manage political ambiguity, align stakeholders, and overcome obstacles during change processes.

Conversely, the change management literature emphasizes the importance of organizational change capability: the institutional capacity to adapt and respond to transformation. Classical frameworks, such as Kotter's eight-step model, highlight leadership, establishing urgency, forming guiding coalitions, and achieving short-term wins as essential components of successful change implementation [10]. Broader theoretical reviews, such as those by Armenakis and Bedeian, have focused on the content, context, and process dimensions of change, emphasizing employee readiness and acceptance as critical factors [9].

In practice, growing attention has been paid to strengthening organizational capacity for change rather than merely managing isolated change events. The aim is to transform organizations into adaptive entities capable of embracing, executing, and institutionalizing change: an approach reinforced by works such as Judge's on building organizational capacity for change [11].

The linkage between political intelligence and change management capability has emerged in both theoretical frameworks and case-based studies. Leaders with strong political skill can foster a climate of change acceptance, build supportive coalitions, and mitigate political resistance. In this regard, political skill functions as a key resource underpinning organizational capacity for change [7, 8, 9]. However, most empirical evidence originates from business or service sectors, with limited research addressing this relationship within the specific context of sports organizations, particularly women's sports.

The field of sports management and governance has unique structural and cultural characteristics. National and local sports organizations typically feature a semi-voluntary, federal, and networked structure, involving diverse stakeholders such as federations, clubs, governments, and sponsors: factors that render decision-making processes inherently political and complex. Studies on governance capacity in sports boards suggest that developing strategic governance capability is essential for managing change and innovation in the sports sector [12, 13]. Systematic reviews on the influence of governance principles and frameworks on sports organizations' performance have shown that implementing standards of transparency, accountability, and participation can facilitate organizational

adaptation to change, though these principles often face structural resistance and contextual challenges in practice [18, 14].

Within the realm of gender and women's sports, extensive evidence points to the underrepresentation of women in organizational, media, and leadership levels. Studies such as Adriaanse's Sydney Scoreboard report highlight women's limited presence in executive and decision-making positions in sports organizations an imbalance that affects both policy outcomes and organizational capacity for change [13]. Other research has shown that sports media and marketing tendencies often marginalize women's sports, leading to weak institutional and financial support for positive transformation [15].

Combining these three lines of research suggests that in the context of women's sports, leaders' and managers' political intelligence their ability to read political climates, network, and exert influence likely plays a crucial role in strengthening or weakening organizational change capability. In other words, in the absence of political skills among leaders and board members in women's sports organizations, even well-designed change programs or governance reforms may fail to achieve their goals. Conversely, politically skilled leaders can build supportive coalitions, manage resistance, and enhance the organization's ability to institutionalize change [7, 8, 12, 13].

Nonetheless, empirical studies specifically investigating this interaction particularly in-depth case studies within national or local women's sports organizations remain scarce. Some context-specific studies have suggested that managerial and political competencies determine the type of management model adopted by sports organizations [17]; however, causal relationships between leaders' political skill, organizational change capacity, and operational outcomes in women's sports still require stronger empirical validation.

Therefore, a case study that simultaneously measures leaders' or managers' political intelligence and assesses organizational change management capacity in women's sports institutions (e.g., national federations, provincial associations, or women's clubs) can address three key gaps:

1. Clarifying how political skill operates in the unique context of women's sports;
2. Identifying the mechanisms through which political intelligence enhances or hinders organizational change capability; and
3. Providing managerial and policy recommendations for strengthening institutional capacity and accelerating gender-related transformation in sports governance.

Such studies can contribute both to general organizational theory by reinforcing the link between change capability and political skill and to practical policymaking, by offering sports administrators actionable tools to promote gender equity and organizational effectiveness in women's sports [7–18].

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is applied in nature with respect to its purpose and employs a descriptive–survey design of correlational type. The relationships among variables were analyzed according to the research objectives, using the structural equation modeling (SEM) approach. To collect information on theoretical foundations and literature, library resources, academic articles, relevant books, scientific databases, and electronic journals were reviewed. For field data collection, a questionnaire was employed. Finally, to evaluate and model the relationships among variables, the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method and SmartPLS software (version 2) were utilized.

The statistical population of the study consisted of managers responsible for women's sports in the Ministry of Sports and various sports federations. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula [19]. Based on this formula, with a confidence level of 95% (and an error margin of 5%) and considering a total population of 186 individuals, the required sample size was calculated to be 123. However, to account for potential incomplete or invalid responses (due to questionnaire loss, non-responsiveness, or incomplete answers), 150 questionnaires were distributed. Ultimately, 116 valid and complete questionnaires were collected and analyzed.

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire comprising 60 items measured on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree). To measure the variable of political intelligence (28 items), the instrument developed by Doustar et al. (2016) was used, while change management capability (32

items) was assessed using the questionnaire developed by Heller (2003). To ensure face and content validity, the initial version of the questionnaire was reviewed by experts and subject-matter specialists. Based on their feedback, necessary modifications were made before final administration.

To test the research hypotheses and evaluate model fit using structural models, the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method and SmartPLS version 2 software were applied. This method is particularly suitable for research involving complex variable relationships, small sample sizes, and non-normal data distributions [22]. Since the interaction effects between variables with normal distributions often exhibit skewness, the PLS approach which is less sensitive to distributional assumptions is recommended for such analyses.

In PLS-SEM, model evaluation is conducted in three stages:

1. Assessment of measurement models,
2. Assessment of the structural model, and
3. Assessment of the overall model fit [23].

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Measurement Model Fit

To assess the fit of the measurement model, three key criteria were examined: reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Reliability was evaluated using composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach’s alpha coefficients. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability Indices

Variables	Model Label	Cronbach’s Alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.7$)	Composite Reliability (CR ≥ 0.7)
Social Games	Soc Gam	0.819	0.870
Power Dynamics	Pow Dyn	0.826	0.874
Political Personality	Pol Per	0.944	0.950
Apparent Sincerity	App Sin	0.731	0.823
Impression Management	Imp Man	0.811	0.863
Readiness for Change	Campet	0.886	0.910
Change Planning	Avoid	0.873	0.902
Change Implementation	Colla	0.850	0.884
Change Stability and Sustainability	Compr	0.908	0.925
Political Intelligence	Poli Inte	0.902	0.916

As shown in Table 1, all variables demonstrate high internal consistency. Both Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability coefficients exceed the recommended threshold of 0.7, confirming the reliability and internal coherence of the measurement model.

Convergent and discriminant validity were also assessed, as these are essential indicators in structural equation modeling (SEM). Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) criterion, which represents the average variance shared between each construct and its indicators. In other words, AVE reflects the degree of correlation between a construct and its observed variables; higher values indicate stronger relationships and better model fit ([24]; Barclay et al., 1995). The AVE values for each construct are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Convergent Validity (AVE)

Variables	Model Label	Average Variance Extracted (AVE ≥ 0.5)
Social Games	Soc Gam	0.533
Power Dynamics	Pow Dyn	0.539
Political Personality	Pol Per	0.578
Apparent Sincerity	App Sin	0.553
Impression Management	Imp Man	0.516

Readiness for Change	Campet	0.561
Change Planning	Avoid	0.572
Change Implementation	Colla	0.524
Change Stability and Sustainability	Compr	0.610
Political Intelligence	Poli Inte	0.611

As indicated in Table 2, all constructs have AVE values greater than 0.5, confirming adequate convergent validity and satisfactory measurement model fit.

Discriminant validity was then examined by comparing the square root of the AVE of each construct with the correlations among constructs. This test ensures that each construct is more strongly associated with its own indicators than with those of other constructs. The results of discriminant validity are reported in Table 3.

To assess discriminant validity, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was applied. According to this criterion, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct should be higher than its correlations with other constructs. This indicates that each latent variable shares more variance with its indicators than with other latent variables, confirming discriminant validity.

Table 3. Correlations among Constructs and AVE Values

Constructs	Soc Gam	Pow Dyn	Pol Per	App Sin	Imp Man	Understan	Planning	Execut	Sustain
Social Games (Soc Gam)	0.730								
Power Dynamics (Pow Dyn)	0.650	0.734							
Political Personality (Pol Per)	0.555	0.493	0.760						
Apparent Sincerity (App Sin)	0.662	0.342	0.705	0.743					
Impression Management (Imp Man)	0.651	0.560	0.503	0.212	0.718				
Understanding Change (Understan)	0.583	0.693	0.520	0.328	0.235	0.748			
Change Planning (Planning)	0.408	0.503	0.462	0.618	0.470	0.711	0.756		
Change Execution (Execut)	0.347	0.674	0.410	0.490	0.395	0.354	0.723	0.723	
Change Sustainability (Sustain)	0.309	0.293	0.603	0.563	0.392	0.236	0.548	0.781	0.781

Diagonal elements (bold values) represent the square roots of AVE for each construct.

As seen in Table 3, the diagonal values (square roots of AVE) are all greater than the off-diagonal correlations between constructs. This confirms that each construct has adequate discriminant validity and is empirically distinct from the others. Therefore, the measurement model demonstrates satisfactory reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, indicating that the constructs were measured appropriately.

4.2. Structural Model Fit

In this study, the fit of the structural model was assessed using R-squared (R²) coefficients and the Q² predictive relevance criterion. R² is a measure that links the measurement and structural components of SEM, indicating the extent to which an exogenous variable explains the variance in an endogenous variable. Q², introduced by Stone and Geisser (1975), evaluates the predictive power of the model (Darvishi & Reza-zadeh, 2013). The R² and Q² values for the model constructs are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. R² and Q² Values for Model Constructs

Constructs	Soc Gam	Pow Dyn	Pol Per	App Sin	Imp Man	Campet	Avoid	Colla	Compr
R ²	0.848	0.945	0.593	0.807	0.740	0.639	0.421	0.379	0.541
Q ²	0.444	0.503	0.316	0.437	0.367	0.334	0.202	0.184	0.312

Higher R² values for endogenous constructs indicate better explanatory power of the structural model. As shown in Table 5, the model demonstrates strong explanatory fit. Similarly, higher Q² values reflect greater predictive relevance, confirming that the structural model of the present study possesses robust predictive power.

4.3. Overall Model Fit

After assessing the measurement and structural models, the overall model fit was evaluated using the Goodness of Fit (GOF) index, introduced by Tenenhaus et al. (2004) [25]. The GOF is calculated using the following formula:

$$GOF = \sqrt{\text{Communalities} \times \bar{R}^2} \tag{1}$$

where Communalities represents the average of the communalities for all constructs, and \bar{R}^2 represents the average R² of the endogenous constructs.

For the present study, the GOF value was calculated as follows:

$$GOF = \sqrt{0.554 \times 0.657} = 0.603$$

According to Wetzels et al. (2009), GOF values of 0.1, 0.25, and 0.36 represent small, medium, and large fit, respectively [26]. Therefore, a GOF of 0.603 indicates a strong overall fit for the proposed model.

4.4. Hypothesis Testing

The PLS algorithm indicates that after assessing the fit of the measurement model, structural model, and overall model, the research hypotheses can be tested and the study findings derived. When the t-statistic of a path coefficient exceeds 1.96, the corresponding parameter is considered significant, confirming the associated hypothesis [27]. The standardized path coefficients and significance levels for the model hypotheses are illustrated in Figure 1, and the hypothesis test results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Effect	Dependent Variable	Estimate	t-Statistic	Result
H1	Political Intelligence	→	Change Perception	0.800	25.166	***
H2	Political Intelligence	→	Change Planning	0.650	14.175	***
H3	Political Intelligence	→	Change Implementation	0.616	11.947	***
H4	Political Intelligence	→	Change Stabilization	0.736	18.404	***

(*ns = not significant; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001)

As shown in Table 6 and Figure 1, all research hypotheses are supported, since the t-values for all paths exceed 1.96, indicating significance.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Challenges and barriers in the development of women’s sports necessitate fundamental and constructive changes in the organizational structure of women’s sports. In this context, the change management capability of responsible managers and women’s sports association leaders plays a pivotal role. Effective change management requires specific skills, among which political intelligence has recently garnered attention due to its significant impact on the efficacy of change management.

This study examined the effect of political intelligence on the components of change management among women’s sports managers and association leaders. The results indicate that political intelligence significantly influences managers’ ability to perceive change. These findings are consistent with prior studies by Cook & Magill (2004), Ashraf (2011), and Mombini et al. (2016), which also highlighted the positive impact of political intelligence on change or change management [28–30].

Managers with high political intelligence possess comprehensive knowledge of environmental, social, economic, and cultural shifts and demonstrate strong analytical abilities. They can understand others' needs through social acuity, thereby enhancing their capacity to perceive the need for change. Additionally, involving staff in identifying environmental changes increases their awareness and receptivity to change, which explains the positive effect of political intelligence on the change perception stage.

Regarding change planning, politically intelligent managers recognize power bases, understand who to influence for successful change, and identify the optimal timing and methods for gaining acceptance. They analyze strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats affecting the change process, thereby enhancing their planning capabilities.

For change implementation, politically intelligent managers are aware of resources and power levers, know the optimal timing for staff acceptance, and leverage influence to overcome resistance. They replace outdated organizational knowledge with evidence-based practices, thereby reducing organizational resistance. Their integrity and trustworthiness inspire confidence, while their ability to engage influential stakeholders ensures support during implementation, facilitating the process.

Concerning change stabilization, politically intelligent managers continuously identify areas requiring improvement, engage staff in the change process to increase motivation, and reinforce successes to institutionalize change effectively.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that political intelligence be considered as a key criterion in the appointment of managers for women's sports and association leaders. Alternatively, specialized training and workshops should be organized to develop essential political intelligence skills among managers, enhancing their change management capability. Such measures will help women's sports, both at grassroots and elite levels, move beyond outdated structures toward a position befitting their significance in the national context.

Transparency Statement

The data supporting this study are available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author, subject to ethical and confidentiality considerations.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals who contributed to this project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

REFERENCES

- [1] Pfeffer, J. (2010). *Power: Why some people have it and others don't*. Fletcher & Company, LLC.
- [2] Ayman, R., & Korabik, K. (2010). Leadership: Why gender and culture matter. *American Psychologist*, 65(3), 157–170. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018806>
- [3] Cunningham, G. B. (2015). *Diversity and inclusion in sport organizations: A multilevel perspective* (3rd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429504310-2>
- [4] Amis, J., & Silk, M. (2008). The philosophy and politics of quality in qualitative organizational research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 11(3), 456–481. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428107300341>

- [5] Cigu, E., Agheorghiesei, D., Gavriluță Vatamanu, A.-F., & Toader, E. (2018). Transport Infrastructure Development, Public Performance and Long-Run Economic Growth: A Case Study for the Eu-28 Countries. Sustainability. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11010067>
- [6] Fink, J. S. (2016). Hiding in plain sight: The embedded nature of sexism in sport. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 40(6), 458–470.
- [7] Ferris, G. R., Treadway, D. C., Perrewé, P. L., Brouer, R. L., Douglas, C., & Lux, S. (2007). Political skill in organizations. *Journal of Management*, 33(3), 290–320. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206307300813>
- [8] Munyon, T. P., Summers, J. K., Thompson, K. M., & Ferris, G. R. (2015). Political skill and work outcomes: A theoretical extension, meta-analytic investigation, and agenda for the future. *Personnel Psychology*, 68(1), 143–184. <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12066>
- [9] Armenakis, A. A., & Bedeian, A. G. (1999). Organizational change: A review of theory and research in the 1990s. *Journal of Management*, 25(3), 293–315. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639902500303>
- [10] Kotter, J. P. (1996). *Leading change*. Harvard Business School Press.
- [11] Judge, W. Q. (2011). *Building organizational capacity for change: The leader's new mandate*. Business Expert Press. <https://doi.org/10.4128/9781606491256>
- [12] Ferkins, L., & Shilbury, D. (2010). Developing board strategic capability in sport organisations: The national-regional governing relationship. *Sport Management Review*, 13(3), 235–254. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2010.01.009>
- [13] Adriaanse, J. A. (2016). Gender diversity in the governance of sport associations: The Sydney Scoreboard Global Index of Participation. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 137(1), 149–160. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2550-3>
- [14] Geeraert, A. (Ed.). (2018). *National Sports Governance Observer - Final report*. Play the Game / Danish Institute for Sports Studies.
- [15] Fink, J. S. (2015). Female athletes, women's sport, and the sport media commercial complex: Have we really "come a long way, baby"? *Sport Management Review*, 18(3), 331–342. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2014.05.001>
- [16] Burton, L. J. (2015). Underrepresentation of women in sport leadership: A review of research. *Sport Management Review*, 18(2), 155–165. [تکراری] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2014.02.004>
- [17] Nazari, R. (2017). The impact of mental skills on management skills and selecting management models on sports managers. *International Journal of Sport Culture and Science*, 5(3), 124–133. <https://doi.org/10.14486/IntJSCS658>
- [18] Parent, M. M., & Hoye, R. (2018). The impact of governance principles on sport organisations' governance practices and performance: A systematic review. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 4(1), Article 1503578. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2018.1503578>
- [19] Hafeznia, M. R. (2005). *An introduction to research methods in the humanities*. Tehran: SAMT.
- [20] Doustar, M., & Mombini, Y. (2014). Components and functions of political intelligence. *Political Science Semi-Annual Journal*, 20(1), 65–86.
- [21] Heller, R. (2005). *Change Management* (Trans. K. Abili & S. Alimirzaei). Sargol Publications.

- [22] Diamantopoulos, A., Sarstedt, M., Fuchs, C., Wilczynski, P., & Kaiser, S. (2012). Guidelines for choosing between multi-item and single-item scales for construct measurement: A predictive validity perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 40(3), 434–449. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-011-0300-3>
- [23] Davari, A., & Rezazadeh, A. (2013). *Structural equation modeling with PLS software*. Tehran: Jihad Daneshgahi Publications.
- [24] Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(1), 39–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224378101800104>
- [25] Tenenhaus, M., Amato, S., & Esposito Vinzi, V. (2004). A global goodness-of-fit index for PLS structural equation modeling. In *Proceedings of the XLII SIS scientific meeting*, 1, 739–742.
- [26] Wetzels, M., Odekerken-Schroder, G., & Van Oppen, C. (2009). Using PLS path modeling for assessing hierarchical construct models: Guidelines and empirical illustration. *Management Information Systems Quarterly*, 33(1), 177–196. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20650284>
- [27] Vinzi, V. E., Trinchera, L., & Amato, S. (2010). PLS path modeling: From foundations to recent developments and open issues for model assessment and improvement. In *Handbook of Partial Least Squares* (pp. 47–82). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-32827-8_3
- [28] Cook, S., & Macaulay, S. (2004). *Change management excellence: Using the five intelligence for successful organizational change*. London & Sterling.
- [29] Ashraf, F., & Iqbal, M. Z. (2011). A research agenda on the leaders' political intelligence for effective change management. *African Journal of Business Management*, 5(14), 5798–5806.
- [30] Mombini, Y., Doustar, M., & Goodarzi, M. (2015). Managing organizations with political intelligence. *Tadbir Monthly Journal*, 25(272), 33–36.