




## The Resource-Based View and the Implications of Organisational Orientation in Professional Football Clubs: An Exploratory Study.

*La Visión Basada en Recursos y las Implicaciones de la Orientación Organizacional en los Clubes de Fútbol Profesionales: Un Estudio Exploratorio.*

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17398/1885-7019.19.243>

Recibido: 27/07/2023; Aceptado: 31/10/2023; Publicado: 27/12/2023

### OPEN ACCESS

Sección / Section:

Análisis del rendimiento deportivo /  
Performance analysis in sport

Editor de Sección / Edited by:

Sebastián Feu  
Universidad de Extremadura

Citación / Citation:

Miragaia, D. A. M., Ferreira, J. J. M.,  
& Fernandes, D. F. (2023). The  
Resource-Based View and the  
Implications of Organisational  
Orientation in Professional Football  
Clubs: An Exploratory Study. E-  
balonmano Com, 19(3), 243-262.

Fuentes de Financiación / Funding:

NECE – Research Unit in Business  
Sciences funded by the  
Multiannual Funding Programme of  
R&D Centres of FCT - Fundação  
para a Ciência e a Tecnologia,  
under the project  
"UIDB/04630/2020".

Agradecimientos/  
Acknowledgments:

The authors would like to thank to  
NECE – Research Unit in Business  
Sciences funded

Conflicto de intereses / Conflicts of  
Interest:

All authors declare no conflict of  
interest

### Abstract

The COVID-19 crisis represented a major challenge in various social and economic sectors, and the sport context was no exception. Professional clubs had to deal with an intense organisational and operational environment, which is essential to apply their tangible and intangible assets to obtain a sustainable competitive advantage. This study aims to examine the role of entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation and learning orientation in the performance of professional football clubs. In light of the lens of the resource-based view and adopted a qualitative approach, we conducted semi-structured interviews during the pandemic period with stakeholders from five football clubs participating in professional competitions. The results show that entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation, and learning orientation influence sports clubs' performance. This study is relevant for sports organisations as it identifies a set of assets that, when strategically managed, can increase organisational performance and generate and enhance their competitive advantage and sustainability. It shows a relation between organisational orientations, the resources implemented in clubs and their performance. Competition stimulated sports organisations to adapt, renew, reconfigure and re-create their resources and capabilities in tune with the environment. Furthermore, professional sports clubs try to follow strategies that improve their sports performance, adapting entrepreneurial orientation to developing new services, products and activities, accepting risks and being proactive. This study is relevant for sports organizations in general, as it identifies a set of assets that, when strategically managed, can increase organizational performance as well as generate and improve a competitive advantage.

**Keywords:** Resource-based vision; competitive advantage; strategy; professional football; sports clubs.

### Resumen

La crisis de COVID-19 representó un gran reto en diversos sectores sociales y económicos, y el contexto deportivo no fue una excepción. Los clubes profesionales tuvieron que hacer frente a un intenso entorno organizativo y operativo, esencial para aplicar sus activos tangibles e intangibles con el fin de obtener una ventaja competitiva sostenible. Este estudio pretende examinar el papel de la orientación emprendedora, la orientación al mercado y la orientación al aprendizaje en el rendimiento de los clubes profesionales de fútbol. A la luz de la óptica de la visión basada en los recursos y adoptando un enfoque cualitativo, realizamos entrevistas semiestructuradas durante el periodo pandémico con stakeholders de cinco clubes deportivos que participan en competiciones profesionales. Los resultados muestran que la orientación empresarial, la orientación al mercado y la orientación al aprendizaje influyen en el rendimiento de los clubes deportivos. Este estudio es relevante para las organizaciones deportivas, ya que identifica un conjunto de activos que, gestionados estratégicamente, pueden aumentar el rendimiento de la organización y generar y mejorar su ventaja competitiva y su sostenibilidad. Muestra una relación entre las orientaciones organizativas, los recursos implantados en los clubes y su rendimiento. La competencia estimula a las organizaciones deportivas a adaptar, renovar, reconfigurar y recrear sus recursos y capacidades en sintonía con el entorno. Además, los clubes deportivos profesionales intentan seguir estrategias que mejoren su rendimiento

deportivo, adaptando la orientación empresarial al desarrollo de nuevos servicios, productos y actividades, aceptando riesgos y siendo proactivos. Este estudio es relevante para las organizaciones deportivas en general, ya que identifica un conjunto de activos que, cuando se gestionan estratégicamente, pueden aumentar el desempeño organizacional, además de generar y mejorar una ventaja competitiva.

**Palabras clave:** Visión basada en los recursos; ventaja competitiva; estrategia; fútbol profesional; clubes deportivos.

## Introduction

Today, organisations face an intense environment with the constant challenge of preserving their performance indicators. According to the Resource-Based View – RBV (Barney, 2001), organisations must obtain resources and use human and organisational assets to develop a long-term competitive advantage and achieve higher performance (Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003).

Organisations must innovate constantly to create and/or revitalise products and services, especially when the existing barriers to imitation and mobility are low (D. L. Smart & Wolfe, 2000). This approach has been developed in the last three decades (Barney, 2001; Lonial & Carter, 2015), originating a change of focus in the strategic management process more focused on the organisation's internal environment (resources and capabilities) (Shilbury, 2012).

Among the assets described by RBV, these can be systematised in three levels: i) Entrepreneurial orientation (EO), which corresponds to processes of formulating the organisation's strategies used by the main decision-makers (Lonial & Carter, 2015); ii) Market orientation (MO), which generally reflects the organisation's behaviour regarding generating market intelligence through systems to support decision-making, information systems and market research (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990); and iii) Learning orientation (LO), meaning corporate behaviour and activities related to creating, acquiring and using knowledge to develop or improve the organisation's competitive advantage (Calantone et al., 2002; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003). This behaviour is particularly difficult for the competition to imitate and allows the organisation to gain a sustainable competitive advantage (Atuahene-Gima & Ko, 2001; Martin et al., 2009).

However, previous research often analyses the impact of just one organisational dimension (orientation) on organisations' performance (Baker & Sinkula, 1999; Bhuian et al., 2005; Kirca et al., 2005; Matsuno et al., 2002; Pelham, 2000), which can be considered a gap. According to Li, Zhao, Tan, and Liu (2008), analysis of only one of these dimensions provides a limited understanding of the orientation's effect on the organisation's performance and may lead to incomplete results. To respond to these shortcomings, various researchers have studied the impact of EO, MO and LO on companies' performance (Lonial & Carter, 2015; Merlo & Auh, 2009).

Therefore, this relation is perfectly applied to the sport club contexts, which have very a particular dynamics, due to depending partly on their members for funding, through membership fees, and the involvement of human resources collaborating as volunteers (Rossi et al., 2020). In this context, RBV can make an excellent contribution to the sports management area (Bar-Eli et al., 2008; D. L. Smart & Wolfe, 2000, 2003), since many sport organisations have transformed in recent decades, moving from centres directed towards leisure activities and financed by government to authentic business structures (Bennike et al., 2020; Dewhurst & Vamplew, 2020). However, there is little knowledge about organisational development and resource allocation in sport organisations, particularly in the specific case of football clubs (Asselstine & Edwards, 2019; Bradbury et al., 2021; Chutipongdech & Kampitak, 2022; Jensen et al., 2023; Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2012; Omondi-Ochieng, 2019; Orr, 2021; Pianese, 2021; Truyens et al., 2014).

Therefore, because sports clubs also operate in a constantly changing competitive environment, and it is necessary to find models of strategic management that can help identify responses to a variety of questions, such as: What should be done? Where and when should it be done? How and by whom should it be done? What resources should be allocated for this purpose? The answer to these questions requires sport organisations to anticipate alterations in the

environment, where economic, political, technological and competitive conditions are in a constant flux, to ensure that organisational goals are achieved (Petronel & Florentina, 2013).

All these questions can be the basis for assessment of a club, but how will football teams be assessed? Today, the media and society in general usually base their assessment of football teams purely on sport results, in domestic competitions, and when applicable, internationally, in the belief that “great teams” are those that are able to sign the most valuable players and victory in competitions is only possible with their help (Espitia-Escuer & Garcia-Cebrian, 2020). Despite this belief, ensuring a sustained competitive advantage in this industry does not depend only on victories, but also on management policies (Bar-Eli et al., 2008) and the club’s internal context (Gerrard, 2003).

Therefore, in the light of RBV, this study aims to analyse the influence of EO, MO and LO on the performance of football clubs playing in professional competitions in Portugal. A qualitative methodology was adopted, resorting to semi-structured interviews with five football clubs participating in these competitions in the 2020/2021 season.

The study presents some implications for practice and theory. Regarding theory, it shows a relation between organisational orientations, the resources implemented in clubs and their performance. Competition was found to stimulate sport organisations to adapt, renew, reconfigure and re-create their resources and capacities in tune with the environment. In practical terms, professional sports clubs try to follow strategies that improve their sport performance, adapting EO to the development of new services, products and even activities, accepting risks and being pro-active. Sport organisations can therefore understand how to implement organisational orientations and where they fall short, as well as how they can be used to remedy this.

## Theoretical Background

Competitive advantage is central to the performance of an organisation operating in competitive markets (Porter, 1985). Achieving a competitive advantage depends on an organisation discovering its unique resources and capabilities and how these can be used to choice and implement strategies (Barney, 2014). In turn, an organisation’s intangible assets, such as EO, MO and LO are difficult for competitors to imitate perfectly and can lead to a sustainable competitive advantage (Atuahene-Gima & Ko, 2001; Martin et al., 2009). EO is operationalised in different ways, although there seems to be a consensus that it reflects three components: risk-taking, proactiveness, and innovation (Lonial & Carter, 2015; Matsuno et al., 2002; Merlo & Auh, 2009; Verhees & Meulenber, 2004). There is convincing evidence of the link between EO and organisational performance (Lonial & Carter, 2015). Organisations can use EO as a response mechanism in a hostile environment to improve performance (Ramírez et al., 2016). This involves entrepreneurial activities, such as presenting new products and services, which can be a good strategy for facing crises (Hammerschmidt et al., 2021). According to Devece, Peris-Ortiz and Rueda-Armengot (2016), EO in sport sectors can potentially lead to better performance during recessions as entrepreneurial organisations are more likely to survive and in the recovery phase present higher rates of growth and job creation. A proactive attitude focused on creating innovative products and services can be expected to have a positive effect on operational results (Ramírez et al., 2016). Hammerschmidt et al. (2021) consider entrepreneurship a fundamental strategic approach for organisations’ sustainability.

Despite various definitions of MO (Lonial & Carter, 2015; Matsuno et al., 2005), it normally refers to organisational behaviour focused on generating market intelligence through systems supporting decision-making, information systems, and market research, disseminating that intelligence throughout the organisation’s departments, and responding to changes in the competitive environment (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Lonial & Carter, 2015). MO provides the organisation with a market sensor and a capacity to attract customers, which can lead to higher organisational performance (Babu et al., 2019).

LO refers to corporate behaviour and activities related to creating, acquiring, and using knowledge to develop a competitive advantage (Calantone et al., 2002; Lonial & Carter, 2015; J. E. Martinez et al., 2020; Wiklund & Shepherd,

2003). LO is formed of three components (Baker & Sinkula, 1999): commitment to learning (the value that organisation gives to learning), open mind (the degree to which an organisation is receptive to new ideas that challenge current procedures), and shared vision (a unifying element that orients how the organisation should direct its learning activities).

RBV has been applied in various organisational fields, including sport (Bar-Eli et al., 2008; Gerrard, 2003; D. L. Smart & Wolfe, 2000; Wicker & Breuer, 2011). RBV provides an emerging paradigm for understanding strategic resources. However, these resources do not persist in dynamic environments over time and may not represent a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Gerrard, 2005). Therefore, RBV and competitive advantage are linked to performance (D. L. Smart & Wolfe, 2000). Nevertheless, higher performance does not depend only on the resources but also on the efficiency of these resources.

Therefore, the reasoning behind the strategy and structure for football teams is based on their available resources (Espitia-Escuer & Garcia-Cebrian, 2020). Bar-Eli et al. (2008) concluded that Bayern Munich and Maccabi Tel-Aviv achieved a competitive advantage by obtaining long-term media rights through stadiums, higher performance, legendary managers and excellent players. For these authors, these clubs' actions fit well in the RBV model; their strategic assets helped them obtain a sustainable competitive advantage.

Since football has transformed its internal structures: physical, structural and symbolic (Costa et al., 2018; García et al., 2019; Prieto et al., 2021), it is essential to reinforce the idea that other clubs are not only opponents but rather competitors, i.e., clubs are no longer opponents only on the pitch but are also competitors outside it (Ogbonna & Harris, 2014). Consequently, it becomes fundamental to know the internal and external resources that create a sustainable competitive advantage for professional football clubs, aiming to understand those clubs' performance off the pitch too (Costa et al., 2018; Ibáñez et al., 2018; Sánchez-Murillo et al., 2021).

Therefore, despite the links between organisational resources and performance capability and the relation with competitive advantage, being increasingly mentioned in the literature, there has been little application to the sports context, particularly regarding football (Truyens et al., 2016).

## Method

### Research Approach, Case Description and Context

This research follows a qualitative empirical approach, with the purpose of making an exploratory study in Portuguese professional football clubs. Using an interpretative phenomenological approach, an interview was conducted with the clubs' managers (Montero & Leon, 2007). This approach allows analysing social contexts from the individual perceptions and interpretations of stakeholders who are part of that sport system (Bhattacharya, 2017). For this reason, this type of study must be contextualised in its time and space. The importance of this type of approach should be highlighted, namely to help the development of future quantitative research, in order to obtain interpretations with more generalised extrapolations (Smith & Caddick, 2012).

This study involved five football clubs playing in professional competitions in Portugal (Football League First Division). Three of those clubs competed in the NOS League and the other two in the Portugal 2 SABSEG League (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Clubs present in the study

Club	Year of foundation	League	SAD/SDUQ	Competition in the last 5 years
1	1904	NOS league	SLC *	NOS league
2	1921	NOS league	SLC *	NOS league
3	1933	NOS league	SLC *	NOS league
4	1887	SABSEG league	SMLC**	Portugal 2 SABSEG league
5	1923	SABSEG league	SMLC**	Portugal 2 SABSEG league

\*SLC - Sport Limited Company

\*\* SMLC - Single-Member Limited Company

The study included participants who belonged to the clubs' manager structure (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Characterisation of the respondents

No.	Position	Club	Age	Length of time in the club	Interview length
1	Main joint coach (B team)	1	51	11 years	35 minutes
2	Professional Football Department	2	42	4 years	35 minutes
3	Public Relations	3	34	7 years	30 minutes
4	Goalkeeper coach	3	43	3 years	40 minutes
5	Operational director	4	23	1 year	35 minutes
6	Vice-President	5	45	8 years	35 minutes
7	Manager/board member	5	43	17 years	40 minutes

### Instrument and Data Collection

A qualitative approach with semi-structured interview was adopted, adapted from the study by Lonial and Carter (2015), containing 67 questions referring to organisational orientations (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Organisational orientations measuring

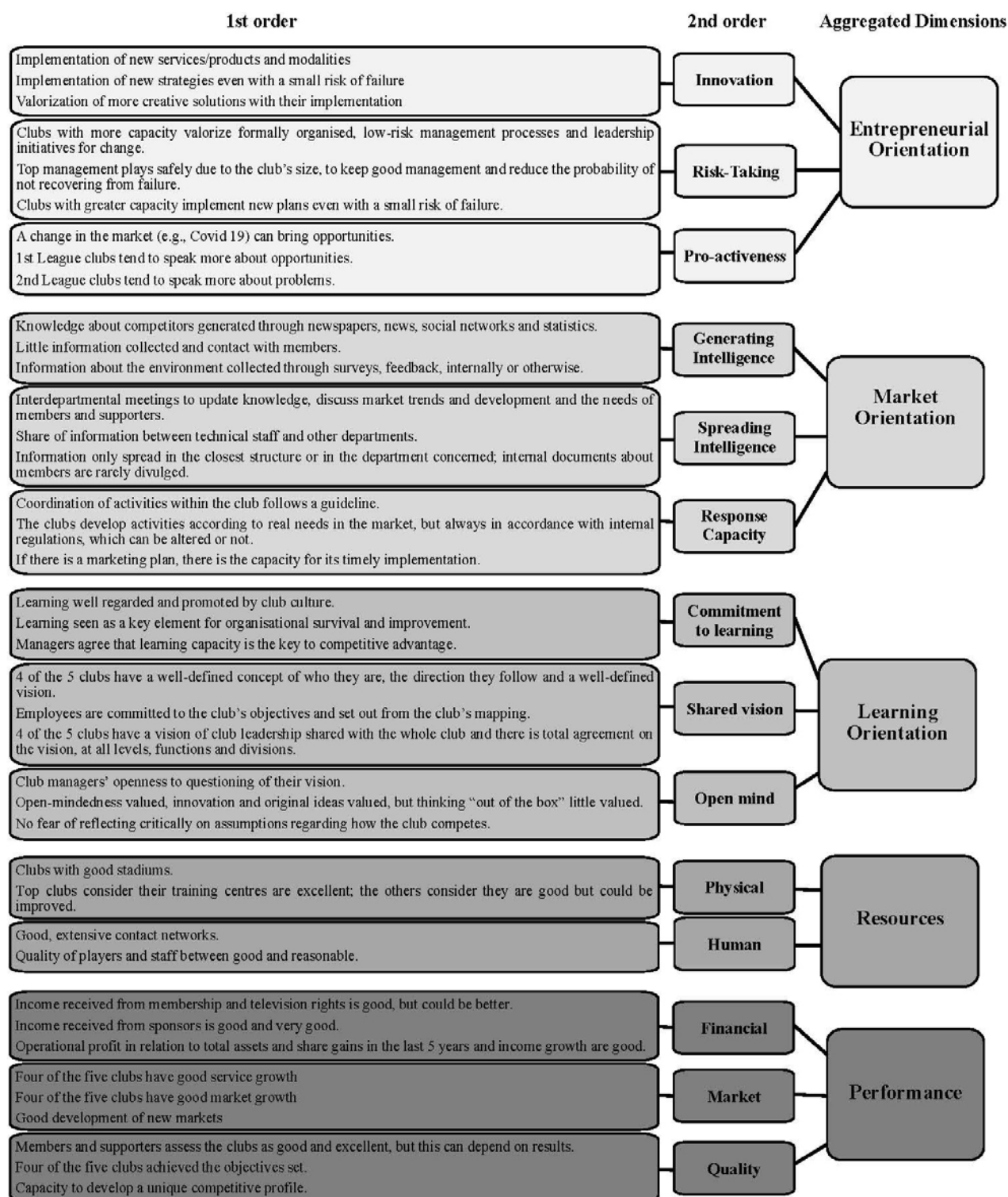
Organisational orientations	Dimensions	No. items
<b>Entrepreneurial orientation</b>	Innovation	3
	Risk	3
	Proactiveness	2
<b>Market orientation</b>	Generating intelligence	6
	Spreading intelligence	6
	Response capacity	7
<b>Learning orientation</b>	Commitment to learning	6
	Shared vision	6
	Open mind	6
<b>Resources</b>	Physical	3
	Human	2
<b>Performance</b>	Financial	5
	Market	3
	Quality	3

Data were collected between January 2021 and June 2021. This phase included preparation for data collection and interviews. Contact was made by e-mail and phone with the 34 clubs involved in professional competitions in Portugal. To guarantee the reliability of the data, only clubs that have competed at this level in the last five seasons have been considered. We also tried to improve the reliability of the data by interviewing more than one stakeholder from each club. However, only five clubs were available to do so and in only two clubs was possible to obtain an interview with two different actors. A request was made to each club to interview more than one top manager. Seven individuals were interviewed, lasting between 30 and 40 minutes each interview. Two interviews were held via video, three by telephone and two face-to-face. Participants were encouraged to speak freely following Riessman (2008) recommendations. Informed consent was requested from each participant and anonymity was guaranteed. Ethically, the study was guided by the Declaration of Helsinki (Association, 2013) and the suggested ethical standards for research in Sport and Exercise Sciences (Harriss et al., 2019).



## Results

Figure 1 shows the main results for each question (1<sup>st</sup> order categories), and the respective correspondence with their dimensions (2<sup>nd</sup> order topics).



Regarding Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO), the answers obtained are shown in Table 4.

**Table 1.** Data supporting interpretations of EO

Topic	Subtopic	Representative Answers
<b>Entrepreneurial Orientation</b>	<b>Innovation</b>	<b>How does the club develop and/or implement new activities, products/services or even new sports?</b> <i>"From year to year, we try to implement new sports, always ensuring we have all the conditions to do so. We also try to implement new products each year" (6)</i> <i>"We are an inward-looking club and develop/implement few new activities, products and services" (7)</i>
		<b>Does top management encourage the implementation of new strategies, even if they may fail? How?</b> <i>"Yes. Even with a low risk of failure, new strategies can be implemented" (4)</i> <i>"When implementation is carried out with certainty, this is encouraged. When it might fail, no" (3)</i>
		<b>In your club, when a problem is solved, are more creative new solutions valorised? In what way?</b> <i>"Yes, with implementation of those ideas" (2)</i>
	<b>Risk</b>	<b>Are the most valued management processes formally organised, low-risk ones, or leadership initiatives for change? Is there a reason for that?</b> <i>"It's mixed. When it's for the best, the most suitable one is chosen" (4)</i> <i>"Normally, it's formally organised, low-risk ones. When they are implemented, then we can think about leadership initiatives for change. This ideology is defined due to the risks that can arise" (3)</i>
		<b>Does top management like to "play safely"? Why?</b> <i>"Yes. If there's a great probability of failure, new plans are not implemented. If they subsequently fail, there may not be a capacity to recover" (2)</i> <i>"Yes. So as not to run unnecessary risks and always maintain good management in the club" (3)</i> <i>"Yes. Given the size of the club, the risk has to be calculated" (4)</i>
		<b>Are plans only implemented if they are certain to work?</b> <i>"Only if there's a great probability of success are they implemented" (2)</i> <i>"When there's a low risk of failure, they are implemented" (6)</i> <i>"Yes, not to run risks" (7)</i>
		<b>Do you believe that a change in the market (for example, the Covid-19 pandemic or the Super-League) will create positive opportunities for the club? Why?</b> <i>"Yes. At various levels there could be new opportunities" (2)</i> <i>"No. A change in the market, such as Covid-19, will bring problems for the club, since it's in an isolated region and it will be more difficult to react" (3)</i> <i>"Yes. Crises such as Covid-19 always bring opportunities. When you survive a crisis, there will certainly be growth" (4)</i>
	<b>Proactiveness</b>	<b>Do club members tend to speak more about opportunities or problems? Why?</b> <i>"There's a tendency to speak about problems, because they're more frequent than opportunities" (2)</i> <i>"Due to the large size of the club, we speak more about opportunities" (5)</i> <i>"It depends. When we speak about problems, it's in a positive way" (6)</i>

The evidence shows that most clubs value "Innovation", with the majority tending to implement new sports, products and services, and that implementation generally originates in the marketing department. Top management in these clubs seems to encourage the implementation of new strategies, even if they might fail.

*"The marketing department gets together and presents ideas and also feedback and proposals from companies, and a consensus is reached. There is also an attempt to attract younger fans through merchandising" (4)*

Despite these data, among those studied is Club 5, which in this sub-topic shows different characteristics from the other clubs, stating that it is an inward-looking club and does not develop/implement many new activities, services and sports. In addition, it mentions that when strategies may fail, top management does not encourage implementation. All the clubs studied were found to value the creation of new solutions when there is a problem with implementing solutions.

Regarding the "Risk" sub-dimension, most clubs were seen to accept some risk, valuing both formally organised, low-risk management processes and leadership initiatives for change. It is indicated that plans are implemented with a low risk of failure.

*"Normally, plans are intended to succeed. So when the risk of failure is slow, they are implemented" (1)*

However, Club 5 admits it is cautious and does not “invest” in risk-taking. It normally values organised, low-risk management processes, and plans will only be implemented if there is no risk of failure. Despite different stances concerning risk-taking, in all the clubs, top management plays safely, not run unnecessary risks.

As for the sub-dimension of “Proactiveness”, clubs competing in the NOS League (1,2 and 3) tend to speak more about opportunities than problems. This is not the case in clubs competing in the SABSEG League, which admit there is a greater tendency to speak about problems.

There was no consensus regarding the possibility of changes in the market creating opportunities for the club. Clubs 2,3 and 4 believe that a change in the market could bring new opportunities, while clubs 1 and 5 do not think so. Various reasons are given, Club 1 indicating that it was greatly affected in the last season by issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic, and Club 5 stating that its geographical location could make things worse as it is situated in an inland, more isolated area of the country.

*“No. We were hit badly by Covid-19 and that only brought many problems” (5)*

*“No, a change in the market such as the pandemic situation will bring problems for the club, since we are situated in inland Portugal and it will be more difficult to react” (3)*

Table 5 shows answers obtained in the respective dimensions of MO.



**Table 2.** Data supporting interpretations of MO

Topic	Subtopic	Representative Answers	
Market Orientation	Generating Intelligence	<p><b>In the club, how is knowledge about competitors generated?</b>  <i>"Among players, it is through videos and statistics" (1)</i>  <i>"Through accompanying work on social media and we join with competitors in order to cooperate, due to our need to catch up. It's also created through news and statistics" (2)</i>  <i>"The strategies are known to a greater or lesser extent. Then there's a department more focused on collecting that information" (4)</i></p>	
		<p><b>How are the effects of changes in the club environment seen by members and supporters?</b>  <i>"For historical reasons, members are more conservative and so changes might not be well accepted" (2)</i>  <i>"Due to the size of the club, members and supporters only know the word "victory" and any change that doesn't mean winning is not seen well by supporters" (5)</i>  <i>"They don't usually accept change well or easily" (7)</i></p>	
		<p><b>In the club, is time spent with suppliers (e.g., equipment supplier) to learn more about various aspects of the club? If yes, how much time?</b>  <i>"Yes. Given our history, normally in fact it's the suppliers who want to get together with the club" (2)</i>  <i>"Yes. The amount of time depends" (7)</i></p>	
		<p><b>Do only some people gather information about members and supporters in the club, or does this involve the whole structure? How is this information collected?</b>  <i>"The information appears on the member's file, but there is also a member ombudsman" (4)</i>  <i>"The information appears on the member's file and is inserted in a database" (6)</i></p>	
		<p><b>Is there any collection and assessment of information about general social trends that can affect the environment? In what way?</b>  <i>"Yes. Through surveys and feedback" (4)</i>  <i>"Yes. Normally, there's internal gathering of information" (6)</i></p>	
		<p><b>Are members and supporters contacted to assess club activities? If so, how many times per year?</b>  <i>"Generally, no. Normally these contacts are made with the athletes" (2)</i>  <i>"Yes. Whenever the club intends to make some change, members are asked via a questionnaire" (4)</i></p>	
		<p><b>Are there usually meetings between the various departments to update knowledge about regulatory requirements? With a specific frequency or whenever this is considered necessary?</b>  <i>"Meetings are held informally" (2)</i>  <i>"Yes. The generally occur every two weeks" (3)</i>  <i>"These meetings are held weekly" (4)</i></p>	
	Spreading intelligence	<p><b>Are there multi-functional meetings to discuss market trends and developments? If so, how often and in what way?</b>  <i>"Yes. Informally" (2)</i>  <i>"Yes, almost every week" (3)</i>  <i>"Yes. The frequency depends" (7)</i></p>	
		<p><b>Are internal documents released with information about members and supporters? If so, how frequently and in what way (newsletter, email, ...)</b>  <i>"Yes. In a closed circuit, via e-mail" (4)</i>  <i>"No" (6)</i></p>	
		<p><b>Is there discussion about members and supporters' future needs between the marketing staff and other departments? Explain.</b>  <i>"Yes, but not as regularly as inter-departmental meetings" (4)</i>  <i>"Yes. The frequency can vary" (6)</i>  <i>"Yes. This normally occurs in board meetings" (7)</i></p>	
		<p><b>Does the club's specialist staff share information about technology (to support management processes with the structure and to support training with the technical team) for new activities/services with other departments? If so, how often and in what way?</b>  <i>"Yes. In the case of the player pool, the analyst develops a technology and passes that information to the technical team" (1)</i>  <i>"Yes. Often through presentations and briefings" (4)</i></p>	
		<p><b>Is information about the market spread through the whole structure? In what way?</b>  <i>"Only through the closest structure" (3)</i>  <i>"In a closed circuit, by word-of-mouth" (4)</i>  <i>"No" (6)</i></p>	
		Response Capacity	<p><b>In what way are the various departments' activities coordinated within the club?</b>  <i>"They follow a hierarchy. The information sets out from the president and so on" (3)</i>  <i>"The general director proposes an activity and then it passes through the structure. If it concerns football, it gets to the football director" (4)</i></p>
			<p><b>If an opponent, especially one at the same level of classification, launched an intensive campaign targeting members and supporters, would a response be implemented quickly? In what way?</b>  <i>"If it was a subject of interest, yes. However, this rarely happens, given the club's different needs" (3)</i>  <i>"The club doesn't look outside much. It would depend on the topic" (6)</i></p>

**Table 3.** Data supporting interpretations of MO (cont.)

	<p><b>real market needs? If so, explain why.</b>  <i>"More according to internal policies" (3)</i>  <i>"There's an attempt to follow the market, but always dependent on internal regulations, as that is where the basis of the club's behaviour lies" (4)</i></p>
	<p><b>When there is a new marketing plan, do you have the capacity to implement it in good time? How?</b>  <i>"At this moment, launching a marketing plan has to be very well thought out, given the current situation. But yes" (3)</i>  <i>"Yes, it will depend on the type of plan" (4)</i></p>
	<p><b>Generally speaking, does the club tend to take more or less time than its opponents to change the regulatory policy (for example, internal regulations)? Why?</b>  <i>"The regulatory policy is pre-defined and in principle will not be changed" (3)</i>  <i>"The internal regulations are always being updated" (6)</i></p>
	<p><b>If you were publicly accused of harmful practices, would you respond immediately to the criticism? In what way?</b>  <i>"Yes. It would be through an announcement from the communication department. But always with the legal department's support to fulfil all the legal requirements" (4)</i>  <i>"The club does not usually comment on news that appears about the club, but it depends on the subject" (6)</i></p>
	<p><b>When it comes to negotiating with new suppliers, is this a quick process? How?</b>  <i>"It is done quickly, with a medium/long term view" (3)</i>  <i>"It depends on the type of product" (4)</i></p>

Regarding "Generating intelligence", the clubs studied tend to generate knowledge about competitors, through videos, statistics and news, about themselves, in time spent with their suppliers and from the surrounding environment, collecting information about social trends that can affect the environment.

*"The club is on a platform that sends the newspapers every day, and the information is collected from that" (6)*

As for members, this needs to be improved in practically all the clubs studied since information about members is only collected on their enrolment form, and they are not called on to evaluate club activities. Only Club 2 is seen to be more active here as it has a member ombudsman and contacts members when intending to make a change. All the clubs studied indicated that members and supporters' opinion of changes can depend on the type of change, as some members are more conservative or the clubs are situated in small towns.

Concerning "Spreading intelligence", the five clubs hold inter-departmental meetings to update knowledge, particularly about regulatory and multi-functional requirements, to discuss market trends and development, and to discuss members' and supporters' future needs. Despite this harmony, the information does not circulate throughout the whole structure. Only clubs 1 and 2 say that internal documents about members and supporters are divulged, but only in a closed circuit. Market information is spread in clubs 1,2, and 5, but only in the closest structure.

*"Yes, in the closest structure" (7)*

Regarding the technology share, this occurs between the technical staff and other services in all the clubs studied.

*"Yes. Whenever there's something new, through presentations" (2)*

Turning to "Response capacity" the various departments' activities are coordinated similarly, in all the clubs, generally following a guideline. A marketing plan will be implemented in good time when there is a marketing plan. Depending on the type of plan, the necessary tools will be applied, but when faced with an opponent's intensive campaign, only Club 4 said it would implement a rapid response, the others said they had different needs and that their policy was to act rather than react.

*"No. Our policy is to act, not react" (4)*

However, if accused of harmful practices, all the clubs would react. The majority would organise that reaction through the communication and legal department. Clubs 3 and 5 stated it was not their custom to comment on news involving the club, but that decision would depend on the subject.

Concerning internal policies, the clubs have different visions. While some state that the internal regulations are pre-defined and are not touched, Clubs 2 and 3 state that internal regulations are permanently updated. Although some clubs demonstrate "rigidity" in their internal regulations, only Club 5 stated it tended to govern itself according to internal policies, the others being governed by market needs or both. All the clubs stated that negotiating with suppliers is generally quick, but it would depend on the type of product.

Concerning the dimension designated as Learning Orientation (LO), Table 6 presents the representative answers obtained.

**Table 6.** Data supporting interpretations of LO

Topic	Subtopic	Representative Answers	
Learning Orientation	Commitment to Learning	<b>How are club employees' learning viewed (administration, departments, technical team and staff)?</b> <i>"It is seen as something good, but employees have different points of view. Generally, younger employees have a more positive view" (2)</i> <i>"It is seen positively. When there is training, advantage is taken from this" (3)</i>	
		<b>Does the club culture prioritize club employees' learning? How?</b> <i>"Normally, in our club learning is undertaken proactively" (2)</i> <i>"Yes. Through training and experience is valued" (5)</i>	
		<b>Is learning seen in the club as a key to ensuring organisational survival? Explain this approach.</b> <i>"Yes. The football world is similar to companies and so learning is seen as a key element of organisational survival" (4)</i> <i>"Yes. Due to changes in the market (6)</i>	
		<b>Does the club adopt the approach that if you stop learning, the club's future is at risk? Explain.</b> <i>"Yes. Due to changes in the market, learning becomes important for the club not to be at risk" (2)</i>	
		<b>What is the managers' opinion about learning capacity being the key to competitive advantage?</b> <i>"They promote this view" (1)</i> <i>"They know it's important, but do not give due importance to the fact of learning being the key to competitive advantage" (2)</i>	
		<b>Among the club's basic values, is learning included as a key element for improvement? Explain.</b> <i>"Yes. The more you know, the better prepared you are for any type of change in the environment and there's a better chance of improvement" (3)</i> <i>"Yes. With constant change in the market, the more you know, the more you develop and improve"(4)</i>	
		Shared Vision	<b>In your opinion, does the club have a well-expressed concept of who it is and the direction it follows? Explain.</b> <i>"No. The various departments have different concepts" (2)</i> <i>"Yes. In the club, there's a good definition of who we are and where we're going" (4)</i>
	<b>Do you feel that the employees are committed to the club's objectives? Explain</b> <i>"Yes. All the employees feel committed to the club and its objectives" (3)</i> <i>"Yes. To work in the club, you have to feel committed to its objectives" (5)</i>		
	<b>Do employees consider themselves partners in the club board's overall plan? Explain</b> <i>"Yes. Everyone feels part of the club" (7)</i>		
	<b>Is top management's vision shared by the whole club? In what way?</b> <i>"No. This is still very restricted" (2)</i> <i>"Yes. All elements of the club know about the club leadership's vision" (4)</i>		
	<b>At all levels, functions and divisions, is there total agreement with the club's vision? Explain.</b> <i>"Yes. The vision is formed by those at the top and everyone must accept this" (3)</i> <i>"Yes. When employees join the club, they adopt the club's vision" (4)</i> <i>"No" (6)</i>		
	<b>Does the club have a well-defined vision? What is it?</b> <i>"More or less" (2)</i> <i>"Yes. To consolidate the club, carry out work and get the club into the 1<sup>st</sup> league on reaching its centenary" (3)</i>		
	Open Mind		<b>Are club managers open to their vision being questioned? Is this easily accessed? In what way?</b> <i>"Yes. When an employee raises a question, the head of the department questions the club managers" (4)</i> <i>"Yes. Access is easy due to the closeness of everyone in the club" (6)</i>
			<b>Is an open mind valued in your unit of operation? In what way?</b> <i>"Yes, by applying new ideas" (6)</i>
<b>Do managers give employees any incentive to think "out of the box"? In what way?</b> <i>"Yes. Employees are encouraged to think out of the box" (4)</i> <i>"No" (7)</i>			
<b>In the club culture, is constant innovation emphasized? In what way? Can you give examples?</b> <i>"Yes. By applying new ideas" (1)</i> <i>"Yes. By applying innovative ideas, for example, the BenficaLab" (5)</i>			
<b>Are people afraid to reflect critically on the assumptions held about how the club competes? Explain</b> <i>"No. As many employees have been in the club longer than the board members, this problem does not exist" (2)</i> <i>"When the results are bad, this is the case" (3)</i> <i>"No, on the contrary. There are moments of reflection" (5)</i>			
<b>Are original ideas valued? In what way?</b> <i>"Yes. Those ideas are chosen" (1)</i>			

In the sub-dimension of “Commitment to learning”, all the clubs studied are found to value learning, accepting it is a key element for organisational survival, the key to competitive advantage. However, only Club 4 did not consider learning a key element for improvement. All the clubs state that the future can be at risk if they stop learning.

*“As already mentioned, despite knowing the importance of learning, it is not one of the key elements for improvement.” (2)*

In all the clubs studied, employees’ learning is well-regarded. In the sub-dimension of “Shared Vision”, it is concluded that employees feel committed to the club’s objectives and consider themselves partners in the board’s overall plan. As for the club’s vision, only Club 4 states there is no well-defined vision and each department has a different concept of who the club is and where it is going. Still in this domain, only Clubs 3 and 4 say there is no complete agreement about the vision at all levels, functions and divisions.

Within the club “bubbles” are found concerning the shared leadership vision. Although some clubs indicate that the leaders’ vision is shared with the whole club, Club 4 says that vision is not shared, and Club 5 says it is only shared with the closest structure.

*“Yes. With the closest structure” (3)*

About “Open Mind”, all the clubs studied value an open mind, innovation and original ideas, but not all encourage employees to think “out of the box”. Employees have easy access to managers and there is no fear of reflecting on how the club competes.

*“Yes. Managers are open to being questioned.” (2)*

Concerning the dimension named Resources, Table 7 presents representative answers obtained.

**Table 7.** Data supporting interpretations of Resources

Topic	Subtopic	Representative Answers
Resources	Physical	<b>How do you perceive the quality of the club’s stadium?</b> <i>“A silver stadium. It has excellent facilities and can be considered a 1st League stadium” (3)</i> <i>“Good, and investment is being made to improve it” (4)</i> <i>“Good, but it could be better” (6)</i>
		<b>How do you perceive the quality of the club’s training centre?</b> <i>“A good structure, but it could be improved” (2)</i> <i>“We can consider we have the best training centre in the country” (4)</i>
		<b>In terms of technology and equipment, do you think the club is well equipped? Why?</b> <i>“Very. We have the best technology” (5)</i> <i>“The minimum required, providing conditions” (1)</i>
	Human	<b>Is the club’s contact network extensive? How does it work?</b> <i>“It’s good. In the world of football, there’s always a lot of knowledge. Internal communication is done via e-mail, personal contact” (6)</i> <i>“It’s good. Internally, contacts are usually made by phone. Externally, it’s done by e-mail and telephone” (7)</i>
		<b>How do you perceive the quality of the players/staff?</b> <i>“There was a good work group, but the quality wasn’t what was expected” (3)</i> <i>“Good quality” (5)</i> <i>“For what the club intended, it was good” (6)</i>

Regarding “Physical” resources, all the clubs are satisfied with their stadiums and training centres, although some indicate these could be improved. As for equipment and technology, only the clubs with the greatest capacity (1 and 2) are completely satisfied.

*“Very well equipped. The equipment and technology are the best.” (4)*

In the sub-dimension of “Human” resources, all the clubs consider they have a good, extensive contact network, both internally and externally. Concerning the quality of the players, only Club 5 is dissatisfied, resulting from a bad season.

*“Given the quality of the players/staff, the classification could have been a position or two above what we achieved” (1)*

Table 8 presents representative results obtained in the respective dimensions of performance.

**Table 8.** Data supporting interpretations of Performance

Topic	Subtopic	Representative Answers
Performance	Financial	<b>How do you assess the income from membership?</b> <i>"It's good, but could be better" (2)</i> <i>"Good. We're the club with most members in Portugal" (5)</i>
		<b>How do you assess the income from sponsors?</b> <i>"Good. We have good sponsors who support the club" (1)</i> <i>"Good. The sponsors are a major part of the club and its income" (4)</i>
		<b>How do you assess the income from television rights?</b> <i>"Could be better" (3)</i> <i>"Very good" (2)</i> <i>"Poor" (6)</i>
		<b>How do you assess operational profit in relation to total assets? And to shareholders' funds/heritage?</b> <i>"Good" (4)</i>
		<b>How do you assess share gains in the last 5 years? Did income grow in these years?</b> <i>"There was income growth" (3)</i>
	Market	<b>How do you assess service development?</b> <i>"The club has developed services well" (4)</i> <i>"In the club there has been little development of services" (7)</i>
		<b>How do you assess development of the market for merchandising products?</b> <i>"The club is focusing on this market" (4)</i> <i>"Good, and the club accompanies development" (6)</i>
		<b>How do you assess the development of new markets?</b> <i>"Good and the club tries to accompany and the conditions are in place to develop new markets" (6)</i>
	Quality	<b>How do you regard the way supporters/members assess the quality of the club?</b> <i>"It's controversial. It depends on the results" (3)</i> <i>"They see it as a good club" (6)</i>
		<b>Has the club achieved the objectives it set? If not, why not?</b> <i>"Yes, staying in the SABSEG League" (3)</i> <i>"No. Various factors over the season can be considered" (5)</i>
		<b>Has the club acquired the capacity to develop a unique competitive profile? In what way?</b> <i>"Yes. The value of the player-pool is generally the lowest in the 2nd League, there are no investors and even with these limitations, it's the club that's been in the 2<sup>nd</sup> League for longest" (3)</i> <i>"Yes. It has achieved a capacity and a unique competitive profile through the club's growth in recent years" (4)</i>

Observing "Financial" performance, regarding the income associated with membership fees, sponsorship and television rights, only Club 1 is completely satisfied.

*"Although it's good, I believe that with the centralisation of television rights there won't be such a big discrepancy and the League will become more competitive" (1)*

All the clubs studied evaluate operational profit between "good" and "some", with all saying income has grown in recent years.

In the sub-theme of "Market", only Club 5 indicates little development of services and merchandising, while the others say there has been good development of the service and merchandising market, which they try to accompany. All the clubs agree that it is good to develop new markets and they try to accompany this.

*"Good and we try to accompany it" (2)*

Regarding "Quality", most clubs state that their members and supporters consider them good clubs, with only Club 5 indicating that members regard the club according to its results. Except for Club 1, they have all achieved their objectives and say they have acquired the capacity to develop a unique competitive profile.

*"Yes. It has achieved a capacity and a unique competitive profile through the club's growth in recent years" (4)*



## Discussion

RBV conceptualizes strategy as a function of organisations' access to resources and the organisation's efficiency with which those resources are structured and used (Gerrard, 2005; Truyens et al., 2014). The difference in levels of efficiency can be related to the characteristics of resources and their organisation, namely, organisational design, task distribution and communication (Espitia-Escuer & Garcia-Cebrian, 2020). To be effective, a sport organisation's management must consider internal and external aspects of the surrounding context (Petronel & Florentina, 2013).

Competition between organisations stimulates the latter to adapt, renew, reconfigure and recreate their resources and capabilities according to the environment (Wang & Ahmed, 2007). Therefore, organisations that implement those capacities effectively can have high market performance (Lonial & Carter, 2015). Since organisations can follow several orientations, researchers have noted the importance of EO, MO, and LO and their corresponding relation with the organisation's results (Atuahene-Gima & Ko, 2001).

Rapidly changing competitive and technological environments and uncertainty caused by current participants require organisations to develop and commercialise new opportunities (Lonial & Carter, 2015). Acquiring a sustainable competitive advantage requires an entrepreneurial spirit due to the need to reformulate the organisation, this is a process followed by organisations that are innovative, proactive and open to risk (Matsuno et al., 2002).

The results show that most clubs studied use EO, developing new products, services and even activities, assuming risks and being proactive. Although 4 of the 5 clubs use EO, one states it focuses more on its internal context, does not innovate in products and services, is not proactive and does not take on risk, following the principle of only applying new strategies and ideas if there is no risk of failure. This stance may be due to these costly and slow processes (Hart, 1992; D. T. Smart & Conant, 1994). However, assets can be implemented more effectively in other undertakings (Lumpkin & Dess, 2001; Merlo & Auh, 2009), due to a limited budget to research new product development and other financial restrictions (Verhees & Meulenbergh, 2004), given that the club admits income is low (data obtained in the performance dimension) and that it does not want to run risks.

When speaking about MO, this relates to marketing strategy, with segmentation necessary for more directed, efficient campaigns, which should be dealt with in detail (MacPherson & Kerr, 2021). Clubs often adopt micro-segmentation to use their resources, which is complicated today due to the highly dynamic behaviour of customers (Varmus & Kubina, 2015). The results indicate that all clubs "invest" in this aspect, reporting discussing members' and supporters' needs. However, there are shortcomings regarding contact with members. Only Club 2 indicated it has a members' ombudsman, who contacts members when some change is intended for the club. This confirms that although the clubs use social networks (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) to communicate with supporters, finding an appropriate configuration of the communication mix is still challenging to reach the targeted segment and achieve the desired effect (Goodyear, 2017; Varmus & Kubina, 2015).

The clubs studied say it is unusual to implement a rapid response when competitors launch an intensive campaign, as they do not look at what opponents are doing, which may agree with the conclusion by Barney (2014), who says that for an organisation to seek a competitive advantage, it is better to be excellent at developing and exploiting their resources and capacities than to be excellent at imitating those of other firms. Professional sports clubs try to follow strategies that improve their sport performance. In the particular context of football, implementing new technology plays an important role (Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2020). Concerning market research and generating intelligence, the clubs implement this orientation, stating they have inter-departmental meetings to update knowledge on regulatory requirements and to discuss market trends and developments. They spend some time with suppliers, indicating a search for a sustainable competitive advantage. However, some failings are noted in the sub-theme of spread of intelligence, showing that clubs still have "bubbles", as the clubs that spread information about the market only do so in the closest structure. This can compromise the competitive advantage, as confirmed in the LO. These data agree with the approach by Lechner and Gudmundsson (2008), who mention that organisations still need to develop value creation strategies in

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an organisation's entire value chain and exploit the links between the elements of the value chain, aiming to create a sustainable competitive advantage.

In this connection, the five clubs studied indicate that the technical staff share information about technology for activities, with this information exchange also occurring in the other direction, as in the case of Club 3 where the analyst created a new work methodology and passed this information on to the training staff.

The organisation's employees should also accept the responsibility to create, nourish and exploit resources and capabilities to create a competitive advantage, which is too important for top management. Employees can have the autonomy to develop and exploit these resources and capacities in fulfilling their work duties (Barney, 2014). This statement is supported in the clubs studied, where this aspect is valued. All five clubs value an open mind, emphasise innovation, and appreciate original ideas. In addition, employees are encouraged to think "out of the box", except in Club 5.

Potential competitive advantage sources are everywhere in an organisation. Each department, branch or other organisational unit has a function that must be defined and understood. All employees must recognise their role in helping the organisation to achieve and hold on to a competitive advantage (Porter, 1985). Despite these clubs saying that their employees feel committed to the clubs' objectives and feel they are part of the board's overall plan, there is not complete agreement on the vision in Clubs 3 and 4, which can compromise this orientation.

Employees must know about an organisation's customs, habits and beliefs, as these affect the organisation's functioning. Organisational culture can be described as acquiring knowledge and skills that can lead to a competitive advantage in the market (Matic & Maksimovic, 2020). A club's employees can represent a unique source of competitive advantage which is difficult for rivals to imitate (Mnzava, 2013). It is up to managers to support, facilitate and accelerate the creation, spread and use of knowledge in the organisation (Matic & Maksimovic, 2020). These five clubs have a positive view of learning as a key element of the club's learning. They believe that if the club stops learning, its future may be at risk, indicating that learning is the key to competitive advantage, even if Club 4 does not give it due importance. Concerning the club's vision, this is not well-defined in Club 4. This could cause a loss of competitive advantage as they do not clearly define who they are and where they are going.

According to D. L. Smart and Wolfe (2000), an organisation can sustain a competitive advantage by exploiting its human and physical resources more fully than other organisations. However, only Clubs 1 and 2 are completely satisfied with their physical resources, claiming to have excellent stadiums, training centres, and the latest technology. The club is seen as a home, a place for communicating and socialising, turning it into a network (Digel, 2010). All the clubs studied say they have a good, extensive communication network, both internally and externally. As for the quality of the players and training staff in the 2020/2021 season, only Club 5 is dissatisfied, indicating the quality was not as hoped for that despite a good work group. This may be because the club had an inconsistent season, finishing in 12th position in the league. This assessment follows the arguments of Martinez et al. (2019), stating that organisations provide the structure to train, develop and improve the behaviour of employees, who are operationalised through perceptions of service quality. Managers can also emphasise the capacity to create talent through investing in training systems and skill development (Fainshmidt et al., 2017; Feu et al., 2023; García-Ceberino et al., 2023).

The interviews also revealed that the clubs in this study, most prominent in Portuguese football, indicate that the income from television rights is very good. This agrees with the conclusion of Jensen, Turner and McEvoy (2015), who indicate that the variables reflecting success can have a significant effect on the value of television rights.

The results seem to point to the need for sports organisations to articulate all organisational orientations for better performance. Despite implementing all the organisational orientations, clubs do not implement all of their dimensions and do not have the best physical and technological resources, also apparently manage to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. However, these clubs are not better than those implementing all the dimensions. Concerning performance, even if clubs fail in applying MO, LO and resources, they present good market performance when they implement EO

entirely. In turn, it was concluded that the club that implements MO and LO (but not completely) but does not implement EO in its activity, indicated low market performance.

Differences are found between NOS League clubs and those in the Portugal 2 SABSEG League, as well as within each division. Of the three clubs competing in the NOS League, those in the top positions present a considerably better financial performance. In the Portugal SABSEG League, the same is found, where Club 4 is in the higher position in the table and has a better financial performance than the other, Club 5, which has struggled to remain in the league for the last 5 years.

### Practical Implications

Therefore, this study evidenced that organisational orientations seem to influence football clubs in professional competitions in Portugal positively, and the greater the number of sub-dimensions applied, allied to the quality of physical and human resources, the better the club's performance can be. Can also help in the process of implementing organisational orientations, particularly by football clubs. They allow clubs to understand how they can implement organisational orientations and identify their failings, and how they can use them to remedy these shortcomings. The study can also encourage them to apply orientations since their influence is shown to be positive. There may also be implications for their structure, through changing the focus on a given orientation to the application of all orientations, aiming to improve the club's performance.

### Conclusion

This study analysed how organisational orientations influence football clubs involved in professional competitions. There seems to be a relation between organisational orientations, the resources implemented in clubs and their performance. Another conclusion is that clubs that implement all the dimensions of organisational orientations appear to have the best physical and technological resources and the best financial, market and quality performance. Nevertheless, the results should be interpreted with caution for several reasons.

Firstly, despite contacting the 36 clubs competing in professional competitions in Portugal, only five were willing to participate. Due to the differences between all the clubs, the influence of organisational orientations might vary if all clubs were included in the study, suggesting extending the research to all clubs competing in the first and second leagues.

Future research lines could include assessing the club's past to identify whether they had implemented organisational orientations previously. Another suggestion is to analyse the interviewees' perceptions over time, to provide a more detailed analysis of the club and its formulations. It is also important to conduct mixed (quantitative/qualitative) research for more complete results. Finally, it would be useful to conduct a longitudinal analysis of clubs over some seasons to study the variation in organisational orientations implemented over time. It would also be important to expand the sample to other clubs that compete in other divisions, to analyse how they use their resources and capacities. Extending this type of study to other sports clubs would also be important, as research on this topic in the context of sport is still limited.

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