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MEASURING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF SPORTS CLUBS

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This article develops a conceptual and methodological framework for measuring the relationship between crisis management and organizational performance of sports clubs. The study is not empirical and does not calculate indicators for real clubs. Its purpose is to clarify how crisis management capacity and organizational performance can be defined, operationalized and connected in future research. The article responds to a methodological gap in sport management studies: crisis management, organizational resilience, club capacity and performance measurement are often discussed separately, while their measurable relationship remains insufficiently specified. Crisis management is interpreted as a multidimensional organizational capacity that includes risk identification, preparedness, financial readiness, decision-making, stakeholder communication and post-crisis learning. Organizational performance is operationalized through crisis-relevant dimensions, including financial stability, continuity of activity, membership and participation, stakeholder trust, governance quality and adaptive capacity. The article proposes a measurement model in which crisis management capacity affects organizational performance through response quality. The relationship is expected to be positive, but conditional. It may be moderated by club size, club type, ownership model, revenue structure, stakeholder dependence, crisis severity and institutional support. The article also shows how the framework may be applied to a practical analytical case, such as the sudden loss of a main sponsor, without performing numerical calculations. The methodological contribution lies in the development of measurable dimensions, indicators and possible data sources that can be used in document analysis, interviews, surveys, expert assessment, comparative case studies and mixed-method research. The practical contribution concerns sports clubs, federations and local authorities. The framework can be used as a diagnostic tool for identifying organizational weak points before a crisis occurs. The article argues that crisis management in sports clubs should be understood not only as emergency response, but also as part of broader organizational maturity, preparedness and performance under crisis conditions.

Keywords: crisis management, organizational performance, measurement, sports clubs, stakeholder trust.

Krīzes vadības un sporta klubu organizatoriskās veikspējas saiknes mērīšana

Rakstā izstrādāts konceptuāls un metodoloģisks ietvars krīzes vadības un sporta klubu organizatoriskās veikspējas saiknes mērīšanai. Pētījums nav empīrisks un neapņēma reālu klubu rādītājus. Tā mērķis ir precizēt, kā krīzes vadības kapacitāti un organizatorisko veikspēju var definēt, operacionalizēt un sasaistīt turpmākajos pētījumos. Raksts reaģē uz metodoloģisku trūkumu sporta vadības pētījumos: krīzes vadība, organizatoriskā noturība, klubu kapacitāte un veikspējas mērīšana bieži tiek aplūkotas atsevišķi, savukārt to izmērāmā savstarpējā saikne joprojām nav pietiekami precizēta. Krīzes vadība tiek interpretēta kā daudzdimensionāla organizatoriskā kapacitāte, kas ietver risku identificēšanu, sagatavotību, finansiālo gatavību, lēmumu pieņemšanu, komunikāciju ar ieinteresētajām pusēm un mācīšanos pēc krīzes. Organizatoriskā veikspēja tiek operacionalizēta ar krīzes apstākļiem atbilstošām dimensijām, tostarp finanšu stabilitāti, darbības nepārtrauktību, dalības un līdzdalības saglabāšanu, ieinteresēto pušu uzticēšanos, pārvaldības kvalitāti un pielāgošanās spēju. Rakstā piedāvāts mērīšanas modelis, kurā krīzes vadības kapacitāte ietekmē organizatorisko veikspēju caur reakcijas kvalitāti. Paredzamā saikne ir pozitīva, bet nosacīta. To var ietekmēt kluba lielums, kluba tips, īpašuma modelis, ieņēmumu struktūra, atkarība no ieinteresētajām pusēm, krīzes smagums un institucionālais atbalsts. Rakstā arī parādīts, kā ietvaru var piemērot praktiskam analītiskam gadījumam, piemēram, pēkšņam galvenā sponsora zaudējumam, neveicot kvantitatīvus aprēķinus. Metodoloģiskais ieguldījums ir mērāmu dimensiju, indikatoru un iespējamo datu avotu izstrāde, ko var izmantot dokumentu analizē, intervijās, aptaujās, ekspertvērtējumos, salīdzinošās gadījumu izpētēs un jauktu metožu pētījumos. Praktiskais ieguldījums attiecas uz sporta klubiem, federācijām un pašvaldībām. Ietvaru var izmantot kā diagnostikas instrumentu organizatorisko vājo vietu identificēšanai pirms krīzes iestāšanās. Rakstā pamatots, ka krīzes vadība sporta klubos jāsaprot ne tikai kā ārkārtas reakcija, bet arī kā daļa no plašākas organizatoriskās brieduma pakāpes, sagatavotības un veikspējas krīzes apstākļos.

Atslēgvārdi: krīzes vadība, organizatoriskā veikspēja, mērīšana, sporta klubi, ieinteresēto pušu uzticēšanās.

Introduction

Sports clubs operate in an environment in which crises have become a recurrent managerial challenge rather than an exceptional event. A club may suddenly lose a sponsor, face a decline in membership, lose access to facilities, experience financial instability or enter into reputational conflict. It may also face governance disputes, public health restrictions or the departure of key athletes and coaches. These situations have different causes, but they raise the same organizational question: can the club continue to function under pressure?

This question is important because sports clubs are not ordinary business organizations. They combine sporting, economic, social and symbolic functions. A professional club must compete, attract spectators, maintain sponsors, manage athletes and protect its public legitimacy. A community or nonprofit club must preserve membership, volunteer engagement, youth participation, local trust and basic service continuity. In both cases, crisis affects more than annual income or sporting results. It affects the ability of the club to reproduce its core activities.

A sports club should therefore be understood not only as a team that plays matches or organizes training. It is also an organization that connects athletes, coaches, managers, parents, supporters, sponsors, local authorities and the wider community. When crisis occurs, these relations may become unstable. Financial pressure may reduce training opportunities. Reputational conflict may weaken trust. Governance problems may block decision-making. The effect of crisis is organizational, not only financial or sporting.

For this reason, crisis management in sports clubs should not be reduced to emergency communication or short-term damage control. In organizational research, crisis management is usually understood as a set of processes through which organizations anticipate, prepare for, respond to and learn from events that threaten their legitimacy, performance or survival (Pearson, Clair 1998; Bundy et al. 2017). In the context of sports clubs, this includes risk scanning, preparedness, decision-making procedures, stakeholder communication, financial buffers, operational continuity and post-crisis learning.

Organizational performance of sports clubs should also be interpreted broadly. It cannot be measured only through league position, sporting victories or annual financial results. A club may have weak competitive results and still preserve membership, youth development, community legitimacy and organizational stability. Another club may achieve short-term sporting success while accumulating debt, reputational risks or governance conflicts. In this article, organizational performance is therefore not equated with competitive success. It is operationalized through crisis-relevant dimensions that show whether the club can preserve resources, activity and trust under pressure.

These performance dimensions include financial stability, continuity of training and competition, stakeholder trust, membership retention, governance quality and adaptive capacity. They are especially important in crisis conditions. During a stable period, a club may appear successful because it wins matches or attracts public attention. During crisis, a deeper question appears: can the club preserve activity, relationships and decision-making capacity? This is why performance should be measured through several dimensions, not through one indicator.

This interpretation corresponds to the multidimensional understanding of organizational performance in management research (Venkatraman, Ramanujam 1986; Richard et al. 2009). It also corresponds to sport management studies, where performance is analysed through several dimensions rather than through one dominant indicator (Bayle, Madella 2002; Papadimitriou, Taylor 2000; Shilbury, Moore 2006; O'Boyle, Hassan 2014). For community and nonprofit sport organizations, the concept of organizational capacity is especially relevant because it includes people, finance, infrastructure, planning and external relationships (Misener, Doherty 2009; Doherty et al. 2014).

The main research problem of this article is methodological. Existing literature discusses crisis management, organizational resilience, sport organization performance and organizational capacity. These research streams are important, but they are often developed separately. As a result, crisis management is usually described as a desirable managerial function, while organizational performance is measured through separate financial, sporting or participation indicators. The connection between the two remains insufficiently operationalized.

The central research question is therefore: how can the relationship between crisis management capacity and organizational performance of sports clubs be conceptualized and operationalized for future empirical research?

The aim of the article is to develop a conceptual and methodological framework for measuring the relationship between crisis management and organizational performance of sports clubs. To achieve this aim, the article has three objectives: to define crisis management as a multidimensional capacity of sports clubs; to identify indicators for measuring organizational performance under crisis conditions; and to propose methodological approaches for studying the relationship between these constructs.

The expected relationship is positive, but it should not be treated as automatic. Strong crisis management capacity may improve organizational performance by increasing preparedness, protecting resources, supporting communication, reducing response delays and strengthening post-crisis learning. However, this relationship may be mediated by response quality and moderated by club type, size, revenue structure, ownership model, stakeholder dependence and crisis severity. The novelty of the article lies in this measurement logic.

Literature review

Crisis management literature provides the first theoretical foundation for this article. In organizational studies, crisis is usually understood as a situation that threatens important organizational goals, creates uncertainty and requires urgent decisions. Pearson and Clair define organizational crisis as a low-probability and high-impact event that threatens organizational functioning and survival and is marked by ambiguity of cause, effect and response (Pearson, Clair 1998). This definition is useful for sports clubs because crisis rarely appears only as one technical problem. It usually creates uncertainty about finance, responsibility, communication, reputation and the future of the club.

Later research develops this view by separating internal and external dimensions of crisis management. Internally, an organization must prevent, prepare, respond, recover and learn. Externally, it must manage stakeholder interpretation, reputation and legitimacy (Bundy et al. 2017). This distinction is important for sports clubs because a club must solve operational problems and at the same time explain its actions to athletes, parents, volunteers, supporters, sponsors, media and local authorities.

Recent review evidence also shows that risk management in sports organizations has become a multidimensional issue involving operational disruptions, financial instability, governance challenges and long-term sustainability. This supports the view that crisis management in sports clubs should be connected with broader organizational performance rather than treated only as short-term emergency response (Genovard et al. 2025).

Crisis communication research is directly relevant because stakeholder reactions depend on how responsibility for crisis is attributed and how the organization communicates during disruption (Coombs 2007). In sports clubs, communication failures may affect not only reputation, but also supporter loyalty, sponsorship value, attendance and trust. Sport-specific studies confirm this point: crisis response influences fan trust (Lee, Oh 2023), while crisis communication in sport combines operational information, institutional positioning and public narrative construction (Manoli,

Anagnostou 2023). Recent research on the European Super League crisis also shows that sport crisis communication should be analysed through stakeholder relations and sport-specific institutional contexts (Simpson et al. 2025). Therefore, communication can be operationalized through response speed, message consistency, transparency, stakeholder coverage, digital communication and post-crisis trust.

COVID-19 made crisis management in sport a central research topic because it disrupted competitions, training, facility access, spectatorship, membership services, sponsorship relations and community activities. It affected both elite and grassroots systems and showed that sport clubs operate within wider networks of organizational relations (Evans et al. 2020; Parnell et al. 2022). Studies of professional football clubs connected the pandemic with financial fragility, stakeholder coordination and entrepreneurial response (Hammerschmidt et al. 2021), while research on nonprofit sports clubs showed that member loss, volunteer decline and revenue reduction were perceived as major threats shaped by organizational capacity (Feiler, Breuer 2021). These findings support the view that crisis management should be measured through preparedness, financial readiness, stakeholder coordination and adaptive behaviour, not only through the existence of a formal crisis plan.

The resilience perspective adds another layer. Wicker, Filo and Cuskelly studied community sport clubs affected by natural disasters and showed that resilience depends on resources, social networks, volunteers, redundancy, resourcefulness and rapidity of response (Wicker et al. 2013). Bostock and Breese later argue that organizational resilience in sport should be understood as a dynamic capacity, not simply as a return to the previous state (Bostock, Breese 2023). Marques et al. also show that economic, social, technological, human and political capital can support resilience in sport organizations during COVID-19 (Marques et al. 2025).

The second theoretical foundation is organizational performance measurement in sport. General performance literature supports a multidimensional approach, distinguishing financial, operational and organizational performance and warning against mixing indicators and levels of analysis (Venkatraman, Ramanujam 1986; Richard et al. 2009). This is especially important for sports clubs because league position, liquidity, member retention, volunteer engagement, public trust and governance quality represent different outcomes.

This argument is supported by recent sports club research that applies the organizational capacity framework to measure club performance through the problems and resources of sports clubs. Post shows that board capacity, financial stability and strategic planning are important predictors of fewer organizational problems and stronger club performance (Post 2023).

Sport management literature follows the same logic. Papadimitriou and Taylor apply the multiple constituency approach and show that sport organizations are evaluated by different stakeholder groups (Papadimitriou, Taylor 2000). Shilbury and Moore also treat organizational effectiveness in sport as multidimensional (Shilbury, Moore 2006). Bayle and Madella propose a taxonomy of performance for sport organizations, while O'Boyle and Hassan discuss performance management in nonprofit sport organizations (Bayle, Madella 2002; O'Boyle, Hassan 2014).

The balanced scorecard approach is also relevant. Dimitropoulos et al. show that it can be adapted to sport organizations because it combines financial, stakeholder, internal process and learning dimensions (Dimitropoulos et al. 2017). This logic is useful for crisis analysis because some crisis effects are visible immediately, for example revenue loss or event cancellation, while others appear later, such as lower trust, weaker volunteer engagement, reduced membership or governance deterioration.

Organizational capacity research is especially important for community and nonprofit sports clubs. Misener and Doherty show that capacity includes human resources, financial resources, infrastructure, planning, networks and relationships (Misener, Doherty 2009). Doherty et al. develop a multidimensional framework of capacity in community sport clubs, including human, financial,

structural, network and planning dimensions (Doherty et al. 2014). Doherty and Cuskelly later connect capacity dimensions with performance outcomes of community sport clubs (Doherty, Cuskelly 2020).

Longitudinal evidence from voluntary sports clubs also shows that organizational capacity is connected with perceived need for change, service innovation and organizational growth. This is important for the present framework because adaptive capacity and activity continuity are treated as dimensions of organizational performance under crisis conditions (Corthouts et al. 2024).

Recent research on capacity building and digitalization supports this interpretation. Rossi et al. show that nonprofit sport clubs operate in a competitive environment and that external pressure may stimulate investment in organizational capacities (Rossi et al. 2024). Ehnold et al. show that voluntary sport clubs use digital instruments depending on their goals and organizational capacity (Ehnold et al. 2021). During crisis, digital tools can support communication, registration, payments, volunteer coordination and continuity of member services.

Previous analysis of a professional sports club as a social system also supports the view that a club cannot be reduced to sporting performance, administration or business activity alone (Zeng 2026).

The reviewed literature suggests that crisis management and organizational performance are connected but not identical: crisis management is a capacity and process, while organizational performance refers to outcomes and continuing organizational conditions. The relationship is expected to be positive, but conditional on club type, size, ownership model, revenue structure, stakeholder dependence, digital capacity, crisis severity and institutional support. The main gap is methodological: crisis management, communication, trust, resilience, capacity and sport performance are rarely integrated into one measurement framework for sports clubs. This gap justifies the conceptual and methodological design of the present article.

Research methodology

This article uses a conceptual and methodological research design. It does not test empirical data from existing sports clubs and does not calculate real indicators. The aim is to develop a measurement framework that can be used in future empirical studies to analyse the relationship between crisis management and organizational performance of sports clubs.

This methodological choice is appropriate because the research problem is not only empirical. Before clubs can be compared statistically, the main constructs must be defined and operationalized. It is necessary to clarify what crisis management capacity means in a sports club, how organizational performance can be measured beyond sporting results, and which methods can be used to study the relationship between these two constructs. In this sense, the article follows the logic of conceptual synthesis and methodological modelling (Torraco 2005; Snyder 2019).

The literature base was formed through a targeted conceptual review rather than a systematic bibliometric procedure. The search focused on English-language peer-reviewed publications using combinations of the keywords crisis management, crisis communication, sport clubs, sports organizations, organizational performance, organizational capacity, organizational resilience, stakeholder trust and performance measurement. Sources were included when they defined the core constructs, provided sport-specific evidence or supported the methodological logic of conceptual synthesis; sources focused only on sporting results, coaching practice or athlete performance were excluded. The final evidence base included 31 sources grouped into four blocks: crisis management and risk management in sport; crisis communication and stakeholder trust; sport organization performance and organizational capacity; and sport resilience.

The unit of analysis is the sports club as an organization. The framework can be applied to professional clubs, semi-professional clubs and community or nonprofit clubs. However, the same indicators should not be used mechanically for all types of clubs. A professional club may be more

dependent on sponsors, media visibility and ticket revenue. A community club may be more dependent on volunteers, membership fees, local facilities and municipal support.

The article distinguishes two main constructs. The first construct is crisis management capacity. It refers to the club's ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to and learn from crisis situations. The second construct is organizational performance. In crisis conditions, it is operationalized through the club's ability to maintain activity, resources, trust, governance and adaptive capacity.

The operationalization of these constructs is based on the literature on crisis management, sport organization capacity and multidimensional performance measurement (Bundy et al. 2017; Doherty et al. 2014; Richard et al. 2009). Communication and stakeholder trust are included in the measurement framework because crisis communication and sport capacity studies show that organizational performance depends not only on resources, but also on legitimacy, stakeholder interpretation and external relations (Coombs 2007; Lee, Oh 2023; Doherty et al. 2014).

The proposed measurement logic is presented in Table 1. The table does not contain empirical scores. It shows which dimensions, indicators and data sources can be used in future studies.

Table 1

Proposed indicators for measuring crisis management capacity and organizational performance of sports clubs

Construct	Dimension	Possible indicators	Possible data sources
Crisis management capacity	Risk identification	Existence of risk register; regular monitoring of financial, reputational, operational and governance risks	Club documents; interviews with managers; expert assessment
	Preparedness	Crisis plan; continuity plan; distribution of responsibilities; reserve procedures for facilities, staff and competitions	Internal regulations; management interviews; document analysis
	Financial readiness	Reserve funds; revenue diversification; dependence on one sponsor; ability to cover fixed costs during disruption	Financial reports; budgets; sponsorship data
	Decision-making	Speed of response; clarity of authority; board involvement; crisis team activity	Meeting minutes; interviews; case reconstruction
	Stakeholder communication	Response speed; transparency; consistency of messages; communication with fans, parents, athletes, sponsors and local authorities	Website, social media, press releases, stakeholder surveys
	Learning after crisis	Post-crisis review; changes in procedures; staff learning; updated crisis plans	Reports; interviews; revised documents
Organizational performance	Financial stability	Liquidity, debt pressure, revenue continuity, sponsor retention	
Organizational performance	Activity continuity	Continuation of training, competitions, youth programmes and member services	Club schedules; participation records; interviews
	Membership and participation	Member retention, new members, dropout rates, volunteer continuity	Membership database; club records

Construct	Dimension	Possible indicators	Possible data sources
	Stakeholder trust	Trust of fans, parents, athletes, sponsors, volunteers and local authorities	Surveys; interviews; media analysis
	Governance quality	Transparency, board stability, decision legitimacy, conflict management	Statutes; board minutes; interviews
	Adaptive capacity	Ability to redesign services, use digital tools, find alternative facilities or change revenue model	Case analysis; documents; expert assessment

Source: compiled by the authors based on the literature review.

Table 1 shows that crisis management capacity and organizational performance are related, but they are not the same. Crisis management capacity describes what the club can do before, during and after crisis. Organizational performance describes whether the club preserves resources, activities, trust and governance under crisis conditions. This distinction is important because a club may have a formal crisis plan but still lose trust or members, while another club may survive because it has strong local networks and flexible volunteers.

The proposed framework can be studied through several methods. Document analysis can examine crisis plans, statutes, annual reports, financial statements, board decisions, communication materials and public statements. Semi-structured interviews with managers, coaches, board members, volunteers, sponsors and local stakeholders can reveal how decisions are made and how responsibility is distributed. Stakeholder surveys can measure perceived preparedness, trust, communication quality, satisfaction, loyalty and willingness to continue supporting the club.

Comparative case study is useful when researchers compare clubs that faced similar crisis conditions but showed different outcomes. A possible case may include a club that lost a major sponsor, a club affected by facility closure, or a club that had to redesign its activities during COVID-19. Expert assessment may also be used when direct data are incomplete or when indicators must be adapted to different club types.

The expected relationship between crisis management capacity and organizational performance is positive, but not automatic. Better crisis management should help a club protect financial resources, reduce response delays, maintain stakeholder trust, continue basic activities and learn from disruption. The framework also assumes that response quality may mediate this relationship. Future empirical studies may therefore test a sequence: crisis management capacity → response quality → organizational performance.

The methodological contribution of this article is the construction of a measurable framework rather than the production of empirical scores. The proposed indicators can be used later in surveys, interviews, case studies, expert evaluations and mixed-method research. This makes it possible to study crisis management in sports clubs not as a general recommendation, but as a structured organizational capacity connected with organizational performance.

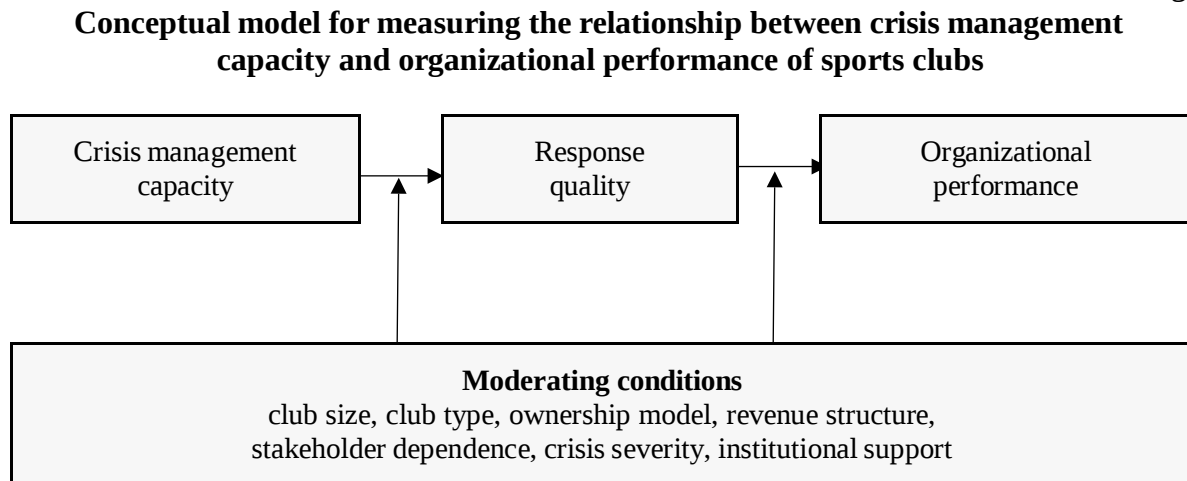
Results

The results of this study are presented as a conceptual measurement model. The model integrates two constructs defined in the methodology: crisis management capacity and organizational performance. Crisis management capacity includes risk identification, preparedness, financial readiness, decision-making, stakeholder communication and post-crisis learning, which reflects the broader understanding of crisis management as prevention, preparation, response, recovery and learning (Pearson, Clair 1998; Bundy et al. 2017). Organizational performance is interpreted not as sporting success alone, but through crisis-relevant dimensions, including financial stability, activity

continuity, membership and participation, stakeholder trust, governance quality and adaptive capacity. This interpretation follows the multidimensional logic of organizational and sport performance measurement (Venkatraman, Ramanujam 1986; Richard et al. 2009; Bayle, Madella 2002; O’Boyle, Hassan 2014). The model also identifies response quality as an intermediate element, because formal preparedness affects performance only when it is activated through timely, coordinated and credible action during crisis (Coombs 2007; Lee, Oh 2023).

The conceptual model developed in the article is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1



Note: the model shows an expected analytical relationship, not a statistically tested causal chain.

Source: compiled by the authors.

Figure 1 summarizes the sequential logic of the framework: crisis management capacity is expected to improve response quality, while response quality increases the probability of stronger organizational performance during and after crisis.

The model also identifies the main measurement dimensions. Crisis management capacity includes risk identification, preparedness, financial readiness, decision-making, stakeholder communication and post-crisis learning, while organizational performance includes financial stability, activity continuity, membership and participation, stakeholder trust, governance quality and adaptive capacity. The expected links between these dimensions are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Expected links between crisis management capacity and organizational performance of sports clubs

Crisis management dimension	Main organizational effect	
Risk identification	Earlier recognition of financial, operational, reputational and governance threats	Governance quality; adaptive capacity
Preparedness	Clearer procedures, lower response delay and better continuity planning	Activity continuity; governance quality
Financial readiness	Greater ability to cover fixed costs and reduce immediate resource pressure	Financial stability; activity continuity
Decision-making	Faster, clearer and more legitimate organizational response	Governance quality; stakeholder trust

Crisis management dimension	Main organizational effect	Performance dimension most directly affected
Stakeholder communication	Lower uncertainty and stronger trust among members, athletes, fans, parents, sponsors and local partners	Stakeholder trust; membership and participation
Post-crisis learning	Revision of procedures, correction of weaknesses and improvement of future preparedness	Adaptive capacity; long-term organizational performance

Source: compiled by the authors.

Table 2 shows that crisis management capacity does not influence organizational performance as one single mechanism. Different dimensions protect different aspects of club performance under crisis conditions. Financial readiness is most directly linked to financial stability and activity continuity. Stakeholder communication is more closely connected with trust, reputation and participation. Decision-making affects governance quality and the legitimacy of organizational action. Post-crisis learning supports adaptive capacity and long-term performance.

A further result is the distinction between direct, mediated and moderated effects. Some effects may be direct: reserve funds may immediately support the continuation of training and competitions after a financial shock. Other effects are mediated: a communication plan may protect stakeholder trust only if actual communication is clear, timely and credible. Still other effects are moderated: communication quality may matter more in a professional club with strong media visibility than in a small local club with a narrow stakeholder circle.

The model can be used in an analytical case without numerical calculation. For example, a sports club may lose its main sponsor shortly before the season. In this case, crisis management capacity can be examined through several questions: Did the club identify sponsor dependence as a risk before the crisis? Did it have reserve funds or alternative funding sources? Was responsibility clearly distributed? Did the club communicate quickly and transparently? Did it preserve training and competition activity? Did it revise its sponsorship strategy after the crisis?

In such a case, organizational performance would not be reduced to the amount of lost money. It would also include continuity of training, retention of athletes and members, stability of governance, stakeholder trust and the club's ability to adapt its resource base. The same logic may be applied to facility closure, reputational scandal, public health restrictions, internal governance conflict or the departure of key coaches.

Analytically, this case would activate several indicators from Table 1. Sponsor dependence and revenue diversification would be assessed under financial readiness; reserve funds and the ability to cover fixed costs would indicate immediate resource protection; response speed and clarity of authority would be assessed under decision-making; transparency of communication with athletes, parents, fans, sponsors and local partners would indicate stakeholder communication; sponsor retention or replacement, continuity of training and member retention would show organizational performance. This makes the sponsor-loss case an application of the measurement framework rather than a narrative illustration only.

The final result is a usable conceptual and methodological model. It suggests that sports clubs with stronger crisis management capacity are more likely to demonstrate higher organizational performance during and after crisis. However, the relationship should not be treated as automatic. Severe external shocks, weak local support or high structural dependence on one resource may still produce negative outcomes. This corresponds to sport resilience research, which treats resilience as the ability to adapt, reconfigure resources and continue functioning under pressure (Bostock, Breese 2023; Marques et al. 2025).

Discussion

Crisis management should not be treated as an isolated emergency function in sports clubs. It forms part of the broader organizational capacity through which clubs maintain decision-making, communication, resource protection and stakeholder relations under pressure. This interpretation is important because the same crisis management elements may influence both immediate crisis response and longer-term organizational maturity.

This point is especially relevant because sports clubs often operate with limited resources. Many clubs, especially community and nonprofit clubs, cannot create complex risk management departments or formal crisis systems. However, they can still develop basic crisis capacity. They can identify the most important risks, distribute responsibilities, maintain contact lists, create minimal financial reserves, communicate transparently and review mistakes after disruption.

The framework also shows why organizational performance should not be reduced to sporting results. Sporting success is visible and emotionally important, but it may hide deeper organizational weakness. A club may win competitions while depending on one sponsor, having weak governance or losing trust among members. Conversely, a club may have modest sporting results but remain stable, socially useful and organizationally resilient. Crisis therefore works as a test of organizational quality.

These differences mean that the proposed framework should not be used as a universal ranking instrument. Its purpose is diagnostic and comparative: to identify which elements of crisis capacity are most relevant for a particular type of club and crisis. In professional clubs, reputational and commercial indicators may dominate; in community clubs, continuity, volunteering and local legitimacy may be more important. Therefore, empirical application should adapt indicators, data sources and possible weights to the organizational type and crisis context.

The proposed model helps avoid a simplified causal interpretation. It would be too mechanical to state that better crisis management always produces better performance. The framework should therefore be read probabilistically rather than deterministically. Crisis management increases the probability of a stronger response, but it cannot fully control external shocks. A club may be well prepared but still suffer because the crisis is too severe, institutional support is weak or the club is structurally dependent on one source of funding.

The role of response quality is especially important. Formal preparedness does not guarantee effective action. A crisis plan may exist only on paper. Financial reserves may be insufficient or poorly used. Communication may be late or defensive. Decision-making may be blocked by internal conflict. In such cases, crisis management capacity does not become real organizational protection. The capacity must be activated through timely, coordinated and credible response.

The framework has different implications for different types of sports clubs. Professional clubs are more exposed to media pressure, sponsor expectations, public reputation and commercial revenue risks. For them, communication quality, brand trust, financial diversification and governance transparency may be central indicators. Community clubs are more dependent on volunteers, parents, local authorities, facilities and membership continuity. For them, key indicators may include volunteer stability, youth programme continuity, local trust and municipal support.

This point is connected with the broader sport management literature. Sport organizations are pluralistic. They serve several constituencies and cannot be evaluated through one dominant criterion (Papadimitriou, Taylor 2000; Shilbury, Moore 2006). The present framework follows this logic. It does not ask whether a club is successful in general. It asks which aspect of performance is protected or weakened during crisis.

The model also has practical value for club managers. It can be used as a diagnostic tool before crisis happens. A club can examine whether it has excessive dependence on one sponsor, unclear decision authority, weak communication channels or no continuity plan for facilities and training. Such

self-assessment does not require complex statistical tools. It requires a structured understanding of organizational vulnerability.

For policymakers and sport federations, the framework suggests that support for sports clubs should not focus only on subsidies, competition organization or sporting development. It should also strengthen crisis readiness and organizational capacity. Federations and municipalities may provide templates for crisis plans, training for board members, communication guidelines, financial planning support and digital tools for membership management.

Trust is a central element of this approach. In sports clubs, trust is not an abstract moral category. It has operational consequences. If athletes, parents, volunteers, sponsors or supporters do not trust the club's response, they may leave, reduce participation, withdraw support or damage the club's reputation. Crisis communication research confirms that stakeholder interpretation influences the reputational consequences of crisis (Coombs 2007; Lee, Oh 2023).

This point reinforces the broader argument that crisis performance in sports clubs should be assessed relationally, not only financially. A club must preserve not only resources and activity continuity, but also a coherent relationship with athletes, members, supporters, sponsors and the wider social environment.

The framework also clarifies the role of resilience. Resilience should not be understood only as a return to the pre-crisis condition. In many cases, such a return is impossible or undesirable. A club may need to change its revenue structure, digital communication, governance practices or membership model. Recent sport resilience research also treats resilience as adaptation and reconfiguration rather than simple recovery (Bostock, Breese 2023; Marques et al. 2025).

At the same time, the framework has limitations. It does not provide a ready-made universal index. This is deliberate. A professional football club, a youth swimming club and a local athletics association cannot be measured in exactly the same way. The proposed framework therefore offers dimensions and indicators, but future empirical studies must adapt them to the type of club and the crisis being studied.

Another limitation concerns data availability. Professional clubs may have financial reports, media archives, sponsorship data and communication records. Community clubs may have fewer formal documents. Their real capacity may exist in informal networks, personal trust and volunteer routines. This means that future research should not rely only on documents. Interviews, surveys, expert assessment and case reconstruction are necessary.

Overall, the discussion shows that the relationship between crisis management and organizational performance of sports clubs should be understood as structured, conditional and measurable. Crisis management capacity matters because it shapes response quality. Response quality matters because it influences whether the club can preserve resources, activities, trust and governance. Yet the final outcome depends on context. This is why the proposed framework is not a final empirical conclusion, but a methodological basis for future research.

Conclusion

The article did not aim to calculate real indicators or test empirical data from existing clubs. Its purpose was to clarify the main constructs and develop a framework that can be used in future empirical research.

The main conclusion is that crisis management in sports clubs should be understood as a multidimensional organizational capacity. It includes risk identification, preparedness, financial readiness, decision-making, stakeholder communication and post-crisis learning. These elements show whether a club can recognize threats, respond coherently and preserve its core activity under pressure.

The article also showed that organizational performance of sports clubs should not be reduced to sporting success or financial results. In crisis conditions, performance should be operationalized through dimensions such as financial stability, continuity of activity, membership and participation, stakeholder trust, governance quality and adaptive capacity.

The proposed model links crisis management capacity with organizational performance through response quality. Preparedness alone is not enough. The real effect depends on how the club acts during crisis: how quickly it makes decisions, how clearly it communicates, how it protects resources and how it maintains relations with stakeholders. The relationship is expected to be positive, but conditional.

The methodological contribution of the article lies in the proposed measurement logic. Crisis management capacity and organizational performance are divided into measurable dimensions. This makes it possible to study their relationship through case studies, document analysis, interviews, surveys, expert assessment or mixed-method research.

The illustrative sponsor-loss case shows how the framework can be applied without numerical calculation. It allows researchers to trace whether the club identified the risk, activated resources, communicated with stakeholders and preserved organizational performance under crisis conditions.

The practical implication is that sports clubs, federations and local authorities can use the framework as a diagnostic tool. It helps identify weak points before crisis occurs: dependence on one sponsor, unclear decision-making, weak communication, lack of financial reserves or insufficient learning after disruption. Future research may test the proposed framework empirically by comparing clubs that faced similar crisis situations but demonstrated different levels of organizational performance under crisis conditions.

Thus, the article shows that organizational performance of sports clubs under crisis conditions should be measured not only as a final outcome, but also as a structured reflection of preparedness, response quality, stakeholder trust, governance stability and adaptive capacity.

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