Factors Influencing Knowledge Sharing in Polish Sports Clubs

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Abstract:

Purpose: *This study aims to identify and evaluate the factors influencing knowledge sharing in sports clubs.*
Approach/Methodology/Design: *A case study was conducted in six purposefully selected Polish sports clubs, representing three different sports disciplines and various league levels.*
Findings: *The results indicate that, among individual factors, athletes and coaches - members of the sports teams - identified a greater number of both facilitators and barriers to knowledge sharing compared to respondents in managerial positions. In contrast, the analysis of organizational factors revealed that the higher the management level, the more factors were identified. Club presidents identified the highest number of factors, followed by managers and coaches, while athletes identified the fewest.*
Practical Implications: *The findings can serve as a guide for all members of the studied sports clubs in improving their knowledge-sharing processes.*
Originality/Value: *The study identifies both individual and organizational factors - facilitating and hindering - that influence knowledge sharing in sports clubs, while accounting for different stakeholder perspectives.*

Keywords: *Knowledge, knowledge sharing, sports clubs.*

JEL classification: *Z29, D83.*

Paper Type: *Research paper.*

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1. Introduction

Knowledge is a crucial asset of every modern organization, essential for effectively carrying out its tasks and fostering innovation (Imran *et al.,* 2021; Santoro *et al.,* 2018; Straccia *et al.,* 2023). It also plays a significant role in the life of every individual, being closely linked to intelligence, emotions, culture, and even physical capability through the body-mind connection. Thus, knowledge is inherently tied to the person who possesses it (Fazlagić, 2011).

This becomes particularly important in the context of sport, where human involvement is central across all disciplines-whether as an athlete, coach, manager, official, sponsor, organizer, physiotherapist, president, or supporter. Depending on the role an individual plays within a sports organization, their knowledge-and the ability to apply it effectively-directly influences the achievement of sporting success or the lack thereof.

In the context of knowledge management within sports organizations, knowledge sharing is of critical importance due to the sector's specific characteristics-including its highly diverse nature, varying organizational objectives, the unique nature of sports-related products, and distinct target audiences.

Knowledge sharing occurs across multiple levels: at the individual level (e.g., in a dyad such as athlete-coach), the group level (e.g., among members of a sports team), the organizational level (e.g., between the president of a sports organization and other members), and the interorganizational level (e.g., between different sports organizations).

Given the above, the aim of this article is to identify and assess the factors that influence knowledge sharing within sports clubs. The study, conducted in the form of a case study, was carried out in six purposefully selected Polish sports clubs, representing three different sports disciplines and various league levels.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the literature and introduces key research constructs. Section 3 describes the methodology. Section 4 presents the findings, while Section 5 concludes with limitations and directions for future research

2. Literature Review

A sports club, comprising athletes, coaches, and technical support specialists, constitutes the fundamental organizational structure in sport, as defined by the Polish Sports Act of June 25, 2010. The Act does not specify the legal form a sports club should adopt, nor does it provide a precise definition of a sports club. However, it does require that such entities operate within organizational forms possessing legal personality.

According to Gniatkowski (2011), a sports club is a legal entity engaged in sports activities, registered and headquartered in Poland. In contrast, Krześniak (2016) argues that any legal entity involved in the practice or organization of sport may be considered a sports club, regardless of the provisions in its founding documents, the type of activity conducted, or its legal form.

When classifying sports clubs, one can consider their legal and organizational form, as well as distinguish between clubs that conduct business activities and those that do not, single-sport and multi-sport clubs, and clubs that do or do not participate in officially ranked sports competitions (Panfil, 2004).

As a specific type of organization, a sports club possesses an additional component that plays a critical role in achieving multidimensional success: organizational culture. It is this culture that gives each club its own unique and distinctive „personality", clearly setting it apart from others and shaping specific behaviors.

Although sports clubs operate under similar external conditions-such as rules, regulations, and gameplay standards-each club has its own atmosphere, history, fan base, brand identity, and public perception (Kuźbik, 2014).

Knowledge within a sports club represents a resource embodied as intellectual capital, encompassing the individual knowledge, skills, and experiences of its employees (Edvinsson and Malone, 2001). Simultaneously, knowledge constitutes a product grounded in the specific sport discipline, which includes the players, the sports team, the sporting event, and the club's brand (Panfil, 2004).

Optimal utilization of knowledge resources and the creation of an enhanced product are achievable through the process of knowledge sharing, as this subprocess determines the effective use of both individual and collective experiences. This process involves disseminating knowledge both within and beyond the organization and denotes a centrally managed process of knowledge distribution (Sopińska and Wachowiak, 2006; Probst *et al.,* 2002).

Sharing explicit knowledge refers to the exchange of experiences, skills, and technical know-how in a codified form-such as through discussions, debates, seminars, rules, or procedures. In contrast, sharing tacit knowledge involves the exchange of ideas and professional perspectives, which contributes added value during the development of new approaches and concepts by individuals (Ziaeddini and Kordi, 2013).

In the literature, the term knowledge sharing is often used interchangeably with related concepts such as knowledge transfer, knowledge dissemination, and, less frequently, knowledge diffusion or knowledge exchange. Selected approaches are presented in Table 1.

Tabel 1. *Knowledge Sharing According to Various Authors*

Authors	Definitions
T.J. Beckman, J. Liebowitz	Automated knowledge dissemination among users, taking into account their access permissions and interests.
P.H. Christensen	A process focused on the exploitation of existing knowledge, involving the identification of available knowledge in order to transfer and apply it to achieve better, faster, or more cost-effective completion of a specific task than would be possible without knowledge sharing.
T.H. Daventport, L. Prusak	Knowledge transfer encompasses the processes of transferring, disseminating, and sharing knowledge. It consists of two key components: transmission (sending or presenting) and absorption (receiving and internalizing) of knowledge.
M. Ipe	Knowledge sharing is the act of making knowledge accessible to others within an organization. The process of knowledge sharing between individuals involves transforming knowledge possessed by one individual into a form that can be understood, assimilated, and utilized by others. Sharing is a conscious and voluntary action undertaken by the knowledge holder. Moreover, the individual sharing the knowledge does not relinquish ownership of it; rather, the knowledge becomes jointly held by both the sender and the recipient.
W.R. King	Knowledge exchange occurs between or among individuals, as well as within or between teams, organizational units, and organizations. This exchange may be focused on a specific issue or not, but typically lacks a clearly defined, predetermined objective, unlike knowledge transfer. Transfer is a deliberate, unidirectional action involving the communication of knowledge intended for specific application, whereas knowledge sharing is a multidirectional process characterized by reciprocal exchange of knowledge.
S. Wang, R.A. Noe	Providing task-related information or know-how to assist others and to collaborate in problem-solving, developing new ideas, or implementing policies and procedures.

Source: Own study based on Beckman, 1999; Christensen, 2007; Davenport, Prusak, 2000; Ipe, 2003; King, 2006; Wang, Noe, 2010.

Although there are differences in the theoretical interpretations of the above-mentioned concepts, in practice, all three phenomena-knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer, and knowledge dissemination-are present within organizations.

Knowledge sharing refers to the exchange of knowledge between members or parts of the organization; knowledge transfer involves providing specific solutions to designated individuals in concrete situations; and knowledge dissemination concerns

enabling access to both organizational and individual knowledge for all members. Together, these processes lead to the diffusion of knowledge within the organization (Rudawska, 2014).

The approaches and definitions of knowledge sharing found in the literature indicate that the concept can be understood both as a focused transmission of information aimed at improving the use of knowledge within the organization, and as a socially embedded process. For the purposes of this article, these terms are used interchangeably.

Research on knowledge management in sports organizations tends to focus primarily on explicit, formal knowledge, whereas the core knowledge that determines organizational performance and excellence is often tacit (Razaghi *et al.,* 2013). Given that the dissemination of tacit knowledge occurs through collaboration and interpersonal communication-and that IT-based systems (designed to manage codified knowledge) are insufficient in this context-it becomes both relevant and necessary to undertake initiatives focused on the management of tacit knowledge.

In sports organizations-particularly within sports clubs-there is a significant flow of knowledge between coaches and athletes. Coaches do not merely transmit knowledge to coordinate and execute tasks; they also support knowledge creation and learning among players, both on and off the field. The coach's subject-matter expertise is also a predictor of performance outcomes.

When coaches, teams, and managers are required to solve sudden problems or make quick decisions, they often rely on the sharing of tacit knowledge. In contrast, when sharing technical knowledge, the transfer tends to be more explicit and structured (Erhardt *et al.,* 2015). The coach is thus a key actor in the sports organization, whose competencies enable deliberate sharing of both explicit and tacit knowledge (Morawski, 2009).

From another perspective, the manager or head coach, by leveraging the team's collective knowledge, promotes discussion, stimulates initiative, carefully listens to players' conclusions and suggestions, empowers athletes by recognizing their knowledge and skills, and integrates the team around shared goals (Panfil, 2004).

This subject-oriented approach to athletes and the use of participative coaching styles facilitate information flow within the team and enhance the potential for reflective engagement in the team-building process by all members. This is especially important in the functioning of a sports team, as one of its distinguishing features is the simultaneous presence of both player integration-arising from shared objectives-and conflict-resulting from the pursuit of individual goals.

Both integration and conflict, when occurring within an optimal range, stimulate players to intensify training and perform effectively during competition. However,

this requires intra-team cooperation, knowledge sharing among all members, and an atmosphere conducive to these processes (Panfil, 2015).

The nature of sports clubs and the ongoing changes within them necessitate the exchange of knowledge among numerous key individuals working for the benefit of the organization. In addition to the sports team, important roles are fulfilled by sports managers, officials, presidents, volunteers, sporting directors, and coordinators-without whom the club's operations would not be possible.

Although knowledge flows are linked to the organizational structure, the complexity and dynamic nature of the internal environment mean that communication processes occur in multiple directions. While formal communication-and the associated flow of explicit knowledge-typically follows a vertical path, aligned with hierarchical reporting lines, informal communication and the exchange of tacit knowledge more often take place horizontally, between employees at the same level.

However, these processes may also follow diagonal paths or occur within communication networks, involving individuals across different departments or functional areas (Wyrębek, 2013).

This is particularly important in the context of interdepartmental and interdisciplinary projects, where organizational divisions overlap, and communication and knowledge transfer processes intersect and interact across traditional boundaries.

Due to their specific nature, sports clubs engage in knowledge and information sharing with both their immediate and broader external environments. Particularly distinctive are their relationships with key stakeholders such as fans/participants/supporters, current and potential sponsors, and the media. The media-especially television and the Internet-play a critical role by providing broad access to information and knowledge about a club or athlete.

Collaboration with the media not only satisfies fans' appetite for continuous updates about their idols but also serves sponsors, who view sponsorship as an effective platform for communicating with their target audiences (Rudawska, 2011).

At the organizational level, knowledge sharing also occurs during pre- and post-match press conferences and interviews, representing a process of knowledge dissemination from the organization to its environment. Additionally, many clubs facilitate two-way communication with fans by using websites and social media platforms, allowing supporters to express opinions about the team's performance and the decisions made by club authorities. The organization also shares its knowledge through the sale of products and services-a form of targeted knowledge transfer directed at specific individuals or organizations (Mikuła and Oczkowska, 2009).

Moreover, interorganizational knowledge exchange frequently occurs among sports organizations, particularly between clubs, market partners, and organizing committees of sports events. Knowledge sharing in this context involves the transfer of personal experience, best practices, and recommendations from experienced organizers to those responsible for future events.

Research in this field highlights the importance of storing and transferring valuable organizational knowledge and emphasizes the significance of tacit knowledge transfer for all stakeholders involved in sports event planning (Parent *et al.,* 2015).

As noted by Doktór (2015), contemporary sports organizations cannot operate in isolation; they must collaborate with entities from industrial, political, scientific, financial, and other sectors. A prominent phenomenon in this context is "coopetition", a strategy that combines cooperation and competition with direct rivals. Coopetition involves creating informal networks with competitors based on knowledge flows, information sharing, and other resource exchanges governed by loosely structured market rules.

Organizations are increasingly engaging in such efforts to build relational capital with other market participants, including competitors. This cooperation spans various areas, such as planning and conducting training sessions, mutual support during operations, co-organizing sports events, participating in joint training programs, and improving customer relations. Factors driving such collaboration include the need for learning and development, knowledge sharing, achieving greater benefits, enhancing professional qualifications, operating at a higher organizational level, and contributing to the growth of the sports industry, among many others.

3. Research Methodology

The study was conducted using a case study approach involving six Polish sports clubs. The sampling was purposive, and the selection criteria included:

- the sports discipline, and
- the league level, defined by the competitive division.

Two clubs representing football (soccer), two basketball clubs, and two handball clubs were invited to participate in the study (Table 2).

Table 2. *Research Subjects*

Sports discipline	Name of sports clubs
Football	ŁKS Łódź (extraclass)
	Widzew Łódź (II league)
Basketball	Widzew Łódź (extraclass)
	ŁKS AZS UŁ SG Łódź (II league)

Handball	UKS Anilana Łódź (I league)
	CHKS (I league)

Source: *Own study based on Brochocka, 2020.*

The research was conducted in stages, using the following methods:

- non-participant (overt) observation,
- semi-structured individual interviews with coaches, team captains, managers, and club presidents,
- focus group interviews with players, and
- analysis of available documents.

The study was carried out between June 2018 and April 2019, and a detailed description of the research procedure can be found in Brochocka's work (2020).

4. Research Results

Based on the content analysis of interview responses, both individual and organizational factors influencing the knowledge sharing process within sports clubs were identified. Table 3 presents a summary of these factors, taking into account the perspectives of different participants as well as the nature of the identified factors.

Tabel 3. *Determinants of Knowledge Sharing at the Individual and Organizational Levels, Considering the Perspectives of Various Participants*

Perspective	Individual	
	supporting factors	inhibiting factors
Athletes	Motivation to work and willingness to acquire knowledge; desire for personal development Achievement of good sports performance Building positive relationships within the team Positive relationships with the coach Effective communication Positive emotions Healthy competition Experience and expertise Positive stress (eustress) Appropriate knowledge transfer Good character traits of the athlete Financial incentives Shared goals and desire to win Participation in sports camps Adequate mental preparation Cooperation among athletes Spending time together off the field Established conflict resolution methods	Lack of willingness to acquire knowledge; absence of motivation Personal alliances and favoritism within the team Defeat in matches Inappropriate or ineffective coach behavior Lack of communication Absence of ambition Strong negative emotions and stress Unhealthy competition Lack of experience and young age of players Chaotic, excessive, and one-time knowledge transfer Negative personality traits Characterological conflicts Insufficient financial incentives Prioritizing personal goals over team objectives Absence of training camps Fear of making mistakes during knowledge transfer Additional extracurricular commitments

		Lack of game intelligence (tactical awareness) Presence of new players in the team Training monotony Fatigue Language and cultural barriers within the team Lack of a leader or authoritative figure in the team
Coach	Individual motivation and methods of motivating athletes Team victory, success of the team, and individual athlete success Positive character traits Clearly defined goals Tailored methods of knowledge transfer Absence of psychological burden Cooperation and positive emotions Healthy competition Professional approach to sport Mutual respect and trust Experience and competencies of coaches and athletes Sports achievements Role differentiation within the team and club Focus on performed activities Personal satisfaction with performance Short training camps Mental preparation	Lack of motivation Absence of authority within the team Defeat in competition Negative personality traits Psychological burden, stress, and fatigue Inappropriate competition Lack of professional approach to sport and knowledge transfer Insufficient experience Language barriers Cultural barriers Long training camps Extensive experience of athletes leading to undermining the coach's authority Performance anxiety (stage fright) Family-related situations Additional extracurricular commitments (work, studies)
Captain	Willingness to acquire knowledge and active engagement in training Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation Appropriate character traits of athletes and coaches Authority of the knowledge transmitter Suitable methods and approaches to knowledge transfer Positive relationships among athletes and between athletes and coaches Professional approach to training Awareness of knowledge sharing with fellow athletes Healthy competition, absence of stress and pressure, and collaborative relationships with coaches	Lack of willingness to acquire knowledge Lack of engagement in training and motivation; conflicts of interest Unhealthy competition Inappropriate character traits of athletes or coaches Personality conflicts Communication errors Ineffective knowledge transfer Insufficient experience Lack of adequate mental preparation Large age gaps within the team Small age differences coupled with lack of authority among athletes Absence of a leader and lack of training camps Training monotony Fear of repercussions from expressing opinions
	Professional approach to sport Appropriate character traits and authority Frequent and systematic meetings	Resistance to knowledge sharing Personality conflicts Lack of professionalism in task execution Negative personality traits

Manager	Collaboration and teamwork Utilization of others' experiences Relevant experience and proper qualifications Shared vision of the club Suitable methods of knowledge transfer Positive collegial relationships Employee engagement and motivation	
Club President	Awareness of knowledge and the necessity of knowledge sharing Experience and collaboration between various entities and environments Identification with the specific sport and club, effective communication Passion, motivation, and reliability Ongoing problem-solving Lack of resistance to knowledge sharing and positive character traits	Lack of competencies among sports organizers Excessive workload Inadequate organizational atmosphere Lack of cooperation between coaches and between coaches and management Insufficiently qualified coaching staff Lack of professional approach
Organizational		
Perspective	**supporting factors**	**inhibiting factors**
Athletes	Positive team atmosphere Good climate and strong "team spirit" Support from fans	Poor team atmosphere Lack of fan support Large open spaces causing noise distractions Adverse weather conditions
Coach	Positive atmosphere Coach's attitude encouraging knowledge sharing	Poor organizational atmosphere Financial difficulties within the club Lack of a standardized training system Frequent changes of coaching staff
Captain	Positive atmosphere within the team and club Effective collaboration and clear role differentiation Coach's attitude encouraging knowledge sharing Good relations with the media Positive relationships with athletes' parents	Poor atmosphere within the team and club Financial constraints Organizational and infrastructural challenges Lack of shared goals among coaches
Manager	Familial atmosphere Small organizational structure of the club Personalization strategy-frequent meetings of club members in various configurations Internal training programs for coaches Shared vision of the club Well-developed club development strategy Adequate workspace IT systems and good media relations	Overly complex club structure Financial difficulties Political barriers Lack of a shared vision within the club
	Knowledge management strategy	Lack of strategic planning

Club President	(delegation of authority, personalization strategy) Mandatory internal training programs Open workspace design (open space) promoting teamwork Designated booths for interpersonal communication Effective club management Healthy atmosphere within the club and team Coach's authoritative and supportive attitude toward athletes Advanced IT infrastructure Direct communication channels between management and athletes	Financial difficulties Organizational challenges Insufficient workspace Difficulties in securing and maintaining sponsorships due to changing corporate policies Political barriers Rigid and outdated structures within sports associations Inadequate support for sports from municipal authorities

Source: *Own study based on Brochocka (2020).*

Considering individual-level factors, athletes and coaches forming the sports team identified a greater number of both facilitators and barriers to knowledge flow compared to respondents in managerial positions. This is likely due to the fact that a sports team functions as a specific, cohesive unit in which continuous feedback loops among its members create diverse conditions for knowledge exchange.

Frequent training sessions foster deeper mutual understanding, often under conditions of conflict, competition, stress, and emotion-situations that allow for more profound reflection on the determinants of knowledge transfer. All respondents emphasized motivation, personality traits, and experience as the most critical individual factors that either support or hinder knowledge sharing.

It is noteworthy that both the management staff (including coaches) highlighted a professional approach-defined as high-level skills and work performance-as a key factor positively influencing knowledge transfer at both the team and organizational levels. Therefore, it is recommended that clubs employ individuals who are motivated, possess appropriate character traits and experience, and demonstrate a professional attitude toward their work.

The analysis of organizational factors reveals that the higher the management level, the greater the number of identified factors. Club presidents identified the most factors, followed by managers and coaches, while athletes identified the fewest. From the perspective of club presidents, knowledge sharing is facilitated by an appropriate knowledge management strategy-particularly a personalization strategy-as well as by spaces that support team collaboration and interpersonal communication.

Managers also recognize the importance of a personalization strategy. In the context of smaller clubs, a lean organizational structure is perceived as conducive to knowledge sharing, whereas in one football club, an overly complex organizational structure was cited as a barrier to knowledge flow.

Coaches emphasized the importance of effective teamwork and their own attitudes and approaches toward knowledge transfer. It is worth highlighting that all respondents pointed to a positive team atmosphere as a key factor enabling knowledge exchange.

5. Conclusions

The conducted research demonstrated that the process of knowledge sharing is an inherent attribute of sports clubs. When understood as a resource, knowledge-through its transfer via various forms and methods-ultimately becomes a sporting product in the form of athletic success. This success may take different forms, and interpersonal relationships serve as the medium through which a resource is transformed into a product and vice versa.

Sporting products are created by individuals and result from the effective transfer of knowledge among the various actors involved in this process. This process is influenced by numerous factors. The complexity of its determinants further stems from the specific nature of sport-particularly of team sports-where collaboration and internal competition within the group, as well as rivalry with opponents, are inherent characteristics.

In the examined sports clubs, knowledge sharing is influenced by a wide range of individual and organizational factors. Most of these factors can either facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of knowledge transfer, depending on the context. Given the role of the athlete-as both a sender and receiver of knowledge, with their knowledge acting as both a resource and a product-particular attention was given to the importance of individual determinants in this process.

One of the key factors is personality, which shapes behavior within the group, motivation, engagement in training, and the individual's approach to both transmitting and receiving knowledge. Other important factors include experience, competencies, awareness of one's knowledge and knowledge gaps, as well as interpersonal relationships among team members-especially in light of the coopetition phenomenon inherent in team sports, where cooperation and competition coexist.

Among organizational factors, the most influential on knowledge transfer are the structure, climate, culture, and the external environment of the organization. The identified factors may stimulate (e.g., healthy competition, a supportive climate, willingness to grow) or inhibit (e.g., unhealthy competition, a toxic team atmosphere, lack of development orientation) the knowledge-sharing process within a sports club.

In addition, knowledge sharing is affected by financial and political conditions, as well as by language and cultural barriers.

The research presented is not without limitations, as it focused solely on six purposefully selected sports clubs across three disciplines, which restricts the generalizability of the findings and may reflect the subjective perspectives of respondents. Further research on this topic is warranted, and a promising future direction would be a nationwide study encompassing all sports organizations operating in Poland.

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